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MASTER'S THESIS

Play by My Rules

reflections on the relationship between audience and performer in Plan B/C/D/E

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Examiner: Howard Lotker

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KATEDRA AUTORSKÉ TVORBY A PEDAGOGIKY

DIPLOMOVA PRACE

Hra Podle Mých Pravidel

reflexe vztahu mezi publikem a umělkyní v Plánu B/C/D/E

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Key Words:

Authorial Presentation, political theatre, performance art, audience interaction, dramaturgy of the spectator, documentary theatre, climate change, Mumbai, theatre as play, Non-theatre

Abstract:

In the summer of 2019, I premiered an authorial presentation entitled ‘Plan B/C/D/E’, an hour-long interactive show about the imminent drowning of my home in Mumbai, brought on by the climate crisis.

This auto-ethnographical thesis is a reflection on the creation and presentation of that piece. In particular, the aim of the thesis is to focus on the relationship between the audience and myself, the performer. I investigate the strategies I used to provoke and/or invite audience interaction, as also the strategies required for me to control the same. Though there is a pretence of openness and equality, through my reflections I realise that the performance and the interaction are both rather limited for the audience. The audience’s input is integral to the continuation and success of the show, yet the audience is treated more as material for the Text, rather than equal collaborators in this endeavour.

In particular, I use the lens of performance-as-game or play, to understand the processes by which the audience is invited and restricted in their participation.

Klíčová slova:

Autorská prezentace, politické divadlo, performance, interakce s publikem, dramaturgie diváka, dokumentární divadlo, klimatická změna, Bombaj, představení-jako-hra, Nedivadlo

Abstrakt:

V létě 2019 jsem poprvé uvedla svou autorskou prezentaci nazvanou ‚Plan B/C/D/E', tedy hodinové interaktivní představení o nevyhnutelné potopě mého domova v Bombaji, způsobené klimatickou krizí.

Tato auto-etnografická diplomová práce reflektuje tvorbu a prezentaci tohoto kusu. Jejím cílem je především zaměřit se na vztah mezi publikem a mnou, performerkou. Zkoumám zde strategie, které jsem použila k provokaci a/nebo přizvání publika k interakci stejně jako strategie, které jsou pro mne potřebné k uřízení této interakce. Ačkoli je zde domnělá otevřenost a rovnost, skrze svou reflexi si uvědomuji, že jak představení, tak interakce mají pro publikum své limity. Vklad publika je zásadní pro pokračování a úspěch celé inscenace, nicméně s divákem je zacházeno spíše jako s materiálem pro představení než jako s rovnocenným spolupracovníkem v tomto hledání.

K pochopení procesu, kterým se publikum stává součástí, či je omezováno v podílení se na představení, používám v této práci zejména přístupu představení-jako-hra.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Priyanka D'Souza who is the reason Plan B/C/D/E was ever created; the Miranda family, and Krisstina Rao, for giving me the space to let the show grow; Kateřina Daňková for her steadfast support through the writing process; Kent Sjöström for his invaluable feedback to this academic work; Markéta Štauberová for translation assistance; Ajin K Thomas for proof-reading; my family for supporting me through a rough year; and my late grandfather, without whose financial prudence I would never be able to work in the theatre.

Finally, I must thank every venue manager that gave me a chance, and every audience member who became an unwitting subject of this thesis. Without you, there is no theatre, and there is no Plan.

Contents

Operational Definitions

1. Text: When used with a capital T, the word ‘Text’ will be used to signify the material of the show Plan B/C/D/E, not limited to the dialogue. “This is conceived of as a complex network of different types of signs, expressive means, or actions, coming back to the etymology of the word "text" which implies the idea of texture, of something woven together.” (de Marinis, 1987). ‘Text’ in this case includes the material which I have prepared before the show, that which is improvised during the show, and that which is supplied by each audience member at each performance.
2. Audience Interaction: this could be any sort of measurable response from an audience member; an audible laugh, gasp, cough etc. However, for this paper, I refer to the response given by audience members with an intent to communicate with the performer as well as fellow spectators. This would include raising their hands at a particular ‘poll’ in the show, answering a question put forth by the performer, heckling, among others. White’s (2013) definition of interaction as “the participation of an audience or an audience member in the action of the performance” (p. 4) also suits the aim of this paper.
3. Mumbaikar – a resident of Mumbai.
4. Pražák – a resident of Prague.

Introduction

My interest in audience interaction in theatre has been with me since my bachelor's degree in Sociology and Anthropology. My Anthropology dissertation at the time was entitled *Dramaturgy of the Lavani Spectator – Audience-Performer Dynamics in a Lavani Performance*. That piece of writing was an inquiry into the ways the audience affected the performance of this folk artform from Maharashtra, the region in India I hail from.

As I continued to work in and watch theatre, my interest in audience interactive work grew. How does one devise such a show? Where does one draw the lines in the sand for the audience to be able to participate, while still staying on a particular course? These questions were particularly fuelled by my work as a stage manager for the highly original show *White Rabbit Red Rabbit*, written by Nasim Soleimanpour. Each performance has a different actor, who has never read the script before. The actor reads the script out loud, on stage for the first time ever. The actor is given a few basic instructions the day before, but is, in essence, as unfamiliar with the text as the audience. There are several interactive moments where individual audience members are called on to perform certain tasks. This was a fascinating experience for me to watch. I watched more than 20 shows of this text, and no two shows were alike. And yet, Soleimanpour had successfully created what he would later refer to as a 'theatre machine'. This theatre machine has an input, a process, and an output. We cannot guarantee the nature of the output; thus, we must try to control the factors of the input, and streamline the process as best we can.

When I began to work on the Text, Plan B/C/D/E, I was reminded of this logic of the theatre machine. I had no idea what was to come of the Text, and I didn't expect too much. The show's

initial success encouraged me to take it forward, by applying to festivals and modifying it for an international audience in Prague.

This Text, though created by me, is still a bit of a mystery to my mind. The process of devising it was based very strongly on gut feeling and instinct; "I know I should do/say *x* but I can't say why" was the guiding motivation behind virtually every dramaturgical decision I made. When I decided to write this thesis work on the Text and specifically the audience interaction, that was when I truly began to unravel the threads of logic that had played a part in the creation process, unbeknownst to my conscious mind. Furthermore, as I entered my second year of my master's degree, I began to have more tools to create and understand dramaturgical work in general, and my own process.

The relationship between audience and performer, in interactive and non-interactive shows is of particular interest to me. My previous background in Sociology and Anthropology led to me wanting to better understand the power relations between the audience and the performer. Interactive performances present themselves as being a rather equitable mode of theatre/performance art. Yet, the performer/author of the piece will probably want to still maintain control to a large extent. Does the audience relinquish this control with ease? Are they wary when called on to participate? How does the process of devising translate into the space? What are the cultural factors that affect such a performance? These were all questions I was keen to ask and attempt to answer.

I believe that interaction is vital for political theatre, which my work usually is. Theatre theorists from Boal to Brecht have envisaged a political theatre that involves some amount of active work from the spectator. Pickels (2016) insists that the proliferation of participatory theatre should not be surprising; as there is a global rise in government control and trampling of human rights,

"participation in the arts has the merit of reminding us what it means to have an opinion and directly engage, even should it be in a purely formal manner" (p. 60). In her introduction to the same book, Burzynska (2016) states that participatory theatre can be a "rehearsal space for democracy" (p. 9).

A less formed version of the same opinion existed in my mind when I built this show. What plagued me the most about climate change is my feeling of helplessness. This show was created and premiered in the weeks before Greta Thunberg and her rage at political inaction on climate change went viral. At the time, I already knew that my individual attempts to safeguard the environment were rather useless. Even signing online petitions or joining real-life protests had begun to feel purposeless. I wanted to feel useful, and I truly believed that by having such a show, I could encourage a more specific and pointed conversation about climate change and the exact consequences that we (as Mumbaikars) would face. I felt there had to be participation; without participation, this would simply be a rant, some form of yelling into the void, like posting on social media. I was also extremely curious to have interaction, to know how people around me were dealing with this problem that I couldn't fathom. Could I maybe learn some new tools of coping? I can now admit, this was a selfish desire I harboured before the premiere. Indeed, in the early performances I joked that this entire Text was a coping mechanism for me and my climate grief[1]. What I was seeking, more than anything else, was catharsis; everything else was simply a tool for me to achieve this.

Having reflected on the processes that went into the Text's creation and presentation, I can see more clearly the inequitable power relations between myself and the performer. This unequal

[1] Climate grief is experienced by people when they notice or anticipate the loss of "species, ecosystems and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change" (Cunsolo and Ellis, cited by Ellen, 2020).

relationship is drawn from my use of the audience as "material that is used to compose the performance" (White, 2013, p. 9).

The thesis is divided into three main sections: the process of creation of the Text; the strategies I used to provoke and invite, and control audience interaction; and the factors that affect this audience interaction that I have little to no control over.

Methodology

Based on my background in the social sciences, this thesis has been written as an autoethnography[2]. I cannot claim to know what each spectator experienced or felt while attending a show, nor do I claim that my experience of creating and performing this piece can be generalised to other performers and authors.

To write this thesis, I needed to have performances in Prague. I hoped to have a minimum of six performances, as it seemed unfathomable to write an academic work with any smaller sample size. I had no less than eight performances scheduled in the period of March-early June when the Covid-19 lockdown struck, and all shows were suspended. When restrictions lifted in the summer, I managed to organise another seven shows, and this time, the coronavirus struck me down. I was left with only three shows to base this thesis on. In addition, I had done a "work in progress" showing of the first half of the Text in October 2019, which I also refer to.

[2] Autoethnography is a qualitative research method where the author writes about their lived experiences, often in the first person, drawing on the links between personal and cultural perspectives.

Ideally, I would not have written a thesis with so small a sample size, however, the situation is beyond my control. Due to this small sample size, there is more generalisation and less insight than I would have liked. I have also included insights from my two performances in Mumbai and occasionally from one performance in New Delhi, India.

To collect data for this paper, I have re-watched video tapings and listened to audio recordings of the performances in Prague and in Mumbai. I had several conversations with friends and acquaintances who were in the audience, and these conversations greatly informed my understanding of the audience perception.

The complete list of shows I performed and refer to is as follows:

Mumbai Premiere – in August 2019, at a small art gallery called 'The Mumbai Art Room' as part of the exhibition *Muterarium.* The venue was approximately 13 m^2, with an audience of about 15-20 people, half of whom were personally known to me. This was not a ticketed event.

Living room performance, Mumbai – in September 2019, in the living room of a friend and colleague. Hosted by the Miranda family, with an invited audience of about fifty-five people, half of whom were personally known to me. The known audience was largely made of people in the theatre/arts sector.

Living room performance, New Delhi – in October 2019, in the living room of a friend. The invited audience of about twelve people was largely made up of consultants, who had previously studied engineering, law, business. I knew only two people besides the host. I rarely refer to this performance in the thesis as I have no proper recording of it.

Open Sunday – a 'work in progress' event at Studio Truhlárna, in Prague, in mid-November 2019. I performed the first 20 minutes of the work, followed by an unmoderated feedback

session with the audience. The venue is a re-purposed rehearsal room with an audience of about 10 or 12 people, most of whom I knew. The intention was to see whether this format of the show could be transferred to a non-Indian setting for an international audience.

Prague premiere at Přístav, Karlín: the Czech premiere took place at the end of July 2020, at a venue whose stage overlooks the banks of the river Vltava. This open-air venue hosted about thirty-forty spectators on that evening, of whom at least half were known to me. The event was not ticketed, though audiences were encouraged to donate as they wished.

At Ferenc Futurista, Černošice – a small private venue, with an invited audience, of whom I knew only two (both were professors from my department). The event was not ticketed, and the audience of about ten was largely middle-aged.

Praha Září –at a month-long festival in September 2020, comprising many smaller festivals that had to be cancelled earlier in the year due to Covid restrictions. The stage was very large, though the screen was brought downstage, such that there was approximately 1.5m depth, and a usable width of around 10m. The venue was a very large tent, with seating for up to 150 people. There were approximately fifteen people in the audience, in addition to a few who would come and go. Only three people in the audience were known to me. The event was not ticketed.

A note on the use of the word ‘audience’ or ‘spectator’

Throughout the course of this paper, I alternate between the words ‘audience’ and ‘spectator’. I believe the etymology of words has value and affects how we use and understand them. ‘Audience’ has its root in the Latin word *audientia* meaning ‘the act of hearing’ or ‘a group of

listeners', while 'spectator' is derived from the word *spectare* meaning 'to gaze' or to observe (courtesy Merriam-Webster online dictionary).

Incidentally, in old English, one would "hear a play" unlike in modern English when one "sees/watches a play". Mark Rylance, a Tony Award winning actor, states that the theatre was once an aural tradition, which is why Shakespeare's texts frequently directly reference the fact that they are on stage, and that this is indeed theatre (Lunden, 2013). This is an aural tradition because the audience member must hear the words and create/fill the gaps in the image in their own head.

In this sense, 'audience' seems to indicate a more active role on the part of the individual, whereas 'spectator' indicates merely the act of seeing. However, I believe we live in a visual culture, perhaps more than ever, as we consume visual media forms above all others. To denigrate the act of seeing as somehow lower than the act of hearing strikes me as both outdated and arrogant. Moreover, several pieces of literature that have influenced this piece greatly, chose to use the word spectator. The value of the word 'spectator' over 'audience' lies also in its singularity; 'audience' sees the group as a single collective, whereas spectator seems to grant each person their autonomy. Besides this, the 'viewing' of the images showing the extent to which Mumbai is predicted to flood (refer to slides 5, 6, and 7 in the appendix of this paper) is far more effective than a simple explanation. In this way, the show is limited to those who are sighted, as the ability to see the images of the PowerPoint Presentation is crucial to the understanding of the show.

This conflict between the two words remains unsolved in my mind, and so, through the course of this paper, I alternate between the words, as I feel suits that sentence. I do hope the reader can forgive this uncertainty on my part.

Creation of the Performance

Genesis

In the summer of 2019, I was commissioned to create a performance as a part of a limited run exhibition in Mumbai. The exhibition, curated by Adwait Singh. entitled ‘Muterarium’ was based on the imagination of the earth post Anthropocene. Digital animations showed creeper figs growing over concrete buildings; mushrooms were grown on plastic and concrete in little glass topped cases. The gallery hosting the exhibition, and my own performance, was no larger than $13m^2$, with an audience capacity of 15 standees. Besides making a performance somehow relevant to this exhibition, my mandate included that it be related to Mumbai city, and that there be some form of audience interaction or discussion.

As a regular theatregoer in Mumbai, I’ve attended my fair share of post-show discussions. I have found them overwhelming frustrating, and frankly, useless. The immediacy of the format doesn’t allow for much new thought; I find that most of the people sharing their opinions are those who already had an opinion on said topic. Those who are presenting fresh revelations are often those who haven’t previously been sensitised to the topic of the performance. As a result, these basic pronouncements will face the ire of those who are more familiar with the theme, who find these utterances to be quite problematic, or too simplistic. The learning possibilities are limited and the usefulness of this post-show talk, thus, is negligible. Subsequently, I was wary of having such a post-show discussion, and was actively looking for ways to include audience input in other ways.

In the early stages of devising, I imagined a storytelling performance, where I would tell a meta-myth of a Great Flood, building connections between the many mythological floods of different

religions. I thought it would be a wonderful irony, that so many cultures have warned of societal-collapse-by-flood, and yet, we have paid no heed to these warnings, and are likely to die of the same cause. However, this idea was vetoed by the artist commissioning my show. Still in the storytelling mode, though, I devised a second idea, where I would read a myth of a Great Flood, and soon after read about the impending flooding of Mumbai. Panicked, I would then begin to draw up back-up plans, scribbling them on little bits of newspaper or recycled paper, and placing these on the floor around me. The audience could maybe give me some suggestions for these, and perhaps vote for which alternative they thought would be most likely to work. However, I was sceptical of enacting that panic at such close quarters. It was not that I doubted my skills as an actor, but I imagined it would probably be rather uncomfortable. The audience was, after all, no more than a few feet away from me. That my panic wasn't occurring in real time would be evident because of the promise of an evening at the theatre, and the lack of physical distance between us would render my mask rather transparent. Moreover, I imagined it would be quite uncomfortable to watch someone be in a panicked state, when they are hardly a metre or two away from you. I decided to re-phrase the start of this show to make it as though the panic had happened beforehand, and the plans were not being thought up on the spot, but simply being presented here for the first time. In an effort to make the show 'greener', I decided to replace the recycled paper with a laptop screen. Once I had the screen, I could also add reference images to the facts I was talking about in the first half of the show. My lack of digital design skills meant the only application I had at my disposal was Microsoft PowerPoint. Rather than try to pretend that this was a shortcoming, I decided to lean into this format, and make it seem as though the presentation was the starting point of my show.

Form

At last, the format that the show took on was as follows:

Entitled Plan B/C/D/E, the performance begins with me declaring that this is not, in fact, a performance, but a presentation, similar to those I frequently had to give during school and college. I would begin with doing a breathing exercise that would help with stress, ostensibly because the topic of the show (destruction of our city in the face of the climate crisis) might be quite anxiety-inducing for audience members and so I want to share a coping mechanism for them to return to as needed. For the first twenty minutes, I present various examples of destruction of the earth's natural environment, alongside scientific research predicting further destruction. One resource in particular (http://climatecentral.org/) drives the need for immediate action far more than others. The prediction software on this website presents maps of a flooded Mumbai, with different levels of flooding depending on certain variables: the amount of carbon emissions, the year (2050 or 2100), and luck (best-case, worst-case, and an in-between scenario). These images are instantly sobering, especially when I would point out that the venue we were in would be underwater by 2050.

Having set the scene that Mumbai will certainly drown, the second half of the show begins. I describe the various ways in which I have invested in the city. Financially, with the home I still live in, that my father inherited; linguistically, as I speak all three languages that are widely spoken in the city; and professionally, as this is the city where I have built the foundation of my theatre career. Having invested a lot of money in learning theatre, with the specific purpose of returning to Mumbai to continue my career, I certainly have a lot to lose if I can no longer perform in Mumbai. At this point it is considered obvious that neither our government or big corporates will do anything to stop this flooding, and that my personal contribution to stop the flooding is minimal.

Thus, all I can do is prepare some back-up plans to ensure that my theatre career can continue even in a flooded city. Each plan is presented along with some pictures, illustrating how life in general and especially theatre will function. The plans at present are as follows:

Plan B: performances on boats. Life will continue as before, in the same buildings we currently live in, simply on the fourth floor and above. All roadways will be replaced by canals and vehicular locomotion will be strictly boat-based. Different boat sizes will allow for a variety of performances of different scales. Theatre performances will be of three sizes; small (on houseboats), medium (on the deck of a ship) and large (in sports stadiums, with the audience in the stands and the stage on the deck of a ship docked in the watery pitch).

Plan C: Aquarium Theatre. This plan is modelled on massive aquariums where the visitors may walk through tunnels with a seemingly endless expanse of water stretching above and to the sides, filled with a variety of marine life. My modification is that the performers will now be in this watery expanse, wearing diving gear, with some filtering mechanism to keep sea life and sea garbage out. The audience remains in the dry portion as they would in the aquarium. The performers require scuba training, which in the future I assume will be commonplace.

Plan D: *Gillyweed*. This plan is inspired by the novel Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, by J. K. Rowling, where the protagonist Harry consumes a specific kind of sea-weed called *gillyweed*, which modifies his body, giving him gills, webbed fingers, and flippers. In this plan I hope that non-magic genetic modification will allow us to lead amphibious lives, which in turn would ensure that theatre and the arts can continue both above and underwater.

Plan E: Jellyfish. Before I begin to explain this plan, I claim to be very nervous about presenting it, because it is new and quite raw. I underline that this plan was included into the Text at the last moment. I specifically ask for extra help because I am unsure about how to proceed. I then begin

to tell the audience several facts about jellyfish; how they are an ancient organism, anatomically without a brain, whose populations have been growing worldwide due to human activity. I have a few suggestions about how the jellyfish figure into my plans, each one more ridiculous than the last. Some of these suggestions include harvesting the jellyfish for meat, using jellyfish as weapons in future wars (freeing up nuclear power for electricity), riding jellyfish as our new vehicles, creating a settlement on top of a jellyfish bloom.

The performance ends abruptly, with me getting frustrated by my own plans, and the jellyfish plan in particular, and how evidently improbable they are. The frustration plays out either as anger with the system, or as an individual insecurity at being unable to effect actual change, depending on the energy that that evening's performance has created. Through this thesis, I refer to this sudden end, as a 'breakdown'. I thank the audience for coming, and begin unplugging my laptop and projector, and packing up my things. So far, people have successfully understood that this is the end of the show, and applause was hesitant only for a few seconds.

The Journey

Plan B/C/D/E was never intended to be performed more than once. However, a positive response from the audience at the first show, and an offer to perform in a friend's living room, made me believe that this show could be scaled up to be performed again. A pipe dream of performing at a Fringe Festival came to fruition when I applied and got accepted by the Prague Fringe Festival. The show now had legs, and it could swim to distant shores.

Naturally, the show had to be modified for the new audiences that would be seeing it. The venue would also need to feed into the show. The first two performances happened in Mumbai, both near

the sea – in fact, the second venue had French windows with a magnificent view of the Arabian Sea along one end of the room. A chance performance in Delhi became a baby step towards making the show viable outside its Mumbai-centric format. A short 'work-in-progress' showing in Prague helped me understand how far I could push some jokes, and just how much of the present city I could bring into this show, that was increasingly seeming like a 'love letter to Mumbai'.

Through repeated lockdowns and Corona consequences, the number of shows kept being altered, until I finally managed to have three shows in three very different venues in Prague. The show maintained almost an identical structure to the version performed in India. All multi-lingual jokes were removed, and a few references to local events (such as a catastrophic flooding of Prague in 2002) were added. The breathing exercise at the beginning was removed as well, in part because of a shortage of time, due to my having to speak slower to be understood by a non-native-English speaking audience, and in part because I assumed the topic would not be as distressful to an audience that is not facing imminent threat from rising seas.

Is this even theatre?

This marks an important question in the analysis of this Text. The repeated insistence at the beginning of the Text that this is **not** a performance demand this clarificatory portion. It may be enough for the author (myself) of the piece to say it is theatre, though it would be more scientific to defend this stance with the help of other perspectives. In support of my position, I look to White (2013, p. 7) and his analysis of McAuley's *Space and Performance* (2000) where she notes that theatre exists in the social interaction between the performer and the audience, rather than in its "relationship to the dramatic", as is the case for TV and film. A social occasion may be considered

theatre through the separation of the performers from the audience, which is "achieved architecturally and socially, is historically and culturally specific, as is the behaviour considered appropriate to the role of audience members" (White, 2013, p. 7). Consequently, I would argue that the cultural notions attached to the venue and the promise made before the Text began, would sufficiently confirm this Text to be a piece of theatre.

Furthermore, this Text was developed half-way through my master's studies at the Department of Authorial Creativity and Pedagogy, founded by Ivan Vyskočil, who also created the form he called 'Non-Theatre'. Vyskočil intended Non-theatre (*Nedivadlo* in the original Czech) "to be as small an institution as possible, ideally not one at all" (Čunderle and Komlosi, 2011, p. 66). This form grew from his 'text-appeals' where Vyskočil would read and improvise his absurd short stories to a small audience at the Reduta club in Prague. This form/non-form of Non-theatre is the foundation of the practise at our department. What particularly stayed with me at the end of my first year, was the aspect of direct address integral to both text-appeals and Non-theatre. This direct address to the audience was still without the pretence that usually accompanies mono-acting that may purportedly speak directly to the audience without making real contact. In our practise of Non-theatre, there was no special lighting; bright white tube-lights equally illuminated every part of the room. The audience was at the same level as the performance space (which would never be referred to as a stage). We would engage in both direct address and scene work (which could be considered closer to "classical acting"[3]). Another important tenet of Non-theatre was 'play'. Much like Jerzy Grotowski's work, Vyskočil's Non-theatre was also 'poor theatre' with an intention of

[3] By 'classical theatre' I refer to the form of theatre where each actor plays a particular character, these characters interact with one another in a scripted scene, with or without the presence of the fourth wall. In such theatre the 'character' the actor is playing is key, and the scope for improvisation is limited or negligible.

creating a laboratory environment; however, Vyskočil "privileged joyous poverty over venerable asceticism" (Čunderle and Komlosi, 2011, p. 66). 'Play', within the text of the show, between co-actors on stage, and with the listening audience is key to our practise. As Roubal explains, "Nedivadlo is about an 'encounter', making the closest face-to-face contact possible, where people can see each other, hear each other, and 'play together'" (Roubal, 2011, p. 129). The concepts of direct address and playfulness are not only equally important, but crucially linked. Vyskočil saw the value of the raw, unfinished nature of the rehearsal process, and a "theatrical variation on the "work-in-progress"" (Roubal, 2011, p. 130). The text is never complete, and each show will necessarily be different; if Non-theatre is truly an encounter between audience and performer, each change in the quality of the encounter (in terms of venue, audience composition and mindset of the performer on a given day) will be directly reflected in the output of the show.

At the early stage of devising Plan B/C/D/E I saw the possibility of making a monologic "text appeal". I thought I would speak directly to the audience but not let them speak until the end; however, since there would once again be no differentiation of performance space and audience space, either with lighting or through physical markers. I could see their expressions and would play off of their reactions to the things I said. Of course, over time, the Text changed, and the audience input became woven throughout the course of the evening. However, I still maintained the concept of actively responding to the audience, in a playful and improvisational way.

This active state of the Text, where it is at once written before its presentation, yet gets re-written as it is being performed, with the help of the audience, makes me see this Text as residing in Vyskočil's formulation of Nedivadlo. I understand Vyskočil's decision to place the negative prefix before this classification of his work; yet, I think the decision to call it "Non-theatre" is firmly rooted in the context and time in which Vyskočil was working. From my lens, in today's

cultural milieu, Nedivadlo is very much theatre, though it may be on the fringes of the conventional understanding of the same. I was pleasantly surprised when some theatre friends from Mumbai who were totally unfamiliar with the concept of Non-theatre as Vyskočil meant it, remarked after attending Plan B/C/D/E that it was definitely a performance, and perhaps it was theatre, but perhaps it wasn't. This was a success for me, as I had previously wondered how well these concepts we had studied in my department would translate to a foreign environment, without the context in which they had been created.

The Personal is Political

While describing this work, I often use phrases such as 'documentary theatre', 'political theatre' and of course, 'authorial theatre'. This show was devised after one year of my master's studies at the Authorial Acting programme at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, Theatre faculty. My simplified understanding of an authorial presentation, at that time, was a performance where the author remained present on stage. This was not something that I imagine could be achieved simply by having the author be the performer; the identity of the author remained visible for the audience to see, even as the author slipped into the role of the performer, and in and out of personas/characters they had created.

My understanding of authorial presentations has grown and changed with time, and now I would see an authorial presentation as a processual form created in the context of the Department of Authorial Creativity and Pedagogy. This serves as a part of the process of the education, rather than an outcome of the same. The performer is encouraged to practise 'active communication' or 'creative communication'. There is work with a particular and clear topic, perhaps looking at it

from multiple perspectives and through different methods that we are taught here. 'Distance' (in a metaphorical sense) is another key method we are frequently encouraged to employ. My understanding of 'distance' in this sense, is the ability of the performer to discuss a topic which may be (and often is) quite personal or emotional, without being blocked by it. The distance from the topic allows one to approach it from different perspectives, and perhaps with different tools that are taught at the department. For example, approaching a concept with written text as a starting point, or with physical movement, or perhaps with the spoken word. Unfortunately, this particular position of distance-from-the-theme is one that remains most contentious for me. I believe there is an aspect of cultural dissonance here; what I, as an Indian woman, saw as a Text where the performer had quite an artistic distance from a personal topic, was one that was often criticised as being too intimate a portrayal. This is a gap I don't think I could easily bridge; as the form focuses on authenticity and the personality of the author/performer, for me to play 'distance' in a Czech sense is utterly inauthentic, and usually feels very cold to my sensibilities. When I see Czech performers play 'distance' as described by our pedagogues, I don't find it inauthentic/cold, which makes me believe that distance, like authorial creation itself, is rooted in the performer's culture and personality.

Thus, Plan B/C/D/E was born out of my understandings of this form, the Authorial Presentation. It gave me the option of directly addressing the audience, and taking their active attention to be central to the creation of the work. It also offered me the opportunity to consider playing myself, without pretence of character and persona. Though there is certainly a personality that is built through the course of the Text, I would say this is one who is quite close to a 'Meghana' that people might meet on the street, and thus is less of a character and more of a persona, one who is nearly indistinguishable from the "real me".

Another philosophy that guided me in the creation of this piece was the old feminist idiom ‘the personal is political’. This means, that politics does not exist purely in the realm of larger society. The way we live our lives, the influences on us, and the perspectives we hold, are indicative of the world we live in, and larger politics will be reflected in our everyday lives. To talk of climate change in the larger sense, of the ramifications on the ‘environment’ is difficult. The concept of ‘the environment', ‘the earth’, ‘ecosystems’ are often too ambiguous, or too abstract to be properly grasped. When we turn these large-scale problems into individual problems, I believe it is easier to understand, empathise, and be motivated into action.

Plan B/C/D/E is certainly political theatre. It is also deeply personal, at times a love letter from me to my home city of Mumbai, and at times a cry for help, or even a distress signal. Perhaps most important of all, it is a coping mechanism; a way for me to experience some semblance of catharsis while living in a world that I can see dying as I age. It is documentary theatre, as its foundations are firmly rooted in current scientific research and data, mixed with my genuine experiences.

This is perhaps the most important aspect of the premise of the Text; it is firmly rooted in reality. This is further underlined by my repeated assertions that this is not a show but a real life problem-solving session. Yet, there is whimsy and absurdity; there is a game to be played, and some suspension of disbelief from the audience is necessary. I don’t see this as a problem. Rather, as the world becomes harder to understand, reality, the news, or current events are increasingly absurd. I see this absurdity of real life reflected in the absurdity of my almost-real Text.

Strategies to Provoke and Invite, and Control Audience Interaction

The primary fear I had before the premiere of Plan B/C/D/E was that the audience would not be responsive. I had outlined several possible methods to ensure that the show could continue, even if no feedback/suggestions came in during the time ear-marked for the audience to speak. The first solution I used was to encourage the audience to speak up; to assure them there were no 'stupid questions', that every bit of feedback was valuable, that I really wanted to hear what they had to say. This varied between a sincere request and a slightly exaggerated and aggrandizing one, such as "You look like such a beautiful, intelligent, open-minded bunch of people, I am sure anything you might think of will be *super* useful to me." The audience could pick up that this was a bit of a joke, but I found it helped reduce the tension in the room, when I suddenly switched from having sole control of the stage, to asking them to chip in.

Another strategy in these silent moments was to exclaim "No suggestions?! I suppose that means my plan is perfect!". I would wait a minute, and if there were indeed no comments, I would switch off the timer, and move on.

However, such strategies cannot come only in the moments when there is a lull in the performance. Throughout the show, I must work to create an environment where the audience "*feels able* to rebel" (Sedgman, 2018, p. 19, emphasis in original). I must ensure that the audience knows that I am inviting their input. Sedgman (2018) points out that even in performances that truly invite such input, "theatre *as an institution* still bears the weight of its own behavioural norms" (p. 19, emphasis in original).

The other block of methods is the provocation to interact. Perhaps it is not always possible to clearly demarcate a difference between what constitutes a provocation and what constitutes an

invitation. Referring to the previous example, I would say that my exclamation "No suggestions?! I suppose that means my plan is perfect!" could be considered a provocation. Indeed, it was often successful in people raising a point that they were not very confident about. I believe that my assertion that the plan was perfect (which it most certainly was not) made them feel more comfortable that their suggestion didn't need to be iron-clad either. One hesitant suggestion can then help get the ball rolling to have more audience members feel comfortable to speak up.

Though this section deals with these two verbs (and thus, two modes) of facilitating audience interaction, I will not attempt to go into great detail trying to differentiate between what constitutes a provocation and an invitation, as I feel the line between them is too thin, and the scope of this thesis would not allow me to sufficiently delve into this differentiation.

The Rules of the Game

An integral aspect of the Text's premise is the play/game with the audience. The set-up of "this is not a show" is the first indication that there is a game to be had here; the repeated casualness of my attitude juxtaposed with my obvious familiarity with the material and clearly pre-prepared PowerPoint Presentation reveal that this is not not-a-show either. And finally, the game itself is where I ask for feedback, and accept/reject it at will, only to end the show with the exclamation that this is all useless anyway.

Eugen Fink (originally writing in 1957) elaborates on the importance of play, its universality and reflects on its status as "remedy for the harms of a contemporary technocratic civilization" (Fink, 2012, p. 1). Play is viewed by many as a form of rest and relaxation in contrast to "the

serious and responsible activity of life" (Fink, 2012, p. 4). The juxtaposition of work and play seems to Fink as an oversimplification, where adults usually see play as a way to pass the time, to break boredom, and fitting within their own routine. 'Play' is by no means limited to children; for adults the play is simply better masked, without the innocence of the child. Moreover, Fink underlines the goal-oriented nature of human (and especially adult) life; "we take life as a task" (Fink, 2012, p. 8) and yet, play exists outside this strict task orientation – it exists for its own sake. This is not to suggest that it is purposeless, but rather that its objectives lie within the play itself, rather than having any transcendental purposes. With this last clarification, Fink disqualifies play which is played with a goal in mind; for example when one plays a sport with the intention of training and strengthening one's body, this is not the play he is talking about. As per my understanding, this doesn't disqualify play if it has pre-determined rules, and play can continue to be an 'oasis of happiness' even if it has some pre-decided rules. In fact, some structure or rules (which are mutable, unlike laws) may be necessary, as totally arbitrary play cannot function smoothly (Fink, 2012, p. 13).

My reading of Fink allows me to see what Sedgman (2013, p. 12) called the 'theatre contract'[4] as a loosely defined, socially understood structured play[5]. Vyskočil's Nedivadlo is founded on this

[4] The theatre contract comprises the spectator's suspension of disbelief, where the audience understands what is expected of them; namely silence, appropriate responses at appropriate times, contributing to the illusion that the performers are elsewhere (rather than the theatre venue, that they are in the scene of the play) (Sedgman, 2013, p. 12-13).

[5] I doubt whether we can clearly delineate intent in the context of an individual attending the theatre; are they attending for entertainment, for the joy of it, for the broadening of their minds, to support a friend in the cast or crew – the possibilities are manifold, and the ability to clearly define one is limited.

very ‘play’ with the audience. There is some shared understanding of expectations of audience and performer, with the space to improvise these ‘rules’ as called for by a particular text, or particular room of people.

As described before, Plan B/C/D/E is a game; play with a certain set of rules. This game has been written by me, and is best understood by me, the author/performer/presenter on stage. Ideally, this game must not be totally foreign to the audience, nor must it be so complicated that they cannot get acquainted with it in the span of a sixty-minute performance.

If the text must continue as designed, it is important that the audience ‘plays the game’. Playing the game, is this context, requires the audience to (at least on the face of it) accept the following propositions: that climate change is real and presents a serious threat to my life in the coming years; that my plans do indeed require their suggestions and feedback to become more reasonable; and that the scope for their input is limited by me, the ‘master-of-ceremonies’ so to speak, who not only controls the time within which they may speak, but also can accept or reject their input at will. The audience must accept this limited scope within which they are to provide their input. Rebellion, or rejection, of the game could be to interrupt me and speak outside the demarcated feedback time, or to not speak at all in the feedback time. The audience may not accept that I am being honest in claiming that the Text is not a show; but so long as they maintain the expectations of the ‘theatre-contract’ (see above), this does not prevent the game from being played.

Thus, we have ascertained that for the Text it is essential that the audience be in on the game. How, then, do I bring them on board this game? Nasim Soleimanpour, a playwright who has written shows with varying amounts of audience input, credits the success of his shows to the creation of a working ‘theatre-machine’. At an online workshop that I participated in, in April 2020, he simplified the theatre machine as one that had input, leading to process, leading to output.

Before the premiere of the show, the author must work hard to ensure that this chain of reactions (input to process to output) is as smooth as possible, regardless of the quality of input. For example, a show of his like *White Rabbit Red Rabbit* is totally unmoderated; the performer reads the text for the first time while performing it, learning the rules of the game at the same time as the audience, thus ensuring that the author (who is not physically present), is the one with the most control over the process. The quality of the input may vary; regardless, the process must continue to work to create the necessary output. The output itself is not singular; the outcome of each show is different, and this is guaranteed. However, there is an intended range of output that the author (and producers of the show) would consider a successful show. Those performances that fall outside this range are usually somewhat of a disappointment.

Similarly, the theatre-machine of Plan B/C/D/E has a fixed process and requires certain input for me to consider a show to be successful or otherwise. Without the audience's input, the show can continue based on my pre-prepared text; however, it is not a result that I would be happy with. I would ideally like the audience to participate; to 'play the game' or to 'provide the input' (depending on which theatrical metaphor one prefers) and for this they must understand and then accept the game. As Fink explains, a child playing with her doll, plays the role of 'mother' and the doll is her 'child'. However, she is aware that she is playing, that the doll is not indeed her child. This awareness doesn't limit the play at all; there is a physical reality of the doll, and the "mysterious reality" that she applies to it. (Fink, 2012, p. 14). The basis of the game is the premise of theatre or performance art – a reality that both the audience and I are familiar with. The subject of the performance (climate change) is also a physical reality – it is the manner in which I cope with this subject that forms the 'mysterious reality' of the evening, which I must successfully communicate to the audience for the game to be played successfully. Thus, much like the child in

Fink's example, the audience and I share a physical reality, and some basic understanding of the game. Knowing this is a game and not a real-life request for feedback doesn't hinder the audience's ability to play the game; rather, it clarifies the role they are being put in.

The first step in the process of explaining the game, is the familiar format. I use Microsoft PowerPoint (a physical reality shared by all participants) and refer to my experience of using this to make presentations at school and college. An important dialogue in the text goes, "This was the one thing I was always good at in school and college. And now, as an adult, when I struggle with some aspect of life, this is what I return to."

The Microsoft PowerPoint format is one that I imagine my audience to be as familiar with as me. If not in their schooling, I assume that most (if not all) audience members have used/seen the format in their work, or through the schooling of their children. In Mumbai, the choice to use this ubiquitous software got many chuckles and seemed much more like a reference to everyone's childhood, teen years, or professional life. This response of familiarity was also there in Prague, but to a smaller degree.

Auslander (2006, p. 198) points out that several theoreticians use antagonistic terms such as 'encroachment' or 'contamination' to refer to the mediatization[6] of live art. I believe that the use of the PowerPoint format does qualify this text as a mediatized piece of art. Phelan's explanation

[6] Auslander also uses Baudrillard's term 'mediatized' to refer to 'culture dominated by the presentations of the mass media' (2006, p. 210), referring to live performance (from theatre to concerts to sporting events) being reproduced/simulcast on screens such that what can be seen by most of the audience is the screen rather than the performer(s) themselves.

of her ontology of performance focuses on the ephemerality of live art. “Performance honors [sic] the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/frame can have an experience of value which leaves no trace afterwards” (Phelan, cited in Auslander, 2006, p. 196). The use of ‘technologies of reproduction’ undercuts this ephemerality, as the PowerPoint can be reproduced identically. Furthermore, in most venues, the projection is significantly larger than the performer, and functions as a dramaturgical tool as much as it does a scenographic tool.

However, I would reject an approach that sees the use of this media as an ‘encroachment of technologies of reproduction’. The ubiquitous PowerPoint Presentation has been a consistent educational format throughout my childhood. Consequently, this technology is a welcomed partner, rather than an encroachment. Due to my assumption that the audience has a similarly familiar relationship with this technology, I count on them understanding the context of the PowerPoint, with minimal explanation from me.

Simply by informing the audience that I have used PowerPoint to create the visuals they see, and alluding to my experience with this technology in school and university, I can assume the audience knows what part they must play. I must choose ‘frames’ that I assume the audience can easily understand. Goffman’s *Frame Analysis* was applied to theatre by Anthony Jackson (as cited in White, 2013, p. 32) to explain how the audience begins the viewing of theatre with an “Outer Theatrical Frame” where the audience performs the behaviour expected of them (watching, responding as appropriate to the venue, type of performance, cultural norms) and the performer is clear in their position in this equation as well (of presenting a particular text). Through the course of the performance “Inner Frames” may reveal themselves, where the specific behaviour expected of the audience may change. Of the handful of Inner Frames that Jackson lists, the ‘Investigative Frame’ is most relevant to the matter at hand. This frame requires the audience to join in the action,

such that without their fulfilment of a task, the story may not progress. “The ‘Involvement Frame’ is where the audience and performers occupy the same space, physically and imaginatively, and the audience have become participants with a significant influence over the course of the action” (Jackson 1997, cited in White, 2013, p. 32).

Within this broad frame, I can also refer to certain social roles that specify the social norms or relationships that would further qualify a specific relationship between the audience and myself in that moment. Though the Outer Frame of audience-performer is constant, the Inner Frame may vary. This variation is culturally located, and can only be chosen once the show has begun, and the audience members have revealed their personalities to some extent, allowing me to make a decision regarding which specific frame of reference I would like to refer to. For example, in an invite-only performance in a friend’s living room in Mumbai, where a large majority of the audience was known to me, I referred to the ‘frame’ of a teacher. This allowed me to scold audiences, threaten detention, and shush hecklers, while still maintaining a comic air. At the Prague premiere of Plan B/C/D/E, I referred to the ‘frame’ of a student presenting a topic they have researched more than their colleagues (the audience). There was less of a performed hierarchy in this setting, yet I still had the scope to claim greater familiarity with the material than the audience members/commentors.

In both cases, I found I did not need to explain to the audience what role I was taking on, I simply jumped into the part, and since I chose a frame with that specific audience in mind, they were also able to follow me. In the living room show, I explained the format where I would describe a plan, and then they would be invited to give three minutes of feedback. I then asked, “Is this clear?”, in a “teacherly” voice. Here was a specific reference to a particular generation of teachers, which the audience was familiar with, having either studied under such teachers, or

having had their children study under such teachers. In response to my question, the host of the evening, whose home the show took place in, who is the father of my friend, responding, “yes miss” (‘Miss’ is used to refer to female teachers in English medium schools in India). I immediately retorted, “It’s ma’am to you” (which is a line often used by senior teachers). This prompted a huge laugh from the audience, and throughout the evening, I kept returning to the ‘frame’ of teacher-student relationship. This allowed me to continue to “discipline” the audience in ways that were as controlling as they were humourous. I did not consistently play the part of the teacher; I simply used it as a tool when the audience was too rowdy. At no point did I have to explain that I was choosing this particular frame; if chosen correctly, a frame should be immediately obvious to the audience without the need for an explanation. As White (2013) notes, “the purpose of the idea of frame is to explain how we go from one kind of activity to another without constantly instructing each other or asking questions about what is going on” (p. 39).

This particular example sheds light on the utter disbalance of power in this game that the audience enters into, when they attend Plan B/C/D/E. Unfortunately for them, this game is rigged in my favour. I created the game, I made the rules, I am more familiar with the situation than they are, and as game-master, I can accept or reject whatever they propose, at will. I can even change the frame as I choose (though I am bound to choose a frame that will be met with familiarity and acceptance).

Performed Authenticity

Each performance begins with my sincere insistence that this is not, in fact, a show. I make it a point to not have a written script, so that the speech may flow organically; I use colloquialisms, I allow myself to make errors that I correct as I go along. In other words, I make every effort to seem as 'authentic' as possible. However, this authenticity itself is in some ways a falsehood, as it is being played as such for the specific benefit of the final moments of the show.

The "authentic" Meghana that the audience sees is necessarily one that I have identified as being Meghana-without-edifice. As Knaller says, "(authenticity)... is to a good degree self-referential (autological) because it creates and marks itself" (Knaller 2012a:59 as cited in Schulze, p. 39). Thus, the authenticity I portray is only relevant because it has been named by me as an 'authentic portrayal'.

Despite my supposedly authentic manner, it must be quickly evident to the audience that I have rehearsed what I am about to say. It is obvious that this is not totally improvised, seeing as I cite studies, and refer to slides on my pre-prepared PowerPoint presentation. What I attempt to project, rather than a performer-without-edifice, is a public speaking persona that this presenter is putting on. This fits in with my insistence that this is not a show but a presentation. I certainly feel a need to be a more performative version of myself than I would be in civil life, simply from the act of being on stage, separated from the audience. I must be louder, slower, more communicative than I would be in civil conversations, the way one would expect a person at a board-meeting to be. But I feel quite confident that I am successful in convincing the audience that what I share and experience on stage is true to my heart. This surety comes from the frequency with which I am asked whether my 'breakdown' at the end of the show was scripted or indeed real. With people from a theatre/film background, this answer is usually clear, and they are able to successfully guess

it is scripted, at least to some extent. However, people from a non-artistic background tend to be more trepidatious as they leave the theatre, sometimes worrying for my peace of mind.

When such audience members ask me if I rehearsed the final portion or if that was a spontaneous 'breakdown', I often answer that it was a bit of both; I do know I am going to play the part of a person falling apart, but the exact manner in which I fall apart depends on the nature of the performance thus far.

Would the audience have this doubt if I never staked a claim to authenticity?

Schulze (2019) postulates that for any experience (of food, clothing or custom) to be experienced as authentic, it must be named as such. Conversely, the claim to authenticity includes a claim of being unmediated.

> "*The paradox, the dilemma of authenticity, is that to be experienced as authentic it must be marked as authentic, but when it is marked as authentic it is mediated, a sign of itself, and hence lacks the authenticity of what is truly unspoiled, untouched by mediating cultural codes. (Culler, 1988: 164) (cited in Schulze, 2017, p. 39)*

Plan B/C/D/E certainly walks the line of this paradox with its claim to authenticity. I would venture this claim is accurate in terms of the manner of the performer being quite similar to her 'true' personality; and it is untrue because even this pattern of behaviour is totally rehearsed, and the presentation has an outcome that is long since decided.

The question begs to be asked: having staked a claim to authenticity, and seemingly distanced itself from being a performance, can Plan B/C/D/E be considered a piece of theatre at all? Though this question has been addressed before in this paper, I would like to focus on a different

perspective of classification of theatre and performance. In a discussion about the relationship between audience and performer in one-on-one theatre pieces, Schulze (2019) says,

> "*If one were to place such an event on a continuum with theatre on one end and performance art on the other, it* [one-on-one performances] *would surely have to be located closer to performance art, which usually follows a pattern of actions but does not employ make-believe."* (p. 108)

This quotation raised a lot of questions for me and my performance. Though Schulze was referring to one-on-one performances, which Plan B/C/D/E most certainly is not, the idea of a performance that follows a pattern of actions (in my case, a strict pattern as determined by the previously prepared PowerPoint Presentation) but does not employ make-believe, is extremely relevant to Plan B/C/D/E. At the outset, the Text seemingly does not employ make-believe: in fact, it begins with an insistence that this is not a show, that I am taking this topic very seriously, and begins with facts and figures, updated for every show. The plans are also presented with an earnest air, though perhaps during the performance, or a few hours after, the audience may realise that none of my plans are in fact viable. Thus, more than the average theatre performance, this performance goes out of its way to convince the audience that this is not make-believe, even though they may discover (during the show or after) that it was often make-believe in disguise.

This is by no means an invention of mine; I see a reflection of this in the work of the UK based group 'Forced Entertainment'. The audience is considered to be a part of the spectacle, even if they are silently seated (Schulze, 2017, p. 69).

> *"By acknowledging the audience, and thus acknowledging the theatrical nature of the event, Forced Entertainment allowed the 'real world' to enter the theater* [sic] *room. The theatrical space is no longer a space of fantasy, suspension of disbelief and make-believe. It becomes a*

> *very real place of performance where audience and performers come together with a common purpose but without a fourth wall – a real place of assembly, as Lehman has it (cf. 2008: 12). […] The works of FE are curiously positioned between the real world and the theatrical world, set in an ontological limbo, neither here, nor there."* (Schulze, 2017, p. 69)

How does existing in this liminal space, with the aura of authenticity serve to invite audience interaction? In the first iteration of the Text, the 'authentic' aura was a dramaturgical decision, made to support the intimacy of the space Plan B/C/D/E was to premiere in. However, as I performed, it I realised that the authentic aura was key to putting the spectators at ease. As mentioned before, no written script of the Text exists; the words I speak, though prepared, are full of colloquialisms, corrections made as the Text progresses, with several moments where I forget the word I intended to say and have to ask the audience to help me fill it in. Though this doesn't totally negate it being a 'performance', I believe it puts an audience member at ease, when they are asked for their input. After all, if I, the so-called "performer", am making mistakes and speaking imperfectly, this must surely mean that they are not expected to speak eloquently either.

This strategy attempts to invite (rather than provoke) audience interaction. I found that in more intimate venues, where there was no clear demarcation (through elevation or lighting) between the performance space and the audience, spectators would interrupt me more often. For example, in the first half of the presentation, the following question is posed to the audience: "How many of you believe that climate scientists are wrong or lying about the extent of destruction to be expected? Could you please raise your hands?" The question has always provoked an audible reaction from the audience, as it sounds rather like a denial of climate-science, which may be particularly unexpected after twenty-odd minutes of the presentation insisting that the performer's

home and life are at risk from climate change. The question is met with no raised hands, and I usually follow it with an awkward giggle, and an explanation that I believe climate scientists may be exaggerating to ensure a more active response from the general populace. At the first work-in-progress showing in Prague, in a venue with no special lighting or stage, when I posed the question, it was met with hesitation, and one audience member almost unconsciously blurted out the response “I think it’s the opposite” and immediately covered her mouth, and shook her head and apologised. Her urge to speak seemed to be involuntary, and she was worried she had interrupted me, and apologised again after the performance. However, I was extremely grateful for the interruption because it felt like a victory of the performed authentic façade. To interrupt in civil conversation to agree or disagree, or to show that you are listening is rather normal. Sacks points out that in everyday conversation "people heckle in the course of a story as compared to making remarks at the end of it so as to affect other listeners' hearing of the story" (McIlvenny, 1996, p.33).

Similarly, at a show in Mumbai, which took place in a packed living room, with most audience members from the arts professions, and almost all who knew me personally, the interruptions were frequent. The first interruption was similarly apologetic as the one in the former example; however, once it became evident that I not only didn’t mind, but seemed to enjoy this interruption, heckling became nearly constant. However, on re-watching a video recording of that performance, I can note that the most heckles came at the most “casual” moments in the show. When I was citing data or research, the responses were more muted than when I passed a comment that was improvised or sounded improvised.

As Fink (2012, p. 14) says of the child who plays the role of ‘mother’ with the doll, who knows she is playing and yet perfectly true to her play, the façade of authenticity is not intended as a falsehood or an act of trickery. After all, the theatre is not intended as a place of total honesty or

confession. The head of Battersea Arts Centre, while referring to a show they produced called 'London Stories' says, "there are always masks. But this should not stop us from reaching [for honesty] nonetheless." (Schulze, 2017, p. 125). Rather than achieving honesty (if that is even possible) what they are interested in is the pursuit of honesty. This rings true for my process as well. Though the 'breakdown' I have at the end of the Text is scripted, it comes from a very honest place. It is a true-to-life representation of my experiences with climate grief, and my struggles with the same. Although I am not having a real emotional breakdown on stage, it is an honest portrayal of my relationship with the topic.

Perhaps it is this honesty which contributes to several spectators' lack of surety about whether I am having a breakdown in real-time, or if it is planned. Afterall, though my plans may be fantastical, I am "bringing the real world into the theatre" as Schulze describes Forced Entertainment's work. In this sense, the 'marking of authenticity' is assisted by the shared knowledge the audience has about the climate crisis. For the first half of the Text, the discussion of facts and studies regarding climate change set the scene by necessarily being as real-world as possible. I constantly update the facts, and refer to my notebook on stage, to ensure the audience knows that there is no falsehood or exaggeration involved in this portion. Once they are sufficiently convinced that I am being honest and authentic, the absurdity of the second half of the Text is thrown into sharp contrast. To a large extent, my manner remains the same; and my hope is that at least at the beginning of this portion of the Text, the audience continues to believe that I am being authentic. This belief in my authenticity may wane, which is perfectly alright with my intentions for the show – so long as they continue to play the game (refer to section 'The Rules of the Game').

An important factor in promoting the 'authentic aura' of the show, is the minimal staging. Schulze (2017) points out that documentary theatre, and verbatim plays in particular, often follow

austere staging to “achieve the effect of austerity” (p. 201), in an attempt to seem as close to the real world as possible. “Scenographic paucity” (Roubal, 200, p. 129) is also an integral part of Nedivadlo/Non-theatre, with either no set elements, or just a basic table and chair as needed.

The staging of Plan B/C/D/E has a similar approach. I wouldn’t describe it as austere, but I would say a conscious effort is made to show a bare-bones set-up to make it seem more ‘non-theatrical’ as Schulze puts it. There is always a table with my laptop on it, and a notebook that I refer to from time to time. While the audience enters, I am either writing in this notebook or re-reading the notes I have written there. My backpack is also on the stage, usually semi-hidden behind the table, with my water bottle on the table as well. In the Prague premiere, I pulled out a pair of swimming goggles (at the point of explaining Plan D), which I had purposely left in my backpack. I made it a point to let the audience see that I had to reach into my backpack, pull out a wallet and a pouch before I could reach the swimming goggles. A friend of mine who is not from a theatre background questioned this decision, saying it looked like I had not prepared well for the show. At this moment in time, I am quite content with the audience occasionally having this impression during the show. At that moment in the text, I enjoyed the absurdity of interrupting myself mid-sentence, to reach into my bag and pull out: a “wrong” (and civil) object, followed by a prop. This didn’t even need to be staged, and just occurred as such on that evening. It was an honest moment, and reflected a mundane moment that perhaps everyone experiences – the act of reaching for something and finding their hands grasping something else.

Thus, there is indeed a reasonable amount of authenticity and honesty in the Text. Whether it is the little moments of forgetting the appropriate word for something, or the larger moments such as my expression of climate grief at the end of the show. The intent of using this ‘aura of authenticity’ is not to manipulate or coerce audiences; rather, it is to help the process of suspension

of disbelief, which I believe is integral for the 'game' of the Text. The audience's faith in me and my struggles is similarly key to the game. As Samuel Taylor Coleridge said, drama is "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith" (Safire, 2007). His intent in saying this was that there must be a semblance of truth, for the imagination to take hold; and it is inaccurate to assume the reader of poetry (or spectator of a show, in our case) to be a "passive recipient of the supernatural content" (Coleridge 1817, cited in Safire, 2007). I agree with this stance; the authenticity is to guide the audience to first have faith in the Text, and then to aid their decision to suspend disbelief.

Humour

In the early days of devising the show, I finished a rehearsal and felt utterly exhausted. This wasn't simple exertion from performing for nearly 50 minutes non-stop, but it was a mental and emotional drain. This was a heavy topic in every sense of the word; in terms of the science involved, which is beyond my usual daily scientific-research-intake; and certainly in terms of the sense of doom it left me with. If I, the performer, who was perfectly primed for this topic and wasn't facing this information for the first time was so exhausted, how could I expect an audience member to maintain their attention for the entire duration of the performance? I had to add lightness into the Text from time to time, to give the audience a 'break'.

Once I began to add the comedy, however, I realised it served not only as a break from the heaviness of the topic, but also a tool to make a point more effectively. I found this to be a perspective I shared with a Forced Entertainment's show *Speak Bitterness*, as described by Schulze (2017). Schulze describes how in this show, there is laughter which the audience immediately

chokes on, when something serious is discussed straight after a light moment. This "oxymoronic humour" serves to unsettle the audience, such that they can't be sure of what to expect next. It is in this state of unease that they are able to play the active role of an emancipated spectator. (Schulze, 2017, p. 96). It also serves to link the performance to the real world, where it is commonplace to see the juxtaposition of the "funny and sad, and the beautiful and the horrid". (Schulze, 2017, p. 96). Though some may question whether joking about horrific situations serves to belittle these events, I firmly believe that it is a coping mechanism that is quite effective, especially among the meme-users of my generation. The sheer number of meme pages on social media dedicated to creating content about the climate crisis that are simultaneously hilarious and informative is evidence for the same[7]. It seems as though the philosopher Nietzsche would approve of this pan-generational coping mechanism, as he formulates it in Ecce Homo: "I do not know any other way of handling great tasks than as play" (Fink, 2012, p. 17).

Furthermore, I truly believe it is not only my plans that are absurd; the situation we are in is itself quite absurd. As a generation, we have been raised with the knowledge that many of us will die because for centuries we have been slowly killing our planet, and the consequences of the actions of our forefathers and foremothers are finally catching up to us. This is simultaneously a truism that many of us don't question because of how long we have been hearing it, while also being a fact that we don't think of every day because it is difficult to confront such a frightening topic. An article on The Washington Post entitled "Why is Millennial Humour so Weird?" quickly went viral, with screenshots of the article headline juxtaposed with other images, meant to mock

[7] Some of the best sources of news related to climate change are pages that primarily share memes (humourous images accompanied with text) on social media. A particular mention must be made here of the page 'Climate Collapse Memes for Extinct Indian Teens' which addresses the real threat to our lives, while also sharing humour, and up-to-date news items.

not only the article, but also millennials ourselves. Aroesti (2019) writing in The Guardian posits that "one explanation for all this un-realism is that it's a response to a world that has stopped making sense." The original Washington Post article itself proposed that the uncertainty of the economic climate, the de-stabilisation of previously held milestones of marriage, child-rearing etc. have left millennials feeling "unpleasantly rootless" and their taste for absurd comedy reflects this rootlessness. (Aroesti, 2019)

Besides my own millennial tilt towards absurd humour, I have found that when I read a fact that is written in a dry/straightforward way, it could be frightening, but it was easier to be emotionally disengaged from it. However, when the same fact was presented in a way that incited an emotional response (for example, if it was written with the intent to enrage, or the intent to amuse), I was more likely to engage with it, and furthermore, more likely to remember it.

Using comedy as a tool to engage audiences in serious matters is by no-means a recent invention. The boom in stand-up comedy, particularly with intentionally political themes, could be taken as an indication of the success of this format. Willett and Willett (2019, p. 149) believe that the equation "tragedy plus time equals comedy", can be traced back to the era of Mark Twain, in the nineteenth century. In the case of Plan B/C/D/E, the 'time' factor could refer to time/pace/rhythm within the Text, or the sense of a deadline – by 2050, my house is almost certainly going to be submerged and time is running out.

In the case of the former, where time is an important factor in creating comedy, the work at the Department of Authorial Creativity and Pedagogy is especially useful. Comedy is an oft-used tool in our work, and especially in the group devising work we do in our Authorial Acting classes. This is also a key principle of Vyskočil's Nedivadlo; he is quoted saying it "always has been about play.

The dramatic play in particular." (Vyskočil as cited in Roubal, 2011, p. 131). As Roubal (2011) puts it, this play was dependent on a sense of humour:

> *"It is a humour full of paradoxes ad absurdum, sparkling with playful invention, humour, as Vyskočil says, that is intense, that has no satirical, objective focus, but is directed, instead, "towards 'the subject', towards itself, towards recognising and communicating its own comicality, and towards 'the subjects', and expresses itself as irony, grotesqueness, 'nonsensification'".*" pp. 131-132.

As I see it, comedy can be used as a means to create metaphorical/emotional distance from an intimate or troubling subject. If used effectively, it could alleviate the tension caused by speaking about or listening to an intimate/troubling topic, as also provide greater insight. An 'effective' use of comedy in this case, could refer either to the quality of the humour, or the timing applied to it.

For example, in the Text I talk about how there is a global focus on individual attempts to curb climate change, and how this is a false narrative, as individual contribution to the climate crisis is minimal – real change must be systemic, coming from government regulations and changes to big industry. In the Prague shows, I used the analogy of the National Museum (a grand, stately building at the end of the largest boulevard in the city) being on fire. By recycling, taking public transport etc, you are helping as much as if you stood at the opposite end of this boulevard (Wenceslas Square) and threw a glass of water at the raging fire. Yes, the intent is good, but the value of this action is negligible. This analogy always gets a laugh despite the morbid framing of a national monument on fire.

I felt it was important to make the above point with comedy as a vessel to communicate it. To be told that your attempts to help the world are useless can be quite a painful thing to hear. Moreover, it can be quite disheartening, especially since individual action often feels like the only

thing we can do. When I tell it like a joke, I feel I can effectively communicate this "uselessness" without being overtly hurtful or causing too much discomfort.

This is the line I am most wary of crossing throughout the show. The nature of the topic is such that it is very easy to shock/frighten the audience. However, it is my firm belief that an audience member that is too shocked/frightened will begin to reject the show. This may happen through each individual spectator's mind wandering as they think about their own lives implicated in this problem; or they may continue listening but emotionally disengage as a defence mechanism. I have experienced both the above as an audience member myself.

Naturally, this line between shocking enough and being too shocking is hugely subjective, besides being located in socio-political contexts. Still, comedy helps me bring the audience back to the here and now, by lightening the mood, or by changing the rhythm and pattern of my speech.

How then, does this tool help provoke or invite audience input? I firmly believe that comedy and humour are fantastic tools in reducing the uncomfortable tension in the theatre space. Used effectively, they can create dramatic tension, which needn't be uncomfortable. A professor of mine, Howard Lotker, reports that Vyskočil would often say to his students "turn the tension into dramatic tension", when referring to the tension inherent in the material, or the nervousness of the performer. When the spectator feels comfortable (rather than too shocked, too frightened, or in any way, responding very emotionally to the subject matter) they are more likely to be willing to speak, and if they are sufficiently emotionally stable, they are more likely to be able to apply some of their "rational mind" to suggest input.

The comedy also helps me control audience input. Many of my behaviours that might otherwise be considered rude, can be forgiven if coated in a comedic veneer. For example, at the premiere at Přístav, the feedback for Plan C (the aquarium-theatre) was rather repetitive. People kept bringing

up that fish, or sea-waste could float into the space and disturb the performance. By the third such suggestion, I could exaggerate my frustration by yelling "CAGE, CAGE, CAGE!", to refer to the clause that the "performance area" will have a net cage that will keep marine life and marine garbage at bay. Since I knew the person who made the third comment, I could even go so far as to say "Urgh, Indian men just don't know how to listen." After this comment, which got a few laughs, I giggled and said "just kidding" to the spectator in question, and then continued by repeating what I had said before in a calmer tone. The audience in general and the spectator in question both laughed, and this moment of "tension" could be passed off as simple teasing.

In civil situations, when I must answer the same question thrice, I struggle with my patience. To joke about being repetitive can help me even in such situations; and the theatrical format allows me to exaggerate such a joke, which may also work to alleviate the annoyance of any other audience member who may be frustrated at hearing the same thing be repeated. The stark contrast between civil and theatrical intercourse was brought out in particular at the living room performance in Mumbai. The audience was made up of about 50 people, with approximately 30% being my parents' generation, and the rest being my generation. I did not want a post-show discussion, but one began anyway. I suspect that this was because of the living room allowing for a congenial atmosphere, and the fact that the people who began the discussion were all a generation older than me. During the performance, I had used the 'Teacher-Student' frame and shut down any line of conversation that didn't suit the Text, and it hadn't felt uncomfortable. I got the feeling that the audience members didn't feel insulted by my 'scolding' either, as they always laughed, and usually played the part of the student in some way (for example, pressing their finger to their lips, a typical "punishment" given by teachers to young children who talk out of turn in Indian classrooms). However, now that I had ended the performance, I found I had no control over this

conversation. One person in particular kept speaking about how "all these problems can't be fixed by laws because the common man in India will still throw garbage on the street". Other audience members supported me when I tried to explain that individuals throwing garbage is neither the problem nor the solution – yet, this proved useless as she was certain that she was right, and wouldn't listen to us. Now that the performance was over, I had no control over the event, and even my humour was unable to control the conversation. It also seemed impossible for me to suddenly play the 'Teacher-Student' frame anymore – to do so would be extremely rude, where mere minutes ago it had been comedy.

After having used humour to successfully control/invite the audience's input, at the very end of the show, after I have had my 'breakdown' I often make a dry attempt at humour. I try to repeat a joke that has been used before, on that particular evening, or I try to nervously laugh at my own situation. This weakened humour serves as a final act of control over the narrative; it serves to show that I am indeed affected by the 'breakdown', seeing as my wit is not as sharp as I was a few moments ago, while also serving to tell the audience that I am okay. Though I seem to falling apart, if I can joke about it, I will probably make it through.

Stakes

After explaining some aspects of the science of global warming followed up by facts as to the extent of flooding expected in Mumbai, I delve into my personal relationship or 'investments' in the city. I have ensured that everything said in this portion of the performance is true; there is no embellishment of the truth, either in the science, or in explanation of the value the city holds for

me. This was intentional, because the second half of the Text can be as whimsical as I like, but for the audience to believe, even for a moment, that I am serious about these plans, they must believe I am serious about the city and my future in it.

"Raise the stakes!" is a comment often yelled by directors to actors, telling them to take their character's situation more seriously. "What do you have to lose?" is a way we question our stakes in real-life situations. The way I draw the map of my future in the Text, it seems that I have everything to lose. My career, my home, my future, everything hangs in balance. Komlosi (2011) draws on Donnellan's thesis of heightened senses leading to heightened stakes: "when we feel there is something meaningful to win or loose [sic] in a given situation, suspense rises in the situation and our body." (p. 350) The raising of the stakes is important for my process as a performer, especially to explain my 'breakdown' at the end of the text, where the intellectual understanding of the situation supposedly leads to a sensory overload where I can "no longer continue the performance". The stakes for the audience may not be as high as they are for me, but it is important that they also feel there is something meaningful to be lost, as Komlosi puts it.

That I have everything to lose, is a refrain I come back to throughout the course of the show. This is in some ways an implication of the Prague audience in my survival; after all, if they do not help me, they stand to feel the guilt of simply watching while at least one person loses their life or livelihood to this impending catastrophe.

The success of the show in Mumbai was perhaps built on the ease with which I could also raise the stakes for the audience. Even though the focus of the Text was my own situation and my own life, being in Mumbai meant that everybody could see their own disastrous future within the context of mine. In the PowerPoint presented in the Mumbai shows, I do not include slide 7 (refer to appendix, page 78) as I do in the Prague shows. Instead I briefly move to a slide where the map

is zoomed in to show the venue of the performance and how flooded it will be in 2050. Coincidentally, both Mumbai shows happened very close to the sea, ensuring we were sitting in a room that would be deep underwater on both occasions.

With Prague, it is harder for me to raise stakes in a similar way. Being a landlocked country, in the northern hemisphere, the truly disastrous effects of climate change will be felt far later into the future in the Czech Republic than they will be in the Global South. The closest solution I could find was to share images of the flooded Vltava. This was particularly helpful at the premiere in Přístav, which is not only on the banks of the Vltava, but is in one of the districts that was worst affected by a major flood in 2002. Still, this simply showed that ecological disasters can happen everywhere, not necessarily that this particular part of the world will soon face its own total disaster.

Why does it matter whether the audience is in imminent danger from climate change or not? I venture this can be answered with the help of Rasa theory. Originating in the ancient text 'Natya Shastra', the rasa theory proposes that a performance must evoke a certain 'rasa' in each spectator, and this rasa must be felt by the performer as well. The word *rasa* can be loosely translated to flavour, taste, or experience. In one translation of the Natya Shastra it is said that "Rasa is the cumulative result of *vibhava* [stimulus], *anubhava* [involuntary reaction], and *vyabhicari bhava* [voluntary reaction]" (Schechner, 2001). Coorlawala asserts even today, as per the propositions of the Natya Shastra, a performance is an "ongoing dialogue between performer and audience" (Coorlawala, 2003, p. 37). As per the theory, it is not the performer's responsibility to evoke rasa, but merely to represent it. The audience is the one who can/must "taste" the performance.

It goes without saying that the cultural differences between a spectator in Mumbai and Prague are many, and certainly beyond the scope of this paper to unravel. The contextual difference is

what I am more interested in focusing on. The context in which a show is to be staged/performed makes a world of difference. Bogart (2007) describes how the reception to her production of *War of the Worlds* was markedly different a year before, versus in the months after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States of America. The show itself hadn't changed, but the context of larger society had changed so much, that the show now evoked something totally different in the audience. Bogart and her company worried whether it would be picking at a raw wound but were pleasantly surprised to discover it was a successful run that served as a space of catharsis for many attendees (Bogart, 2007, pp. 7-9).

What are the rasas I wish to represent in this text? Certainly *bhayanaka* (fear), *bhibhatsa* (disgust), *raudra* (rage/anger) are the cornerstones of my own 'taste' of this topic, and subsequently will be represented more than any other. *Hasya* (laughter) is peppered through the show, though it is akin to the proverbial "spoonful of sugar to make the medicine go down", rather than being the intended rasa itself. *Adbutha* which is usually translated as surprise/wonder may appear from time, though I would prefer to translate it as 'awe'. I find that simply re-reading the scientific data is enough to evoke awe in me, despite these being facts I have already familiarised myself with. The final important rasa in this mix, is *karuna* (pity, kindness), which the audience may feel for me, or for themselves.

In the experience of *karuna* lies the difference between the Mumbai and the Prague audience member. An audience member seated in Mumbai, and especially one who lives there, can experience fear for their own life; an audience member in Prague potentially experiences this fear in a different way as the threat is not so imminent for them. This is not to say that every audience member in Mumbai experiences more fear than any audience member in Prague; rather, the context suits the ease of evoking *bhayanaka* in a spectator in Mumbai. This experience of fear for the self,

versus fear for the vulnerable other, is directly linked to the experience of karuna for the other. In many long conversations I had with friends and acquaintances after the Mumbai performances, no one reported feeling sorry for me. In similar conversations in Prague, every single conversation mentioned that at the end of the show, the lasting "taste in their mouth" (forgive the pun) was pity for me, the helpless victim of climate change. Was this due to a difference in my performance? From my re-viewings of the shows, I don't believe it is.

I had known from the outset, that the stakes for a Pražák would not be on par with those in the Mumbaikar's mind. I tried to off-set this imbalance, by attempting to implicate the audience in my survival; unless they provide me with suitable feedback, I will not survive. This attempt seems to have been rather unsuccessful.

One way in which it was unsuccessful was the show at Černošice, where I seemed to be unable to convince the audience to play the game and offer suggestions. This could mean either that I did convince them that the stakes for me are high; and did such a good job of this, that they were unwilling to give me advice, lest it be bad advice. However, I sincerely doubt this was the case. In that moment, I felt utterly alone in the space. I felt that they had not bought into the idea that the stakes were high at all. I wondered, more than once, if they were offended by my jokes about climate change, thinking I was not taking it seriously enough. Throughout the show, I wondered if the Text had indeed evoked *any* rasa at all, and felt quite sure that it hadn't. After the show, several audience members came up to me and spoke warmly about what they had seen. At first this took me by surprise, as I was certain they had hated it. Later I wondered if this was simply a post-communistic stoicism, one that even two years of living in Prague have not taught me to read

well, where they simply do not openly show their feelings[8]. Finally, I decided they were simply being polite. I have no way of knowing what actually occurred in the minds of the audience members; but to follow up on Coorlawala's thesis of the "performance as dialogue", this particular evening, the Text felt like a monologue.

What effect do these stakes have on the audience interaction? I propose that if the stakes are sufficiently raised, I can provoke the audience to respond, by repeating that without their suggestions, my plans will be considered perfect. At the same time, if they turn out to not be perfect, this would be a direct threat to my life and home. I believe this to have a reasonable amount of success, with a definite spike in responses on most occasions when I use the latter argument.

I also feel that I can use the argument that it is my life we are talking about to control the responses, and this was especially true of shows in Prague. I can shut down a variety of suggestions as I choose by claiming to have greater knowledge of my life, the site (Mumbai) and the material at hand. In essence, this is also me claiming to have higher stakes (i.e. more to lose) than the audience. I have also often used this 'threat to life' as a crowd-control tactic. When someone was being particularly rowdy, and interrupting the show, I jokingly said "Wow, here I am, talking about my imminent death, and you just want to laugh?! Rude." This worked perfectly, because it got a giggle from most of the audience, while also giving me a few moments of peace from the audience member's interruptions.

[8] It has been reported to me by many Czech acquaintances that in the communist era, under heavy surveillance, people were forced to keep their feelings about things secret. Younger generations who never lived through such surveillance say they still hold their feelings close to their chest, as they have learnt from their parents. This particular audience was old enough that most of them had certainly spent some years under communistic rule. I feel uncomfortable assuming this is the reason for Czech stoicism, especially as I don't know nearly enough about Czech history and socio-politics; yet, having heard this same explanation from several different sources, I am inclined to believe it.

The Author Who Refuses to Die

One of the most influential theories of my academic consciousness was the 'death of the author' put forth by Roland Barthes. Put simply, Barthes postulated that once a text has been written and put out into the world, the "writer's interiority" (Barthes, cited in Auslander, 2008, p. 47) (which includes the context in which they live and write, and their intent) is irrelevant, and it is the reader's interiority that matters. "[Meaning] is derived not from authorial intention but from the network of relations between the reader, the text, and the larger conceptual networks suggested by that text" (Auslander, 2008, p. 46). Barthes was speaking specifically in the context of the written text, and unfortunately wrote little about theatre. In his essay "The Grain of the Voice" published in 1977, he speaks of music performances, where one can hear aspects of the performance "produced directly by the performer's body and therefore as transcending cultural and textual norms" (Auslander, 2008, p. 49). This suggests he is not so certain about the author's irrelevance in the reading of live performance.

My position in this theory is less radical than Barthes'; though I see value in his proposition, I do believe the author's interiority is an important factor and will be 'read' into the reading of the text. This is especially true in the age of the internet, where the author is no longer a mysterious figure limited to a fifty-word bio on the book sleeve. A reader can look up the author online, follow them on social media, and read the "writer's interiority" into their text, to a greater degree than they could in the times Barthes was writing in.

Moreover, the 'death of the author' cannot easily be applied to the theatre; after all, who is the author of a play? Is it the playwright, or the director and their interpretation of the text, or the actor and their interpretation of text and direction, or is authorship shared and contested between these parties? Vyskočil's Nedivadlo allows us to steer clear of this debate. The author is present on stage, the author is the performer, and the 'text' continues to be written as it is performed, as per the reception by the audience. In Plan B/C/D/E, for example, not only is the author (me) present on stage, I constantly engage in acts of authorship on the stage, by improvising and making it clear to the audience that this is active authorship they see. By encouraging them to speak, and occasionally censoring their work, I am further cementing my place as the Author of not only the Text that I bring to the event but also the Author-Editor of the Text that we (the audience and myself) collaboratively create during a given show. The audience may hold the position of co-author (with their active input), material (when I use a response from a specific audience member as the basis for an improvised reaction on my part), or inspiration (where, by knowing the identities of some of the audience members, I can edit the Text to refer to them in more specific ways). The largest authorial contribution remains mine, and any creative input from the audience can still potentially be censored by me. Thus, I grant myself the status of author-editor.

There is evidently a hierarchy or a disbalance in the relationship between me and the audience. De Marinis takes for granted that one side of the "theatrical relationship" (between the spectator and the performance) is "manipulation of the audience by the performance" (de Marinis, 1987, p. 101). He refers to Algirdas J Greimas' classification of the theatrical relationship as *faire-croire* (making believed) or *faire-faire* (making done) rather than a *faire-savoir* (making-known) which would be "an aseptic exchange of information/messages/knowledge" (de Marinis, 1987, p. 101). De Marinis remarks that this is particularly true of political theatre (which Plan B/C/D/E can surely

be called) and further clarifies that his use of the word ‘manipulation’ is not intended to refer to a persuasion or seduction, but rather to bring out the asymmetrical nature of the relationship.

The other side of this “theatrical relationship” is the active cooperation by the spectator. The term active cooperation is not limited to the examples of theatre where a spectator is called on to make a material contribution, but refers to the autonomous act of meaning-making that occurs in the mind of the spectator as they view the performance. At first glance, this strikes a similar chord to Barthes’ Death of the Author, however, de Marinis rebukes this as a radical stance (de Marinis, 1987, p. 102).

Instead, de Marinis draws on Umberto Eco’s ‘Model Reader’ to draft his own term of the ‘Model Spectator’. Eco’s Model Reader was “an attempt to remind us that production and reception are strictly linked, even though they obviously do not altogether coincide” (de Marinis, 1987, p. 102). This was a counter to post-structuralist approaches of the ‘death of the author’ that “speak of reading as misreading” (de Marinis, 1987, p. 102). With this proposition, Eco (and de Marinis) see the text as dependent on the reader for meaning-making, but still maintaining its own potential for meaning.

Open and Closed Performances

Furthermore, de Marinis draws a dichotomy between closed performances (which “anticipate a very precise receiver and demand well-defined types of competence for their “correct” reception” (deMarinis, 2011, p. 103)) and open performances (which are supposedly not restricted to audiences with encyclopaedic, intertextual or ideological competence). He uses the example of genre based (political, children’s theatre, musicals etc) for the former, while the range of examples

used for ‘open performances’ remains much larger. He includes traditional non-western forms, such as traditional Indian theatre, Kathakali, Noh as also modern avant-garde theatre. I would disagree with de Marinis on the inclusion of traditional Indian theatre in the latter. My experience as a student and an audience member of an Indian classical form, Bharatanatyam (which cannot be strictly classified as either dance or theatre as per western understandings of the same), reveals that the audience must be reasonably well-versed in the technique and the foundation of the story to understand the *abhinaya* (expressions that tell the story). De Marinis further critiques the so-called ‘openness’ of modern avant-garde theatre, contending that the gaps left to be filled by the audience are so broad, that the ensuing performance may be rather esoteric and thus, the audience more limited. The form that both de Marinis and I can agree to see as an ‘Open Performance’ would be Barba’s classification of the Third Theatre, which “might allow a real plurality of reception or viewings which are equal to one another” (de Marinis, 1987, p. 104)

Where might de Marinis, or indeed myself, place Plan B/C/D/E in this dichotomy? On the one hand, by being political theatre, specifically regarding an oft contested and yet omnipresent topic such as climate change, Plan B/C/D/E must be closed. I would not be able to singularly restrict the Text to be “making-done” or “making-known”, the way de Marinis believes can be done for political theatre. However, due to several open-ended moments in the Text, where the spectator must fill in the gaps on their own (and to some extent, in their own time), the Text could qualify as an Open Performance.

For example, though the topic of climate change is portrayed in the media as being contentious and disagreed on, I have never encountered any disagreement in person on the basic proposition that climate change, global warming and rising seas are real facts of nature. The poster with the tagline “life after the sea takes over” and the write up of the performance on event pages describe

the show to be about this topic. Does that automatically ensure that climate-deniers (as we often call people who do not believe in the existence of climate change) do not attend the show? Or is it simply the case that such people are in a minority, at least in theatre-going circles? In either scenario, this would be a supporting argument for the show to be a Closed Performance. De Marinis' proposition that the spectator in a Closed Performance must have encyclopaedic knowledge of the topic at hand can be accepted to an extent; the spectator of Plan B/C/D/E does not need to have encyclopaedic knowledge, but a reasonable familiarity with concepts such as global warming, melting of ice-caps, and familiarity with major events related to the same, such as forest fires and recently melted glaciers. I would further argue that the shared knowledge of the spectator and the performer both help and hinder the control of audience participation, in a way that renders the show rather open.

For one, the spectator's agreement with the Text on basic principles such as the existence of the climate emergency would help to ensure that the audience contribution as a whole is not side-tracked into an argument about the fundamental premise of the Text. On the other hand, there is a potential risk of the spectator having greater knowledge of the science, making it harder for the performer to limit the Text to the points she intends. As I am referring to some complicated scientific facts, I am forced to simplify them for the benefit of an audience member not familiar with science, as also for dramaturgical purposes. If I were to have a real climate scientist in the audience, my over-simplification could potentially put them off the project, or could create an argument between myself and them. Fortunately, this has not yet happened.

Having looked at the Text from both sides of de Marinis' perspective, I conclude that it can be seen neither as a closed nor an open performance. Perhaps there is an oversimplification in de Marinis' classifications. There is active authorship from the performer through the performance,

and collaborative authorial creation with the audience. Meaning-making in the minds of the audience is also necessary for the show to proceed. And yet, the controlled nature of the performance ensures that the audience has limited authorial or creative freedom. Indeed, even my creative freedom is limited by the topic and the reality that I am addressing.

Implicating the Audience

De Marinis (1987) refers to a post-World War I "Theatre of Research" (p. 105) that began involving the audience in the performance in varied ways, most notably by rejecting the traditional theatre spaces. Some note-worthy examples of the same include Grotowski's staging of *Faust* in the 1960s, where the spectators were seated at the protagonist's table (which he often stood on like a stage) or *Akropolis* where the audience are survivors of the concentration camps, as opposed to the unfortunate characters of the show. In such set-ups the audience is not being called on to contribute to the material of the performance, and yet, their physical position in the space implicates them in ways that a traditional theatre space would be unable to do.

The original design of the three Indian performances of Plan B/C/D/E could (to some extent) create a similar 'implication' of the audience. The distance between the nearest spectator and myself was never more than 1.5 metres. The proposition just before the interactive portion (that stated the dire need of the audience's feedback to help me survive), implicated the audience in not only my survival, but also theirs, especially for the shows in Mumbai. While performing in Prague, the audience is less personally implicated in this existential question, as they are not at direct risk from this threat, unlike myself and Mumbaikar audiences.

De Marinis critiques such audience implication (as did Grotowski later in his career), for being authoritarian: “rather than deconditioning the audience, this approach risked blocking and further inhibiting them” (de Marinis, 1987 p. 106). In theory, I disagree with de Marinis, as I feel the audience is not blocked, but guided into a specific direction. I would agree that this is a particularly manipulative staging approach, though the audience is likely to notice this manipulation early on and be prepared accordingly. As a theatregoer, I am always initially uncomfortable with performances that place me very close to the stage area, although this discomfort is usually forgotten once the show begins. This perspective I hold was validated by an audience member at my final presentation as part of my master’s studies. The performance in September 2020, entitled *The Art of Crying,* was staged in the round. There were aisles in this audience circle, and I sometimes stood in the aisles, sometimes in the open space in the centre of the circle, and sometimes outside the periphery of the audience circle. When the performance began, I stood at the mouth of one of the aisles, for at least the first seven minutes. After the show, the audience member sitting right next to me at that point of the show came up to me and mentioned that in the beginning he felt very at-risk to be so close to me, the performer. He explained that he was worried I would pull him into the performance or ask for his direct input. This made him especially nervous, because the performance was in English, a language he is not at all comfortable speaking in. However, within a few minutes, he realised that this was not something he needed to worry about; and the moment he realised this, it no longer bothered him to be so close to me (or in his words, “to be almost on the ‘stage’”, emphasis his).

In practise, however, I am forced to agree with de Marinis. What I see as the biggest failure of the Text is that non-Mumbaikar audience members report that by the end of the performance, they feel more sympathy for me and my personal loss than disappointment/disgust/rage/fear etc. about

the upcoming disaster. By placing the audience so close to me both physically and metaphorically, by baring so much of my inner turmoil regarding climate grief to them, the audience is more sympathetic to me than they are to the cause itself. Ironically, the feedback those same audience members gave me, was to have the Text implicate them more. The suggestions included giving examples of ecological disasters in the Czech lands, such that they would be put in as distressing a situation as I was/am in, resulting in a more emotional response to the imminent climate disaster. Unfortunately, the climate disaster in landlocked regions of Central Europe is further into the future, thus a reference to this future disaster wouldn't have a so I have avoided bringing it up.

This failure of the Text may be indicative of a failure in all such performances, that wish to manipulate the audience in a very specific direction. To begin with, each spectator has a mind, personal history, political position, and sense of empathy of their own – as Barthes would put it, this is their interiority, and these are the contexts and texts that they read into the performances they watch. Though some cultural or generational patterns can be tapped into, the success rate can never be 100%. Furthermore, an attempt to press on the audience the seriousness of my situation can result (and seemingly, has resulted in) mere pity for my situation, rather than the intended result which was the seriousness of the situation as a whole.

I believed that I had created a space where the audience could decide for themselves how to feel about the situation. But I still wanted the audience to feel what I wanted them to feel; and this authoritarian perspective in a seemingly open-minded, co-created piece could be considered a major flaw in the Text. By the time I began performing in Prague, I had realised that I was quite an authoritarian performer in this regard, however I still wanted to maintain the façade of an open and welcoming setting. I subsequently made a greater effort in seeming more casual, performed authenticity with greater gusto, such that even if the audience realised the extent of

authoritarianism of the piece, they wouldn't have much time during the performance to come to this conclusion. Though I was prepared to downplay this authoritarian image, I was taken completely by surprise, when I learnt that the audience was largely feeling sorry for me.

Perhaps this is exactly what de Marinis refers to when he describes the process of meaning making as happening largely in the spectator's mind. My own leanings towards post-structuralism lead me to read this as proof of the inevitable death of the Author, even when she is present on stage and actively trying to edit and control meaning as it is being created.

Factors Beyond my Control

In this section, I would like to discuss factors that help/hinder audience interaction, that are extraneous to the material of the Text, and that I have limited control over. I may be informed about some of these variables before-hand, and may attempt to adjust the text accordingly, but this may not be successful.

Venue

The effect of the performance space on the performer and the spectator have been studied and written about at length. Sedgman (2013) speaks of the theatre contract, the spectator's suspension of disbelief, where the audience understands what is expected of them; namely silence, appropriate responses at appropriate times, contributing to the illusion that the performers are elsewhere (rather the theatre venue, that they are in the scene of the play) (pp . 12-13). She also states that this is less likely to be the case with forms of theatre that are more immersive or are in non-theatre venues, such as performances by German collective Rimini Protokoll or UK's Punchdrunk (Sedgman, 2013, p. 13).

I find there is also variation in the theatre contract with some forms of theatre in India. This is not something that can simplistically be broken down to location and/or form; I have often watched performances in the prestigious Prithvi Theatre in Mumbai, which is performed by a mixed troupe of artists, mostly urban, performing a folk form. While watching this folk form, the audience intuitively cheers, claps along to the songs, and is, on the whole, 'rowdier' with their response to the show. The same performance in another prestigious venue, the NCPA theatre, in the older/wealthier part of the city, usually has a tamer response, with more 'civilised' responses of

clapping only at the end of a song, or at the end of the show itself. There is a reasonable amount of overlap in the audience members who attend performances at these two venues. This is particularly interesting to me, because in most folk forms across India, the audience is expected to hoot and cheer. It happens less among the westernised, urbanised audiences in big cities like Mumbai. Even within the city of Mumbai there is an unwritten understanding of which theatre space and which theatre form would allow what amount of heckling. Audiences in the city seem to be reasonably consistent in their understanding of these variations in expectation.

I also noticed that the amount of audience input differed according to how theatrical/not the space was. The more intimate the space was, the less demarcation between performance area and audience space, the greater the chance of not only invited audience input, but audience heckling as well. For example, the second performance of Plan B/C/D/E in Mumbai was in a large living room, filled with fifty-five people. The seating was varied, including a mat on the floor, a mix of chairs, footstools and sofas. This was the show with the most audience interruption; there were a slew of comments that either interrupted me, or came up in any short pause I took. I believe that the casual environment that was created by the living room space, helped this greatly. It also helped that a large number of audience members were familiar/friendly with me, and were also from the arts.

The Prague premiere took place at an open-air venue called Přístav, which had a small stage overlooking the river Vltava, with raised rows seating. There was no intimate atmosphere; there was constant ambient noise, of trams on the other side of the river, of boats, of people enjoying a drink in the nearby beer garden. On multiple occasions, somebody wandered in, looking for a place to sit, unaware they had walked into a performance. On more than one occasion, a serious moment was undercut by laughter or yelling from the people just outside the ‘theatre space’. This venue

was paradoxically a theatre space, having a clear demarcation between stage and audience, with professional lighting, and with a large projection behind me. However, it was also a non-theatre space, in that it had many factors beyond the control of the performer or the venue managers, such as the ambient noise or the intruding passer-by. The venue is usually used for musical performances, and occasionally for film/documentary screenings.

Another venue I performed in was Klub Ferenc Futurista, in the town Černosice just outside Prague. This is a café-cum-performance space, with an irregular programming that includes a wide variety of shows/events, ranging in form and content, curated by the owners of the space. The audience comprised about fifteen people, and the venue was no larger than 11-12 m^2. Though I was not more than a few feet away from the closest audience member, there was a sharp demarcation between audience and performance space. This was due to a much brighter light being on me, and only enough light for me to just about see the audience for the rest of the room. The table that my laptop sat on was in front of me, standing as a sort of barricade between myself and the audience. Though there is always a table on stage, it is usually off to the side, leaving a larger space to walk around in, such that I can move closer/further away from the first row. This audience was more reticent, not only in interrupting me during the show, but also in speaking up in the allotted feedback time. Besides the space differentiation, I think another factor is the expectations they held before the evening had even begun. The usual poster of the show conveyed some amount of whimsy, with an illustration of me dressed in jeans and a t-shirt wearing swimming goggles (refer to appendix, page 74). The invitation sent by the venue for the Ferenc Futurista show was an image of flooded Mumbai (from a past monsoon, during high tide) and simply mentioned that it would be an interactive presentation about climate change and Mumbai. In other shows, the

audience could potentially read details of the show on the Facebook event page, that suggest that the show is not a wholly serious one. The description on the event page is usually as follows:

> *What do you do when the sea is going to destroy your home? Tired of waiting for political change, this performer decides to make her own back-up plans to survive global warming. In a unique interactive experience, Meghana enlists the help of her audience to ensure that by the time the apocalypse comes, her plans are watertight.*
>
> *Plan B/C/D/E is an original show, written and performed by Meghana AT. It will last for one hour, with audience interaction!*

Although this write up does not explicitly state that the show is a comedy, it ensures the audience sees this as a theatrical presentation, rather than a purely factual one. This, combined with the slight absurdity of the poster do communicate that a certain lightness should be expected. I believe that a major factor in the reticence of the audience at Ferenc Futurista was that they were not expecting that form of content that evening.

The most structured of the three venues I performed at in Prague was the final performance, at the festival Praha Září. This was a festival made up of several smaller festivals highlighting different mediums that ran through the month of September in the massive Stromovka park in Prague. The venue assigned to me was a large tent, with no walls. The seating capacity was one hundred, whereas the audience present was just 15 people. The stage was designed for concerts; there was a gap of nearly 4m between the edge of the stage and the first row of seats, which had not only a steep drop, but also metal barricades. There was a lot of ambient sound, from the nearby playground where children played through the length of the show, and there was occasionally music playing from neighbouring tents. There were also some people seated in the venue who were not there for the show but were simply seated at the back of the venue and were chatting.

This was perhaps the most challenging performance of my life; though I could sense that the audience was listening intently, I had to continuously invest a lot of energy in maintaining that focus of the audience. I felt like I was competing with the screaming and laughing children and the chatting by-standers for the attention of the audience, and this resulted in a persona that was more theatrical than any previous performance. Incidentally, at Přístav, though there was ambient noise, I did not feel that same sense of having to fight for the audience's attention. This may have to do with the volume of the sound, or the fact that the audience was not so far away from where I stood on the stage.

Even before the distractions at Praha Září began, the simple fact of being so far away from the nearest audience member meant I had to project my voice and employ a larger stage presence than I normally would. This could have led to a performance that came across as more rehearsed and controlled than previous ones; if it hadn't been for the distractions that invariably interrupted the flow. When the show was done, I wondered if the audience ever accepted my claim that this was not, in fact, a performance. I was happy to be asked by one group of spectators whether the 'meltdown' at the end of the show was real or rehearsed. These group, all in their late teens, interested but not directly involved in the arts, were all at least a little unsure, but felt that it could just as well have been intended or otherwise. However, I did notice a relative hesitation in giving input during the show. I wonder if this was a consequence of how loud they would need to be for me to hear them.

Thus, Sedgman's proposition must come with the caveat: a non-theatre space could help in superseding the theatre contract, provided the performer can control certain factors of the venue to ensure a more immersive performance experience. In my limited experience, this would include

the previous notions of the show in the minds of the audience and the logistics of the venue itself. The space in which a performance is held can have a lasting effect on the audience, with one study reporting that audiences found spaces to be “friendly” or “intimidating” (Brown, 2012). Thus, a space like Přístav, though also open aired and with ambient noise, could feel more friendly (perhaps because of a smaller distance between myself and the audience) than a space like the tent at Praha Září, which might have felt intimidating or even slightly alienating (because of the distance between myself and the first row, the height of the stage, and the barricades between us). Perhaps the tent at Září wasn’t intentionally underlining the norms of the theatre contract, but the effect was functionally the same.

Lighting is another important topic in the effect of the venue on both the audience and the performer. Prior to the 1880s, western theatre had the audience illuminated as much as the stage. With the advent of electric lighting, the auditorium began to be darkened, and this began the era of theatre professionals dictating etiquette to the audience (Heim, 2016, p.12). Most Indian folk theatre forms have a simpler lighting format, where the audience is also well lit (though perhaps not as much as the stage). Authorial Presentations also take place in rooms where the audience and performer are equally lit. Sedgman (2018, p. 25) believes that the darkening of the audience space ‘anesthetised’ the audiences. Schulze (2017) seems to offer a similar perspective, saying that the change in lighting etiquette “led to monologue where once there had been dialogue” (p. 138).

In the Mumbai premiere of Plan B/C/D/E, there was no question about lighting, as the gallery space offered no modification, and I was exactly as lit as the audience. In future performances, though, I had to decide whether the lighting would be equal or centred on me. The problem with equal lighting was that it would seem too much like “not-theatre” from before the beginning of the performance. Moreover, I still wanted to have the control of the event; though I invite dialogue, it

would be false to assume I think of this as an equal dialogue. The premise of the show is that I know more about the topic, or at the very least, about my entanglement in this situation. Furthermore, the audience's comments are simply suggestions for how I may live my life in the future. Once they have made their comment, it is up to me to accept or reject the same. I need the audience to be clear that though they are invited to play, this is still my game.

At the same time, I do want the atmosphere to seem open to dialogue. Even an un-equal dialogue is dialogue, after all! If the audience was in total darkness, it might convey to them that my pleas for their help are simply rhetorical questions. The ideal solution was for the audience to be quite well lit, such that I could see their faces and expressions with ease, throughout the performance, while having the stage slightly better lit.

The final hurdle was the technical options available to me in the venues I performed at. Each venue had its own technical issues, which meant the light on the audience was always either too much or too little, or too uneven. Each time, I had to make do with whatever I had at hand, rather than what I would have most preferred.

The effect of the lighting on the audience's approach to the performance was best experienced at the living room performance in Mumbai. The quality of the projector was rather low, so for slide 6, we switched off all the lights in the room, to make sure that the image could be seen more clearly. The sudden silence in the room was noticeable in the moment, and in the recording I later watched. Perhaps we cannot give entire credit for this silencing to the switching off of the lights; it certainly could have been caused by everyone focusing on the image. But the moment the lights came back on, I could sense an "energy-shift" in the room. This indicated to me that lighting was certainly key in the experience of dramatic tension.

Age Group

The theme of Plan B/C/D/E is climate change, and specifically threat to one's own life because of it. A lot of research has been done on the differing perspectives on climate change held by people of different age groups, only a small amount of which I will cite here. Petrová Kafková (2019) points out that it is not only age-group, but also the cultural context one is raised in, that affects one's perception of climate change. She tells a story of a young girl walking with her grandmother in a small town in Czechoslovakia of the 1980's, being encouraged by her grandmother to put a plastic boat in the river. The young girl has been taught in school that plastic takes very long to decompose and should be thrown in the trash bin. Her grandmother was raised in an era of war shortages, and though she may have seen immediate consequences of pollution, she did not have knowledge of plastic and its non-biodegradable nature. Petrová Kafková (2019) further states that the first shift towards ecological consciousness came in the 1960s and '70s in western countries, while the shift began a bit later, and more cautiously, in former socialist countries, in the 1980s (p. 202). In a cross-generational study of residents of Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, the Netherlands, the Slovak Republic and Spain, Petrová Kafková (2019) found that though age was a variable in any generation's environmental attitudes, the biggest influence on these attitudes was the period at which the survey was taken; depending on change in the larger society of a particular country (p. 212).

Cohen (2019) talks about the important of climate change as an important issue in the eyes of American voters of different ages. "The biggest generational gap is visible in the belief that global warming will pose a serious threat in one's own lifetime" (Reinhart, cited in Cohen, 2019). This is something that I think is essential to the perception of the Text. As I mentioned before in the segment entitled 'Stakes', the threat posed by climate change to people my age living in Central

Europe is negligible, unlike the threat to people of my generation in coastal regions, especially in the Global South. Similarly, older people may see climate change as an issue, and may agree that it is a process caused by human activity, but they know they are almost certainly not going to face life-threatening consequences in their lifetimes. Perhaps this would be slightly different for an audience in India; as I point out in the show, slides 6-7 reveal what Mumbai would look like in 2050, and in 2050, I will be the exact age by mother is today. "My mother is not old enough to die!" I exclaim, more than once. I can imagine the impact of this line in a room in Mumbai, with people my mother's age (or older) in it, being quite different to the personal effect it would have on people the same age in Prague. This would seemingly be supported by Petrová Kafková's (2019) findings that nationality, context, and current events would be determining factors in perception of climate change for members of different cohorts.

Besides the personal threat to climate change, I believe a major generational difference lies in the ubiquitous nature of the knowledge of climate change. I took a casual survey among friends, and found that those aged 30 and under, could not remember or accurately guess when they first heard about climate change. Those 35 and older could make a ballpark guess, whereas in my mother's cohort, those whom I asked, could pinpoint more specifically what age they were when they first heard about this problem (and it was usually adulthood). This casual survey naturally has no scientific standing, and it was taken simply for me to better understand the context in which my work was to be received.

In my case, I remember studying the concept of the "Greenhouse Effect" and ozone layer depletion at age 8/9 in school (in fourth grade Science class), which included a note about global warming. I also remember that this was not the first time I had heard of global warming; as a child

aged three to seven, I watched an American cartoon show called '*Captain Planet*' about the eponymous superhero who "is gonna take pollution down to zero" (as per the opening track).

The Text is quite dependent on having an audience that believes in climate change and has a basic understanding of it. I never doubted that this would be a problem, and fortunately, it never was. Still, I believe there was a difference in attitude in the audience according to age, which directly affected their willingness to interact, as also the quality of their interaction.

The first hint of this difference became evident to me in the living room performance in Mumbai. The joking suggestions came overwhelmingly from people aged 40 and above. These joking suggestions were clearly not intended to be taken seriously and ranged from "where will we source wine from if we're all underwater?" as feedback to Plan C, to "Gills! Bollywood predicted this would happen in the 1970's by writing a song with the line '*gilly-gilly akka*'" (the words in italics are gibberish lyrics of a popular Bollywood song) as feedback to Plan D. The younger people in the audience would also joke from time to time during the show, but in the feedback sessions they would propose things that suggested they were taking the propositions quite seriously. For example, the feedback to Plan C was to scale it up, consider using the third phase of the Mumbai Metro (currently under construction, which is entirely underground) as the site of the underwater theatre. Several of them came to me after the show and insisted that Plan E had potential: "Write to me later! I have some ideas for how the jellyfish can work!". This indicated that though by now, they knew I had been performing, they still wanted to get supportive feedback.

On the other hand, in two shows in Prague, one with an overwhelmingly millennial audience, and another with an audience largely in their late 40s or 50s, had a markedly opposite response to humour. The responses of the millennials, both Mumbaikar and Pražák, were rather similar, in terms of their response to my humour, and how seriously they gave suggestions. However, with

the older audience in Černošice, I found my jokes almost never landed. This may be because my own style of humour was too foreign for them; or too located in generational contexts of memes and online references that were lost on the older audience. At many moments of the show, I felt as though this audience as a collective was a bit offended that I was joking about so serious a topic. At other moments it felt as though they saw my jokes as a defence mechanism, which, though not offensive, were not intended to be laughed at. There is also a very real possibility that they simply did not find my jokes funny.

Though in that moment I perceived this as a failure of myself or the Text to connect with this particular audience, Sedgman (2018) offers a different perspective; that a non-participative audience is not necessarily a dull/disengaged one. Her past research had revealed that audience enjoy the possibility of being carried away by the performance, besides being a part of it with their response. After all, when an audience member is openly and vocally responding with the performance, they are reminded of their position in the audience, the distance between themselves and the performer, and the fact that this is all just a performance. The 'suspension of disbelief' that was formerly considered the pre-requisite of theatre, is certainly diminished in this scenario (Sedgman, 2018, pp. 19-20).

This perspective allows me to question my initial belief that the older audience was refusing to play the game. Rather, it allowed me to understand that unwillingness to play an active part could come from a place of respect and active spectatorship.

Conclusion

While devising this Text, I was very clear about what I wanted to leave the audience with. At the time of the premiere, I knew exactly what I wanted to do and what I hoped would happen when the Text came to life in a room full of people. My expectations were not only met but exceeded. With the second performance, I was a bit more confident in expecting a certain outcome and response, and by the third show, my doubts had almost totally waned. I knew I had a 'theatre machine' that worked; the process was solid, and the input may need some polishing and updating, but that was easy work.

Bringing the show to Prague, to venues I was unfamiliar with, to audiences I didn't know revealed how foolish this confidence of mine was. It also revealed just how strict I had been in creating the game that was to be the 'process' of my theatre machine. How dictatorial can a performer be, without letting the audience see the tyranny on display? I think I took this question down to the very line, because though most people didn't notice my tyranny as they watched the show, every thread I pulled at when I began this reflective process revealed more attempts I had made to control the game we played.

Can game be truly open and yet controlled? Can the audience be allowed to have agency, while the game still retains the title of 'theatre'? Or would agency on the part of the audience render the game 'performance art', with authorship, power, and creation contested and shared? These are some of the questions that I am left with at the end of this thesis, and questions I hope my future projects will be able to answer.

The events of the year 2020 have cast a shadow on Plan B/C/D/E's future. The number of performances scheduled, cancelled, scheduled once again, and finally cancelled once again was

more than I could keep track of. Moreover, in a year when everyone began questioning their futures, the lack of control over our lives, and when plans made were dashed, talking about the events of 2050 seems more unfathomable than ever before. At the same time, the need to be prepared has been underlined in ways that no art form could have done. The climate crisis has been announcing its upcoming arrival for decades; but smaller events within the scope of this crisis (such as extreme weather events) will appear without warning, and wreck destruction upon our lives. The fires in Australia, and North America this year, especially in during a global pandemic, drove this point home for many of us.

When theatres were shut down, digital performances became a new reality. I was often asked why I don't perform Plan B/C/D/E online; surely there are ways in which audiences can interact, through chat boxes and private messages. Though I have held myself back from this possibility, it is now seemingly less avoidable than I had once hoped.

Audience interaction in the age of social distancing will have to take on news forms; what will power and control mean in a digital version of this show, when audiences laugh or gasp and can't even be heard by each other or by the performer? When muted mics mean that any active input must be specifically typed in, rendering the 'thinking out loud' quality of live interaction invalid?

Once again, these are questions I do not have the answers to, though I am keen to discover for myself, what it would take to uncover them.

Though the reflections in this thesis are largely through the lens of my experiences as a student of the Department of Authorial Creativity and Pedagogy, there are several other influences that have made me the author I am today. The work I did in Mumbai as an actor, production manager, arts manager, workshop conductor, activist, and writer, all fed into my creative and reflective

process. Most of all, my previous studies in Sociology and Anthropology have offered me the tools to see the world through the lens of power that dictates our interactions.

Though the overwhelming reflection of this thesis work has been that Plan B/C/D/E is as much an authorial Text as it is an authoritative one, an important caveat to this reflection has been that authoritarian theatre can only go so far. Success of a tyrannical presentation can be measured not only in the appropriate reception of the audience, but also their willing rebellion. To follow through on Burzynska's (2016) statement, that participatory theatre can be a "rehearsal space for democracy" (p. 9), the audience's rebellion, or rejection of the game, is a positive outcome when looked at from a greater perspective!

Finally, though I present an image of a strict and particular planner in the Text, and to some extent, in this thesis work, the biggest take away from the creation of both was the utter lack of control I possess. Either towards saving myself from the climate crisis, or from controlling the narrative a spectator leaves my performance with. This lack of control can be frightening to come to terms with; and at times it can be liberating. If I cannot control my future, the possibilities before me are endless. Though it is good to plan, one must always be ready to surrender.

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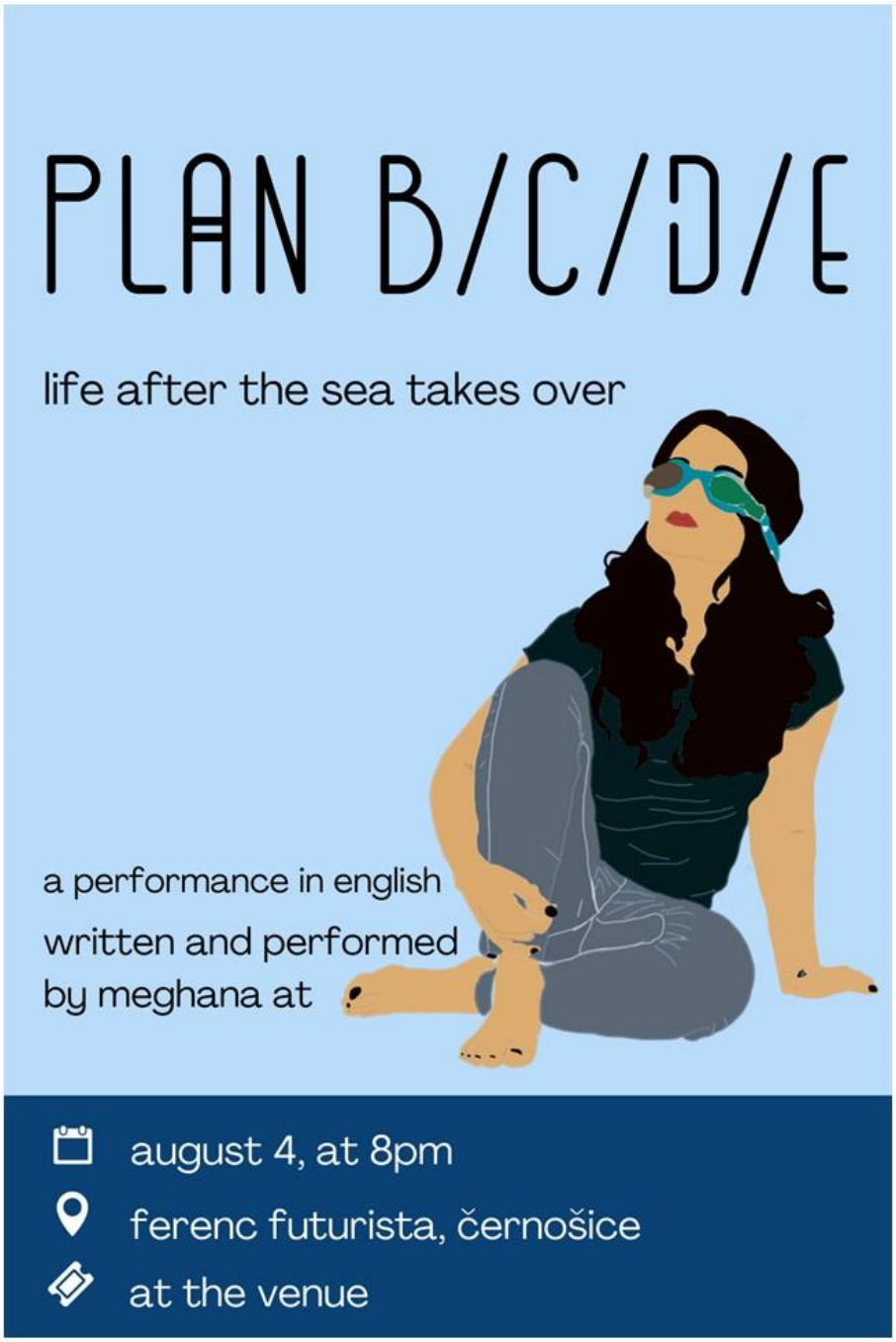
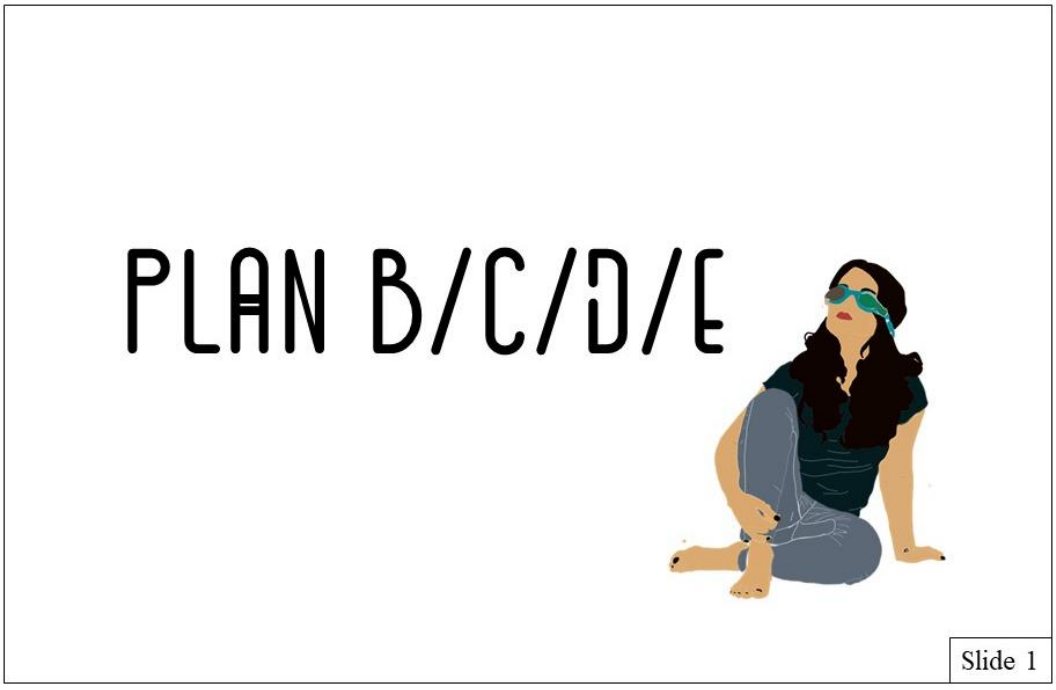
Appendix

The show poster



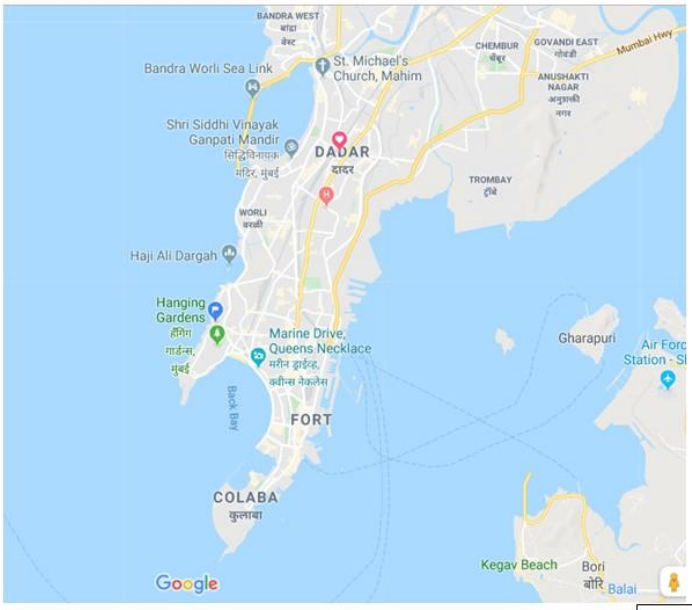
Slides from the PowerPoint Presentation, as shown in Prague performances.



MUMBAI IN 1661

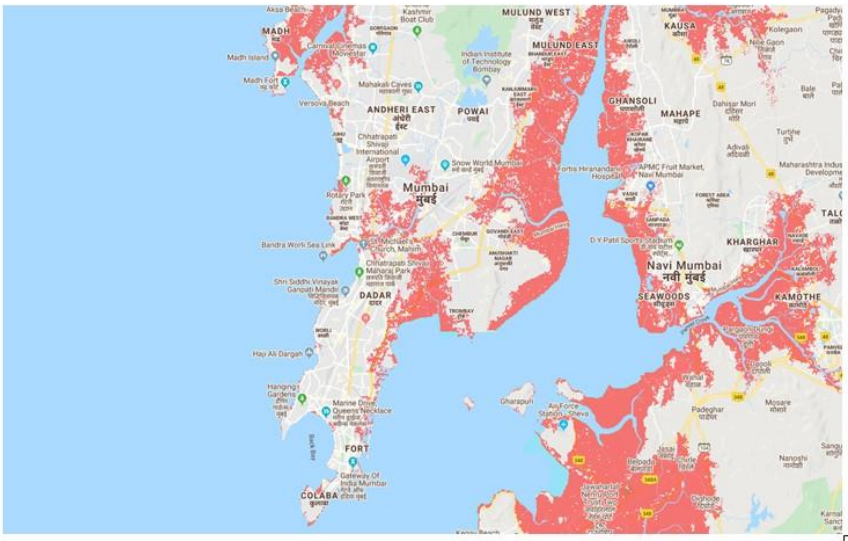
Slide 3

MUMBAI IN 2020



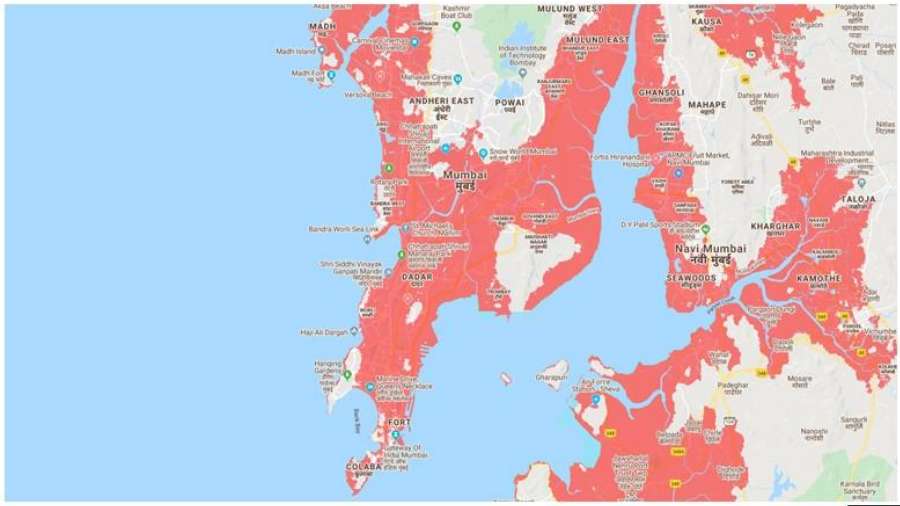
Slide 4

MUMBAI IN 2050



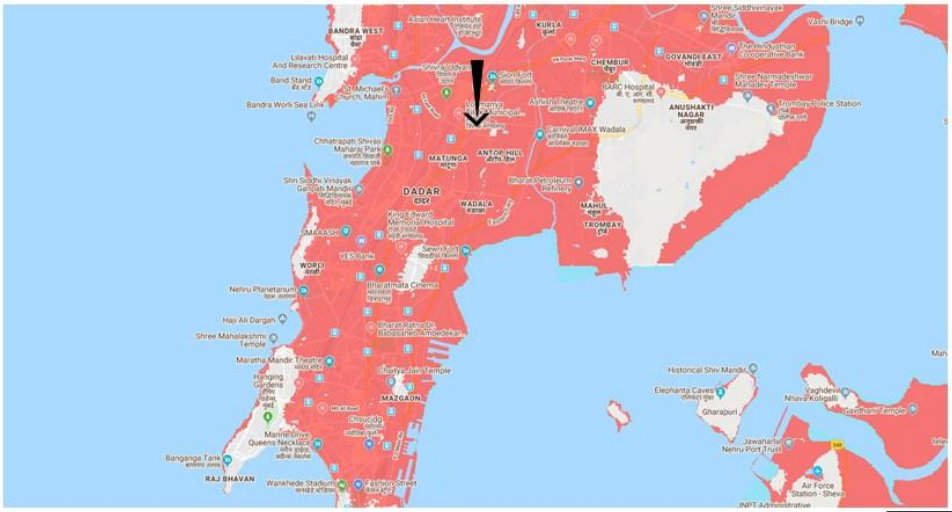
Slide 5

UPDATE! MUMBAI IN 2050



Slide 6

MY HOME – WHEN THE SEA COMES



Slide 7

PLAN B

Slide 8

Slide 9

Slide 10

Slide 11

PLAN C

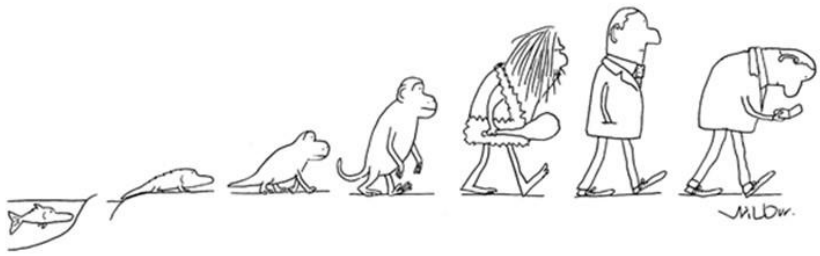
Slide 12

Slide 13

PLAN D

Slide 14

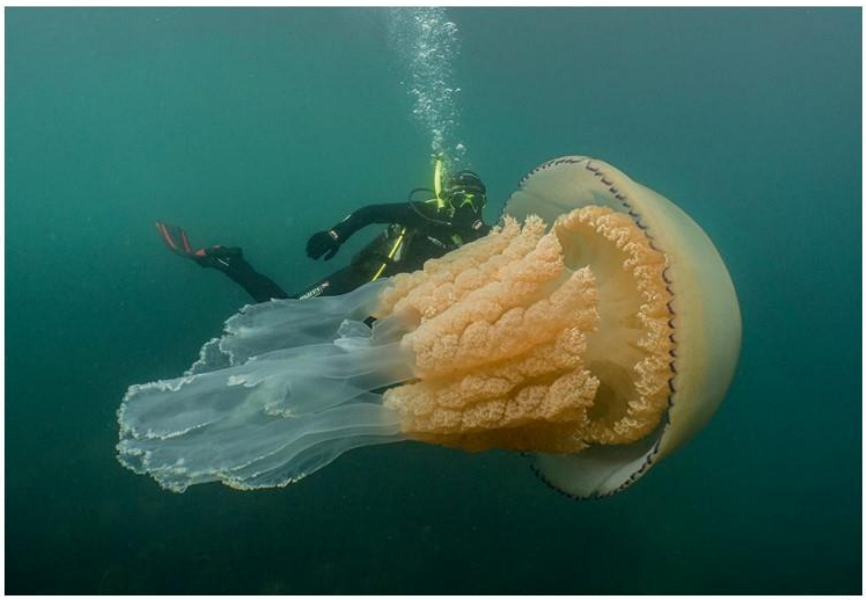
Slide 15



Slide 16

PLAN E

Slide 17



Slide 18

Slide 19

FUNDING

Slide 20