

Walkin the portal

WALKIN THE PORTAL

A series of 15-minute live interviews with sixteen artists,
writers, researchers and musicians during a time of
in-betweenness

19 April – 4 May 2020
(from day 26 to day 41 of the “Lockdown 2.0”)

Curated by Vivek Chockalingam and Marialaura Ghidini
for **Walkin Studios**, Bangalore.



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PREFACE

After being locked in a house for twenty-five days as part of the “Lockdown 1.0” and “2.0” called by the Indian government to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic, we found ourselves in an information overload, full of questions and lacking answers to them, wondering about the role of our work and our place in the world. We realised it was time to resume our activities and find a way to connect with other people in our community — artists, writers, researchers and creatives — and wonder about, together with them, what was going on (and still goes on). In a time of isolation and confusion, continuing to learn, think and share with others felt important and necessary. And so “Walkin the Portal” was born, as a series of live interviews.

The interviews took place daily at 4pm on Walkin Studios Instagram Live, from the 19th April to the 4th May 2020. Although unconvinced about the platform we used (one of us did not even have the app installed on the phone), we thought it could help us to insert these exchanges into the daily routines of people — old friends and new ones — since the lives of many (at least those from our community) shifted online, on social media platforms and communication channels. Thus, we adopted the format of a 15-min conversation, as a way to create an intermezzo, a daily disruption of online routines.

We have learnt a lot from these interviews. Above all, we have learnt that, despite each of us is unique and has many facets, we all have common desires, fears, hopes and dreams. We have also learnt that such commonalities go beyond geographical locations, the idea of global and local narratives, and cultural milieux. Because of this, we decided to create a record of the conversations we had as a publication, while simultaneously attempting to document what was going on, and was written about the world outside the house we were locked in.

Each interview is preceded by a compilation of news excerpts taken from newspapers and social media feeds that we feel tells a story (however partial) of the times we were in during “Walkin the Portal.” Beyond being an account of that period, the news compilations, all together, highlight the difficulty in the task of making sense of the vast amounts of information we receive and consume — we navigate in an ocean of idiosyncrasies, incongruences and partiality. Yet, we feel the words and thoughts of the people we interviewed, as well as those of the audience, shed a light on our times, and provide tools for hoping, desiring, and being active agents of our lives and environment.

— Vivek Chockalingam and Marialaura Ghidini

INTRODUCTION TO THE SIXTEEN INTERVIEWS

INT. A HOUSE - DAY

Walkin the Portal poster attached to the window, plants in the background. The jingle plays. Bird sounds overlapping and fading away.

RECORDED VOICE:

Welcome to Walkin the Portal, a series of 15-minute interviews with creative people during a time of in-betweenness - today is the XX day of total lockdown in India.

A lockdown, for us, is an in-between space, neither what it was not what it will be. Amongst the widespread limitation of civil liberties, of 'normality' being brought to a halt, we see this period as a time of possible reinvention.

This in-betweenness is like a portal. It is a door, an entrance, a passage. Symbolically, it is also a point of entry to a digital network. Spiritually, it is an entrance to another dimension. More importantly, a portal is "a gateway between one world and the next", as writer Arundathi Roy recently said in a thoughtful essay**. According to Roy, we can go through this transition with all our luggage and burden, or with lightness to imagine and construct our future.

With Walkin Portal, we want to discuss how our relationship with the environment is changing - how we are establishing new ways of understanding the circumstances, the objects or the conditions that surround us. And we want to do this with others, with people whose work, thinking, humor, observations, actions we admire.

By walking through this portal, will we ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

The jingle* plays. Bird sounds overlapping and fading away. The series host enters the scene and the interview starts.

* Claudia Fonti, "128kbps Ident" (2012); for or-bits.com

** Arundhati Roy, "The pandemic is a portal," *Financial Times*, April 3, 2020

Live interviews
on instagram

 **WALKIN**
the portal

everyday at 4.00pm

untill we cross to
the other side

 **WALKIN**
the portal

April 19th 4pm IST
Live interview with Meenakshi Thirukode
on instagram

 **WALKIN**
the portal


April 20th Live 4.00pm IST
Live interview with Anil Menon
On Instagram

 **WALKIN**
the portal

April 21st 4pm IST
Live interview with Sultana Zana
on instagram

 **WALKIN**
the portal

April 22nd 4.00pm IST
Live interview with Rahul Giri
on instagram

 **WALKIN**
the portal

April 23rd 4.00pm IST
Live interview with IOCOSE
on instagram

 **WALKIN**
the portal


April 24th 4.00pm IST
Live interview with Jennifer Hodgson
on instagram

 **WALKIN**
the portal

April 25th 4.00pm IST
Live interview with Gayatri Kodikal
on instagram

 **WALKIN**
the portal

April 26th 4.00pm IST
Live interview with Akshat Nauriyal
on instagram

 **WALKIN**
the portal

April 27th 4.00pm IST
Live interview with Nick Tobier
on instagram

 **WALKIN**
the portal


April 28th 4.00pm IST
Live interview with Tatiana Bazzichelli
on instagram

 **WALKIN**
the portal


April 29th 4.00pm IST
Live interview with Mathangi Khrishnamurthy
on instagram

 **WALKIN**
the portal

April 30th 4.00pm IST
Live interview with Andreas Ullrich
on instagram

 **WALKIN**
the portal

May 1st 4.00pm IST
Live interview with Ali Akbar Mehta
on Instagram

 **WALKIN**
the portal

May 2nd 4.00pm IST
Live interview with Harun Morrison
on instagram

 **WALKIN**
the portal

May 3rd 4.00pm IST
Live interview with Josephine Simone
on instagram

 **WALKIN**
the portal

May 4th 4.00pm IST
Live interview with Suvani Suri
on instagram

DEAR FRIENDS, EXTRAORDINARY TIMES CALL FOR NEW THINKING. AT [REDACTED] WE HAVE BEEN INTROSPECTING OUR ROLE AND OUR RESPONSIBILITIES DURING THIS TIME OF UNCERTAINTY. WITH A LARGE PART OF THE WORLD CURRENTLY UNDER RESTRICTED, QUARANTINED ENVIRONMENTS, WE FEEL IT IS NECESSARY TO REACH OUT TO OUR AUDIENCES IN WAYS THAT CHALLENGE GEOGRAPHIC LIMITATIONS AND FAMILIAR TEMPLATES. WE ARE DELIGHTED TO PRESENT OUR LATEST INITIATIVE....

— GALLERY [REDACTED] EMAIL NEWSLETTER

IS THE LOCKDOWN HELPING INDIA?

by Jacob Koshy; The Hindu, 19th April 2020

“It has been over 3 weeks since Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the world biggest lockdown in India. [...] While India’s lockdown has been among the harshest in the world, there have been several instances of people gathering in large numbers. In fact, the makeshift relief camps the states have set up for migrant labour, the high average density of population are all aggravating factors of the spread of clusters”.



Coronavirus concert from the balcony of Via Massena in Turin with musicians Federico Sirianni e Federica Magliano who invited the neighbours to join in for a night. Flash mobs happened all across the country during the lockdown. Photo by Getty Images. Published on La Stampa newspaper; 20 March 2020

MANY MASKS OF A LOCKDOWN.

by Krithika Srinivasan; The Hindu, 19th April 2020

The irony is that those who benefit from lockdown do so only because there are others who aren’t going into lockdown and who continue to face the risk of infection. In our deeply interconnected societies, every minute aspect of our everyday lives — from food and water to electricity, phone and internet connections, sewage systems and waste management services and medical supply chains — depends on the work of other people, who more often than not, are the low-income occupations.



Art installation made by protesters at the site of the Shaheen Bagh protests in Delhi. Photo by DTM. Published on Wikimedia Commons, 17th January 2020

ART INSTALLATIONS AT SHAHEEN BAGH, JAMIA, REMOVED BY DELHI POLICE, GRAFFITI PAINTED WHITE

by Fatima Khan; The Print, 4th March 2020

“The police barged in at the site, and completely dismantled the tents, broke down the scaffolding and even took away the mattresses. Why do this when there were no protesters in sight anymore? This shows the priority of the police in the time of a lockdown and a pandemic,” an organiser of the Hauz Rani protest, who did not want to be named, told The Print.



SUNDAY 19TH APRIL

MEENAKSHI THIRUKODE

Meenakshi Thirukode is a writer and curator focusing on culture in conflict and post-conflict spaces through a feminist praxis.
([instagram.com/kanmaniponmani](https://www.instagram.com/kanmaniponmani))

#COLLECTIVITY

MG: Hello Meenakshi. I am very glad to introduce you as our first guest for Walkin the Portal!

MT: Hello Marialaura. I am glad to be here. [smiles]

MG: Let's get into the interview then. [smiles] In your work you have explored the idea of collectivity in many different forms — texts, books, exhibitions, and recently master classes on Instagram. Can you tell me a bit about how you see collectivity manifesting, and the role it plays in your practice?

MT: I think that collectivity is essential to my practice. I describe my work as feminist praxis, but I also think about culture and its relationship to the kind of political movements we align ourselves with. Politics can be a micropolitics or aligning yourself with something far broader, because you are of this world and you are participating in it. The idea of collectivity for me is on a very micro-political level, which is to do with the way I think about my curatorial practice. I have spoken a lot about the idea friendships, for example, or collaborative processes existing, not necessarily in a deliberate way, but over long, sustained periods of time. They kind of happen organically for me because I develop that kind of relationship with the people I meet. This sort of micro-politics also relates to the larger politics of the political movements I choose to align myself with, whether it's the resistance movement that's happened over that last couple of months, or just building certain dreams with people that I'm invested in as individuals, not just for the work they do, but also for who they are.

I was reading a text about collectivity in the curatorial master class yesterday. Collectivity is really about the way in which you develop your interpersonal relationships, and this will just lead to the work you do happening in a very organic, improvisational form. It just responds to the way we live and create the worlds we are living in. That's how I see it manifesting.

MG: A few months ago, we met in Delhi with a group of students, and you talked about the idea of improvisation. You discussed the need to improvise as a way of responding to the space someone is in. Since we are all finding ourselves in 'new spaces,' new circumstances, how do you think improvisation could help?

MT: I think improvisation is a kind of survival tactic. When I say survival tactic, it's related to the way I think about sustainability, of being able to maintain a certain kind of practice as cultural producers. For me, improvisation is always to be on your toes and be responsive, rather than having knee-jerk reactions in the spaces you want to create. I've spoken about this before in relation to everyone, especially galleries, moving online, and I am not quite sure what this does. This is because galleries are often just translating something that used to be a physical structure, in an exhibition space, and they just replicate it online. This really doesn't do much to me. By doing this, you are not really keeping a finger on the pulse; you are not living this kind of life where the work you do, the person you are, and what you want to create are the same thing.

I think improvisation is just really knowing the ebbs and flows of your own practice; it's about knowing when you want to be visible and when you don't want to be visible, and therefore, knowing what you need to produce and what you don't need to produce, when to speak and when not to speak. I think it's about that. You don't really know the direction you would go in, and neither would anybody else, and that's also how you beat that kind of co-option of the system. The moment you do that, you maintain a certain friction with the system and don't allow that to enter your work.

MG: I like this idea of knowing when to speak and when not to speak — it's very important. That said, let's move onto the next question. [smiles] We are at day 26 of lockdown in India and many other countries are dealing with a similar scenario. It's

a time of widespread limitation of civil liberties, everywhere, although in varying degrees of constraint. What kind of role does coming together as an act of resistance play in this?

MT: It's a really interesting question because I was thinking about the term resistance, and also this idea of, "Who are we resisting against?" We are looking at the pandemic as an isolated event, but actually a lot of things indicating that we have lost a connection have already been going on in the world. We have lost the connection between each other as just fellow human beings sharing this planet [smiles], and with the planet itself. Even within visual culture, one of the biggest things is that we just can't fathom the idea of climate change, or the way in which nature is going to correct a lot of things, whether you and I like that or not. I feel it's a question that poses more questions because it's not just an act of resisting. I mean, "What are we resisting? The virus? A fascist government? Or are we resisting our own sense of importance?"

If there is anything that has happened, it's actually the breakdown of the idea of the 'we.' [moves her fingers in the air] Because, if anything, this time has exposed the fact that it is the poor, it is those who don't have the kind of voice we have, that suffer. It has exposed the way we have built society with immense amounts of structural violence. We already knew there are disparities, that it's an unequal world, but right now I think we are all collectively processing this trauma because it's in our face a lot more, and because we are all sitting inside our homes. Especially for those of us who are privileged, we are going through our own battles of isolation, and at the same time we can't speak of it in a certain way because there are others who are going through a lot more than we are — you are resisting a lot of things within yourself as much as you resisting a larger politics. I figured this out a couple of months ago: we were part of the resistance movement, and we felt like the collectivity went across class, religion and cast, to a certain extent. We were beginning to have these questions and

it meant a lot for all of us to fight together, and then suddenly here we are. This has just broken down everything again. That's where I feel I am with this question.

MG: When I say the word 'portal,' what comes to your mind?

MT: I love that question! [smiles] I can only think about every science fiction movie ever, and I am like, hmm... portals! I think it's a lot about transformation, rather than transition from one space to another. [waves her hands] I think it's something more of the self, while not being of the self. It's about introspection, of being in a nebulous space.

When you think of portals you are always talking about time and space, and the dissonance between all of that — just like you are floating somewhere and land up in some other space. It's just a feeling of going through the process of transformation, which relates to the idea of improvisation a lot. That's why I love the idea of a portal — I just want to be in a portal most of the time. [laughs] It is a space from which I'm able to produce the work I think I want to produce. I spoke about that idea of breaking points and the feminist snap, where I lead a life where I'm always trying to reach certain kinds of breaking points and snap like a twig, because that is where something is produced. So, I feel that a portal, or improvisation, are variables that lead me to that kind of space.

MG: There is the myth that habits are formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row. Although this is a myth, which habits do you think you have developed or lost during the lockdown?

MT: I think I have developed a habit of creating routines out of nothing. Suddenly, there is a weird sense of trying to be productive just to stay sane. So suddenly, I'm exercising more, and I am really doing banal things, but I think they are still very important. There are my flatmates and we all have our routines.

I don't think it's a habit so much as I feel like I'm back to that student life — this is what we did: we cooked, we cleaned our own rooms, we studied. It's sort of this weird time-space-location where I don't feel like I'm in a particular city, but able to just recollect other parts of my life. So it's weird and strange. Making routines out of nothing has become a habit. [smiles]

MG: To end our interview, and go back to where we started, do you think we will ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

MT: We would need an explosion, an annihilation so something new can emerge. [smiles]

MG: Thank you Meenakshi for your thoughts. Let me go through comments and questions from the audience.

sultana_zana: What is the feminist snap you were talking about?

MT: A femist snap is an act of self-realisation where some kind of dissociation happens. It is something that happens suddenly, in an instance, and not in a gradual manner. It destabilises the status quo.

debosmitadam: Do you think social trust will be affected by this sudden isolation?

MT: It really depends, right? I think that trust is a very difficult thing. I have been in many spaces and moments where I've politically participated in certain kinds of movements where trust was implicit — the MeToo Movement is one example of it. Even within that, trust has been broken down. I think what could work is if we were to introspect — that's a really important part of rethinking the way we talk about trust. We have all spent a lot of time being hyper-productive within a techno-capitalist framework. So right now, the isolation, if anything is possible, is a time for

introspection, and how you would create another layer of trust, both within yourself and others you are creating it with. Time will tell. This is something I've not completely wrapped my head around. I just go with the flow right now.

MG: Thank you very much for sharing your ideas with us Meenakshi, and for being our first guest!

MT: Thank you for the invite and good luck with the series!

"I think the portal is a lot about transformation, rather than transition from one space to another."



A boy wearing a mask walks past a mural warning people about the coronavirus, Nairobi, Kenya. Photo by Brian Inganga | Published by World Politics Review; 18th April 2020.



TRUMP SUGGESTS 'INJECTION' OF DISINFECTANT TO BEAT CORONAVIRUS AND 'CLEAN' THE LUNGS

by Dartunorro Clark; NBC news — 24 April 2020

Trump made the remark after Bill Bryan, who leads the Department of Homeland Security's science and technology division, gave a presentation on research his team has conducted that shows that the virus doesn't live as long in warmer and more humid temperatures. Bryan said, "The virus dies quickest in sunlight," leaving Trump to wonder whether you could bring the light "inside the body." [...] He added: "I see the disinfectant that knocks it out in a minute, one minute. And is there a way we can do something like that by injection inside or almost a cleaning? As you see, it gets in the lungs, it does a tremendous number on the lungs, so it would be interesting to check that."



Poster for the "Ascension Timeline call for 1 million meditators to liberate and reclaim our world on April 4th, 2020 at precisely 10:45pm EST when a celestial stargate opens".

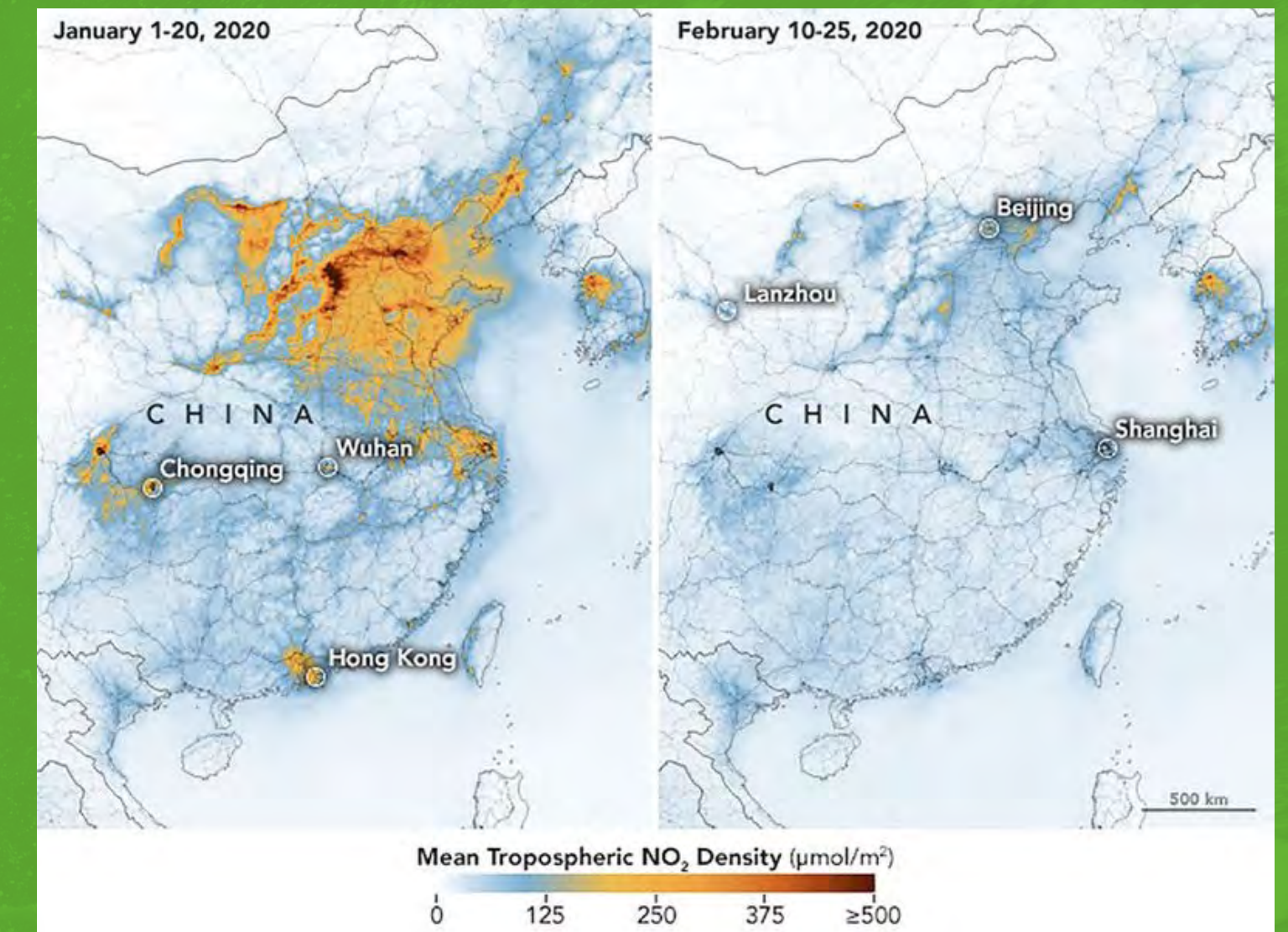


A photo released on 2nd March 2020 by NASA shows maps displaying nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) values across China from January 1-20 (before the quarantine) and February 10-25 (during the quarantine) illustrating a significant decrease in NO₂ over China related to the economic slowdown following the outbreak of the COVID-19. Published by Chicago Tribune; 4th March 2020.

5G CORONAVIRUS CONSPIRACY THEORY DRIVEN BY COORDINATED EFFORT

by Ryan Gallagher, Bloomberg; Aljazeera, 11th April 2020

A conspiracy theory linking 5G technology to the outbreak of the coronavirus is quickly gaining momentum, with celebrities including actor Woody Harrelson promoting the idea. But the theory is also getting a boost from what some researchers say is a coordinated disinformation campaign.



CORONAVIRUS CONSPIRACY THEORIES TARGETING MUSLIMS SPREAD IN INDIA

by Hannah Ellis-Petersen, Shaikh Azizur Rahman; The Guardian; 13th April 2020

In a statement this week, the Indian Scientists' Response to Covid-19 group said "the available data does not support the speculation" that the blame for the coronavirus epidemic in India lies mainly with Tablighi Jamaat. The scientists emphasised that while testing for coronavirus is extremely low across India, a disproportionate number have been of members of Tablighi Jamaat, as per a government order, therefore heavily skewing the figures.

MONDAY 20TH APRIL

ANIL MENON

Anil Menon is a writer, editor and critic who works mostly in speculative fiction. His most recent work is the novel “Half Of What I Say” from Bloomsbury. (anilmenon.com)

#SPECULATION

[Our guest tried to join the live video from the computer. It didn’t work. He downloaded the app. After that we went online again.]

MG: Hello Anil.

AM: Hello.

MG: I’m glad we sorted our technical problem. Good to see you on screen! Let’s begin the interview.

AM: Alright. [smiles]

MG: You work with speculative fiction and you define it beautifully on your blog. Can you tell me a bit about the role of speculation in your work as writer?

AM: I think the role of speculation in my fiction is that it greatly increases the number of situations that I can work with. The most fundamental aspect of storytelling is the situations you are dealing with. In regular fiction, you have a certain number of standard situations and you use these situations to talk about being human, to fall in love, to hate, to de-humanise, and so on. In speculative fiction, this arena of situations is greatly expanded, so you can do a lot more. It allows for a lot more explorations of the *same ideas*, but with very different kinds of situations. So, you see afresh, you see for the first time, *again*.

Let me give you an example to make things a little clearer: suppose you are dealing with the notion of authorship, of creativity, of whether books or ideas are specific to a particular author — a very complicated topic. You could do it in regular fiction by writing a story of the publishing industry or plagiarising, and so on. But in speculative fiction, you could have someone like Borges who comes along and asks the question: “Why is it that we think that two different people can’t write the same book, identical book, though they are separated by decades or even regions?” In Jorge Luis Borges’ “Quixote” he imagines this guy,

Pierre Menard, who's written a novel, "Don Quixote," identical to Cervantes' "Don Quixote," except it is another one. You are talking about the same issue, of creativity, of uniqueness, of identity, but in this very lovely, different, new context. And that's what speculative fiction allows you to do; it comes up with these things that are formally not there in the world. And it says, suppose that we change it, we can still talk about *the world*, but we just change the context. That's the basic idea. And I find that freedom allows me to tell stories in a new way.

MG: In the introduction of the anthology "Breaking the Bow,"* which you co-authored, you write that "to take the road not taken requires a road that has been taken." How does someone take the road not taken?

AM: Lovely question. It's after the poem "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost — it's a lovely poem, it's actually a *speculative poem*, it uses technical speculation — David Orr's eponymous book** has a beautiful description of all the things that Robert Frost hid in that poem. It's not as simple as it appears on the surface. But let me step away from the poem itself and say that one of the simplest things that you can do to take the road not taken is to work with your default response. By that I mean, suppose I were to ask you, "What is the name of a city in Germany?" The first thing people might come up with is Berlin. But why not Tübingen? Why not Oldenberg? Why not Heidelberg? These are not names that would typically come to a non-German. Whereas cities like Paris, Bombay, Berlin are typical responses. The default response comes from your brain trying not to work, that is, it is trying to save glucose — the brain needs to spend glucose, so it goes to the familiar, it goes for the predictable, it goes for the expected, it goes for the road taken, right? If someone were to ask you "What time is it?" You would say, "Well, it's 4:17," but it could also be "It was a bright, cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen." When you ask Orwell this question "What time is it?" you get the novel "Nineteen Eighty-Four." So, the way you take the road not taken is to take your default response,

look at it, and ask: "How do I move away from this default response?" And that gives you a new story. That's what I meant by that. [laughs]

MG: In these current times — we are at day 27 of lockdown in India — the act of speculating has become widespread behaviour. And its meaning, I feel, is even more entangled. For many it's hard to look beyond today, to re-imagine. What is your strategy for remaining imaginative in this time of in-betweenness?

AM: [laughs] That's an easy question, isn't it? What I find, judging from the recent articles that I have been reading, is that we are letting imagination run riot. People are getting really too imaginative. Most of the times we don't imagine, we do our usual things, right? But when we have a crisis we start to speculate, and I think what we are seeing is people fantasising all over the place. For example, I have read Arundhati's article saying that this might be a portal for another world, we have people saying capitalism will end, the governments are going to fall perhaps, or authoritarianism is going to take over, and stuff like that, right? We are imagining massive changes because that is what a pandemic typically does.

I think for me the thing is that lot of the old stuff is going to remain because that is the way the old stuff is — the persistence of the old is very, very hard to get rid of. If you just look around your house, or most of the things we are around, the devices were invented in 1870 and 1890. Things don't just change overnight, systems don't change, people don't change overnight.

I think that one thing that does change is trust between people. And what I am thinking about is the kind of breakdown of trust, the kind of policing that is going on in housing societies, the cops that are taking law into their own hands, people that are getting very suspicious of each other. And when you have a breakdown of trust in society you start to see problems down the road. We see, for example, the communalisation problem that recently happened. That worsens trust — it's the deficiency

of trust in society. So, my way of responding to it is that we must imagine new ways of trusting each other. For example, just smiling at people, right? You find that people are not smiling at each other anymore — there is a kind of seriousness in people's faces, well, actually, you can't see their faces [mimicking a mask on his face, laughs]. Adding a little laugh to your voice, for example. Just lightening the mood a bit. The idea is to relax a bit, because at the moment we are like school children, we are on our best behaviour. From my side, it's better not to panic too much about getting infected or putting up with restrictions and rules. Being careful, of course, but not letting the thing take over. And what you do from your side is to do things that maintain your trust factor, so you resist, at times, the temptation to distrust your neighbour. My neighbour just gave me grapes. It was a simple gift, but it helped keep the 'social' going even if we had to maintain some distance.

I don't believe that after this is over, we are going to become a very different society because I think we are social animals, and we have this great need to connect, to be together, to go to clubs, to go to parties... I don't think that any of that is going to change. I think we are going to be captive for a while and then we are going to see the social animal coming back in full form. One of my favourite poets is George Oppen and he has got this little fragment that says:

"Obsessed, bewildered
By the shipwreck
Of the singular
We have chosen the meaning
Of being numerous."

[laughs] I think we will find different ways of being numerous again. I am hopeful. Sitting at home, locked in, that is not the human animal.

MG: When I say the word 'portal,' what comes to your mind?

AM: [laughs] That's easy because I was actually a software engineer and when we said portal in those days — the nineties — it meant web portal. Every data company under the *sun* was actually making these web portals [making a frame with his hands]. And the web portals were little windows on the screen where you could see the clock, you could see the status of your database. They were filled with gadgets that you could clutter up your desktop with. Every company wanted to be a web portal company and when the word portal comes to me that's what I associate it with.

The other association is with fantasy literature, where you have a gateway into another world, a different world. Usually this world, for most fantasy books, is just basically medieval Europe, with maybe better toilets and vaccinations. But, yes, it is medieval Europe! I think Arundhati Roy's article has brought the word back to circulation in a way. My feeling is that the new world, whatever it is, will have capitalism because capitalism is incredibly tough — it is the toughest thing we have invented, it is even tougher than Hinduism [smiles]. It's built around our desires, and fears, and it cannot be eliminated that easily. So, I don't think that, with the possible exception of religion, anything can challenge its domination. And I think we might get a cleaner world, a quieter world, but as for it not being less cruel, or less greedy, or less unequal, let's forget about it. I think, like the fantasy world, we are going to get a pre-corona world, but maybe with better epidemic management...

[connection disrupted]

MG: There is the myth that habits are formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row. Although this is a myth, what habits do you think you have developed or lost during the lockdown?

AM: Well, let me say that I have been wearing a shirt after a very long time [laughs out loud]. The thing is that I have been

working from home for a long time so my personal habits have not changed all that much. I meet far fewer people, that's really it. Otherwise, it's not crazy different for me. There are some people that I really, really miss, and being separated from them makes it hard. So you try not to develop the habit of pining- not constantly thinking of how life used to be. I listen to a lot more music — I don't have a TV, but that does not make any difference these days: you have a screen, you have a TV, and you are more or less continuously connected to the net. I have not learnt French, I have not learnt Hungarian, not Confu... [laughs] — I am the same shabby dude!

MG: To end our interview, and go back to where we started, do you think we will ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

AM: This is a question where I tend to irritate lots of my friends because they see me as optimistic. I think that we will go in all directions because we have always done that — people will do different things all the time. But overall, I think that the direction is that we are going forward. I think that life is going to get better for most people, everywhere. I am not speaking out of sheer faith. If you look at the work of William James or Julian Simon or Hans Rosling — the epidemiologist, for example — you find that the history of human species is, by and large, one of improvement for the masses. Any developmental measure — education, health, child mortality, or whatever it is — you find that, by and large, the numbers are getting better the world over. So I expect this background to improve.

I don't know about the political situation, that really seems to be a matter of how people react in terms of fears and desires. I hope we will be sensible. The political situation is of course something that one can never predict. The thing is that there is no point in time I'd rather be living. I don't want to live in the eighteenth century, I don't want to live in the eleventh century, I don't want to be a king in England in the fourteenth century. This is the time for us. I think that we will be fine, overall. So we are going to move forward — that's my prediction.

MG: Thank you Anil. Let's see if we have any questions from the audience.

vishalkswamy: Can speculative fiction be considered to be a precursor to futurism? Or would futurism be a function within speculation?

AM: Yes, definitely the latter. One of the mistakes that people tend to make is that it is about the future. It isn't. It's really about alternative worlds. And all those worlds lie in our world. So it's grounded in our world, but it is possibility deriving from our world. I think there is a Nelson Goodman quote which captures it beautifully, and it says that we have become used to thinking about this world — the actual world — as one among many worlds. But all possible worlds lie in this actual world. And I think that's the philosophy of speculative fiction as well. You ground it in this world, but then you break constraints, you break contexts. So the futurism is one aspect of speculative fiction, but it's not necessary — you could set it in the past and still have a speculative story. I hope that answers your question Vishal.

vishalkswamy: That's great, thanks!

vivek_chockalingam: We might not change drastically like Anil said, the old will persist. But this will be the biggest shift we see in our lives, as trust and behaviour. Is this an opportunity for something?

AM: Yeah, definitely. I think especially in terms of, "Do you want a society that is built on the welfare of people or the welfare of capital, so to speak?" Of that question, "Do you want to save companies or do you want to save people?" Places like Kerala, by focusing on people, have clearly shown that it's the way to go in terms of crisis management. So in places like the US, where a tough focus — in the last thirty, forty years — has been towards corporations, making sure that corporations are okay, society has completely disintegrated. I feel that this question is going

to be on the minds of everyone, “What kind of worlds do we want to build?” And it will be a much harder sell to say that corporations are the ones to be saved, for our sake, when it is very clear that they are not able to keep us safe during a crisis of this sort. I think we are going to see a reemphasis of the so-called socialist governments that people were so scared of about ten, twenty years ago. It’s a great opportunity.

synesthesia_collective: [thumbs up emoji]

MG: Thank you very much for this beautiful chat and for donating us your time.

AM: My pleasure. Bye.

**"We must imagine new ways of
trusting each other."**

* Anil Menon and Vandana Singh, “Breaking the Bow: Speculative Fiction Inspired by the Ramayana,” (2012: Zubaan Books)

** David Orr, “The Road Not Taken: Finding America in the Poem Everyone Loves and Almost Everyone Gets Wrong,” (2016: Penguin Press)

| UNDERSTANDING GAIA THEORY

GaiaTheory.org

The Gaia Theory posits that the organic and inorganic components of Planet Earth have evolved together as a single living, self-regulating system. It suggests that this living system has automatically controlled global temperature, atmospheric content, ocean salinity, and other factors, that maintains its own habitability. In a phrase, “life maintains conditions suitable for its own survival.” In this respect, the living system of Earth can be thought of analogous to the workings of any individual organism that regulates body temperature, blood salinity, etc. [...] The Gaia theory was developed in the late 1960’s by Dr. James Lovelock, a British Scientist and inventor, shortly after his work with NASA in determining that there was probably no life on Mars. His research led to profound new insights about life on Earth.



Sultana Zana, “Lockdown network experiments” (2020)

| FIVE WILDLIFE FILMS TO WATCH DURING LOCKDOWN

by Amanda Burrell; Aljazeera, 16th May 2020

With human populations around the world being forced to take a back seat, emboldened animals are gliding through clear waterways, stepping out onto peaceful city streets and reclaiming deserted national parks. Animal sightings are drawing wonder on social media. A jellyfish floating along the canals of Venice, a civet cat sauntering along a zebra crossing in Kerala, a puma lying asleep in a tree in a backyard in Boulder, Colorado, and others scouting the streets of Santiago. In Istanbul, dolphins are frolicking in the Bosphorus. In Thailand, on beaches devoid of tourists, more endangered leatherback turtle nests have been counted than at any time in the past two decades. This only goes to show how damaging the human presence is. It is also, however, a welcome sign of nature’s ability to recover.

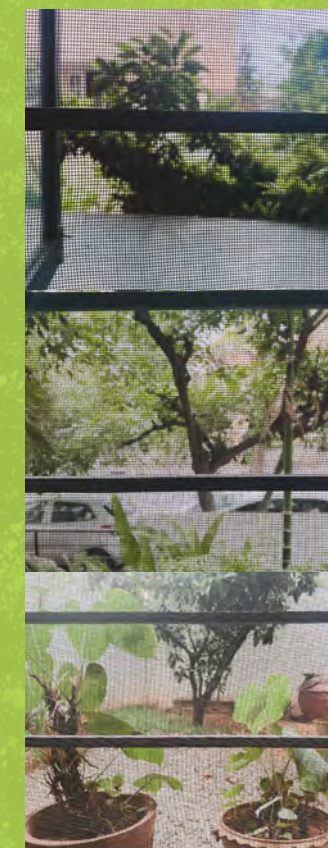


Coronavirus helmets: Bangalore Traffic Police wear themed-headgear to spread lockdown messages. Published on Financial Express Online, 1st April 2020

| HOW ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION FUELS PANDEMICS

by staff; Eurotopics - European Press Roundup
15th April 2020

As the focus of global debate slowly shifts from curbing the coronavirus to how to end the social and economic restrictions, previously dominant “green” issues such as climate protection seem to have disappeared from the political and social agenda. Europe’s press stresses in unison that these issues are no less urgent than they were before — on the contrary.



BMC in coordination with Mumbai Fire Brigade use mobile equipment to sanitise, fumigate Dharavi considered as Asia’s largest slum in Mumbai. Photo by Prashant Nakwe, 3rd April 2020



| STATE USING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN LAWS IN INDIA TO ARREST ACTIVISTS

by Murali Krishnan; Radio France Internationale, 1st April 2020

Several other media outlets and journalists have been the targets of judicial proceedings sometimes bordering on harassment. The timing of the police action has raised eyebrows, especially at a time when strict restrictions on the mobility and assembly of people are placed in the country because of the complete lockdown. Concerns are also being raised about limited access to justice during the coronavirus pandemic. Visits to prisons by lawyers and families have been banned.



TUESDAY 21ST APRIL

SULTANA ZANA

Sultana Zana is an artist interested in looking at the relationships between phenomena at different scales, fine grain observations of chaos and predictability, life and emergence. She is part of the team who runs Walkin Studios.
(whattt.cargo.site)

#MICROSCOPICWORLDS

MG: Hello Sultana, very nice to see you.

SZ: Hi! [smiles] Very nice to see you too. I am happy to be here.

MG: So, I'll start straight away with question one.

In your work you have been interested in the microscopic world, like mycelium and insects — lives that exist in the soil. What is it that fascinates you in the microscopic, in what is seemingly not visible?

SZ: You have to imagine looking at the microscopic or that which is invisible as a tool to move in and out of scale, and a tool that helps us to be able to behold more complexity in our minds at any given point in time. This is one of the things that I find really interesting about the microscopic, the fact that we can look at one thing and be able to see many other things that are all encompassed within that thing at different scales, of both space and time. This leads to the idea that the boundary between the visible and the invisible is interchangeably related to the boundary between an organism and what lives within, what lives inside it.

MG: The landscapes that you present in your work — visual, sonic, tactile landscapes, or a mix of them — propose a shift in points of observation. I feel they are not just about a world and another — the macro and the micro — they are also about how the observer changes what they observe. Can you tell me a bit more about this?

SZ: In the process of observation, we not only observe something, but we also become a part of it being observed, and both realities actually entangle. We understand this as a phenomenon in quantum physics: that the viewer and the viewed are entangled, and the observer and the observed are entangled. There are many realities that exist in parallel and only one of them becomes manifest in the process of observation. This is fascinating. In

my practice I am always observing non-human agents in their natural environment, but I am also observing the process of observation itself. But right now, in this period of isolation — in this *portal* [smiles] — I am also isolated from all kinds of things I am always observing. For example, forests or bees, any kind of natural living beings, non-human agents, like mushrooms. I am in a space in which I am not usually in, not in the vicinity of non-human agents — the things that I am observing and that are observing me. It's a strange thing for me to be in right now.

MG: Viruses are also seemingly invisible. But in this time, the time of a pandemic, they seem more visible than before, to the point of creating coronavirus-themed helmets. What do you think is happening in the way we try to observe and relate to the sub-microscopic?

SZ: It's interesting because we are all trying to imagine something of such a tiny scale. I do this a lot in my practice, to look at microscopic and sub-microscopic scales. But now suddenly, with everyone trying to imagine the virus — it's interesting. A lens that, right now, we are using to look at the virus is to observe how it is travelling through different bodies, so we are using a human lens to observe it. But if we shift the lens, and we imagine to be the virus, we will be exploring more territory by using different tactics. From a human perspective, we know that our bodies are not leakage proof at all. In fact, we are trying to make them leakage proof, in some ways, to block the travelling of the virus through a droplet, like a mask. But everything always touched everything else- the virus has actually brought this forth very significantly; the outside, the body, and what lives within it don't have very clear boundaries — those boundaries are all really porous.

MG: When I say the word 'portal,' what comes to your mind?

SZ: The fact that nothing in the portal is fixed, that everything is

in a hung state. The meaning of what the portal is can only be understood when we are outside the portal.

MG: There is the myth that habits are formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row. Although this is a myth, which habits do you think you have developed or lost during the lockdown?

SZ: I haven't really developed or lost any habit I would say. But one of the things is that I have been observing myself over time [smiles] — durational observation of mental patterns and stuff. Maybe something which becomes a habit will come up once we are outside the portal.

MG: To end our interview, and go back to where we started, do you think we will ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

SZ: I am going to cheat in this answer because I am going to give the answer that Anil gave yesterday [smiles], which was a very nice answer. We are going to go in all kinds of directions because we always do. But for me, certainly this time will hold some meaning and will be entangled in any of the future directions that people will take. [smiles]

MG: Thank you Sultana. Let me check if we have any comments or questions.

vishalkswamy: Quantum entanglement

kohli.simar: Great question!

Reddify: [emoji smile]

xyz: Do you think that lockdowns make sense at a microscopic scale?

SZ: We have been in lockdown in India, but that doesn't seem to stop the spread of the virus. We are thinking of a lockdown really at a macroscopic scale, but contamination, like I said, is so porous. [pauses] Locking down contamination is a difficult one because we always hear how contamination leaks out, be it nuclear waste or mining waste, or just viruses leaking out of labs — one of the current conspiracy theories. Is locking down really going to work? You know, locking down the truth, locking down the virus... These are really difficult questions. [smiles]

kohli.simar: How will the pandemic affect the art industry?

SZ: I don't understand much about the art industry myself — it's as mysterious to me as it might be to you Simar! [laughs] The pandemic is certainly affecting artists in a lot of ways. For example, shows are getting cancelled. That's a very direct answer to that. But in larger ways, it's going to become a significant step, or trope, because it's coming into the public imagination. So, I guess, in terms of works, it's going to stay. [nodding]

amyth: How do you think the pandemic has affected our perception of time?

SZ: That's a great question! [smiles] This question would require one more session of 15 minutes. [smiles] I think the change in how we perceive time is something that everyone now is experiencing... I don't know what the answer to that is... [pauses] Simar is saying in a comment that it has slowed down... certainly it has.

art.mukta: Time feels more continuous... Less broken down

vivek_chockalingham: If the observed is changed by the observer it leaves everything in a contextual state. How do we come to universal conclusions?

SZ: It's a really good question, firstly. Since it's saying that what is observed is changed by the observer, it's not really saying that it is subjected to the observer. It is not subjected to what the observer might think. The observation remains objective, but it does not matter if I or you are viewing. I am talking on a quantum level because you are asking it in a scientific way. It is not the subjectivity of the viewer which gets entangled into the observation, but actually it is the act of viewing. So, if we were to view the same thing many times over, we will be able to reach universal conclusions, which remain the same even when the observer changes. What I am saying is, it is possible to reach universal conclusions, but the act of viewing gets entangled in what is observed.

abc: Will the thought-process behind the word virus change from now on?

SZ: Certainly. It will carry meanings which are personal to people but, when the common understanding of a word begins to be attached to a particular incident, I believe it also changes the common perception of a word. And I also think that a past event, the meaning of a past event, can also be changed by a future event. In that way, the meaning of the word virus is always evolving, and now it will always be reflected with the coronavirus.

Reddify: Will art hold a similar level of celebration and support in the post-pandemic world, in the light of shift of economic power from West to East?

SZ: There can be a few different answers to this question, but surely, I feel that art for me is a way of living and thinking and imagining, and for a lot of people that I know, it is also that. And so, it will at least have the same level of celebration, or it will be more celebrated, because it is the only thing that has the capacity to make sense of a world that is without any 'should be-s' right now, because we have come to a point where there

is a rupture in the whole idea of how things should be. So, art would be important to imagine a world now.

MG: Thank you! I think we are done now with taking questions from the audience. Sultana, I thank you very much for joining us, and for this very interesting conversation. [smiles]

SZ: [smiles] Thank you Marialaura. Bye.

"The outside, the body, and what lives within it don't have very clear boundaries – those boundaries are all really porous."

| SPEAKING POSITIVITY TO POWER

by Sagar; The Caravan Magazine, 31st March 2020

Before lockdown, Modi asked print media owners, editors to refrain from negative COVID coverage. Among the English national dailies, the Hindustan Times's coverage of the public-health crisis appeared to most diligently follow Modi's suggestion on publishing "positive stories" and avoiding "negativity."



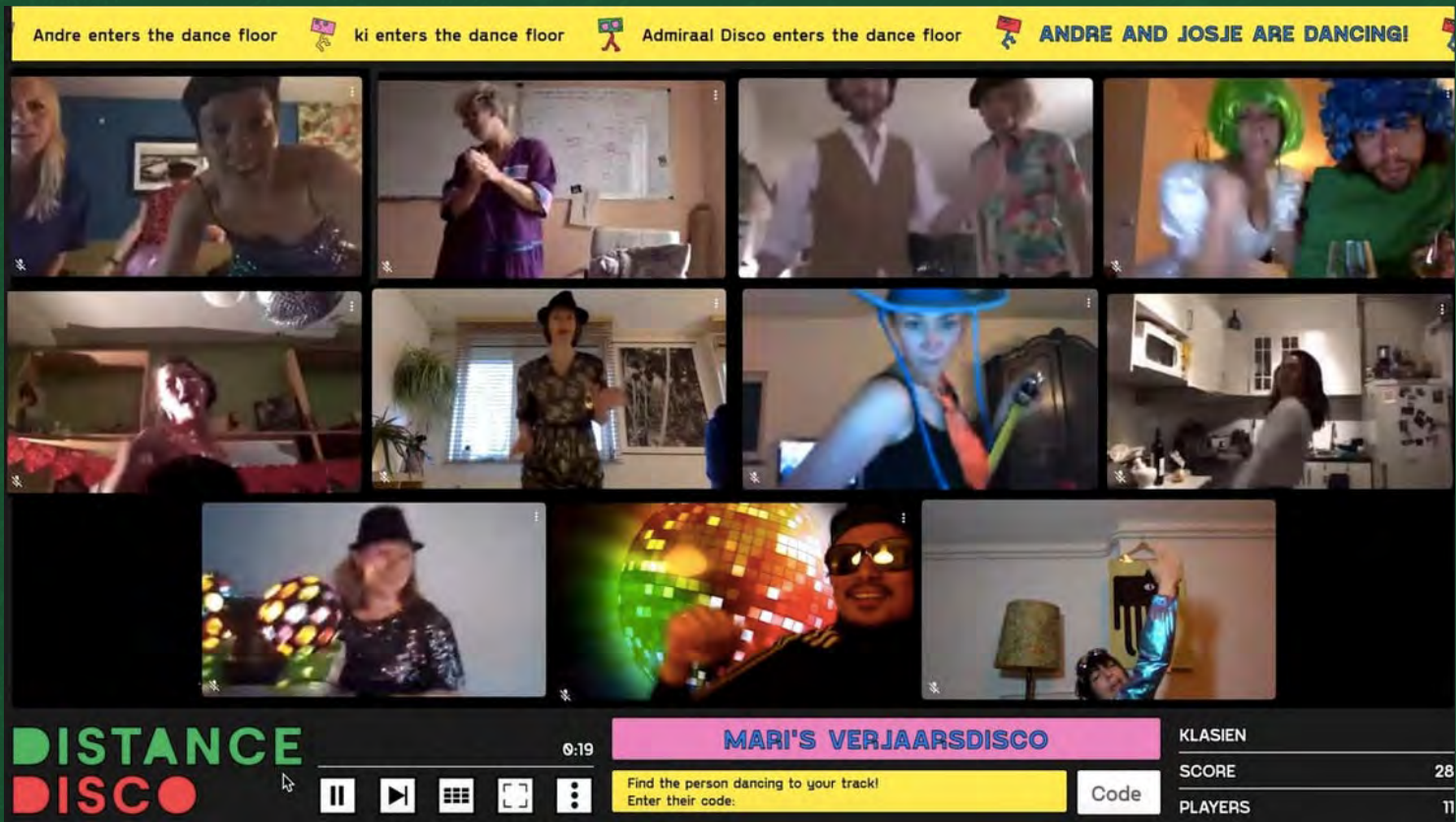
Viral Solidarity is a global open platform to map and connect social innovation and innovators, ideas and knowledge against COVID-19! What we keep in mind is something similar to an InfoPoint (which there are too many already), but a sort of "open and collective observatory" accessible to everyone that wants to think and make experiments about social-technological practices as well as contribute to their circulation. So we would like to create a space to host an extensive collaborative mapping and connecting effort. — from Viral Solidarity Facebook page



| A 25-DAY JOURNEY FROM GUJARAT TO ASSAM

by special correspondent; The Hindu, 21st April 2020

Jadav Gogoi, a migrant labourer in Vapi, told his rescuers that he began walking on March 27 along the highway. He dodged the police in several districts along the route and hitch-hiked on trucks, sometimes for a fee, to reach a toll gate near his home at Gadharua village in Nagaon district. He had set out with ₹4,000 but was robbed of the money, mobile phone and other belongings on the way and had to beg to survive.



Distance Disco is initiated and created by Amsterdam based independent and interactive artists as a quirky social experiment. The project is created by DuoDisco (Mark Meeuwenoord, Arjan Scherpenisse and Klasien van de Zandschulp) in collaboration with TIN.—from distancedisco.nl

| CANCEL CORONA CULTURE. THROWBACK PICTURES, READING CHALLENGES AND OTHER PEEVES FROM THE LOCKDOWN

by Magandeep Singh; The Hindu, 25th April 2020

As the lockdown nears its end, here are a few of my Corona peeves. [...] 5. Social isolation: For a population where an outing for two means bringing the driver, nanny and Man Friday along, being expected to do your own dishes, cooking, laundry and ironing is a sped-up life sentence. I love what Reebok and Under Armour are doing with their online workout videos. But by the time I am done scrubbing floors and making beds, I am too pooped to bother with anything. I have never been so jobless and yet so tired in my life. So Under Armour it is for physical fitness and routine chores for the much-needed mental grounding that us Indians need.



| GOVT PAID TO EVACUATE INDIANS STRANDED ABROAD, BUT MIGRANT WORKERS HAVE TO BEAR OWN TRAIN FARE TO RETURN HOME

by Zeba Warsi; NEWS18, 4th May 2020

Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan had earlier told the Parliament that Air India raised a bill of around Rs 5.98 crore for operating two special flights to China to bring back Indians stranded there. [...] Hundreds of migrant workers gathered at a bus depot after the government gave its nod for inter-district movement. Initially, it was speculated that the workers would be transported home in buses and the state government would bear the cost. Soon after this, some of them rushed to the depot only to be told they have to shell out a large sum as bus fare.

WEDNESDAY 22ND APRIL

RAHUL GIRI

Kathmandu-raised, Bangalore-based producer Rahul Giri has many avatars. He's one half of downtempo electronic duo Sulk Station, the face behind the abstract electronic sounds of _RHL, and founder of the music collective/record label Consolidate. (consolidateblr.com)

#INDEPENDENTCHANNELS

VC: Hey Rahul. How are you doing?

RG: Good good. Can you hear me?

VC: I can hear you. Can you hear me?

RG: Yeah, but there is a slight echo, let me put my headphones on.

VC: Okay let's start and if it gets inaudible, we'll fix it then.

You started an independent music label which is called Consolidate. From what I know about it, you started it to bring different musicians working outside the conventional music scene together. What is Consolidate? What made you start it?

RG: Consolidate, as of now, is a record label and a collective. It's a bunch of artists who have a sense of community to them, who are part of each other's journey in a way. I started Consolidate just because of excitement. I was done with the Sulk Station album; we were touring and at some point, I had some time off. At the same time, there was a lot of cool music coming out, especially in Bangalore from the younger lot; people like Aniruddh Menon, Machli, and Disco Puppet. But I felt that all of this was quite fractured, and I just wanted to consolidate everything, hence the name Consolidate [laughs]. I wanted to create a channel where everything would come under a banner of sorts, where everybody would know each other, appreciate each other and stuff like that. And so, I started off with a Facebook group in 2013, just to consolidate. Slowly it turned into a collective and in 2015 we launched it as a record label.

VC: You have no formal education in music or music production, but managed to learn an art form by self-practicing and staying on your toes. Do you think that starting a creative practice from scratch is possible for anyone? What are your tips?

RG: Why not? It's possible for everybody. I actually started making music when I was 24 or something like that. I started off very late. So, if I have figured out something like fruity loops at 24 without any knowledge of music or whatever [laughs], if I could do it, then anyone can do that! Now there are resources everywhere. There are YouTube channels, there are people who teach you. Back in those days there was nothing — you were forced to figure out things on your own. But the thing is, to do this kind of thing obviously you need some kind of curiosity first, and passion. You need some level of perseverance and, to a certain extent, some level of desperation also, like, "This is what I want to do and I cannot do anything else." You need desire and commitment, and if you have that kind of commitment, yes, it's possible.

VC: In these current times — we are at day 29 of a nationwide, total lockdown in India — people are restless and lacking social experiences. Going back to Consolidate, what I find interesting is that it's mostly distributed online and it has created a network of like-minded people. Now more than ever, there is widespread belief that online platforms can replace the sense of community we are lacking. What do you think is happening? How do you balance quality and being together as a community in this scenario?

RG: We don't really know what is happening, it's at a very initial phase. For a lot of people, it's an opportunity — you see many people jumping on the bandwagon and saying "Let's do something! Let's collaborate!" So, I think it's a great opportunity for collaborations. But everything else is an extension of, and exaggeration of, real life. Because there is the internet, there is a sense of freedom, a lack of inhibition, a bit of bravado — internet enables you to do a lot of things that you might not be able to do IRL. [laughs] It can be a supplement, it might be a trigger, but I don't think it can replace that sense of community that can be found, or that can be created, in real gatherings.

Even if Consolidate has a lot of stuff online, a lot of stuff that is given out online, it is mostly out of convenience more than anything else. Most of the relationships that have been built, have been built before the actual online distribution. Interpersonal relationships are a very big part of Consolidate — I think even more than music. You can only figure out people if you have actual interactions. As far as things go now, I don't think that can be replaced. But who knows? Let's see how long this lockdown lasts.

VC: If I say the word 'portal,' what comes to your mind?

RG: [smiles] "Being John Malkovich." [laughs] I was thinking of the idea of a portal and I just started to think about it. It's one of my favourite films and I had completely forgotten about it. It's that idea of the gateway, escape, start afresh, being somebody new... All of that is represented in that film... and getting fucked is there also. [laughs]

VC: There is the myth that habits are formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row. Although this is a myth, which habits do you think you have developed during the lockdown?

RG: I am hoping it's not a myth because I have cut down on smoking... and I am hoping that after 21 days I won't have any of those cravings. [laughs] I have been eating healthy because I am not eating out. So, yeah, healthy living in a lot of ways.

VC: To end our interview, and go back to where we started, do you think we will ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

RG: I think there are bigger forces at play than coronavirus. I don't think anything will change unfortunately. It's downhill. Coronavirus or no coronavirus, lockdown or no lockdown. I am very pessimistic. The politics and the economy are two forces; they run the country and they have a direct effect on how this

whole lockdown and coronavirus will affect lives. Looking at how things are, they look like an extension of what was going on before. So, no portal for me.

VC: Thank you Rahul. Let's go through the audience's comments and questions.

synesthesia_collective: Teleportation

synesthesia_collective: Would co-working spaces be lost after this because people will have learnt to make their spaces, or they will be more needed?

RG: That's difficult to answer... As of now, we don't know the extent of the containment, the reality of it. We don't even know the actual numbers right now. It will take 6 to 12 months to even figure things out. I don't think anyone will take a call on these things before then. Looking at the nature of the virus and looking at what is happening everywhere else, this is going to be around for a long, long time. Even after the lockdown is over, there will be some sort of restriction mentally as well. Co-working spaces, venues, any kind of social gatherings will take a hit for at least a year.

madhansiya: 12, 21, 40, 42, 48... Not a myth. So, you're good.

marialauraghidini: What do you hope would change, if it could?

RG: It's a very simple thing: I hope people would value life more after this. Right now, the level of sympathy or empathy is just down the drain. And the way you look at poor people and migrants, the way they are treated, it's horrible, it's ridiculous. Valuing life should be the first step.

synesthesia_collective: What do you think about the work from home culture? What is your input?

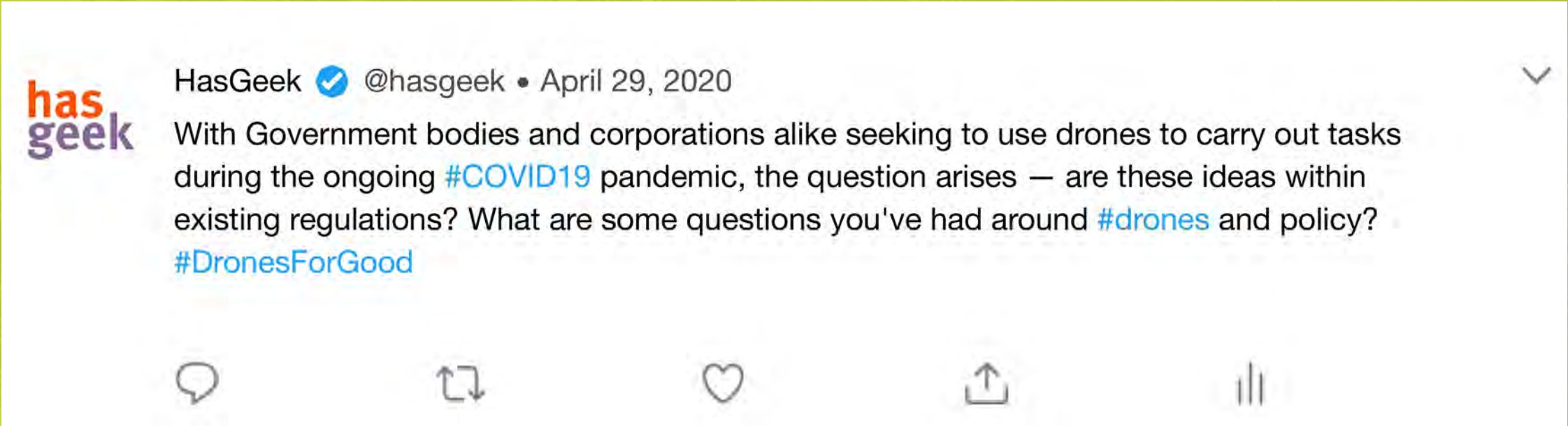
RG: Personally, I work from home. Lockdown is how my life is normally. [laughs] It has its ups and downs for sure. Just because you are working from home, there are things that one does not talk about much; there is depression, anxiety and stress. They are big factors because you are holed up and social interaction is at a minimum. The stress that you take when you are working by yourself is way more, as opposed to when you are working in a social environment. But at the same time, you have greater control of your environment. When your productivity is up, it is very high, but when you are down and out it's gone because your routine is affected, your discipline gets affected. When you work in an actual office, things are a little more constant. When you work from home the graph is just up and down.

vishalkswamy: With your experience in bringing projects back from hibernation, should artists look back or to the future? [emoji smirk]

RG: I think both. You should be everywhere. Artists should look everywhere. [laughs] They should be like Doctor Manhattan.

VC: Thanks Rahul for this time and fun conversation.

RG: Thank you for having me.



THE RISE OF CORONAVIRUS HATE CRIMES

by Anna Russell; The New York Times, 17th March 2020

Rebecca Hayes Jacobs, an urban-studies scholar who co-curated an exhibition titled “Germ City: Microbes and the Metropolis” at the Museum of the City of New York last year, told me that, throughout history, pandemics had often intensified discrimination against minorities. In 1858, a mob burned down a massive quarantine hospital on Staten Island. Locals “were afraid that immigrants were carrying yellow fever, especially Irish immigrants,” Jacobs said. Pandemics can intensify fears of “the other,” and exacerbate racist myths about foreigners being diseased or unclean.



IOCOSE, “Drone Selfies #bedroom #droneselfie #intimesofpeace” (2014); lambda print on metal paper mounted on Dbond 2mm 30 x 30 cm



CORONAVIRUS: HOW NEW ZEALAND RELIED ON SCIENCE AND EMPATHY

by staff; BBC News, 20th April 2020

Unlike the countries that declared “war on Covid-19”, the government’s message was that of a country coming together. It urged people to “Unite Against Covid-19.” Ms Ardern has repeatedly called the country “our team of five million”.

Members of the Asian American Commission hold a press conference on the steps of the Massachusetts State House to condemn racism towards the Asian American community because of coronavirus on March 12, 2020 in Boston. Photo by John Tlumacki/The Boston Globe via Getty Images. Published on The Intercept_, 11th May 2020



Photo by Olivier Douliery/AFP via Getty Images. Published on The Guardian, 2nd April 2020.

'ZOOM IS MALWARE': WHY EXPERTS WORRY ABOUT THE VIDEO CONFERENCING PLATFORM

by Kari Paul; The Guardian, 2nd April 2020

The company has seen a 535% rise in daily traffic in the past month, but security researchers say the app is a ‘privacy disaster’.

THURSDAY 23RD APRIL

IOCOSE

IOCOSE is a collective of four artists based in Europe (Paolo Ruffino, Matteo Cremonesi, Filippo Cuttica, and Davide Prati). IOCOSE's art investigates the after-failure moment of the teleological narratives of technological development in regards to both their enthusiastic and pessimistic visions.
(iocose.org)

#AFTERFAILURE

MG: Hello Paolo! [smiles]

PR: Hi. How are you? [smiles]

MG: I'm good. After a long time, it's good to see you on screen! Let's go into the interview.

In your work you often use pranks to subvert the ideologies embedded in ubiquitous technologies. I am thinking of your "Drone Series," where you reimagine the function of a drone by giving it a life — transforming the narrative of efficiency and surveillance associated with drone technology. What's the role of humour in your work?

PR: There is definitely an element of humour and irony in our work generally. The "Drone Series" is a good example of that. But at the same time, there is also an attempt to think differently about some of the stories or narratives that we are hearing. Around 2013, when we started working with drones, they were presented as a new toy, as a new object or product that you could buy for entertainment and for filming, or that could be used by Amazon for delivering parcels. But, at the same time, they were also a weapon used to kill terrorists, or suspected terrorists, and a surveillance tool. There were all these things at the same time, which is of course part of the heritage of the broader military entertainment industrial complex, where technologies are essentially produced as weapons and as potential tools for everyday use to the point that it is almost impossible to disentangle this. In that sense, you can also think of GPS, or even smart phones, as another example. Our intervention was essentially to imagine, "What if drones could really be at peace?" and that's also the title of the series "In Times of Peace." The irony, if you like, is a consequence of not really being able to seriously imagine, in any way, a life in times of peace for drones, or for anyone really. So, we imagined them taking selfies or exercising, or even mourning their own death in the work "Drone Memorial." But, of course, all these

forms of imagination are also paradoxical. In that sense, our way of approaching this problem was to expose the impossibility, or the difficulty, of imagining an alternative without making it a bit awkward. [smiles]

MG: I am interested in picking up an idea you developed when doing an art residency in Bangalore. When here, you wrote the artistic manifesto “Art After Failure.” And you discussed failure as a moment of reinvention. How does failure turn into a possibility?

PR: We wrote the manifesto drawing on the notes that we were taking while in Bangalore. So, it is very much inspired, and it directly refers to, the city of Bangalore. There is this thing about failure that is very often used in the Silicon Valley — in the startup environment — for which you need to be always thinking in terms of failure; your enterprise needs to be always on the brink of failure, or maybe you need to fail to be in any way creative, disruptive or innovative. So, there is a celebration of failure. But at the same time, we were trying to think of what it means to really stay with failure, thinking of it as a passage to a better context. We are also living in a context where much broader failures are really all around us. There is, of course, the pandemic, but also economic failure, political crisis, and I would say that the environmental failure of our world has the most visible and strongest impact on our lives. And we know very well that not everyone gets out of a crisis as a better person. It doesn't matter how resilient you are, but environmental crisis impacts the life of people, political crisis deteriorates our rights in ways that are very difficult to restore or to consider in a positive manner. So, our manifesto was trying to think of what it could mean to make art after a certain myth of failure, but looking at failure to stay with failure. We also identified many artists who share a similar approach or interest and curiosity towards failure, which is interesting for our contemporary moment.

MG: We are at the 30th day of total nationwide lockdown in India, and I assume you are experiencing something similar.

I continuously come across narratives of the pandemic that appropriate the language of conflict: war, fighting, curfew, battling, winning. What do you think this appropriation is about, or hints at?

PR: I am living this from London, and of course I get news from Italy as well, which is where my family is. The quarantine is definitely something that has an impact on our daily lives. I agree with you — my impression is that there is definitely a narrative that is using war to try to claim a form of agency. If you think of the pandemic as a war against an invisible enemy, you are also claiming, in a sense, that there is a victory condition, there is a moment when you can put an end to all of this. So, it is a way of trying to think of the pandemic as a phenomenon that has an identifiable cause, a region, an effect, a solution. What is troubling for our perception is that virus and bacteria are not really visible; they are not something that you can definitely say, at any point, that you have definitely eradicated from the world because you will never really know. And it is not even possible to identify a specific point or a region in this pandemic. It's also very worrying that there is this very political discourse about where it all started, and when or why it started, which is the subject of so many conspiracy theories. This is an unresolvable question — you can never really say for sure where exactly an invisible virus was born. It is an unidentifiable point of origin, an invisible point of origin. And this troubles our conception, not only of politics, but also of our body. This form of disease does not have a specific cause, or effect, or solutions... these are much more difficult to identify and to see.

MG: When I say the word ‘portal,’ what comes to your mind?

PR: [smiles] When you are talking about portal, the first thing that comes to my mind is a web portal. But you shared with me that article by Arundhati Roy in the Financial Times where she uses a metaphor that makes an interesting use of the word “portal.” Her point is that we can take up this pandemic as our portal to

a new and different world. And it is up to us to decide what we want to bring with us; if it is the corpses of all the problems we had in the past, which are the source of many problems that we are now seeing, or if we want to bring a much lighter, much fairer and just world. Her way of thinking of the portal is very interesting because it reminds us that, in these periods of crisis and transition, we always bring something with us.

At the same time, the web portal that comes to my mind [smiles] is born from the metaphors that originate from a form of cultural appropriation. Particularly, this appropriation is from Indian and Asian cultures and religions, whereby technology is seen as this sort of magic tool that disembodies the user and brings them to a new and different world. Another appropriated word from Indian culture is that of the Avatar, for example, which is being used by the Silicon Valley in the development of new digital technologies. So, in the web portal, there are no burdens, there are no bodies, there is no materiality. It is a sort of free brand new world where you can imagine and do anything you like — think about how many video games are sold and marketed with this... But Arundhati Roy is reminding us that if we think of the pandemic as a portal, then we are going to carry something through it, and what we carry really matters and makes a difference.

MG: There is the myth that habits are formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row. Although this is a myth, which habits do you think you have developed or lost during the lockdown?

PR: With the group IOCOSE, we have always had the habit of working via video conferencing. [smiles] That's a habit we developed out of necessity because we have all been living in different parts of the world. So, we already have that habit. And actually, now we are a little bit frustrated that everyone is doing it, and technologies are working so well, because they never worked that well for the last ten/fifteen years... [smiles] If only they were this efficient ten years ago, it would have been much

easier for us! So, I'm not sure...I guess it is something that we will have to see after the end of the lockdown, and we will then look back retrospectively and see what kind of habits we have developed or lost. It is very difficult to notice while you are doing it. We are all going to be different, in one way or another.

MG: To end our interview, and go back to where we started, do you think we will ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

PR: Probably we are going to take new directions, as it always happens in a time of crisis. There are always new directions that are taken by individuals and collectively, very much like what the article by Arundhati Roy says. It is up to us where we are going, how we are going and how we will be moving after this. I guess there is an element of individual choice, but there is also an element of political collective action that we can part with. But this very much depends on how every single country will be after the pandemic. I guess the question is, "What can we do as artists?" That is an open question that is related to this practice of keeping the imagination alive and thinking alive, particularly in relation to the new technologies we are using now, on a daily basis, more than before.

ML: Thank you Paolo! Let me see if we have any comments or questions from the audience.

vivek_chockalingam: If failure is a point of reinvention, where has the art industry failed?

PR: It's difficult to give a simple and straight answer to this. [pauses]

There is definitely an ongoing clash between the more experimental side of art and the more economic form of co-optation and exploitation of art. We have seen this already in relation to the

internet. For instance, you can think about the passage from net art to the post-internet, which personally we, as IOCOSE, have some skepticism about, even though we see there are important and interesting discourses about it. There is definitely also an element of rebranding some more experimental and critical interventions into something that is more easily marketable. So, in that sense, there is a failure; a political and social failure in using art as a form of critique when art [pauses] — I don't want to use any bad word [smiles] — loses its political critique. This is a failure that we can avoid in the future.

vishalkswamy: Going back to your comment about certain technology becoming better, how can we combat technology that becomes the new normal (like Zoom calls) within an investigative art practice?

PR: I think Zoom might become a new site for artistic intervention. [smiles] We have seen many hackers attacking Zoom, but that was mostly just a prank. We have seen many Zoom calls being pranked by people who were disrupting the call, but also exposing, in a sense, the vulnerabilities of the system, if you like. Maybe these vulnerabilities can also be exposed for more critical attitudes and questions. Zoom is a relatively new thing, but in the ways that we are using it now, it can be a new site for artistic interventions. I am not sure of how exactly that can happen, but it is up to every one of us; we can all do something with it. [smiles]

MG: Paolo, thank you very much for being with us! Have a great afternoon.

PR: Yes, thank you. See you soon! [smiles]

"I guess the question is,
What can we do as artists?"

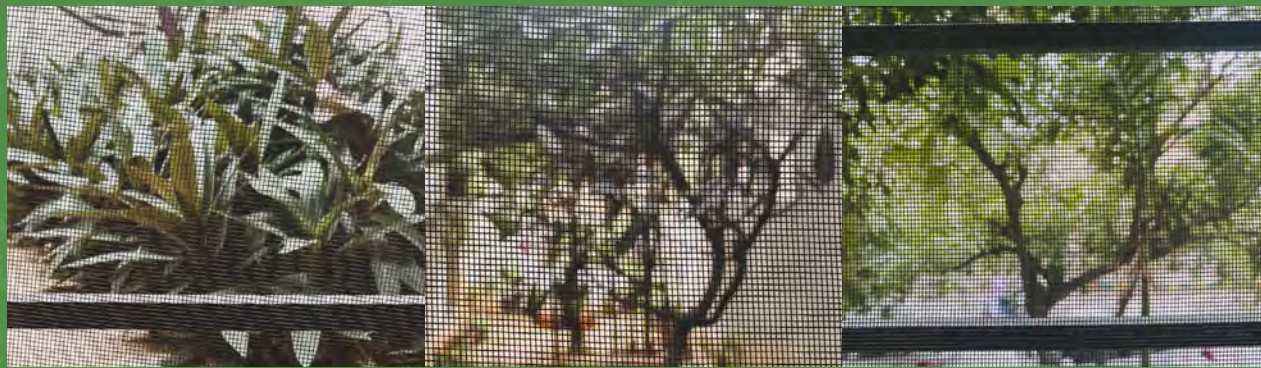
INDIA'S COVID-19 TESTING CONUNDRUM: WHY THE GOVT AND ITS CRITICS ARE BOTH RIGHT

by Deepankar Basu; The Wire, 29th April 2020

A comparison with South Korea might provide a clue. The epidemic is past its peak in South Korea, where the TPR (True Positive Rate) has stabilised to around 2%. To get to this point, South Korea has tested 1.2% of its population. This is a rough benchmark that India could use. It needs to test 1.2% of its population to reach a low and stable TPR (of around 2%). This means that India, which has so far tested about 5,25,667 persons, needs to test another 15.71 million persons. Thus, we see that both the government and its critics are right. Low testing rate does not fully account for the low prevalence of COVID-19 in India, contrary to what critics might claim. The TPR for India is low, but that is not the full story — contrary to what the government might claim. The only conclusion that seems to follow our analysis is that there is no scope for complacency — testing needs to be ramped up big time.



Did anyone see my live body work today? I really enjoyed sharing it with you. today I practiced my before show flow focusing on movements that open up the hips and create lean, mobile and strong muscles. I was thinking of giving more guided flow this week. maybe even tomorrow! it would be amazing to share with you my favourite exercises that I have picked up over the past 2 decades of dance and movement practice. [...] comment below if you like the sound of this! new era! — from fkatwigs Instagram account, 26th April 2020



Police personnel on Thursday dressed up a mannequin to be placed at Sirsi Circle in Bengaluru in an effort to curb traffic violations in case lockdown restrictions are eased. Photo by Sudhakara Jain. Published in The Hindu, 24th March 2020



EU DIVIDED OVER VIRUS RECOVERY PLAN

by Agence France-Presse; The Hindu, 24th April 2020

Bitterly divided EU leaders will try Thursday to hammer out a huge coronavirus rescue package, as the WHO warned the pandemic is far from over. While there are signs the COVID-19 outbreak is slowing and some countries have started to ease restrictions affecting billions of people, the world is grappling with how to repair economic damage on a scale not seen for nearly a century. Other nations are still in the early stages of the fight against a disease that has killed more than 1,80,000 people and infected 2.6 million worldwide, even as it appears to be peaking in Europe and the U.S.

Q: A LOT OF YOUR FICTION USES LANGUAGE AS IT IS SPOKEN.

OLSEN: THINK ABOUT ALL THAT WE'VE LOST THAT HAS BEEN SAID ORALLY BECAUSE NOBODY WAS TAKING IT DOWN. I FEEL VERY FORTUNATE TO LIVE IN A TIME WHERE WE HAVE SO MANY DIFFERENT VOICES. WE HAVE A MUCH RICHER LITERATURE THAN WE'VE EVER HAD, AND WE CAN KNOW OUR COUNTRY SO MUCH BETTER.

—Tillie Olsen
Interview by Anne-Marie Cusac; The Progressive, 4th January 1999



HOW REAL IS THE VIRTUAL?

by Pujita Krishna; The Hindu, 24th April 2020

In these troubled times, it is perhaps social media that has helped many stay connected, stay creative and admittedly according to quite a few, the only way they have remained sane. Amid constraints posed by the lockdown, there are instances of dancers who have embraced the medium like never before and are taking to online teaching and performing via this interfacing. But, hasn't the world seen worse situations? For instance, during the Second World War, dancers such as Ninette de Valois and her troupe of ballet dancers toured Europe and native Britain, often risking their lives, performing to build 'morale' while every second there was the threat of a buzz bomb, or a doodlebug as it was called those days, hovering overhead.

FRIDAY 24TH APRIL

JENNIFER HODGSON

Jennifer Hodgson is a writer from Hull. Most recently, she edited “The Unmapped Country (And Other Stories),” a collection of the ‘lost’ stories of Ann Quin. (jenniferhodgson.co.uk)

#INNERVOICES

MG: Hello Jennifer, it’s very nice to see you in here.

JH: You too! Thank you for getting my surname wrong, as usual. [laughs]

MG: [laughs] My usual me... Let’s go straight into the interview!

JH: [nods]

MG: A few years back you worked on the project “Writers’ Inner Voices.” I am interested in this idea of translating an inner voice to an outer voice. I feel it’s a process of listening that involves quite a lot of fine tuning, from developing sensibility to self-acceptance. What is an inner voice? And what relationship does it have with the outer?

JH: That’s a big one Marialaura! But thank you for asking. [smiles] Five years ago, I was part of a project called “Hearing the Voice.” And I was doing a study into literary creativity and how writers experience their inner voices because it seemed that often writers talk about feelings of agency and flow, and of the ownership of their inner voices, in ways that have similarities, and also some differences, from the kind of ways people who hear auditory hallucinations experience their inner voices. That was the study I was part of. And during my work on that, it kind of became clear that the relationship between inner and outer voice is a complicated one, and a mysterious one. Because, although there is a known language about how we talk about images we see in our minds — we talk about our mind’s eye — there seems to be a lot of variation in the way we conceive of our inner voice, like is it even a voice? Is it something that feels auditory at all? Is it something written? Is it mood? Is it feeling? It’s quite a mysterious thing, and the distinction is also very difficult to quantify because we think of inner voice as something that is profoundly intimate and personal, and private but in fact, of course, our inner voice is a really social thing. It is every conversation we have ever had, and it can also be filled with other people’s voices and can often

not feel our own. Like my own inner voice, whatever 'I' is, doesn't feel like the same thing at all. So I have no answer but lots of questions. [smiles]

MG: I feel we all live with a cacophony of inner voices. As writer and critic, I assume you might be dealing with balancing your imaginative voice and your critical one — the one that dives into uncharted territories and the one deconstructing things to make sense of them. How do you deal with your own different voices in your work?

JH: Yeah, I think for other people probably the distinction is marked. But for me, I was trained as an academic literary critic. And that mode of self-expression for me was one that was about [pauses] — like the difference between knowing and knowing, right? — authority and expertise and mastery. There came a point in my writing career where I just couldn't write like that anymore. I just didn't know. I call myself a recovering academic [laughs] who is partaking in a process of unschooling. Now I am much less interested in really knowing anything. But it's a very difficult thing to let go of, it's kind of a process of unschooling. I hope that what I do now is much more concerned with the process of uncertainty, and I'm much more curious about what one doesn't know and what is impossible to know. Sorry to go all metaphysical for you at half-past eleven UK time. I'm sure for other people the two practices are more inter-linked, but I've got my own particular neurosis... not my story! [laughs]

MG: Apart from our own voices there are those of others we mentally speak with. There are the people we know, but there are also the people we come across during our online browsing routine. What worries me is that this time of lockdown is being used in many countries as an opportunity to consolidate ideological narratives. While this happens, the voices of many people are being undermined, disregarded, or shut down. What do you think is the role of our own voice in this?

JH: That is a difficult one, but thank you. [smiles] Like many, many

others, my country is the UK. I am staying in South-East London at the moment, and like many others, I have been — what adjective to use? — dismayed, disgusted, hugely upset to see how the current circumstances in my country have led to a kind of amplification of existing shitty, bullshit narratives about isolationism, hystericism, exceptionalism, courage and bravery, which is being used to cover up inequality, inequity, injustice, a vicious murderous government and that makes you feel despair and depression. As regards to what is to be done, I don't know that I understand what's going on now. I don't know when I will understand what is happening, I don't know whether the picture will ever fully emerge... But we have a film club at our house and we are watching films every night. I watched a film called "The Stuart Hall Project," which is about the Jamaican-British sociologist Stuart Hall. And what that reminded me of was all the myths that exist; myths about permanence and the immovability of the status-quo. They are myths that are invested in again and again and again by shit kind of people but they're only myths, and things do change, but in terms of new epistemes to deal with it, I have no idea. I am an optimistic pessimist. I don't know! [smiles]

MG: Now we are moving onto something which is a bit easier... [laughs] When I say the word 'portal,' what comes to your mind?

JH: I'd like to say something like the idea of the Bardo, which is an idea that I don't really understand, but I'm really into! [makes a face and smiles] It feels full of possibilities. But it varies from moment to moment, like right now, quite equally it could just be like the idea of a drain cover! [laughs] I'm afraid!

MG: There is the myth that habits are formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row. Although this is a myth, which habits do you think you have developed or lost during the lockdown?

JH: Marialaura you've lived with me, and you know that I lack all self-discipline and I am my own worst task-master. And also, I have to say that I don't think this thing that we have found ourselves

in currently, during a global pandemic, is the best situation to ever be developing any habits.

That said, I'm a writer but I am a writer that has a fairly ambivalent relationship with books, reading, book culture, writing. And in fact, let's be honest, [pauses, makes a face] all I have ever really wanted to be is a dancer. [laughs] So, in terms of my habits, I have taken over one room of my house and I have turned it into a contemporary dance studio where I — a 36 years old, sad, recovering ex-academic — do contemporary dance. I do it every day. I am a dancer. [nods]

MG: To end our interview, and go back to where we started, do you think we will ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

JH: Like I said, I do not know. I think... [pauses] both things are true. Many people have the luxury, the privilege — like me! — of having an anxiety about going back to the way things were. That's certainly not what I want. One of the things that sitting on my ass for five weeks has taught me [smiles], is to reflect upon what my previous existence was. That's not what I want. What I do want, I'm not sure.

MG: Thank you Jennifer. Let's go through the comments and questions from the audience.

JH: Sure!

gaia.tedone: Recovering academic: nice!

annalisa_sonzogni: We are all recovered academics

gaia.tedone: The mother (critical voice)

gaia.tedone: I like Marialaura's question — we have been deprived of a lot of things during this quarantine but we still have our voices.

samirabose: I'm just wondering how we can think about listening to quietness? Quietness and refusal to speak as resistance?

JH: That's really interesting to me. In my work, like the project that I have been talking about, I find myself more interested in the refusal to speak. But actually, because the refusal to speak has a long history in art and in literature, for me what's really interesting at the moment is writers who can't speak. It's that translation between inner and outer, when that breaks down, and writers who can't write. I'm working on a book that is in part about a sixties British writer called Ann Quin, who experienced speech disorders, like Aphasia, and became unable to speak... She stopped writing, and it wasn't like this grand gesture of refusal — she couldn't. There's a really interesting book by a wonderful writer called Tillie Olsen on silences, which is a history of potential literature that doesn't exist because writers couldn't write. It's a great book, I highly recommend it.

samirabose: Thank you for the suggestion.

redify: In this climate of celebrating art for social causes, especially within India, is the weight of the inner voice been lost? What are your thoughts?

JH: I am sorry but I can't speak for an Indian context... I guess I would say that the two things to me are not distinct. I live with visual artists and I see them worrying about making work or not worrying about making work, or whatever. In writing — writing has such a long, arduous process — in terms of any individual or collective response, that's not happening like this. It takes longer.

MG: Jennifer, thank you very much for giving us your time, your voice and your mind.

JH: Thank you everyone. This has been really nice. Bye.



Gayatri Kodikal, "Tigress Kali disappearing into the Ultrasonic. Narrated by the shapeshifting Moth"; image from performance



A CRUEL LOCKDOWN: LESSONS FROM RELIEF WORK IN MUMBAI

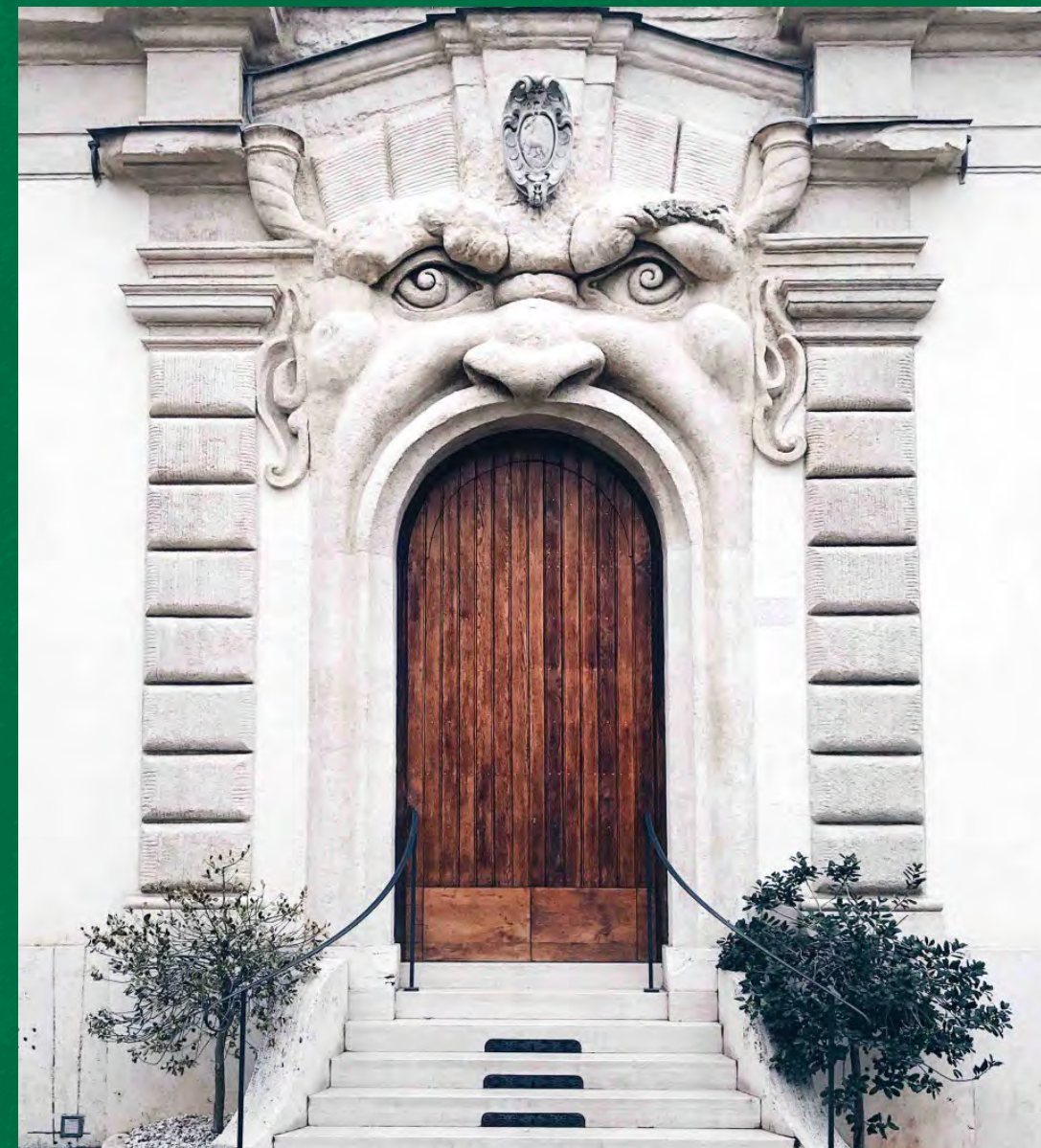
by Bhakti G.; The Wire, 24th April 2020

Migrant workers in Mumbai have been devastated by the national lockdown, imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19. I write this as a member of the Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN) working in the city. [...] As of April 20, more than 73% of the 1,366 workers who reached out to us from Maharashtra have said that they have ration lasting for less than one day. About 90% in Maharashtra (out of 1,251 people who reached out to us) had less than Rs 200 remaining. With this they have to buy soap, oil, fuel for cooking, pay for transportation back home, recharge their phones etc. About 98% (out of 3,884) had not received rations from the government and 84% (out of 1,268) had not received any cooked food. This is not a research study — these figures are based on basic needs.



INDIA RECORDS LARGEST SINGLE-DAY SPIKE OF 1,752 CASES; TOLL HITS 723

by special correspondent; The Hindu, 25th April 2020



Palazzo Zuccari in Rome, Italy, built in 1590

CORONAVIRUS NOW A SHAPESHIFTER: MUTATION OF VIRUS THROWS SPANNER IN WORKS FOR VACCINE DEVELOPMENT

by Shiv Nalapat; timesnownews.com, 5th March 2020

The makeup of coronaviruses permits mutation and recombination through a process known as antigenic drift. Antigenic drift occurs when small changes in the genomic structure of the virus lead to changes in the surface (spike) proteins of the virus. [...] Antigenic drift is the reason why researchers need to produce different recipes for the seasonal flu vaccine every year. When one thinks of mutation or evolution, one usually imagines these as processes that take place over thousands or millions of years. However, antigenic drift processes take place much quicker, increasing the virulence potential of viruses.



Cow urine party in New Delhi, India. Photo by Getty Images.

FACE IT: THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT IS PEDDLING PSEUDOSCIENCE

by Ruchi Kumar; The Wire, 27th April 2020

This isn't the first time the ministry has faced criticism for promoting unscientific claims or backing research derived from religious myths and beliefs. One of its repeated focuses has been cow urine, which is believed by many Hindus to have healing properties given the sacred nature of cows in Hinduism. The urine has been touted as a treatment for many illnesses, including diabetes, epilepsy, and AIDS. Naik himself has made several comments in parliament about how cow urine can cure cancer. In reality, its use can be dangerous. In fact, so widespread is the belief in cow urine that on March 17, an activist working for the BJP in Kolkata organised a "gomutra (cow urine) party" to ward off COVID-19. He believed that drinking the urine would protect them from the disease. Unfortunately, one of the volunteers fell seriously ill after ingesting the urine.

SATURDAY 25TH APRIL

GAYATRI KODIKAL

Gayatri Kodikal is an experimental video and audio game maker and researcher. She is currently pursuing a Masters programme in Arts at the Dutch Art Institute in The Netherlands.
(gayatrikodikal.com)

#SHAPESHIFTING

[the guest comes online with a mask]

VC: Hi Gayatri, good to see you.

GK: Hi Vivek, good to see you too.

VC: Okay, should we go into the interview?

GK: Yeah. Let's go!

VC: Gaming and research are a significant part of your practice. In your current research, you are working with the idea of Shapeshifting. Today, this idea is commonly used in gaming, but it's much older and larger than that. Shapeshifting exists in ancient mythology, folk tales, movies and books — it's been part of human thinking for a long time. Can you tell me what Shapeshifting means within your artistic research?

GK: Sure. I was drawn to the magic and transformative power that this imagery and imagination of Shapeshifting has. It's kind of fundamental to evolution and how we see ourselves as always in a state of becoming. We know it's been part of collective consciousness since a long time, drawing back to shamanistic and totemic practices. But in my experimental film and game work, I've explored the queerness of Shapeshifting, whether it's an interspecies love or the hyper-object quality of the remains of a missing queen's hand. I think Shapeshifting is an integral part, or element, in the work of culture itself and the ever-shifting nature of society.

What I'm writing now is trying to take this narrative trope beyond storytelling, and to investigate how it can become a fascinating lens to look at contemporary political strategies of embodied transformation that is continuous and emancipatory. Some of the things in this lexicon are the mangrove forests, the trans body, the camouflage protestor and protest spaces, the digital fugitive and the suspension of statelessness.

VC: In many of your works, such as “The Travelling Hand” and your present thesis, mangroves have played an important role. You have been looking at the way they grow, they transform their form, as an environment in-between that allows for diversity. What is this transformation? And how does it work?

GK: That is actually a continuous work in progress and I don’t know how long I will continue working with it [smiles]. The game “The Travelling Hand” has a modular board structure. This modular board is actually the shapeshifting mangroves on the Mandovi river in Old Goa. These mangroves are sometimes within water and sometimes on land, so it’s a pretty complex ecosystem. It harbors different sets of species when the tide comes in or when the tide goes out. For example, one particular species of crustaceans that are only found there, in Old Goa, makes a sort of popping sound. Together they sound like a musical orchestra, and I’ve used this sound in the game world as well. Mangroves are the trees of the tropics, the trees of the colonised world. They are rhizomes. The Latin name is rhyzophora where “rhyzo” means “root” and “phora” means “to carry.” So, I’m looking at mangroves as a metaphor — a form of artistic thinking that allows us to create new ontologies and new ways of being. And the game form allows for this rhizomatic thinking, which is also how historical traces and events unravel, and are interconnected and entangled. The multiplicity in mangroves challenges the views of identity, refusing to tie down to any particular geography, or race, ethnicity or culture. And this is very evident and clear in the game “The Travelling Hand” as well, where my own sense of identity kept constantly shifting while encountering these different geographies and cultures and times, from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century.

VC: In the present time of lockdowns, civil liberties have been curbed at various levels around the world. Although we feel in an in-between space in our day-to-day lives, we are increasingly being locked into specific positions. Apps, for example, are created to monitor us, classify us, taking away our uniqueness.

This is similar to other systems of surveillance based on classification that are already in place. How does the idea of Shapeshifting tie into this top-down method of classification?

GK: Shapeshifting is a political strategy of escaping capture and assimilation, and this happens by escaping classification. You can observe this, actually, within the history of Indigenous tribes in Zomia, which is a region set to be from Vietnam to North-East India. You can also observe this in the Yogini cults’ complex nomenclatures and secretive knowledge production. But during the great census of colonial India, one can see the violence of classification and criminalisation of tribes. Something that we are also facing now with the UAPA, right? So, to decolonise this data and the bias that comes with these systems of surveillance and AI technology, I’m thinking of proposing something like the idea of the digital fugitive, but more on that later [laughs]... I have to finish writing that stuff!

VC: If I say the word ‘portal,’ what comes to your mind?

GK: This is a sort of threshold that one has to pass through. Shapeshifting shamans are guides that take you through portals to your inner spiritual essence [puts her hands up and shakes her head]. We see shapeshifters also on the frame of doorways; they are like between the outside and the inside. So, the portal is the process of becoming. Passing through the portal you ask yourself, and as a society, “Who are you? Where did you come from? And where are you going?” These are also the three questions that Sufism asks.

VC: There is the myth that habits are formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row. Although this is a myth, which habits do you think you have developed during the lockdown?

GK: [laughs] I guess I’ve been writing, because I have to — just taking a pause and slowing down. The scale of horror that one encounters during this crisis needs a lot of strength to really

think through it. I think the pause for me is really important and something I would like to carry on. One other thing I have begun doing is wearing a head-dress or turban. This reminds me of the essential. It reminds me of the strength, care of women, past and present. Maybe that's something that might stick with me... [laughs]

VC: To end our interview, and go back to where we started, do you think we will ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

GK: Honestly, I don't know [laughs]. I am okay with this uncertainty. We will be doing all of these things... But for me it's vital that we just take a pause, and really, really look at how we think things, how we do things, how we live and also how we care. There are going to be many portals, just like there are many apocalypses. I would also say, just go with the flow and Shapeshift consciously.

VC: Thank you Gayatri. Let's look at the questions from the audience.

annalisasonzogni: can you tell us about your beautiful mask?

GK: I had made this mask for my first appearance as Shapeshift storyteller's avatar. I used it for a performance I did last year. And yes, I'm here, present, as part of the long history of Shapeshifting and Shapeshifters [laughs].

BeingAnand: Why are you hiding your face?

GK: [laughs] For this particular portal, Anand, this is my face!

CuriousKidHere: Can you explain a bit on pause?

GK: It takes a lot of strength to think through what is going on in the world today, especially in the crisis situation. There are so many different things! What I mean by pause is just to take

space for yourself, instead of just consuming news and information; to understand how you are transforming and how you are Shapeshifting in this time.

annalisasonzogni: Thanks! Vivek and Gayatri.

VC: Thank you Gayatri for this time.

GK: Yes. Bangalore looks like it has great weather. Thank you. Bye.



INDIA AMONG TOP 3 MILITARY SPENDERS: REPORT

by special correspondent; The Hindu, 28th April 2020

The global military expenditure rose to \$1917 billion in 2019 with India and China emerging among the top three spenders, according to a report by a Swedish think-tank, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). "In 2019, China and India were, respectively, the second-and third-largest military spenders in the world. China's military expenditure reached \$261 billion in 2019, a 5.1% increase compared with 2018, while India's grew by 6.8% to \$71.1 billion," the report said.



Akshat Nauryal and Marc Lee, "India Unfiltered" (2020); installation shot at SPACE10, New Delhi



Three Urban Gardeners Share Tips To Keep You Busy During COVID-19 Lockdown: Rajendra in his lush terrace garden. Photo by Rajendra Singh. Published on betterindia.com

ONLY 15% OF POOR HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVED PULSES

by Priscilla Jebaraj; The Hindu, 26th April 2020

Only 15% of poor households have received the 1 kg of pulses promised for April under the Centre's COVID-19 welfare package, according to an analysis of government agency data. Of the 1.96 lakh tonnes of pulses that should have been given to over 19 crore households this month, only 30,000 tonnes have been distributed so far, according to the Consumer Affairs Department.



Shoppers line up outside a Costco in Honolulu to buy supplies after the Hawaii Department of Health on Wednesday advised residents they should stock up on a 14-day supply of food, water, and other necessities. Photo by Handout / Reuters. Published on BuzzFeed News, 24th March 2020

KOLKATA POLICE TAKE DOWN 1.3 LAKH SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS AS 'FAKE NEWS' TAKES COMMUNAL TURN

by Madhuparna Das; The Print, 19th May 2020

Police in Kolkata identified and took down as many as 1.3 lakh "fake" or "misleading" social media posts about Covid-19 between 18 March and 18 May, ThePrint has learnt from senior officers of the force. In the same period, West Bengal Police and their Kolkata counterparts lodged 270 cases and arrested 199 people.

NO NEW CASES AFTER MAY 16, SAYS STUDY

by Jacob Koshy; The Hindu, 26th April 2020

On Friday, V.K. Paul, NITI Aayog member and head of a key government empowered committee on medical management, presented a study to suggest that the lockdown had slowed the rate of transmission and increased the doubling time, the period it took for cases to double, to about 10 days. Though India continues to show a rising trend in cases, his projection also showed a forecast that says new cases would cease by May 16. From May 3, India would hit its peak in adding daily new cases at a little above 1,500 and this would drop to 1,000 cases by May 12, and down to zero by May 16. In all, this would mean that no more than 35,000 cases would be added between Saturday and the first fortnight of May.



SUNDAY 26TH APRIL

AKSHAT NAURIYAL

Akshat Nauriyal is a musician, filmmaker and new media artist who works with emerging technologies. He is also a co-founder of St+art India Foundation. ([instagram.com/ tahska](https://www.instagram.com/tahska))

#DIGITALSUBCULTURES

MG: Hello Akshat. Nice to have you with us.

AN: Hello Marialaura. It's good to be here.

MG: Last January I saw your installation “India Unfiltered,” which you created in collaboration with artist Marc Lee. It felt like an archeology of TikTok — videos of TikTok users were projected on different walls, grouped around specific hashtags, from #cleanindia to #stoprape. It fascinated me to hear the voices of people we hardly listen to, but also to see different types of aesthetics and languages. What was the trigger of this project? And what have you learnt while developing it?

AN: The installation, for those of you who have not seen it, was an audio-visual experience where people could walk into the space while there were projections happening on the walls. Each had a live stream of TikTok videos with some text prompts like questions. One of my first engagements with the visual experience of TikTok videos was the viral filter videos that were going around of Indian boys ‘trying’ on TikTok. They were usually singing to really heartbreaking romantic Indian songs, with tears in their eyes. I was really fascinated by them. This also showed that the people who were putting up those videos were from really remote parts of the country, which was something that I felt was not necessarily happening on platforms like Instagram. If Facebook, to a certain extent, is more open ended and has more reach in rural parts of India, Instagram is like a bubble — it's for the urban elite, in a certain sense. So I felt like I needed to deep dive into this. I also saw that there were a lot more young people, young content creators, on TikTok. India is the youngest country in the world, in the sense that it has the largest population of young people — 54% of our population is under the age of 25. And it is primarily this generation that is really active on a platform like TikTok. So when I started doing my research I was interested in thinking about, “What kind of things are they talking about? Are there any socially relevant ideas and issues people are engaging with on the platform?” And then I realised that

there was a lot of that — a hashtag like #stoprape had something like 1.2 billion views. Then I started piecing together different hashtags, and I started understanding what kind of issues are prevalent on TikTok. It really amazed me to think that if the majority of young people engage with socially relevant ideas, can that, to a certain extent, lead to some kind of systemic change? Now, I am in no position to say, yes that it will happen, or it will not happen, because at the end of the day these are also just numbers. But these numbers are really really large.

So that's where the idea for the installation came from — the questions, that I posed to myself and I posed to the viewers as well. But the idea was also to give an insight into the real India, because my learning, going back to your questions, is that we are definitely in a bubble — our audiences, Instagram and Facebook, are like microcosms of what the actual reality of this country is. A platform like TikTok is instead representative of it. I also chose TikTok because it is meant to be a projection of social media in general, digital media that exist today and how people come there and express themselves. So my learning was that there is a much larger world down there, in terms of even content creators, and how digital platforms can enable people from remote parts of the country to also become content creators. Maybe they can even make a career for themselves, make an alternative livelihood, which is quite interesting in the Indian context because we all have grown up with this idea of being a doctor, or an engineer, or a lawyer — I am a failed engineer myself... [laughs] So, from that perspective, it's interesting how it has opened things up for a lot of people.

MG: You talk about your artistic process as “digital existentialism.” When I think about existentialism I think of European philosophical systems that responded to the erosion of the individual, its ‘uniqueness,’ because of the Industrial Revolution and the beginning of so-called mass society. Can you tell me more about the way you see existentialism in the context of the digital?

AN: This phrase ‘digital existentialism’ is something I came across a few years back in my research into the impact of technology on human psychology. I feel we live in an unprecedented time where we have an insane amount of access to information. It's like you log on to Facebook, Instagram or any of these platforms and you are just bombarded with information about people's lives. And I think what that does is, to a certain extent, to always cause you to question yourself, your own existence, and your own role within the world that you find yourself in. For me the idea of existentialism boils down to the idea of authenticity. In a way, I feel that everybody is looking for that; everybody is trying to find their authenticity, whether in their work, in their life, whether as an artist or whatever it may be. But I also feel it is quite interesting because a lot of these platforms are based on false projections, right? People are just projecting these ideas of themselves, of having this *amazing life*, and constantly putting things out. And that, for a person who is consuming this content, can cause people to internalise, self-reflect and feel like whether they are good enough or not.

When a new platform comes, when a new technology comes, we are the first to jump right into it; we are the first ones to adopt it and say, “Yes this is the best thing ever.” But we also don't realise what kind of impact it is having on us, whether it is affecting our physiology. A lot of studies are now being done about it, and talk about, for example, the dopamine effects of Facebook and Instagram likes. This is something I am very interested in in terms of the kinds of works I engage myself in, but also just as a person who grew up in a generation where we had rotary phones — I'm sure you might remember them [laughs] — and also having this separate radio or a torch... things like that right? [laughs]

Suddenly the world around has really changed tremendously, and I have found myself grappling with that a lot of the time. I wasn't sure how I wanted to engage with these mediums and I still don't know. A lot of my followers might not have even seen

my face on Instagram because I am not part of the selfie generation — unfortunately, I now make augmented reality filters which need somebody's face, so I have to use them... [smiles] So, it's all of these things that find a way into my work, and I try to base my work on this idea of how technology can also be used in different ways, and what kind of interactions people are having with it.

MG: This is day 33 of lockdown in India. Similar to this series of interviews, many galleries, art organisations and independent practitioners have gone online. They present, often for the first time, art exhibitions, video screenings and curated discussions. How do you read this phenomenon, especially in connection to your interest in using digital platforms for disruption?

AN: I feel that this was already happening. It's in the way platforms exist together or the internet is almost like a virtual public space now — it's almost like a virtual version of the real world, but also more global and connected to the rest of the world as opposed to your immediate reality. The world was already shifting to this idea of virtuality- like people are way more active on social media and digital platforms; we are consuming all our content through it, and we use them as our main source of information as well. So I think that it was bound to happen. It's become a space where people are coming to share ideas, and engage with each other on different issues.

A lot of the AR work I do is trying to, in a way, harness that because there is a captive audience already online, on these platforms, and it cuts away the middle man. For example, there are many ways you can do augmented reality, but a lot of them require you to have a separate app that's built and people have to download. While a place like Instagram allows me to just create these filters, and unleash them upon the world [smiles] and let people use them in the way they want to. I think it's encouraging to see that a lot of people have actually started to use them, and that people are using these platforms for social activism, maybe

getting behind causes and movements that they care about. If a protest happens offline it can definitely happen online.

In terms of exhibitions and screening, and things like that, I think there is definitely value to it, but I also feel that I value the tangible experience. I don't want to go to a virtual music concert; I like the idea of being immersed in a space where I can actually enjoy the music, feel the vibe and the energy of the artists and what they are putting on stage. Those are things that will still remain — I am not sure when they are going to open up, since the way things are right now [laughs] ... just the thought of being in a crowd now is very daunting and scary...

MG: When I say the word 'portal,' what comes to your mind?

AN: That's quite a difficult question to grapple with... [laughs] For me the idea of the portal is an entry way to a sort of alternative reality, which is quite different from what you have in front of you. Whether it's good or bad, it's only something that you find once you have crossed the portal. It's something that transcends you from your physical reality, from the world that you know in the way it exists; something that takes you beyond that and makes you experience something new.

MG: There is the myth that habits are formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row. Although this is a myth, which habits do you think you have developed or lost during the lockdown?

AN: I am the worst with habits honestly — my personal life is a struggle with habits so I am not probably the best person to be asking this question to... [laughs] But what I have realised in the past 21 days — X number of days actually, it's a lot more now! — is that you can sharpen your own skills. What I have also realised is that the definition of skills needs to change. Because for me and for, I am guessing, other working professionals and creative people, skills mean working on your software, your process, your

methodology, and things like that. But I have realised that cooking is a skill, watering your plants every day is a skill. People look at them as soft skills, but I think that what this lockdown has forced all of us to do is to realise that you can live life at different paces and it's okay to sometime slow down and not just always be in a rush. I keep thinking of this idea of the rat race but, "Whom are you actually racing? Are you racing yourself? Are you racing somebody else? And what is that for?" I've learnt, at least personally, that there are more skills one can learn in life, and that there are many skills of value, and this is a great time to sort of get into that.

MG: To end our interview, and go back to where we started, do you think we will ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

AN: I think what's also become clear is that the world needs definitely to move in a different direction. I think that our priorities are wrong and that's something one needs really to look at. For example, in India the health care funding is one fifth of the defense budget. Our government has also been planning to cut something like three thousand crore from education. I think that, overall, one would at least assume — logic would dictate — that we would come out of this saying "No, our priorities are all wrong and we need to really figure this out. And we really need to structure this society on the best ideals of socialism, on the best ideals of communism, on all the best ideas that exist outside, to make the best democratic system." But I feel that the opposite is happening. There is xenophobia happening, there is more separation happening. There are castes in return in India, and religion is sort of playing a part in terms of how we are talking about coronavirus here. So sadly, I feel that this is going to aggravate all the little fissures that already existed; it's kind of playing at them, poking at them even more. That's maybe a very pessimistic view and I am hoping that this is not the case. In a nutshell, I would hope that our priorities are realigned... Let's leave this on a positive note... [smiles]

ML: Thank you Akshat. Now let me look at the comments and questions from the audience.

antariksha.sanchar: Akshat makes amazing AR filters

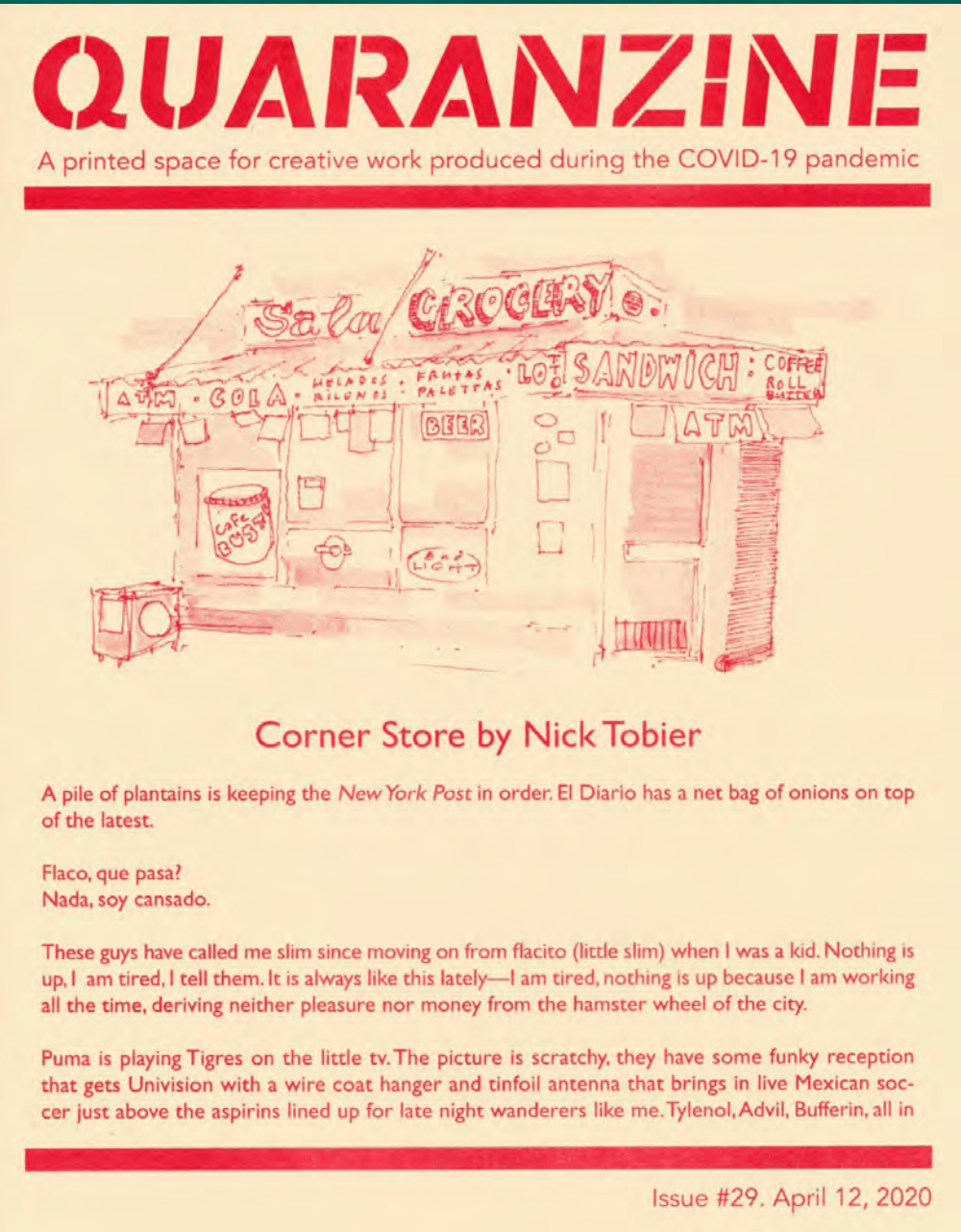
vivek_chockalingam: Do you draw connections between the existentialism in Indian/Asian philosophy and digital existentialism?

AN: Wow, that's a heavy question! [smiles] I am not an expert in Asian or Indian mythology. I have read a lot about existentialism because that's one kind of philosophy that can define our generation right now, where we are constantly asking ourselves, "Where the fuck I am? What the fuck am I doing? Where the fuck am I going?" But Buddhism, for example, has this idea of just observing, and feeling slow rather than getting too caught up in feelings. I definitely think that there are traces of all of this that are coming into play. But, at least for me, this idea of existentialism is tied to this underlying feeling that comes with all the information we are constantly subjected to. There is this line which Sartre said, "Existence precedes essence." I feel that essence is something that we are all chasing, and that is where the authenticity idea comes from — we are all trying to be authentic beings, we are all trying to have a voice, we are trying to be individuals which stand out, whether through work, whether through our values, whether through our belief systems, or whatever that may be. And I feel that is also something we are getting too caught up in, because of our exposure and all that information we get bombarded with.

MG: Thank you Akshat for your time on a Sunday afternoon.

AN: Thank you for the invite. Days feel all similar nowadays [smiles] Ciao!

Nick Tobier, “Corner Store” (2020)
for Quaranzine. Published by Public
Collectors/Half-Letter Press, Chicago



| HAS COVID-19 KILLED GLOBALISATION?

by editors; The Economist, 14thMay 2020

Even before the pandemic, globalisation was in trouble. The open system of trade that had dominated the world economy for decades had been damaged by the financial crash and the Sino-American trade war. Now it is reeling from its third body-blow in a dozen years as lockdowns have sealed borders and disrupted commerce. The number of passengers at Heathrow has dropped by 97% year-on-year; Mexican car exports fell by 90% in April; 21% of transpacific container-sailings in May have been cancelled. As economies reopen, activity will recover, but don’t expect a quick return to a carefree world of unfettered movement and free trade. The pandemic will politicise travel and migration and entrench a bias towards self-reliance. This inward-looking lurch will enfeeble the recovery, leave the economy vulnerable and spread geopolitical instability.



Healthcare workers at Riverview Jefferson Nursing Home in Detroit, Michigan, USA, during COVID-19 pandemic. Photo by Trella White



| FINDING CONNECTION AND RESILIENCE DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

by Robin Write; The New Yorker, 12th March 2020.

In Iran, another of the COVID-19 “red zones,” doctors and nurses — individually and in groups — have participated in a coronavirus dance challenge, posting videos of themselves dancing to lively music in hazmat suits. Other medical staff in quarantine serenaded each other or brought instruments to perform for sequestered patients. A third-grade teacher in Khuzestan Province improvised to keep her classes going online after schools were closed nationwide. Stuck at home, she used the side of her refrigerator as a whiteboard. With a blue marker, she wrote out the rules, with diagrams, to explain how to calculate the area of squares, rectangles, and triangles. A photo of her lesson went viral on Twitter.



This Ramzan, a sub-inspector of police and his wife have started distributing home-cooked meals for Iftar every evening at 4:30pm for families in D.J. Halli and Shivajinagar, Bangalore. Published in The Hindu, 27th April 2020

| ROBOT TO HELP HOSPITALS IN BREAKING THE CHAIN

by M.P. Praveen; The Hindu, 26thApril 2020

KARMI-Bot, a robot deployed at the isolation ward for COVID-19 patients at the Government Medical College Hospital, Ernakulam, may soon find its way to hospitals across the country and even abroad. [...] The robot performs a slew of activities from dispensing food and medicines and collection of trash left behind by patients to initiating a video call between doctors and patients. Besides, it can perform ultraviolet-based disinfection and also spray detergents at targets. Its main goal is to limit the interaction between patients and health workers, minimising the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) kits, which are scarce in the country at present.

MONDAY 27TH APRIL

NICK TOBIER

Nick Tobier is an artist whose work focuses on collaborative projects in the public realm. Tobier's interest in the potential of public places has manifested itself in built public projects and actions in San Francisco, Detroit, New York and internationally from Toronto to Tokyo, Brussels to Medellin. He is a Professor at STAMPS School of Art & Design at the University of Michigan, USA. (everydayplaces.com).

#UTOPIAANDEVERYDAYPLACES

MG: Hello Nick.

NT: Hello, good morning.

MG: Nick is in the USA. It's 6.30am there right now.

NT: Correct. [smiles]

MG: So let's wish Nick a good morning. And we will get straight into the interview. [smiles]

MG: You are an artist, writer and educator who has worked on projects (performances, actions, interventions) focusing on the street life and social life of public spaces all over the world. For example, there are the projects "Brightmoor Runway" in Detroit, the book "Utopia Toolbox" and the recent "Quaranzine." I think of you as a storyteller.

(To the audience: I suggest you to look at Nick's website and start from the About section.)

I am interested in your role, to use your words, of "participant-observer of life in public spaces." Can you tell me a little bit more about this role and how it manifests in your work?

NT: I am very aware of what this means, especially right now, where my relationship to the outside world is mediated by some type of device, by the distance. But the projects I worked on, whether they were written, or performed, were built up over time, and the relationships come through what I describe as 'repeated casual encounters.' I have been working on this small series called "Quaranzine," which involves drawings, interviews and semi-fictionalised stories of very small shops — the type of small places that I most miss in this time of not being able to circulate freely. But these have all been sort of concreted over time, so they don't involve me going in as an artist with some type of weapon, whether it's a camera or a sketchpad and a pen, and extracting data. Instead, they come from real honest

engagement with the place and the people that populate it.

MG: I'd like to go back to the book "Utopia Toolbox," which you co-edited with Juliane Stiegele. I like that the book is an art & design manual that, and I quote the description, is "less about the design of a chair or a table, and more about the social space between those sitting at the table." The book is also about DIY actions. Which visions of utopia did you want to encourage with this book? And what is the role that action has in it?

NT: Originally the title of the book was meant to be "Design and Utopia," and Juliane, who is German, was teaching at the University of Bolzano in Italy. She was in a design department, where there was a lot of emphasis on *this beautiful* table and *this beautiful* chair. When we started working on the book, neither of us were interested in creating another chair or a manual of how to make a chair. We asked questions like "What is it that fundamentally make you sit with someone? And, do you really need a chair? Maybe better to sit on the ground. And if you don't like to sit on the ground maybe we should walk and talk — who needs sitting anyway?" We recognised that we recreate objects out of habit, rather than out of genuine insight.

The first edition that came out was German, and tended to be very large and metaphysically grand. There is an interview in there with someone who was working on the concept of basic income, and with a physicist who was in his eighties, so it was a big cerebral concept of utopia, more philosophical than functional or quotidian. When we did the US edition, we were much more interested in the idea of things that were not created sort of idea first, but more in, "What do I need to have in a life that sort of maximises my humanity?" In the interim, we got to this neighbourhood in Davis, California where two people took away the fence between their homes so they could share their back garden and their kids could play. Then, one by one, the people on that side of the street also took down their fences, and so they created this coincidental park.

It wasn't something where someone says "You know, we are going to share our backyards," and then you make an argument, and then you have an argument and things fall apart.

Our recognition was that the ideal situation could be created from what I would describe as 'functional creativity' rather than 'sublime creativity.' And so, throughout the book are punctuations that ask you, as an individual, to think differently about the way you go about your day. There is a spread that says, "At 10:00 tomorrow morning, the gravity switch will be turned off, please plan accordingly." And this is meant so that you don't live by habit, but you live by responding to a current situation. The book is thick [shows it with his hand], so you could stand on it, if you want to use it as a table or as a doorframe opener, it's okay... [smiles]

MG: At this moment in time, more than ever, I think it is quite difficult to grapple with the idea of community. Lockdowns, for example, have shown social divisions and disparities in all their blatant truths. You have been very active with communities, both in your work and personally, and you have long-lasting relationships with some of them. How are you navigating being an artist engaged with social life and being engaged socially like an activist, especially in relation to current times?

NT: I think this goes back to what we talked about at the very beginning of this conversation. It's that you have to be a lot more explicit — you don't have the chance of sort of running into someone in the street, and then see how it evolves and do something else. For instance, a lot of the people I work with in Detroit I won't run into unless I go there, and so now I have to call people. And when you call someone you are saying, really, really carefully "You know, you really matter to me. I have made this effort." I think there is a jump in intimacy in certain ways that I recognise, or explicitness that happens in this. If I want to go to a small shop, where it might be somewhere hazardous to go — in Michigan everything is shut down, schools are shut down, all non-essential business is closed — you have to make an effort.

Yesterday we went to a small Mexican sweet shop, and they are desperate for any clients to come by to buy anything. You can't go in now, so you have to call and have to find a way to interpret their menu, which is Spanish translated into English. It's like a child made the menu [smiles], the ingredients of some of the sweets are hysterical — pineapple ice-cream with gummy berries, Japanese peanuts and sweet spaghetti. You can't see it, you have to talk to the guy on the phone, and you have to make an effort to do it. There are things that are taking so many interesting forms right now — like there was a drive-by wedding that I saw in Detroit where everybody would drive by the church and wave to the people on the steps, and yell [makes a yelling gesture and smiles]. As a social animal you can choose to retreat and hibernate, you know, take care of yourself and the people near you, or go through the slight awkwardness of calling someone, whether it is on the phone or try some other way to contact them, make sure they are okay, and make an effort. I think that is the core of it. We have seen the worst in people, where they retreat and they have enough toilet paper and they lock their door, and then there are people who say "I am thinking about you as an artist, as an activist, and we are going to keep doing things even though the restrictions make it a little harder, but doesn't matter because it makes us more human."

MG: When I say the word 'portal,' what comes to your mind?

NT: I think of the roots of the word, maybe from Latin or Greek, "porai," which means porosity. So that your skin, your all being, is open to the world. And I think during a virus time it's interesting, because if you are open to it then it comes in, but also it goes out. I don't think of it as a thing, but as a state of being.

MG: There is the myth that habits are formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row. Although this is a myth, which habits do you think you have developed or lost during the lockdown?

NT: [smiles] I have acquired something that I always wanted to

do, which is to learn a new language. I taught myself two Japanese alphabets — two of three. And I do that every day since March 15th, and I haven't missed a single day [smiles]. It's amazing. What looked like insane characters [hand drawing in the air], I can now read! I didn't plan to — I thought I would start and get frustrated. But I really have some focus that I didn't know I had. What this means maybe is that now I know that I can do something that happens slowly.

MG: To end our interview, and go back to where we started, do you think we will ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

NT: To me we will go in new directions [smiles].

MG: Thank you Nick for your thoughts. Let me see if we have comments or questions.

koylabear: In betweenies

koylabear: Nice reverb

vivek_chockalingam: I love the way you see the everyday as unique and design as a way of breaking habits and patterns.

annalisa.sonzogni: Sorry I've just joined

vivek_chockalingam: The idea of the portal as being porous, to let things in and out — can this be a way of being? To not force what you believe in, but to move with time?

NT: Yes. [smiles] There's a book I read last year called "Surfing with Sartre" written by the philosopher Aaron James, who is also a surfer, who talks about a way of being like a surfer, in which you can only respond: you have to be in time with a wave, and you can't plan how you are going to ride that wave. But you can be available to the wave that comes. That's the true surfing philosophy of life, which is that you can worry or you can surf,

which they say is to go with the flow. But the thing with the surfer is that the mind, and the body, and the place, and the time have to all be open, and ready for it. But it may never come...so it wasn't meant. [smiles]

vivek_chockalingam: [Thumbs up emoji]

MG: Thank you so much Nick for being with us.

NT: Thank you. It's so nice to see the tree outside, beyond your window.

MG: Oh yes, it's a plant with bright red flowers... I wish you could see it in person... Anyway, thank you for your time.

NT: Thank you. Bye, bye.

ML: Bye!

**"And this is meant so that you don't live
by habit, but you live by responding to a
current situation."**



“Racism is a real virus” mask by Patricia Medeiros for Racism Is The Real Virus. Published on racismistherealvirus.com

| UN WARNS OF A 'HUMAN RIGHTS DISASTER'

by Agence France-Presse; The Hindu, 28th April 2020

The UN rights chief warned on Monday that countries flouting the rule of law in the name of fighting the novel coronavirus pandemic risk sparking a “human rights disaster.” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet called on countries to refrain from violating fundamental rights “under the guise of exceptional or emergency measures.” “Emergency powers should not be a weapon governments can wield to quash dissent, control the population, and even perpetuate their time in power,” she warned in a statement.



| HOW CORONAVIRUS TURNED THE 'DYSTOPIAN JOKE' OF FACEID MASKS INTO A REALITY

by Angela Chen; The MIT Technology Review, 29th February 2020

While talking with friends about the coronavirus outbreak, Baskin, an artist in San Francisco, realized that people using face masks to protect themselves from infection would have trouble unlocking phones that use facial recognition. (This has indeed been a problem.) She quickly created a prototype of a mask printed with a face—not “your” face, but rather unique faces of imaginary people generated using artificial intelligence—and posted her idea on Twitter: “Protect people from viral epidemics while still being able to unlock your phone.” Baskin says there’s an element of anti-surveillance built in. [...] “[The mask] appears to be working with facial recognition, but it will never actually be your face,” she says. It’s tricking the technology and protecting your biometric information: “The image is something your friends could identify as you but that machine learning can’t, and it shows that face recognition has errors.”



Danielle Baskin, “FaceIDMasks” (2020); image of masks posted on the artist’s Twitter account

| INDIA'S WORKERS FACE 'RACE TO THE BOTTOM' OF LABOUR STANDARDS

by staff; Aljazeera, 15th May 2020

Workers in India are set to face longer days and lower pay in “race to bottom,” academics, activists and unions said, as six states plan to suspend labour laws to help industry recover from the coronavirus lockdown. Despite a spike in COVID-19 cases this week, India is looking to ease its seven-week lockdown amid increasing pressure from business leaders and people who say the strict curbs have destroyed the livelihoods of millions of workers.



A migrant worker carries his son as they walk along a road with others to return to their village, during a 21-day nationwide lockdown to limit the spreading of coronavirus disease, in New Delhi on March 26, 2020. Photo by Reuters. Published by Deccan Herald, 27th March 2020



| WHY MIGHT SWEDEN'S COVID-19 POLICY WORK? TRUST BETWEEN CITIZENS AND STATE

by Ars Trägårdh and Umut Özkırmılı; The Guardian, 21st April 2020

The Swedish historian Sverker Sörlin, himself a Covid-19 survivor, noted in a recent article that there was never just one global pandemic but many, each shaped by its own national logic. [...] In Sweden, the path chosen may be less draconian but it is possibly more demanding, since it shifts the burden from laws and policing to self-regulation. While social media memes at times suggest an endless after-ski party afoot in the hipster joints of Stockholm, for those of us who live here the reality is a more sombre balance between distancing and the remaining freedoms to move about and carry on a normal life, while supporting local businesses. And to be sure, even in Sweden there are many who call for a more radical closure of society. It may yet come to that. But others continue to plead for continued calm, reminding us that the word for society in Sweden is samhälle, to hold together.

TUESDAY 28TH APRIL

TATIANA BAZZICHELLI

Tatiana Bazzichelli is a curator and researcher. She is the founder and director of the Disruption Network Lab, leading the conference programme that has been taking place since 2015 at Kunstquartier Bethanien in Berlin, Germany, and other locations. Previously she was programme and conference curator at the art and digital culture festival transmediale. (disruptionlab.org)

#HACKTIVISM

MG: [network disruption] Hi Tatiana. Can you hear me well?

TB: Yes.

MG: My video got stuck. So anyway, let's carry on to the interview.

You have explored the notion of disruption and art & hacktivism in relation to digital culture and information technology for a long time. You have written books, from "Networked Disruption" to "Disrupting Business," and in 2014 you started the Disruption Network Lab — an ongoing platform of events and research focused on the intersection of politics, technology and society. I am interested in talking a bit about your journey as a curator. What is it that fascinates you about disruption and hacktivism in the space of digital culture? What is it that is important to you in this way of thinking?

TB: The concept of disruption comes from business culture and business studies through the notion of disrupting business, which means to introduce in the market a product that the market does not expect. For more than 10 years I have explored the concept of disruption and transferred it into the fieldwork of hacking and political reflection.

When I conceived the philosophy around the Disruption Network Lab, I transferred this concept from business to technology and politics. We want to understand the logic of political and technological systems, to analyse such systems from within, to bring interference in their logic and to introduce something that they don't expect. Our motto is "to expose systems of power and injustice" — exposing the bugs of the systems, misconduct and wrongdoing. What we do is pretty connected with the practice of whistleblowing — whistleblowers reveal what is inside the systems because they know them pretty well since they come from within them. We try to open up something that is closed and, at the same time, find new ways to interpret it. At the Disruption Network Lab we achieve this through a programme of conferences, which I direct, and a community programme

before and after each conference, directed by Lieke Ploeger.

MG: Going back to the Disruption Network Lab, I think that one of the things that is unique to it is the way it stimulates dialogue. Artists are brought together with policy makers, activists, investigative journalists, giving form to a platform made for the encounter of multiple perspectives. Why is it important for you to bring practitioners from different fields together?

TB: The idea of bringing together different expertise is at the core of our programme. We aim to create dialogue amongst people that come from different backgrounds even if they share a similar way of interpreting politics, society and technology. We believe that it is through this encounter of diversity that it is possible to produce new forms of knowledge and to provoke change. We connect artists, activists, lawyers and investigative journalists. These people often don't meet, or if they meet, are rarely in a common discussion. We believe that culture is a place of common development and negotiation and we have the responsibility to provide literacy and to inform about difficult topics that are often politically obfuscated. We are offering a cultural alternative to avoid misinformation by opening common ways to consider culture as a space of interaction. This encounter of expertise is an opportunity to generate awareness and more literacy, and to avoid considering culture as a space of conflict, but rather as a space of dialogue.

MG: You have recently launched the series Disruptive Fridays, which are live discussions from Berlin. The introduction to the series states this is "a moment in which we are all experiencing a deep closure." In India we are at day 35 of a total lockdown. I feel conflicted about lockdowns — there is a fine line between lockdown and crackdown. Can you tell me your view on this, especially since you live in Germany, a country that has had a different approach to the pandemic?

TB: I think it is a difficult subject because each country is dealing with it in a very specific way. The next Disruptive Friday is actually

named "Lockdown or Crackdown?" because we want to understand in which way it is possible to create critical thinking, especially on the 1st of May, when collective demonstrations will not happen. We should go beyond the different local situations because the problem was and still is to serve the citizens at large on a global scale. We are speaking about the future of of us, not only of specific countries; what we decide in one region will bring consequences on other ones. This pandemic is showing us that we need to take responsibility globally and that the consequences of our actions are interconnected.

For sure in political terms it is very difficult to understand what to predict and adopt the right procedure in long terms. The lockdown was necessary at the beginning when information on the pandemic was very fragmented, and for some countries also it makes sense to prolong it, but, of course, we should reflect on what is really important and necessary for the good of the people, beyond political schemes. Politics should be used to serve people not to execute power. This is the responsibility of politicians to ask themselves: "How do I consciously serve my population?" We know that in countries like Poland and Hungary this state of exception has been used to create more power over the population. This is really something we have to reflect on collectively, "How do we try to protect the vulnerable, the people at risk, to make sure they can survive the crisis and the consequences of it?" We have to think about the people that are not the privileged ones. For example, when we say 'stay home,' this sentence does not consider people who don't have a home. When we speak about the support on each other during the lockdown, we have to consider the people that will be subjects of abuses and violence if confined at home in difficult family structures. We have to think about the people in prison, or hospitals, without any possibility to go anywhere else and suffer from the increasing numbers of infection rates. How do we deal with them? It's important to think of people who don't have a house, who are stateless, who are refugees. This type of measure has to consider these exceptions, and the people who need our solidarity.

MG: When I say the word ‘portal,’ what comes to your mind?

TB: I’m thinking of a state in-between, a liminal situation before crossing the portal. We are still in a moment in which many measures need to be discussed. We still don’t know much about the future of the pandemic, and we are in a moment where we are trying to understand what is happening and to reconfigure our future society. We are in front of many doors, not only a portal, and we still need to cross them. But these doors could bring us to different futures — the future of nightmare, the future of solidarity, the future in which people are called to build up something new and do not forget what they experienced before. We really need to be awake, and also try, through our work, to investigate and open up what is hidden, to deal with difficult topics even if not many people want to hear about them. We can provide and provoke occasions of dialogue to produce awareness. If we want to imagine the society of the future, this is the moment in which we need to share this imagination, and hopefully we can enter the door that does not lead us to the nightmare, but to a better society.

MG: There is the myth that habits are formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row. Although this is a myth, which habits do you think you have developed or lost during the lockdown?

TB: If I speak for the Disruption Network Lab, for sure our new habit during the lockdown is to produce the Disruptive Fridays — it’s something that did not exist for us before and now it’s a moment of live events of sharing and reflection. We invite up to three speakers every time and we discuss a different subject. So far, we have done it every Friday starting from April 3rd, inviting the audience to comment and send questions via live chat.

The episodes are all recorded and available online (disruptionlab.org/fridays). We have proposed discussions about the future of culture during the lockdown, collective care, harm reduction in isolation, tracking and surveillance, whistleblowing during the

pandemic, etc. Since many spaces of culture need to be closed, we need to be alive and provide discussion.

As for my own individual life, after each Disruptive Friday, I am sharing a pizza with my husband Jonas Frankki — who also works with us — and drinking some prosecco at home. [laughs] And I do it every Friday to celebrate this moment of encounter with people, and the fact that we are still able to openly discuss important subjects.

MG: To end our interview, and go back to where we started, do you think we will ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

TB: For sure we are taking new directions, but they are still to be imagined. We will take the occasion of this moment to imagine possible futures. Futures that are hopefully for the good and not for the bad.

MG: Thank you for this Tatiana. Now let’s see if we have comments and questions from the audience.

vivek_chockalingam: You have been working in the realm of hacktivism for some time now, have you seen any significant changes in this time?

TB: It depends on which time, because it’s been 20 years for me. But for sure I would say that, at the moment, in terms of technology, we are facing much bigger powers than in the 1990s and more pervasive than in the past. In the realm of hacktivism, the motto has been to try to open up systems and try to make them shared and collective. It has also been to try understanding the logic of these systems, especially the ones related to the threat of surveillance, of corporate control. On the one side, today there is more participation because everyone is more connected — we all moved into the digital; on the other side, we need to be aware that more digital means more forms of control. The idea

of using Zoom, for example, should make us reflect on the risk of being tracked — we are speaking on Instagram right now, which is not a completely independent space... [smiles] So this is the responsibility we still need to have — to understand how to deal with these forms of control in the post-digital scene we live in.

gaiatedone: Tracing apps and use of technology by governments is a complex topic. How to maintain a critical position?

TB: To maintain a critical position, I think we need to maintain literacy, and so to use the technology as a tool to foster critical thinking and practices. For example, we need to try understanding which sources of information we are dealing with, how information is generated and what is behind the surface, and to deconstruct information itself. We now know that many people are using information as a form of propaganda, especially in the framework of right-wing extremism and are appropriating digital platforms to generate misinformation. From our side, we should not undermine this challenge by refusing to understand its logics, and we should try providing even more awareness and more literacy by developing a conscious use of technology and a critical political reflection. I think this is a challenge because information is developing alongside the market, the technology is easily appropriated by sources of power and commercial strategies, and it is our responsibility as individuals and as organisations to unveil hidden mechanisms behind these phenomena. Culture is not a space for war, as the right-wing extremism is trying to put it, but it is a space of reflection, knowledge sharing and constructive dialogue. We need to answer with a feedback that is a positive form of inspiration, and not just a destructive critique.

gaiatedone: [thumbs up emoji]

MG: Thank you all for listening and again thank you Tatiana for

being with us. I suggest everyone follow the Disruptive Fridays, especially the one coming up.

TB: Thank you! I wish you all the best in this moment. Hope to meet you in the future. Bye.

MG: Yes, you too. Bye.



CORONAVIRUS: WHY FREQUENT HAND WASHES ARE NOT FEASIBLE FOR MILLIONS OF INDIANS

by Kabir Agarwal; The Wire, 30th April 2020

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that physical distancing, wearing a mask and washing hands “again and again” will be “the biggest medicine to fight this disease.” But for a large portion of India’s population, this is easier said than done. Only 50% of rural Indians and 80% of urban Indians use soap and water to wash their hands, according to the National Family Health Survey 2015-2016. Water scarcity is a daily reality for a majority of Indians. Around 800 million people in the country face high extreme water stress and as much as 70% of the surface of water resources are contaminated, according to a 2029 Niti Ayog report.

Nurses protest at a hospital in the north Indian city of Patiala, Punjab, over lack of PPEs. Photo by Tribune News Service. Published by NewsClick, 13th May 2020



16 MIGRANT WORKERS KILLED IN 3 DIFFERENT ROAD ACCIDENTS IN 24 HOURS;

by staff; The Hindu, 14th May 2020

A four-legged robot is being tested at Boston’s Brigham and Women’s Hospital (USA) as a way to treat some COVID-19 patients. Photo by Boston Dynamics



— AarogyaSetu Twitter Account, 20th April 2020

A TASK FOR SOUTH ASIA

by Aamir Jafarey & Sanjay Nagral; The Hindu, 29th April 2020

South Asian countries have invested very little in health. This is reflected in our abysmally low health parameters. It is interesting that Britain, which formulated our health policies before independence, went on to form one of the world’s strongest public health systems, the National Health Service, whereas its South Asian colonies chose to stray from that path. This resulted in a dysfunctional public healthcare system. Governments have also relinquished what ought to have been their primary duty, of health care provision, to the private sector. Having become an industry, the focus of healthcare in the private sector is on profit rather than on people’s needs.



WEDNESDAY 29TH APRIL

MATHANGI KRISHNAMURTHY

Mathangi Krishnamurthy teaches anthropology, feminist theory, and postcolonial studies at IIT Madras. She also writes on art, popular culture, and everyday life through a column called “Culture Mulch” for The Hindu newspaper.

#UNIVERSALANDPARTICULAR

MG: Hi Mathangi.

MK: I cannot hear you very well Marialaura. There seems to be a lot of disturbance.

MG: Me too actually.

[both wear headphones]

MK: This is great now.

MG: Welcome Mathangi! It’s very nice to see you, even though it’s on the screen. [smiles]

MK: It’s good to see you too. Thank you for having me.

MG: Okay let’s start with question number 1.

You are an anthropologist whose work often intersects with different fields, and is also quite site-specific in the way you conduct your research, for example when you worked in a call center while researching life in call centers*. How does site-specificity play a role in your anthropological approach?

MK: Thank you for this question. It seems particularly pertinent now — I see notes circulating in anthropology email lists about how to do field work now that ‘field’ is a distant possibility. So, I want to break it down and say that critiques about the field have been rampant in anthropology since the sixties. We are talking about early critiques of how anthropologists always had to go somewhere to gather evidence, and we all needed a site to sort of say that the work we do is really important, it matters, and it’s different from the sociologists. There are multiple kinds of critiques that have been coming at us since the sixties. Primary among them was the idea that the whole point of going somewhere else was to justify a Eurocentric form of life.

Anthropologists used to think that there is a particular trajectory

and telos along which the world developed; they used to study the Other in non-Western parts of the world as examples of a primitive version of humankind still to catch up with the West. Then you scale back from that and you start to ask other questions about the interconnectedness of sites themselves. There is no site that can be understood as insular or particular or completely isolated from the world. In the contemporary era, you have to ask about those interconnections at the same time that you are investigating those particularities. So, in a sense, when I located myself in the call center it was not for any sort of romantic ideal of “Let’s go see how a call center actually works.” There was some of it — you have to excuse my naïve student starry-eyedness about it — but there was also the sense of “What are the sets of flows through which I can actually understand the call center as a site even? Does it matter in a way that I can take away from its fetishisation?” So, a site to me has increasingly become a temporary agglomeration of a wide variety of forces, each of which has to be teased out. That’s a sort of short answer, I can elaborate on that further, but I know we have only 15 minutes. [smiles]

MG: In a recent article you wrote for The Hindu newspaper** you refer to the pandemic as a “boundary-crosser.” I like the fact that you put this in relation to the tension between universal perspective and the particular one, emphasising the fact that you feel “stuck in the particularities of a remarkably narrow life.” Despite this you started an online writing project to foster collective imagination. Can you tell me a bit more about this project, and how it is placed in the midst of this universal-particular tension?

MK: Thank you for that question also. I’m obsessed with this kind of weaving back and forth between the universal and the particular, as is anybody interested in praxis, and the relationships between what theory and practice are. When this whole thing began to unravel at a speed that I could not comprehend, I needed to find ways to pause. Also — this is true of academics and all of us — we are being hit with large amounts of information, and to me reading is the only skill I have — it’s a compulsion.

So, I kept reading with no tools to be able to interpret, understand what is exactly going on and I needed to step back. But in the kind of neuroses that we are surrounded by, I needed artificial mechanisms to make me pause. I hesitate to even call it a project — I started to send out a set of suggestions to a list and a narrow community, and people responded. It was a fairly simple exercise; I wake up in the morning and before 10:00 I send out a writing prompt. And I would say, “Okay, today you write in third person about a scene unravelling in front of you, as you sit in your balcony or your window. 500 words, submit it before 7:00pm, post it on your page and the community reads and comments on each other’s pieces.” So, it began almost like a very, very simple, “Write an essay in this kind of fashion.”

But the more it progressed, the more I realised that the kernel of it was also the daily practice of empathy. This was also to say that, yes, the suffering may be “universal.” There is a universality to it, something that happened to us, to all of us, in an unprecedented fashion; something that we have not experienced, that I have not experienced in my lifetime. But it’s also not universal, we are all burdened by our particular histories, particularities, and ought to be able to clock our particular privileges, definitely. So even in this narrow community that is writing, I know we share a lot of similarities — we have the same class, same background, same kinds of privileges — even within that, if I can expand some of my own boundaries of understanding, if I can expand what it means to both be located in my own body and understand other bodily experiences, writing becomes a way of accessing that. It’s experimental, it’s limited, it’s narrow, but it does something, and I think it does push for that kind of broadening of empathetic consideration.

MG: Talking about universality and collective imagination — the other day I was amazed to see a video for the Aarogya Setu app. The app was represented as a human, specifically as a body guard, protecting you (the user) and your family from an enemy. As an observer of the human nature and the narratives of the pandemic, what does this anthropomorphism stand for?

MK: Thank you, first of all for alerting me to that prior to this interview. Once you told me that, I went on a little bit of a trawl looking for all kinds of representations of Aarogya Setu. I saw the bodyguard representation, and the bodyguard is a man, right? Let me not even start with the obvious on that account. [smiles] I made a couple of notes as I was going through it. We know this kind of representation — firstly, I am not surprised. Just at the very basic, if I want to take a non-cynical point of view of this kind of thing, we know that we function with a strongly metaphorical imagination. To make something accessible you have to make it seem like something else, you have to familiarise it, you have to bring it into the realm of available metaphors and boundaries and discourses. I am not surprised, in a sense, but I also started thinking, “What are the other things this reminds me of?” A couple of different things. All of the ways in which metaphors are used in mundane talk of viruses, contagion, body... we think about it only through metaphors, even Siddhartha Mukherjee’s wonderful book on cancer, the biography of cancer that he speaks about uses metaphors. He calls it “the emperor of maladies.” The account is wonderful; it’s a wonderfully located medical history and investigation and it quotes all sorts of texts to explain it, but I can’t get rid of the notion that the emperor is a very particular metaphor. The anthropologist Emily Martin talks about the rise of immunology in the US at a particular time and how the body came to be spoken about in exactly the same terms as the nation state in need of defense, as walls, as breaching of walls, as defense of a particular order, through particular guards and protections...

[connection disrupted]

I was interrupted by a call, my apologies, sorry.

So, I was saying, in many ways, those metaphors became part of imaginations of the body in modernity. However, it does not mean they are innocent, or that they simply reflect reality in life. They do particular and universal things. Universally, they speak to the ways in which understanding needs familiarity.

We need metaphors, we need similes to understand, comprehend what is going on. But the particular terms and symbols, and symbolisms that they choose to bring about familiarity, then become the new reality. We then begin forever to think about it in those terms. An old professor of mine once told me about the kinds of pernicious effects brought about by Amitabh Bachchan in “Kaun Banega Crorepati” by talking about the computer as ‘computer ji.’ Anthropomorphising something begins to have a big brotherly effect in our imaginations, even before it actually wreaks any damage. So, there is a twin act of this discourse, and an accompanying limiting of possibly radical imagination that would have been free to think about things otherwise.

I hope that makes sense. I am a little all over the place there, but in a deconstructive imagination you ask what something says. [smiles]

MG: When I say the word ‘portal,’ what comes to your mind?

MK: Possibility, openings, interruption, disruption, rupture. [pause and smiles] But possibility first.

MG: There is the myth that habits are formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row. Although this is a myth, which habits do you think you have developed or lost during the lockdown?

MK: Nothing. [pauses] Zero. [pauses] Nothing. [pauses] I am doing a combination of all the things that I knew how to do before the lockdown. And I am doing it irregularly, inconsistently, without pattern. [pauses] Nothing. [smiles] I am baking banana bread like the rest of the Instagram universe, but I always did that anyway. It’s a good skill to have.

MG: To end our interview, and go back to where we started, do you think we will ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

MK: In the spirit of my response to the last question of yours, I’m going to say I don’t know. [pauses] I have no idea.

I am only learning that there is a need to quiet down, to pay attention to things that we have not paid attention to in a very long time — to absences, to silences, to erasures, to life as it has always been. The status quo so to speak. If we don't learn to pay attention at this point in time, then I'm going to go out on a limb and say there better be no movements whatsoever. [pauses] So, "I don't know" is my first response.

MG: Thank you Mathangi. [pauses while scrolling through the comments] It seems we don't have questions today.

MK: Thank you all of those who joined in, thank you for being here and taking time. And thank you Marialaura for these wonderful questions, and this series, which I have been following pretty much every day.

MG: Thanks to you for taking the time to be with us amongst the floating routine of your days.

MK: Conversations are good! Thanks for having me. Bye.

* Mathangi Krishnamurthy, "In the end, who will we be?"; The Hindu — Culture Mulch, 18th April, 2020.

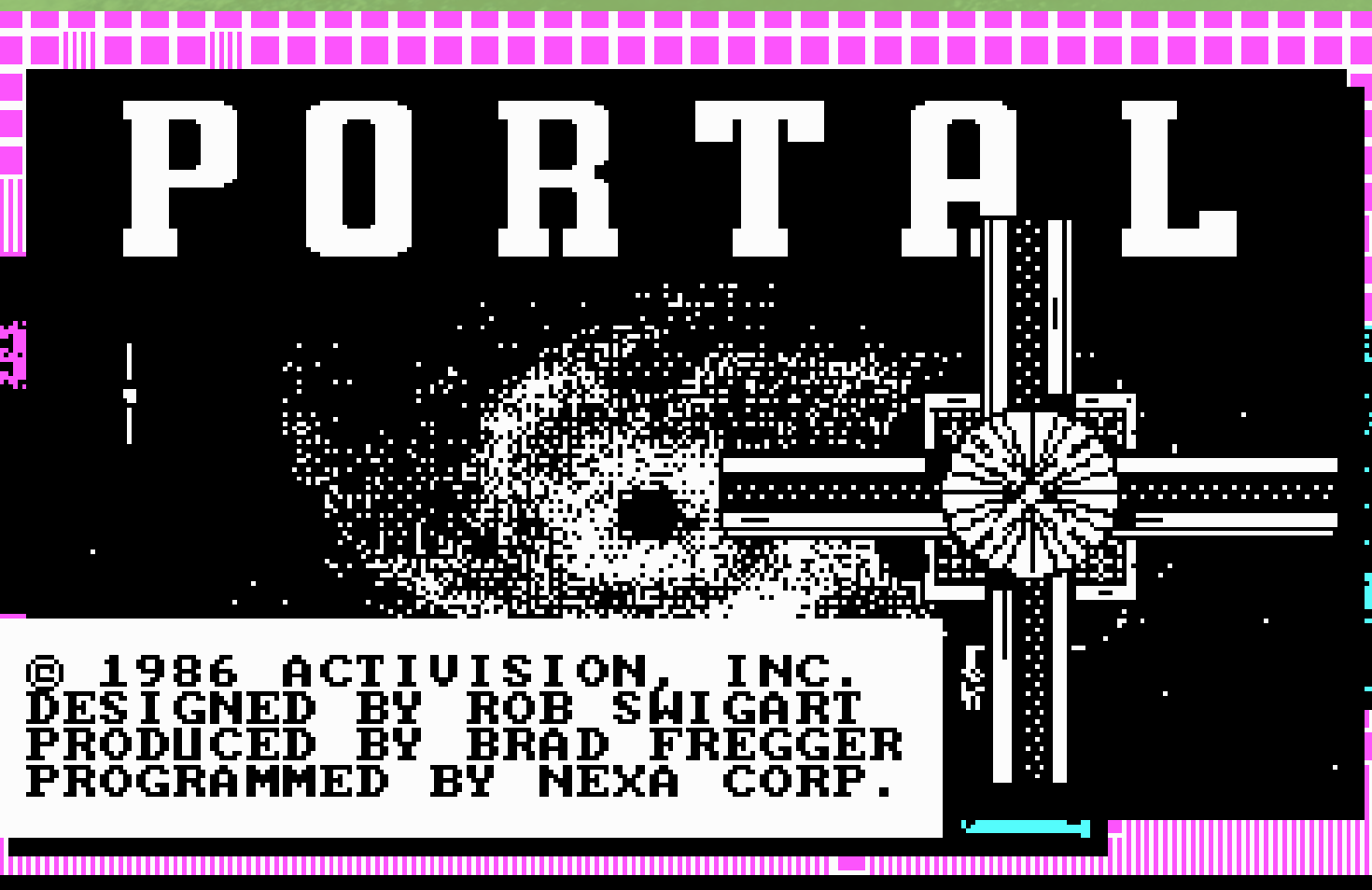
** Mathangi Krishnamurthy, "1-800-Worlds. The Making of the Indian Call Centre Economy, " (2018: Oxford University Press)

**"Anthropomorphising something begins
to have a big brotherly effect in our
imaginations, even before it actually
wreaks any damage."**

'PRIVACY MINEFIELD': INDIA COVID-19 APP RAISES SURVEILLANCE FEARS

by staff; Aljazeera, 1st May 2020

Indian authorities have made a contact-tracing mobile app mandatory for all public and private sector employees, raising concerns among digital rights experts about privacy and increased surveillance. Aarogya Setu evaluates users' risk of infection based on location, and their medical and travel history. It uses Bluetooth and location services to trace a user's contacts. [...] "Aarogya Setu is framed as a necessary technological invasion into personal privacy to achieve a larger social purpose," Suhrith Parthasarathy, a lawyer, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation, "But without a statutory framework, and in the absence of a data protection law, the application's reach is boundless."



"Portal" video game first released in 1986



A policeman wields his baton towards a man for breaking the curfew, during a nationwide lockdown in India to slow the spread of COVID-19, in Dharavi, one of Asia's largest slums, during the coronavirus disease outbreak, in Mumbai, India, April 11, 2020. Photo by Reuters/Francis Mascarenhas. Published in The Wire, 24th April 2020

ITALIAN ENGINEERS HELP CORONAVIRUS PATIENTS BY HARNESSING SNORKEL MASKS FOR CPAP MACHINES

by Rebecca Kesten; Fox News, 26th March 2020

After news spread that the Italian innovation firm Isinnova successfully saved lives by 3D printing ventilator valves for its local hospital, CEO Cristian Fracassi and engineer Alessandro Romaioli fielded all sorts of calls from around the world. Renato Favero, a retired physician, proposed an idea: making an "emergency ventilator mask" by modifying a snorkeling mask that was available to the public. The teams contacted Decathlon, the French sporting goods retailer, about the Easy Breath Surface Snorkeling Mask. Isinnova said that Decathlon immediately provided the 3D computer-aided design for the mask, so the engineers could easily evaluate what modification could be made. [...] From start to finish, the project took only three days.

LOCKDOWN EXTENDED TILL MAY 17; CURBS STAY ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT

by special correspondent; The Hindu, 2nd May 2020

ONLY NON-POLLUTING UNITS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO RESTART OPERATIONS

by staff reporter; The Hindu, 28th April 2020

Even as May 3 approaches and States are looking at ways to ease restrictions, activists have urged the government to utilise the positive learnings from this period in the future. Case in point: Vrishabhavathi river. Citizens say that though sewage and garbage continue to choke the river, which has seen decades of neglect, the fact that industrial and chemical effluents are not being let into the river now has yielded some positive results. They now want the government to ask the polluting industries to get their act together before allowing them to start functioning again.



THURSDAY 30TH APRIL

ANDREAS ULRICH

Andreas Ulrich is the co-founder and curator of the C. Rockfeller Center for Contemporary Arts, co-founder of the art space Theater Impermanent, owner of the media center Wildsmile Studios and the publishing house International Neighborhood. He also has his own art practice as a media artist.

#POSITIONINGANDART

VC: Hi Andreas.

AU: Hi.

VC: You seem to have dramatic lighting there.

AU: Yeah, I'm sitting on the balcony with a coffee. The sun is behind me and I can't see my phone screen, so I don't know what is really being displayed.

VC: I see. It looks good. Let's start with the interview.

Over the years I have got glimpses of you playing many creative roles, in different cities, countries and situations. You manage a printing studio, run a new media festival, you are part of an artist community and also have your own art practice. How do you navigate these different roles and spaces and their 'rules'?

AU: That's a good question. I think I understand why sometimes people are a little puzzled over all these roles and positions that are totally heterogenic — I play in a Reggae sound system for instance, I build speakers as well. There are many things I'm interested in, and I think this is valid for everybody else. Usually, however, we have the idea that we are one person, or when we think about somebody else, we think, "He has this name and he has this one entity." But each of us knows that we have many different facets, and it's hard to combine them all into one projected person only. [dramatic light effect/lens flares] I think I have two, three, four, five, or more personalities, each of which has different interests, and I like to keep them all.

Let's imagine, you are a child, you are a father, you are a husband, you are a lover, you are a professional; you have all these many roles that you play. When you meet somebody you try to show him the face of one, like "I'm a professional in the arts." In this way, you are an actor and every situation demands acting. It doesn't mean lying; it means to commit to the fact that you are not only one aspect. I play very openly with this; I'm not trying

to hide it because I have to be many persons to find out about these specific realities. When I put this back in the form of a puzzle, I get the image of someone with eight heads or more. It's for the sake of simplification that we would rather have only one personality, but this means missing out. I'd rather put everything on the table — it gets funnier and more interesting. [smiles]

VC: In your work “Battlefield 2.0” you link the position of the army of a battle that happened in Leipzig two hundred years ago with the current position of department stores. You create a parallel between them to talk about the idea of the siege — both are strategically positioned to encounter people coming into and out of the city. Today, we live in so-called democracies in which we are locked into positions because of the strategies of someone else, and not ours. It feels like the collapse of a system we all believed in for too long. Where is the opportunity for us to unlock our positions if our belief in a system, such as democracy, has collapsed?

AU: That's many questions in one! [laughs] Of course, the system is the problem, but the system is in you as well — it's in us. If we are disappointed, or if we don't find a representation of what we want to do outside us, then it actually means that we didn't contribute to it too much — we have to contribute to be part of it. So, the question would be, “What did I do to change the system? Or even to enlarge it?” I'm not talking about revolution; I'm not talking about taking over power, or killing people, or instigating a cruel change. I'm talking about evolution so that we encounter a system when we are born and this system will be a different one when we die. The other question then would be, “At which point do we step in? At which point do we make the system our system?” If we look at the larger picture, it seems impossible — we cannot change the world. But everyone is already developing their own system of society, in a small scale — maybe three people, maybe five, maybe fifteen — and, within this, everyone can build a model of how the world could work. If we do this, then we can enlarge the system. But what I see is that most people don't even think to contribute, or have the idea

of building up their own system. They find something, they take part in it, then they feel disappointed and wait for someone to change it — for the savior, for Jesus, or for a big hero.

As artists, instead, we create an escape; we are escapists. We create our own islands; we build a small hut or a small cave; we build a small world where we put in our own ideas and try them out. Therefore, we have the gallery or the public space or whatever it may be. These ‘tries’ might look very naïve and small, but they are not. I'll refer to “Battlefield 2.0,” which was an installation for which I went to a shopping mall and rearranged all the shopping carts in fighting formations, in a way that any customer would find them. It was an aesthetic gesture: I would do this at night or in the afternoon when nobody saw me, and, on the surface, it didn't change anything, but doing it made me so happy. The next day the formation would be there, I would take pictures and show them to people and talk about them. This changed my world because I could share it and share the narrative. This is to say, as artists, we invent narratives, like how the world could be different, and we tell them to each other. That's our small way of creating our own world and implementing it also in the outside system. It's a bit escapist, as I said, but everyone can do it — even a child finds its own invention, like seeing a butterfly as a big spaceship to fly to the next planet. [smiles] It's just an idea, but we have to share ideas, and we have to let illusion free because reality is the material now. To talk about what this material can transform into, we have to tell fairy tales about what this material's reincarnation will be, and then we can reach it together.

For me, imagination sets the path to where reality will flow to. So, the story board has to be ready; we have to work on our story boards now. [smiles]

VC: Today there are lockdowns all around the world, and it's the 37th day of complete lockdown in India. War-like language is used everywhere to create a sense of sharing or community. For example, “We must fight this together” or “We must stand

up for our nation by staying at home” or “We must salute the frontline warriors.” What is the reason for war-like language now? And, also, what does this “us” mean?

AU: It has been used for a long time. Language is used for framing and, in this current situation, we should try to understand the people who use such language. They don’t believe in the idea of the ‘self-responsible individual,’ or the idea of democracy, whereby everyone has their own kingdom, and everyone can take decision for themselves. For example, if you went out and there was danger, it would actually be your own decision about your own life. But it’s different if someone tells you what to do, and if it happens without a dialogue it’s a dictatorship. If somebody else is ruling over you, and there is an outspoken democratic framework, this definitely brings about problems.

If you frame problems by pointing out a very big and hostile enemy, rather than saying “A virus is a biological organism that manipulates genes,” if you use military language, you are saying, “Look, you are no longer an individual anymore, you are part of a mass.” And the mass is always directed by a ruler, by one person, by the monarch, by a dictator. If you can make the majority of people think they are part of the mass — this is mass psychology — you don’t have the problem of dealing with one billion individuals and one billion ideas. It makes things simpler, but it takes everything away that was promised before with democracy. By doing this, you don’t treat people like grownups, like people who can make their own decisions; you don’t trust them. People are not a subject anymore, they become an object; they are objectified. This has advantages and disadvantages, but from a philosophical point of view, to rule without any discussion, like in a military operation — forward march, don’t ask questions and so on — is for me insulting to the mind — I feel insulted. If nobody takes me through a dialogue, if this is the underlying reality, then ‘these guys’ are thinking in military terms, and are not interested in individual qualities. They don’t see that our development would be much richer if we were discussing ideas, but they think there is one succeeding opinion only and this one opinion should rule.

We have now learnt what is their idea of leadership, and if you like this then go elect them, if you don’t like it then think about it on the next election day.

VC: If I say the word ‘portal,’ what comes to your mind?

AU: That’s a funny question. I have grown up with the science fiction world; I have been playing computer games since I was 12 years old. So, when you say portal to me, I see this kind of thing that you walk through from one world to the other. In the portal you cannot expect what is on the other side. But still, you are curious, you want to know, you want to find out. Even if there is the danger of dying, you still walk into the unknown to grow and unfold the potential. So, the portal is usually connecting things, but the things are not connected in themselves, they don’t belong together — there is something unknown behind it. With the help of the portal, you can get from one to the other. It’s a transition.

VC: There is the myth that habits are formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row. Although this is a myth, which habits do you think you have developed during the lockdown?

AU: Well, I’ve changed routines. I was in Kochi for a week, from the 23rd to the 31st March; I was alone in the house and wasn’t allowed to go out. Actually, the police were beating up people that went out, and I was thinking about this. What I have developed is a habit similar to a certain kind of university self-study routine: at a certain time of the day, around nine in the evening, I start to listen to controversial philosophical lectures, like by Allen Watts, or Terence McKenna, or Jordan Peterson — thinkers that are on the edge of a subject. I have listened to Jiddu Krishnamurti for some time now, after talking to you in Bangalore. Basically, in the evening I try to find a specific lecture on a topic I have been thinking about during the day. It’s like deep library research of listening, and I like this practice a lot.

The other thing is maybe to use a different technology that I didn’t

use before and think about it. Like what I'm doing now with you — I started to do video conferences with different people and I have close groups on Zoom and Jitsi. And now I am on Instagram — I wasn't before! I am very suspicious of these services created by big companies because your personal data should be treated very carefully, but now I have opened up a little to this. I'm trying out what I can do with these new forms of communication, this new way of being in touch with each other, technically very close, but still distant like a fata morgana. I have to say it's nice, but it's a little like non-alcoholic beer — you know what it tastes like, or what it smells like, it has the colour, but it doesn't have the full effect really. I would like to sit down with you around a table right now and discuss these questions, because we would not have limitations, and we could roll out on this ocean without knowing which waves are coming, without knowing which questions we answer and which ones we leave unanswered. [laughs] These services have a very strong framework, and we should analyse this — what they bring us and how they limit us.

VC: To end our interview, and go back to where we started, do you think we will ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

AU: Sorry, but I have to answer with another question. When you say “we,” who are you talking about? The two of us? Who are you addressing?

VC: I am addressing you, me, the people listening and everyone affected by the pandemic.

AU: Firstly, speaking about the two of us and those who are watching, we are art people who own technologies and can access many resources and somehow direct our own reality; we can influence it, change it, and manipulate it. For us, I think it's very interesting, and definitely a gain in quality, because we see reality with authenticity; we see why things are happening much more now. But it's somehow cynical because, if you are not in such a blessed position, then there is a danger. If you get

beaten up on the street because you're hungry, and a policeman tells you “Well, I'm beating you up for the sake of the health of the nation,” it feels really wrong, totally illogical. So, for the people in this position, this is not a change for the better. I don't know what to think about the way power is revealing itself now. In the artworld, of course, we find a lot of similar people who connect with each other and form their own sect. It's almost like a religion; a religion of logic and not hurting other people and things like this. And this is a big advantage.

VC: Thank you Andreas. Let's go through the comments and questions from the audience.

annalisa.sonzogni: Different personalities. Agreed.

marialauraghidini: I like the way you phrase who we are as the convergence of many realities.

sultana_zana: I quite like these ideas about imaginaries being where reality flows to. I have experienced this.

puneet_idk: How does our perception towards non-humans change in these times?

AU: That's very interesting because when I hear the word ‘non-human,’ I think about artificial life forms and artificial intelligence. But non-human here refers to organic life, right? [smiles] The larger system of nature demands that we understand that we are part of a big organism, especially right now. I would answer this question by referring to James Lovelock, who formulated the Gaia principle. He postulated that our planet is one big organism that is self-regulated; so, bacteria in the sea and microbes in the air and everything else belong to one big being. Let me visualise this for clarity. I'm sitting here, consisting of 30 trillion cells out of which there is about three to four kilograms of bacteria. When I say ‘I,’ I am saying that, in me, there are many life forms; they are part of me, but they are individual life forms. Just by looking at myself, I know that the earth is a big concept; I'm part of it, I'm

sitting in an experimental stage where there are small organisms trying to do something. And that's totally okay because it brings me back to art: I am connected, I am not in danger because this is what evolution does. 'Trying' is the principle of expansion, and now we can see it at work.

marialauraghidini: What are the tips that you can share with us for actively working "on our own story boards"?

AU: Don't listen to others, of course. Usually, you know what you're interested in and what's on your agenda. You really have to believe in it, like you believe in your role, like as if you are an actor in a movie. If you don't play it out like it was real, it will not work. It's a good start to say, "Okay, tomorrow I will be the best lover in the world, or the best thinker." The idea of just postulating something that you are not and then fulfilling it is what the artist, the clown, the harlequin, the jester does. At a king's place, the jester was the only person who could say, "Now I am this, now I am that, now I will tell you the story of the reality of your kingdom." He was allowed to do that. If you assume this same role, you will be perceived as a little foolish, you will be laughed at, but you will be able to speak the truth and, therefore, transform the reality around you. And if you will make a good point, you will succeed because people will see your intention; they will believe in your role eventually and they will see it as real. Maybe this is the only tip I have: believe in your own story, in your own narrative or possible narratives and you will become the director of your character.

VC: Thank you Andreas for your time and thoughts. [smiles]

AU: Greetings from Germany. Bye, Bye. [smiles]

"We have to tell fairy tales about what this material's reincarnation [reality] will be, and then we can reach it together."



STATEMENT: VICTORY! AAROGYA SETU CHANGES FROM MANDATORY TO, "BEST EFFORTS"

by staff; Internet Freedom Foundation, 18th May 2020

Yesterday evening as lockdown 4.0 was extended, we recorded a small but significant win. On May 2, based on your support, a letter was sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs by 45 civil society organisations and over 100 individuals clearly calling the Ministry to roll back an order requiring the mandatory use of Aarogya Setu. On Sunday evening, as an incremental first step the installation of Aarogya Setu has now been changed to a best effort basis. Endorsement and advocacy efforts by diverse organisations from trade unions to gender justice collectives signed on to this joint letter. They played a significant role in this shift, and the demands under it were widely covered in the press.



THE SURVEYS CAN'T BE TRUE: MODI'S POPULARITY HAS TAKEN A BEATING WITH MIGRANT CRISIS

by Shivam Vij; The Print, 20 May, 2020

ONLINE MATCHMAKER SIGN-UPS INCREASE 30%

by Mini Tejaswi; The Hindu, 26th April 2020

Online matchmaking sites are witnessing a sudden spurt in new sign-ups and interactions between potential brides, grooms and their families after the COVID-19 lockdown kicked in. Leading players in the trade — BhartMatrimony and Shaadi.com — say they have witnessed at least a 30% increase in profile acquisitions and interaction between existing members.

'CAN'T KEEP MIGRANTS AS CAPTIVE LABOUR': EXPERTS SLAM K TAKA GOVT

by Vakasha Sachdev; The Quint, 6th May 2020

Karnataka government on 5 May is to cancel trains for migrant workers to return to their homes, hours after Chief Minister BS Yeddiyurappa met with leading property developers and builders in the state. The state government and its supporters claim that it is 'unnecessary' for the migrant workers to travel at this time, two days into the second extension of the nationwide coronavirus lockdown, and that, in fact, the migrants are needed to kick start the economy.



Ferry passengers flee from police firing tear gas, after new measures aimed at halting the spread of the new coronavirus instead caused a crowd to form outside the ferry in Mombasa, Kenya on March 27, 2020. The new measures required public transport vehicles to drop passengers 1km away and walk to the ferry terminal and then queue, but passengers fearing they would get stuck before a 7pm curfew started crowding to get on causing police to fire tear gas and round up the passengers. Photo by The Associated Press



Ali Akbar Mehta, "Is there a room with just a colour?" (2020); installation shot at Myymala2, Helsinki

FRIDAY 1ST MAY

ALI AKBAR MEHTA

Ali Akbar Mehta is a media artist who creates immersive cyber archives to explore narratives of violence, conflict and trauma within the fictions of history, memory and identity. He is a founding member and co-artistic director of the Museum of Impossible Forms. (aliakbarmehta.com)

#PERFORMINGONLINESURVEYS

VC: Hi Ali. Good to see you after a long time.

AAM: Hi. How are you?

VC: I'm good, how are you?

AAM: Good, good. [smiles]

VC: Okay, let's go straight to the interview since we are limited by time.

Today data has become the highest valued commodity in the world. With your project "256 million colours of violence" you explore how data is collected online, while also addressing our understanding of violence. I am fascinated by the fact you used the format of the online survey to subvert the idea of data collection. You say the project wants to facilitate an "encounter of equals." Can you tell me more about how the project works, and how this encounter of equals happens?

AAM: The core of the project is the questionnaire. It asks participants to answer to a series of fifty questions related to what the colour of violence might be according to them. They are everyday questions that we are all confronted with on a daily basis, and they are meant to reveal and sensitise participants to the existence and the presence of violence that surrounds us. The subversion that you talked about is firstly to recognise that most surveys are conducted as a one-way stream of information gathering and data collection. This process is for the benefit of governments, bureaucratic systems, corporate entities, and so on so forth. So, the questions are, "How can this process be democratised? How can we create a system that does not function as a one-way stream of information collection?" The project's aim is to transform the questionnaire into a platform that facilitates a dialogue between the participants and the survey. And this is done through an archive of information and notes that are embedded within it.

For me, the encounter of equals actually happens when there is a certain process of co-learning, of co-developing, and therefore co-archiving the colours of violence, instead of participants blindly being requested to give out information, as is usually the case. The encounter of equals also represents a mode of thinking that originates from the idea of the subaltern, and their ability, or lack of their ability, to speak — theirs and ours. It can be also understood as learning to learn from below, or how to work together. The idea of this encounter is to essentially facilitate an exchange of knowledges and information.

VC: You have been researching this project for four years. I went through the survey on the website and found it pretty provocative. As a participant/user it made me go through endless possibilities for each of your questions. For example, the gender question had twenty options I could choose from. It made me analyse myself, like I was performing. How does this “encounter,” this way of engaging, create new forms of knowledge systems?

AAM: I actually started thinking about the project in 2012, but I could only start working on it in 2016 when I came to Helsinki. Here I met Palash Mukhopadhyay, who has been a fundamental part of the process of developing this work. Right from the beginning, he actually transformed the conceptual idea into an online experience. And I think that the project would have not been possible without his inputs and his thinking. Before this, the project never really moved forward. During these years, I have been populating the website and the questionnaire. The idea is that for each question you have many options, like the question for gender that you mentioned — it has over one hundred options where otherwise, in most surveys, you would have male, female and, if you are lucky, other. For me, gender as a form, or as a way of identifying oneself, cannot be reduced to that binary, and even the extension to ‘other’ is an oversimplification. It is very important then to start thinking about the ways we seek to identify ourselves in very nuanced ways, and so the format of the questionnaire.

The fact that it’s in an online space actually gives me the possibility of expanding what the questionnaire does. If it was a paper questionnaire, I would have not been able to structure it in this way. The structure of the questionnaire is, in fact, based on the idea of gaming. In the early years of gaming, online chat rooms and portals called MUD (Multi User Dungeon) or MOOs — MUD object-oriented spaces — were essentially portals, text-based chatrooms, where you could move through a game in the form of an online book. And so the narrative proceeded, progressed, according to your own choices. For the project, I used a similar format with many options. Even if you would not necessarily pick more than a few, or maybe just one, in the instance of gender, the idea is to show that these are very real, potential forms of identity that people may choose to identify with. In a way, it puts your own identity in relationship with another, and at the same time it gives you the possibility to look at what are the other forms of identity that are acceptable, or in the process of being discursively fabricated and manifested.

In a sense, that is the idea of the performance: the performance is a solitary, contemplative experience of you engaging and interfacing with this online questionnaire. But there is also, I hope, emotional and analytical turbulence that is generated through the participation in the survey. The other performative element is that once all of these colours are submitted, viewed or experienced collectively, it gives life to a form of networked performance or ‘cyberperformance.’ And this idea of networked performance or cyberperformance, which is a live performance of multiple actors across a networked space, is a very important part of the project.

In my Ph.D. at Aalto university, I am looking at the relationship between archives and their users, and how their relationship is performative in a way that defines the agency of both the user and the archive, while at the same time they also define each other and how they progress. For me, online archives, but also archives in offline spaces, just by virtue of their being and what they hold, inform us.

They generate a kind of agency within us, and us, as people who are interacting with them, generate their own agency. So it is a reciprocate relationship. When I am talking about this idea of knowledge systems, I am reflecting on the fact that although we have had the data or the cultural tools to know ourselves very intimately for a very long time now, our data are highly fragmented. So maybe a new knowledge system, or a new form of the internet, would allow us to defragment these data into more understandable and accessible ways of both interfacing with the data and with ourselves.

VC: We are in the 38th day of lockdown in India, with our civil liberties heavily curbed. We are on the internet more than ever, giving out our data while being fed information that is designed specifically for each of us. Our online behaviours are monitored and collected so that we are often exposed to very narrow sets of information tailored to us. Your project does the opposite — it proposes multiple narratives. Can you explain this emphasis on multiple narratives?

AAM: I think that both in the context of governments and social media companies, as well as those organisations that are seeking to algorithmically force-feed data to us, there is a drive that dictates that data is now more valuable than anything else in the world. Then data becomes a source of both financial and political power. The ways in which we are interfacing with online spaces, especially when we are looking at something like the eyeball economy, is basically saying that attention is currency. But then, whose attention is garnered? Whose attention is sought? What forms of data then become more important, or more powerful than others? These are very political questions and there is no singular form or response that can be given. This situation is also saying that the ways in which these governments and bureaucratic systems function are very similar to laboratory-style ways of conducting surveys, where the test subjects are also a very carefully selected group of individuals. But the real world does not function like that. And so, in that sense, the emphasis

of the project on multiple narratives says that there cannot be a single answer; there cannot be a single colour of violence; there cannot be a singular way in which we construct our identities. At the heart of it, the project is also a celebration of the plurality of our humanity. [smiles]

VC: If I say the word ‘portal,’ what comes to your mind?

AAM: [smiles] Well, as a major science fiction buff, the first thing I would think of is teleportation devices — something that I have been hoping would be part of our realities since I was thirteen years old. [laughs] But, in relation to what we have been talking about so far also, you can look at the internet as a portal, or books for that matter, because they allow for a certain kind of teleportation into another time or space. I think the idea of the portal, outside its science fiction manifestations, is a certain realisation, or a certain presence of empathy, of being able to think about ourselves as well as the other in a kind of sympathetic form of coexistence. That is what a portal would be to me. [smiles]

VC: There is the myth that habits are formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row. Although this is a myth, which habits do you think you have developed during the lockdown?

AAM: There has definitely been a kind of increase of my sense alertness and borderline paranoia regarding closeness to people [smiles], and I think that is something that has been fed to us by these ideas, or rules, of how we are to conduct ourselves in this time. I feel that this is something I need to be aware of, not for it to take over my thinking and emotional state.

VC: To end our interview, and go back to where we started, do you think we will ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

AAM: Well... [pauses] maybe I’ll just read a response that Homi [K.] Bhabha had to this idea of the between and the beyond. He says that “In-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating

strategies of selfhood, singular or communal, that have initiated new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation in the act of defining the idea of society itself.”

So that’s the in-between. But then he says, “It is the trope of our times to locate the question of culture in the realm of the beyond.” This then would be “that beyond means at, or, to the furthest side of, both in time and space, past and future, over and under, before and after, arrival or departure. Beyond defines the limits of being outside the range of, beyond the power or the capacity of, outside the limitations of, surpassing. Or as a superlative, greater than, more than, exceeding, in excess of, above, over and above, above and beyond, upwards of, as well as the unknown.”

So I see this idea of ‘the beyond’ and its relationship with the between as a kind of interstitial space, or a non-space almost: I see it as a kind of new horizon, and a new unknown. And these are things we need to talk about in the context of new directions.

VC: Thank you Ali. Let’s look at the comments and questions from the audience.

sultana_zana: Could you give an example of a question in a questionnaire that you particularly like? Or a concept that you spend time with to form a question around?

AAM: Personally, I really liked questions 47 A and 47 B [laughs], which essentially list a series of forms of violence that you may have confronted or you may have experienced. 47 A is from the perspective of a victim or a survivor of that form of violence, whereas 47 B is about experiences that you may have confronted as an oppressor. The options are basically the same. In this regard, it’s been very interesting for me talking to people who participated in the survey afterwards. For most people, a form of violence experienced as a survivor has very different connotations than having perpetrated the same. For example, you would get yelled at by your boss at work, that is a form of violence that you

are very conscious of. But then you would yell at your taxi driver or someone who is in a ‘lower’ position, economically or in some other ways, and you don’t really think of that as being violent. For me these two questions really highlight that being either the oppressor or the oppressed is highly relative and subjective to our position in specific contexts. And in a way, really, I think it helps to sensitise people, to make people think of certain relationships in society. That is a very important question for me.

kanmaniponmani: [heartface emoji]

VC: Thank you for your thoughts Ali. Audience please go see Ali’s website. It’s totally worth your time!

AAM: Thank you. Bye.



ABC Displays, which usually manufactures cardboard advertising props, has developed a bed that converts into a coffin. Photo by ABC Displays

UP: FIR AGAINST JOURNALIST FOR REPORT ON MISMANAGEMENT AT QUARANTINE CENTRE

by staff; The Wire, 18th May 2020

In the latest instance of harassment of the media for critical reporting, the Uttar Pradesh administration has lodged an FIR against Ravindra Saxena, a journalist at Today-24 news portal for reporting on the mismanagement and negligence at a quarantine centre in Sitapur district. In a video report, Saxena spoke to people at a quarantine centre in Maholi Tehsil of Sitapur district of eastern Uttar Pradesh, who alleged that they were served rotten rice.

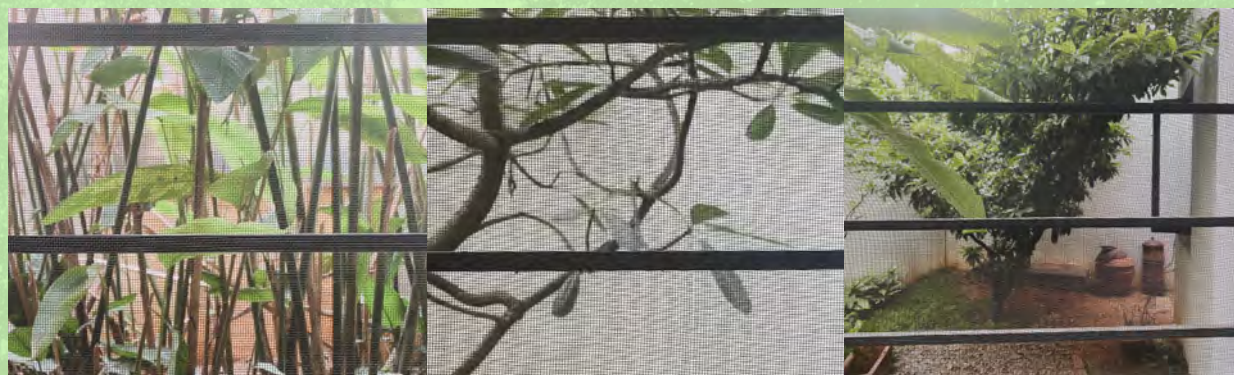


Despite industrial units not functioning during the lockdown, the demand for power has dropped by only around 20%, as domestic consumption has increased. Photo by Bhagya Prakash K. Published in The Hindu

THE TIME FOR A NEW INTERNATIONAL IS NOW BY PRIME MINISTER OF ICELAND

by Katrín Jakobsdóttir; Progressive International, 11th May 2020

What German sociologist Ulrich Beck once called the “risk society” in a globalised world – involving pandemics, climate change, pollution, nuclear accidents, etc. – does not respect borders or other sovereign demarcations. Such risk factors are “democratic” in the sense that they are faced by humanity as a whole, even if they do so unevenly. Lacking infrastructure and unable to afford “societal risk managers”, poor countries are poised to suffer more as a result of the pandemic than rich ones. For the Global South, it can result in major restrictions of freedom of movement, as well as tightened export markets and limited access to financial resources.



NO COMMUNITY SPREAD YET, SERO-SURVEYS ON: ICMR

by Sushmi Dey; Times of India, 27th May 2020

While the health ministry has maintained that there is no evidence of community transmission, it initiated a population based sero-survey in select districts under ICMR earlier this month. A section of experts has held that insufficient testing has meant that community spread has not been detected.

Swans re-appropriate the canals in Burano, Venice. Published in “Clean Venice” Facebook group by Marco Contessa, 9th March 2020



SATURDAY 2ND MAY

HARUN MORRISON

Harun Morrison is an artist and writer currently living on a narrow boat on Regent's Canal in London, UK. He is a co-founder of the collective They Are Here with artist Helen Walker. Since 2019 he has been a trustee of the Black Cultural Archive (est.1981) and is currently artist-in-residence with Arts Catalyst, London. (theyarehere.net)

#CONTINUOSCRUSING

MG: Hello Harun. Nice to see you here.

HM: Hello. I am in my studio in London.

MG: It looks great. Let's dive into the interview.

MG: Your work often experiments with the transformation of social spaces. For the project "Precarity Centre" by your collective practice They Are Here, you turned a London gallery space, Studio Voltaire, into a platform of diverse 'spaces' to explore precarity. I am interested in this idea of an existence that lacks in predictability versus the "totalising efficiency of the technoutopian dream" — I quote you — because it hints at changes in the way we understand our place in the world. Can you tell me more about this project and how precarity can be used as a way of looking at things differently?

HM: "Precarity Centre" first took place at Grand Union, Birmingham in 2016 and later London in 2017. We were guided by self-set questions as to what degree a dedicated art space could expand its field of operations and intersect with others beyond the art world precariat. It was also a short-term, propositional exercise in the liquid potential of spaces themselves, a call for function-shifting, over solely aesthetic-shapeshifting. Rather than thinking of singular spaces having singular roles, we were interested in unfixing these identities to enable the gallery space to be an interface in a material context where different individuals and narratives could interact.

We later converted Studio Voltaire into a pop-up comedy club, in our piece "Routine" (2017), working with individuals who considered themselves precarious to participate in a 10-week stand-up course. We provided a platform for them to perform a 5-minute autobiographical set to a live audience. We were keen to broaden and amplify voices often excluded from dominant media, or without the means to narrate themselves as they see fit and enjoy.

Near my studio in Manor Park, East London and along the canal and riverside you often see adverts for new housing developments. You'll notice these rendered visions of the future space will include couples standing on a balcony, a child playing on the green, but never any litter. No syringes. No homeless. I'm currently developing some new work with architectural designers using the language of real-estate adverts, to reinstate visual traces of precarity.

MG: You have been living on a narrow boat on the London canals for a few years now. And you are currently working on a research project for which you are developing a theory of continuous cruising. In your research you talk about continuous cruising as an embodied / somatic practice. What does this embodiment entail? And how does this connect to your artistic practice / interest in exploring social dynamics?

HM: The inland waters in the UK are managed by the Canal and River Trust. There are about fifteen-thousand people living on the water across the British Isles. There are people who pay rent or have bought a spot to stay in one place. The others, like myself, are obliged to move every two weeks — the Canal & River Trust formally designate this group 'continuous cruisers.' I am interested in how this itinerant mode of living contests a capitalist pressure to buy land-based property and in turn enforce sedentariness. Your address here, determines your doctor, your school and so on. I am also keen to see how different itinerant groups could also form alliances, such as the increasing number living in motor-vehicles or the Travelling Community.

The day-to-day practice of boating is physical in the sense of moving, maintenance and so on. The proximity to the water is an elemental part of this life. Many of the skills you pick up are learnt through doing, such as knot-tying. At the same time, I'm interested in what I call the 'virtual-boater.' This enables the abstraction of the knowledge and attitudes of boating, to deploy them in off-water contexts. De-industrialisation, using material-to-hand, listening to the water for example, are all acts that can be

implemented across the social spectrum of the technologically-cocooned Global North, including art.

MG: I think this research could have not been timelier. You discuss boat-living as "composite and pluralistic," as well as "horizontal" in its structure, whereby one is "more directly responsible for the labour of living." During these interviews, our guests have often wished that the experience of this pandemic made us more empathic, more in tune with others, the small things of life and nature. This has emerged in a time where our lives have been extremely regulated, and are mono-vision. What do you think this is the manifestation of, socially?

HM: Using the word 'we' often obscures the power-dynamics of a situation. There have long been solidarities practiced by workers, womxn, people of colour; the absence of empathy lies with the boards of directors of transnational corporations and certain politicians who trade economy for life. Alongside empathy we need justice. In party-orientated politics voting left is only one transitional step, not an end goal.

MG: When I say the word 'portal,' what comes to your mind?

HM: A portal is a two-way street; it's a threshold you can cross to enter a new zone, but other entities can also come from the other side. So let's be mindful of what's flying in as we look to step out.

MG: There is the myth that habits are formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row. Although this is a myth, which habits do you think you have developed or lost during the lockdown?

[connections breaks and our guest takes us on a walk]

HM: My routines were never particularly structured pre-lockdown. However, behind my studio, where I'm self-isolating, is a prefabricated mortuary, built in response to COVID19, opposite a cemetery. During my government sanctioned daily exercise

I've taken to running around the perimeter fence of this structure anti-clockwise.

[the walk eventually takes us to the prefabricated structure Harun mentioned]

MG: To end our interview, and go back to where we started, do you think we will ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

HM: It will be different for each individual and their capacity for change, internal and external. A lot will depend on how each person processes this situation, how deeply they connect it to other long-standing exploitations of the Earth itself, the other-than-human, the labour of womxn, people of colour and the working-classes.

MG: It looks like we don't have questions from the audience. Thank you Harun. And thank you for taking us on this thought-provoking walk.

HM: Thank you for having me. Take care.

"Alongside empathy we
need justice."

| **SPEAKING UP TO SAVE PATIENTS' LIVES**

by Transparency Int'l; Medium, 7th May 2020

Chinese doctor Li Wenliang didn't just expose COVID-19. He was punished for blowing the whistle on the authorities' cover-up, and his death from the disease sparked widespread demands among China's people for freedom of speech. By speaking out about wrongdoing, Li became a hero in China and beyond. But he's not alone in exposing malpractice linked to COVID-19. In May 2020, Dr Rick Bright, former head of the US Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, filed a 63-page complaint with the US Office of Special Counsel detailing undue political pressure by the Trump administration. When COVID-19 swept the country, he says he was urged to approve plans to source unproven doses of chloroquine from uninspected factories in Asia.



Tribal community gathering food from the forest and rivers. Photo by Josephine Simone



Seraikela, instead of celebrating spring with chhau, Jharkhand artisans are pivoting their skills to redesign traditional masks as PPE, with some modifications. Published in The Hindu, 23rd April 2020



| **INDIA'S ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY IS IN A HURRY TO CLEAR 191 PROJECTS AMID CORONAVIRUS CRISIS**

by Nihar Gokhale; Scroll, 7th April 2020

Even as India is just coming out of a nationwide lockdown due to the novel coronavirus, the environment ministry is considering large-scale mining, infrastructure and industrial projects for environment, forest and wildlife clearances by hosting video meetings of its expert panels. This is despite the expert panels admitting that time available for considering some of these projects is "very less" and in some cases just about 10 minutes per project.

| **OUT OF THE COVID-19 DISASTER COMES PRIVATISATION, AND OTHER REFORMS**

by Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar; The Economic Times, 20th May 2020

'Never waste a crisis' is an old saying, and Modi is not wasting this one. But he and Sitharaman have not spelt out details of many proposed reforms in land, labour and the legal system. But their dramatic embrace of privatisation is unambiguous and stunning.

| **SOCIAL STIGMA, ATTACK ON NURSES**

by Anish R; NewsClick, 13th May 2020

All the representatives spoke of the general abuse and stigmatization that healthcare workers, especially nurses, have had to face in their respective countries. In India, multiple State governments had to pass laws to protect nurses from evictions by landlords, making it punishable. [...] But it is not just attacks from neighbors and landlords that the nurses have to face. In India, State governments and hospital authorities have initiated lawsuits against nurses who have resigned over highly unsafe working conditions. Even those who have protested against the unsafe working conditions in hospitals have been targeted by hospital management and authorities.



A man wearing a mask grazing goats near Deverapalli in Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. Photo by K.R. Deepak. Published in The Hindu, 28th April 2020



SUNDAY 3RD MAY

JOSEPHINE SIMONE

Josephine Simone is an independent writer who works with Indigenous nations and migrant communities to document and retell stories.

#ALTERNATIVEASLIFE

VC: Hello Josephine.

JS: Hi Vivek. Good to see you!

VC: You have worked with a few tribal communities, including the Chhara nomadic tribal community. You look at how they perform Indigenous Resurgence through liberation theatre. Can you tell us about liberation theatre? Does it have relevance today with the urban dwellers?

JS: I think liberation theatre is extremely relevant within cities. Especially today, when the state is using identity politics to pit people against each other and demonise certain communities. You see people being told one version of history and other stories being silenced. Liberation theatre is important because it is about reclaiming those stories. It's about who gets to tell stories, and it's about representing ourselves on our own terms. It's about performing the identities that we choose, instead of the identities that are assigned to us.

At its heart liberation theatre is about reclaiming narrative power; it tells stories that you might not otherwise hear. Budhan Theatre's practice, for example, is extremely powerful because it's a public art practice. When they are telling their own stories, they are also calling in audiences that might not otherwise engage with them to listen. By doing that, they open a space for conversation, for dialogue and exchange.

One of the things I am wondering about, with this coronavirus pandemic, is how public art practice is going to be affected. Because with Budhan Theatre, for example, all their work happens in public space, and public spaces have always transformed the ways that we engage with each other. I guess those practices will have to change, and I think many of us have not found out yet how. I think we have to do a lot of thinking, and talking about what public practice is going to look like after this.

VC: Today we prescribe to a modern and industrial way of

medicine and see healthcare as a one stop solution. Recently, you have been speaking to a tribe in the Saranda forest, specifically the Ho Adivasi women-led health initiative, which understands medicine and healthcare in a different way. What are the major differences between the two systems?

JS: Lots. [laughs] The group you mentioned that is working with Ho Adivasi women is called Omon Mahila Sanghatan. It was started in 2000 by a group of women researching witch-hunting in the Saranda forest. They found that every case of witch-hunting was connected to health. So, every time there was a community health crisis the accusation of the presence of a witch would start. Instead of turning to allopathic medicine, the group decided to look towards Adivasi traditions of health and wellness. So, they started producing these traditional medicines. But the work didn't stop there. To get the ingredients, they needed to harvest and gather from the forests and rivers surrounding them, which are under threat from mining and large-scale industrial projects. The work grew to move in the direction of land protection. Now, while making medicines, they are also acting to protect their homeland and their forests.

I think the difference between these healthcare systems is that this has a very land-based approach, while in allopathic practices, doctors who diagnose people, and often cure them, rarely address economic or environmental causes. So, Omon Mahila Sanghatan are really saying that if you return land, water and earth to Adivasi people, they themselves will take care of the health of the people within their own communities. As much as it is about community health, it is also about sovereignty and environmental sustainability. [smiles]

VC: I recently read an anecdote you wrote about an 'incident' that occurred with a group of Adivasi people at the beginning of the lockdown in India. While your instinct was to get supplies from the closest town, the villagers looked upon the forest to support themselves and, eventually, they were the ones who brought you food. Can you tell us a little more about this exchange of

commodities and conversations? What are some of the learnings you've had there?

JS: What happened in that area, is that nobody was warned about the lockdown. It was only announced the day after it had started. No one had heard about what coronavirus is; it was just some vague thing happening elsewhere. So, nobody was given the opportunity to prepare and get supplies and provisions. This made me very angry as it just felt like another moment when people who live in rural India and Adivasi communities were being ignored. People there don't exactly have a financial backbone to fall on in these moments of crisis. So, my partner and I decided to get basic supplies; not just for ourselves, but for everybody in the village. Things like rice, dal, oil, matchboxes and all that kind of stuff. What really surprised me was the next day a group of people showed up with rice and sambar for us because they were really worried about us. Because they basically saw us as city people who depended on shops for our supplies, whereas they know how to live with the forest, they have always been living with the forest, and they know how to sustain themselves. So, they got us food, saying "You poor things, the shops are all closed, what are you going to do? How are you going to live?" It was really lovely. It kind of turned the tables on our assumptions about resources, and I guess it was another beautiful example of Adivasi systems that have always existed. And now, as these other systems that have been built to suppress them are crumbling under their own architecture, I see the Adivasi systems starting to re-emerge, more and more, stronger.

I guess the learning I got from that was [pauses] more of a humbling. In that moment, I didn't see the forest as a way of sustenance. I treated it like a backdrop and I didn't look at it as the web of complex relationships that it truly is. It also made me think a lot about creative practice, in the sense that Indigenous societies have always been societies of makers rather than just consumers. I think we are so surrounded by consumption and capitalism all the time that we think the art of making is only for artistic practitioners, or crafts people. But there, people make

everything they need; they make their own systems of governance, they make their own houses, they make their own clothes, they make their own food. This is what they have always done.

VC: If I say the word ‘portal,’ what comes to your mind?

JS: All of the things we have been talking about so far. [smiles] To me a portal is like an opening into another possibility. That’s exactly what the people in Budhan Theatre have done, it’s exactly what women of Omon have done, it’s what people living in the forests have done. It’s by acting, and thinking, and creating differently, every day, all the time, that they create these openings and opportunities for all of us to engage, learn and do things differently. A powerful reminder for me is that these portals don’t just exist in times of pandemics, but they exist every day, all the time. It’s just a matter of us paying attention, looking out for them and stepping into them.

VC: There is the myth that habits are formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row. Although this is a myth, which habits do you think you have developed during the lockdown?

JS: I wish I could say that I have developed more good habits. [laughs] I think I’ve just dropped a lot of old ones. Definitely because it’s the longest I’ve spent at home at a stretch, as far as I can remember. Before this, I was like many of us, running around and trying to be productive all the time. This has forced me to slow down. At first, a bit begrudgingly to be honest, but now I hope this slowing down and paying attention will stick around. An old habit I picked up again is the practice of writing in a journal, which I used to do religiously every single day. I guess trying to produce things and be productive made me forget about writing for the sake of writing. So, I started doing that again.

VC: To end our interview, and go back to where we started, do you think we will ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

JS: I don’t know, I don’t think any of us know. But I hope [pauses] that we circle [smiles and hands circling around her head] and we circle back! Everything we have been talking about, all these examples of Indigenous resurgence, are ways people are looking back at their old traditions. I think one of the things that has happened, since there are so many systems that we live in, is that we assume that systems are permanent, like the internet, or social media, or central governance. If you really think about it, most of the systems we live with now have been around only for the past few hundred years, actually four or five generations, and the internet only for one. All these older practices of living, instead, have been around for thousands of years. They have carried people through crisis and pandemics like this. So, I hope that maybe this is an opportunity for us to look back at those old ways and think about the practices that we want to reclaim, “What are the practices that we want to revise? What are the ones we want to reclaim? What are the ones that no longer serve us?” For me, this always includes thinking about land, our relationships to it and reviving those relationships. But it also means having meaningful conversations about who has access to land and who doesn’t — “Whose access to land has been taken away for the benefit of others? How can we break this chain down?”

VC: Thank you Josephine. Let’s check if we have comments and questions from the audience.

amritree: And teacher. :-)

fromkodur: Governments that never provided basic care are suddenly wanting to save everyone. Especially the privileged. Don’t you think their concern is lopsided?

JS: That’s maybe why we have seen this upsurge of community-led activism, especially in cities where people are reaching out to each other and providing things like relief and food packages because nobody else is doing it. It’s beautiful in so many ways, but the question I have been wondering is, “Is it sustainable in the long term?” If the central government is not doing these things

then what is the point of central governance? [laughs]

sultana_zana: For us city dwellers, can you please give an example of something from the forest that you have found sustenance in?

JS: Let me think... [smiles] Right now, there is a lot of fruit that is growing, so we harvest the fruits.

We have also been fishing. Also the space and clean air feels like a blessing. In terms of having peace of mind, it's been a great source.

t.mny: Can you tell us more about your area of research? What are you currently working on?

JS: Right now, the women I mentioned. I spent seven years documenting stories with them and now I'm just sitting with them, going through those big backlogs of documentation.

VC: Thank you Josephine for sharing many things urban people and Instagram folks don't see.

JS: Thank you. [smiles] Bye.

**"These portals don't just exist in
times of pandemics, but they exist
every day, all the time."**

| **HARD-HIT ITALY PREPARES TO LIFT LOCKDOWN**

by Agence France-Presse; The Hindu, 4th May 2020

European nations on Sunday prepared for further cautious easing of COVID-19 restrictions following signs the pandemic may be slowing, with hard-hit Italy set to follow Spain in allowing people outside after weeks of confinement. More than 2,43,000 people have been killed and 3.4 million infected worldwide by the virus, which has left half of humanity under some form of lockdown and pushed the global economy towards its worst downturn since the Great Depression.

COVID-19 Pandemic: India (Updates)
Sources: covidvisualizer.com,
coronapolicyimpact.org, ndtv.com
— Instagram post



The Himalayas stand clear to view from Pathankot in Punjab. The coronavirus lockdown has rapidly reduced pollution. Photo by Parasrishi. Published in The Times India, 13th April 2020



| **COVID-19: CREMATION, BURIAL RECORDS SUGGEST DELHI'S DEATH TOLL IS OVER TWICE THE OFFICIAL FIGURE**

by staff; The Wire, 28th May 2020

The controversy surrounding the discrepancy in the COVID-19 death count available with the civic bodies and the health department of the Delhi government refuses to die down. The death toll figure reported by the municipal corporations is nearly twice the 'official' figure – which climbed to 288 on May 26. To make matters worse, a recent order by the Delhi high court dismissing a plea to scrap the "Death Audit Committee" that vets the figures provided by Delhi hospitals, has not helped resolve the imbroglio surrounding the disparity in the figures.

Suvani Suri, "Q'tine feed" (2020); screenshot from Instagram

| **INDIA CONTINUES TO REPORT 6K+ NEW COVID-19 CASES PER DAY**

by staff; The Wire, 28th May 2020

The death toll due to COVID-19 rose to 4,531 and the number of cases climbed to 1,58,333 in the country, registering an increase of 194 deaths and 6,566 cases in the last 24 hours till 8 am, the Union Health Ministry said.



500 likes

Q'tine feed
/ 20.04 /

A Sonic take on the Coronavirus

The ungraspable and mysterious reality of the Coronavirus has been provoking a great rush of images, views, and visual representations, in an urgent desire for meaning.

The obscurity of the microbe has been given the shape of memes, cartoons, illustrations, 3d renders, quirky products and even headgear that cops seem to have taken a great liking to!

Meanwhile, elsewhere, someone was thinking of the question—*what could the virus possibly sound like?*



MONDAY 4TH MAY

SUVANI SURI

Suvani Suri is an artist based in Delhi who experiments with various media in the context of the auditory spectrum. She has been a component of several trans-disciplinary practices, often alternating between various roles.
(cargocollective.com/suvanisuri)

#INAUDIBLE

MG: Hello Suvani!

SS: Hello Marialaura.

[connection disrupted]

MG: Okay, let's try again. [pauses while the speaker reconnects]

SS: Can you hear me now?

MG: Yes! Great, let's go ahead with the interview. You are an artist, researcher, educator and designer, amongst other things. Your work explores listening, the auditory, as well as the spaces in which they occur — social, political, and technological. I am interested in your research into the inaudible and what we hear. I like that you define the inaudible not just as something that we cannot hear, but also as something that passes unnoticed and can be imagined. What is the inaudible for you, especially in relation to your practice?

SS: So right. The inaudible for me as locus of interest opens up a thinking about limits — limits in comprehensibility, limits in perceptibility, the logic of sense and sensibility. In a way, as a site it reveals an impossibility that is an articulation of the possible that goes beyond the 'heard,' into that which perhaps 'sounds' but, because of physiological or ideological or socio-political reasons, it either cannot be heard or it could include strains of what we try to hear — so both the ideas in a way.

I have been fascinated by the spectral qualities of sound and the perceptual gaps it throws up. It could have to do with the indeterminacy of identifying the source from which you are listening, or watching sound as it goes through different spaces. So these ideas have made me feel intrigued by the inaudible. My encounter with it has not just to do with encountering our current technological realm in which these ideas manifest themselves, but also with looking at fiction — looking at non-realist fiction, or the science fiction of J.G.Ballad, or the weird fiction of Blackwood.

Some of these ideas continue into looking at real world manifestations, such as sonic warfare or audio virology, and how there are various modalities and registers of sound, and frequencies manifest themselves in the world as signals that may or may not be controlled or that appear, fade away and die. Every time some of these instances are teased apart, they stretch the thinkable and the knowable, putting the boundaries into doubt. So it's those doubts and uncertainties that I classify as the inaudible.

MG: You recently started "Q'tine Feed," which is presented in the Instagram feed of the Global Music Institute in Greater Noida. I really enjoyed the format, which to me, is like an archival exhibition — a feed-exhibition as a feed. Also, I like the fact that it traces an explorative history of sound and noise and how artists worked and are working with it. In a way, I feel "Q'tine Feed" is related to the idea of the inaudible, but also of inhabiting spaces in-between. Can you tell me more about this project?

SS: [laughs] It's interesting that you call it a project or an archival exhibition because it actually just started off as a daily emailer to the students of the institute — this is an institute that offers contemporary music education in the city. Largely the stress of the programme is on musicality, performance and instrumentation, but the course that I teach there has to do with looking at an expanded sound practice that goes beyond the tonal and the musica and into how sound as a sensory modality and medium interfaces with various kinds of creative practices — be it performative or visual or literary. During the lockdown, I started doing this emailer for the students and at some point the director suggested we turn it into an online feed so as to give access to a wider range of audience. So in a way it's a very unusual format, where I'm just hoping, or rather exploring, the entire continuum of the inaudible and the audible. It includes the ideas of silence and noise, and just quiet, of course; but also the implicit and the imagined become ideas contained within the whole continuum. Through these projects that we are featuring or the artists and practices we are talking about we are trying

to look through sound, trying to think through sound. We are trying to look at it as an emergence and a passing of time, as a sense of duration and a feel of memory, at its interaction with spaces, and all of that. It's a very relational field. Essentially, for me that is about looking at the various facets of it on an everyday basis and not to segregate it into categories, but trying to look at sound in its ownness. I think that's the best I can describe the in-betweenness that you say, its rather sort of inseparability.

MG: The lockdown has just been extended. Today is day 41 and you are our last guest. I think a sense of repetition has started to sip into our lives. Yet I am thinking about a quote by choreographer Pina Baush in your project "Q'tine Feed:" "repetition is not repetition...the same action makes you feel something completely different by the end." Does repetition have a role in your work? And has it changed during this period?

SS: Repetition is an interesting idea. [pauses] I think anyone with any kind of practice would agree to the fact that, to develop a certain familiarity and intimacy with their medium, the act of repetition comes into play; the act of doing the same thing again and again inscribes in a certain way a memory does in the body, and of course skills and craft, and all of that. I don't know what has changed, but for me repetition has to do a lot with thinking [pauses] and with the idea of rethinking and thinking again. It's like thought can only be thought of all over again. For me, when repetition as an idea is applied to not just acting, but to staying with thoughts, certain new forms of understanding can emerge which are not just deeper but also, perhaps, wider. While there is a certain exhaustion that is often associated with the act of repetition, thinking about it in this way also helps one look at it as a renewal, production of newer forms of understanding. Other than Pina Baush, one of the things that Kirkegaard has said has been significant for me. He speaks of repetition as an inverted memory, which allows for one to go back and exercise one's memory to move forward, and also, not just to reproduce the old, but to produce a new. Every time there is a new that's produced, it's also retroactively changing the past. For me, that

kind of an idea of repetition is extremely significant [pauses] and profound. I'm not sure what has changed, but I'm thinking about thinking more [laughs], reflexively.

MG: I am now starting the set of questions we have asked everyone. When I say the word 'portal,' what comes to your mind?

SS: The portal for me is more like an edge. It's a significant entity that marks an edge — an edge that can again open up possibilities of contact, of different points of contacts between spaces that have been held separate so far. It's that idea of edge that I find intriguing about the portal, because just at the point of some kind of closure, there is an opening. I see it as that, more as what you encounter once you enter, or what is going to encounter you once you come to the other side.

MG: There is the myth that habits are formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row. Although this is a myth, which habits do you think you have developed or lost during the lockdown?

SS: I don't know. I would like to lose lots of habits, but I don't think I have so far. [laughs] I haven't developed any either. [pauses] I think I am trying to insert new rituals every day, and I am trying to turn them into habits, but they don't become habits, and then the old ones take over. I'm also slightly skeptical of the idea of a habit. I think we are in an economy of habits.

[connection disrupted]

MG: We have lost Suvani, let's wait for the connection to resume.

SS: Can you hear me now?

MG: Yes.

SS: As I was saying. Habits and the attention economy flow into each other in a strange way. For instance, how 'behavioral

economics' absolutely capitalises on the idea and atomization of habits, tending to view the mind and the body as merely a collection of habits and patterns that can create a market — as something that needs to be formed or broken. It uses the idea of gentle nudges and prods to change habits. But we're not all habits, and all it takes is a pandemic to know that.

MG: To end our interview, and go back to where we started, do you think we will ascend, descend, go straightaway, or take new directions?

SS: I feel fairly clueless about it. We will do all I suppose, for there is no homogenous way of proceeding. It is going to be different; it is going to have to be different. But I also wonder if we need to just be in stasis for a while, without the need to do either. Just wait. [pauses] Wait some more. Not to wait for something, but just to stay still. Like Žižek says, "Don't act but think." Stasis is also a form of movement.

MG: Thank you Suvani. It looks like we don't have questions for today — too many glitches in the connection.

SS: Thank you Marialaura for the invite. I've been following this series with interest.

MG: To everyone, this is our last interview. It's been great to have these daily encounters and moments of sharing with different people — those who we interviewed and those who have been listening to us and sharing their thoughts and questions. Keep following Walkin Studios on Instagram because we are working on a publication about the series. Goodbye Suvani and all!

SS: Bye!

CURATORS BIO

Vivek Chockhalingam is an artist and curator. He is founder director of Walkin Studios, an art and residency space that promotes experimentation in the field of art and technology in Bangalore. He completed his bachelor's degree in Product Design at Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology (Bangalore) in 2008 and the Summer School in Architecture programme at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (USA) in 2014. For over a decade, Vivek has created sculptural installations and environments for architects, design studios and festivals. As curator, he was awarded a fellowship (2015) as a Young Curator for the Students Biennale 2016/17 by the Kochi Biennale Foundation and he was selected for the 'Young Curator Workshop' for the 9th Berlin Biennale (2016). (vivekchocka.com)

Marialaura Ghidini is a curator whose work explores the intersections between art, technology and society. She founded the curatorial platform or-bits.com (2009-2015), and since her PhD with CRUMB (University of Sunderland, 2015), she has researched the field of curating on the web. Interested in working with various exhibition formats, her projects include “#exstrange” (2017) on eBay; “The C(h)roma Show” (2014) in an electronics shop in Bangalore, IN; “Search Engine” (2012) across public spaces in Birmingham, UK; and “128kbps objects” on basic.fm (2013). She is co-editor of “Silicon Plateau” (a publishing series that looks at the impact of digital technology and its infrastructure in the city of Bangalore) and course leader of the MA Curatorial Practices pathway at Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology in Bangalore, India. (marialaura-ghidini.hotglue.me)

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Walkin Studios is space for multidisciplinary art, a space to pursue uninhibited creation. We support fearless thought and practice. Driven by critical discourse and sensitivity to our environments, we try to find ways of flourishing in this ever-changing present. Finding the local contexts within the global playground, Walkin Studios is a creative hub of action for artists. It is an ecosystem that promotes dialogue, collaboration, experimentation and dissemination of art. (walkinstudios.com)

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