ISSUE
ARRHYTHMIA

[SPECIAL VOLUME]

ISSUE is an international peer-reviewed art journal focused on exploring issues in contemporary art and culture. This annual publication is an inter- and trans-disciplinary journal that carries a curated set of scholarly articles, essays, interviews and exhibitions on disciplines ranging from contemporary art, design, film, media, performance and cultures.

This is a Special Volume of ISSUE.

LASALLE
COLLEGE OF THE ARTS

Special

This special volume of ISSUE is dedicated to a series of critical inquiries into the field of performance curricula, pedagogies and practices. Informed by changing positionalities in performing arts education and emerging interdisciplinary approaches in performance and experience-making, these inquiries were germinated and crystallised at a landmark conference, *Arrhythmia: Performance Pedagogy and Practice*, held in Singapore in June 2021 amid a raging pandemic. The pandemic was a stark reminder of that which is often taken for granted: how much the embodied and existential coalesce in situ to create magic. The substance of the conference was prompting us to go further afield with renewed vigour to explore new opportunities and give voice to that which is vulnerable—human connectivity. This exploration warranted study, leading to the commission of the conference organisers to curate a series of articles for this special volume.

This is the first special volume for ISSUE in its ten-year history. We are delighted to present this remarkable body of work.

Introduction: Arrhythmia

This special volume of ISSUE features commissioned writings emerging out of the proceedings of the *Arrhythmia: Performance Pedagogy and Practice* conference held in June 2021. Arrhythmia refers to an irregular heartbeat. It is a medical condition symptomatic of severe heart disease, even indicative of a heart attack. Drawing inspiration from the medical implications of the term, the conference and its ensuing journal volume frames it as a metaphor for the disruption and havoc brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The rhythms of teaching and learning were disrupted ad libitum, without an end in sight in a rather convulsive manner. The conference and this volume aim to encapsulate this historical moment by gathering artists, performance makers, scholars, students, and researchers to share and reflect on our collective challenge. The articles in this volume express the profound and invigorating experiences of the conference. Arrhythmia was a clarion call to an emerging reality: we had become acutely aware of rhythm in its absence.

As editors, we wanted this volume of the journal to represent the foci of the conference. To draw out international perspectives, situate local practices, nurture emerging research and locate the impact of COVID-19 on performance pedagogies and practices. The contributors reflect a cross-section of the arts community—artists, scholars, social workers, teachers, and students who are both established and upcoming.

The volume is divided into essays, conversations and emerging research. The essays bring scholars' and artistic practitioners' theoretical and practical insights into the more significant pedagogical shifts brought about by the pandemic. The keynote conversations by world-leading artists Peter Sellars and Melati Suryodarmo are archived here to offer diverse perspectives around care, hope, and opportunity to the field of performance. Emerging research by both staff and students reflects on experiences of the pandemic within the institutional context. Finally, the editor of *ISSUE,* Venka Purushothaman, connects the ideas gathered by the contributors to the critical discussions on contagion and collaboration to remind us that what is really at stake is a rethinking of our presence in this world as the cornerstone of pedagogy.

The conference took place while Singapore was experiencing its first significant wave of COVID-19 infections, with numbers escalating quickly from tens to thousands of cases. Since then, and during the production of this special issue, we saw that wave recede only to experience the impact of a consecutive, more significant wave caused

by the Omicron variant. The experience marks the transition to living with COVID-19 as an endemic disease. This transition has not been easy, but it demands re-evaluating and re-orientating everyday practices and modes of interaction. We must learn how to live with the virus and move on to co-habit this planet in some semblance of ecological harmony. Editing this issue has been an experience marked by that transition. We are very grateful for the opportunity to edit *ISSUE*'s first special volume, and in doing so, to contribute to the strengthening of the research culture in the Faculty of Performing Arts at LASALLE.

Pandemic-Induced Educational Bradycardia: Slowing Down to Rethink Pedagogy While in Quarantine

Bradycardia *is defined as heart rate slower than normal. The normal resting human heart rate is between 60-100 per minute. However, athletes' hearts may beat less than sixty beats per minute, as their hearts may have been conditioned to do so.*

— Cedars Sinai

Knowledge from Narrative

Within a fortnight from the day the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the Corona Virus 2019 (COVID-19) a pandemic, three professors of the medical school I graduated from succumbed to the virus; one classmate passed away with a mysterious massive thromboembolism. A month later, on my social media feed, the number of frontline casualties who were colleagues or juniors rose until I stopped counting. The international news was dire enough, but what made my fear worse was that I knew the names of the people who lost the fight. The image of wearing a mask to protect others in order to protect ourselves became a ubiquitous meme of altruism in my head. I posted COVID-19 articles from journals in the hope of spreading scientific facts to the community. The process of writing about it seemed to wipe off the survivor guilt that comes when one has left a profession that is now the sacrificial pawn in this morbid game of chess. I thought that I could keep myself and my family away from the effects of this pandemic if I continued supporting my peers. However, more than a year later, the viral contagion was at our doorstep. My father who has Parkinson's Disease (PD) developed aspiration pneumonia, a usual complication of patients with PD.[1] I booked a flight immediately to Manila. Thankfully, my father tested negative for the virus, but we repeated it just to confirm the result as he was a high-risk patient. By that time, I was already serving my quarantine in the Philippines, and when I reached home after the government-imposed sojourn, I was glad to see him. Unfortunately, his condition appeared to have worsened, so I decided to take him to the hospital.

[1] Won et al.

According to Dr. Dayrit in "The Philippines Health Systems Review," the country, while home to over 104 million people, offers only 23 hospital beds per 10,000 people in Manila alone.[2] During the current pandemic, when the hospitals are overwhelmed with the number of cases, getting immediate healthcare was close to impossible. My father and I were firsthand witnesses to this phenomenon. As the only one in the household who was fully vaccinated against the Severe Acute

[2] Dayrit xxi

Respiratory Corona Virus 2 (SARS-Cov2), the causative agent of COVID-19, I was the sole individual who could accompany my father to the non-COVID-19 sector of the hospital. So we got ourselves tested again to prove that we did not harbour the virus and so the doctors could attend to us in the Emergency Room (ER). Still, I had to wait 48 hours in the driveway of the hospital, staving off sleep and exhaustion, before a bed became available in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). What I saw in the news while I was in Singapore became my own reality. I was just fortunate that I belonged to a fraternity of doctors who would not hesitate to help me in my need. But I asked myself 'what about those who were not as well connected as I was?' Truly, their situation would have been much worse. My instinct for survival overtook my self-reproach and eventually my dad got better and was discharged on the eleventh day.

What does this personal ordeal have to do with pedagogy? It is precisely this experience that has prompted me to slow down and investigate my own process of teaching, and, in effect, the local educational processes, where the emphasis on acquiring skills and knowledge has been to match the accelerated development of the country.

There are three key-points I want to highlight from this incident.

1   Empathy in Experience

Emotions are the domain of empathy, and empathy is the backbone of emotional intelligence.[3] There is abundant evidence that humans remember events, data and situations better with emotion. This just makes sense. Don't we recall easily the moments we were happiest in our lives or those when we were grieving? Tyng and colleagues, in a study done in 2017, concluded that "emotional events are remembered more clearly, accurately and for longer periods of time than are neutral events."[4] This suggests that emotions play a crucial role in the higher order mental processing of information, such as problem solving and creativity. Sheldon and Donahue, in 2017, further elaborated on the effect of emotions in the retrieval of memories.[5] Another article by the Columbia University Irving Medical Center (CUIMC) in 2020, stated that long-lasting memories are tied to intense emotions.

[3] Goleman

[4] Tyng et al. 17

[5] Sheldon and Donahue 740

Fig.1 Memorable experiences are key to effective learning.

Building memories is therefore indispensable in learning, and vice versa. For us in education, this means our memorable experiences can and should be a take-off point in the delivery of our lessons. We must diversify ourselves so we can have a range of life experiences to

use as narratives for learning, because narratives, by their nature, are repositories of our emotions. This does not mean that we just sit in class and tell stories, it means we have to relate our own experiences to the lessons we have planned for the day. We should not dismiss our own life stories as unimportant in our syllabus, rather, we must use them to make our classes more effective (see figure 1).

Empathy is both a tool and a product. We use it to establish rapport and develop more meaningful relationships within our communities. It is also the result of the constant practice of emotional awareness. We use this tool frequently in our repertoire classes when we have to set an existing piece on our students. We teach them, apprentice-style, the choreography, sharing our personal experiences with the piece, describing what we felt dancing a variation (e.g. from *Romeo & Juliet*).[6] Muscle memory and emotional memory become moulded into the dancer through the transference of emotional experiences, enabling them to have a more empathic journey in the performance. We can apply this to contextual subjects as well. For example, if I were a physics teacher, I can use my experience caring for my dad as a narrative to begin a lecture on levers: how to partner and catch humans more efficiently. The excitement and fear of catching or lifting another human being will surely make them remember the lesson for a long time. The class becomes active and empathic to each other's roles in the narrative.

[6] Prokofiev

Giving real-life scenarios is nothing new, but it is important that we revisit this tool especially now when face-to-face learning has become a luxury. Through narratives and the strong empathic connections they make, our students can better appreciate the significance of education in their own lives. We do not teach only skills in school but instill values in our learners, and values are best taught in an authentic setting, which segues to the next key point.

2   Category and Hierarchy of Values

Primum non nocere is a Latin phrase we often use in the medical profession which literally translates to "first do no harm." It reminds physicians to be always cautious in the practice of treating patients to make their lives better, not worse. In teaching, we can follow the same principle to encompass values we impart to our students. We regard our students as fully healthy and consider their safety first in their physical, mental and emotional states, so that they can reflect and improve on these aspects in our class. In the current educational milieu of emphasising the acquisition of skill and knowledge, values seem to be last in the pecking order of importance, when, in practice, values should underpin the possession of information and skill.

On their website, "Critical Thinking Web," Drs. Lau and Chan of the University of Hong Kong categorise human values as either personal, moral, or aesthetic. Personal values are those upheld by an individual (i.e. family first, followed by career, etc.). Moral values are governed by social norms of fairness, well-being and so forth, while aesthetics regard the standards of an art.[7] In all these categories there will inadvertently be a ranking of importance for every individual. Our roles as teachers become very significant at this point. We become guides for our students to understand what values they have and how they can organise them.

[7] Lau and Chan

In dance, aesthetic values take the spotlight. We remind our students to train mobility, strength, and stability simultaneously. We should also train their minds and emotions to equally mirror their skills, so that knowledge, skills and values coexist in a singular event.
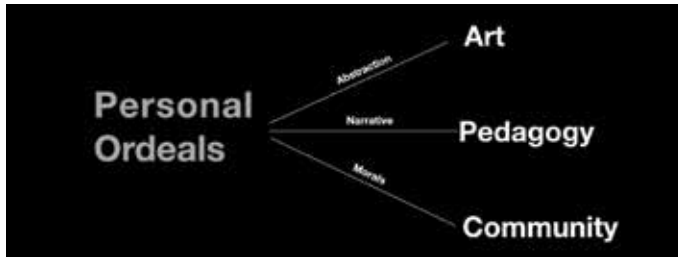
Fig. 2 Personal ordeals as source of ideals.

We are able to create art by abstracting from our own personal ordeals and, thus, become more cognisant of the values we practice in the management of these life trials while applying them in the lessons we have for the day (see figure 2). Furthermore, the mind is able to form parallels between seemingly unrelated events in our lives. The choice students make between fulfilling a combination's spatial requirements vs adjusting to the limited space between their codancers is a simple challenge to their moral values. Do they continue moving expansively, even if it means hitting another person? By bringing these issues to their awareness, we let the students realise how their values affect others. By scaling this moral conundrum to an issue of global survival, we can understand how important reinforcing value systems is in academia.

Thus, I invoke the potential of emotions to elicit a better long-term learning response. The grit I had to muster to keep awake for more than 48-hours in the hospital reminded me of my own hard-headedness in pursuing my friends in a simple game of "catch" during my childhood. Do you still recall the story times we used to have in kindergarten or the games we used to play in preschool?

Emotional events colour our lives. We should use them to make our students remember better. My own hospital tribulations made me find ways to create an environment for myself to safely care for my dad. I can transmute this incident in my improvisation class to make the students find ways to create, even in the absence of equipment or spaces they are used to. I can ask them questions that can reveal their hierarchy of values and make them aware if these values resonate with the principles of "first do no harm." By initiating this dialogue, I prepare them for the consequences that will follow. They will feel the impact of their decisions regarding something as simple as a movement of the hand in a partnering choreography.

At a time of a global health crisis that challenges our morals and attitudes in life, our domain-specific skills become secondary to our ability to categorise and prioritise our values in relation to our fellow humans. It is even more imperative now for us to focus on values education to prepare our students for the resilience and moral rectitude they need to

not merely survive but thrive in difficult times. Perhaps the best example of this can be gleaned from highly trained soldiers during wartime. Faramir, speaking of the battle ahead of his company, the Fellowship of the Ring, said, "... I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory. I love only that which they defend [...]."[8] This great commander and would-be steward of Gondor extolled the values for which he uses his talents and not the mere display of his combat skills. Freedom, equality, and dignity are only some of the benevolent values that are life affirming, which noble men will die for. But arguably, the most important virtue that will encompass these aforementioned values is empathy. With empathy we become more appreciative of our fellow man's condition, whether in mirth or in misery.[9] It helps us understand each other's perspective and initiates conversation amidst conflict. Should we not then imbue with these same moral principles the demonstration of skills that we so highly covet in the conservatoire? By narrating our personal journeys and the values they represent, we would have guided our students to educate themselves not only in skill-acquisition but in the ethical decision-making that is required in the application of this skill. In doing so, we prepare our students for whatever trials they will inadvertently encounter in the future within or without the academe. This process is a hallmark of the next and last key-point.

[8] Tolkien 608

[9] Agosta

3   Holistic Teaching
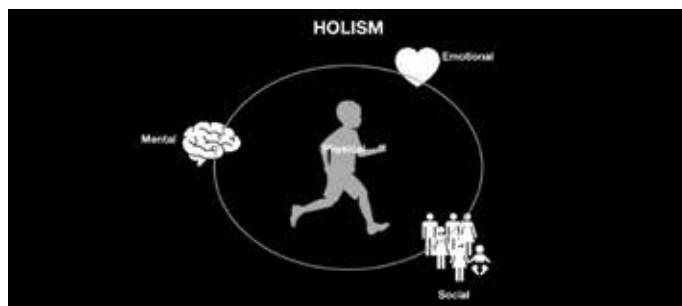
Fig. 3 Holistic Education.

Holism can be traced in the educational systems of the Indian subcontinent and the Greeks.[10] The goal of holism is to educate the child to become emotionally, physically, and intellectually a well-rounded individual, contributing to society.[11] Singapore has already started to shift its approach to learning by incorporating principles of holistic education in its curriculum, outlining its drive to promote active and healthy living and learning.[12] While commendable, its spirit still remains to be truly practiced in the four walls of the classroom, or, in this case, outside of it.

[10] Miller 1

[11] Hare 3

[12] Ministry of Education Singapore

Holism puts authentic learning as the benchmark for education: learning with and in the environment while being physically active, e.g. learning while playing, experimenting, etc.[13] Then, how come classes begin in the morning with the students seated in the classrooms passively listening to lectures, when they could be outside following the natural circadian rhythms of human hormones (see figure 3)? An

[13] Loveless

opportune time to exercise is in the morning, when cortisol and growth hormone levels are highest.[14] Physical education usually is sidelined to the afternoon, oftentimes after lunch when the natural processes of the body is to decelerate, to be able to store nutrients in the liver.[15] Should we not then reverse the timetable (see figure 4)? Better still, should we not start training our teachers to teach in the outdoors, to use the playground for their lectures? Learning then becomes both a physical and mental activity. In 2016, the WHO stated that over 39% of the adult population is overweight partly due to poor eating habits and lack of adequate exercise.[16] Obesity predisposes us to a variety of illnesses, (e.g. COVID-19). Indeed, there is less reason for us to teach our morning classes seated, than to have them on the playground! In this case, the value of experiential learning is not in its narrative, but in its practice. We allow the whole body to learn physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. We can achieve this by beginning the day with a physical activity that stimulates critical collaboration (e.g. dance-drama in history class), allowing their bodies to rest and store energy after lunch to focus on more contextually creative and less physically demanding work, and by ending their day with a reflective practice (e.g. somatics).

Seeing our students navigate through the technical, personal and social aspects of their skills throughout the day can help us assess their value systems and make them reflect on these, without going against their normal body rhythms. This whole-body perspective to teaching is empowering to both student and lecturer. In the process of teaching, we can reflect on our own experiences and the emotions that they bring about. It provides us a technique to be aware of our feelings without being overwhelmed by them, so that when we teach through the narrative of our experiences, we may do so with a reasonable clarity of purpose.

[14] Ducharme

[15] Drayer

[16] World Health Organization
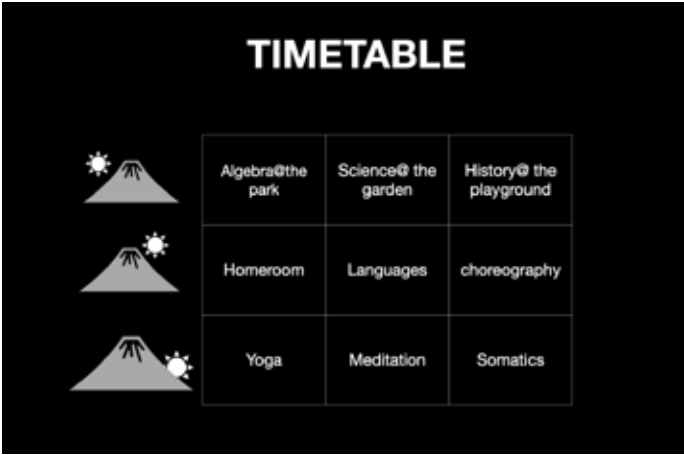
Fig. 4 Sample of a holistic schedule.

Unlike in the post-industrial-revolution school setting where we segregate the contextual subjects as a domain of the mind and physical education or the arts as a domain of the body, in a holistic class these domains are integrated in a singular experience.[17] Mind, body, emotion, community in one. And we should be able to apply this concept not just in the arts, but in the maths and the sciences as well.

[17] Krishnan

Conclusion

I began this discourse with a narrative, I will similarly conclude.

On the fifteenth day of my quarantine in Singapore, I noted my resting heart rate dip to 52 beats per minute. I still have a dancer's heart. The solitude and the challenges I recently faced in the hospital made me slow down and recall my own learning journey as an aspiring physician: being thrown into the ER and the clinics, applying what we have learned from the lecture halls. What I remembered most were the times I had to face the patients: delivering babies, inserting intravenous lines, being guided by our senior doctors. But 2021 found me on the opposite side of the fence, I became a patient (or, at least, the caregiver). It made me empathise more with those who sought help from us. It reinforced the concept that the best types of learning are those we carry on throughout our lives—the most memorable ones being those which have triggered strong emotional responses from us.

Like the food that nourishes our bodies, emotional information needs to be processed to ensure its effective delivery and safe application. Our food does not go directly from our mouth into our cells, because the molecules need to be packaged first before they can be utilised in the target organs, so does the information we give our students. Knowledge becomes more easily accessible and useful if it is wrapped in the events of our own life narratives. This does not mean that all our classes need to be sweat-inducing endeavours, but it means that we take the students away from their chairs and on their feet more, to be quick and active in learning.

Fig. 5 Somatic movement to end the day.

The ideas presented here are perhaps already inherent in our daily pedagogic practice. I am simply bringing awareness to these processes so that we may properly utilise them in our classes and make the most of the learning journey of our students.

My personal travails have made me realise that there must be some overhaul in the way we teach and how we schedule our lessons for this well-rounded approach to education to happen.

We can slow down to tell our own stories to derive quality information from them by: starting the day with physical activities inspired by narratives; allowing the body to go through the natural processes after lunch to focus on more contextual problem-based work as their bodies store fuel; ending the day with a method for self-reflection and wellness (see figure 5). We would have then transformed our learning spaces into a microcosm of the real world, making our instructions more empirical and humanistic in the process. In this way, we engage our students holistically and empathically through the values we have shared from our own life experiences.

References

Agosta, Lou. "Empathy and Sympathy in Ethics." *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. iep.utm.edu/emp-symp.

"Sinus Bradycardia." *Cedars-Sinai Health Library*, Cedars Sinai, 2021, https://www.cedars-sinai.org/health-library/diseases-and-conditions/s/sinus-bradycardia.html.

Columbia University Irving Medical Center. "Why Are Memories Attached to Emotions so Strong? -- ScienceDaily." *ScienceDaily*, 13 July 2020, https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/07/200713144408.htm.

Dayrit, Manuel, et al. "Health Systems in Transition: The Philippines Health System Review." *The Philippines Health System Review.* Edited by Walaiporn Patcharanarumol and Viroj Tangcharoensathien, vol. 8, No.2, World Health Organisation, 2018, pp. xxi–1.

Drayer, Lisa. "Are 'Food Comas' Real or a Figment of Your Digestion?" *CNN*, 3 Feb. 2017, https://edition.cnn.com/2017/02/03/health/food-comas-drayer/index.html.

Ducharme, Jamie. "This Is the Best Time of Day to Work Out, According to Science." *Time*, 27 Feb. 2019, https://time.com/5533388/best-time-to-exercise/.

Goleman, Daniel. "What People (Still) Get Wrong About Emotional Intelligence." *Harvard Business Review*, https://www.facebook.com/HBR, 22 Dec. 2020, https://hbr.org/2020/12/what-people-still-get-wrong-about-emotional-intelligence.

Hare, John. "Holistic Education: An Interpretation for Teachers in the IB Programmes." International Baccalaureate Organization, 2010. https://kirrawatt.com/uploads/2/4/7/2/24720749/holistic_education.pdf.

Lau, Joe, and Jonathan Chan. "[U01] Three Types of Values." *PHILOSOPHY@ HKU*, 2021, Critical Thinking Web https://philosophy.hku.hk/think/value/values.php.

Loveless, Becton. "Holistic Education: A Comprehensive Guide." *Education Corner© Online Education, Colleges & K12 Education Guide*, Education Corner, 2021, https://www.educationcorner.com/holistic-education.html.

"Our Students." *Ministry of Education Singapore*, Ministry of Education, www.moe.gov.sg/education-in-sg/our-students. Accessed 6 June 2021.

Prokofiev, Sergei. *Romeo and Juliet.* choreographed by Ivo Váňa-Psota. Performed by Ballet of the National Theatre. 1938, Mahen Theatre, Brno.

Sheldon, Signy, and Julia Donahue. "More than a Feeling: Emotional Cues Impact the Access and Experience of Autobiographical Memories." *Memory & Cognition*, no. 5, Springer Science and Business Media LLC, Feb. 2017, pp. 731–744.

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Lord of the Rings.* Res. ed. of 2002, EPuB ed., Great Britain, Harper Collins, 2009.

Tyng, Chai M., et al. "The Influences of Emotion on Learning and Memory." *Frontiers in Psychology*, Frontiers Media SA, Aug. 2017.

Krishnan, Karthik. "Our Education System Is Losing Relevance. Here's How to Update It ." *World Economic Forum*, 13 Apr. 2020, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/our-education-system-is-losing-relevance-heres-how-to-update-it/.

Miller, John P. "Ancient Roots of Holistic Education." *Encounter*, vol. 19, no. 2, Summer 2006, pp. 55–59. *EBSCOhost*, https://search-ebscohost-com.libproxy.nie.edu.sg/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=21723989&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Won, Jun Hee, et al. "Risk and Mortality of Aspiration Pneumonia in Parkinson's Disease: A Nationwide Database Study." *Scientific Reports*, no. 1, Springer Science and Business Media LLC, Mar. 2021, p. 1.

"Obesity and Overweight." *World Health Organization*, World Health Organization. 9 June 2021, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight.

Identity Interrupted: Negotiating Identities Among Music Students in the Time of COVID-19

Introduction

Music is often seen as a form of personal expression. A listener may comment on the way a piece of music touches them, or perhaps suggest that there is something in a performance that seems genuine or authentic. At other times such observations take the form of a simple preference for one artist over another, citing a variety of reasons for these choices. In each of these scenarios identity, "an essence signified through signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes, and lifestyles,"[1] may be seen as the driving force behind such reactions. When an individual perceives some point of commonality or alignment with someone else, there is a sense of connection. Identity is a central force in every aspect of our lives; from clothing choices to the quality and nature of interpersonal relationships, much of our experience is influenced by the features which we view as our own defining characteristics and the points at which they overlap with the defining characteristics of another.

As a concept, identity is multifaceted, with a variety of definitions and theories drawing on a wide range of disciplines. This paper is informed by my own experiences and observations teaching music at a tertiary institution, coupled with an examination of a range of sources addressing student experience and identity formation, particularly those which adopt positions grounded in anthropology or social psychology. Steph Lawler suggests that identity is best understood as a series of "ongoing processes" rather than a simple "sociological filing system."[2] The focus on the ongoing process of identity negotiation necessitates an approach grounded in social psychology, which takes into account the way in which "social identities might differ in the functions they serve."[3] Kay Deaux suggests that seven such functions exist, many of which are prominent in university life, including self-insight, social and intergroup comparisons, and social interaction.[4] A similar premise is suggested by James Cote and Charles Levine, who propose a three level approach to identity analysis, focusing on society, interaction, and personality.[5] Building on this, I suggest that a key concept relating to identity formation and communication is that of value, specifically the interplay between individual and collective values. For this reason, the discussion that follows is based upon Herbert Blumer's model of symbolic interactionism, which suggests meaning is determined by both personal experience and social interaction, and it is this sense of meaning which determines how an individual will act towards something.[6] Identity, then, may be seen as a collection of constantly

1 Barker

2 Lawler

3 Deaux

4 Deaux

5 Cote and Levine

6 Blumer 2

evolving characteristics formed through the interplay of personal experiences, values, and social interaction, leading to a sense of self and belonging based on perceived shared values with a social group. Once established, this sense of identity will continue to evolve over time, and will be revealed to others to a greater or lesser extent as a result of a conscious act of curation on the part of the individual.

This article seeks to explore the ways in which tertiary music students form and develop a deeper understanding of their own unique identities, and how students may be encouraged to reflect upon and engage with this process. It focuses on the exploration and development of identity in the training and education of musicians within a higher education context. Following a brief introduction to identity in music, the discussion will move on to the processes of identity negotiation within higher education. Some of the factors influencing this process will be examined, both in 'normal' times and within the 'new normal' of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions. This will lead to a discussion of the way these have impacted the way in which students understand and explore their own identities. Following this, a number of recommendations will be presented, with accompanying examples from my own experience teaching critical thinking and contextual studies to tertiary music students, to suggest potential responses to some of the challenges faced by students today, while maintaining a non-prescriptive approach to these interventions, which can and should be tailored to fit individual context. Overall, the aim is to reassert, or perhaps reinforce, the importance of a focus on identity development in the training and education of performing artists.

Identity in Music

In his discussion of Portuguese fado music, Richard Elliot puts forward the suggestion that:

> the music is about the people [audience] themselves, but they desire to see others [performers and named individuals] representing them wishing to see themselves represented by those privileged, highlighted and floodlit actors[…] the request for representation of the community […] comes from within the community itself.[7]

[7] Elliot 89

Although his remarks referred to one specific form of music, it could be supposed that it is this need for representation which first gave birth to numerous other genres, whether the desire is for representation of the individual, the community, or the emotions experienced by these entities. This sense of connection via shared experiences or beliefs is the foundation of communities, and is inextricably linked with the notion of individual and collective identity. While there are other factors contributing to perceptions of and preferences for one artist over another, such as technical execution or particular aesthetic qualities, one only needs to look at media coverage to realise the amount of value placed upon the identities associated with individual artists. It is, in fact, identity which is often the mediating factor connecting performer and audience. As such, I suggest that an awareness and focus on identity should be seen as a vital component of any form of professional education or preparation for musicians.

However, just as musical skill and commercial success do not manifest overnight, neither is an identity born fully formed, in the spur of the moment. Given the amount of time devoted to the development and honing of these abilities, and the centrality of identity to every human interaction, it is necessary to understand the ways in which identity may be negotiated and developed by an individual. Furthermore, as the focus of this paper is the experience of undergraduates majoring in music, it is necessary to understand the particular way in which identity can (or may) be nurtured, formed, and communicated as part of the training received by every music student.

The Impact of COVID-19

The past two years have seen the emergence of a new challenge to identity negotiation. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a radical change in the way everyday tasks are approached, and this has been particularly significant within educational institutions. While the situation has evolved since the early days of the pandemic, and many universities are moving towards a more stable situation in which administrators and educators are able to plan and act, rather than implement the hurried reactions that were required in the early days of the crisis, the limitations and effects of the various precautionary measures are still prominent forces, and at the time of writing the situation is still unfolding. New forms of digital media and technology have quickly become ubiquitous, with terms such as 'Zoom' receiving new definitions in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.[8] In many ways, disruption has been kept to a minimum, with the rise of home-based learning apparently seeking to prevent the worst of the losses for students.

[8] Collins

However, despite living in an age of increasingly sophisticated technology, the effects of a sudden switch to a model of education and interaction which is predominantly digitally mediated are still significant; not only for content delivery and skill development, but also for the ongoing process of identity negotiation, "in the digital age, where students spend much of their time online, identity is […] moderated by their experiences in the online environment."[9] The sudden shift to online modes of teaching and learning, even when delivered synchronously, have undoubtedly had an effect on the experience of tertiary education. While the present paper does not seek to evaluate the effectiveness of online or blended learning approaches for teaching purposes, other elements of university life have taken a significant hit.

[9] Chang and Gomes 39

With a move away from face-to-face classes and campus life, social interactions no longer take into account notions of proximity. While it may be argued that there have long been forms of interaction taking place at a distance, whether through letter writing or telephone conversations, this is the first time in history that such distance has become the norm, with social interactions now entirely dependent on just two senses. This is further compounded by a drastic reduction of spontaneity. Whereas once students might have bumped into one another on campus, during the worst of the pandemic these third spaces were empty, depriving students of the opportunity for impromptu interactions, revelations, or genuinely organic encounters with fellow students or teaching faculty. Increasingly, social interaction takes place by schedule, with both

parties consulting their timetables before agreeing on an appointment for a video call.

The effects of this may vary from student to student, but as interactions become more limited, whether due to digitally enforced distance or the visual barrier of a mask, it becomes harder for individuals to relate to one another or understand one another. Students may, therefore, feel less certain of their own identities because they are less confident in their perception of others. Many interactions depend on a certain level of comfort and familiarity, which is built up over time and enables honest and open exchanges of ideas and sharing of experiences. Where that comfort is uncertain, these exchanges become more heavily and consciously curated, which in turn limits opportunities for exposure to alternative perspectives or for a respectful challenge of beliefs. This can result in a much narrower view and range of experiences, comparatively speaking, while potentially limiting the opportunity for artistic, intellectual, and personal growth.

Identity in Tertiary Music Education

One of the key assumptions underpinning this paper is the notion that a decision to study music at university level cannot, for most students, be written off as a purely pragmatic choice. It is likely that most music students see the value in such a course of study beyond simply that of obtaining an academic qualification, and as such they might wish not only to learn, but to develop and grow within their chosen field. This implies a certain investment in the discipline and an inclination to view music as a part of their personality. To put it another way, music goes beyond the 'doing,' and is a significant factor of the students' 'being.' In a study focusing on the link between identity formation and academic motivation among university students, Faye and Sharpe suggest that, "a sense of identity leads to intrinsic motivation in part because it provides university students with a solid base on which to build an enduring sense of self."[10] They argue that this is due to the motivational process which involves the individual seeing value in an activity because they are able to make it a central part of self. The study goes on to suggest that "a strong sense of self affects intrinsic academic motivation because a strong sense of self affects feelings of competence," which in turn contributes to the development of a connection between personal and professional identities.[11] In this way, a student who can form this kind of relationship between themselves and their own music is able to engage in a cyclical process of development in which identity feeds motivation, which in turn increases competence, and this reinforces the sense of self and identity.

It should not be assumed, however, that the development of identity is entirely determined by individual actions. Rather, identity is perceived, at least in part, as it relates to a wider sense of place and belonging in relation to others. Reed and Dunn draw upon a number of studies to suggest that "a sense of belonging in [higher education] relies on the development of connections and relationships with peers through positive social engagement and support."[12] Building on Blumer's symbolic interactionism, identity may be seen as interpreted and developed not in isolation but viewed in comparison with (or perhaps in opposition to) lived experiences within society. In his examination of identity formation

[10] Faye and Sharpe 196

[11] Faye and Sharpe 196

[12] Reed and Dunn

among undergraduates majoring in music education, McClellan defines social identity as "the portion of an individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group."[13] He goes on to cite Dolloff's account of the identity formation process, suggesting that "we construct a dynamic and evolving sense of who we are through our experiences and relationships to our environment, others, and the results of our actions."[14] The role of social interaction within the process is further emphasised through the suggestion that individuals choose to become members of certain cultures, after which they work to become familiar with the prevailing cultural norms and practices in order to shape and contribute to the cultural production of the group, and through this conscious act of identifying with a certain group, this membership becomes assimilated into the identity of the individual.[15] In this way, an individual is able to form a personally meaningful sense of identity based on a sense of belonging within a group they have chosen, which in turn is validated through active involvement and contribution. This results in a situation in which the individual does not simply feel as if they chose to join the group, but that they are bringing value to, and enriching, the group through their membership. However, when these social interactions are altered, impeded, or disrupted, there are potentially negative consequences for an individual's sense of self or identity. As such, it is important to recognise some factors which affect identity formation, both under normal circumstances and as they exist during the pandemic.

[13] McClellan 280

[14] qtd in McClellan 281

[15] McClellan 281

Factors Affecting Identity Formation

While the process of identity formation is an ongoing one, with each interaction contributing something to a student's sense of self and sense of belonging, the journey is not always a smooth one. While there may be occasional turning points—key moments in which a particular student is forced to re-examine certain beliefs they may have about themselves—these tend to vary from one individual to the next. There are, however, certain factors which may complicate the process of identity negotiation, or in some cases create a situation in which the need for such a process is heightened.

Transition Process

The first of these obstacles is encountered at the very beginning of the university experience. In their examination of identity formation among students transitioning to university for the first time, Scanlon et al. argue that identity is closely linked with context, and that the massive change in context precipitated by this transition "may result in feelings of loss, of 'displacement', and subsequent identity discontinuity," which in turn requires the individual to re-negotiate their identity within this new context.[16] This situation is exacerbated, they argue, by students' reliance on former experiences and knowledge from prior educational and practical experiences, which does not correspond with the reality of university life, and as such did not fully prepare them for the identity shift that would be required.[17] Students entering university for the first time, then, find themselves in a situation in which they must relearn many of the habits and behaviours they had previously relied upon. Faced with the opportunity to start a new chapter of their lives, this transition period is critical. For many, this is the first educational experience in

[16] Scanlon et al. 228

[17] Scanlon et al. 230

which they are able to exercise complete freedom of choice, selecting not only the subject they wish to study, but also the institution and, by extension, the culture into which they are entering. Furthermore, with some exceptions, this process takes place at the onset of adulthood, with each student able to draw upon a growing range of life experiences with greater maturity and self-awareness than any previous new beginning.

While the specific details of an individual's transition experience will be largely affected by the prevailing COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines in different parts of the world, the pandemic has undoubtedly affected this process. Some of the more obvious examples of this include online classes, which may sometimes be delivered asynchronously, limits on group sizes, and restrictions to social activities. The significance of these changes are magnified, however, by the fact that there has been no precedent for this new type of university experience. Students are no longer transitioning to a lifestyle they have seen depicted in popular media, or have heard of from acquaintances, but are faced with an entirely new situation. While certain elements, such as the role of assessment, may remain stable, many other experiences are either filtered or diluted as a result of health risk requirements, or in some cases changed entirely.

Role of Socio-Economic Status and Social Capital

For all the free agency experienced by new students, however, there are still some factors already in play over which they have little to no control. When considering factors which may facilitate or hinder the development of identity for students in higher education, Jensen and Jetten highlight the role of socio-economic status. They suggest that students entering university from backgrounds of higher socio-economic status (SES) have an advantage due to greater social capital, which they claim, "forms an important building block for the development of these identities in higher education."[18] Social capital, in this context, is defined as "the value derived from membership in social groups, social networks or institutions. Such membership gives individuals access to resources and collective understanding." They do clarify, however, that opportunities to form new social capital during a student's time at university will arise.[19] Despite these opportunities, it stands to reason that those students with greater social capital at the outset are likely to experience an advantage when it comes to identity formation, particularly in the early days and weeks of their course of study.

The importance of these early interactions for the formation of identity cannot be overlooked. Beyond the adage about only getting one chance at a first impression, the shift in mindset and behaviour required when first entering tertiary education can be a jarring shock to the system. The obvious changes include increased levels of independence and responsibility, higher academic standards and expectations, and in many cases even a geographical shift.

Jensen and Jetten's investigation into social capital also highlighted the importance of two main forms of social interaction with relation to identity formation—bonding interactions and bridging interactions. Bonding interactions are those which take place between socially homogeneous groups, such as students undertaking the same course of study, whereas bridging interactions are those involving diverse

[18] Jensen and Jetten 1

[19] Jensen and Jetten 1

individuals, illustrated in this study by interactions between students and lecturers. While presenting both forms of interaction as valuable opportunities for identity formation and development, their findings suggested that many students prioritised bonding social capital, which contributed to a sense of communal identity and stability through the strengthening of mutual support networks. However, the authors note that this can, at times, hinder students from seeking bridging opportunities either with students at higher course levels or with educators. As the students became more confident and established in their sense of shared identity, they were less inclined to seek connections beyond those groups, preventing them from forming new relationships and potentially missing out on opportunities for further academic and professional identity formation.[20]

[20] Jensen and Jetten 6

The importance of such varied social interactions was also apparent in the findings of McClellan's investigation into identity among music education majors. He lists a number of examples, including "undergraduate interactions with peers, music professors, music education professors, and ensemble directors in ensemble rehearsals, applied lessons, class meetings, and social settings in the music department," all of which reinforced students' self-concept.[21] This self-concept will form the basis of any self-perception of identity, which in the context of the music student, will ultimately play a part in the formulation and presentation of current and future artistic identities. The link between social capital and identity is further emphasised by James Côte who suggests that "social capital networks activate relational aspects of identity."[22]

[21] McClellan 289

[22] qtd in Weller

With regard to social capital, COVID-19 has caused two major disruptions. A full discussion of the first, which is the financial impact upon individuals and organisations, is beyond the scope of this paper, although this will certainly have been felt by students and their families who are facing financial restrictions, which at times necessitate a withdrawal from programmes of study. Beyond the economic effects, new measures have also placed restrictions upon social interactions of various types, thereby hindering efforts at bridging interactions. While this may change as regulations and recommendations are eased, in the early days of the pandemic interpersonal exchanges adopted a more formalised nature often taking place at a distance within the framework of digital communication software. This lack of proximity and spontaneity results in relationships and common understandings emerging much more slowly, which by extension affects the growth rate of any social or professional networks. Beyond the effect upon interactions between peers, this also feeds into the nature of interactions between students and faculty.

Interactions Within the Institution

Having now entered the tertiary institution of their choice, students find themselves in a situation where their concept of self-identity is potentially less stable than ever before, yet more important than ever. Depending on the nature of the institution and the students' prior experiences in the education system, it is quite likely that this is the first time a student may find themselves in an environment in which they can devote themselves almost entirely to the pursuit of a single discipline, such as music. Additionally, they are working and learning alongside an

entire community of supposedly like-minded individuals, sharing the same passion and devotion to a subject. And yet, such a situation is not without its challenges. The student becomes aware that they are about to spend several years among people they have never met before. Add to that the fact that seeing so many other practitioners of the same art up close can often cause the small differences in ability and understanding to block out the larger commonalities that bind and unite. While not without opportunity, it is easy to understand the reasons why Scanlon et al. describe the transition to university as a "loss experience."

The role of interactions with academic staff, in particular, was emphasised by Scanlon et al. who found that a major challenge for new students was rooted in their concept of the identity of the teacher. Previously, they suggested, teachers were simultaneously friend, confidante, supporter, and someone who developed a personal relationship and understanding with each student, visible as both professional and social beings. However, university lecturers and professors were seen as the antithesis of this—distant figures who saw each student as a number and as one face among many, "when students feel that they are only a number and the lecturer is no longer a friend, then they suffer identity displacement and a sense of loss for past learning situations."[23] They suggest this is made worse in environments where gaining physical access to the lecturer seems to be difficult. They clarify, however, that rather than pointing a finger of blame, this difficulty arises out of mismatched expectations: "students are not aware that lecturers are working within a neo-liberal set of practices and are struggling in many cases to develop a more research-based identity and so have less time for students."[24] Nevertheless, this perceived distance between learner and teacher can become an impediment in the student's desire to relate to, or identify with, influential industry practitioners.

[23] Scanlon et al. 232

[24] Scanlon et al. 233

The various demands upon educators' time and attention has only increased since the start of the pandemic. While most institutions have now moved beyond the initial rush of reactions to the virus, the process is nevertheless an ongoing one, with changing regulations leading to a desire to pre-emptively adapt courses and teaching materials, preparing for both digital and physical modes of delivery. Beyond this, many departments have recognised the need for heightened levels of pastoral care for students navigating the uncertain landscape. Similarly, there are fewer opportunities for impromptu exchanges between staff and students, either due to the emphasis on reduced proximity and face to face meetings or the use of online platforms which may discourage the former practice of students grabbing a moment with the lecturer after a class, to either ask for clarification or share a point of interest.

Identity Curation and Communication

While the processes discussed above may be referred to as identity formation or development, a more accurate term would be identity negotiation. This is a multifaceted process which involves not only discerning and establishing the various elements of an identity, but also places emphasis on the way that identity is presented and communicated. Swann and Bosson argue that this goes beyond simple self-presentation, which they define as a set of tactics designed to achieve interaction goals, but seeks a balance between fulfilment of

interaction goals and fulfilment of other identity-related goals such as independence or coherence.[25] Nevertheless, as in any other form of communication, consideration must be given not only to what is to be communicated, but also how it is communicated, how it is received, and how it is perceived. When the message being communicated is an individual's identity, this may be seen as communicating signs of unity or individuality. This communicative aspect of identity is highlighted by Thomas Turino, who dismisses the idea of complete unity within cultures or social groups. Rather than seeing identity as a fixed set of characteristics or behaviours for each individual, Turino emphasises the importance of recognising "how individuals within the same society group themselves and differentiate themselves from others along a variety of axes depending on the parts of the self that are salient for a given social situation."[26] In this way, the individual negotiates the balance between the various elements of themselves and the needs of any given situation or interaction.

[25] Swann and Bosson 449

[26] Turino 112

Turino suggests that a clear conception of the self and individual identity is vital for any examination or discussion of expressive cultural practices. Importantly, he distinguishes between the concepts of self and identity, due to the differences in the way they function.[27] The former, he argues, incorporates all aspects of the individual, including beliefs, habits, and behaviours, whereas the latter consists of a partial selection of habits and behaviours, specifically chosen for a given situation in order to represent oneself in a particular way.[28]

[27] Turino 101

[28] Turino 95

In this way, I propose that the communication of identity may be viewed as an act of conscious curation. The individual must consider what they choose to reveal in any given situation and to whom they reveal it. While I do not suggest any individual retains total control over the way in which others see them, this process nevertheless allows the individual a significant amount of curatorial influence. Just as a celebrity may keep elements of their personal life out of the public eye, so too does each individual construct multiple personae depending on the particular arena or social setting in which they find themselves. Each of these personae is carefully crafted to allow the individual to attain a certain end. These goals may be positive, in the form of achieving a certain goal, or may be more defensive in nature, such as maintaining a façade as a form of emotional protection. In this way, identities are constantly negotiated, providing room for growth and development while allowing the individual to retain control.

This curatorial act has become more prominent during the pandemic, largely as a result of an increase in digital communication. Students and educators alike are now able to decide not only how much of their face is seen on camera (or in some cases whether to turn it on at all), but also the context in which they are seen through the use of virtual backgrounds. Decisions regarding clothing choices are regulated by how much is visible on camera, and the mute button prevents the majority of comments and reactions reaching other students. While there are potential benefits to this enhanced ability to control the way one appears to others, the flipside is that this brings about fewer opportunities for individuals to perceive or understand the nuances of social or educational situations and norms.

Recommendations

The discussion so far has established that identity can be seen as a crucial part of the university experience and that it is a particularly important factor in the training and preparation of musicians. Undergraduates majoring in music will face frequent challenges and obstacles as they negotiate their identity, and the recent pandemic has only made this situation more challenging. Just as it is foolish to continue doing the same thing while expecting a different outcome, it has become clear that the new circumstances necessitate a different approach, not just to obtain a different result, but even to achieve the same outcome as before. Educators need to be sensitive to this process of negotiation and should provide opportunities to support students wherever possible. Below are some recommendations which may help facilitate a greater focus on identity among students. Each recommendation will be accompanied by a personal example of the way in which they have manifested in my own teaching practices while teaching modules focusing on contextual studies, critical thinking, and research to tertiary music students. These examples are intended to highlight just one possible application of these principles in my own context. As with all approaches to teaching, factors such as student and teacher personalities, needs, objectives, and institutional regulations should be the guiding principle. It should also be noted that while many of these approaches have come about during a time of pandemic, there is much to be said for continuing the emphasis on supporting student identity development beyond the current situation.

Interactions with Faculty

The role of social interaction in cultivating identities has already been established above. However, it should be remembered that this refers to any interaction between individuals and these can be particularly powerful when they take the form of a bridging interaction, such as an exchange between student and teacher. Scanlon et al. reported multiple findings that suggest students value such interactions highly, while feeling a sense of loss and anonymity when these connections are missing or lacking in some way.[29] Similarly, Linda Dam warns that digital content delivery may lead to a sense of isolation among students due to a perceived lack of contact and interaction with faculty, especially when classes are delivered asynchronously.[30] While there will always be professional boundaries, and of course lecturers are entitled to the privacy and control that comes with curation, an appropriate level of openness and familiarity is often welcomed by students. This is particularly beneficial in subjects such as music where many faculty members possess not only academic credentials, but also professional industry experience. As such, they will often be seen as figures occupying roles and having accumulated experiences which are an object of aspiration for their students. In this way, the lecturer is not simply an educator, but an example; they become role models and, as such, there is great value in students recognising such figures as relatable people, representing attainable goals.

In general, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of students pursuing further study in a subject such as music chose this path not only on the basis of some level of skill or ability, but also out of a genuine interest and passion. As such, they look not only to their peers,

[29] Scanlon et al. 235

[30] Dam

but also to their lecturers. Their past experiences have taught them that teachers can be accessible and, even when this may not seem to be the case, many students will often persevere, seeking not only information or education, but points of connection. While educators are by their nature in positions of authority they are also seen as experts in their field and this expertise lends credibility to their experiences and opinions, which may lead to a perceived value placed upon such thoughts.

I saw this for myself during an online class with some first-year diploma students. It was about half way through the first semester of their studies and, despite teaching them on a weekly basis, we had yet to have any face-to-face interaction. After a student made a passing reference to the value of 'world music,' I suggested that, if we are to engage fully in critical thinking, we should be prepared to question such terms as surely all music comes from somewhere in the world. The student sent me a private message asking to discuss it further after class and remained online for almost half an hour just to ask questions and share opinions.

What comes across as friendliness or inquisitiveness may actually be a manifestation of a search for commonality. By engaging in conversation about a topic that interests them, the student may be trying to build a sense of connection. This is not simply to regain the friendly teacher figure they knew from school, but is an act of engagement with someone whose position identifies them as a representative of a professional community. By choosing to study a specific major, the student is either indicating an aspiration to be seen as a member of that community, or is already identifying with it. Either way, this easily overlooked conversation is a conscious act of identity formation, in which the student is seeking validation or affirmation, looking for points of similarity that suggest or reinforce a sense of belonging.

Assessment

Beyond personal interaction, other areas of the students' learning experience can also be considered when looking for opportunities to encourage greater exploration of identity. Formative and summative assessment tasks, for example, are ripe with opportunity for students to explore what matters to them—whether this is a critical reflection on a performance, a journal relating to the classes undertaken in the course of the module, or even a task such as writing a blog post on an issue in which they have some sort of investment. Feedback, similarly, should validate and encourage this form of reflexivity. One of the most fruitful activities that came out of a recent module was when I asked students to write and share an artist statement. This not only required students to think in the abstract, but to engage with how they saw themselves and how they wished to be seen. Without exception, every student engaged in this activity and shared elements of their professional journey and identity. The lasting effect of this activity was revealed in the final assessment for the module, which was a reflective journal, in which a number of students made reference to either the specific activity or the process. Of course, academic and intellectual rigour can be encouraged and developed, but it should also be remembered that even academic research, at least within the arts, relies on a series of interpretations of ideas or evidence, with every interpretative act shaped by personal bias, beliefs, and experiences, all of which are tied inextricably to a sense of identity. While these interpretive acts are generally carefully considered

and well-informed, the subjective nature of artistic research is such that the identity of the individual will always play a part.

Establishing Sense of Community and Multiple Levels of Interaction

While the digital medium may be seen as filtering out some of the more interactive opportunities of the physical classroom, it is still possible to encourage identity negotiation when using digital platforms. Rachel Toor offers some suggestions for establishing a sense of community and building relationships in the context of classes taking place over Zoom or other synchronous video platforms. She emphasises the value of this, acknowledging that "students want to be seen, to know that we care about them, to be reminded that we understand that they're struggling."[31] While some of the suggestions made are intended to simplify logistics, many of the approaches serve to promote interaction among students, and between student and educator, encouraging engagement and participation within the bounds of each students' comfort level. One such strategy is making use of breakout rooms for small-group activities. This has an empowering effect on students, particularly those who may be reluctant to draw attention to themselves by speaking out in a larger group setting, while giving them the chance to make their voices heard. With the provision of this opportunity, students are encouraged to see their ideas and experiences as valid, allowing them to see themselves as contributing members of a society or group.

Another strategy suggested by Toor involves the use of the text-based chat box. Much like the breakout room activity, this offers a platform for students to respond and contribute without fighting to be heard over more dominant voices. She suggests that this approach adds an element of fun, particularly when students feel able to go beyond simply responding to questions and are free to react and converse with one another, much as they would when physically together.[32] There is much to be said for this kind of interaction as, beyond lightening the mood, it once again reinforces that sense of camaraderie common to shared membership of a social group. Taking this further, the chat box becomes a vital tool in the process of identity curation. Not only will it allow for the free and spontaneous reactions and responses that come with familiarity and comfort, it also offers students a chance to carefully select their words, crafting the message before hitting send in an act of self-reflection, simultaneously maintaining and communicating the identity they wish to be known. At times this may take the form of a carefully thought-out response to a question, other times it may be words of encouragement following another student's presentation. Beyond communication, the chat function also offers a way of protecting image and identity with the use of private messages, such as a request for clarification from a student who does not wish to be seen as struggling to understand, or a thoughtful or insightful response to a question from a student who wishes to be seen in a particular light. By offering students this way to contribute, I have seen increased engagement from many students, including those who are usually reluctant to speak up in a physical class. In this way, the digital environment is an improvement on face-to-face environments when it comes to identity, allowing for a particular type of connection and interaction, giving students more of a voice and a sense of belonging, while simultaneously allowing them greater control over how they are perceived.

31 Toor

32 Dam

Conclusion

In recent times, with disruptions to all forms of pedagogical rhythms, and the development of new rhythms arising out of necessity, the interruptions to content delivery and technical skill acquisition have been keenly felt and discussed. Indeed, many students may even believe, or voice the opinion, that the acquisition of technical skills is the fundamental purpose of higher education. Such views are, it seems, especially prevalent among those pursuing studies in subjects such as music, where technical ability and prowess are often the most visible application of one's education and expertise. However, this paper has argued that effective music education is founded not only on technique, but on an understanding and appreciation of the relationship between the musician and their music. Building on the work of Turino, this may be seen as the accumulation and development of self, leading to the curation and communication of an identity, whether authentic or constructed.

Hildegard Froehlich makes the following observation:

> Teaching music should always begin with "what makes my students tick." Although that is hard enough, even harder is perhaps to enable them from there on to explore and discover what is unfamiliar and new to them—something they can sink their teeth into and become increasingly better at doing… I nearly always found myself torn between roles of gatekeeper and gate opener.[33]

[33] qtd in Smith

We are in a situation now where, more than ever, there is a need to identify what makes our students tick. At the heart of this is the concept of identity. Weller asserts that educational institutions are "fundamentally influential in fostering social connections, and, therefore, are implicated in shaping identities."[34] Students and educators alike must be aware of the centrality of identity in every interaction. Each encounter, whether with an idea, an experience, or an individual, is an act of identity negotiation, and within the university environment, students are faced with daily opportunities to explore and express their identities. Going forward, we need not only to open the gates, but equip our students with the understanding to discover how to find and open gates for themselves. While the rhythms of daily life and education may have been disrupted, we are able to enable the establishment of new rhythms. The foundation of these new rhythms requires stability, and the varied experiences of the global pandemic have shown us that stability looks different for each individual. The realities of COVID-19 make no distinctions between individuals, yet each views and experiences the situation slightly differently. In a similar way, the fundamental elements of music are recognised and accepted by musicians and students within the same tradition, but the true value comes from enabling our students to explore and create experiences and meaning, using shared tools, but in a way that is specific to their own situation, in other words, their own identity.

[34] Weller

References

Barker, Chris. *The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies*. E-Book, SAGE
    Publications, 2004.

Blumer, Herbert. *Symbolic Interactionism*. Prentice-Hall, 1969.

Chang, Shanton, and Catherine Gomes. "International Student Identity and
    the Digital Environment." *Learning across Cultures: Locally and Globally*,
    edited by B Kappler Mikk and I. E. Steglitz, NAFSA and Stylus Publishing,
    2017, pp. 39–62.

Collins, Barry. "Zoom Zings Into The Oxford Dictionary Words Of The Year."
    Forbes, Nov 23 2020, https://www.forbes.com/sites/barrycollins/2020/11/23/
    zoom-zings-into-the-oxford-dictionary-words-of-the-year/?sh=2342faaa465.

Cote, James, and Charles Levine. *Identity Formation, Youth, and Development*.
    E-Book, Taylor & Francis, 2015.

Dam, Linda. "Pandemic Pedagogy: Disparity in University Remote Teaching
    Effectiveness." *Online Teaching and Learning in Higher Education during
    COVID-19: International Perspectives and Experiences*, edited by Roy Y.
    Chan et al., E-Book, Routledge, 2021.

Deaux, Kay. "Models, Meanings and Motivations." *Social Identity Processes*,
    edited by Dora Capozza and Rupert Brown, E-Book, 2000.

Elliot, Richard. *Fado and the Place of Longing: Loss, Memory and the City*.
    Ashgate, 2010.

Faye, Cathy, and Donald Sharpe. "Academic Motivation in University: The Role
    of Basic Psychological Needs and Identity Formation." *Canadian Journal of
    Behavioural Science*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2008, pp. 189–99.

Jensen, Dorthe H., and Jolanda Jetten. "Bridging and Bonding Interactions in
    Higher Education: Social Capital and Students' Academic and Professional
    Identity Formation." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 6, 2015, pp. 1–11.

Lawler, Steph. *Identity*. E-Book, Wiley, 2014.

McClellan, Edward. "Undergraduate Music Education Major Identity Formation
    in the University Music Department." *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music
    Education*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2014, pp. 279–309.

Reed, Jack, and Catherine Dunn. "Life in 280 Characters: Social Media,
    Belonging, and Community during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Online
    Teaching and Learning in Higher Education during COVID-19: International
    Perspectives and Experiences*, edited by Roy Y. Chan et al., E-Book,
    Routledge, 2021.

Scanlon, Lesley, et al. "'You Don't Have like an Identity… You Are Just Lost in a
    Crowd': Forming a Student Identity in the First-Year Transition to University."
    Journal of Youth Studies, vol. 10, no. 2, 2007, pp. 223–41.

Smith, Gareth Dylan. "Popular Music Education: Identity, Aesthetic Experience,
    and Eudaimonia." *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Popular Music Education:
    Perspectives and Practices*, edited by Zack Moir et al., E-Book, Bloomsbury
    Academic, 2019.

Swann, W. B., and J. K. Bosson. "Identity Negotiation: A Theory of Self and
    Social Interaction." *Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research*, edited
    by O. P. John et al., The Guilford Press, 2008, pp. 448–71.

Toor, Rachel. "Turns Out You Can Build Community in a Zoom Classroom." *The
    Chronicle of Higher Education*, https://www.chronicle.com/article/turns-out-
    you-can-build-community-in-a-zoom-classroom. Accessed 8 Oct. 2021.

Turino, Thomas. *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*. Chicago UP, 2008.

Weller, Susie. "Young People's Social Capital: Complex Identities, Dynamic
    Networks." *Young People, Social Capital and Ethnic Identity*, edited by
    Tracey Reynolds, E-Book, Routledge, 2011.

Shifting Pedagogies: Critical Reflections on Teaching Dance Improvisation Online

Keeping the Distance - Introduction

Lockdown, circuit breaker, and social distancing are some of the words and notions of disruption that became a lived reality for people around the globe in 2020 and much of 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused us to change regular rhythms and altered movement patterns in everyday life. The symmetry of work, relationships, and routine activities were severely unsettled with few answers to questions of when it will end, or when the new normal might begin. Our bodies were made to spatially distance, which may be more accurately described as physical distancing defined by mathematical measures taking the form of metres or the number of people we were allowed to meet, rather than social distancing which could be overcome through the use of technology. These circumstances subsequently had severe impacts on tertiary dance education in Singapore and globally.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that traditional notions of teaching and learning in tertiary dance education at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) were halted for several months. Dance lessons that would normally take place in a studio setting were either replaced by homework or moved online. As a consequence of these shifts in delivering the learning objectives, educators were unexpectedly forced to learn and improvise with digital media and enact a fundamental shift in the way they communicated and interacted with students. In other words, all of a sudden, tertiary dance education took place via laptops and desktop computer screens which subsequently heavily influenced the accessibility and fluidity of dance learning, creation, and performance.

At NAFA, this was followed by the implementation of blended methods of teaching and learning towards the end of 2020, where on some days lessons were taught online, and on other days a limited number of students could take part in face-to-face teaching within a restricted dance studio setting at the academy. While using digital media in dance learning, exploration, dance creation and performance practices is not at all new in the 21st century, it was imposed upon dance educators as the only way - albeit temporarily - forward within the given circumstances of COVID-19.

Communication in dance learning, creation, performance and movement exploration naturally includes physical expression and the use of our human senses while training, exploring or performing together.[1] It also

includes facial expressions, haptic communication and the use of space to communicate and interact with each other.[2] This is especially the case in dance improvisation lessons. Wearing face masks and not being able to have any physical contact, due to COVID-19 restrictions imposed at that time by Singapore's Ministry of Health, limited students' abilities to connect and understand facial or even verbal queues in communicating with each other. From a pedagogical perspective, this has created challenges and opportunities simultaneously. How, for example, can we achieve and deliver dance improvisation curriculum objectives while dealing with the inability to read each other's facial expressions, the incapacity of students to experience any physical contact, and the lack of opportunity to learn and explore dance in a collective space?

In the following paragraphs I critically reflect, analyse, and discuss how my approach to teaching and learning has shifted and changed throughout the process of planning and delivering dance improvisation lessons online in late 2020. I begin with a short definition of what I am referring to as dance improvisation and the use of self-study research as a method for inquiry.[3] This is followed by a reflection and analysis of challenges I faced during the initial planning and implementation phase for the online lessons, and how these challenges created new opportunities for interdisciplinary learning. I conclude the paper by discussing the learning outcomes and new skill sets students have been able to acquire, as well as the pedagogical benefits I have been able to gain by expanding my own teaching dexterities and practices.

Improvisation and New Learning Environments

Dance improvisation combines the creation and execution of bodily movement instantaneously. The movement creation by dancers or dance students thereby originates without any pre-planning.[4] Blom and Chaplin explain dance improvisation as a "creative movement of the moment" and method "of tapping the stream of the subconscious without intellectual censorship, allowing spontaneous and simultaneous exploring, creating and performing" of dance to take place.[5]

Exploring bodily movement possibilities through improvisation can also break "culturally determined taboos about body boundaries and personal space.[6] For example, in dance improvisation individuals can physically experience how to communicate through sensing others, as well as exploring how their bodies react to touch and being touched as a way of non-verbal communication. In turn, this process can lead to an increase in bodily and psychological comfort in individuals.[7] During the process of teaching dance improvisation online, students were not able to experience these notions of bodily interaction within a shared space.

Student's learning environments play an important part in the action of, reaction to, and interaction between individuals in dance improvisation as well.[8] In other words, in dance improvisation lessons students can realise the "embeddedness of thought in experience as it emerges" during and through their physical interactions and in relation to the environment that surrounds them.[9] Whether they are in a dance studio or exploring their moving bodies as a response to a particular site within an urban environment, for example, can play a part in stimulating their interactions.

[2] Blom and Chaplin 6; Brown 75; Matzdorf and Ramen 113

[3] Garbett and Ovens 13; LaBoskey 817; Sahin and Shelley 108

[4] Burrows 25; Lavender and Predock-Linnell 195

[5] Blom and Chaplin 6

[6] Blom and Chaplin 22

[7] Cooper Albright and Gere 260

[8] Carter and O'Shea 1; Brown and Hannah 261

[9] Davidson 198

While improvisation students would naturally interact through their moving bodies, the COVID-19 pandemic, and its ensuing need to shift teaching and learning to online platforms, made these physical and simultaneous spatial explorations impossible. Needless to say, this has created various challenges for student learners, such as accessibility, spatial, and motivational challenges while learning in their homes. It also created numerous challenges from an educator's perspective. These include overcoming obstacles in achieving the learning objectives, as well as the need to adjust the way I communicate lesson content to students. In hindsight, these experiences led me to critically reflect on my approaches to teaching and learning in tertiary dance education in general.

Endorsing Self-Study Research

One of the initial questions that came to my mind after a circuit breaker lockdown was announced by the government of Singapore from April to June 2020 was: how could dance improvisation be taught via a laptop or desktop computer? I also asked myself how I would be able to deliver the curriculum objectives and learning outcomes of NAFA's Dance Programme regarding dance improvisation. Discussions with local colleagues and other dance pedagogues from around the globe revealed that they were asking themselves similar questions.

Teaching dance improvisation is complex and requires trust and empathy in the interactions between student learners and lecturers.[10] Hence, stepping into the mostly unfamiliar realm of online teaching required me to find opportunities to maintain a trusting and empathetic exchange with students, as well as overcoming some cognitive and emotional barriers in planning and delivering dance improvisation coursework online. These barriers mostly existed due to the firm belief that dance and dance improvisation can only be taught in-depth with students and lecturers being physically present within a given learning environment, such as a dance studio. However, as this was no longer feasible during that early point of the pandemic I needed to overcome these thoughts in order to be able to expand on my teaching skills and practices.

[10] Davidson 197; Jordan and Schwartz 25

I subsequently started to reflect on cognitive and emotional aspects alongside previous teaching experiences during the planning and ensuing online teaching processes. Existing literature on self-study research and various teaching practices were thereby beneficial.[11] For example, I critically analysed how teaching online is or can be different to being physically present within a studio teaching context.[12] Moreover, I explored how dance improvisation online lessons can be taught in various ways while also emphasising NAFA's curriculum objectives. This included the importance of providing students an enriching teaching and learning experience. I noted these thoughts and ideas in a research journal in which I regularly reflected upon my teaching practices.

[11] Fried et al. 415; Ham and Kane 103; Robertson 13; Vanassche and Kelchtermans 100
[12] Schwartz and Snyder-Duch 7; Puritz Cook 67

The regular reflection on my thoughts, ideas and teaching experiences subsequently led me to overcome the initial challenges I addressed above. In other words, self-study research helped me to transform my thinking about teaching dance improvisation online.[13] It has also helped me to expand on my teaching practices in ways I could not foresee prior to the need to shift to online teaching and learning.

[13] Papadopoulou 1

From a different perspective, the use of self-study research to critically reflect on my teaching practices has enabled me to uncover thoughts and emotions that can also be perceived as a form of qualitative data informing this research.[14] I explain more on these thoughts and findings in what follows.

[14] Loughran 271; Pinnegar and Hamilton 103; Trumbull 1211

Overcoming Challenges

Shifting away from teaching dance improvisation within a studio context entails overcoming curriculum delivery challenges, accessibility and technical issues, spatial challenges, and at times motivational challenges where some students became uninterested in part due to the lack of social interaction during the home-based learning period. I explain these challenges in greater detail below.

Curriculum Delivery

The aims and objectives of the Dance Improvisation module at NAFA's Dance Programme include the development of creative skills through structured and guided movement explorations. Over the duration of their studies, students get to experience various approaches to dance improvisation while an openness to sensitivity and responsible movement exploration is emphasised. Demonstrating safe dance practices, as well as being compassionate when working with others, is also reflected in the anticipated learning objectives of the academy.

Furthermore, the dance curriculum expects students to display an ability to apply and maintain corrections given by their lecturers, as well as developing a capacity to discover their personal voice during dance improvisation. Teaching and learning strategies to achieve these aims and objectives include practical improvisation exercises, studio observations, peer discussions, the use of audio-visual material, and formative feedback by lecturers.

While most of these curriculum objectives are arguably common practice in tertiary dance education, these were created based on the assumption that students and lecturers are physically present while the teaching and learning process takes place. As COVID-19 restrictions required learning to take place online, my colleagues and I faced the challenge of addressing and delivering these learning objectives while making online learning in dance improvisation interesting and accessible for all students.

Creating Accessible Learning

Some of the most challenging issues to consider while shifting to online teaching was to create accessible learning for all students. This included reflections on how improvisation exercises may be structured and subsequently be undertaken by students within the spatial constraints of their homes. For example, while some students live in, or have access to, large spaces where they can easily move around and dance safely, other students live in small spaces with little room to safely explore their moving bodies. I did not know about any individual student's circumstances regarding their new or makeshift learning environments until after the first online dance improvisation lesson. This made it

Fig. 1 NAFA dance alumni Aloysius Tang improvising at his Singapore home, 2021.
Photo: Aloysius Tang

initially challenging to plan exercises that are in line with curriculum objectives as well as safe dance practices.

Another salient issue to consider was students' access to digital media and electronic devices. While more affluent students own laptop computers, have high-speed internet access, and possess the most up to date mobile phones and software, other students had to deal with internet connectivity issues or a lack of access to sophisticated computer hardware. While I was not aware of every student's socioeconomic background, during the very short planning stage before moving to online learning, I did know that every student has a smart phone with video recording capabilities. I thus decided to try and make use of this common denominator in order to create equal learning opportunities for all students throughout the course.

Moreover, I decided to incorporate the use of video recording as one of the main tools to help students explore dance and the moving body, record and share their movement experiences, and to subsequently reflect on their learning through discussions with their peers as this is in line with the curriculum objectives. In general, students very much enjoyed this somewhat unusual approach to dance improvisation lessons, though over the duration of the semester some motivational challenges started to emerge.

Motivating and Engaging Students

As mentioned above, some students had little room to move while learning from home. In most instances, these learners were also the ones with internet connectivity issues. Based on my observations and

reflecting on feedback from students, I assumed that the combination of spatial challenges and connectivity issues led to a lack of motivation to learn in some students.

Another concern that led to motivational challenges was the lack of physical interaction between students during lesson time, but also outside of regular curriculum hours. As Singapore's population was legally required to stay at home due to COVID-19 restrictions over a prolonged period of time, students were feeling somewhat unmotivated to learn on some days as there was no end to the pandemic in sight and feelings of being physically isolated started to play their part.

The sum of these challenges subsequently led me to think, reflect, and re-imagine how I could facilitate online learning while also delivering the curriculum objectives in Dance Improvisation. Moreover, I asked myself how I could make online learning interesting, accessible, inclusive, and yet challenging enough to make students curious to learn more about what dance is or what dance could be.

Finding and Creating Opportunities

The need to overcome curriculum, accessibility, and motivational issues naturally opened the door to exploring new possibilities in teaching dance improvisation. The initial thought, and probably fear, I had was how dance improvisation could practically be taught online while also taking these issues into account. Rather than just teaching about dance improvisation and the underlying theoretic principles, some of which are discussed above, I wanted to find a way to let students physically explore their actions and reactions to given tasks and subsequently analyse and discuss these with their peers within a group setting.

In general, I did not change any content that I would normally include in dance improvisation lessons throughout a semester. The improvisation lesson content includes, for example, the physical experience and exploration of Rudolf von Laban's movement qualities to develop students' body awareness, the exploration of space and differing places with and through the moving body, playing with varying movement motifs, examining different cultural dance forms and their approaches to movement exploration, creation and performance, as well as looking at differing music genres in order to discover how our bodies can become the visual aspect of music by physically portraying what we hear, or to distort music in order to provoke actions or reactions in an audience. These topics can be taught online and practised while learning from home. What differs in comparison to studio teaching and learning, however, was the way students communicate with each other, as well as how students and I interacted throughout the process.

Transforming Communication

Under normal circumstances, dance improvisation lessons take place in one of the dance studios at NAFA. Occasionally students and I would also visit other spaces and places on campus in order to develop and explore site-specific dance improvisation. Whether students improvise at a site-specific location or in a dance studio context, the communication that takes place during these lessons includes verbal communication, the use

of bodily senses, and physical touch between students. As shifting dance improvisation lessons online did not enable students to use their bodily senses or touch as ways of interaction, I needed to find differing notions to not replace but to facilitate methods or create spaces where some lively virtual interactions among students could take place.

I therefore split students into several groups who worked together in separate breakout rooms on Zoom. Each of these groups then discussed given tasks and decided how each individual student would undertake an improvisation exercise in their home. Each student was tasked to video record themselves with their mobile phone, and to subsequently share their improvisation exercise with their group members to reflect and discuss their thoughts and experiences. At the end of every lesson, one student from each group shared their video recorded improvisation exercise with all other groups. After students shared their videos, I started to facilitate discussions on the learning content and their thoughts and understanding about their moving bodies, but also on the way they documented themselves via video recordings throughout the process.

The short video recordings by each individual student subsequently served as a source of reflection on their own learning. It also served as a way to share what everyone achieved during an online lesson in their respective homes. By using this approach to teaching and learning within this context I aimed to address various educational objectives, such as accommodating different learners' needs and stimulating the creative potential of students through interdisciplinary learning.[15] Using this approach to teaching and learning also enabled me to address NAFA's curriculum objectives.

[15] Carbonell et al. 29; Garrison and Kanuka 95; Khalil and Elkhider 147

Over the duration of the semester, students accumulated a number of video excerpts that eventually became a video diary of their dance improvisation learning journey. As part of recording their learning progress, I also asked students to take it a step further and think about how they could use the camera in different ways while filming. This was aimed to foster what students explore, or what they are trying to communicate through bodily movement and spatial exploration. At the end of the semester each student was then tasked to present a three to five minute short film that incorporated some of the module content with their recorded learning journey. While I did not grade the short film as part of the Dance Improvisation module, using this approach to teaching and learning enabled me to address all curriculum objectives on one hand, while on the other hand opening up new dimensions for interdisciplinary learning.

Interdisciplinary Learning

The use of video recording and sharing helped to bridge the spatial divide between the students and I. In turn, it also opened up opportunities to learn about the moving body from entirely different perspectives. Rather than concentrating on exploring a given motif through bodily movement within the context of a dance studio, students were practising in their homes which are very different spaces and places. For example, each student's home consists of different dimensions, textures, light, and sounds, which added various scopes to the form of a dancer's bodily movements. It also added numerous possibilities on how to capture and record movement and dance by means of film.

By using video recording as a method to capture, share, and reflect upon dance improvisation lessons during the pandemic, I was able to make the learning journey equally accessible for all students, regardless of their socio-economic background. This was vitally important to me as I, in line with Eeva Anttila, Mariana Siljamäki, and Nicholas Rowe, as well as Charis-Olga Papadopoulou, amongst others, perceive the role of educators to be at the forefront of promoting inclusive teaching and learning.[16]

[16] Anttila et al. 609; Papadopoulou 1

While integrating technologies in education might be challenging in some respects, such as with regard to the nature of dance as a subject of study, it does create opportunities by making education accessible and potentially engaging.[17] Moreover, using video as a means to capture, share, and reflect upon the student learning journeys also enabled me to adhere to the core principles and values of inclusive education. The student feedback about this approach to teaching and learning was very positive throughout the semester.

[17] Hargis 3

Over time, practising dance improvisation at home and video recording the exercises started to become both somewhat familiar and yet remained a very unique experience for students. As each individual's home added its own dimension to dance and the moving body, I encouraged students to also explore how and to what extent they could use different camera angles and camera movements while recording their dance improvisation exercises. The ensuing editing work with the film material subsequently opened up new learning opportunities beyond the art of dance itself.

Perspective Taking

It was very interesting to note that while the students I was working with are very versatile in dance improvisation and creative in dance making for performances on a theatre stage, they perceived it as challenging to see dance from different perspectives to that of dance studio or theatrical settings. I thus asked myself, how I could get students to explore different perspectives on bodily movement, dissimilar spatial dimensions, and varying textures of light, for example. I also asked myself how I could teach students to take the spectator's point of view; in other words, how could they learn to see through the eyes of a viewer?

To gradually untangle students' confusion about how they could film their moving bodies from different angles and perspectives, I first suggested recording themselves from three different camera angles without any camera movement and by improvising with the same given movement task. Students could also ask to get recorded by one of their family members if they wished to do so. The considerations students had to emphasise included how different camera angles can change or influence the way a viewer may understand improvised movement material, how the spatial positioning of the moving body within a room can affect its mode of expression, and what influence different textures of light may have to the meaning of movement. Very bright light near a window in combination with some enthusiastic and fast movement may suggest a very happy person enjoying the sunshine, for example, while a very slow moving body in a dark and shady corner may point to some suspicious or sad movement expressions.

This exercise was then repeated by students with their cameras being required to either zoom in or zoom out while filming a dance improvisation exercise from each of the three respective angles. The final two steps were to allow the camera to travel while filming the moving body, and to zoom in or zoom out as the camera was travelling along various spatial pathways while recording the dancer moving in her or his respective place and space. The film material that students collected over the duration of the semester subsequently required editing to create their final product, a short dance film.

The exploration of dance through the lens of a camera added an additional perspective to the teaching and learning in dance improvisation. This interdisciplinary approach also added very personal dimensions to students' works, which in turn required me to provide students with personal feedback. In line with existing research on the benefits of providing students with positive feedback about their ideas and achievements, students appeared to be more motivated, confident, and determined to master given tasks after receiving positive personal feedback about their learning.[18] The feedback I provided for each individual student encompassed a mix of written and verbal formative feedback throughout the semester.

[18] Ani 134; Deci et al. 627; Kennette and Chapman 2; Rowe 343

Learning Technology

As mentioned above, the video material that students collected over the duration of the semester was thought to serve as a starting point to create a short dance film. While I did not grade the dance film as part of the improvisation module, I did perceive the creation of the individual

dance films as an important learning goal and in a sense tangible learning outcome at the end of the semester.

Most of the dance students, as well as myself, had only very modest knowledge and experience in film editing prior to the discussed semester. I therefore encouraged students to share their ideas and experiences with various video editing software during online discussions at the end of some of the improvisation lessons. In hindsight, I was more than positively surprised by how eagerly and passionately the vast majority of students engaged in these dialogues, as well as in the post-production work for their dance films.

The topics that were deliberated during these discussions included matters concerning the improvement of camera work, which editing software was preferable, as well as how to add music and adjust soundscapes in relation to the visual material. The learning about these technology issues was an additional bonus to the teaching and learning practices in dance improvisation.

Overcoming the challenges of not knowing where to start with teaching and learning dance improvisation online led to what Deirdre Ní Chróinín, Tim Fletcher, and Mary O'Sullivan describe as "pedagogical innovation."[19] In other words, the restriction and need to shift to online education has actually helped the emergence of new pathways in teaching and learning dance improvisation by fusing the learning process with another discipline, video/film making. Moreover, while I did not know how to teach dance improvisation online at first, I did find one possible pathway through critically reflecting on established teaching and learning methods and the subsequent search for strategies to create an engaging and challenging learning process despite COVID-19 restrictions being put in place. I thereby needed to embrace the use of technology and change my somewhat routine teaching and learning practices.

[19] Chróinín et al. 273

Embracing Change - Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic created opportunities to expand on well-established teaching and learning practices in tertiary dance education at NAFA and beyond. It also paved the way to critically reflect on and challenge my own pedagogy through the use of self-study research as a method of inquiry. This analysis subsequently helped to expand my capabilities and pedagogic practices in teaching dance and dance improvisation.

While the existing dance curriculum at NAFA sets the guidelines and establishes what learning outcomes students should be able to achieve within this module, I found one possible pathway to realise these aims and objectives while delivering the module online instead of in a dance studio. More explicitly, I created an interdisciplinary learning process by using video recording as a notion to capture, share, and reflect upon dance improvisation lessons during the isolation brought about by the pandemic. Observing students' engagement during the learning process and reflecting on the learning outcomes and approach to teaching I took during the semester, it can be argued that while not without its challenges, teaching dance improvisation online can be beneficial for students' learning journeys in tertiary dance education.

One benefit of teaching and learning dance improvisation online is the opportunity to develop new skill sets. For example, home-based learning helped students to think in different spatial dimensions by exploring the moving body from very different perspectives to that of well-established teaching and learning practices within a dance studio setting. While dance studios provide a blank canvas that students can draw on with their moving bodies to create shapes, pathways, and moving images, dancing at home requires students to negotiate the space with other objects and living species, such as chairs, sofas, or sometimes even their pets. They therefore had to analyse and solve such spatial challenges in order to fulfil the learning tasks. The challenge for me as the facilitator of the learning process was to guide students virtually instead of being physically present during the lessons. This shift in the approach to education was, retrospectively, an enriching experience.

Another skill set students acquired was interdisciplinary learning. In addition to using video recording as a means to capture, share, and reflect upon dance improvisation lessons by each individual, students learned how to plan, create, and subsequently edit moving images that portray dance as a way of expressing diverse connotations. Moreover, while commencing with the collection of short exercises that were filmed from different angles and perspectives by students themselves or one of their household members, the film material finally amounted to what can be seen as a dance improvisation diary of their home-based learning journey. Students later edited their film material to create a short dance film on their own as an additional learning outcome of the Dance Improvisation module.

At the core of dance and dance improvisation is the communication and expression of meaning through the moving body. Movement can thereby be created as a response to a feeling or sensual understanding. Listening and reacting to one's senses is also a crucial part in the communication between dancing individuals, and arguably between individuals in general. Shifting dance improvisation lessons online meant that the physical distance that the use of technology created required students to find different modes of communication to that of physically sensing each other. Discussions students and I had after various online improvisation lessons revealed that not being able to physically sense others actually helped students to develop a better awareness of this vital notion of communication. In other words, the distance to others helped students to become more aware of themselves and reconnect with their senses. This learning outcome was a somewhat unexpected benefit of learning online.

Throughout the process of teaching and learning online it was important to provide students with guidance and ongoing positive formative feedback about their development in dance improvisation and their overall studies. The lack of social interaction with peers that normally occurs on campus during an academic year appeared to be one reason why some students seemed to occasionally become demotivated or uninterested to learn and achieve. I therefore perceived it as vital to reserve some time at the end of every lesson to facilitate group discussions during which students could share their thoughts and experiences while learning from home. Besides talking about the learning content, these conversations were also important to stay connected during this challenging time.

Dance learning, dance teaching, or simply dancing is a process that does not only require a bit of physical space for people to move their bodies. Dance is arguably also a social process in which people move together for reasons of joy, excitement, or as a way of challenging each other. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our daily routines and altered some of our regular life rhythms. This was particularly so for tertiary dance education where learning from home was no longer optional due to the pandemic. In fact, it was the only way forward for dance education during much of 2020 and 2021. The use of technology helped to overcome some of these disruptions.

Using technology to teach and learn is not new or uncommon. While the use of technology in tertiary dance education is arguably here to stay, some of the questions that need to be addressed by educators and future research include what impact online learning may have on the physical development and training of dance students in the long term, as well as how the awareness of people's feelings and sensual connections may be impacted by the lack of physical presence in online learning. While change is inevitable, and the arts are arguably a driving force for change and advancement in society, it is important to be mindful about the long-term impacts shifting pedagogies might cause in tertiary dance education.

References

Ani, Asryan. "Positive Feedback Improves Students' Psychological and Physical Learning Outcomes." *Indonesian Journal of Educational Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2019, pp. 134-143.

Anttila, Eva, et al. "Teachers as Frontline Agents of Integration: Finnish Physical Education Students' Reflections on Intercultural Encounters." *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, vol.23. no. 6, 2018, pp. 609-622.

Blom, Lynne Anne, and Tarin Chaplin. *The Moment of Movement: Dance Improvisation.* Dance Books, 2000.

Brown, Carol. "Spacing Events: Charting Choreo-Spatial Dramaturgies." *Artistic Approaches to Cultural Mapping: Activating Imaginaries and Means of Knowing*, edited by Nancy Duxbury et al., 2019, pp. 75-91.

Brown, Carol, and Dorita Hannah. "Tongues of Stone: Making Space Speak... Again and Again." *Playing with Theory in Theatre Practice*, edited by Julia Listengarten et al., 2011, pp. 261-280.

Burrows, Jonathan. *A Choreographer's Handbook.* Routledge, 2010.

Butterworth, Jo. "Teaching Choreography in Higher Education: A Process Continuum Model." *Research in Dance Education*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2004, pp. 45-67.

Butterworth, Jo, and Liesbeth Wildschut. *Contemporary Choreography: A Critical Reader.* Routledge, 2009.

Carbonell, Katerina Bohle, et al. "Unleashing the Creative Potential of Faculty to Create Blended Learning." *The Internet and Higher Education*, vol. 1, no. 19, 2013, pp. 29-37.

Carter, Alexandra, and Janet O'Shea. *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader.* 2nd ed., Routledge, 2010.

Cooper Albright, Ann, and David Gere. *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader.* Wesleyan University Press, 2003.

Davidson, Judith. "Embodied Knowledge: Possibilities and Constraints in Arts Education and Curriculum." *Knowing Bodies, Moving Minds*, edited by Liora Bresler, Springer, 2004, pp. 197-212.

Deci, Edward, et al. "A Meta-Analytic Review of Experiments Examining the
Effects of Extrinsic Rewards and Intrinsic Motivation." *Psychological Bulletin*,
vol. 125, no. 6, 1999, pp. 627-668.

Fried, Leanne, et al. "Teacher Emotion Research: Introducing a Conceptual
Model to Guide Future Research." *Issues in Educational Research*, vol. 25,
no. 4, 2015, pp. 415–441.

Garbett, Dawn, and Alan Ovens. *Enacting Self-Study as Methodology for
Professional Inquiry.* Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices, 2016.

Garrison, Randy, and Heather Kanuka. "Blended Learning: Uncovering Its
Transformative Potential in Higher Education." *The Internet and Higher
Education*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2004, pp. 95-105.

Ham, Vince, and Ruth Kane. "Finding a Way through the Swamp: A Case for
Self-Study as Research." *International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching
and Teacher Education Practices*, edited by J. John Loughran et al., Springer,
2004, pp. 103-150.

Hargis, Jace. "What Is Effective Online Teaching and Learning in Higher
Education?" *Academia Letters*, Article 13, 2020.

Jordan, Judith, and Harriet Schwartz. "Radical Empathy in Teaching." *Teaching
and Emotion*, edited by Harriet L. Schwartz and Jennifer Snyder-Duch,
Jossey-Bass, 2018, pp. 25-36.

Kennette, Lynne, and Morgan Chapman. "Providing Positive Student Feedback
in an Online Environment." *Academia Letters*, Article 203, 2021. https://doi.
org/10.20935/AL203.

Khalil, Mohammed, and Ihsan Elkhider. "Applying Learning Theories and
Instructional Design Models for Effective Instruction." *Advances in Physiology
Education*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2016, pp. 147-156.

Krathwohl, David, and Lorin Anderson. *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching,
and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.*
Longman, 2009.

Laban, Rudolf. *Choreutics.* Macdonald & Evans, 1966.

Laban, Rudolf. *The Mastery of Movement.* 4th ed., MacDonald & Evans, 1996.

LaBoskey, Vicky Kubler. "The Methodology of Self-Study and Its Theoretical
Underpinnings." *International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and
Teacher Education Practices*, edited by J. John Loughran et al., Springer,
2004, pp. 817-869.

Lavender, Larry, and Jennifer Predock-Linnel. "From Improvisation to
Choreography: The Critical Bridge." *Research in Dance Education*, vol. 2, no.
2, 2001, pp. 195-209.

Loughran, John. "Professionally Developing as a Teacher Educator." *Journal of
Teacher Education*, vol. 65, no. 4, 2014, pp. 271-283.

Matzdorf, Fides, and Sen Ramen. "Demanding Followers, Empowered Leaders:
Dance as a 'Embodied Metaphor' for Leader-Follower-Ship." *Organizational
Aesthetics*, vol. 5, no. 1, Dec. 2016, pp. 113-128.

Ní Chróinín, Déirdre, et al. "Using Self-Study to Explore the Processes of
Pedagogical Innovation in Physical Education Teacher Education." *Asia-
Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education*, vol. 6, 2015, pp.
273-286.

Papadopoulou, Charis-Olga. 2021. "The Aha! Moments in Self-Studies."
Academia Letters, Article 522, 2021.

Pinnegar, Stefinee, and Mary Lynn Hamilton. *Self-Study of Practice as a Genre of
Qualitative Research: Theory, Methodology, and Practice.* Springer, 2009.

Puritz Cook, Judi. "Online Education and the Emotional Experience of the
Teacher." *Teaching and Emotion*, edited by Harriet L. Schwartz and Jennifer
Snyder-Duch, Jossey-Bass, 2018, pp. 67-76.

An Audio Texture Lutherie[1]

No one ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and not the same person.

—Heraclitus

1   Introduction

Audio textures comprise a class of sounds that are simultaneously stable at long time scales but complex and unpredictable at shorter time scales. In sound art practices, textures break from the pitched and metrical patterns of the past. Their complexity and unpredictability at one level combined with the sense of eternal sameness at another can be read as reflecting aspects of the last millennium of urbanisation, technological advancement, the rescaling of time and space through travel and communication, and the recent disruptions to rhythms and patterns due to a pandemic. Contemporary sound artists exploit the riches of audio textures, but their complexity makes them a challenge to model in such a way that they can be systematically explored or played like musical instruments. Deep learning approaches are well-suited to the task and offer new ways for the instrument designer to pursue their craft of providing a means of sound access and navigation. In this paper I discuss four deep learning tools from the sound modeler's workbench, how each is the right tool for a different part of the job of addressing the various compelling aspects of audio textures, and how they can work artistically.

1.1   Historical Context

The incorporation of noise into art has been an ongoing process for well over a hundred years now. The history is deeply connected with socioeconomic evolution. The migrations from rural to urban environments disrupted the circadian rhythms of daily life. Machinery of the industrial revolutions immersed us in noisier soundscapes. These disruptions naturally found their way into artistic expression. Luigi Russolo's suite of mechanical instrument inventions including roarers, scrapers, howlers, etc. were orchestrated in his composition Sounds of the City in 1923.[1] Music was moving off the pitch-time grid to which it had long been bound, and the luthier's concern would no longer be the 'warm tone' mastered by Stradivarius.

[1] Russolo

Technological developments are also deeply entwined with the story of arrhythmia and noise in sonic artistic practice. Audio recording

brought the ability to 'displace' an original sound source in location and time as well as to capture and reproduce sounds exactly no matter how complex. Magnetic tape afforded rhythmic and arrhythmic reassembling of sound. Electronic circuits opened up access to a vast new space of sounds not previously accessible with acoustic systems. The digital computer can be inscribed with any sound-generating processes that can be written in mathematical or algorithmic form. The combination of physical, electronic and digital systems has given artists tools for sensing in any domain and mapping to arbitrary sound which broadens the possibilities for 'instrument' design almost beyond recognition.

This paper is about recent developments in the practice of instrument making, or to use a term less burdened by historical baggage, 'sound modeling.' The sonic focus will be on audio textures, a class of sounds far broader and more complex than the pitched sounds produced by traditional musical instruments, and thus reflective of the sound we now so freely accept in sound art. The modeling tools and techniques that will be discussed come from emerging developments in machine learning. The discussion is not meant as a scientific presentation of the tools but will attempt to share with the lay reader enough technical detail to appreciate how they work, and how they connect with various aspects of audio textures that might be explored for artistic purposes.

1.2   Audio Texture

An audio 'texture,' like its analogs in the visual and haptic domains, can be arbitrarily complex. Some examples include the sound of wind, radio static, rain, engines, air conditioners, flowing rivers, running water, bubbling, insects, applause, train, church bells, gargling, frying eggs, sparrows, jackhammers, fire, cocktail party babble, shaking coins, helicopters, wind chimes, scraping, rolling, rubbing, walking on gravel, thunder, or a busy electronic game arcade.

Artists use such sounds in a variety of ways such as incorporating sounding objects in performance and installations, or by recording sounds and possibly manipulating them electronically. Modeling the sounds or sounding objects so that they can be synthesised is a way of providing new possibilities for exploration, interaction, and performance. However, capturing the natural richness of textures in a computational model and designing interaction for them is challenging.

For the purpose of sound modeling, it is helpful to start by thinking of textures as either 'stationary' or 'dynamic.' Despite their complexity, for some long enough window of time, there is a description of a stationary texture that need not change for different windows of time (figure 1). Sitting next to a babbling brook, we hear the sound as 'the same' from minute to minute, even though we know that the sequence of splashes, bubbles, and babbles is never literally the same at two different moments of time. However, if it starts to rain, the brook would change due to the increasing rush and flow. We would describe the sound differently after the rain than before the rain, and this illustrates the dynamic aspect of an audio texture.

The distinction between a stationary and dynamic texture is precisely analogous to the distinction between a note and a melody in terms of traditional instruments. The luthier factors out the interactive performative control from the sound generation. The sound of the different static configurations is characteristic of the instrument or model, while the dynamic sequence of configurations defines the imposed expressive or musical content. The sound generation is then conditionally dependent upon the instrument player's parametric control through an interface.

1.3   Previous Texture Modeling Strategies

Computational sound modeling is typically a time and resource-intensive process of writing code. There are a variety of approaches that address the complexity of textures.

One approach is to assemble sounds from a massive set of tiny pieces. Granular synthesis has been theorised and used by multiple musicians: Iannis Xenakis in "Formalized music: thought and mathematics in composition;" Barry Truax in his piece *Riverrun* and in "Real-time granular synthesis with a digital signal processor" and; Curtis Roads in his "Introduction to granular synthesis" and "Microsound." The term is used to describe a family of techniques such as assembling windowed sine tones of varying frequencies and windows spanning a few cycles of the wave form. A related technique is called "granulation," which breaks a recorded sound into tiny pieces before reassembling it.[2] By specifying various distributions of grains in time, grain signal choices and window sizes, innumerable similar textures can be created. Related techniques include "wavelet analysis and resynthesis"[3] and "concatenative synthesis."[4]

[2] Truax

[3] Dubnov et al.

[4] Schwarz

Physical models simulate the actual physical behaviour of sound sources. Simulated plates, tubes, and strings are great for models of pitched instruments, but many physical systems generate more complex

textures. For example, the sound of raindrops can be modeled with wave and acoustic pressure equations describing surface impacts.[5] Other sounds derived from physical phenomena such as bubbling in liquids have been modelled based on fluid simulations).[6] Rolling, scrapping, and rubbing sounds with a continuous interaction between different objects have been explored.[7] Perry Cook developed an approach referred to as "physically informed" modeling for sounds such as rattles and footsteps.

[5] Miklavcic et al.

[6] Moss, et al.; van den Doel

[7] Conan et al.

1.4   A Paradigm Shift

There is a deep interdependence between the sound space that artists work with and the technologies available during the historical time in which they live. The recording technologies (phonographic and magnetic tape) of the early 20th century brought any sound producible in the physical world into the studio and on to the stage. Tape could be speed-controlled and spliced, and vinyl can be scratched, but it was the electronic instruments, and later, digital computers that seemed to promise that any imaginable sound could be synthesised and arbitrarily manipulated performatively. Still, even a synthesiser that can make 'any sound' has limits on the ways the sound space can be navigated. The quest continues for the holy grail of access to any and all sound arranged in a designable space for arbitrary navigation. That search is now conducted using the most power-hungry, cloud-based virtually served artificial intelligence machinery. It is driven by artists, engineers, and scientists who might only meet virtually in that same cloud immersed in a communication system that logs their every keystroke as data for AI analysis. Even the pandemic-driven physical isolation seems to drive this mode of production and communication that resonates so deeply with the technologies being developed for artistic exploitation.

Recent years have seen big data and deep learning models disrupt almost every scientific and technical endeavour, and it is no different in the world of sonic arts. Modeling, in particular for generative processes like image and sound synthesis, is now often *data driven*. Rather than providing a machine with explicitly coded algorithms that execute to produce sound, a learning system is trained to produce media given (usually lots of) data.

Seminal work in data driven modeling of audio textures was done by McDermott and Simoncelli. They studied the human perception of audio textures by generating audio examples to match extracted statistical measurements on noise samples. Their synthesis by analysis approach workswell on sounds with variation at shorter time scales but is less successful on sounds with longer-term structure.[8] More recently Ulyanov and Lebedev modeled musical textures and others have since applied their approach to general purpose audio.[9]

[8] McDermott and Simoncelli

[9] See Antognini et al.; Grinstein et al.; Huzaifah and Wyse

The next section takes a deeper dive into four specific deep learning architectures that have been effectively used to address the challenge of synthesising complex and noisy data such as natural sound textures.

2   A Sound Modeling Toolset

To the uninitiated, the suite of tools in a violin-makers workshop are a large and curious-looking set. From thickness calibrators to router guides, peg hole reamers, gaugers, planers, and purfling tools, the specialised and motley collection bear names as colourful as the tools themselves. So it is for the modern-day sound model designer. In this section we will discuss four important tools hanging on the wall of the sound modelers workshop: The Generative Adversarial Network (GAN), the Self-Organizing Map (SOM), the Style-Transfer Network (STN) and the Recurrent Neural Network (RNN). I will furthermore give these tools more familiar nicknames: the Interpolator, the Smoother, the Variator, and the Performer (figure 2), which better describe their functionality. Like the tools on any workbench, each has its own function and using one to do the job of another can only lead to disaster.

2.1   The Interpolator

We have high demands and expectations for data-driven synthesiser design: when we train a system with data, we want a system that can generate not only the sounds in the training data set, but a 'filled out' space of sounds. That is, we demand that our system create novel sounds, even if such sounds do not come from the physical world. If we provide sounds of rain and the din of forest bugs as training data, then we expect to play a 'morph' on the new instrument in the same way we play a scale between pitches on a violin. The Interpolator (GAN) is a somewhat unwieldy tool for sound design, but it does construct a navigable high-dimensional space where in some regions it generates sounds like those in the data set, and for the rest of the space, it invents convincing 'in-between' sounds.

The tool gets its formal name (Generative Adversarial Network) from the way it is structured in two parts. The first part (the Generator) learns to organise a map from an input space of parameters to a set of sounds that are distributed similarly to the dataset. The second part (the Discriminator), is tasked with learning to recognise sounds from the Generator vs. sound from the database (figure 2(a)). The two networks are 'adversaries' as the Generator trains to fool the Discriminator. When training completes, and the Discriminator can no longer differentiate between the real and synthetic sounds, we have the Generator we seek.
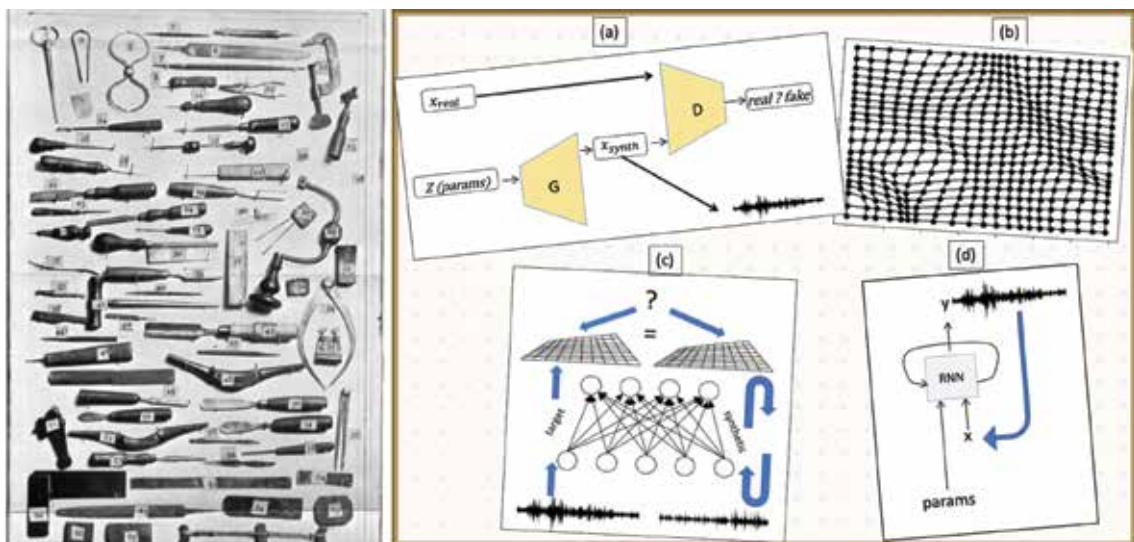
Fig. 2
Left: Violin maker's toolset.
Right: Sound modeler's toolset, (a) The Interpolator (GAN) learns to create novel 'tween' sounds as the generator G trains to fool the discriminator D, (b) The Smoother (SOM) makes distances between sounds more uniform as it resamples the parameter space, (c) The Variator (SNT) creates stationary textural variations by matching network activation statistics of a target texture, and (d) The Performer (RNN) generates sound one sample at a time in response to parameters.
Image: Project Gutenberg EBook of Violin Making

To appreciate the nature of this tool, the first thing to note is that it creates a map from a large number of input parameters to sound characteristics. This is what is meant by 'creating a space' for the sounds, and mapping is done by the tool, not the sound designer. The sound designer must figure out what the parameters actually do to the sound after training! Secondly, the number of input parameters is much larger than those we typically use to control an instrument. The network might require over 100 dimensions in order to organise a sensible space, but for an instrument to be playable by a human, it must offer a far smaller number.

Reflecting on how the Interpolator does its job, provides some insight into the relationship between technology and our historical times. The machine requires a certain amount of autonomy to do its job properly. We can provide some guidance by encoding and communicating our objectives, but we can not micromanage its organisation of the sound space. In fact, to meet our goals for synthesising and interacting with natural and novel sounds, there is generally far too much data address and the synthesis algorithms learned by the machine are too complex for mere mortals to organise or manually design. The process depends on yielding what may have previously been considered creative decision making to the machine.

The self-organisation and generation of novelty only address part of the playability requirements. A limitation of the Interpolator is that it learns long (e.g. 4-second) chunks of sound for each parameter, so is structurally incapable of being 'played' in response to continuously varying control parameters. Furthermore, it generates a single sound

for each point in the space, not the infinite number of variations we associate with a texture of a given description such as the ever-changing sound of a river with a particular rate of flow. This is a job for the Variator described below.

2.2   The Smoother

The Interpolator distributes sound in a parametric space but does not necessarily do so evenly. That is, large parts of the space can be devoted to one or another type of sound and moving over the border from the territory of one to the territory of another might happen very quickly. We want to expand the transitions, and the great thing about the Interpolator's space is that it can be zoomed infinitely. An analogy to this smoothing process would be zooming in on dusk and dawn so that they last as long as day and night.

The Smoother's Self Organizing Map (SOM) can learn to create a map of a data distribution with a two-dimensional grid-like representation (figure 2(b)).[10] Playing the remapped instrument, we would move quickly through the regions of sound space where nothing much changes as you navigate, and dwell in the unstable and changing regions between them. To exploit an acoustic instrument analogy again, it would be akin to removing the fret bars from a guitar which cause the pitch to be the same for fingering positions between them so that it would behave more like a (fretless) violin where changes happen smoothly as a finger glides along the neck. This is more natural for textures that do not lend themselves to standardised discrete scales in the way that legacy musical instruments do. It is probably not just an accident of history that we can see the less categorically punctuated and metrical lives we are now living reflected in the borderless sound space of textures that comprise so much sound art today. The Smoother is a tool that literally expands the space and time at narrow border regions turning them into spaces in their own right for the discovery of novel sound that might otherwise go unnoticed.

[10] Kohonen

2.3   The Variator

The essence of textures is infinite variation, and for this we reach for another deep learning tool, the Style-transfer networks (STN). Most people have encountered STN's in the image domain where they take style and textural elements from one image such as a painting to generate a variation on the 'content' of another[11] (figure 3), thus our nickname, the Variator. It can also be used without content, to simply reproduce images with a similar texture to the original. The network can be used the same way for sound.

[11] Gatys et al.

Fig. 3 Style transfer networks have been used in the image domain to superimpose the style of one image (van Gogh's The Starry Night, inset) onto content from one image (left) to produce new images (right). Images: Gatys et al. "A neural algorithm of artistic style"

The way this tool works is that a segment of sound exhibiting the 'target' texture is fed into a neural network. Then the feature activation pattern of one or more network layers are correlated with each other in a time-independent way. Features might represent anything from a short rhythmic pattern, to how pitched an event is. The matrices of feature characteristics are represented by the grids at the top of figure 2(c).

Next, we use the network and the target matrix of feature correlations to construct new sounds. We do that by feeding random noise into the network, deriving its feature characteristics and tweaking the noise until its feature's characteristics match that of the target. When the process completes, we have a new sound with the texture of the target, but a different temporal structure or variation (figure 4).

This tool has a profoundly beautiful nature: the neural network that serves as the audio feature extractor need not be trained. The same network works as well for sounds of birds flying, rain falling, air conditioners humming, rocks rolling, or cattle bellowing. Indeed, the network need not be trained at all, and features can be entirely random. It seems to matter not what the audio features actually are, but rather what the pattern of relationships between features is.

The Variator also works on an aspect of textures that have a very particular alignment with a common experience of patterns of contemporary life in the time of a pandemic, and that is that it can create an endless series of sounds that, despite their infinite variety, all sound in some way 'the same.'

In summary, the Variator generates variations of a static texture for a particular instrumental configuration. However, it does not provide the dynamic textures for which playable reconfigurations of instruments are required.
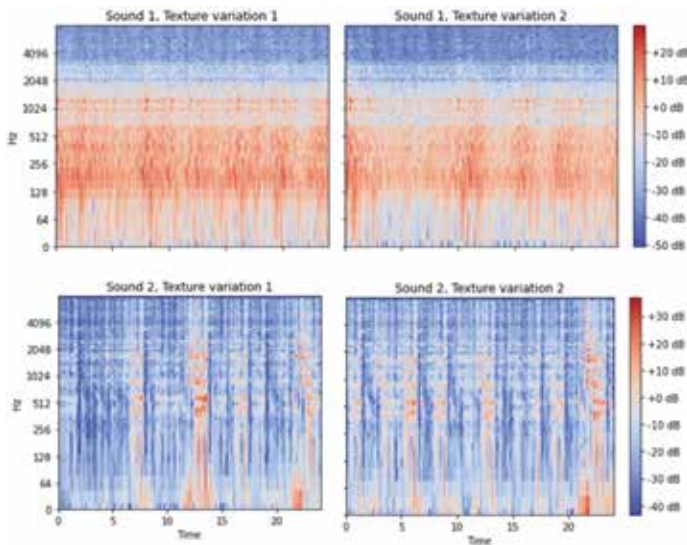
Fig. 4 The two rows correspond to two different dynamic parameter settings.
Each column shows textural variations of the sound for those parameter settings.

2.4   The Performer

The Performer is oriented toward generating sound sequentially in time, unlike the Interpolator and the Variator which generate fixed duration chunks of sound. It gets its formal name, Recurrent Neural Network (RNN), from the fact that the audio output from each step is fed back in as input along with the parameters to create the network state that produces the next sample (figure 2(d)). It provides the playable parametric interface for a musician and generates sound samples that are immediately responsive to parametric input from the instrumentalist one at a time.

When we train the Performer, we provide whatever parameters we want to use to interact with the sound. This network learns to map the parameters and the previous sound sample, together with its current state of activation, to the next sound sample in time. As instrument designers, we choose what the parameters mean by associating them with the specific sequences of sound we want the model to produce. Thus, if we want an interface parameter to control the 'roughness' of a scratching sound or the speed of a steam engine, we simply pair appropriate values for the parameter with the sounds we expect them to generate. The Performer learns the mapping.

The mapping from interface to sound need not be deterministic. That is, if we pair a 'flow rate' parameter to a rushing water sound, the model can, like the brook it is modeling, generate endless variations of the stationary processes associated with a single input parameter configuration, never repeating the exact same sound sequence. It is at the same time capable of a dynamic range of sounds responding to different configuration parameters—for example for flow rate.

3 The Toolset Working as an Ensemble

No craftsperson would use a single tool for all jobs. The tools discussed above all have complementary strengths and weaknesses in the same way that a violin luthier's router and purfling set do. As an example of texture instrument building, the Interpolator was trained on a set of one-second texture sounds from sound artist Brian O'Reilly, from which we extract a two-dimensional slice for dynamic musical control with two parameters.[12] After the Smoother adjusts the spacing between sounds, the Variator generates extended stationary variations at each parameter point. Finally, the Performer is trained so that the sound can be generated continuously as the space is explored musically by a human performer. A visualisation of how the Interpolator, the Smoother, the Variator and the Performer all work together can be seen in figure 5 and auditioned online at https://animatedsound.com/arrhythmia2021.

[12] See https://vimeo.com/dendriform

4 Final Reflections

The noisy and complex sounds that constitute such an important part of contemporary sound art practices are fiendishly difficult to model using traditional approaches to signal processing and computer programming. New deep learning approaches are synergistically evolving, with contemporary artistic interest in exploring the multi-scale complexity of natural sounds that are situated in a world that is itself evermore computationally created, mediated, and richly textured.

The tools described herein are being explored by artists in a variety of media, representing a space of convergence for exploring themes such as creative partnerships with machines, questions of authorship, the incorporation of massive amounts of data in artistic production, and many others. Whether the machines are mobilised for text generation, choreography, visual arts, or music, they generally require a different mode of interaction with artists than traditional tools. Rather than explicit control through physical manipulation or programming, the artist might interact with the more autonomous tools by providing training data or communicating through visual or speech channels. Often the artist evaluates and curates the output from the machines. The style transfer network (Variator) is one such example that emerged first in the visual domain. The artist 'guides' its behaviour with target images for content and/or texture, but the machine makes the actual images (or sounds) for the artist.

There are both aesthetic and functional reasons for striking different balances between control and indeterminacy in the tools described here and the creative use of sound they support. No claims about the right way to think about sound art are intended with this approach to sound modeling with its separation of control and texture generation. The practice of modeling and instrument interface design is necessarily explicit about which aspects of a sound are controllable and which are left open to textural variation, but the tool set we have been exploring supports various ways of making choices framing the way we hear, interact with, and make complex sound as part of the design process.
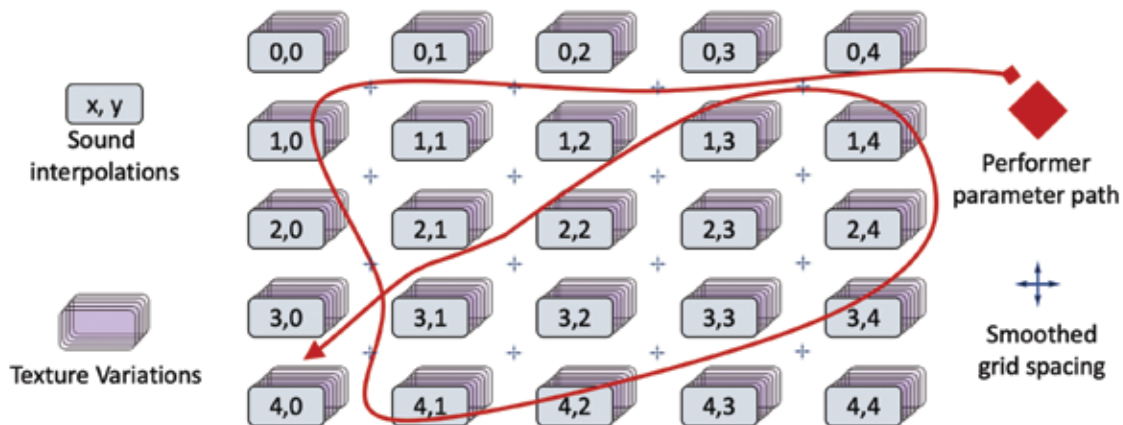
Fig. 5 Each of the four tools presented accomplishes a unique and critical part to the instrument building processes. The Interpolator fills out a space of dynamic textures (indexed here by parameter pairs x and y), the Smoother adjusts the space to more evenly spread the interpolations, the Variator creates different stationary textures (shown stacked) at each point, and the Performer makes the space playable along paths under instrumental control. (To listen to how these tools work, visit https://animatedsound.com/arrhythmia2021)

The focus of this paper has been on modeling audio textures that extend our musical legacy of pitched sounds and regular metres. The data-driven instrumental sound design process also differs from a traditional lutherie in that it reflects a conception of a space of sound that is infinitely generative and configurable rather than one for which there could ever be a definitive set of canonical instruments for playing. While these new sound design processes are inextricably entwined with the very computational and communication technologies that too often oppress, surveil, misinform, and isolate us, they subvert these tendencies with their rich creative musical potential.

References

Antognini, Joseph, et al. "Synthesising Diverse, High-Quality Audio Textures." 2018, *arXiv preprint, arXiv:1806.08002*. Accessed 31 March 2022.

"Barry Truax – Riverrun (1986)." YouTube, uploaded by Sebastian Ars Acoustica, 12 September 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u81IGEFt7dM.

Conan, Simon, et al. "An Intuitive Synthesizer of Continuous- Interaction Sounds: Rubbing, Scratching, and Rolling" *Computer Music Journal*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2014, pp. 24–37.

Cook, Perry R. "Physically Informed Sonic Modeling (Phism): Synthesis of Percussive Sounds." *Computer Music Journal*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1997, pp. 38–49.

Doel van den, Kees. "Physically Based Models for Liquid Sounds." *ACM Transactions on Applied Perception (TAP)*, vol. 2, no. 4, Oct. 2005, pp. 534–546.

Dubnov, Shlomo, et al., "Synthesizing Sound Textures through Wavelet Tree Learning." *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications*, vol. 23, no. 4, Mar. 2002, pp. 38–48.

Gatys, Leon, et al., "A neural algorithm of artistic style." 2015. *arXiv preprint, arXiv:1508.06576*. Accessed 31 March 2022.

Grinstein, Eric, et al., "Audio Style Transfer." *IEEE International Conference on Acoustics, Speech and Signal Processing (ICASSP)*, 2018, pp. 586–590.

Kohonen, Teuvo. "The Self-Organizing Map." *Proceedings of the IEEE* vol. 78, no. 9 Sept. 1990, pp. 1464–1480.

McDermott, Josh H., and Eero P. Simoncelli. "Sound Texture Perception via Statistics of the Auditory Periphery: Evidence from Sound Synthesis." *Neuron*, vol. 71, no. 5, Sept. 2011, pp. 926–940.

Miklavcic, Stanley, et al. *Computational Real-time Sound Synthesis of Rain*. Department of Science and Technology (ITN), 2004.

Moss, William, et al. "Sounding Liquids: Automatic Sound Synthesis from Fluid Simulation." *ACM Transactions on Graphics (TOG)*, vol. 29, no. 3, Jun. 2010, pp. 1–13.

Roads, Curtis. "Introduction to Granular Synthesis." *Computer Music Journal*, vol. 12, no. 2, Summer 1998, pp. 11–13.

—. *Microsound*. MIT Press, 2004.

Russolo, Luigi *The Art of Noises*. Trans. Barclay Brown, Pendragon, 1986.

Schwarz, Diemo. "Concatenative Sound Synthesis: The Early Years." *Journal of New Music Research*. vol. 35, no. 1, Feb. 2006, pp. 3–22.

Shahrin, M. Huzaifah, and Lonce Wyse. "Applying Visual Domain Style Transfer and Texture Synthesis Techniques to Audio: Insights and Challenges." *Neural Computing and Applications*, vol. 32, no. 4, February. 2020, pp. 38–48.

Truax, Barry. "Real-Time Granular Synthesis with a Digital Signal Processor." *Computer Music Journal*, vol. 12, no. 2, Summer 1988, pp. 14–26.

Ulyanov, Dmitry and Vadim Lebedev. *Audio Texture Synthesis and Style Transfer*. 13 December 2016. https://dmitryulyanov.github.io/audio-texture-synthesis-and-style-transfer/.

Xenakis, Iannis. *Formalized Music: Thought and Mathematics in Composition*. Pendragon Press, 1992.

Emotional Graphing and the Phenomenology of A/Liveness in Three Arts Educators in Singapore During COVID-19

Introduction

On 23 January 2020, the Singapore Ministry of Health confirmed the first case of the novel coronavirus in Singapore imported from Wuhan, China.[1] As cases continued to rise, Singapore went into the first lockdown, locally known as the Circuit Breaker, from 7 April to 4 May 2020,[2] which was later extended through 1 June 2020.[3] The Circuit Breaker essentially suspended the rhythm of life and work. For freelance artists whose livelihood in the gig economy depends on festivals, cultural events, and performances, this meant zero income as shows and classes were cancelled. Many struggled to convert new works into the virtual space, while others turned to broadcasting old works online, sometimes for free.

On 14 June 2020, *The Straits Times* produced an infographic on jobs that were most crucial to keep Singapore going.[4] On the list of the top five non-essential jobs, 71% of the 1000 respondents said that an artist was non-essential. This was contrasted with the top five essential jobs which were doctor or nurse (86%), cleaner (78%), garbage collector (77%), hawker (76%), and deliveryman (70%). These statistics did not go down well with artists who then made their voices heard, including Jeremy Monteiro, Ivan Heng, Neil Humphreys,[5] R. Chandran Rama, and Rishi Budhrani.[6] Even Professor Tommy Koh, ambassador-at-large of the Singapore government, questioned the value of the survey, arguing that "Singaporeans [have] kept themselves sane [during the Circuit Breaker] by reading books, listening to music, watching film and television shows and concerts online."[7] In addition to the transient nature of the gig economy within creative industries, the precariousness of artists' work and the perceived loss of significance of their work demonstrated a huge divide with the public. This was evident in the public outcry voiced by artists fending for themselves.

Precarity has been understood as the "casualization of labor in post-Fordist, immaterial production and in association with post-welfare states."[8] Zygmunt Bauman characterises these liquid times as a "playground for the notoriously capricious and inherently unpredictable market forces and/or are left to the private initiative and care of individuals."[9] However, Nancy Ettlinger believes that precarity is not imposed by global events or macrostructures. Rather, it is "located in the microspaces of everyday life" and is an enduring feature of the human condition.[10] Similarly, performance theorists Nicholas Ridout

[1] Ministry of Health "Confirmed Imported Case Of Novel Coronavirus"
[2] Ministry of Health "Circuit Breaker"
[3] Abu Baker

[4] Tan

[5] Basbas
[6] Tan

[7] Koh

[8] Ettlinger 320

[9] Bauman 2

[10] Ettlinger 320

and Rebecca Schneider define precarity as "life lived in relation to a future that cannot be propped securely upon the past."[11] They invite us to think about the labour of performance:

[11] Ridout and Schneider 5

> How do we pay attention to precarity—economic precarity, neoliberal precarity—through a close reading of the performing body? At one time, claims for resistance to commodity capitalism were addressed through the idea that performance does not offer an object for sale. What of the performing body in an economy where the laboring body, and its production of affect, is the new commodity du jour?[12]

[12] Ridout and Schneider 6

During the onslaught of the coronavirus pandemic, the "performing body" did not labour as much; live performances, co-curricular activities, and enrichment programmes had been cancelled, and for most artists, work stopped momentarily. How then did "economic precarity" during the lockdown regulate aspects of life for artists and arts educators? Especially with the lack of immediacy with students in a virtual space, how is liveness being negotiated as a consequence of such uncertainties in their practice and pedagogy?

All these questions point to work (or labour) as a defining marker of one's life, but I also want to know if being alive is a question that should even be considered during this pandemic. What does it mean to struggle to stay alive? If liveness exists in, or co-exists with, the sentient body, is that notion adequate to account for one's life? I argue that it is not. Death (lacking liveness) and work (being alive) are extreme polarities, yet the significance of one's labour (essentialness) is contingent on productivity. This is problematic because productivity excludes the lived experience. This paper, therefore, seeks to examine the phenomenology of liveness among three arts educators from the disciplines of dance, music and theatre in Singapore. It is also the aim of this paper to devise a visual methodology to understand more fully (both quantitatively and qualitatively) the spectrum of emotional rhythms felt by participants so that the visibility of the arts and arts education can change how public discourses are generated or maintained.

Liveness and Presence

To operationalise the key performance concepts of liveness in this study, I aligned these to the theme of the conference—"Arrhythmia"—and used the heartbeat as a conceptual metaphor and methodology. I wanted to understand what the participants' emotional rhythms were—were they too fast, too slow, or irregular—and what effects they have had on their lives and on their practice.

Within performance studies literature, scholars have examined the phenomenon of presence quite differently. Cormac Power distinguishes "making-present," "having presence" and "being present." In "making-present," he illustrates the magic of theatre to transform consciousness and structures of conscious experience. Here, presence is defined as "being the simultaneity between consciousness and an object of attention."[13] The second classification Power highlights is the auratic presence in theatre, which is related to Artaud and Grotowski's transcendental quality that is beyond representation. It is also connected to an actor's powerful

[13] Power 3

charismatic presence. Power's third classification is the literal "being present" in the same room referring to Joseph Chaikin's "existential moment-to-moment awareness of a shared situation between actors and audience."[14] It is this form of immediacy and contingency, "subject to the conditions of time and place in which the performance takes place"[15] that would be relevant to this study since teachers are constantly sharing the same space with students; their moment-to-moment exchanges potentially mean a sustained and heightened state of performance. If the ratio of one teacher to forty students is the expected class size, I might argue that this form of presence is extensive and probably reaches across space and time, with possibly forty nuanced variations of "being present." Implied within this is the speculation that teachers are affectively linked to students' lives; forty worldviews would probably weigh in heavily on the teachers' mental and emotional wellbeing. If presence contributes to emotional labour, then why is emotional labour often missing from educational discourse?

[14] Power 80
[15] Power 87

More politically driven, Peggy Phelan interrogates the power and value of presence as, "that which is not 'really' there" and puts forward an argument for a re-evaluation of "a belief in subjectivity and identity which is not visibly representable."[16] She states that many assumptions are framed within an ideology of the visible which therefore erases the power of the unspoken and unseen, which she calls "unmarked". Phelan makes a distinction between Lacan and Freud's immateriality of the unconscious and states that the immateriality of the unmarked, in contrast, shows "itself through the negative and through disappearance."[17] Even though the art works examined in *Unmarked*, especially performance art, are framed within the politics of performance, Phelan states, "in the analysis of the means of production, the unmarked signals the un(re)productive"[18] and it is even more urgent to "remember the undocumentable, unreproducible art they made."[19] In other words, Phelan is suggesting that in the context of cultural reproduction we might be able to interfere with its labour, at least recognising the deeper body of work that is not visible. To understand this form of presence, I might argue, requires an excavation into the labour of teaching where the extraneous efforts put into teaching are neither seen nor recognised as labour but are, nonetheless, "materiality" for teaching and for "being present" with students.

[16] Phelan 1

[17] Phelan 19

[18] Phelan 27
[19] Phelan 31

In an attempt to mark and make legitimate the undocumentable, unreproducible labour that extends across, as well as below, the surface of a lesson, this study foregrounds the states of emotion felt during COVID-19 and visualises varieties of presence demonstrated by arts educators as they engage with their learners.

Emotional States

To contextualise these constructs further, I draw on Peggy A. Thoit's definition of feelings, affects and emotions. She states that *feelings* include experiences of physical drive states (e.g. hunger) as well as emotional states, whereas *affects* refer to positive or negative evaluations of an object, behaviour or idea. *Emotions*, on the other hand, are "culturally delineated *types* of feelings or affects."[20] Emotions must involve an appraisal of a situational stimulus or context, create physiological changes or bodily sensations, result in free or inhibited display of

[20] Thoit 318

expressive gestures, and a cultural label for the first three components. Until recently, emotion has had not been a topic of inquiry within education or educational psychology. Previous research on emotion was connected to values, beliefs, attitudes, and motivations of pre-service teachers,[21] but not discussed as an independent area of investigation. For example, teacher education handbooks have also relied on James Gross's model of emotional regulation as a coping or adaptive strategy to improve students' performance tasks or reduce errant behaviours.[22] One study found that teachers controlling their anger effectively kept "them focused on their goal of academic learning and helping them nurture relationships with students."[23] All these point to the need to develop self-regulation strategies in service of the student. Seeing the importance of teachers' emotions and the direct impact on what, and how, they teach, Rosemary Sutton and Karl F Wheatley ask more poignantly:

> How are teachers' emotions shaped by their temperaments, family experiences, cultural origins, age, their emotional experiences as students, and the settings in which they learn to teach? […] How are teachers' emotions related to their classroom behaviors?[24]

Though the more recent discourses acknowledge the role of emotions in education and rightly point to teacher efficacy, the danger is that the emotions of teachers felt in their own bodies are completely suppressed for a larger academic goal. How then can teachers' emotional wellbeing be conceived if their emotions are not permitted to be present? This again points to Phelan's call to acknowledge the unmarked, disappearing acts of labour. To raise the level of significance of our "non-essential" artists in Singapore's public discourse, there is an imperative to examine the emotions felt by arts educators during COVID-19 as they not only operate within the arts, but they also operate within education. To account for their lived experiences during COVID-19 would perhaps demystify the labour of arts educators whose commitment in schools can also impact not just their art practice, but also their emotional wellbeing.

Methodology in Visualising Presence

To visualise presence, I draw inspiration from psychology and behavioural sciences. Though their methods are more empirical, James Gross and Hooria Jazaieri's article provided a more hermeneutic example which I could easily adapt, where they graphically represented emotional problems on a graph, with the x-axis representing *time* and y-axis *intensity*.[25] In their article, emotional problems could be examined through four kinds of graphs, namely intensity (hyperactivity-hypoactivity range), duration (short-long), frequency (infrequent-frequent), and type (anger-sadness). For me, I have used similar constructs and dimensions to quantitatively account for the emotional valences of the three participants. Yet, my methodology is also qualitative because the data is collected from interviews, and numbers on the graphs are coded as self-reported values rather than empirically obtained using skin conductors and neuroimaging techniques, both of which are not readily accessible.

Sampling was done from three of the performing arts; Durga, a classical Indian dancer; Boni, a Jazz musician; and Simon[26], a theatre teacher. Both Durga and Boni are freelancers who run co-curricular activities or

[21] Richardson

[22] See Cassady and Thomas 52-74; Thomas et al 40-48, Pekrun et al 13-36
[23] Sutton 267

[24] Sutton and Wheatley 346

[25] Gross and Jazaieri

[26] Name changed at the request of the participant.

assembly programmes respectively, while Simon is a full-time teacher in an independent school.

A series of interviews were conducted in May 2021, where I had invited the participants to reflect on their life's rhythms from March 2020 to April 2021. This meant highlighting the significant moments from the last year, and giving themselves a numerical value for their emotions each month. The numerical values were then plotted on a graph paper as a comparative way to symbolically represent the electrocardiogram (ECG) that records electric signals from the heart, except that I record signals for their emotions, hence my coinage *Emotional Graph* (EG). On the graph, the y-axis reflects emotional valence in positive or negative values and the values reflect intensity of emotions, ranging from 0 to +5 or from 0-5 respectively. The x-axis reflects the timeline from March 2020 to April 2021.

The values on the EG formed the quantitative data whilst the interview responses formed the qualitative data. To provide direct access to the participants' feelings and experiences during COVID-19, I have left their words verbatim within quotation marks. Varela and Shear argue that:

> to accept experience as a domain to be explored is to accept the evidence that life and mind includes that first-person dimension which is a trademark of our ongoing existence. To deprive our scientific examination of this phenomenal realm amounts to either amputating human life of its most intimate domains, or else denying science explanatory access to it.[26]

[26] Varela and Shear 4

This means the first-person dimension—stated in their own words or felt in their bodies—is an important methodology within qualitative research, which empirical methods fail to account for. Roy, Petitot, Pachoud and Varela have also used the phrase *phenomenological data* to validate first-person narratives.[27]

[27] Roy et al. 4

Both sets of lived experience data were then analysed thematically for trends before abstracting them into the meaning of being-in-the-world, in alignment with Simon Heidegger's existential phenomenology. Briefly, Heidegger explains that one's experience of the world is dependent on one's lived experience as well as the structure of that experience, what he calls *Dasein* or being-in-the-world.[28] There is a relational ontology between the subject "I", the act, and the object of perception. In this study, it is the arts educators' relationship with the arts (or the 'absence' of performances during the pandemic), their students, their audiences, as well as their private family lives which are, unavoidably, brought into their being-in-the-world when boundaries of home and work collapse.

[28] Heidegger Being And Time

At the outset, one of the limitations of this study is that memory is often fragmented, so asking participants to think about the last twelve months could be difficult. Another limitation is that because the self-reported values were retrospectively ascribed, these numbers may not reveal an accurate representation of emotional intensity felt and experienced at that point in time. Nonetheless, I have used the Emotional Graph as a pictorial representation to visualise embodied phenomena, so as to, in Manuel Lima's words, "[give] life to structures hidden from human perception, [hence] providing us with an original 'map' of the territory."[29] The following sections are also arranged as case studies,

another textual technique to bring significance to each of the three participants' stories.

Case 1: Durga

For the last 20 years, Durga has been teaching Indian dance and contemporary dance in Ministry of Education (MOE) schools as well as in Special Education schools (SPED) as a freelance dance instructor. Her work in schools comes under the Artist-in-School Scheme (AISS) for SPED schools. She has been dancing professionally for 20 years, and in the last 15 years has operated privately, founding her own dance company. Durga holds a Master's Degree in Arts Pedagogy and Practice from Goldsmiths University of London, a Bachelor's Degree in Contemporary Arts with a Dance major from Deakin University, Australia, and a Specialist Diploma in Arts Education from the National Institute of Education, Singapore. She also holds a Certificate in Working and Facilitating the Learning of Children with Special Needs in the Arts.
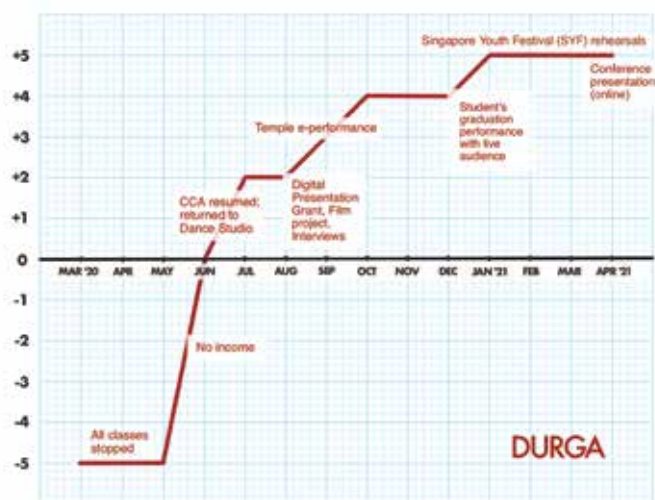
Fig. 1 Durga's Emotional Graph Values from March 2020 to April 2021.

The EG for Durga showed an upward trend from -5 to +5 over a one-year period. In March and April 2020, all face-to-face classes stopped and so did her income. From August to December, she worked on a film after having been awarded the Singapore National Arts Council's (NAC) Digital Presentation Grant[30] of $10,000. Interviews came in continuously from various media channels for a few months. Meanwhile, in October, there was an e-performance for a Temple. In January 2021, she produced a performance for her only graduating student at the Singapore Repertory Theatre with a live audience and a live orchestra. Her emotional intensities peaked in January and February 2021 as she was preparing two of her schools for the *Singapore Youth Festival* competitions. In April 2021, she delivered a paper at a conference organised by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

[30] The Digital Presentation Grant (DPG) was launched by the National Arts Council (NAC) to support artists and arts organisations to present their work in digital form or via digital mediums during the COVID-19 period. They may include digital presentation of new or existing works, livestreaming of performances, virtual exhibitions and digital adaptations of texts. Successful applicants received up to $20,000 per project.

Those were the major events on her EG. But to have an understanding of her emotional valences, some of Durga's interview responses are transcribed below. For example during the circuit breaker period[31] when she was doing all her classes online, she said she needed to move things around in her home because she needed more space to dance. She had to borrow her husband's computer, use another phone to play the music, and then hook up the phone to the home speaker. It was such a hassle. She said, "it was so ridiculous. For eight hours, my family members could not do anything. It was quite an inconvenience." In terms of her pedagogy, she quips:

> We had to compromise the movements […] It's very, very hard for embodied practices like that, for us to be able to […] But if I'm trying to teach something brand new, it's very hard to see whether the rhythm is in sync. Because a lot of the times, it's lagging.

There is a certain exasperation in Durga's recount.

To ensure her students got the choreography correct, Durga pre-recorded exercises for them for weekly practices, labelled them, wrote annotations on the video itself, and uploaded them to the cloud. Students would record themselves and send her the videos for correction. Then the cycle would repeat every week. Though videorecording was not a new practice to her she said, "this whole process was just time-consuming for no reason. It was very draining—mentally and emotionally draining for most of us—because we all wanted to dance in a nice big space as what we always did. […] I felt very stifled because my apartment is small."

Even after they had returned to the studio, Durga could not feel the same sort of enthusiasm from her students. "I think it's a sort of mundaneness—I think that's exactly what the word is." She realised that this was because there was no big production to look forward to:

> So no music, no dance, no live performances. I also feel they come to class, [and] they train, train, train, and aiyah, there's nowhere to perform. I do feel them. And I think that anxiety is sort of, you know, even before they feel it, maybe I'm the one giving it to them. […] So hopeless. None of us liked this online thing.

In October 2020, there would usually have been a nine-day festival called Navratri dedicated to nine forms of the goddess Maa Durga. Usually, students would dance in different temples. Due to COVID-19, it was done online. Durga lamented: "we did the e-performance for the temple last year. It was so ridiculous. We're imagining the goddess sitting on the internet looking like this and watching all of us and blessing us. It's so silly. We made such a big joke out of it."

Durga also shared her sentiments on the irregularity of a freelancer's work and life. For her, there was no CPF (Central Provident Fund),[32] no bonuses, no medical benefits, no sick leave benefits for co-curricular instructors under MOE. So the loss of income was a recurring theme. She said:

> We've been doing that for many years. But this [COVID-19 and payouts] sort of… messed up the system for us quite a bit. And now I'm feeling a bit lost because this month, I managed to get 2 schools

to give me proper salaries. So I can come back into my regular mode again, in terms of paying my bills. I also think it's sort of a mental space, especially for people like us with families and children and all that. […] I can't believe it's taken a year.

Durga also mentioned that she was worried for her husband, as he had to be in India to do a film for two months. With the escalating cases of COVID-19 deaths in India, it would be a risk for everyone. Moreover, the fact that she could not travel with him added to her anxieties.

Case 2: Boni

Boni de Souza has been a professional musician playing the piano in hotels since the 1980s. In the 1990s, he operated his own recording studio. Since 2004, he has been teaching privately and training the music scholarship band at a reputable private music school. As a freelance music instructor in MOE schools, he also runs NAC-AEP workshops from primary schools to junior colleges. He has 17 programme offerings, such as music composition, songwriting, classical music, pop music, and jazz. He is currently pursuing his Master's Degree in Arts Pedagogy and Practice from LASALLE College of the Arts/Goldsmiths University of London.

Boni's EG dipped sharply in April 2020 and then it rose quickly to the peak in August 2020. There are some fluctuations, but the most noticeable drop came in February 2021. It then rose to a mid-level from March 2021, closer to the zero baseline.
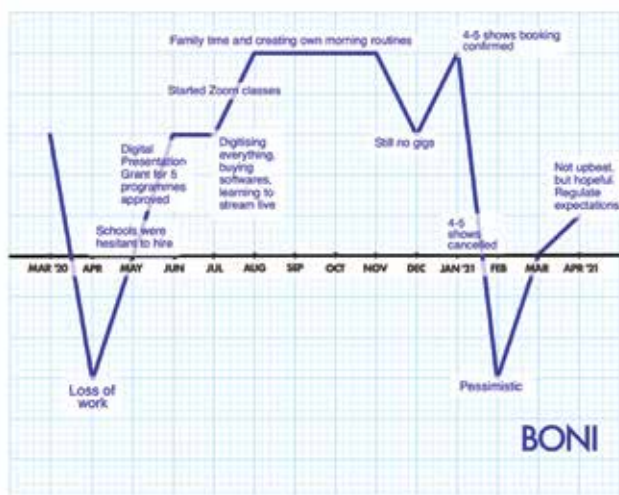
Fig. 2 Boni's Emotional Graph Values from March 2020 to April 2021.

More specifically, from March to June 2020, Boni lost all his classes. But in late May, he received the NAC Digital Presentation Grant for five of his assembly programmes. He stayed at home to digitise everything and he felt "very good, very productive." He was not familiar with Zoom and YouTube streaming then, so he learned it and even bought a new software, Wirecast, which cost about $1000. He explained that when he was not occupied with anything, he would get "antsy." He said:

I need to do something productive. I need to finish something and be proud of it. That, I'm happy. It's my sense of accomplishment. That is why I also enrolled into the [MA Arts Pedagogy and Practice] programme. At my age—I'm 60 plus—I don't think, after this, I'm able to work somewhere full-time even with the degree. But I'm happy because I want to accomplish something. That is my character.

In late June 2020, schools "were hesitant" to hire external vendors into their premises to teach face-to-face. Nonetheless, as can be seen in the EG, Boni reached +5 from August to November 2020. He claimed that it was because he had found a new routine while working from home. He would wake up at 6.30 am and play his guitar or piano every morning. Within a month, he said, "I was able to create new arrangements […] or compositions. By lunchtime, I feel like I have achieved something." He also explained that after developing these new routines, he felt "more balanced, more satisfied as compared to before." Boni also attributed his positive emotional valence to having more quality time with his daughter during those months of working from home.

In January 2021, there were about five bookings for his assembly shows, but by February, all of the schools cancelled their bookings. This sent Boni into a -5 state of pessimism. He was not "really upbeat" but remained mildly hopeful. He said he had to regulate his own expectations.

Throughout the entire COVID-19 period, Boni applied for government payouts once. He recounts, "actually you don't even have to apply. As long as you just declare you are a freelancer or sole proprietor or whatever they will fund you." He said that every month for a few months, "they give you $1000 or something like that, which is great. I never realised that this government would do things like that. I find that in times when push comes to shove, I think they did the right thing."

Boni elaborates, "financially, work-wise, there was none, but I had to rely on savings and the little that trickled in. Thankfully, it did not last long. We are not rich but we can survive a few months."

Case 3: Simon

Simon has been teaching in an independent secondary school as Head of Drama since 2007. Unlike freelance drama teachers who are engaged as vendors, he is fully employed by the school. As part of his job scope, he teaches drama as a core curriculum for the entire secondary two cohort, and runs his Theatre Club as a co-curricular activity. Each year, the secondary two students put up a DramaFest where each class stages an original play to a ticketed audience, showcasing their year of drama learning. He also directs all the Theatre Club's performances, preparing them for Singapore Youth Festival (SYF) and their bi-annual public performance. Prior to this, he was a professional theatre director, running his own theatre company for ten years. He holds a Master's Degree in Arts Pedagogy and Practice from Goldsmiths University of London, and a Diploma in Education from National Institute of Education (Singapore) with a specialisation in Art (Visual) Education.

Simon's EG dipped early during COVID-19 and it slowly rose peaking in October 2020. It slowly saw an emotional decline before reaching a level near the baseline.
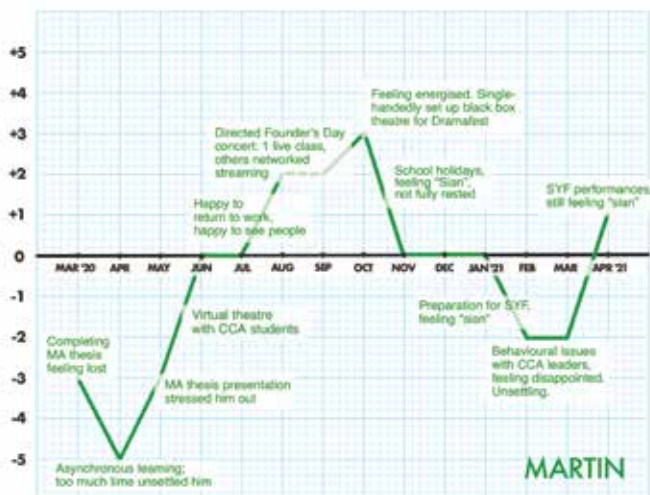
Fig 3. Simon's Emotional Graph Values from March 2020 to April 2021.

Simon explained that he was feeling very lost and stressed when he was completing his Master's thesis, so his emotions dipped to -5 in April 2020. It was his final semester of postgraduate studies. As his teaching workload in school for home-based learning was asynchronous, it did not affect him as much, but he felt unsettled and anxious. He recounted, "I'll feel guilty because my colleagues are working like hell, and then I'm like […] can go NTUC[33] every day. Because I'm writing my thesis, I can't be bothered with school, I mean work… It's a different kind of emotional stress." Because students were doing asynchronous learning in his subject area which was non-examinable, he explained:

[33] NTUC is a local supermarket in Singapore.

> I lost track of what's happening in school, for example. Because you're not following a timetable, you're not following anything. So basically, you're a bit like lost. It's a different kind of stress, whereby you're like, 'OK, what's going on, what's going on?

That feeling of loss morphed into another emotion: guilt. He pondered: "How do I account for my work? You get what I mean? There's this guilty conscience."

Before June, he experimented with virtual theatre with his CCA Theatre Club students. By June, he was happy to be back in school getting to see people. In August, his emotional intensity rose to +2 as he directed a Founder's Day concert, and then to +3 when he single-handedly set up his Blackbox Theatre for the upcoming secondary two DramaFest. That was the peak. After that it dipped to a neutral zero because school holidays came and went—but his feelings of being *sian* (which can be translated to a sense of boredom or lethargy) continued through 2021, even though performances for SYF were going on full steam.

In February 2021, student management issues caused him extreme distress. Two of his Theatre Club student leaders started disagreeing with a member of staff, ending up in outbursts. Simon said:

> We are beginning to see the effects of… Hard to quantify or qualify…
> The kids are behaving strangely. And I don't understand. It's a kind
> of behaviour I've not seen in my CCA. Kids were breaking down,
> start crying in the toilet. Only two kids. Very draining.

Later in March 2021, he found out that one of his students was suicidal
and had been sexually assaulted. He sighed as he elaborated:

> Kinda disturbing to me coz she's very happy. No sign of any problem.
> A very happy child. Having suicidal thoughts and has plans. That
> disturbed me. I had to watch her very closely.

Simon felt unsettled from these issues, but also because he took on the
SYF team that was not doing too well. He reflected: "What if my team
didn't do well? When one team does not do well, people will compare.
[…] I'm still the teacher in charge. So worried that kids will think lesser
of me and the team."

Discussion

The three Emotional Graphs are superimposed to identify arrhythmia in
emotions (see figure 4). In the earlier months of COVID-19, the trends
dipped and then increased rather proportionately. By around November
or December 2020, the three lines diverged in slightly different ways.
In fact, a comparison with a working paper by Tan et al. from the
Singapore Management University shows a similar trend. The authors
wrote that, "overall life satisfaction […] dropped significantly when the
'circuit breaker' began in April 2020. […] Yet life satisfaction has not
returned to pre-COVID-19 levels and appears to have plateaued"[34]

[34] Tan et al. 3

It might be comforting to know that all of us in Singapore felt the same.
But how meaningful would it be to know that one person's wellbeing
followed identical trends of other Singapore residents? When emotions
rising, dipping, and plateauing are universalised, this potentially negates
individual differences and undermines the nuances of each emotional
journey, especially evidenced through the three arts educators' stories.

Fluctuations, Affective Homeostasis and Liveness

Methodologically, some of the steepest lines are exhibited by Boni, from
+5 in January 2021 to -3 in February 2021 (a drop of 8 points), from +3
in March 2020 to -3 in April 2020 (a drop of 6 points), and from -3 in
April 2020 to +3 in June 2020 (a rise in 6 points); as well as by Durga
from -5 in May 2020 to 0 in June 2020 (a rise in 5 points). Intensive
hyper fluctuations within one or two months, especially for both Boni
and Durga, would indicate erratic and unpredictable emotions. In a
typical medical context, fluctuations in an electrocardiogram (ECG)
– called ventricular fibrillation (VF) – would show that a patient is
slipping into cardiac arrest, the fatal outcome of arrhythmia. But how
can these fluctuations be interpreted?
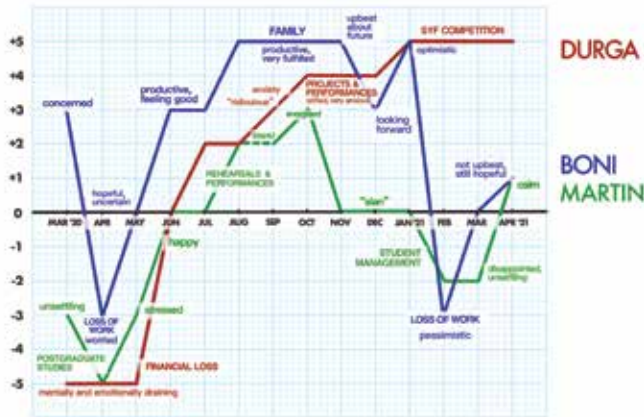
Fig. 4 Combined Emotional Graphs.

In addition to these fluctuations in figure 4, straight horizontal lines in the Emotional Graph would signal a different "heartbeat." Unlike the straight lines on an ECG machine indicating an absence of electrical impulses—hence death—straight lines on an EG would indicate some form of stability, what I call *affective homeostasis*. I make a distinction here from "emotional stability" because this construct is defined as a "personality trait that has to do with being even tempered, particularly in the face of challenges and threats,"[35] which is usually conceived as the opposite of neuroticism. Emotional stability scores are often administered in questionnaires to evaluate a person's eligibility for a job, hence *affective homeostasis* would be a better coinage to show emotional regulation over time.

From the graph, Boni exhibited extremely positive emotions in one month and an extremely negative change the next month. More specifically from January to February 2021, there is a sharp drop from +5 optimism to -3 pessimism. If Boni's emotions had continued to fluctuate, it might indicate an emotional arrhythmia. But because his EG values from March to April 2021 remained at 0 and +1 respectively, it could be interpreted as a sign of internal emotional regulation; what James Gross would call "altering the emotion trajectory."[36] Boni admitted that he tried to be "hopeful" even though he was "not feeling upbeat." The attempt to remain hopeful in difficult times is perhaps a form of balance near the baseline of fluctuating emotions.

By contrast, Durga's waves are slowly increasing due to the number of performances and projects from August 2020 to January 2021, her upward trend representing more positive emotions. Yet her words show she is feeling "anxiety" over the "ridiculousness" of performing to a goddess on Zoom, for example. She also feels "stifled" at not being able to travel to India with her family, but presumably because her finances are slowly returning to some form of regularity, her EG did not dip. It could indicate that family priorities might be less important than her work and finances during that period. But this also shows that despite the quantitative representation on the EG showing a more positive outlook, there are less positive undertones that she needed to battle against. Even if a feeling is negative—for example -5 for Durga from March to June 2020—I would argue that emotional regulation is still taking place.

35 Ellis et al. 77

36 Gross 5

More specifically, Simon and Durga showed four periods of *affective homeostasis*. These four periods actualise themselves into nine months of *affective homeostasis* each in the last year, regardless of emotional intensities. For example, Simon showed homeostasis from June-July 2020, August-September 2020, November 2020-January 2021, and February-March 2021. Likewise, Durga's stable months were from March-May 2020, July-August 2020, October-December 2020, and January-April 2021. By contrast, Boni's stable months were only from June-July 2020 and August-November 2020—only 6 months out of the entire year. If these participants' wellbeing were to be analysed in terms of *affective homeostasis*, both Durga and Simon probably showed that they were better at regulating their emotions, whereas Boni might not have had the same inner resources. As seen in the EG, all of Boni's graphs showed intense fluctuations which could potentially raise alarm bells for early psychosocial interventions if needed. But if zero on the EG is a baseline between extreme emotional valences, it could be argued that Boni and Simon eventually regulated their emotional trajectory closer to a mid-level, whereas Durga's EG values remained at +5, which may show that she is riding on a consistent high. It might also mean Durga may not have regulated herself as well. Both interpretations are plausible.

In *The Neural Basis of Emotion Dysregulation*, Tom Johnstone and Henrik Walter state that, "we cannot afford to be constantly interrupted; emotions exist in a balance with other ongoing cognitive, attentional, and behavioural processes."[37] It has been posited that bodily stability is a requirement for survival. In explaining why some people are able to regulate their emotions while some are not, James Gross explains:

[37] Johnstone and Walter 58

> People differ substantially in their ability to track subtle emotion dynamics and represent these in a differentiated fashion; some do this very well, but others (e.g., those who have alexithymia or low levels of emotion awareness) have little or no awareness of ongoing emotional responses.[38]

[38] Gross 13

Based on the phenomenological data, I would contest that survivability—being alive—is more than a mere maintenance and control of emotional triggers. Life performs liveness. The paradox of the Emotional Graph is in visualising emotions over an intensity-time continuum is that it reveals more than the emotions themselves. The relational nature of phenomenal data points to entities beyond the perceiver to what is also being perceived. In other words, the liveness of the perceiver, as would be explained later, is also in the being of the perceived.

Attunement

This study does not seek psycho-pathological explanations behind emotions, but to narrativise, enflesh, and make visible 'how' the three arts educators' liveness had been performed with their 'what.' This can be understood by examining the entities that have affected them, namely family, students, money, and the management of work. None of them had identical priorities—Durga has more financial priorities than Boni or Simon; Boni places more importance on finding a routine at home; and Simon's attention was completely fixated on students' wellbeing, as well as on his postgraduate studies. As evidenced by the annotations on the EG (figure 4), the three participants were affected

in their relationships with both humans and nonhumans. This is important from a phenomenological perspective because the three arts educators defined what their *being* meant for them. Heidegger calls this being-in-the-world, or *Dasein.* He explains that the essence of being does not lie in existence in the world but in the inner worlds that we inhabit. In other words, Heidegger's *Dasein* is a relational world describing the human *being* with their entities. These entities are known as attunements.

Gerhard Thonhauser, a scholar in Heideggerian's existentialism, explains that *Befindlichkeit* is a general condition of an entity existing in the mode of being-in-the-world; we experience *Befindlichkeit* by being attuned to one another. He writes:

> Attunements are not simply modes of colouring our experience, but rather serve a fundamental disclosive function. […] At the same time, attunements disclose one's own situation; they are modes of finding oneself: 'Attunement makes manifest 'how one is and is coming along.'[39]

[39] Thonhauser 104

The disclosive function highlights the fact that the inability to perform in a physical space and to a live audience matters very much to these artists. Even though there were performances and competitions for Durga and Simon from September 2020 through April 2021, they were heavily compromised with the wearing of masks, or with safe-distancing measures required of performers, and very limited audiences. They lamented that loss. Durga found e-performing to her goddess ridiculous; Boni was deeply affected by the cancellation of five shows, and if he had not regulated his expectations, he might have entered a more depressive state and; Simon seemed to be 'floating' across time and space in a state of boredom and purposelessness. Perhaps for these artists, art without an audience is akin to an existence without an identity. Underlying those small acts are big affective valences—worry, stress, being unsettled, pessimism, stifle, uncertainties, hope, productivity—all of which presuppose *being* with attunements. Heidegger argues:

> These existential determinations are not pieces belonging to something composite, one of which might sometimes be missing, but a primordial content is woven in them which constitutes the totality of the structural whole that we are seeking.[40]

[40] Heidegger 178

In other words, these attunements help to elucidate what their worlds constitute.

Engrossment and Emotional Labour

In *Being and Time* Heidegger states, "because being-in-the-world belongs essentially to *Dasein*, its being toward the world is essentially taking care."[41] In this section, I explore the concept of care beyond their arts practice by arguing that because they are arts educators they are taking care of specific entities in their world—their curriculum, students, proficiency levels, group dynamics, performances and competitions. In fact, the amount of emotional work associated with being a teacher goes beyond checking that dance students have learnt the rhythms and choreography correctly in Durga's example, or ensuring that music

[41] Heidegger 53

students have digital access to Boni's resources, or checking that drama students have submitted their online homework in Simon's case. For Simon, his inability to understand his students, especially in the two cases of students having suicidal tendencies, led him to feel unsettled, with emotions swinging somewhere between anguish and worry. It is stress connected to the wellbeing of his students, a form of caring that contributes to a teacher's *emotional labour*.

In the original conception of *emotional labour*, Arlie R. Hochschild defines this as labour that "requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others."[42] For example, a judge maintains the semblance of impartiality when being presented with horrific evidence such as maiming, murder, dismemberment, and child rape.[43] Nurses encouraging patients to eat, listening to a patient's story, making a joke, or patting an arm are now invisible acts of emotional labour.[44] For some other occupations—police officers, teachers, and prison officers for instance—there may be a need to display antipathetic emotions to incite fear and intimidation to accomplish organisational tasks and goals.[45] Perhaps these are what performance scholars Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider refer to as the neoliberal condition where, "the production of feelings and the various practices or structures through which affect circulates."[46] But the emotional labour demonstrated by at least two of the participants in this study take on very different valences. They are not suppressing emotions to show a professional front, or regulating them for the sake of the organisation; they are sincerely concerned for their students' welfare and needs.

Nel Noddings, a philosopher of education describes caring as "the relation between the one-caring and the cared-for."[47] She explains:

> The one-caring, in caring, is *present* in her acts of caring. Even in physical absence, acts at a distance bear the signs of presence: engrossment in the other, regard, [sic] desire for the other's well-being. Caring is largely reactive and responsive. Perhaps it is even better characterized as receptive. The one-caring is sufficiently engrossed in the other to listen to him and to take pleasure or pain in what he recounts. Whatever she does for the cared-for is embedded in a relationship that reveals itself as engrossment and in an attitude that warms and comforts the cared-for.[48]

Noddings adds a conceptual metaphor to describe the attitude of caring: disposability. Drawing on Gabriel Marcel, she argues that disposability (or *disponibilité*) is the "readiness to bestow and spend oneself and make oneself available, and its contrary, indisposability. One who is disposable recognizes that she has a self to invest, to give. […] She is present for the cared-for."[49]

From the Emotional Graph, the engrossment shown by Durga and Simon is towards their students, whereas Boni's is towards his daughter. It is possible that Durga and Simon have a lot more emotional investment in the act of care (as more students are involved) than Boni. As a result of such caring, I agree with Noddings that arts educators are more present in times of precarity—as they know there are younger lives in their charge who may be in need.

[42] Hochschild 7

[43] Hochschild x

[44] Hochschild xii

[45] Ward and McMurray 17

[46] Ridout and Schneider 8

[47] Noddings 9

[48] Noddings 19

[49] Noddings 19

Conclusion

This study seeks to understand the phenomenology of liveness in three arts educators during COVID-19 in Singapore. What does it mean to *be* during COVID-19? Is it the feeling of being alive in a time of precarity that determines one's liveness? Through Heidegger's lens of existential phenomenology, I highlight the "attunements" that cause fluctuations in emotional valences, some of which were not directly related to their arts practice, such as completing a postgraduate degree, spending time with family, and worrying about students' suicidal thoughts. Those related to their arts practice would include the need to create or use digital performances, experiment with new technologies, adjust their pedagogies, and wait helplessly for classes to resume.

Heidegger asks, "how can the temporal constitution of attunement become visible? How can we gain insight into the existential connection between attunement and understanding in terms of the ecstatic unity of actual temporality?"[50] By methodologically plotting the emotional values of a dance teacher, a music teacher, and a drama teacher from March 2020 to April 2021, the Emotional Graph has not only attempted to answer Heidegger's call to make attunement visible, but this analytical tool has also revealed when these valences are out of control, and if homeostasis was ever attained. The EG is a powerful methodology to visually measure emotional arrhythmia. Phenomenologically, these markings are complex performances of liveness, articulations of being-in-the-world.

50 Heidegger 312

Especially in a time of precarity, arts educators have had to exert and project their presence in acts of caring. and because of the uncertainties brought about by COVID-19, they were further endowed with the quality of disposability, one which confers the meaning of insignificance (and therefore, being non-essential), and another on making oneself emotionally available. Paradoxically, when artists are perceived to be non-essential in the eyes of the public, that non-essential "disposability" is a quality that foregrounds affectivity. Underpinning these affective valences is their emotional labour. Their invisible acts of care—from caring about the curriculum to caring about students' mental wellbeing—have become emotional weights that diversely affected these teachers' a/liveness.

References

Abu Baker, Jalelah. "Singapore's Circuit Breaker and Beyond: Timeline of the COVID-19 Reality." *Channel News Asia*, 2 Jun 2020, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/covid-19-circuit-breaker-chronicles-charting-evolution-645586.

Basbas, Franchesca. "Singaporean Artists and Creatives Respond to Non-Essential Survey Claims." *Bandwagon Asia*, 19 Jun 2020, https://www.bandwagon.asia/articles/singapore-artists-creative-industry-respond-to-non-essential-survey-claims.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*. Polity Press, 2007.

Boniface Marcellinus de Souza. Personal interview. 7, 9 April 2021.

Cassady, Jerrell C., and Christopher L. Thomas. "Identifying and Supporting Students with Affective Disorders in Schools: Academic Anxieties and Emotional Information Processing". *Handbook ofEducational Psychology and*

Students with Special Needs, edited by Andrew J. Martin et al., Routledge, 2020, pp. 52-74.

"Confirmed Imported Case of Novel Coronavirus Infection in Singapore; Multi-Ministry Taskforce Ramps Up Precautionary Measures." *Ministry of Health*, 2020, https://www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/confirmed-imported-case-of-novel-coronavirus-infection-in-singapore-multi-ministry-taskforce-ramps-up-precautionary-measures.

"Circuit Breaker to Minimise Further Spread of COVID-19." *Ministry of Health*, 2020, https://www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/circuit-breaker-to-minimise-further-spread-of-covid-19. Accessed 6 Oct 2021.

Durga Devi Manimaran. Personal interview. 7 April 2021.

"Essential v Non-essential Jobs: How the Survey was Conducted." *The Straits Times*, 16 Jun 2020, https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/how-the-survey-was-conducted.

Ettlinger, Nancy. "Precarity Unbound". *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, vol 32, no. 3, 2007, pp. 319-340.

Gross, James J. "Emotion Regulation: Conceptual and Empirical Foundations." *Handbook of Emotion Regulation*, James J Gross, 2nd ed., The Guilford Press, 2014, pp. 3-20.

Gross, James J., and Hooria Jazaieri. "Emotion, Emotion Regulation, and Psychopathology:

An Affective Science Perspective." Clinical Psychological Science, vol 2, no. 4, 2014, pp. 387-401.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time: A Translation Of Sein und Zeit*. State University of New York Press, 1996.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. California UP, 2012.

Johnstone, Tom, and Henrik Walter. "The Neural Basis of Emotion Dysregulation". *Handbook of Emotion Regulation*, James J. Gross, 2nd ed., The Guilford Press, 2014, pp. 58-75.

Koh, Tommy. "Are Art Workers Non-Essential?" *Tembusu College NUS*, 18 Jun 2020, https://tembusu.nus.edu.sg/news/2020/are-art-workers-non-essential.

Lima, Manuel. *Visual Complexity*. Princeton Architectural Press, 2011.

Noddings, Nel. Caring: *A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. California UP, 2013.

Pekrun, Reinhard et al. "The Control-Value Theory of Achievement Emotions: An Integrative Approach to Emotions In Education". *Emotion in Education*, edited by Paul A. Schutz and Reinhard Pekrun, Academic Press, London, 2021

Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. Routledge, 1996.

Power, Cormac. *Presence: A Critique of Theories of Presence in the Theatre*. Rodopi, 2008.

Richardson, Virginia. "The Role of Attitudes and Beliefs in Learning to Teach." *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education*, edited by John Sikula, 2nd ed., Macmillan, 1996, pp. 102-119.

Ridout, Nicholas, and Rebecca Schneider. "Precarity and Performance: An Introduction." *The Drama Review*, vol 56, no. 4, 2012, pp. 5-9.

Roy, Jean-Michel et al. "Beyond the Gap: An Introduction to Naturalizing Phenomenology." *Naturalizing Phenomenology: Issues in Contemporary Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, edited by Jean Petitot et al., Stanford UP, 1999, pp. 2-80.

Simon. Personal interview. 9 April 2021.

Sutton, Rosemary E. "Teachers' Anger, Frustration, and Self-Regulation". *Emotion in Education*, Edited by Paul A. Schutz and Reinhard Pekrun, Academic Press, 2007, pp. 259-274.

Sutton, Rosemary E., and Karl F. Wheatley. "Teachers' Emotions and Teaching: A Review of the Literature and Directions for Future Research". *Educational Psychology Review*, vol 15, no. 4, 2003, pp. 327-358.

Tan, Ashley. "Sunday Times Survey Saying Artist Is Topmost Non-Essential Job Sparks Anger in Community." *Mothership*, 14 Jun 2020, https://mothership.sg/2020/06/sunday-times-survey-artist-non-essential/.

Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire*. Duke UP, 2003.

Thoit, Peggy A. "The Sociology of Emotions". *Annual Review Of Sociology*, vol 15, 1989, pp. 317-342.

Thomas, Christopher L. et al. "The Influence of Emotional Intelligence, Cognitive Test Anxiety, and Coping Strategies on Undergraduate Academic Performance". *Learning and Individual Differences*, vol 55, 2017, pp. 40-48.

Thonhauser, Gerhard. "Martin Heidegger and Otto Friedrich Bollnow." *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology of Emotion*, edited by Thomas Szanto and Hilge Landweer, Routledge, 2020.

Varela, Francisco J, and Jonathan Shear. "First-Person Methodologies: What, Why, How?" *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol 6, no. 2-3, 1999, pp. 1-14.

Ward, Jenna, and Robert McMurray. *The Dark Side of Emotional Labour*. Routledge, 2016.

A New Pulse for Seniors in Community Theatre

Introduction

Singapore became part of a worldwide pandemic in January 2020. The fear of an unknown virus, the loss of lives and livelihoods became the norm. Seniors, defined as persons over sixty, were identified as the most vulnerable group, dying not only from the virus but also of complications from age-related ailments. Vaccines were a year away and social interactions were minimised. For the community theatre group The Glowers, comprised of seniors, the pulse of training, rehearsing and performing, weakened. While stage performances took to hybrid theatre, livestreams and videos on demand, The Glowers lacked the resources and more importantly, the knowledge to do the same. To feed their love of learning and performing on stage, the group returned to a genre they grew up with –- the radio play. This article outlines briefly how a radio play is produced and more importantly, articulates how a new pulse for The Glowers is a new way of learning and rehearsing for an online audience. It also gives an insight into how the group increased digital fluency, shares strategies for working with those showing signs of physical and cognitive decline and affirms that the benefits of drama in ageing still exist in the difficult times of the pandemic. It ends with a look at how ageing affects an artist and the reasons for finding a new pulse.

Background

The Glowers Drama Group began in 2008 as a ground-up community drama group for seniors (figure 1). Its aim is to provide a platform to showcase the talents of seniors, help them stay mentally and physically alert and active, and expand their social network. The Glowers was founded by local actress Catherine Sng who runs the group like a club. Members, as group participants call themselves, are between 55 to 80 years old, with Sng herself in her 70s.

The Glowers have a regular meeting and rehearsal room in the Kampong Glam Community Club where they meet weekly to play drama games, do improvisation or rehearse for upcoming performances. Being an interest group,[1] the Community Club provides them rent-free space for their practice. In return, The Glowers provides residents in the area with simple performances on special occasions like Mother's Day and National Day. At other times, they create larger-scale performances that

[1] Besides bringing people of similar interests together to forge friendships, interest groups are sometimes allotted free time and space at government run Community Clubs.

Fig. 1 Members of The Glowers Drama Group, 2018.
Photo: Shamus Choy

are staged at local and international arts festivals. For these projects, the group works with directors like Jalyn Han, Pat Toh, Serena Ho, Ace Chew and Jeremiah Choy. Members audition for roles and commit to a rigorous rehearsal schedule. Those not cast often volunteer to look after props and costumes, manage ticket sales, do front-of-house duties or simply sit in on rehearsals to learn from the process.

The Glowers have built a repertoire of plays often involving a mix of Mandarin, English and local Chinese dialects like Teochew, Hokkien, Cantonese, Hainanese and Khek. The content they create satisfies their own needs to tell personal stories and to share them with other seniors who miss hearing dialects being spoken. The Glowers' reputation for creating multilingual performances steeped in nostalgia has led one of their pieces, *Kampong Chempedak*, to be presented at Singapore's Silver Arts Festival 2016, an arts festival targeted at seniors. This play about villagers being resettled into the city also struck a chord with audiences outside of Singapore. It has been staged at Malaysia's George Town Festival[2] as well as Japan's 2019 Gold Theatre Festival, a festival started by Yukio Ninagawa featuring people over 55 years of age with no performing experience. The effect of performing overseas has given the group a new sense of confidence and a stronger belief that the stage has a place for seniors. It has also brought them closer as a group as they've had to watch out for signs of ageing in each other. On the trip to Japan, one of the cast, R,[3] who had early stages of dementia, started having more pronounced symptoms of forgetfulness and disorientation. While I learned all her lines in case I had to replace her, Sng provided guidance to the other actors in R's scenes on how to get the flow of the playback on track. Group members also took turns to look after R outside of rehearsals, including her in their outings and meals. This sobering incident made me want to find out more, not only about dementia but

[2] A Malaysian cultural festival with international artists in a UNESCO world heritage site.

[3] Names are anonymised to protect the identity of the seniors.

how ageing affects the cognitive functions of the brain. It was a timely move as COVID-19 and its restrictions on live performances tested the group's ability to switch from familiar in-person rehearsals to the almost foreign practice of online rehearsals.

The Onslaught of COVID-19

In March 2020, group activities involving senior citizens were suspended and performance venues lowered their curtains. Many theatre companies quickly went digital. Some screened performances meant for archival and documentation purposes, while others experimented with hybrid performances where a limited number of live actors perform or interact with video projections of actors performing at other venues.[4]

[4] Kapadia, "Podcast 95"

The Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA) 2021 programmed live streaming and videos-on-demand to cater to audiences watching from home. A community group like The Glowers does not have the experience nor the inclination to do anything close to a hybrid production or even something that requires live streaming because they lack the resources and technical know-how. During this time, The Glowers were in early discussions for *Chap Lau*, the sequel to *Kampong Chempedak*, when the rhythm of in-person Friday afternoon meetings came to a halt. Meetings went online but were restricted to a handful of those who knew how to use Zoom. The group did not see the chance of a stage production and were losing their purpose to stay involved in the arts. As producer and playwright for *Chap Lau*, I felt there was still a possibility for the play to take another form, one that members of The Glowers could relate to and could give authenticity to their stories. My proposal to adapt *Chap Lau* from a stage play into a radio play was readily accepted by the members. Sng and I decided to work with Liow Shi Suen as studio director. Liow not only had years of experience, she was also a student of the late Lee Dai Sor, a renowned radio storyteller of the 60s and 70s. Lee Dai Sor was a celebrity that many members of The Glowers had spent hours listening to. *Chap Lau* was going to be an old school radio play set in the 60s replete with sound effects, music and a host of colourful characters. However, this shot in the arm for the production came with side-effects: the lack of funding and resources, digital challenges, ageing issues, and working within a new genre. *Chap Lau* not only became a radio play but a vehicle to express the issues in artmaking faced by seniors like The Glowers during the pandemic.

The Making of *Chap Lau*, the Radio Play

Chap Lau is a generic name for government-subsidised flats found in Singapore in the 60s. Against this setting, listeners follow the neighbours of *Kampong Chempedak* to see how they adjust to life in a newly created housing estate. One of the plot points is a neighbour starting a tontine and getting into trouble when one of her subscribers defaults on payment. Tontines, a way of managing savings and accessing cash have been illegal in Singapore since the 70s due to the lost savings from dishonesty.[5] The tontine was a reminder of a forgotten part of our social history and an illustration of how the kampong spirit[6] never left the residents of *Kampong Chempedak*. Reminiscent of radio plays of the 60s, each episode starts with a narrator introducing the episode or

[5] Tan, "This is What Our Grandparents Did to Manage Risk and Save Money."

[6] A sense of community found in kampongs or villages where everyone looks out for each other.

providing a verbal flashback of the story. The episode ends on a cliff-hanger and closes with the narrator's commentary or a reflection of the characters or incidents.

Methods of adapting the play for radio included revising lines to help listeners visualise scenes or characters, incorporating sound effects to heighten imagination and allowing music to suggest emotions. The audience had to see in their heads what they heard. Every sound effect from distant traffic and children's voices that help create the environment of a town, to the kind of footsteps that marked a character, had to be specified in stage directions for the audio engineers to include. Characters entering scenes also had to be described in passing dialogue, just enough for listeners to be able to imagine what they looked like. Restrictions we faced included a two-week window of use of the recording studio, the inexperience of the group in recording a radio play, and the ever-present fear of constantly changing Safety Management Measures[7] (SMM) which restricted group sizes.

[7] In Singapore, besides wearing masks and social distancing, Safety Management Measures include restrictions on the number of people in confined spaces like rehearsal rooms, studios and performance venues. Restriction numbers can vary quite quickly in response to the number of COVID-19 cases.

During auditions, Liow was looking for voices that would create mental pictures of characters. Actors also needed to show a fairly large range of vocal expression and carry out instructions to adjust vocal quality. A cast of twenty-two actors was chosen from auditions. It was a large cast because we wanted to include as many members as possible who were willing to undergo training and commit to daily rehearsals. Eight of the cast were bilingual and took on roles in the English and Mandarin versions while the other 15 spoke either Mandarin or English. Only two actors were below 60 years old. The oldest was 80 and one actor was wheelchair-bound.

During the first read of *Chap Lau,* we realised that while characters speaking in various dialects provided the authenticity of how people communicated in the 50s and 60s worked on stage, it caused confusion in an audio play. There was no meaning-making provided by the actors' body language or subtitles, the use of too many dialects caused a lack of coherence and the pace of the story suffered. Liow translated my English version into Mandarin and in both versions, we retained exclamations or grumbling in the background by characters in the various dialects. We still wanted dialects to make a connection with older audiences[8]. The story was spread over ten episodes each lasting ten minutes. Listeners had a choice of listening to either an English or Mandarin version of *Chap Lau*. With two versions as well, *Chap Lau* could cater to a larger audience and perhaps include younger listeners who were unfamiliar with the dialects.

[8] The use of Chinese dialects declined in 1979 with the start of the Speak Mandarin Campaign. The then-Prime Minister, Lee Kwan Yew, saw the use of dialects as unprogressive and causing a lack of cohesion in society (Yeo).

Myct Boon designed the key visual– a candy-coloured sky and neon-orange flats that represented an idyllic time in the process of change, and the black and white photos sprinkled in the foreground tells us about people and stories of the past (figure 2). These photos were personal items provided by members of The Glowers as a way of including those who were not part of the radio play. The eye-catching visual was also designed to hook nostalgia loving audiences over online platforms like YouTube as well as for advertising and promotional purposes.

Fig. 2 Key visual for *Chap Lau, 2021.*
Photo: Myct Boon

We also wanted music to help tell the story and we decided to work with local composer Julian Wong. Our brief to him was to compose a tune that could be used as the main theme as well as include variations that express feelings such as falling in love, regret, and contentment. Liow was quite specific with transition music and incidental music to heighten emotions. She either sang or used other music references as examples for Wong. In total, *Chap Lau* had two variations of theme music, fifteen pieces of incidental music and over twenty sound effects. Although it's billed as a radio play, *Chap Lau* was going to appear on online platforms and ultimately be promoted in senior homes and activity centres. Its purpose is not only to entertain but act as a resource to ignite conversation or design other activities.

Finding Funding and Resources for *Chap Lau*

Singapore's National Arts Council (NAC) provides partial funding for the creation of new works of art but funding for the stage version of *Chap Lau* had to be withdrawn in place of a new proposal for a radio play. I wasn't sure if the project would get any funding at all as, during this period, other artists had many good ideas for creating new works of art with technology. My applications to NAC and the Oscar@sg fund managed by Temasek Foundation awarded funds amounting to only 57% of the cost. Sng and I had to take a pay cut and The Glowers had to dip into company savings to make up the shortfall. Although it was a significant financial strain all-around, we appreciated the fact that, like us, both funders, saw the value in the simplicity of *Chap Lau*, and how it served two groups of seniors. The first being The Glowers, who could continue their learning and practice and the second, older audiences distanced from the arts. Both groups had not been forgotten. The Institute of Technical Education (ITE) also supported us with two

weeks' use of studio and equipment and we also worked with an intern from their Performance Production course and two alumni who were our audio engineers.

Overcoming Digital Challenges

To many people, Zoom has become as commonplace as a phone call. However, when we started auditions and rehearsals in March 2021, one challenge was that some of the cast didn't own computers. They relied on their mobile phones to view the other participants as well as read off a shared screen. This slowed everyone down as some had failing eyesight and most were not familiar nor dexterous with the use of the functions of Zoom. We resorted to delivering printed scripts and only utilising Zoom's camera and microphone functions.

The next hurdle was getting cast members to go online efficiently. Some could not negotiate weak Wi-Fi signals and others had problems locating icons and functions on Zoom. During auditions and early rehearsals, there were many gaps of silence because microphones were muted or people didn't realise someone was talking to them. "My turn?" was a constant question. Perhaps these actors needed the visual cues that could only happen in a face-to-face session. One lady, S, expressed her frustration and despair saying, "My mic's not working, everything is not working… I can see, but I have to scroll. I give up! When I'm ready, I'll come back to you."

Unfortunately, S never re-joined the project. Perhaps she feared making mistakes and was daunted by a learning curve she could not keep up with. Research suggests that a way of bridging the digital or the grey divide is to increase motivation to use technology. While the novelty of *Chap Lau* seemed enticing to some, a general skills deficit and a dislike for technology, believing it to be inconvenient[9], is another reason why some seniors seem to stay away from online learning.

[9] Martins Van Jaarsveld, 3

One of the reasons for this inconvenience is pointed out in the e-article *Online Learning for Seniors.* Notess and Lorenzen-Huber quote Keates and Clarkson who say that "Web designers prefer to design for people like themselves, rather than for people in a different stage of life with very different wants and needs." They go on to add from Ito, O'Day et al. that, "Designers are also inclined toward the new and cool, so web-based interfaces change all the time and require constant re-learning. Crossing the digital divide is something that has to be done many times, not just once."[10]

[10] Notess and Lorenzen-Huber 4

To make up for a digital skills deficit and to build familiarity with Zoom, a basic protocol was created:

- Click link to get online
- Turn mic on for speaking and off for silence
- Speak one at a time
- Leave meeting and rejoin when Wi-Fi is patchy

While these seem like basic skills, the repetition of these steps created dexterity and confidence. With over sixty full-day rehearsals before them, it meant the cast could go online successfully and do very simple troubleshooting on their own.

Two months into rehearsals, an actor, BY, shared that Zoom enhanced her learning experience:

> Sometimes we can't see everyone on Zoom, yet we have to direct our feelings towards the character of the other actor. When Shi Suen (Liow) teaches us different techniques for radio, we not only have to listen, but watch. Our mouths have to learn her actions. Last time, we never knew how to do this. Rehearsals are convenient on Zoom – we don't have to leave the house, yet we can learn.[11]

[11] BY

BY, and others like her gained a new sense of confidence from the dexterity and familiarity with Zoom which fed her desire to learn. This desire to learn is representative of The Glowers who are almost seen as models of active ageing. But sometimes, ageing gets in the way of learning.

Overcoming the Issues of Older Adult Learners

In the critical review *Ageing, Drama and Creativity*, Rickett and Bernard found seventy-seven publications that highlighted better health and well-being, improved group relationships and opportunities for learning as benefits of drama. Evidence also suggests the power of dramatic engagement encourages empathy, reflection and transformed views of the self and others.[12] This evidence is not new and we see it in almost every arts project with seniors. In times when people could move freely between destinations and social groupings had no headcount restrictions, arts engagement could do all of this. However, with the spreading virus and the constant public messages to stay home, a sense of listlessness started growing in the group. While the novelty of *Chap Lau* provided a purpose for learning and an outlet for creative expression, the effects of ageing were more pronounced in the group now than when I first started working with them 12 years ago. When the idea of the radio play was presented to the group, many questions related to physical decline were raised. The first being whether getting to the recording studio had obstacles like stairs, enough seating and proximity to toilets. These seniors prioritised physical safety and well-being before committing to a project.

[12] Rickett and Bernard 44

The second was the worry of how they were going to learn enough over two months to be able to record *Chap Lau*. The online article *How Seniors Learn*, states that older people may have:

- A slower speed of mental processing, meaning they may take longer to recall information and complete tasks.
- Less working memory, i.e., less cognitive resources to manipulate different types of information simultaneously.
- Less ability to focus especially on specific information and to eliminate distractions.
- Less cognitive flexibility, which means they may lack divergent thinking or are less able to generate alternative explanations or solutions to a problem.
- Less capacity to draw inferences from information. It becomes more difficult to read between the lines and to draw conclusions from evidence.[13]

[13] Stevens 2

The article further explains that what the individual deems as useful information would be committed to memory and that repetition helps speed up understanding.

The point on lesser cognitive flexibility to engage in divergent thinking stood out for me. During rehearsals for *Chap Lau*, some cast members were less keen to explore the variety of ways to say lines or run a scene. Some found it tiring to look deeper into lines to consider subtext, inference, subtle humour or even sarcasm. Their response after a few tries would always be "just tell me how to do it and I will do so." I wondered if it was due to a gap in communication between myself and them, or whether they held onto a didactic learning style from their youth, where the tendency was to repeat what the teacher said. The other possibility could be that a combination of the lack of cognitive flexibility, ability to focus and working memory was already starting to set in. Table 1 (below) sets out the age-related issues we faced during the making of *Chap Lau* and the strategies we used to solve them. It does not apply to all seniors because everyone ages differently.

Issues	Strategies
1. Age-related physical changes in vision, hearing, motor dexterity.	1. In scripts: generous font size of sixteen, sparing use of coloured fonts. In recording venue: Flat walkways, lift access, seats, nearby toilets, ample volume of sound playback.
2. Slower mental processing	2. Chunk information clearly and succinctly, allow time for actors to manipulate information to make meaning, use repetition and recap strategies.
3. Less cognitive flexibility to change judgements, analyse information, engage in divergent thinking and draw inferences.	3. Use of good references and modelling. Encourage exploration by saying, "I do it this way, but I don't expect you to follow me."
4. Miscommunication	4. The cast consists of some who are effectively bilingual and some who are more conversant only in English or Mandarin. In every rehearsal, there are constant translations. Checks for understanding and clearing misinterpretations can provide a better working environment for all.
5. Declining motivation to learn	5. Meaningful training leading to performances that can be seen, heard and appreciated by an audience. Pep talks, expressions of love and concern during and out of rehearsals.

Table 1
Identifying ageing issues as well as strategies for this group of seniors helped the cast transition from online rehearsals to in-person recordings in the studio.

Working With a New Genre

The demands of a radio play are different to that of a stage play. Everyday movements like walking, running, and having a meal, have to be translated into sound, and voices have to take on different energies for the microphone. Four workshops were held to bring about greater awareness of the nuances of speech. There was also practise in vocalisations to suggest emotions and attitudes. Sighs, small laughs and expressions of scorn or delight, used together with text make dialogue come alive. Liow also had to work at breaking patterns of speech, for example, dragging the final sounds of words. To help create mental images of characters and their style of talking, the cast had to fully physicalize their characters through their actions, listen to their character voice, and then replicate the voice without movement with lines from the script. Auditions and rehearsals were open to all actors, including those not involved in the production, as an open source of learning. We were surprised that this open access was so popular. Each scene had no more than eight actors rehearsing and often, we would have an equal or greater number of nonperformers listening in. One reason for this could be that with staying home being the norm, these sessions provided a camaraderie that comforted the members. Another possibility was that video conferencing now seemed less daunting, and the third reason was that they were motivated to learn as they had an experience which satisfied their interests and needs.[14]

[14] Knowles et al. 40

When the time came to move into the recording studio, there was much excitement within the group. Instead of the stage that they were so familiar with, the new performance space was a music studio in ITE Central's Centre for Music and the Arts. There was a virtual orientation that included photos and videos on senior-friendly routes to the studio, eateries and toilets. To allay fears of getting lost or being late for call-time, a day was set aside for a physical meet-up on how to get to ITE Central from a train station.

Once in the studio, time was spent introducing the language of recording. For example, terms like "in points," which is where the actor has to start recording, and "out points," where the line has to end. They also had to practice how to vary distances from the microphone to create illusions of space or intimacy or how to place their hands lightly over their mouths to create muffled voices. One of the earlier problems was that the actors tended to rush their lines because they could not see and respond to fellow actors face-to-face. While they could see faces over Zoom, they could not in a studio where they were always facing a mic. They also had to get used to leaving gaps for sound effects and music that had yet to be inserted.

A safety buddy system was set up whenever there was a need. In figure 3, the lady with the blue chair in front of her used it as a support for standing. Due to weak knees, her initial preference was to sit. However, she chose to stand during recordings because she felt she performed better. Liow positioned the younger male performer behind her to provide help if needed.

The two weeks of recording were a happy time for the group. Even with restrictions, they managed to celebrate a birthday and have home-baked bread and cakes during breaks. They were enlivened by the new experience of being in a radio play that held the promise of reaching a new audience. After almost a year, The Glowers came back as a physical group and had a small dose of happier, pre-COVID-19 days.

Feedback on the *Chap Lau* Experience

In the past, The Glowers gathered feedback about productions in a very casual manner—over a meal or a big group discussion at one of their Friday sessions. This time, with the group already familiar with accessing links, they were asked to fill out an online survey. This was a means to hear individual thoughts as opposed to a group setting where responses could be influenced.

The survey also wanted to find out if the cast saw the benefits of online engagement as well as how learning the ropes of performing in a radio play impacted them. The book *The Adult Learner* explains that, "experience is the richest resource for adults' learning; therefore, the core methodology of adult education is the analysis of experience."[15] Likert scale questions that scored high in positive responses were about the enjoyment of the experience, the learning of new performance skills and the newfound confidence in rehearsing online. Written responses to the open-ended questions gathered more information about the scale questions and encouraged further expression about the experience. Here are some examples:

[15] Knowles et al. 40

老师在我们未正式进入录音室前，非常详细的教导与示范如何运用我们自己的声音去演绎角色的性格与感情，这是我最享受与受益的部分。(Before we officially entered the recording studio, *laoshi*[16] demonstrated in great detail how to use our voice to interpret the characters and their feelings. This is the part that I enjoy and benefitted from most.)[17]

[...]

Firstly, I was amazed at the rehearsals and practises via Zoom, all at the individuals' homes. Then the actual recording at Recording Studio at ITE Headquarters. Amazed at the facilities provided, working with young ITE students who were patient with seniors. Very fruitful and happy experience.[18]

[...]

可以跟一群好久没见的好朋友再聚在一起切磋分享录制的过程和心得乃一大乐事。(It's a great pleasure being together with a group of good friends whom you haven't seen for a long time to discuss and share the recording process and experience.)[19]

I was heartened to realise that what Rickett and Bernard found about the benefits of drama— better health and well-being, improved group relationships and opportunities for learning[20] —still holds true even in the time of a pandemic.

Public reception to *Chap Lau* was warm. It was selected as a digital highlight at the Silver Arts Fest 2021 and all episodes were broadcasted on NAC's Facebook over two weeks. There were also two dialogue sessions, one in English and the other in Mandarin where cast members and the creative team shared their experiences of the making of *Chap Lau*. A request also came for us to edit the Mandarin episodes down to five minutes to be broadcast over four time slots on the Mandarin radio station Capital 958. Although we have no way of knowing how many tuned into *Chap Lau*, we do know that Capital 958 has the highest reach for people over 55 years of age and in December 2020, had a weekly listenership of 906,000.[21] At the time of this publication, *Chap Lau* has already garnered 108,102 views on NAC's Facebook page even though we do not know how many viewers sat through each episode. The Lions Befrienders, a social service agency that provides friendship and care for seniors, has also requested for *Chap Lau* to be put on the 7,000 MP3 players owned by seniors under their care. The latest broadcast addition for *Chap Lau* is on the CARA, a mobile phone app that provides support for dementia patients and their caregivers. Links to all episodes and dialogue sessions of *Chap Lau* can be found on https://linktr.ee/chaplau (figure 4) where they will develop their own following. The episodes will be there for as long as the website hosts us.

Closing Thoughts on a New Pulse

The longevity of *Chap Lau* and its mind-boggling audience numbers far exceeded my conservative estimate of five hundred listeners when I submitted the proposal. This number was already more than the three hundred or so audience we would have had in a two-day black box run. While healthy numbers make funders very happy and the cast very proud, what really matters is the lived experience of increased

[16] *Laoshi* means teacher in Mandarin. The Glowers members use this term for Sng and all practitioners who work with them.

[17] LXR

[18] AN

[19] BC

[20] Rickett and Bernard 44

[21] Channel News Asia

Fig. 4 *Chap Lau* links on Linktree, 2021.
Photo: Peggy Ferroa

digital literacy and the experimentation with new ways of art-making. As Knowles et al. remarked, "the most potent motivators are internal desires like increased job satisfaction, self-esteem and quality of life."[22] I can see another rendition of a radio play. Not for the sake of riding on the coattails of this success but to provide another opportunity for those who did not have a chance to take part in *Chap Lau.* They too should have the chance to experience this satisfaction. However, as the world continues to fight new variants of the COVID-19 virus, the seemingly healthy seniors in The Glowers continue to age. Many are already physically slower, a little more forgetful, less patient to get things right and more prone to life-threatening ailments. During the production, one cast member dropped out because he was diagnosed with cancer, even as another two, who also has cancer, carried on with rehearsals and recordings. The production was bookended with the sudden death of an active gentleman, WS, who was in his late 70s, and the demise of B, a spritely eighty-year-old lady. At times like these, I often wonder if I am doing the right thing in giving people advanced in age enriching experiences and opportunities for learning. However, when I look back, I remember the utter joy of WS when the cast of *Kampong Chempedak* celebrated his birthday on stage just before a show in George Town. I also remember B's determination and delight in getting an expression right for her character, Rita, a sexy dancing girl who was a fraction of B's age. *Chap Lau* was probably B's last production, but it did not matter to her. She, like WS, both lived well through the arts right till the end. It brought them happiness, friendship, and performances for their families to remember them by.

I too, cannot help but think of my future with my own ageing affecting the way I work. After reading *How Seniors Learn,* I started to blame myself less because I saw that slower mental processing, less working memory and the decreased ability to focus on my work were part and parcel of the ageing process. When I started writing this article, I

[22] Knowles et al. 68

watched a documentary, *10 Years with Hayao Miyazaki*.[23] Chronicling the decade prior to the Japanese animation director's retirement, it held up a mirror to my ageing and creative process. Like him at sixty-two, I struggle with mental blocks, anguish over creative decisions, and lose confidence, feeling totally embarrassed whenever physical and cognitive functions fail me. His struggle creating his last and most difficult piece of work at seventy-two saw his mental blocks, anguish and frustration at his work exacerbated. He recognized his own ageing and the fact that he was starting to feel distant from his work. Perhaps the pandemic makes it more urgent for me to question the meaning of my work and my future – what is *my* new pulse? Just before the submission of this article, I read that Miyazaki was coming out of retirement (yet again) at the age of eighty. His new film is based on a novel by Genzaburo Yoshino called *How Do You Live?*. He cites his reason for making this movie as, "… because I do not have the answer."[24] Perhaps, a new pulse for me does not necessarily mean one that beats stronger and faster, but one that beats differently to accommodate an ageing body in these uncertain times. To repeatedly ask myself *How Do You Live?* will help me find better answers to the purpose of my work. It will also help keep my new pulse going.

[23] "10 Years with Hayao Miyazaki"

[24] Bisset

References

Anonymous. Personal interview. 21 April 2021.

"10 Years with Hayao Miyazaki, NHK WORLD-JAPAN On Demand." *NHK World*. Accessed 15 Nov. 2021, www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/ondemand/program/video/10yearshayaomiyazaki/?type=tvEpisode&.

AN. Personal interview. 21 April 2021.

"The Glowers Drama Group." *The Glowers Drama Group*, theglowers.com. Accessed 1 Oct. 2021.

BC. Personal interview. 17 April 2021.

BY. Personal interview. 17 Februrary 2021.

Bisset, Jennifer. "Hayao Miyazaki Comes out of Retirement for One Last Studio Ghibli Movie." *CNET*, 24 Nov. 2021, www.cnet.com/culture/entertainment/hayao-miyazaki-comes-out-of-retirement-for-one-last-studio-ghibli-movie.

Kapadia, Naeem. "Podcast 95: Three Sisters and _To701_ at SIFA 2021." *Arts Equator*, 19 Aug. 2021, artsequator.com/podcast-three-sisters-to701.

Knowles, Malcolm, et al. *The Adult Learner, Sixth Edition: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*. 6th ed., Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005.

LXR. Personal interview. 16 April 2021.

Martins Van Jaarsveld, Gabrielle. "The Effects of COVID-19 Among the Elderly Population: A Case for Closing the Digital Divide." *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, vol. 11, 2020. "Mediacorp's Radio Network Sees Audience Growth, Reaches 80% of Singapore Adults Weekly." Channel News Asia, 23 Dec. 2020, www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/mediacorp-radio-network-nielsen-radio-survey-2020-500616.

National Arts Council. "[Silver Arts 2021] Chap Lau by The Glowers." *Facebook*, 2 Sep. 2021, www.facebook.com/watch/NACSingapore/273584091014008.

Notess, Mark, and Lesa Lorenzen-Huber. "Online Learning for Seniors Barriers and Opportunities." *E-Learn Magazine*, May 2007, elearnmag.acm.org/archive.cfm?aid=1266893.

"Podcast 95: Three Sisters and _To701_ at SIFA 2021." *Arts Equator*, 19 Aug. 2021, artsequator.com/podcast-three-sisters-to701.

S. Personal interview. 3 June 2021.

Stevens, Beth. "How Seniors Learn." Center for Medicare Education, 2003,
www.mentalhealthpromotion.net/resources/how-seniors-learn.pdf.

Tan, Jude. "This Is What Our Grandparents Did To Manage Risk And Save
Money." *Dollars and Cents*, 21 Feb. 2020, dollarsandsense.sg/grandparents-
manage-risk-save-money.

Yeo, Nick. "The Death of Dialects in Singapore." *The Lion Raw*, 21 May 2013,
lionraw.com/2012/04/17/the-death-of-dialects-in-singapore.

Rhythm and Modes: Attunements in *Nadam* a Sonic Experience for Babies

Prologue

In May 2017, as a naïve second year PhD student, I found out that I was pregnant.

It was to my surprise, as I was not expecting the pregnancy. I was thrown off rhythm; the fleeting thoughts in my head came and went with such irregularity that I could barely catch a breath.

Never would I have thought that such arrhythmia in my state of being—mentally, physically, and emotionally, would set the tone for the creation of one of my defining works. This work was a sonic experience that t focused on the attunement of rhythms between one and other, particularly babies and their parents.

Arrhythmia, typically a medical term used to describe the irregularity of a heartbeat, is apt in describing the situation in the current pandemic-stricken world.

In this paper, the arrhythmia of creating a sonic experience for babies from the multiplicities of my identity as performer and mother is illustrated through anecdotes, where my rhythm as a performer is at times disrupted by that of being a mother. Yet, the innate rhythm and modes of mutuality between performer/mother and child reflects natural attunement. Similarly, as we navigate through turbulent rhythms to normalcy in a post-pandemic era, there are some rhythms that remain. This paper demonstrates how such innate rhythms attune ourselves with others through anecdotal accounts of this reflective case study.

Nadam as a Reflective Case Study

In 2018, the same year my son (whom we affectionately call 'Dodo') was born, I conceived of *Nadam*. Presented in November that year, *Nadam* is a multi-sensory, immersive performing arts experience driven by sound for infants and their parents. The research objective was to critically examine the creation and presentations of *Nadam*, with research questions that were directed at underpinning theoretical concepts to the creative process, babies' engagement, and parental roles.

Through the bounded system of a case study[1] where the research inquiry was interested specifically in the idiosyncrasy of this case[2], I also employed reflective practice to support my observations and analyses. Reflective practice, including self-reflexivity was important in this case study as I negotiated multiple identities. These were evident in how I had to be acutely aware of my "research-based," "brought" and "situationally created" selves.[3] Reflection requires one to see from the perspective of an outsider, a skill similar across artmaking and research.[4] As a reflective practitioner, I paid attention not only to knowledge constructed through words but observed through the ontology of being. This was resonant with much of my research participants—babies who were non-verbal. I was dependent on their tacit, embodied knowledge that was expressed through their multi-sensory natures as observable data. These were often expressed as descriptive narrative writing through a process of writing post-hoc fieldnotes.

The research data of *Nadam* was collected from August 2018 to February 2019 through video observations, post-hoc fieldnotes and interviews. These were analysed through manual, thematic coding that corresponded with general, underlying themes. Analyses of the video documentations also took on the approach of narrative writing, that allowed for thick descriptions, rather than the monotonous record of actions, to emerge.

[1] Merriam 64
[2] Stake 443

[3] Stake 443
[4] Nelson 29

Fig. 2 Performer-baby attunement through object and gaze. *Nadam,* 2018
Photo: SAtheCollective

Rhythm and Modes in *Nadam*

Through the consistent processes of play and improvisation in the creation of *Nadam*, I explored what sound is to a baby. Sound has survival and socio-emotional imperatives for babies. Our sense of hearing develops in-utero. Foetuses have the competence to hear from week 18 of gestation, and their sensitivities towards sound simply develop further as the foetus grows. Sandra Trehub and colleagues have conducted numerous studies that demonstrated infants' sensitivities towards the perception of melodic contours, rhythmic differentiation, and pitch preferences. These early competencies in sound perception are important for the young infant to begin communicating their needs—first through their cries, and eventually through their linguistic development. The back and forth of an infant crying, and her mother responding to her needs, are patterns of rhythm and modes.

Rhythm and modes is the concept of mutuality put forth by Ellen Dissanayake. She defines mutuality as "the sharing of emotional states in patterned sequences with others."[5] For Dissanayake, this is apparent in the arts, and fundamental to the development of relationships with others. She writes:

[5] Dissanayake 22 *Art and Intimacy*

> The biological phenomenon of love is originally manifested—expressed and exchanged—by means of emotionally meaningful "rhythms and modes" that are jointly created and sustained by mothers and their

infants in ritualized, evolved interactions. From these rudimentary and unlikely beginnings grow adult expressions of love, both sexual and generally affiliative, *and the arts*.[6]

[6] Dissanayake xi *Art and Intimacy*

Rhythm is the bouts of regularity with the passage of time. For mothers and babies, rhythm occurs through the listening and responding to one another to seek attunement. Modes relate to the quality of such experiences. This quality has much to do with our multi-sensorial nature as infants. Feeling music as if it were tactile—sharp, flat; soft, hard; light, heavy; brittle, strong—or moving through space, rising and falling; shifting and changing; or seeing music as if it were coloured—blue, grey, yellow, green.

These notions echo the theory of communicative musicality. Stephen Malloch and Colwyn Trevarthen's studies of mother-baby proto-conversations demonstrated three fundamental characteristics—rhythm, quality, and narrative.[7] Like Dissanayake's notion of rhythm and modes, Malloch and Trevarthen speak of the combination of rhythm and quality as narrative with a clear trajectory that begins with an introduction, develops into a climax, and falls into a resolution.[8]

[7] Malloch & Trevarthen 4

[8] Malloch & Trevarthen 4

Similarly, psychiatrist Daniel Stern's perception of infant and their parents' communicative gestures, facial expressions, and vocalisations could be said to be resonant with mutuality. Through our innate competence to experience an other through their various states of vitality such as "emotions, states of mind, what they are thinking, and what they really mean, their authenticity, what they are likely to do next…expressed in their almost constant movements," we are able to connect, to seek attunement.[9] Stern relates this to the temporal arts that move us from within. We seek to attune when we witness the unfolding of a performing arts experience. And as performers, we attune when we sense resonance with the audience, through rhythm and modes.

[9] Stern 3

Nadam was a delicate balancing act of navigating opportunities for attunement through rhythm and modes between babies and their parents; babies and performers; as well as amongst babies, parents, and performers through sound. Additionally, attuning in mutuality to the needs of Dodo, somewhat *arrhythmic* to the choreographed intentions of the performance, yet resulting in spontaneous expositions of rhythm and modes between mother and child.

Attunement Through Sound

The creation of *Nadam* was underpinned by notions of Chinese and Indian philosophies to sound, sound perception, and nature. The title of the work, *nadam* is a Sanskrit term that refers to the sound that is "unstruck"[10] and refers to the first sound that was ever produced in the universe.

[10] Gannon and Life 218

Sound is the agency that attunes one with nature. Through sound, or *nadam*, one seeks harmony within one and nature. Composer Toru Takemitsu speaks of this as a merger of oneself with the world.

To me the world is sound. Sound penetrates me, linking me to the world. I give sounds active meaning. By doing this I am assured of being in the sounds, becoming one with them. To me this is the greatest reality. It is not that I shape anything, but rather that I desire to merge with the world.[11]

[11] Takemitsu 189

In the process of creating *Nadam*, I found this true of babies' innate natures. This was expressed in Confucius' *Record of Music*,

Man [*sic*] is born and is still—this is Heaven's nature (*xing*).
[He is] [*sic*] touched off by [external] things and [only then] moves—
This is [his] [*sic*] nature's desires.
Things arrive and the [faculty of] knowledge apprehends [them]—only then do likes and dislikes take shape therein.
If likes and dislikes have no regulation within and the [faculty of] knowledge is enticed from without, [man] [*sic*] cannot return to [reflect upon] himself [*sic*], and the principles of Heaven (*tianli*) are destroyed.[12]

[12] Cook 38

Soundscape composer Helen Westerkamp's perception of babies' innate abilities to listen and respond through sound-making relate similarly to the above ancient Chinese philosophy. Babies are born in spontaneity with nature. Through listening, babies receive information about their environment; through sound-making, babies expressed their needs and wants with emotion. To Westerkamp, this is the very existence of babies, because there is no questioning; babies simply be in this process, like how breathing is to our survival.[13] With these underlying philosophies, I began conceptualising the sonic environment of *Nadam*.

[13] Westerkamp 144

Human, Earth, and Heaven

The trinity of human, earth and heaven is a common expression in Chinese philosophy and language. Often used in a way that refers to harmony between human and nature, it echoes the philosophical discourses above. It was thus with intention that I had created the sonic experience based on these three domains, in three acts. The following table shows *Nadam*, the sonic environment created in each act, and instruments used.

Considering the rhythm and modes of mother-baby mutuality, the first act uses voice as the instrument. In Chinese philosophy, it is believed that the voice is closest to nature, where music is an agent to the harmony of heaven and earth.[14] In infant sound perception, the (mother's) voice also breeds familiarity for babies, as they innately seek attunement for survivability and social needs as mentioned above.

[14] Cook 46

The second act choses materials that were representative of my interpretation of earth to create low, grounded sounds such as through wood/bamboo, leather, and gourd. This act is rhythmic and allowed for the synchronicity of movements to occur with a regular, pounding beat in the background. The communal experience of this regular beat attunes the audiences. The third act was designed with a sense of serenity in mind. For me, it represents the recurring conception notion of a sense of harmony with one and other, an attunement with nature that is semblant of the rhythm and modes of mutuality.

Instruments	Music (improvised)	Gestures
Act I - Human		
Voice	Vocalisations began with vowel sounds, then moved on to adding consonants	Embodied vocalizations with actions that mimic the sound (e.g., sliding action for a sliding vocalisation). Baby-like actions such as rolling on the floor, lying on the back, moving on all fours.
Act II – Earth		

Drums
 	
   Buk (Korean drum)
   Shaman Drum
   Paranku (Okinawan hand drum)
   Sogo (Korean hand drum)
 	
Bamboo didgeridoo
Dried gourds (for babies)
Wooden egg shakers (for babies)
Wooden maracas (for babies)
	Low
	Grounded
	Rhythmic
	Ceremonious
	Ritualistic
		Inspired by Gabrielle Roth's 5Rhythms, that helps practitioners attune to their underlying rhythms in their daily existence.[15]
		
		Ritual-like dance where the performing ensemble moves in synchronicity.
		
		Invitation for babies and their parents to get up on their feet to move along.

Act III – Heaven		
Harpsicle® Harp Bells on stick Cymbal Windchime Tongue Drum Bells in balls (for babies) Voice	Ethereal Calm, serene Pentatonic *pelog* scale/ Phrygian mode Non-verbal singing	Slow Settled into a state of being At ease

Table 1

Sonic environment in *Nadam*

Attunements in *Nadam*

With the above-mentioned conceptual underpinnings of rhythm and modes in mind, attunement through the sonic experience was observed through the interactions between babies and their parents, babies and the performers, as well as amongst all participants in the experience, including the performers.

Unique to this case study was the presence and involvement of Dodo throughout the process—from initial creative meetings to final presentations of the sonic experience. I experienced and witnessed first-hand how attending to Dodo's needs reflected a sense of attunement between Dodo and myself in our baby-parent relationships, yet disrupted to the performance routine at times in arrthythmia.

[15] 5Rhythms

In the following anecdote, I describe how I responded to Dodo's fusses as expressed not just amodally through vocalisations, but globally through facial expression, gestures and bodily movements, that resulted in a synchronized, rhythmic performance of a mother attending to her child's needs whilst performing:

Dodo fusses. Using vocalisations of "eh~eh~eh~" in short, agitated yet rhythmic spurts. He expresses his displeasure. I carry him on my lap, facing him outwards. He fusses again, and seem to want to face inwards. He may be hungry or sleepy and needs to be nursed. I avoid it, gently but assertively facing him towards the front. I have to maintain my performance, as much as I needed to comfort my child. I attempt to play with him by holding his hands and gesturing in rotations. He continues to fuss, vocalising "eh, eh, eh". He stands up by himself. A five stone is thrown towards him. He seems curious and looks towards it. I have my hand on him all this while. I felt the need to connect to comfort him.

I proceed on to the next performance routine. I stand up, carrying Dodo up at the same time. As though choreographed, I carry him over to my right as I kneel down. I slide, still holding Dodo in my arms. I pivot around on my bottom, holding Dodo with my hands as I bring him up into the air in an aeroplane position before placing him down on my tummy. I push myself towards the centre of the stage with my legs, and fly Dodo up in the air. I turn him around, and swiftly put him down seated on the floor. Dodo crouches towards another baby. I crouch over him. I

93

Fig. 4 Invitation for parents to participate.
Photo: SAtheCollective

quickly pick him up again, kneel on the floor and seat Dodo in my lap.
Each of these gestures were accompanied by vocalisations of sliding tones
such as "wooo~"; "uh-oooooo~", as part of the performance routine.
(observation, 7 October 2018)

The above anecdote reveals the rhythmic, movement experience that
was driven by my response to Dodo's needs of being cared for. Dodo
was disrupting my intended performance routine. Yet, I had to maintain
a quality of fluency and swiftness while engaging him in play through
gestures that corresponded to sonic impetus of my vocalisations.

Such attunement extends beyond the parent-child dyad. Like
Dissanayake's "mutuality" that extends into "belonging," my co-
performer Andy (who is also my partner and Dodo's father), and
I were attuned in perfect synchronicity as we navigated caregiving
responsibilities whilst performing as well (Figure 1). The following
anecdote describes one such occasion during the performance:

Andy, Dodo and myself looked like we were performing as a family unit.
Upon hearing Dodo's cries, Andy leans back towards Dodo. Andy rises
to be on his knees as I pick Dodo up and handed him over. Andy picks
Dodo up, puts him on his lap, and swiftly carries Dodo into a cradle
position, and then onto the floor, holding his hands and vocalising while
guiding Dodo into playful gestures of waving and flapping arms. Andy
moves Dodo left-right, left-right rhythmically, as though walking on the

94

spot. Andy places Dodo on his lap, as Dodo lets out cries of protest, as he wants to move towards me. Someone tries to distract Dodo. Dodo engages for a moment, but is quick to let out another cry, as he moves towards me. He creeps quickly towards me as I engage in eye contact with him, while vocalising with embodied movements.
(observation, 18 November 2018)

Dodo's attunement with other was not always due to basic needs of food or rest. This was also evident in his interactions with my other co-performer, Renee. Babies innately seek playful companionship with others through game and imitation, in patterned sequences in varying qualities—rhythm and modes.

> As we perform silly actions and sounds, Dodo grins with pleasure. While vocalizing, Renee runs her fingers on the mat towards Dodo, Dodo looks at that action. He then stands up and claps his hands along to our rhythmic clapping, vocalizing along.
> (observation, 16 November 2018).

The dyadic attunement between Dodo and I, that extends into that of the family triad, is also evident beyond familial relationships to include that of the familiar stranger. This allowed for attunements within the babies and parents in the audience to emerge, where Dodo was often viewed as a permissive character, offering permission for parents to feel at ease to let their child play.

The attunements between other babies and their parents were also driven by the sonic objects (i.e., dried gourds; wooden egg shakers) that were handed out. They often engaged in the objects together, connecting in that process. A mother enacted the groove of the sounds she hard by tapping on her baby's back. As the egg shakers were handed to her, she gave it to her baby, and held her baby's hand as they shook it together. This was similar for babies and performers, where attunement was observable when a play object was handed out, often accompanied by a strong gaze, as shown in figure 2. The power of engagement through the gaze were often the determining factor to our movements, as we often lowered ourselves to meet the eyes of the babies, thereby performing at low levels of being on our knees, hands on the ground, lying down or crouched over.

Attunement was also particularly observed in a rhythmic drum sequence with interlocking patterns and synchronised movements in Act II of the experience. Parents expressed that their babies seemed most engaged during this segment. With low vibrations of the didgeridoo, accompanied by regular beats on the *buk*, babies were also intuitively engaged towards the source of the sound as evident through their gaze. In this Act, Parents were invited to get up on their feet, carry their babies, and groove along (e.g., figure 3). I modelled it, giving permission by carrying Dodo to do the same. The ceremonious, ritualistic vitality of this Act is illustrative of Dissanayake's "elaboration", that stems from "mutuality" and develops through "belonging" as mentioned above. "Elaboration", is essentially art in Dissanayake's discourses, because it is in ritual and ceremonies that objects and activities that we call art are presented.[16] Such ceremonious rituals are perhaps our steady rhythm and modes of connecting with one another in current times, times of arrhythmia.

[16] Dissanayake 80 *What is Art For?*

The attunement amongst all participants present in the space was perhaps most evident in the final act of the experience (e.g., figure 4). With the vocalised melody in pentatonic phrygian scale supported by rhythmic and melodic ostinatos on the harp, there was a huge sense of the participants being fully present in the moment. Babies and parents eased into a space of familiarity, spontaneously manipulating sonic play objects as they immersed themselves in the sonic environment designed for them. This was observable as walls of discomfort or boundaries were broken. Families were no longer seated around the circumference of the space, but had come forth to be within the space.

Epilogue

Such attunement amongst babies, parents and performers in *Nadam* is fundamental to our socio-emotional beings as humans. Echoing Dissanayake's discourse that art begins from the rhythm and modes of mutuality, extending to that of other social relations, rituals and ceremonies, I find it comforting to know that in the midst of *arrhythmia*, such rhythms of attunement that resonate amongst human beings will always remain.

References

5Rhythms. "Gabrielle Roth's 5Rhythms," 2022. https://www.5rhythms.com/gabrielle-roths-5rhythms/

Cook, Scott. "'Yue Ji' -Record of Music: Introduction, Translation, Notes, and Commentary." *Asian Music*, 1995, pp 1-96.

Dissanayake, Ellen. *Art and Intimacy: How the Arts Began*. Washington UP, 2000.

---. *What Is Art For?* Washington UP, 2002.

Gannon, Shannon, and David Life. *Jivamukti Yoga*. Ballantine Books, 2002.

Merriam, Sharan B. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. Jossey-Bass, 2009.

Malloch, Stephen, and Colwyn Trevarthen. "Musicality: Communicating the Vitality and Interests of Life." *Communicative Musicality: Exploring the Basis of Human Companionship*, edited by Stephen Malloch and Colwyn Trevarthen, Oxford UP, 2009, pp.1-10.

Nelson, Robin. *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistance*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Reinharz, Shulamit. "Who Am I?: The Need for a Variety of Selves in the Field." *Reflexivity and Voice*, edited by Rosanna Hertz, Sage Publications, 1997, pp.3-20.

Stake, Robert. E. "Qualitative case studies." *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, SAGE Publications, 2005, pp. 443-466.

Stern, Daniel N. *Forms of Vitality: Exploring Dynamic Experience in Psychology, the Arts, Psychotherapy, and Development*. Oxford UP, 2010.

Takemitsu, Toru. "Nature and Music." *The Book of Music and Nature: an Anthology of Sounds, Words, Thoughts*, edited by David Rothenberg and Marta Ulvaeus. Wesleyan UP, 2001, pp.183- 192.

Tse, Natalie Alexandra. *Nadam*. Directed by Natalie Alexandra Tse, performed by Natalie Alexandra Tse, Andy Chia, Renee Chua, SAtheCollective, LittleCr3atures™, 16-18 November 2018, The Artground, Singapore.

Westerkamp, Hildegard. "Speaking from Inside the Soundscape." *The Book of Music and Nature: an Anthology of Sounds, Words, Thoughts*, edited by David Rothenberg and Marta Ulvaeus, Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2001, pp.143-152.

Teaching Generation Z: Student as Consumer, Teacher as Customer Servant

Relationships between teachers, students, and learning have changed rapidly since the turn of the century and the incoming of Generation Z into the educational system. Current tertiary students, who were born between the mid-late 90s and early 2000s came of age during a number of developments, which include increasingly more sophisticated information and communication technologies, shifting political landscapes and rapid consumerism. Social life and behaviours have changed drastically during the lifespan of this generation, and that extends to how they relate to authority. While authority in the classroom once resided exclusively with the teacher, Generation Z now requires an approach to authority that distributes the mechanisms of decision-making across the agencies present in the room, as students further access other sources of knowledge and skill acquisition via social media, and peer experience. Pulling together various factors influencing the outlook and expectations of Generation Z, this paper reflects on the roles and functions of the teacher and suggests modifications in curriculum design.

1   Social Media and Self-Comparison

Today, around 70% of Singaporeans spend an average of two and a half hours a day actively using social media.[1] It has been available for just over twenty years, which means that most young students grew up with it and cannot remember life without it. From an early age, Generation Z students have been influenced in a markedly different way to those born before the 1990s. The impact of mass and digital socialisation is significant because younger generations have become emotionally conditioned to new social emotional, and digital literacies. Moreover, social media is a central conduit for the forces of consumerism, applying duplicitous advertising tactics which render the end-user a vassal to the market economy. Although this is not new, the intensity has increased. In his book *Ideology*, David Hawkes claims that, "the market economy produces a systematically false consciousness" because the dogma of economic growth as indispensable to a successfully functional economy propels it towards dominance over civilized society, "an end in itself, and in consequence, it takes on the aspect of a tyrannous destructive force, whose impact is felt within each of our minds as well as in our material lives."[2] The market becomes an ideology. So in order for the market to survive, people need to spend money. Therefore, advertising persuades the public that they want things by convincing them they

[1] Ngu

[2] Hawkes 2

need them. To achieve this, advertising intoxicates consumers with glittering images representing life better than their own: more rich, more beautiful, more healthy, more cool and so on. The problem is, if one happens to acquire this panoply of delights, indeed, if one becomes these seductive images, there would be no need to spend and the market would collapse. Therefore, to ensure its own survival, the market economy must constantly shift the goalposts to establish and maintain people's belief in their own inadequacy. One must never fully achieve. If we are always made to feel inadequate, our well-being and worldview will be negatively influenced; negative social comparison.[3]

[3] Vaisman-Tzachor

It is no surprise then that as social media intensifies this assault, levels of mental health issues have risen. Recent research published in the *Wall Street Journal* revealed that a high proportion of teenagers are suffering from low self-esteem and the effects of "negative social comparison."[4] The authors of the study claim that these feelings were directly connected to their usage of Instagram. Added to this, recent research by UNICEF identifies lack of social interaction caused by COVID-19 as responsible for increased internet usage, spurring feelings of depression leading to suicidal thoughts.[5]

[4] Horwitz et al.

[5] Idele

The peer-to-peer comparison that arises as a consequence of the constant need to represent oneself on social media is something crucial to bear in mind here, both for its positive and its negative effects. We can observe that many users have become designers or narrators of their own online lives, beginning short accounts with the word 'so' as if they were the continuation of a grander discourse; 'So, I was minding my own business, when…So, I'm looking after the neighbour's cat, when…' etc. In this instance, the observer leaps onto the platform and positions themselves as observed. In other words, the example for others to follow or be compared to.

This inclination is also manifested in the strange phenomenon of photographing a plate of food and posting it online for everyone to admire before one eats it. At face-value it may seem absurd but in the context of the rules of the market economy laid out above by Hawkes, this trend makes complete sense.[6] Bombarded by advertisements for things one should possess, such as a delicious meal, why wouldn't people want to post their acquisitions as trophy events and assert their social accomplishment both to others and to themselves. One has designed one's own reality. Social media has indeed brought many benefits to the global community, such as raising awareness of social issues or connecting people across physical barriers. Nevertheless, people's understanding of themselves and their perceptions of the world have also been hijacked and warped by social media organs, whose *raison d'être* is to squeeze money out of our pockets.

[6] Hawkes

2   Access to Information and the Role of the Teacher

The rise of the internet has changed our relationship towards information, the way in which we acquire it and consequently the value we place upon it. I remember in 1988 gathering a repertoire of songs to learn so I could play in bars in the evenings to support myself financially as a 'jobbing' actor. I had to travel fifty kilometres to the nearest large library and sift through index drawers to find anthologies of Cole

Porter. It took me about five or six hours but I was so happy to return with the lyrics and chords, handwritten, of about five or six songs. The effort put into gathering that information made it valuable. I still have my handwritten sheets. But now, one can acquire all of that and much more in seconds without leaving the armchair. Technology has empowered us with instant access to information so research has never been easier. This is wonderfully useful and it changes our relationships to knowledge. Nowadays, students can find information in an instant. But since it's in everybody's pockets, does this mean it doesn't need to be remembered. The skill of finding information has become more useful than the skill of remembering it. What position, then, does the teacher occupy in this relationship? If the teacher is no longer the primary provider of information, do students need conventional teachers at all? Is it time for teachers to learn a new way of teaching?

I have discussed these developments with many lecturers, some of whom are relatively young, sometimes ex-students of mine. They express similar feelings of uncertainty, that the nature of relationships between students and lecturers have changed markedly over the last ten years or so. Many lecturers express concerns about maintaining relevance in their teaching. If lecturers are not a figure of authority, do their students perceive that they are necessary? If not, how should a teacher rethink their role and strategies?

In addition to that, a large amount of educational content is moving online, in some cases with a complete absence of a teacher, further introducing new authorities. And this is not limited to theoretical content. Good vocational skills training can be found in abundance, from bespoke singing, speech and voice, to acting, movement and dance training. There are various factors driving this trend, including commercial and economic but also practical ones.

I manage a practical vocational programme, which prepares students for professional stage performance. For over ten years, there has been a vigorous discussion about moving parts of the curriculum online and creating self-study modules in contextual studies that integrate with practical skills subjects taught in the studio. Once done, the modules could be run effectively over and over (albeit with updates and modifications) while reducing costs of the lecturers, rooms, electricity bills, etc. If, in addition, the learning experience is abundantly fruitful, then surely the modules would flourish. However, the initial task of creating the modules is highly time-consuming and labour intensive, which is no doubt why it had remained an idea for so long. That is, until recent events.

By April 2020, COVID-19 had spread rapidly and forced everybody into quickly reorganising materials for online, remote learning. Suddenly online learning was no longer merely an ideological discussion—it was a practical imperative and very quickly knowledge, materials and the application of them towards practical skills development were uploaded onto a digital platform. A lot of time and energy was spent last year discovering how to make it work and expertise was acquired very quickly. Although the means of learning, and hence the students' experience, radically changed, delivery continued without any major disruption. Students' acquisition of skills and knowledge were assessed and they progressed. But importantly, this chance circumstance enabled

Listen to me.
Photo: Chitra D/O Jeevan

an investigation of the impact of the removal of face-to-face learning and the role of the teacher.

3   Challenges and Responses

Research conducted by Singapore's National Youth Council indicates that emotional disorders within Generation Z are on the rise.[7] These issues commonly include low self-esteem, negative self-image, depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts.[8] These anxieties affect the learning environment within the classroom. They become less stable and enthusiastic, which can disrupt the focus and, henceforth, the learning. A lot of time is spent managing student dynamics and orientating a group towards its goals. Many students have difficulty attending regularly and this can disrupt overall development of the group. In addition, students are less reliant on teachers for providing information and, in many

[7] National Youth Council, Singapore
[8] Idele

cases, skills. So many lecturers are seeking relevance and perhaps trying to redefine their roles. Reassuringly, however, when students were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the previous year they all overwhelmingly stated their desire to return to face-to-face learning and contact. They want physical classrooms with teachers in them. So the question is, what had they been deprived of over the previous year?

Digital media objectifies the world and with that comes the objectification of relationships and henceforth personal accountability. I suggest that digital technologies, while they have put a world of information in our pockets, have also displaced familiar and instinctive human interactions that we need to keep us healthy. There has been a large amount of research into the negative effects of social isolation, whether it has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic or not.[9]

[9] Pietrabissa and Simpson 1

And so, now we start looking towards the big words—the noble words like community, friendship, empathy, humanity, compassion, purpose— and we can start to identify these elements as the necessary invisible fabric that binds us together in the same way that our ancient ancestors were bound together in tribes, mutually supporting each other in order to survive. So, for the teachers navigating this new territory these are important considerations in the effort to maintain relevance.

Six years ago, when I joined my current institution, we had a huge problem with attendance, motivation and a general sense of community. Although many applicants for a performing arts course are attracted by the possibility of fame (they want to be that advertisement), considerable time is spent in the first year exploring their sense of self, the world at large, our relationships with it and, very importantly, what they want to do with their time here. One mechanism for generating a healthy learning environment is the notion of *community of practice*. Each year, the students review, modify and agree upon ten guiding principles, listed below, which establish behaviours and understandings that foster goodwill and positive working relationships.

> Community of Practice
> 1. Acceptance regardless of race, culture, religion, gender, sexuality
> 2. Full commitment, reliability, punctuality
> 3. To take risks without fear of judgment
> 4. To look out for each other
> 5. Recognise when to separate personal issues from professional issues
> 6. To look out for and motivate each other
> 7. To build trust through honesty
> 8. To share your story
> 9. Commit to the group—offer and accept mature feedback
> 10. Roll around on the floor and laugh.

It's within this framework of behaviour and values that students position their learning and their reasons for it. Through it they can find a clear sense of purpose and these are the essential elements that will motivate and balance them.

A recent graduate said to me that those activities and philosophical discussions in the first year were an important turning point, enabling him to focus his studies and indeed his life towards a meaningful goal. So even formidable practical classes, such as Ballet at 9 am on Monday

morning, can be located within that strong sense of purpose. He can apply the posture enabled by developing core muscular strength to his ability to communicate his worldview through performance. It is his desire to make the world a better place through his artistic labours that motives him in all his classes.

We still have many ongoing challenges. But I do suggest that designers of programmes across the educational spectrum, build these fundamental human necessities into the pedagogical flow of their course structures as a guiding compass, to help students find healthy personal insights, self-worth and a strong sense of purpose within their learning.

References

Hawkes, D. (2003) *Ideology* (2nd ed.), Routledge.

Horwitz, J., Seetharaman, D., and Wells, "Facebook Knows Instagram Is Toxic for Teen Girls, Company Documents Show." *The Wall Street Journal.* 24 Sept. 2021, https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739.

Idele, P., "Children and Youth Mental Health Under COVID-19." *Children and COVID-19 Research Library Quarterly Digest.* 1 Jun. 2021, https://www.unicef-irc.org/files/documents/d-4181-Children-and-COVID-19-Research-Library-Digest-Issue-1-July-2021.pdf.

National Youth Council, Singapore. *Mental Health is a Growing Concern.* National Youth Council Singapore, April 2019, https://www.nyc.gov.sg› final_yplus_mental-health.

Ngu, T. "Social Media Landscape in Singapore." www.hashmeta.com/blog/social-media-landscape-in-singapore-2019. Retrieved 10 Oct. 2021.

Ng, C. The Complete Guide to Social Media Statistics in Singapore (2021). *Best in Singapore.* www.bestinsingapore.co/singapore-social-media-statistics. Accessed 10 Oct. 2021.

Pietrabissa, G., Simpson, S. "Psychological Consequences of Social Isolation During COVID-19 Outbreak," *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 11, no. 2201, 2020, pp.1-4.

Vaisman-Tzachor, Reuben. "Negative Social Comparison Affecting Mental Health." *Seasons in Malibu.* Jan. 2018, www.seasonsmalibu.com/negative-social-comparison-affecting-mental-health.

Disruption and Transformation: An Exploration of Pedagogical Responses to COVID-19

Introduction

The words crisis, life-changing, disruptive and transformative are oft-repeated terms used to describe the effect of the pandemic on education and learning. According to UNESCO, on "1 April 2020, schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) were closed in 185 countries, affecting 1,542,412,000 learners, which constitute 89.4% of total enrolled learners."[1] These worldwide statistics include learners in pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education, demonstrating the widespread impact of closures across the education industry. There is an urgent need in trying to understand the effects of this disruption to education, both in the now and in the future and this can be seen in the growing number of articles and publications since last year—in Singapore for example, the National Institute of Education (NIE) webpage "Education Related Covid-19 Articles"[2] has over a hundred articles. The abstracts on the website show that some articles address the sudden changes that students and teachers have had to face in switching from classroom teaching to online or blended teaching while other articles offer practical tips for educators and parents. A third category of articles is more forward-thinking, and predicts that this rupture will, in fact, act as catalyst for positive change in educational methodologies.[3] While many countries had to shut down schools and colleges completely, in Singapore, after a brief period of completely online interaction, we have been relatively lucky to be able to resume face-to-face classes from September 2021 albeit, with some restrictions. Since March 2020, my classroom experience has included various permutations and combinations of online and face-to-face teaching. The classes that I taught in this time period are all within the purview of contextual studies,[4] which include supervising final year students during their dissertation. Building on the global scholarship that is being produced about the impact of COVID-19 on education, this paper offers a study of my teaching experience at LASALLE College of the Arts since the advent of COVID-19 in March last year.

In what follows, I reflect on how this disruption has transformed the ways in which coursework is planned and executed, the lessons learnt through coping with these unprecedented changes and to examine the suitability of the innovations made as a response to disruption. This reflective process will show that periodic reflection of our own practice, be it in the classroom or on the stage, is an important mindset to have as theatre educators whether during disruptive times or otherwise.

[1] Marinoni et al. 8

[2] A compilation of articles by the Office of Teacher Education as "Useful Resources" to augment their courses.

[3] National Institute of Education

[4] Contextual studies at the degree level include History of World Theatre that provide the students with the social, cultural and historical context to understand live theatre performances of today as well as an introduction to the various cultural theories that frame analysis of contemporary performances. At the Diploma level, it includes an overview of Theatre History as well as an detailed exposure to Theatre, Arts and Culture in various parts of Asia.

The Background

My entire teaching experience prior to COVID-19 was in teaching students face-to-face and therefore it was a steep learning curve to acclimatise to remote teaching. To help in this reflective process, I researched online teaching and the creation of curriculum for online teaching hoping to find a framework of reference. In one of the books that I read, *The Online Teaching Survival Guide* by Boettcher and Conrad, the authors provide a table to explain different types of courses which provided a framework for my teaching experiences.[5] The table is presented below.

[5] Boettcher and Conrad 9

Types of Courses		
Proportion of Content Delivery Online	*Type of Course*	*Description*
None	Traditional – Face-to-Face	No online technology.
1 – 29%	Web facilitated	Web-based technology used to facilitate what is essentially a face to face course – usually a course management system or a website to post syllabus and assignments.
30 – 79%	Blended / Hybrid	A blend of online and face to face delivery. Most of the content is delivered online, typically using online discussions with some face to face meetings.
80% or more	Online	Most or all of the content is delivered online. Typically has no face to face meetings.

Table 1 Description of different types of courses. Adapted from Boettcher and Conrad[6]

I have been teaching part-time in LASALLE since 2007 and over the years I have taught both diploma and BA students a variety of subjects. The curriculum has, of course, changed many times over these years and the ways in which the classes have been structured and delivered have a large part to do with the different Programme Leaders and their vision for the courses. Despite the many changes, what has been consistent through the years is that all the courses were a combination of traditional face-to-face and web facilitated courses as described in the first two types of delivery shown in the table above. It is only after the disruption of COVID-19 that we experienced the other two types—the blended/hybrid and the fully online courses—which I will address later in this paper.

[6] Boettcher and Conrad 9

Disruption:
Reactions and Responses to the Changes Caused by the Pandemic

Phase 1 – March 2020[7]

The courses that I taught till March 2020 had a clearly established rhythm that was thrown into disarray by COVID-19. The response to the first break in rhythm was perforce reactive rather than proactive. The first wave of disruptions we had to manage was the reduced class sizes when we were told at times to split the class into two groups. The first attempt was to have the two groups in two different rooms at the same time and teach one group face-to-face while the other group would watch this on a screen facilitated by Zoom. While this worked for the group in class with the lecturer, the other group tended to get distracted and switch off. As an educator, I found this highly frustrating as my attention was continuously split between the 'live' group in front of me and the online group on my computer and I worried that I was not doing justice to either of the groups. Another issue was the initial unfamiliarity with Zoom—both from a software as well as hardware end—and juggling that with the PowerPoint slides that I used for teaching was challenging. In retrospect, this was obviously a short-term solution that was more about keeping the classes going than ensuring that the learning taking place is centre stage. Another experiment that I tried was to split the class time into two so that each group had some live interaction. As the duration of the classes were fixed, I could only spend half the duration of the class with each group and this meant that the content was not being delivered as planned and had to be modified to fit the timeframe. However, this was not ideal as the group not having the live interaction either had to do some reading or watching related to the subject. As these were younger diploma students who were unused to self-directed learning, there was a vast variation in how they complied with the instructions. While some of the students tried hard to be engaged in the given activity, I could sense that they were disturbed and distracted by the ones who used this opportunity to mess around. Finally, as this was the first time I was trying to do something like this, there was no frame of reference for the students or myself. This too would change in a very short time with the start of the circuit breaker[8] in April when we had to go completely online.

Phase 2 – March/April 2020

The few weeks of online classes before the close of teaching was a painful learning curve, perhaps more so for me as an educator than for the students. The rude shock of realising that what worked for me in face-to-face teaching was failing abysmally when on Zoom was disturbing. For example, one of my classes was with a group of students that are not very vocal in class and one of the strategies that I had utilised successfully to draw them into discussions was to approach a student and ask a question so that it seemed to be a one-on-one chat. When I tried this on Zoom, we had technical issues such as some of their microphones not working or the bandwidth dropping so that they could not turn their cameras on, etc. Further, the virtual distance made connecting with the students even harder.

In addition, there was also the ordeal of working from home—not just for me but perhaps, here, more for the students. We inhabit two spaces

simultaneously while videoconferencing—the physical space as well as the virtual space and each of these come with their own challenges. The virtual space is impacted by variations in bandwidths, hardware, software and a steady connectivity while the physical space is a shared space with friends or family. I well remember the first time a young child—a sibling of one of my students—wandered into the space while we were having a heated discussion on theatre and sexuality. The startled look on my face when I stopped speaking mid-sentence made the whole class laugh. In later discussion with the students, many expressed their discomfort and disorientation in having to convert their family space into a 'college' space.

On reflection, this is not a unique problem. In an article in *Postdigital Science and Education* titled "Quarantined, Sequestered, Closed: Theorising Academic Bodies Under Covid-19 Lockdown" the author, Lesley Gourlay, reports on an interview study conducted at a large UK Higher Education institution during the COVID-19 'lockdown,' analysing the accounts of six academics. She states that:

> the sudden and enforced nature of the lockdown necessitated this sort of creative improvisation, in which spaces which were hitherto private, domestic, and intimate are changed in their nature, arguably becoming outposts of the campus and the world of work.[9]

[9] Gourlay 807

The author goes on to suggest that the screen becomes a kind of "portal" through which a professional identity must be performed.[10] This is an interesting notion that suggests that we need to rethink and re-evaluate our understanding of 'campus' as no longer being a fixed, material space. The idea of a 'virtual' university is not completely new, but, in this case, the necessity for a sudden change in mindset as both educators and students have to shift from the expected physical classes to virtual ones was a struggle for everyone.

[10] Gourlay 808

Another issue I faced was the difficulty that the students experienced in staying alert and listening during online sessions. This is an issue experienced by other educators, for example, according to D'Cruz and Dennis, in their article "Telematic Dramaturgy in the Time Of Covid-19," their students too found the experience very fatiguing:

> far from any feelings they associated with making a live performance, they were more like zo(o)mbies. Professor of sustainable learning Gianpiero Petriglieri (cited in Jiang 2020) attributes this state of not-aliveness to a perceptual dissonance that causes conflicting feelings and states that this is exhausting for participants.[11]

[11] D'Cruz and Dennis

This "not-aliveness" was something that troubled me deeply when faced with online teaching. Both as a theatre practitioner and educator, I realised that I cherished and privileged the 'liveness' that is central to both theatre and teaching. I realised how important this was in the classroom when I was faced with virtual teaching—not being in the same physical space left me feeling as though I had lost some of my senses and that this made 'reading' the reactions of the students extremely difficult. Obviously, the way in which the content was delivered by me during those weeks of lockdown was far from ideal. Boettcher and Conrad list ten core learning principles that guide the design and delivery of online courses where the first principle to follow when creating an online

course is that "every structured learning experience has four elements with the learner at the center."[12] These elements are:

- The learner as the center of the teaching and learning process
- The faculty mentor who directs, supports, and assesses the learner
- The content knowledge, skills, and perspectives that the learner is to develop and acquire
- The environment or context within which the learner is experiencing the learning event[13]

This is illustrated in the following figure which again emphasises the importance of learner-centric approaches.
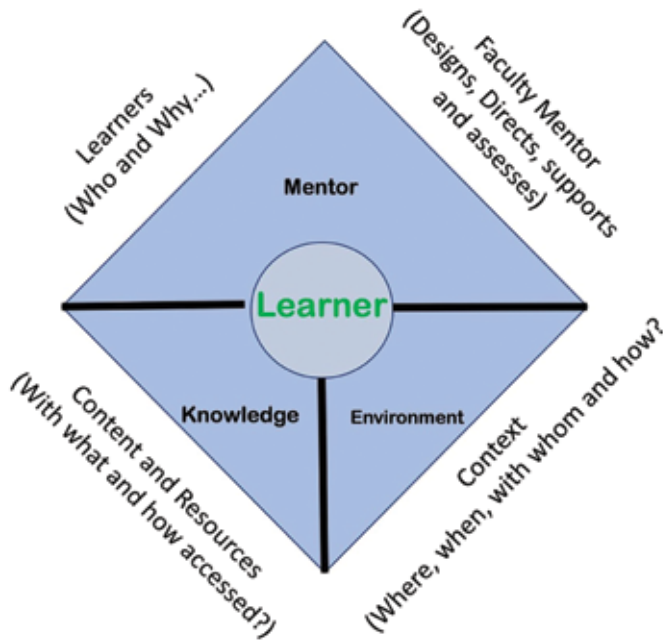
Fig. 1 The Learning Framework (adapted from Boettcher and Conrad).

Firstly, as I have mentioned before, the courses were planned for face-to-face delivery and in taking them online in such a sudden fashion, there were inevitable difficulties. The most challenging of those being "the environment or context within which the learner is experiencing the learning event."[14] I would contend that for most students studying online courses, there is already an acceptance of the very nature of remote study while, for our students, this new learning environment was forced upon them. However, within a week or so I found that most of the students had adapted to the virtual nature of the classes—perhaps because of their familiarity with social media while I, as a teacher, still struggled with the virtual world. Quite apart from having to adjust to this new mode of content delivery, what I missed the most, is being able to 'read' their reactions. The silence when I asked a question or asked for an opinion…waiting…hoping for a response is terrifying.

Therefore, when I reflect on those weeks, I am afraid that instead of the student being at the centre of the learning experience, being directed and supported by me, it was more a case of doing something and hoping for the best. Therefore, it is fair to say that during this phase, neither the planning nor the execution satisfied the first principle to follow while planning an online course that "every structured learning experience has four elements with the learner at the center."[15]

[15] Boettcher and Conrad 21

Another principle that Boettcher and Conrad write about is "Principle 10: We Shape Our Tools, and Our Tools Shape Us" where they explain that, "that learning occurs only within a context and is influenced by the environment."[16] However, while in traditional classrooms this environment is created by personal interaction, the tools that shape the environment in a virtual space are our personal computers, tablets, mobile phones etc., "these tools create an environment that is transformed and infused with powerful psychological learning tools."[17] The communication patterns between teachers and students change and many teachers struggle with this as they move from being the centre of classroom communication to its periphery. Further, in this kind of online learning environment, the students have the power to customise their learning experience. Therefore, a thorough knowledge of the tools that create this new learning environment is vital. Indeed, at the end of that semester, as faculty reflecting on the weeks of online instruction, there was the realisation that where we failed the most was in not having a clear plan for the realities and difficulties of online teaching.

[16] Boettcher and Conrad 34

[17] Boettcher and Conrad 34

Phase 3 – Semester 1 September to December 2020

The planning for the first semester of the academic year starting in September 2020 needed to be agile as we had to account for face-to-face, blended and online learning. In the chapter "An Introduction tTo Rethinking Pedagogy for a Digital Age" authors Beetham and Sharpe explain the importance of 'design' in planning a class and explain that:

> Classroom teaching with minimal equipment allows us to tailor our approach to the immediate needs of learners. Tutors can quickly ascertain how learners are performing, rearrange groups and reassign activities, phrase explanations differently to help learners understand them better, guide discussion and ask questions that challenge learners appropriately. With the use of digital technologies, all of these pedagogical activities require forethought and an explicit representation of what learners and teachers will do.[18]

[18] Beetham and Sharpe 7

Thus, the process of course redesign requires extensive reflection and planning in order to transform the learning process. The Programme Leaders and Contextual Studies Lecturers for the BA in Acting and Musical Theatre courses discussed best-case scenarios and worst-case scenarios and planned for them. We discussed innovative ways in which we would adapt to using online tools to help student learning. I came across the term "disruptive innovation" in an article titled "The Transformation of Higher Education After the COVID-19 Disruption: Emerging Challenges in an Online Learning Scenario" while researching for this paper which, in retrospect, explains what we attempted to do. According to the authors García-Morales et al.

> Disruptive educational innovation replaces existing methodologies and modes of knowledge transmission by opening new alternatives for learning. It also introduces new advances in education systems through information and communication technologies.[19]

[19] García-Morales et al. 2

We had to rethink and redesign the way the curriculum would be delivered as well as learn to incorporate technology in new and innovative ways. It is this kind of innovation that would hopefully lead to "the transformation of the role of students and the way they absorb and use educational knowledge."[20]

[20] García-Morales et al. 2

While it is difficult to quantify, I do believe that we did achieve some of that innovation and transformation in the last academic year. We did manage to ensure that there was greater student-centred learning through the incorporation of more digital material. For example, we were lucky enough to have an expert in Sanskrit drama in India, the eminent Professor Rustom Bharucha, kindly record a masterclass on the Natyashastra and the play Shakuntala which included pre-readings on the subject, recordings of performances as well as a talk that provided excellent context. This was extremely valuable in giving the students access to specialised knowledge on a completely digital platform curated especially for them. The reason this example of self-directed digital learning worked is perhaps because it was designed with forethought and a clear understanding of learning outcomes specific to this situation. A further advantage was that as all the material was online, the students could access and digest the material at their own pace—this is an example of asynchronous learning which is controlled by the student, which is very important in online and blended learning environments.

Another innovation that was very popular with the students was the inclusion of debates in class. I have had debates in class before but they were more impromptu and the idea was to generate a healthy, critical discussion. Therefore, here, it was not the debate per se that was innovative but the way in which we managed to conduct it in a hybrid learning environment. Despite the fact that some students presented the debate via Zoom and some students were in class with me, it was heartening to see that the level of involvement of the students was the same across the board. Maybe the mitigating factor here was that each group of students got a turn to be in class during the three debates that were conducted.

The pastoral care that we included in the planning was to conduct frequent feedback sessions and to ensure that both the in-class groups as well as online groups had sufficient one-on-one time with the lecturer. This again proved very effective as the students felt that their concerns were being addressed and at the same time, as the teacher, I was given the confidence that we were moving in the right direction.

Phase 4 – Semester 2 January to April 2021

Even with the change in Semester two of most classes going face-to-face, some of these practices continued—for example, greater student engagement in the classroom via research and discussion. In every class, some of the students would present their research on a chosen topic related to the subject of the class leading to discussions which ranged

from thought-provoking to hilarious. On a side note, I was absolutely thrilled and gratified when I heard Peter Sellars, (one of the keynote speakers at the *Arrhythmia: Performance Pedagogy and Practice*, an online international conference held June 3-5 2021) talking about making students the teachers and the importance and impact on their learning when they have to teach others.

It would be fallacious on my part if I didn't acknowledge that there were things that I tried which did not have the effect that I intended. I came to realise that some of the courses that I taught were rather content-heavy and that this did not carry over very well into the hybrid or blended learning scenario. For instance, I found that I had too many examples of tradition and culture that the students had to learn about in order to contextualise the theatrical forms we were studying as part of Asian Theatre. I had to re-evaluate and jettison some of the material and rather than prioritising content I prioritised learning the core concept—that the traditional theatre forms that they study are heavily informed by the culture. It is no wonder that Boettcher and Conrad state as their fourth learning principle "all learners do not need to learn all course content; all learners do need to learn the core concepts."[21]

[21] Boettcher and Conrad 20

My experience with Boettcher and Conrad's fourth type of course—the fully online course—came about in the second semester when I was asked to teach the Common Module course for level 1 Diploma students.[22] This was a unique and valuable learning experience for me as I would be teaching pre-prepared lesson plans completely online on the Zoom platform. Each of these lesson plans was prepared by lecturers from a variety of disciplines but would be delivered by me to the class that I was assigned. Simultaneously, the same content would be taught by different lecturers to different classes with a cumulative total of more than 400 students.

[22] The Common Modules include Critical Thinking Skills A and B as well as World of Ideas and Imagination and are taught across all the diploma programmes. The lesson plan is the same for all courses but as tutors we were asked to anchor it within our discipline in the examples that we chose as well as in the choosing of the activities.

Crystal Lim-Lange in a CNA commentary "COVID-19's Education Revolution—Where Going Digital Is Just Half the Battle" talks about the Minerva Project, a futuristic university headquartered in San Francisco and their innovative approach which focuses on interacting and drawing responses rather than instructing.[23] Founded in 2011 by Ben Nelson, Minerva offers undergraduate programmes where all learning is done online. At the heart of their education philosophy is the idea of "active learning" where the emphasis is on how students learn and not on what they learn.[24] As Lim-Lange explains, "Lessons started with a 'hook' at the beginning of a new learning topic—a visually stimulating image, an emotionally striking story or a thought-provoking question that caught attention, then students were placed in breakout rooms to work on short live projects."[25] She could very well have been describing the lesson plans that I was given to teach. What made this course special was that each lesson was organised around learning about a central concept and the discussions, class activities and post-classroom extensions were all geared towards this. I had the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach during the one-on-one tutorial when the students gave very positive feedback on their experiences.

[23] Lim-Lange

[24] "Minerva Project"

[25] Lim-Lange

On reflection, what made this course work is perhaps that it was designed for online teaching and that it followed Boettcher and Conrad's first principle that every structured learning experience has four elements with the learner at the centre.[26] The learners had access

[26] Boettcher and Conrad 21

to course content including the slides used in class, the videos as well as other reading material that they could access before and after the class. The teacher was more a mentor who guided the student's through the learning process rather than delivering content through a lecture. This, again, resonates with Boettcher and Conrad, who go on to explain that, "the fourth element, the environment, answers this question: 'When will the learning experience take place, with whom, where, and with what resources?'"[27] The learning took place over Zoom during a fixed time and the resources used were online resources as well as breakout rooms for discussion. Therefore, in this case, the course design comes close to what the authors describe as being the most effective one for online courses.

[27] Boettcher and Conrad 23

Transformation: Changes That Are Here to stay

The above reflections demonstrate that we have struggled but coped and, at times, triumphed in planning and delivering courses in a variety of ways. One change that is maybe here to stay is the need to strategically use technology in our course design. In their chapter "Designing courses for e-learning" authors Sharpe and Oliver maintain that in courses that need to incorporate more technology into their design to cater to blended learning environments it is the redesign process that is crucial for transforming the learning experience. This redesign process examines the current course design for things that work and will not work in a blended environment as well as the student feedback. They recommend that the redesign process must be done as a team and that the staff have the time to properly integrate face-to-face and online material.[28] They caution that technology shouldn't be treated as a 'bolt on' and used blindly alongside existing course design. Instead, they recommend that the most useful approach is to try and incorporate technology into a course with a constant questioning of its purposes and how it serves the teaching process:

[28] Sharpe and Oliver 48

> This ongoing, transformative engagement with teaching serves a double purpose: it guides the use of technology, but at least as important, it provides academics with the incentive to reflect upon their teaching and learn from the problems that technology adoption can create.[29]

[29] Sharpe and Oliver 49

This is a recommendation that we should most certainly follow as part of the periodic reflection of our own practice, be it in the classroom or on the stage, is an important mindset to have as theatre educators during disruptive times or otherwise. What started as a redesign process to cope with the sudden disruptions has instilled in me a new desire to come up with innovative ways in which course content can be taught, be it online or in a classroom. As part of this reflective process, I have come to realise that my understanding of pedagogy has had its own transformative journey from teacher-centric methodology to a more learner-centric methodology which encourages active learning.

Another realisation that I came to during this research process is that I am not alone—apart from my College colleagues, of course. I was heartened by the sheer plethora of blogs, newspaper articles, journal articles and even books that address the issues that are challenging the field of education and, in particular, theatre education. Perhaps the flip side of the globalisation that allowed for the rapid spread of the coronavirus is the global networks that have been formed to address

the problems caused by the same virus. An excellent example of this is ATHE's Theatre Online Pedagogy and Online Resources that provides ideas, links and how-to knowledge for theatre educators.[30]

[30] Association for Theatre in Higher Education

From a pedagogic perspective, there is a gathering momentum of writing that examines the transformation happening in education and the performing arts—from writing in academic journals to books, researchers are gathering data and postulating models that will probably transform the ways in which we understand education. For instance, authors Li et al. in their journal article "A Hybrid Learning Pedagogy for Surmounting the Challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Performing Arts Education," published in June 2021 conducted a survey of teachers and students at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts to assess how effective the 'hybrid learning' implemented during the second semester 2020/2021 was.[31] Not surprisingly, their conclusion is that the success of a hybrid pedagogy depends on the effective melding of technology, learning environment and a blend of synchronous and asynchronous learning—in other words a successful course redesign such as those recommended by Sharpe and Oliver.[32] Routledge alone has numerous publications such as *Online Teaching and Learning in Higher Education During COVID-19 – International Perspectives and Experiences* edited by Roy Y. Chan, Krishna Bista and Ryan M. Allen which came out in August 2021 and others such as *Performance in a Pandemic* edited by Laura Bissell and Lucy Weir, and *Pandemic Performance – Resilience, Liveness, and Protest in Quarantine Times* edited by Kendra Capece and Patrick Scorese which are due to be published in 2022. An inevitable inference at this point is that irrespective of the end of the pandemic we cannot go back to where we were before. The challenges that we have faced have irrevocably forced a transformation, not just in the ways that we teach but in our very understanding of pedagogy.

[31] Li et al. 7651

[32] Sharpe and Oliver 41

On a personal level, the issue that had troubled me the most at the beginning of this reflective process was my own resistance to teaching online—as, perhaps, at the core of this resistance is the idea of 'liveness.' In my decades of experience in theatre, the embodied experience of acting and experiencing theatre is something that I have cherished. Further, teaching in a conservatoire where experiential learning is encouraged and fostered, the 'liveness' of theatre seems to take centre stage. Therefore, both as a theatre maker and as an educator 'liveness' is something that I perceive as being essential to my practice. However, looking back not just at my own teaching experience but at the ways in which theatre makers have not just coped with but overcome restrictions this resistance seems short sighted. Writer Toczauer offers glimpses into the experience of various educators and their innovative methods and, while there are some successes, many of them feel certain kinds of subjects need face-to-face interactions.[33] On the other hand, examining the "strengths and limitations of Zoom for generating affective qualities (such as intimacy, immediacy, kinaesthetic energy) associated with live theatrical performance" D'Cruz and Dennis conclude that despite their initial resistance and the scores of:

[33] Toczauer

> practical, technological, emotional and pedagogical problems generated by being forced to teach and make creative work online, most students enjoyed the experience of developing their media skills and learning how to work in the online space as live performers.[34]

[34] D'Cruz and Dennis

Nevertheless, not surprisingly, in both these articles and many others that I have read there is a decided preference for going back to 'live' theatre.

However, this does not preclude the fact that perhaps it is time to re-evaluate my understanding of what 'liveness' means in education. Perhaps the screen is not as much of a barrier as I perceive it to be. Looking back at my experiences with supervising students for the dissertation this year which were completely online, I did not feel any sense of discomfort or resistance. If anything, the online nature made the sessions more intimate and focused and free from the constraints of finding a common physical space to meet. Therefore, I would say the most obvious transformation is in my own attitude to teaching and learning. While it would be presumptuous on my part at this stage to suggest that disruption is something that educators need in order to innovate, perhaps a bit of disruption is sometimes necessary in order for us to periodically rethink, reassess and reinvent our approaches to teaching.

References

Association for Theatre in Higher Education. "Resources for Teaching Online." *Athe.org*, www.athe.org/page/resources_teaching_online.

Beetham, Helen, and Rhona Sharpe. *Rethinking Pedagogy for a Digital Age: Designing and Delivering E-Learning*. London, Routledge, 2013.

Boettcher, Judith V, and Rita-Marie Conrad. *The Online Teaching Survival Guide: Simple and Practical Pedagogical Tips*. San Francisco, Ca, Jossey-Bass, 2010.

D'Cruz, Glenn, and Rea Dennis. "Telematic Dramaturgy in the Time of Covid-19." *Digital Culture & Education ISSN: 1836-8301*, 29 June 2020, www.digitalcultureandeducation.com/reflections-on-covid19/telematic-dramaturgy.

García-Morales, Víctor J., et al. "The Transformation of Higher Education after the COVID Disruption: Emerging Challenges in an Online Learning Scenario." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 12, no. 1664-1078, 11 Feb. 2021.

Gourlay, Lesley. "Quarantined, Sequestered, Closed: Theorising Academic Bodies under Covid-19 Lockdown." *Postdigital Science and Education*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1 Oct. 2020, pp. 791–811.

Li, Qingyun, et al. "A Hybrid Learning Pedagogy for Surmounting the Challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Performing Arts Education." *Education and Information Technologies*, 28 June 2021, 10.1007/s10639-021-10612-1.

Lim-Lange, Crystal. "Commentary: COVID-19'S Education Revolution - Where Going Digital Is Just Half the Battle." *CNA*, 19 Apr. 2020, www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/covid-19-coronavirus-education-digital-revolution-transformation-765146.

Marinoni, Giorgio, et al. *The Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education around the World IAU Global Survey Report*. 1 May 2020.

"Minerva Project." www.minervaproject.com. Accessed 16 May 2021.

National Institute of Education, Singapore. "Education-Related Covid-19 Articles." *Nie.edu.sg*, 1 June 2021, www.nie.edu.sg/teacher-education-undergraduate-programmes/useful-resources-for-HBL-WFH-EdCo/education-related-covid-19-articles.

Sharpe, Rhona, and Martin Oliver. "Designing Courses for E-Learning." *Rethinking Pedagogy for a Digital Age: Designing and Delivering E-Learning*, edited by Helen Beetham and Rhona Sharpe. London, Routledge, 2013. pp. 41–51.

Toczauer, Chelsea. "Can Theater Studies and Performing Arts Survive the Covid-19 Pandemic?" *Online Education*. www.onlineeducation.com/features/challenges-of-theater-studies-online.

Critical COVID-19 Creative Work: Kindness, Care, and Repair

In June 2021, Peter Sellars was in Paris hoping to direct what would be his first show during the pandemic. Negotiating rehearsal times, time zones between Europe and Asia, as well as internet connectivity, he connected from his hotel room to have a conversation with Michael Earley, who was then Dean of Performing Arts at LASALLE College of the Arts. Sellars delivered the opening keynote address of *Arrhythmia: Performance Pedagogy and Practice.* His global experience, as well as the agility with which he mixes ideas and practice in his work, makes him an ideal voice to inspire the attendants to think critically about performing arts, and the world, particularly in the context of the pandemic.

The following is a curated version of the 90-minute keynote which was structured as an interactive conversation with public. Sellar's charts the shifts in approach and development, temporary or lasting, that were brought on by the pandemic in his practice as a theatre maker and academic. Sellars invites us to return to the basic principle of theatre as a place to gather and heal as a community. He reflects on the most fundamental power of assembly. He reminds us to consider the possibility of theatre as a healing practice and to activate our place as performing artists in society.

Michael Earley	Tell us what the effects of COVID-19 have wrought?
Peter Sellars	I hope COVID-19 arrived to teach us simple and basic things about the truth of life and what it means to be alive. And to stop everything we were doing, which was too much. We had lost sight of what is actually basic. Lost sight of what was actually the most important parts of life itself. I think theatre is about actually coming down to earth again in a really powerful way.
	Theatre exists for human beings and the substance of theatre *is* human beings. Every human being carries within them the seeds of such profound regeneration, this is the time, now, where the solutions to climate change and the climate emergency are not just primarily technical. Solutions are not going to come from science labs. They're going to come from human beings living and working together, differently.
Michael Earley	From where do you see change coming?
Peter Sellars	The change will come from human beings living together differently, sharing different levels of recognition of what is human and non-human. COVID-19 came, in part, to show us what part of your city has been neglected. COVID-19 came, I think, because the Climate Emergency said: 'I've been trying to get these people's attention on earth

and they keep sending these really strong signals.' And COVID-19 said: 'I think I can make them *stop* for a moment.' And, I believe, we're living in that moment of 'stop!'. When in a state of addiction, the only way you can force change is to stop and resolve to change crazy, out-of-control, destructive behaviour.

Michael Earley And to use your analogy to addiction, we're facing the dilemma of recovery following this arrhythmia?

Peter Sellars Yes. And that would be called theatre. That's what theatre is about: recovery and gathering together friends to help you change your life and keeping you on the wagon, on the path every time you are in danger of going off of it. And so here we all are in this extreme place. All of us—addicted and non-addicted—in denial until we all finally hit the wall. I think this past year we all heard the sound of that wall being hit. Now the question is: can we get over our addictions and can we begin to live in a way of more equity, removing issues like structural racism and structural environmental destruction?

Michael Earley Tell us about kindness, care, repair? It sounds like a kind of three-step recovery process or three-act structure?

Peter Sellars For me, those words are quite personal. One of the most intense things for me in this COVID-19 year was my father's death. With restrictions, I couldn't be there with him or anywhere near him while he was dying. He was in the second most COVID-19 hit emergency city in America, Phoenix, Arizona, while I was in the first emergency city, Los Angeles, California. You realise theatre is also about how we care for people who are not with us and how we acknowledge all the beings that we are carrying inside us.

Theatre began, most likely, in Africa and Asia as performances for the dead. As performances for people who you cannot see but who, as spirits, can see you. If you look more deeply, of course, you see them every day of your life. In the case of my father, he was with me more intensely during the week after he died than when he was in the world. That intense presence of the people we are missing, who are not in the room—the disappeared ones—help with the care and repair. The disappeared have to be acknowledged. How do you acknowledge the weight of 5,000 people who disappeared in India, just this morning, let alone your mother, your father, your sister, your daughter?

So for me one of the important projects of this year, and the coming years, is ceremonies for the people who couldn't say goodbye. What will it take to repair and reweave a structure of what makes us whole as a people, as individuals, as a society? So part of the COVID-19 year for me has been thinking about those kinds of ceremonies.

The other part of the year relates to my mother, a brilliant individual who taught English literature all over the world for decades but who now cannot read, can't write or remember. She's now living in a place that is committed to very advanced processes of memory care. These incredible new technologies are simply called 'affirmation' therapy and love. The therapy dwells not on recovering her past but affirming what she is thinking about in the present, at that very moment, and affirm it. And she has never been happier or more alive, more showered with love, with kindness.

Michael Earley	And what message do you find COVID-19 is sending to the arts?

Peter Sellars	For me, another powerful message coming out of COVID-19, but linked with the climate emergency, is we all should be living with much less. The minute you're living with less, and I mean also in theatre and the arts by practising with much less, then you realise we should not be wasting essential resources. We're living in a society of excess with waste running in every direction and we've got ourselves stuck in a place of such deep negativity.
	Through theatre, we have to give reasons why we are still alive and reasons to still be alive, and with *care* to stay alive. And also simply to recognise the presence of miracles that are surrounding us every day and not just to recognise the evil, corrupt and violent elements that seem to outweigh the good of everything else.
	Every morning in the Congo literally millions of mothers find a way to feed their kids even though there is no income. It is the miracle, every single day, of people fighting and living in impossible conditions. The story of theatre is the recognition of our capacities – our real capacities. Capacities that, frankly, the education system doesn't get. That a system of simply training for employment doesn't get.
	We are constantly in a nightmare of an education system that trains through standardisation. And standardisation is the opposite of being human, creating inequality and racial imbalance because none of us is carrying with us the same stories, the same gifts, the same skills, the same histories or the same futures. So, to ask for us all to be the same is actually about inequality because we are not the same.

Michael Earley	Do you think that this period of intense arrhythmia we are going through, this real emergency, will reshape the way we teach the arts?

Peter Sellars	I think the arts are about how to live independently of money, how to live independently of self-importance and hierarchy, and how to address conditions of an endangered world.

Michael Earley	We have the first question from Professor Steve Dixon, President of LASALLE. He asks: 'How exactly do you think the story of theatre will change in the wake of COVID-19 and how profound and long-lasting will that change be?'

Peter Sellars	Well, you know we are facing a whole generation of practitioners without jobs and income. One of the most beautiful things to say to this current generation is do not confuse who you are with your job. They are not related. Your job is just a job. Meanwhile, who you are is a miracle. And theatre is about the miracle, it's not about the job.
	One of my favourite quotes is from an old man who over several generations trained some of the best dancers in Bali. He said 'There's a difference between a good dancer, an excellent dancer and a great dancer. A good dancer knows the music, knows the moves, can execute everything perfectly. An excellent dancer knows the music, knows the moves, can execute everything perfectly *and* understands the inner meaning. But a *great* dancer knows the moves, knows the music, can execute everything perfectly, knows the inner meaning *and is a farmer.*

We are all part of society. Artists need to be part of society and not just artists. The real future of theatre is actually for it to be seen as part of the health system, the criminal justice system, the education systems, as part of all the things that are *not* exclusively about the arts. The arts should be about making everything else work.

For me, we are all in a society that is on steroids, and on stimulants and drugs because we can't face any of the predicaments that are actually tearing us apart as a society. So for me theatre is about creating that space of recognition, that space of being able to finally look at each other and stop pretending. And, little by little approach something that could be the power of a shared truth. That is to say not my truth, not your truth, but a truth that we are all able to find together and agree upon. So, I would just emphasise that for me theatre is a way to put more justice in the justice system, to put more interaction and levels of productivity into the economic system. To put in really profound levels of health in the health system.

For me, theatre is the place where you test those things that are unthinkable and then you think about them twice and you realise, why have we never thought that before? At what point does the unthinkable become thinkable? Theatre is about putting in front of people situations and alternatives that they themselves could never imagine. Theatre is about putting in front of you a vision of alternatives that have to be acted-on now because our period of reflection has come to an end. COVID-19 and, moreover, climate emergency is that great.

I just want to say, to this forum, that the level of destruction we are facing actually means you in Singapore and we in Los Angeles (and everywhere) have five years to figure this out and act without further discussion. Theatre is called action. It is actually about what it means to act—and act not alone, but together. So for me, the theatre itself is actually both the engine and the laboratory for the immediate change and movement that is required in a society that has become so profoundly institutionalised to the extent that now we have institutions, not theatres, institutions not justice, institutions not schools.

The problem with the way we have to do theatre now and do this conference via Zoom is that we are not all in the same room. The project of the 21st century is how we share: space, water, air, and resources. We need to abandon Westernised ways of thinking where we do not share, where it's about you yourself amassing everything you can for yourself.

Michael Earley   Do you think post-COVID-19 there will be a changed relationship between spectator and performer?

Peter Sellars   The short answer is yes. I believe that the society of spectatorship is over. It is now too late to create uninvolved spectatorship and come to the theatre as a mute audience who sit there with their arms folded and say, 'oh, that was very well spoken.'

We now have to be in a relationship where everyone in the room has something to do, something to say. We all have a part to play. We all actually need to come together to make something happen. And so the theatre is that place of coming together and a place of mutual and collective responsibility and sharing. That's a very dynamic model of

theatre. And I'm very happy that COVID-19 made standard theatres inoperative. Theatre actually gives us the opportunity to imagine, construct and demonstrate structures of equality in prototypical forms.

Michael Earley   Given we are a conference of educators, what are the steps needed to evolve performing arts education and establish new rhythms? How can we value and nurture the individual, in spite of incessant demands for standardisation and assessment?

Peter Sellars   I'm working on it in my own classes at UCLA. Every student gets an A because I just say: I am not interested in evaluating you and there's only one person who is going to evaluate you and that's you. That is to say, if you live an excellent life or if you spend your whole life trying to fake out people around you that's not an issue for me, it is your issue. And my standard of excellence doesn't matter because your standard of excellence is what this is about. And you must have a standard of excellence for yourself.

I do not read the papers or final essays. I say that the only person who can read your paper is you, ten years from now, twenty years from now. This essay is a message from your 21-year-old self to your 31-year-old self, to your 41-year-old self: who are you, what do you stand for, what do you care about and what are you going to commit your life to? Nobody can *make* you an artist, you have *to be* an artist.

I want students to be equipped to take the system apart. To understand not just the political and moral problems that artists face but the wider cultural problems that underlie all politics. For me, education is not me giving somebody the answer to something or them coming up with an answer that I agree with. It's about life telling you that you have to find your own answers.

And you have to look deep inside yourself to find those answers. And that's who you are and that's what we're really hoping to do in education. To just say, please look as deeply as possible into who you are and then look up and see everyone else differently, because they are not who you think they are. What we're talking about is not a job. We're talking about your life work. Why are you on earth?

Every single action is a global action. Theatre is about recognising the consequence, the immense consequence and resonance, of every human action. That is what the Ancient Greek and Chinese plays are about, that's what Shakespeare is about. Every human gesture resonates through an entire kingdom, through an entire ecosystem. And so theatre is just creating that awareness of the power of every gesture to do either more damage or to heal. And right now we need healing.

Michael Earley   An interesting comment comes from our Provost [and Editor of ISSUE], Venka Purushothaman who in the Zoom chat of this session says that clearly there is a need for social and creative correction at this point. That the gap between society and the arts has widened, formalised into an arena of transactional joy. COVID-19 has shown no sympathy for this at all. He says: "I'm reminded that in many Asian traditions death is intertwined with rebirth; letting go is as important as being together." So, he asks, to rebirth the arts following all this arrhythmia, what might constitute the possible?

Peter Sellars	That's so beautifully put. What constitutes the possible is the impossible. What we do in theatre and where we start from is impossible. I always hear: 'Oh, we cannot do this. We cannot do it, no, that would be impossible.' You know, the minute anybody says to me that it would be impossible, I say, 'How do we do it, then?
Michael Earley	Another question from the audience: How is the political question separate from a cultural question, especially when the politics of culture is intertwined with the politics of education? Particularly in post-colonial contexts where there is still a prevalence of white and Western culture being prioritised and valorised?
Peter Sellars	Thank you for saying that. That is literally the problem. Step one: in all cultural spaces, we have to prioritise *other* voices. So for me, one of the things about the standard white view of everything is that it's very good at articulating itself, and so it actually ignores the greater part of the world that doesn't speak English. And not just the world of human beings but the natural world of trees, plants, water and air. There is a beautiful line in a Buddhist Sutra that says holy liberation is in the equality of all things: water, air, animals, people. How do we live in balance with each other, with the environment? We're looking for the equilibrium that represents the equation that is equality.
Michael Earley	Someone asks what is an impossible, unthinkable thing that you are trying to work through now, in your own work or in the way you're talking to students or how you're interacting with others?
Peter Sellars	It's hard to get too specific. In theatre one of the reasons that I do not let people come into rehearsals is because every space that we inhabit is so damned public. Most people need a private space to work things out. So, for me, one of the most important things theatre offers is the process of making protected zones. Most people need a protected zone to work out issues. Most people are not ready for prime time. Most of us actually need the space to make our mistakes, to not be judged and to simply express something that we feel very uncomfortable expressing. So a lot of my work is working with performers or participants in a project who have very, very, difficult things to work through. I have to first create this private space where they work through their own most painful issues to become incredible. Every night you're watching a human being facing something that they have feared their whole life and you see them master it right in front of you. And every night that person relives the moment that finally arrived in the fourth week of rehearsal, where they could face something and they could discover something that again I could never have told them.
Michael Earley	We've got a final group of questions about institutional listening. And about how to manage the patriarchy and the colonial systems that this region of the world, for instance, has inherited.
Peter Sellars	This last summer, in response to the George Floyd and Breonna Taylor murders, my summer class at UCLA, which had 300 students, created together a new curriculum and course called 'Daily Abolitionists Practice'. It was in response to the curriculum we felt was out of date. I said to the class, you know as of this summer, every single curriculum in this university is badly out of date. And it all needs totally rewriting. So step one is we have to recognise that a university is like a movement.

Peter Sellars
Photo: Ruth Watz

We are not just at adjoining desks. This is a movement when you're on the streets together. In a community organising movement, you are not just responsible for yourself but you are also responsible for three people next to you. And you're not learning from the person in the front of the room you're learning from each other. So why not invite the students to start teaching, really creating that sense that the learning is not from me to them, but from them to each other. For me, educational reform is about activating students as activists and teachers. Every act you do in this classroom is taking responsibility for the state of the world. Suddenly the stakes are higher than getting a good grade.

So, for me, this shifting the way energies move and the way responsibility moves is really what education is all about and putting students into real positions of responsibility, because they are responsible.

Michael Earley   Peter let us end on that final thought. To come over the next two days are seminars and panels, which are going to feature students talking about their experiences of arrhythmia and, I think, your powerful opening words will prompt our further talks and discussions. Thank you so much for opening *Arrhythmia* and it's been wonderful having you join us from Paris. Thank you, too, for taking time away from your rehearsals to speak with us.

Peter Sellars   Thank you. And maybe I can leave you all with a final thought related to the state we find ourselves in: as human beings—and this is what Greek tragedy is about—crisis is our friend. Crisis is actually the time we have to get honest and so, wow, let's get honest!

Artist's Studio as an Open Space

In June 2021, weathering the trepidation and concern over possible dropped internet connections, poor Wi-Fi signals and technological glitches, Artist Melati Suryodarmo successfully connected from her studio by the village at the northern part of Surakarta, Indonesia with Melissa Quek, Head of the School of Dance and Theatre at LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore. Suryodarmo gave her keynote presentation over Zoom to the international audience of the *Arrhythmia: Performance Pedagogy and Practice.* Suryodarmo's ability to span the continents with her practice that is based in both Germany and Indonesia, and the Singaporean audience's familiarity with her work made her an ideal person to share the generative effects of a pandemic-induced social and cultural arrhythmia.

The following is a curated version of the 90-minute keynote as conversation that charts the shifts in approach and development, temporary or lasting, that were brought on by the pandemic in Suryodarmo's practice as an artist and a pedagogue. Critically, the arrhythmia that the conversation with Suryodarmo highlights is one that calls for a change in rhythm caused by the pandemic and is actually something that artists may want to cultivate. She notes the importance of slowing down and discusses how contact with nature can assist the body and mind to adjust and adopt this new rhythm. Reflecting too on her study of trance, which began before COVID-19, she emphasises the need she found to rethink the body as an empty entity that can be cleansed and filled. The conversation is a timely reminder that our bodies are affected culturally, physically and spiritually, and performance practice may indeed be a way to balance all these facets of our embodied experience and craft.

Melissa Quek	Please tell us a little about your practice and how it has changed due to the pandemic.
Melati Suryodarmo	I would like to share something that I have been doing for many years, but has not been publicised much as I have been doing it just as part of my daily life. But during the pandemic, it has become an increasingly important centre of my work.
	I would like to introduce a little bit of my background. How I became an artist and how as an artist I prepare or train myself for my practice to share my knowledge and what I can do for other artists. I used to live in Germany for more than 20 years and between 2011 and 2013 I decided to go back to my home country, my hometown Surakarta in Solo, central Jawa, Indonesia and I thought, something must change in my life.
	My practice began in the 90s. It was not an unpopular practice but nowadays performance art is becoming more and more popular. And I'm happy that there are many new performance artists all over the

Melati Suryodarmo, *Ale Lino* (2007), performance
Gross Gleidingen
Photo: Reinhard Lutz

world, and also that this genre is shared or adapted or intertwined with other practices like dance and theatre. Performance art was always an inspiration for many artists, but it was not sustainable in terms of how the knowledge of performance art should be carried on. I think most of the art schools in the world today do not have a special class [for performance art], unlike the school where I was in Braunschweig. We had the special department for performance art where Marina Abramović was. And I think in the art education systems we have running now, we have not left space for learning performance art in the proper way. Performance art should in no way to be a side dish to open up the next exhibition or an act of entertainment. Nor is it a practice that is only used to protest as part of practical politics or demonstrations. Performance art, for me, is a way to deliver ideas, to deliver spirit, to deliver thinking.

In 2012, I decided to open my studio in Solo, for classes, workshops and also performances. I like to grow with the activities of my studio and I like to share and hope it slowly impacts more on society.

It is not very easy to come back to my own country within my own cultural context of 20 years of living abroad. I needed some time to adjust; to understand. I never really want to force my students to follow what I'm doing but, rather, I would like to encourage them to develop their ideas. I was thinking maybe through a laboratory—through the method of sharing and gathering and exchanging discourse. So from this very simple

situation, I would encourage young people to develop something that is not accepted or not permitted at school. So I provide my space Studio Plesungan, as an alternative education space that is free. Everything is for free here, and it is based on exchange. That means those who are meeting here meet because they need to meet. When we do an event, it's not about curating, like in conventional festivals, I invite artists to come in the spirit of sharing, learning and being open to the exchange of experiences.

Melissa Quek   Could you speak more about the idea of slowing down. When you are in the lab and going outdoors there is a different sense of a rhythm in the way your students relate to each other and to nature, that seems to affect the way they learn and create.

Melati Suryodarmo   With COVID-19, we were all suddenly surprised and gradually stopped our regular activities. Schools were closing, all my projects were postponed mostly indefinitely. Some projects were postponed, and then postponed again, and again, and even when we planned something we had to have to have a plan A, B, C, and so we are forced in these conditions to shift our rhythm, to shift our way into a different pace, a different kind of timing. We are forced to sense the time in a different way, and so I was thinking at the beginning of the pandemic: "okay it's a good time for me to rest." I've been traveling a lot, and doing a lot of things in the last five years. So in the beginning of the lockdown in Indonesia, it was two weeks after the opening of my solo exhibition at The Macan Museum in Jakarta, it was a full year of preparations - and the opening was very successful, but after two weeks, we were forced to close and stay at home. At the time I was thinking: "Okay, I accept, I believe it is something good just to stay at home and avoid the virus." I wondered what to do with so much time. I thought of planting vegetables, so I built a greenhouse from bamboo.

[And so I thought:] Another working activity is coming, another rhythm is coming. What should I do in my studio? I cannot do my festival, I cannot do my workshop, and so on. The shifting of rhythm is very interesting. The idea of making activities is a little bit slower, but somehow time is very precious. We work more intensively in one-to-one meetings and conversations. So last October, I brought students on a pilgrimage to nature.

I offered to take them to the south and find some water. Go to the ocean, get some fresh air to get back to ourselves. Basically, I learned this from Marina Abramović because she had workshops every year for us in the countryside in Spain or in France to learn how the body connects with itself using the help of the energy of nature. Because most of us live in a town, and we are always rushing, we are always held by activities and schedules and so on, and I brought them to an undiscovered time and place. Walking slowly and doing a little exercise but mostly just facing the ocean, or just being quiet, writing down something and eating well. We did a lot of beach activities. The beach was very empty, of course, no tourists.

I believe that nature has the power to help us gain our power to regain our awareness of our being human, or in our relationship with nature and other spirits. You know, nature is unpredictable. Nature gives us a lot of messages that we are not aware of sometimes, And I think it's not

just refreshing, it's rather a retreat or a pilgrimage that brings back our connections with nature so that we get reacquainted with the signs that we receive from nature. This is what we have lost over time, especially through modernity. For example, what is the smell of the black sand? How do the ocean's waves sound? What is the smell of the leaves from the tree? What is heat? What is cold? And if you're always in an airconditioned room and then you go out of the office, and then you go out to a very hot Singapore, for example, and then you go again into the air-conditioned environment, you lose this sense of in-between spaces, between nature and your body. And I think this sensitivity is very important. And, a lot of tasks were like, "okay, let nature give you a message." And then we discuss. And most of the students receive some messages. Usually, a message that they have met before or seen [received] before. For example, it goes into personal memories, or reminding their body that it was very exhausted, but they also had messages that they haven't met or received before.

| Melissa Quek | Why is talking about traditional arts in Indonesia important and what are the main differences, for you working in Asia, or Southeast Asia compared to Europe or the United States? |

| Melati Suryodarmo | Sometimes I think our practices in relation to the traditional arts or with the traditional culture are very ambiguous. You know, how the government offers, for example, the idea of preserving culture. But for me, it goes against the reality that culture is developing, it is something that you cannot really preserve unless it is an artifact or object that has no life. |

But if culture belongs to society, and the society is growing, and the growth is unpredictable, the result of the growth can be seen in the future, and so we are in the ongoing process of establishing culture and tradition in Indonesia. We were a long time under colonial rule and even after the independence of Indonesia, I think there is a long process to regain our national identity. Even if we have not fully regained our national identity, traditional culture is still very close to our daily practices, both in our domestic life and our society: that means the way we think, the way we do things, the way we move, talk and eat; everything that is related to our daily culture is still very strong here. And so, I think, in combination with the spirit of redefining identity in the new order it becomes something that is important and a strong part of our existing culture. And that's why I'm offering my younger colleagues a revisiting of the idea of tradition in a different way, because they are living in a very contemporary style, living in a way that is fashionable to do at this time, and most of them can also dance traditional dance. So how do we connect our contemporary behaviour with our traditional bodies when we are doing traditional dance? How do we revisit the knowledge of the traditional dance without our contemporary body? How do we constantly go from riding motorbikes and then stopping, and then rushing to put on makeup, and then dance very slowly a Javanese Dance? So, for example, this kind of thing is very interesting and probably is not happening as much in other countries.

| Melissa Quek | How was the slowing down on the pilgrimage to nature different from the way dancers slow down in some traditional dances? Or is it the same? |

| Melati Suryodarmo | Yes, the slowing down is not according to the music or the rhythm that comes with the dance that leads the dancers to slow down—it's more how |

Melati Suryodarmo, *Sysyphus* (2014), performance
The Jakarta Theatre
Photo: Indonesia Dance Festival

they open themselves up to be with their rhythm. I was not telling them "okay, you have to move slow," except for during one walk away from the place we stayed to the beach which we took very slowly. When they do performances I just remind them to be aware of what kind of rhythm they want to be in, and the slowness is what they adapt from nature. This is quite a special experience for them because normally their rhythm is not according to the language of nature with the intention that you are a part of it, part of the unknown territory. But you are part of an existing territory too. So I think this is how to raise the sensibility of the power of nature. Otherwise, I think we get lost if we are not connected or train our bodies to be familiar with nature.

I've seen my daughter growing up and witnessed her growth physically, mentally, intellectually and I said, I just want to be with her to see a better future. I feel like I don't want to be much older than my daughter in spirit, so I tried to learn her world, to learn and to know her world, her generation, her millennial perspective on the world and not to think that what I'm doing is better and the young people need to know how I'm doing it or experience it as I experienced it. So I think what we are lacking is the opportunity for young artists to experience their lives by themselves. Every day, I feel like a newborn baby because I'm very curious to know the world and to discover new knowledge or to learn something that I haven't seen before, and to know how to deal with it and at the same time, to maybe be more critical. I think this may be how we learn

to protect ourselves from industrial speed or the speed of production, the speed of a click in apps and gadgets. How can we stop this? How can we deal with this in a wise way? It is challenging being young.

Melissa Quek

You've spoken about how an exploration of being present in both time and space is important to your practice. What is your approach to space and spatiality, and how do you work with younger performers and dancers, regarding this, when they might be more used to performing and practising in a box?

Melati Suryodarmo

Yes. Okay, I think, for example, a student in Solo, if you're not from a family who lives in Solo, you rent a small room and maybe it's like three by four, including the bathroom, and very narrow and then you go to school, the school has a lot of space, but also a lot of students, everything is a little bit crowded here. So our sense of space, I think it is how we learn from nature. How nature can provide a space without defined limits. But I think it is very important also in my performance that the term space is not necessarily solely the physical, but it is also the space that we create from our inner being. For example, we don't know what the limit is for communication: the limit is felt when we turn off the internet; of course with the internet there is like, "wow you can see my face, you can see, you can hear me,"—you can probably understand what I'm talking about, but what kind of space exists between humans—for human relations here. What is this cyberspace that is virtual space? What is the

limit of this? Is this nature? You know? And I think this becomes part of nature of course, because we are connected to all this—the frequencies and waves, and all these things that we don't see. But I would still like to believe that nature has the power to train us to understand the limits of space too. It's my personal experience that performing in the landscape is the most difficult part because then we become very small—in that space our being, all we are as a human, is very small compared to the power of nature a life that is so big, the world is so big. Andalso, then [we] return to our ego and presence as a human. And I think that's the most essential thing to do with what you do as an artist.

Melissa Quek   Your work uncovers aspects of the body's mundane everyday struggle. How do you use performance as a vehicle to communicate what the body is thinking and feeling?

Melati Suryodarmo   Oh it's not the body that I'm communicating, it's the world that is carried or attached to this body. So performance art, it completes my idea about art. It's not about making an object that is final, is done and put somewhere to be admired. I love when the art is continuing, when the body is present carrying the life of a world and I think maybe as a vehicle: as a means to transport or to transfer the unpredictable space, unpredictable area, the new matter that probably just appears during that time and that space. So this experience that both the performer and the audience can have is the most important, especially during a live performance. And I think also, in the dance, right? Dance and theatre—it's always special to see them live.

You know, not all my performances are performed only once. But all my performances have this one-time quality because it is the quality of a live performance. So every time I do a performance, even if it is the same concept and supposedly the same performance, it is always one time. It's always a different experience. It's always a different situation, different atmosphere, and it depends on everything. That is considered "live." And so, early on, many artists refused to repeat performance work, but I think I'm not one of them. I like to re-perform and re-do my performance because my life has changed. So I did *Butter Dance* 20 years ago, it will be different when I perform it next month in Jakarta 21 years later, with maybe a little bigger in volume and at an older age. So my ageing body is doing *Butter Dance*. How does it feel? What is the substance of the work? It is still speaking; it's about the ups and downs of life, it's about the precision of live events, about danger and risk. It's an ongoing happening in my life.

Now live streaming is a little bit different, it's much reduced. We are now, I'm afraid, used to live-streamed performances. I'm going to do live streaming for the first time in my life, on the 12th of June [2021]. So since we have been planning this performance for one year, after consideration I decided I'm going to do this because I also want to have the experience. How does it feel? The delivery of the presence all coming together in one constellation is going to be very important.

Because I think first, "I do not want to disappoint so many people in Jakarta. They've been waiting for one year (due to the pandemic)." I will be back after two weeks to do live performances of a longer duration with very strict regulations and health protocols. And some are performances that I really would like to do for my heart [sic], and I've been waiting

for a long time because the last time I did this was in 2009 and I really want to experience this performance again, but because it's using a whole raw liver of a cow it cannot be done indoors, so it cannot happen in the museum. So we decided to do it as a livestream. I will do it in my outdoor studio platform and it will be a three-hour live stream of the performance. I'm also very curious and excited. I don't know how it will feel but I will try it [after] one year of long consideration.

Melissa Quek How will you get the sense of lightness and presence across in a live stream?

Melati Suryodarmo Of course it's the power of the camera and the cameraman and the direction, the director of photography, equipment and so on. I'm quite familiar with cameras and how to direct the camera for documentation and how best to use the camera for recording performance art, and so we will have at least two or three cameras with a switcher, and that will represent the curiosity of the public's eyes. There will be some close-up exposures. So I hope that will be enough, but you know it is not a live performance, it is live streaming. You don't see me. It's a big reduction, the quality is reduced. You don't smell the same area, you don't smell the same air, you are not in the same place. We are not together. You are not hearing with your own ears the sound that is happening.

In the performances, you always have to negotiate with your decisions. You have to adjust with your knowledge, you have to understand that a livestream is a reduction. Sometimes when you record a documentation of dance you think, "wow! I've danced and it is so powerful!" And then, when you watch the video, whoa...no energy is coming up, I cannot feel the energy and so, something is missing and that's the danger of the screen.

I'm not rehearsing for this but we're going to set the light and focus the space, then the cameraman will set the focus and so on. But I'm not rehearsing. I will just probably talk about the space, together with the cameraman on how to present it on this screen. And I will perform as if the camera is the public's eyes. I'm not exaggerating or dramatizing so that I can be seen more. No, that's very dangerous. It's very dangerous.

Melissa Quek You were inspired by Artaud's notion of "the body without organs" while developing *Sisyphus*. Could you talk a little bit about that inspiration?

Melati Suryodarmo Antonin Artaud was considered mentally ill but I was actually especially interested in his Manifesto because he observed the power of a body and he developed the concept of the body with organs inspired by watching the performance of Balinese dance at a World Expo. And he was very inspired by how it relates the outer spirit with the unpredictable being, or with the devil or whatever it was and how it interacts with the body, how the body is living. Usually the actor is committed to following the text, but here the body is creating the text. I think Antonin Artaud also inspired a lot of the Butoh dance practice and so that connects Japan, Indonesia, Paris, and all this knowledge in the 1930s—I think that is very inspiring. The inspiration of the body without organs encouraged me to again revisit the idea of trance. So I made a piece that is called *Sisyphus*. And I did research with a shaman who would teach us or guide us to be in the process of being possessed, and this was a session of processes that we were trained in, also in my studio here in the platform, in the night, after midnight. It is quite mystical but I asked my dancer to join me to do

this research with a critical mind, that we are not doing mysticism, we are learning the technique of being in a trance, and so I think that was a very special experience of how when this body is moved by energies that we haven't met before or haven't known before. This method is meant to open up the subconscious, for our subconscious to be delivered in a freer way, to liberate our hidden subconscious. So I think the idea of the body without organs is ongoing research for me, I will be continuing this and I'm always very interested to see the body as a different substance. Not only the physical body or cultural body or bodies as containers of memory, but also as an empty entity...you know, like how when it's empty, who is coming in? What is coming in? I think this, for me, is always interesting, especially in connection with the traditional idea of catharsis, of cleansing. Like all practices are actually there to bring about a balance between the human body, nature, and god.

Dichotomy: Using Dance to Span a Distance

In times of COVID-19, where almost everything is done virtually due to lockdowns and safety concerns, the topic of distance feels clinical yet familiar as we casually adapted into the 'new normal' as the next phase of life. As we adapt to travel bans, lockdowns and social distancing measures, awareness of physical distance from one to another becomes second nature and connection is expressed intangibly as we distance ourselves to prevent the greater spread of COVID-19.

Distance is usually quantified through a numerical measurement. But for *Spanning Distances* the student choreographers interpreted distance as suppression, space and intimacy.

My initial interpretation was to explore distance as the social disparity in relation to the expectation of and compensation given to males and females.

This inspired me to shed light on the demands of a typical female in conventional society through my choreography. In the domestic sphere, females cook, clean, wash and parent their children. For example, with the common consensus of females being the main caregivers of their children, they are likely faced with the option to give up their career to be a full-time mother, or to balance both. Women also face a higher chance of retrenchment during pregnancy, hence the Singapore Government set a law to protect their careers.

In the corporate world, females are vulnerable to male-dominated environments and masculine stereotypes.Government paid paternity leave entitles fathers to two weeks of leave while mothers get 16 weeks.[1] The difference in parental leave also creates a gap between the two genders as males are awarded a shorter period of caretaking responsibilities. Both males and females get 24-hours a day, yet there seem to be endless tasks for females to complete within the ticking time. These tasks are performed daily and concurrently, often to the detriment of their mental and physical health.

[1] See Tan "Disparity in Maternity, Paternity Leave Reinforces Gender Roles"

With these differences listed, I segmented my dance choreography into two scenes: "motherhood" and the "work-life" of a female. In the first scene, I tried to portray motherhood by the acts of doing daily chores, such as cleaning, cooking, washing and wiping according to the slow metronome beats. The daily tasks are then juggled at a shorter frame of time, switching from one to another, showing the act of multi-tasking

and the unfinished daily tasks of a mother. Overlapping the metronome beats, a soundscape of children screaming and playing is heard. This background noise adds a contrast to the mundane and repetitive tasks of motherhood, where children are the centre of a mother's attention. It also shows audio multi-tasking as mothers have to be alert to their children even when they are busy with their chores.

Fig. 1 The home setting.
Screenshot from *Spanning Distances*, 2021
Photo: Luke Lim

Fig. 2 Multi-tasking. The upper and lower body performing different acts in accordance with the metronome.
Screenshot from *Spanning Distances*, 2021
Photo: Luke Lim

As I shifted the table vertically to face the audience, the table represents a conference room to portray the "working life." The added element for the choreography was my gaze. I change the direction of my gaze from flustered and downward-looking to an intense stare forward between the two scenes. Putting on a shirt while shifting the table and chairs signal the unfinished chores at home, before going to work. Females face backlash on their assertiveness at work. This has denied them leadership

emergence, pay raises and advancements as it goes against feminine stereotypes. Males are statistically paid more for the same job, resulting in a large pay discrepancy between males and females.[2] Elise states that for every dollar males were paid, females were only paid 80 cents. Under the table, the feet act in a flustered and jittery manner, showing the chaos of trying to keep up and fight against the discrimination females face. However, the upper half shows a calm, composed and assertive demeanour—a facade.

[2] Gould et al.

Fig. 3 The corporate setting.
Screenshot from *Spanning Distances, 2021*
Photo: Luke Lim

Due to safety measures, the presentation of the dances switched from a live performance to a recorded dance to be presented online. I found the themes of distance, fulfilling expectations, self-censorship and multi-tasking were heightened in the process. Yes, *Spanning Distances has* allowed us to share our work through tough times, but it has also challenged us to work with the camera and to achieve our intentions even after being mediated by the camera and with the added distance of a virtual wall. The process has also enabled us to experience our choreography through a different lens, outside our bodies and through someone else's eyes.

I also connect it to the idea of multitasking as I constantly have to adapt and switch to different cues. According to the research by *BMC Psychology*,[3] the majority of people proclaim that females are better at multitasking than males but that is false. In general, females in a conventional society are just more involved in multitasking than males. The expectations placed on females in these societies force a female to juggle motherhood and work in order to achieve a similar work-life balance to that of her male counterpart. So, in my choreography, certain instances were actually improvised to react to a situation. This is seen in my choreography when I am on top of the table and juggling the daily objects I have chosen and kept in my pockets. I cannot truly predict when my items will fall, where they will land or which item is picked when I ransack my pockets to find them. The unpredictability of these instances result in my having to

[3] Stoet et al.

multitask as I have to remember how to frame myself in the film and my true intentions despite whatever is happening.

In a recording, spatial awareness is very important. I have to constantly change and adapt to the different angles of the camera so I can stay in the frame. As opposed to performing live I have the whole stage to myself, with only the camera crew and cameras as the audience. Instead of the immediacy of live performance I get to do different takes and after each take I observe my recorded movements. This allows me to improvise and add to the choreography. The video also allows for different framing and lighting that could change the audiences' perspective such as a low angle shot, a close-up, or a facial shot. These edits alter the choices and ways of looking that are available in a live performance and affect how people react to the choreography. However, I feel that the opportunity for multiple takes during the session made my choreography less organic at certain points as I am more aware of whether I am making a mistake or when I did not perform the way that I wanted to. These instances led to mini jerks or facial changes that could have changed the interpretations of my work. Working on the theme of multi-tasking became more real as I was juggling to keep my choreography raw but also rehearsing to remove hiccups in between. Perhaps the constant checking and judging myself added to understanding the role I was exploring.

Everyone has different interpretations of distance, and *Dichotomy* is my way of showing and performing my thought process behind the few disparities I have identified—namely gender, social, and financial disparity. Distance is also projected through the opportunity to film my choreography and have it presented online.

References

Goh, Xue Li. *Dichotomy*. Choreographed by Goh Xue Li, performance by Goh Xue Li, , LASALLE College of the Arts, 17 May 2021, Studio H102.

Gould, Elise, et al. "What Is the Gender Pay Gap and Is It Real?: The Complete Guide to How Women Are Paid Less than Men and Why It Can't Be Explained Away." *Economic Policy Institute*, 20 Oct. 2016.

"The Ballet World Is Still Male-Dominated, Research Shows - Women's Media Center." Women's Media Center, 29 Aug. 2019, womensmediacenter. com/news-features/the-ballet-world-is-still-male-dominated-research-shows#:%7E:text=Despite%20the%20fact%20that%20girls,what%20you%20see%20on%20stage.

Stoet, G. et al. "Are Women Better Than Men at Multi-Tasking?" *BMC Psychology* vol. 1, no. 18, 2013, pp 1 -10.

Tan, Theresa. "Disparity in Maternity, Paternity Leave Reinforces Gender Roles in Child-Rearing, Says Activist Corinna Lim." *The Straits Times*, 14 May 2021, www.straitstimes.com/singapore/disparity-in-leave-for-new-mums-and-dads-reinforces-idea-that-raising-children-is-women.

Listening and Rhythmic Cadence in Online Musical Collaborations

The music student panel at the *Arrhythmia: Performance, Pedagogy and Practice* conference addressed the theme of listening and rhythmic cadence in online collaborations by staging a telematic performance. The panel featured Kla Ittitep Chummek (drums) and Hui Tonwong (saxaphone) from Silpakorn University; Rose Panuelos (dance) from the University of the Philippines; and Nadia Margawi (electronics) and Cheong Xin Ying (electronics) from LASALLE College of the Arts. The panel brought students together from different schools in the region to stage a collaboration that would feature the performers reacting in the moment —exploring ideas of rhythmic cadence, where ideas begin and end, and how performers react to each other in this latent online environment. We were especially concerned with how, with limited preparation, the group could coalesce organically and meaningfully whilst in remote locations, focussing on their abilities to listen and view each other and how they would (or not) form continuities of sound and movement.

To reflect and understand the project more intrinsically from the students' point of view, I interviewed each of the performers after the event to capture their perspectives on the process and the performance. For Kla and Hui, this was the first time they had been involved in a telematic performance; whilst Rose had been involved in filming choreographed and improvised performances that were later presented online, but had never been in a 'live situation'; on the other hand, Xin Ying and Nadia had already been involved in several telematic performances.

I asked the students how they prepared for the collaboration and Kla responded by saying that because he knew the music was going to be 'abstract,' he "found references on abstract music on YouTube and learnt from them." For Nadia and Xin Ying, they felt confident about the collaboration so they prepared as they would for their previous performances — selecting sounds, the software and hardware that they were familiar withand knew they would use to contribute to the group. As for the dancer, Rose, she commented that,

> as my only performance space was my bedroom, I had to move away a lot of things and find the best place to set up the camera…I thought about what I could explore within the area that my camera could capture.

Rose's set-up and consideration of the visual/spatial aspect were in contrast to the musicians where their physical space was not as much a consideration. Rose's awareness of the camera position and sense of the perspective she created with her movement within the limitations of her bedroom was also interesting. The Silpakorn students and the LASALLE students had technical support from their respective schools and performed on campus. In this situation, these students could concentrate on performing and dealing directly with information that they were receiving in real-time. Kla responded that, "as it was the first time I had played like this, I imagined how to play the music by listening to the 'light sounds' and watching the dancer." Hui's response was that:

> the challenge was to try to get the other side to react to our reactions. Another challenge was that they [other performers] may not react as we expect to hear." Nadia responded: "the challenging part was that I wasn't performing face-to-face with the others. There were fewer facial cues so I had to rely more on my listening."

Rose responded, "as the music was improvised, I wasn't sure if I was disconnected or there was intended silence. I kept moving even though there was silence."

From the perspectives of the students, the medium did pose challenges in terms of listening and reacting to each other; where one gesture would be played by musicians in Thailand and then heard, interpreted, and responded to by musicians in Singapore and vice-versa but not in the same synchronicity that would normally be possible in a face-to-face context. This disruption to sonic cadence affected how Rose reacted through her movements as she did not know what was going to be played next, creating a sense of uncertainty in the flow of her ideas. The musicians reflected a keen focus on watching Rose dance and how this shaped their decision making. The visual aspect of the performance became a focal point—a conductor—for musicians to negotiate their sense of time and cadence with the gestures. Rose, on her part, felt disengaged from the others, particularly sonically, because of the instability of her Zoom and internet connection. However, she pushed through the situation and continued to dance and contribute to the performance. For Rose: "the collaboration, being aware that you are watched, getting into the zone and thinking about nothing else but the performance. Hearing people perform live, knowing they are at the other side of the world" was inspiring in itself. For her, the collaboration, although somewhat disembodied, produced a unique experience that challenged her normal way of working.

The underlying objective of the project was to see how students would perform in an environment that would challenge their known experience of rhythmic cadence in performance. How would they confront, embrace and then develop new ways of performing through this online experience? Despite the challenges, the students were nevertheless positive about the experience and the potential of the medium. "Jazz is improvised but also in a box, but this time I tried to improvise out of the box, out of the theory," Kla shared. Hui said, "This experience will continue to make me think out of the box when I play with other musicians." On reflection, although exploring the idea of rhythmic cadence was a key goal of the project, it was evident that more time needed to be put into the technical aspects of the project so that

Screenshot from Listening and Rhythmic Cadence telematic performance, 2021.
Photo: Tim O'Dwyer

the performers were not distracted/restricted by the technology itself, and could fully explore the medium with greater confidence and feel like they could take risks and interact with each other more intuitively. Rose responded: **"**I would probably find another location with a better internet connection. If I could do it better, maybe there would be more concepts in my performance. There could be different spaces, different settings, smaller spaces."

To be more connected to each other, to refine their listening and seeing, and to enable each other to communicate on more subtle levels are all understandable desires. Through the experience, it became obvious that listening and rhythmic cadence was contingent on how much preparation time the performers had, including establishing a technologically sound environment for collaboration. Nevertheless, even with a short amount of preparation time, the performers were compelled to adapt and problem-solve, and it was evident that a heightened learning experience was created by the encounter. An interdisciplinary performance occurred and the visual aspect of the performance became the directive. The musicians adapted, improvised and created sonic connections into an overall form. The students performed with the same commitment as they would in a face-to-face situation. The students, now knowing how immediate the interaction could be in the medium, realised they were 'closer' to each other than before they embarked on the collaboration, and the experience opened up new possibilities for future international collaborations.

References

Cheong, Xin Ying. Personal interview. 8 September 2021.
Tonwong, Hui. Personal interview. 10 September 2021.
Chummek, Kla Ittitep. Personal interview. 10 September 2021.
Margawi, Nadia. Personal interview. 8 September 2021.
Panuelos, Rose. Personal interview. 20 September 2021.

Identity and the Rhythms of Actor Training

When I was offered the opportunity to speak on a conference panel with students from Ateneo University in the Philippines, I did not hesitate to accept. Taking place on Zoom on June 4 2021, the panel discussed the rhythms of actor training—the day to day life of being a conservatoire student in the middle of the pandemic, and how the training was landing on us. As an international student at LASALLE College of the Arts, I can say that I have had a very interesting experience during my training which had its intercultural experience heightened by the isolation that pandemic safety measures induce.

Last year, I would often catch myself wondering about other actors undergoing their own training experiences. In the BA (Hons) Acting Programme at LASALLE we were lucky enough to have a small class size, numbering only 10, so that the restrictions at the time had relatively little effect on our course experience. While we were wearing masks and may have worked in smaller groups than pre-pandemic, we were all still able to be in the same room at all times, and very rarely had online classes. As a result there were times where, in all honesty, the pandemic seemed far away from us. After our conversation with students and colleagues from Ateneo, I can now appreciate just how lucky we were to experience this.

From what I heard, the Ateneo students seemed to be engaging in most, if not all, of their coursework from home via distance learning. At first, I was a bit heartbroken to hear that. For me, theatre has always been about sharing a physical space with other performers and audience members so to hear that they could not do that in their training saddened me. However, after giving it further thought and thinking of some contemporary shows that I've seen that were made in relation to the pandemic, it seems that the Ateneo students are receiving excellent coursework in digital performance through the use of contemporary communication platforms such as Zoom and Discord. and in an increasingly global and tech-friendly world, these skills are incredibly valuable for emerging performing artists. For plays like Pangdemonium's recent *Waiting For The Host*, which aired in 2020 via a live Zoom performance, or *Necropolis* by Arkadi Zaides (produced in 2021), the skill to convey powerful performance through live digital mediums is both necessary and crucial. I'd guess that in the coming years, this new genre of live digital performance will continue to evolve and develop its own performance language that is unlike anything we currently have, and if the students at Ateneo continue to develop these skills they may well be at the forefront of such creations.

Level 3 students of the LASALLE College of the Arts BA(Hons) Acting Programme
performing *godeatgod* by Haresh Sharma, 2021
Photo: Crispian Chan

As a result of our conversation, I have become much more aware of how I can develop my theatre practice in these times. I believe that in my first year, I had been approaching things from the perspective of, "once things go back to normal, I'll be set!" However, things cannot necessarily go back to normal. Rather, as an artist, I must be ready to adapt and change as the world around me faces new challenges and struggles, whether they be pandemic, climate, or economic. Instead of simply developing skills that would have worked before the world changed, my conversation with the students at Ateneo has convinced me that I need to take action into my own hands to develop both the skills and the attitude to succeed in an uncomfortable, uncharted, and unknowable environment.

References

Palmieri, Marc. *Waiting For The Host*. Directed by Tracie Pang, performance by
    Adrian Pang et al., Pangdemonium, 15 Oct. to 1 Nov. 2020, Zoom, Singapore.
Zaides, Arkadi. *Necropolis*. Directed by Arkadi Zaides, performance by Igor
    Dobricic, Simge Gücük et al. 2021. https://arkadizaides.com/necropolis.

Level 2 students of the LASALLE College of the Arts Acting Programme
performing *Homesick* by Alfian Sa'at, 2021
Photo: Crispian Chan

The Future of Technical Theatre in Southeast Asia: A Panel Discussion

Theatre has traditionally been delivered by a company—a group of performers, theatre production and front of house staff—sharing a physical space with an audience. The COVID-19 pandemic meant that, in a heartbeat, theatre-makers and patrons were unable to do the very thing that makes theatre what it is. How did theatre-makers themselves respond to this deep challenge? What effects did it have on theatre-making, and the theatre production industry that supports it? Bringing together leading theatre production professionals and academics from Southeast Asia, together with students from LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore, and University of Philippines Diliman—Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts, this panel deliberated on how artists, no matter what the challenge, always find ways to share their work. This has meant a pivot to creating work that can be shared with an audience digitally and asynchronously.

The panel included members from industry and academia: Juliet Chia, deputy artistic director of Singapore Repertory Theatre; Kenny Wong, head of technical production at the Esplanade; Olivia Nieto, assistant professor at the University of Philippines Diliman, Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts; Petrina Dawn Tan, an award winning set designer, lighting designer and scenographer in Singapore; Pete Andrei V. Fabricante, student at University of Philippines Diliman, Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Art; Muhammad Nurfadhli Bin Jasni student of Diploma in Technical and Production Management at LASALLE in Singapore; and myself, Michael Budmani, Programme Leader, Diploma in Theatre Production and Management and Diploma in Technical and Production Management.

The virtual panel discussion took place whilst Singapore was enjoying relatively low case numbers and mortality rate, with theatres cautiously reopening. In contrast, the Philippines was still deep into a series of lockdowns and increasing numbers. In the face of COVID-19, in both countries the theatre industry has had to immediately pivot to find new ways of creating and sharing theatre work with their audiences, without the need of sharing a physical space. Theatre production educators have had to similarly pivot and alter their modes of delivery. This disruption has created and enabled new ways of theatre-making, creating an evolution in both the industry itself and programmes of study that are designed to prepare the theatre makers of the future. The view of all members of the panel was that no theatre production student should now graduate without a strong portfolio of digital skills, and the knowledge

required to be part of a team that may need to film or stream a show, for asynchronous delivery. This has brought with it new opportunities.

In what follows, Muhammad Nurfadhli Bin Jasni, the student from LASALLE who was part of the panel, offers his reflection about the experience and what he has faced as a young member of the professional industry in Singapore. Fad has a very strong set of media skills and is now highly in demand in a Singapore theatre industry that now needs these skills amongst its theatre-makers.

Muhammad Nurfadhli Bin Jasni

I was very grateful to be part of the panel discussion on the The Future of Technical Theatre in Southeast Asia as I got to meet theatre practitioners and theatre students from Singapore and the Philippines, and talk about how they were handling the pandemic situation and also how they were surviving throughout this phase. There was a shared understanding that we are living in a new normal, thus we have to take or make use of the opportunities in front of us and create magic and miracles from the current situation. Ever since the pandemic started in early 2020 there were so many restrictions that we have had to follow and it has affected most of us around the world. In Singapore, we

were locked down for about two and a half months. Theatre shows had to be cancelled. I was on my final production of the semester as a Year 2 student, and half way through the process, we had to call it off because of the lockdown. Everyone was affected and found themselves jobless. I remember that the seniors graduating from the programme that year were quite worried back then as the lockdown had caused them to lose jobs for a few months and a lot of events had to be called off.

In summer 2020, in preparation for my final year of study, I had arranged to undertake an internship in the UK with Timothy Bird who is a video designer in Royal Academy of Arts, to whom I had been introduced by Gillian Tan, a Singaporean lighting and video designer based in London, who is head of video at Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and an alumni of my programme at LASALLE. The insecurity that this created was still with me as I come into my final year at LASALLE. I was quite worried too, thinking "What if this pandemic will drag till next year or few years ahead?" and "How are we going to do our internship?" Keeping my options open, I met with a multimedia designer for 'ILight', 'Flexi' to whom I was introduced by one of my graduating seniors in 2019.

I completed a three-week internship with him just prior to the start of Year 3 of my studies. Although brief, it was very helpful, as I gained work as a multimedia operator for a commercial film shoot at Changi Airport. This was an excellent launchpad into my final year of study.

For the first few weeks of lessons in my final year, we mostly had our lessons through Zoom. It was a different experience for us as we normally work in a very hands-on environment. Zoom lessons were a new thing for us, but we tried hard to adapt to it. As the situation improved in Singapore, slowly we transitioned to having class in our three LASALLE theatres—Flexible Performance Space, Creative Cube and Singapore Airlines Theatre—but split into smaller groups to accommodate safe working practices and safe distancing. We all preferred face-to-face delivery, and found that online delivery was not as engaging. So much of the content of our theatre-making programme does not lend itself obviously to Zoom delivery and it can be difficult at times to keep focus during long Zoom sessions. Working on productions commenced a few weeks later despite most of us having to work from home. Those who needed to have access to the scenic or costume workshops had to work to safe distancing protocols—one metre between each person and masked at all times.

During the panel discussion, a guest student from the Philippines who is also studying Theatre Production, shared their experiences of the pandemic with COVID-19 cases being so bad in Philippines that all class activity was moved, and had remained online. Their lecturer had to find alternative ways to make their lessons engaging. It was quite sad to hear this as in Singapore we still had the opportunity to work on productions in school and have hands-on lessons, albeit with COVID-19 management measures in place. On the panel I shared how I made use of my time during the lockdown by going to online classes to upgrade my skills as a multimedia designer, with such tools as Adobe software and CAD. These will be so useful for my future practice. Taking the opportunity to train in these new skills was a productive way to use the time that I had at home during lockdown. The lesson for me has been to look for opportunities to try something new.

I am so very thankful that I have been able to still be able to do what I love during this pandemic. I believe that there are elements of COVID-19 theatre-making that will remain as part of 'the new normal'. I was fortunate to work with leading Singaporean video designer Brian Gothong Tan, who was my mentor for LASALLE's BA Acting production of "godeatgod."[1] Now graduated from LASALLE, I am working in the industry as a freelancer in multimedia design and set design. Alongside that, I work as a freelance camera operator for theatre shows—something that would not have been a requirement pre-pandemic. The skills that I learned during the pandemic have definitely helped me to

[1] Sharma

gain new job opportunities. Who knows, one day I might become a director of photography in the film industry! I will just keep my options open and trust the process.

Panel Conclusions

History has repeatedly shown that whatever the challenges artists always find a way to make work and to share their work. COVID-19 is but another example. The pandemic had taken away a core element of traditional theatre-making—that of theatre-makers being able to share their work with their audience in a shared space. Take that away and theatre-makers were always going to find alternative methods of creating and sharing work. It is an imperative. This imperative has created, and continues to create disruption and evolve theatre-making. Whatever the new normal is going to be, it is not going to revert back to pre-pandemic theatre-making nor the skill-sets that supported it. Evolution in art never stops, nor should it. We are just at the beginning of seeing where this exciting digital evolution in theatre-making will take us and how much further it will enable collaborative opportunities. This evolution will also inform a curricular evolution in Theatre Production tertiary education.

References

Sharma, Haresh. *godeatgod*. The Necessary Stage, 2002.

Casting and Accountability: Representation in Post-COVID-19 Musical Theatre

Musical theatre students dream of starring in the lead role upon graduation. They dream to fly as Elphaba in *Wicked*[1] whilst belting out *Defying Gravity*; or to be rocking out as Dewey Finn in *School of Rock.*[2] Graduates aspire to tread the boards in so many roles that have become iconic in their own right. But casting decisions in musical theatre have historically benefited white able bodies to lead in the protagonic roles, leaving black, indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) performers relegated to cultural stereotypes at best.

[1] Schwartz
[2] Webber

The title of this panel, Casting and Accountability: Representation in post-COVID-19 Musical Theatre was an opportunity to explore how places of learning were creating space and breaking away from the established ways to envision casting in contemporary musical theatre. Students and staff from the Musical Theatre and Theatre Programmes from the State University of New York at Buffalo, The University of Philippines Diliman and LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore joined together to think-through the challenges that are brought about by the global call to enforce greater respect to cultural diversity in the creative industries.

Contributors to the panel acknowledged that their programmes have a great number of graduates coming from a variety of races, gender identities and cultural backgrounds. This is indeed a crucial development in the performing arts globally. The vocabularies of 'cultural minorities' now considered outdated with the term "global majority" taking stronger hold as a way to highlight the erratic way in which whiteness is considered to be the predominant identity worldwide in theatre and performance. The larger impulse towards diversity and accountability has meant that students in the performing arts are increasingly critical of their training and keen on addressing the underlying issues that have been prevalent over the years when it comes to casting, appropriation and, most importantly, representation.

The conversation in the panel showed how the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in more shows to be made accessible for online viewing globally. While this has led to amazing developments in the media languages used in musical theatre stagings, it has also meant that the lack of diversity in the casting becomes more pronounced. Indeed, while powerhouses such as *Hamilton,*[3] *In The Heights*[4] and even *West Side Story*[5] are pushing the boundaries for representation, there are still very few productions that cater to minority representation. As one

[3] Miranda
[4] Hudes
[5] Laurents

Students of Musical Theatre in the 2021 production of *The Evolution of Musical Theatre*
LASALLE College of the Arts
Photo: Crispian Chan

student from the State University of New York at Buffalo stated, musical theatre needed to "fortify a new path that allows people of color to be on the front lines to showcase other communities." Lecturers and students concluded that the most effective way to make a difference would start with, in terms of creating diverse casting, it all starts with the writing and development of the shows. There was a clear consensus on the need to build more opportunities within the training for students to develop this focus.

Further cementing the need to address how one is represented, a second year student from LASALLE highlighted in her contribution to the discussion that the tension that current students experience between the need to train to work in a cutthroat industry and the need to find their own voice and stories. The student highlighted her fears about how both their gender and religion might gear casting choices in their future. She therefore expressed a keen need to explore her own identity through original works as a way to bypass bias and move on from the conditioning that canonical musical theatre pieces might bring to her casting possibilities.

The discussion also addressed the misrepresentation of race, gender and sexuality on the stage. Canonical musical theatre works reflect mentalities at the time, but these works are no longer appropriate in the current climate. One example of this is *Thoroughly Modern Millie.*[6] The

Students of Musical Theatre and of Theatre Production & Management
in the 2021 production of *The Evolution of Musical Theatre*
LASALLE College of the Arts
Photo: Crispian Chan

show is still performed and depicts the Asian-American community in a racist light. Works like these either need to be revised or be left in history in order for new works to take over. There needs to be more space made for shows to be workshopped for students to understand the complexities of staging works.

Members from the The University of Philippines Diliman shared that while they did not have a Musical Theatre Programme specifically, their practices did involve their theatre students taking part in workshops and labs giving students the liberty to explore and experiment their own styles. Through this, students could see what was appropriate and what was not, through experimentation. There was also the acknowledgement of the complexities of casting. The panel agreed that that change is not as easy as blind casting for each show, as there are greater complexities in regards to the context and approaches to the communities that are

6 Scanlan

being represented, thus needing a balanced and educated approach to how productions are staged. Students highlighted that being educated means to take more part in their own journey through college and into the industry, which will give them the ability to push forward.

References

Hudes, Quiaea Alegría. *In The Heights*. Heuer Publishing. 2005.

Laurents, Arthur. *West Side Story*. 1957.

Miranda, Lin-Manuel. *Hamilton: An American Musical*. 5000 Broadway Productions. 2015

Scanlan, Dick and Morris, Richard. *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. 2002

Schwartz, Stephen. *Wicked: a New Musical*. Original Broadway Cast Recording. 2003.

Webber, Andrew Lloyd. *School Of Rock*. Hal Leonard Corporation. 2019.

Postscript: Murmurs of the Day

When rhyme and reason falter, we are faced with a choice: to brace ourselves and surge ahead or fall prey to the murmurs of the age.

The pandemic is the single most significant 21st-century human catastrophe directly impacting humanity and its collective consciousness. It will define societies and economies as we move forward, in the manner the world wars did for the last century. Science and politics scramble to provide guidance, help and leadership, while people and their communities have resorted to redefining their lived experiences, their humanness.

In my writings, I have alluded to this moment as an anthropocentric revenge:

> As gods fell silent, politicians, community leaders and healthcare professionals scrambled to arrest the pillage. A new way of performative living, working and engaging had to be birthed as tacit lines between self/community, professional/personal and embodied/existential were perforating rapidly, giving way to anxiety. Communities quickly introduced new rituals in personal and social distancing such as masking, isolating, avoiding and disinfecting. As instruments of care, they seemed antithetical to human socialisation (as evidenced by many who objected). Yet, it is very much part of the embodiment of the modern digital/virtual zone – distanced, isolated and disaffected.[1]

There is a significant social and cultural correction underway. The anthropocene demonstrates the impact of human activity and rapid progress on the living environment as seen through the climate and environmental catastrophe. As environmental advocates argue, human progress and power structures have significantly compromised the planet's ecosystems. While there is a need for a new ecological and ethical contract between humans and nature, more urgently we need to acknowledge that we are one with nature.

The pandemic does not lie outside of these larger environmental concerns. Lest we forget, we are not dealing with a particular virus. But a family, a clan, a kingdom. In the world of virus taxonomy, COVID-19 belongs to the Orthonavirae Kingdom, coming from the family clan of coronaviridae.[2] A virulent war is being waged as we sit sipping tea, frustrated in being boxed-up in virtual and digital screens. The virus is

[1] Purushothaman 1. The author thanks the editors for allowing to elucidate this postscript which was originally delivered as a closing speech at the *Arrhythmia: Performance Pedagogy and Practice Conference.*

[2] International Committee on the Taxonomy of Viruses

around us, within us, amongst us. It is one of us. Like all new visitors entering a collaborative social space, it can be friend or foe. At least to me, the pandemic has revealed that we all seem to be fighting very different battles, at cross purposes, when in fact, we have more in common. We must do away with ignorance, for we embrace, rightly or wrongly, things that go viral in social media but have been less understanding when things are viral in our social spaces. There is much to do, to study.

Arrhythmia, organised in the thick of a pandemic, addressed arrested arts practices in a disrupted world to foster a conversation around hope, opportunities and possibilities in the performing arts. Critically, the conference provided a forum to enquire into new and emerging practices as they evolve into ways of experiencing the arts, the world and ourselves. Performance practices have evolved over the past two centuries and have been institutionalised through education, public performances and scholarly research. The present is a watershed moment to revisit that which we know and begin anew.

The world of embodied performance stands still. From earth, we enter the world of digital screens. As these screens open the doors to new audiences, students and spaces as seen by the range of participants from around the world at this conference, how and what do we teach or convey? For whom and for what intent do we perform? How can performance and educational practices call to action the emergencies of our time?

A postscript. For a conference or a pandemic?

I do not want to provide an ode but push ourselves to commit to a more significant endeavour: to redesign and repurpose our artistic and educational approaches. We must do more than speak at conferences but become leaders committed to effecting substantial change in curriculum, philosophy and ontology by confronting the very crisis facing us.

The pandemic is ours to own; we wear the battle scars with pride. We survive another day. Our excuse is to opportune on our arrested moment and build a new performance world. While empathy, kindness and love, as Peter Sellars alluded in his keynote, would be manifestly crucial as we move forward, I would add that respect, patience and realignment of our relationships with kinships and emerging systems would be the modus operandi of our everyday.

Arrhythmia: Performance Pedagogy and Practice was significant because it provided us with a forum to build a new performance community around respect and realignment. The varied practices and illuminating provocations found in the conference leave us enriched. It is now time for us to take charge and shape a future.

References

International Committee on the Taxonomy of Viruses, 2019. https://talk.ictvonline.org
Purushothaman, Venka. "Introduction: Viral Mobilities." *Issue 09: Mobilities* Vol. 9, 2020, p. 1.

Michael Budmani (UK/Singapore) is an academic and stage and production manager. He is Programme Leader for the Diploma in Theatre Production and Management at LASALLE College of the Arts. Previously, Michael was Subject Leader for Theatre Production at Bath Spa University, U.K. His key industry engagements include Stage Manager for the Royal Shakespeare Company, Head of Stage Management, and Head of Technical for Scottish Opera. Michael's research interest is new pedagogies in theatre production.

Edmund Chow PhD (Singapore) is an applied theatre practitioner and educator who has worked across schools, universities, hospitals and prisons in Singapore and New York. His research interests are in cultural practices in Afghanistan, transdisciplinary education, emotions and corporate storytelling. He has an M.A from New York University and a Ph.D from the University of Manchester. He developed the Executive MBA curriculum on leadership and communication using storytelling and improvisation at INSEAD Business School where he did his Postdoctoral Research Fellowship. Currently, he is the Programme Leader for MA Arts Pedagogy and Practice at LASALLE College of the Arts.

Chloe Chua (Singapore) is an actor and theatre maker with a BA(Hons) degree in Musical Theatre from LASALLE College of the Arts. She is an intuitive and versatile performer, with recent credits in the musical Into the Woods playing the Witch and opera The Last Silent Voice as a movement actor. Her academic interests include actor training, movement studies and practice as research, which she explored in her graduate thesis on the potentialities of improvised movement for joyful acting.

Ethan Curnett (USA/Singapore) is currently in his second year of training at LASALLE College of the Arts' BA Acting Programme. Some of his favourite productions he has performed in include *The Laramie Project*, *High School Musical: On Stage*, *The Rules of Comedy*, and *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral*. In addition to theatre, he also enjoys boxing, gaming, and exploring how performance has begun to evolve in digital spaces. He hopes to find a career in acting for video games and interactive media in the future.

Michael Earley (UK) is Visiting Professor of Shakespeare and Theatre Studies at Harlaxton College (UK), part of the University of Evansville (USA). He was Dean of the Faculty of Performing Arts at LASALLE College of the Arts from 2018-2021. He is now Professor Emeritus of Drama and Theatre at Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance in London. He previously was Professor of Drama, Principal and Chief Executive Officer of Rose Bruford from 2009-17. He was Professor of Drama and Head of the Lincoln School of Performing Arts and Producing Director of the Lincoln Performing Arts Centre (LPAC), projects that he inaugurated at the University of Lincoln (UK).

James P. Félix PhD (UK/Singapore) is an ethnomusicologist and Lecturer in music at LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore, where he teaches contextual studies and critical thinking. His doctoral research focused on notions of tradition and identity in Portuguese fado and how these concepts contribute to an understanding of authenticity in music. His current research interests include processes of identity formation among tertiary music students, the application of ethnomusicological principles as a pedagogical tool for higher education and professional training, and the relationship between perceptions of authenticity and value within folk music.

Peggy Ferroa (Singapore) is an independent performance maker and educator who uses theatre to help individuals build new relationships with themselves, their community and their audience. She has co-created performances with special groups in hospices, prisons, and cultural communities like the Peranakans. Her plays have been featured at various local and international festivals. Amongst these, she is best known for her work with inmates, a community she has been working with since 2008. Her work with them has been presented at local and international conferences and published in industry journals.

Matt Grey (UK/Singapore) began acting in British television over forty years ago. He trained at the Guilford School of Acting and afterwards continued performing in film, television and theatre in the U.K., Australia and now in Singapore. In 2013, he received the Straits Times 13th Life Theatre Best Actor award for his portrayal of Sigmund Freud in *Freud's Last Session* at the Esplanade. He continues to work with Singapore's established theatre companies. In 2000, he qualified to teach voice and speech for actors with Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London. Over the last twenty years, Matt has had extensive experience training acting students in an intercultural environment and he is currently researching a pedagogy for voice and speech that works cross-culturally for a new generation of actors. Matt is the Programme Leader for the Diploma in Performance at LASALLE College of the Arts.

Muhammad Fadhli bin Jasni (Singapore) is a Video Multimedia Designer, Set Designer and Filmmaker who has graduated with a Diploma in Theatre Production & Management from LASALLE College of the Arts. He has been working in performance, entertainment and digital content creation since 2016. He has been mentored by award-winning designers like Brian Gothong Tan and Petrina Dawn Tan and has worked with T>: Works, Checkpoint Theatre, Gateway Theatre, Bhumi Collective and various musical and theatre productions at LASALLE.

Timothy O'Dwyer PhD (Australia) is a saxophonist and composer who has been a lecturer and Head of Music at LASALLE College of the Arts, since 2004. His practice investigates collective performance-making (musical & interdisciplinary) through the experimentation of internal and external directives. His written research has covered situating his practice within the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, and currently, he is working on several projects documenting the cultural histories of music in Southeast Asia.

Melissa Quek (Singapore) is the Head, School of Dance & Theatre at LASALLE College of the Arts and leads their Diploma in Dance Programme. She is a choreographer, performer and educator who founded The Kueh Tutus, a collective dedicated to creating dance for young audiences. Her works attempt to touch on questions of agency, materiality and perception to create a visceral experience for the audience. She writes dance reviews, serves on a number of grant and award panels, and enjoys working to make contemporary dance accessible to new audiences.

MacArthur Fellow **Peter Sellars** (USA) is a distinguished professor in the UCLA Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance, where he has taught since 1988. Known for exploring challenging moral issues such as race, war, poverty, and the international refugee crisis through his work, his most notable courses include Art as Moral Action and Art as Social Action. Sellars has gained international renown for his groundbreaking and transformative interpretations of artistic masterpieces and for collaborative projects with an extraordinary range of creative artists across three decades. Sellars is the founding director of the Boethius Institute at UCLA, which invites scholars, activists, and artists to work together on projects of public significance, exploring radical ways to rethink relationships of communities and complex issues, using the arts as the point of entry and the point of transformation.

Dayal Singh (Australia/Singapore) was born in the outback in the small town of Newman, Western Australia and raised in Perth. Dayal has established himself as a global actor, producer, corporate trainer and educator and is now happily based in Singapore. With degrees in Musical Theatre, Communications, Education and Film, Dayal has built a career marrying all of his passions and established himself at the forefront of the performing arts scene in Singapore. His most recent film, *The Furnace* directed by Roderick Mackay, featured at the 77th Venice International Film Festival in 2021. Dayal believes in being a multifaceted artist and thoroughly enjoys experimenting with his two passions—technology and performing.

Melati Suryodarmo (Indonesia) graduated from the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig, Germany. Her practice is informed by Butoh, contemporary dance, and history, among others. Her work is the result of ongoing research in the movements of the body and its relationship to the self and the world. These are translated into photography, dance choreography, video and live performances. Suryodarmo is interested in the psychological and physical agitations that result in lasting change in the individual, whether these are external or internal. She approaches the body as the home for memories and the self, rather than the individual itself or the body's biological system.

Filomar Cortezano Tariao (The Philippines/ Singapore), Dr Fil, as his students fondly call him, is the incumbent President of World Dance Alliance (Singapore). As a full-time Senior Lecturer at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, he leads the Dance Sciences of the Dance Programme. Currently, he is among the first batch of the Masters in Science of Learning at the National Institute of Education. He has performed, choreographed and presented internationally for over twenty years. His diverse works span dance, theatre, fashion and the differently-abled. A doctor of medicine by training, he left the clinics in pursuit of a greater passion. More on https://drfiloct.wixsite.com/drfil/about

Natalie Alexandra Tse PhD (Singapore) is a performer, educator, and researcher whose practice as an experimental improviser has led her to research babies' sonic play through her doctoral studies and motherhood. As a guzheng (Chinese zither) performer, she experiments with sonic experiences through extended techniques. Natalie is the co-founder and resident artist of SAtheCollective, an arts company that investigates the relationship between man, nature and technology, through the alchemy of ritual, play and improvisation. She has also founded LittleCr3atures, the young audience initiative of the company, where children up to 36 months old get to experience pure, unadulterated play with sound in a safe and immersive space.

Soumya Varma PhD (India/Singapore) has worked variously as an actor, director, stage designer, producer, dramaturge and educator. Her areas of research interest include Intercultural Theatre, the intersection of culture and feminism in theatre, Asian Performing Arts, Singapore Theatre and Puppetry. The nine critical essays she has written about The Finger Players' productions are included in their *Fifteenth Anniversary Collection of Plays* released in October 2014. She is currently a part-time lecturer at LASALLE College of Arts and is pursuing her interest in theatre.

Lonce Wyse PhD (USA/Singapore) is an Associate Professor with the Department of Communications and New Media at the National University of Singapore and directs the Arts and Creativity Lab. He holds a PhD in Cognitive and Neural Systems (Boston University, 1994). He serves on the editorial boards of the *Computer Journal*, *Organised Sound*, and the *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*. He teaches courses on software studies, creative coding, and media art, and his research focuses on musical communication, notation, and neural network models of audio. Website: lonce.org

Goh Xueli (Singapore) was first introduced to dance at the age of three and continued her interest in dance throughout her childhood and adolescence. After completing her tertiary education, she enrolled into LASALLE College of the Arts to professionally pursue dance as a career. At LASALLE, she found interest in somatic practices, process-driven choreographies and critical thinking skills, which she includes in her creative process and research. Xueli was a recipient of the Wu Peihui Dance award for AY2019/20.

David Zeitner PhD (New Zealand/Singapore) is Senior Lecturer at the School of Arts Management, Dance & Theatre at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore. He holds a PhD in Dance Studies from The University of Auckland, New Zealand. Prior to his work in education, David was a professional dance performer with Semperoper Ballet Dresden and rehearsal director at Thoss-Tanzkompanie at Hannover State Opera House in Germany. He served as Advisory Panel Member for the New Zealand School of Dance, as Board Member of the New Zealand Dance Festival Trust, and on various advisory panels for the National Arts Council of Singapore. David's research interests include the development of creative dexterity in dance education and applying arts-based learning methods in leadership and academic education.

Felipe Cervera PhD (Mexico/Singapore) is a Lecturer in Theatre at LASALLE College of the Arts. His research interests are collaborative academia (teaching and research), and the interplays of performance, technology and society. He serves as co-editor of *Global Performance Studies*, and Associate Editor of *Performance Research*. Publications and artistic work can be found at www.felipecervera.me

Darren Moore DMA (Australia/Singapore) is an Australian musician working in the fields of jazz, experimental music and multimedia throughout Southeast Asia, Australia, Japan and Europe. He completed a Doctorate in Musical Arts in performance at Griffith University in 2013, which looked at the adaptation of Carnatic Indian rhythms to the drum set. His research interests centre on interdisciplinary work and improvisation. He lives in Singapore where he is a Senior Lecturer in Music at LASALLE College of the Arts. www.darren-moore.net

Milenko Prvački (former Yugoslavia/Singapore) graduated with a Master of Fine Arts (Painting) from the Institutul de Arte Plastice "Nicolae Grigorescu" in Bucharest, Romania. He is one of Singapore's foremost artists and art educators, having taught at LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore since 1994. He was Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts for 10 years, and is currently Senior Fellow, Office of the President at the College. He also founded Tropical Lab, an annual international art camp for graduate students. He has exhibited extensively in Europe and USA since 1971, in Singapore and the region since 1993, most notable of which was the Biennale of Sydney in 2006. He has participated in numerous symposiums and art workshops worldwide, and acted as visiting professor at Musashino Art University in Japan; Sabanci University in Turkey; and University of Washington School of Art + Art History + Design, USA. He is Adjunct Professor at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. He was awarded the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from France in 2011, and Singapore's Cultural Medallion for Visual Arts in 2012. In 2020, he was awarded the National Art Award, Serbia.

Venka Purushothaman PhD (Singapore) is Deputy President and Provost at LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore. He is an award-winning art writer with a distinguished career in the arts and creative industries in Singapore. He speaks internationally on transformative art and design education and works to enable the development of cultural leaders in Southeast Asia. Venka holds a PhD in Cultural Policy and Asian Cultural Studies from the University of Melbourne. He is a member of the Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art (France/Singapore), Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts (UK), University Fellow at Musashino Art University (Japan) and a member of the International Cultural Relations Research Alliance of the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (Germany).

LASALLE
COLLEGE OF THE ARTS