

Performance after Automation

Nicholas Ridout, Queen Mary, University of London

Drawing on mid-twentieth-century socialist theorisations of automation (Marcuse, Johnson-Forest, Boggs, Braverman) Ridout suggests that theatre in this period can now be examined fruitfully as a site, in which a new regime of labour management is made visible in the actions of performing bodies on stage.

Bio: Nicholas Ridout is Professor of Theatre at Queen Mary University of London. He is the author of *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems* (2006); *Theatre & Ethics* (2009); *Passionate Amateurs: Theatre, Communism and Love* (2013); and *Scenes from Bourgeois Life* (2020), as well as essays in edited collections and peer-reviewed journals. He was the editor of *Theatre Survey* (2016–2018) and is co-editor of the book series Performance Works at Northwestern University Press. He has held visiting fellowships and professorships at Brown University, the Huntington Library and the Centre for Interweaving Performance Cultures at the Freie Universität in Berlin.

1A - Problematising Bodily Performances of Labour as Capital

Romain Chenet, University of Warwick

Considering calls for new critiques in revitalising global studies (Asher and Wainwright, 2018), this article opens from the perspective of bio-power to consider bodies as temporalized “inscription surfaces” tasked with performing perpetuity-aimed reconstruction and adaptation that adheres with extractive accumulation (Foucault, 2000: 82; see also 1978: 131). It does so by assessing governmentalizing rationalities of ‘Human Capital’ aims by the World Bank Group and post-Washington Consensus entities in contemporary contexts. In short, these priorities are nestled under the Bank’s ‘Human Capital Project’ and forward particular health and education outcomes that align with idealised performances of future worker productivity. In exploring these policy-embedded and practice-informing rationalities that target a diverse pool of humans, the imperialising tendencies of global governance are not only apparent, but important to unpack. As such, considering such actors’ texts as modalities exerted from power via discourse of “Human Capital”, itself an anthropic rationality stretching uneasily from “Natural Capital”, I aim for enriching discussion of the “Real” by unearthing and problematising bodily performances of labour that are enabled from these specific human constructs (Foucault, 2000: 232). I also explore implications embedded in World Bank Human Capital policies’ classificatory and subjectifying efforts which target embodied aggregations and devalue aspects of humanity deemed non-compliant with Capital-led aims, notably via age and (sex-binarized) gender. This is to intend an intersectionality of reference points in grappling with terms that classify bodies as performative manifestations. Finally, I revisit Foucauldian notions on “resistance” as a disarticulated and disembodied possibility

(Ettlinger, 2011: 549), given our societal decays implying we hold both dwindling and increasing capacities for subversion and repurpose in diverse contexts. In considering aims for governed realities of experience and exploring performed resistance as a motif to bridge with aims for pluriversal valuations of human life in scholarship (Escobar, 2018), I thus hope to suggest generative opportunities for our common but differentiated futures.

Bio: Romain joined the University of Warwick in 2018 and holds a PhD in Sociology (Development-focused), having recently completed a study of post-2015 development policies. Briefly, Romain's interests span development, sociology, and politics in exploring globality through poststructural (Foucauldian) analysis of discourse and other critical methods such as Neo-Gramscian IPE. Being previously based in London, Romain worked in multinational corporate relations and high-value fundraising management for INGOs including UNICEF and the Red Cross to build long-term development projects, and to respond to humanitarian emergencies with global implementation partners. Before settling in the UK, Romain lived in Asia (Nepal, Thailand, Singapore, Cambodia), shaping diverse experiences with development.

1A - 'I see what my role is. It is to be an African': Theatre Work as Racialized Labour

Tom Six, Royal Central of Speech and Drama, London

The quotation in the title of this paper is from the actor Maynard Eziashi's recollection of the revelation of the racialized terms of his employment at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2006. I will build out from Eziashi's realization to argue that theatre work – both on and offstage – in Britain, as in the rest of the west – has always been deeply racialized. I will begin with a brief survey of the racial stratification of the subsidized British theatre sector between its inception around 1960 and 1990, when its *de facto* racial homogeneity came to an end. I will then chart – with illustrative examples from a range of occupations – the persistence of racialization in the more racially diverse sector that has emerged, in fits and starts, in the last three decades. I will use Jason Read's Marxian conception of the dual nature of (abstract/concrete) labour to argue that analysing racialization through the prism of work clarifies its similarly dual operation as a process of abstraction and concretion. Racialization and work, in other words, both relentlessly treat concrete and particular people as abstract categories. Simultaneously, they systemically concretize those abstract categories in the activities and experiences of workers and racialized people. Furthermore, I will propose that we adopt an affective and atmospheric approach to understanding both labour regimes and institutional racism. Firstly, this approach enables us to challenge the material/immaterial binary that continues to creep into understandings of racism and work. Secondly, it offers an account of the processes whereby institutional conditions become felt realities, which are particularly marked in the lives of racialized workers. In sum, then, I will argue that labour and race are technologies of power by which we are – as Eziashi realised – constantly assigned roles that shape our capacity to engage and be engaged by the world.

Bio: Tom Six is Reader in Politics and Performance at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London, and an editor of the journal *Studies in Theatre and Performance*. His current research focuses on the politics of race in theatre and of planetary performance. He is the author (before 2023 as Tom Cornford) of numerous essays on theatre-making and its politics, and of *Theatre Studios: A Political History of Ensemble Theatre-Making* (Routledge 2021), as well as co-editor of *Michael Chekhov in the Twenty-First Century: New Pathways* (Bloomsbury 2020), and a special issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review* on director Katie Mitchell (2020). <https://www.tom6.space/>

1A - Cultural Labour and the Questions of Embodiment in Performance

Brahma Prakash, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Embodiment has emerged as a vital but valorized category in the field of dance, theatre and performance studies. This embodiment includes claims of embodied knowledge, embodied dance, embodied practices, embodied movement and so on. The claims however raise various questions when it comes to community-based performances: Is there a performance without embodiment to the questions of disembodied performance in the context of cultural labour? The paper intends to engage and interrogates the questions of embodiment and the politics of performance in relation to the local cultural performance of the subaltern communities from India and south Asia.

Drawing on my work on cultural labour that includes various kinds of embodiment, I intend to analyze the dichotomy that exists between the embodied claims of performance and the disembodied formation of the communities in specific cultural contexts. The paper aims to extend the idea of embodiment beyond the corporeality of the body—in the habitus and locations of performers. Second, is embodiment knowledge or embodiment performance always about emancipatory knowledge? The performance of cultural labour certainly complicates the existing idea of embodiment that has been almost taken for granted in the field of dance, theatre and performance studies.

Bio: Dr Brahma Prakash is a writer, cultural theorist and an Assistant Professor of Theatre and Performance Studies at the School of Arts and Aesthetics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is the author of *Cultural Labour: Conceptualizing the 'Folk Performance' in India* (Oxford University Press, 2019) and *Body on the Barricades: Life, Art and Resistance in Contemporary India* (LeftWord 2023). He has also published in various research journals, including *Asian Theatre Journal*, *Performance Research*, *Economic and Political Weekly* and others.

1A - Ritualistic performances and disembodied caste-labour during the Covid-19 pandemic

Sharmistha Saha, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, Mumbai
Kanika Khurana, University of Mumbai

Jagran Gondhal is a living performance tradition focused on telling mythological stories and other folktales through lyrical songs. The performers are traditional nomads who sing these devotional melodies in praise of Hindu gods and goddesses. *Gondhalis*, the performers are invited on several religious and ritualistic occasions like *Navratris*, wedding ceremonies, housewarming ceremonies, childbirth and other ritualistic-celebratory events for their lyrical recital. *Gondhalis* primarily belong to nomadic tribes that often travel through states in South-Western India. During the Covid 19 lockdown, their mobility came to a halt. Unlike the narrative of migrant workers in India, who not only lost their jobs but also walked several miles to reach their home towns, these performers were not only unable to continue with their performances but were also forced to station themselves in one place. In our research where we interviewed 20 such artists, we came to know that since this form is not considered to be an ‘artform’ as such, they were not given any financial relief by the Maharashtra State Government¹¹. In this paper we use ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 2008) to look at how ritualistic performers are disembodied from their labour. The other problem faced by many such performers was their inability to move to the online medium. This was due not only to the lack of access or knowledge of using the platform but also because their performance’s relationship to the ‘sacred’ necessitated co-presence in a ritualistic event and online performances were not seen as efficacious enough by the spectator-devotees. In the context of a larger study on the impact of Covid-19 on performing artists in India sponsored by the Indian Council for Social Science Research where we interviewed performing artists from different backgrounds and forms, we find that especially for urban artists the online medium enabled paid labour through teaching-learning. However *Jagran Gondhal* unlike many other folk or traditional performances does not follow conventional methods of training and here the digital could not become a useful platform. Finally, in this paper we complicate the understanding of ‘labour’, within ritualistic performances, wherein caste communities find themselves at work because they often consider it their caste responsibility, which creates relationships of ‘work’, in a significantly different way than where performances are seen as ‘productions’.

Bio: *Sharmistha Saha* is Assistant Professor of Performance Studies at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, Mumbai. She completed her PhD in Theaterwissenschaft at the Freie Universität, Berlin and was a DFG postdoctoral fellow at Dahlem Research School, Berlin. She is the author of *Theatre and National Identity in Colonial India: Formation of a community through cultural practice* (Springer/Aakar, 2017). As a theatre practitioner Sharmistha's directorial work includes ‘Playing to Bombay’, ‘Her Letters’ commissioned by the Tagore Centre in Berlin, ‘Romeo Ravidas aur Juliet Devi’ amongst others. As a Fulbright-Nehru Research Fellow Sharmistha is working at the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University.

¹¹Although the Maharashtra State Government announced a package for ‘folk’ artists (<https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/maharashtra-one-time-grant-of-rs-5000-each-likely-for-artists-7443660/>) none of the interviewees had received any relief from the government at the time of our study. We still need to verify whether it was because of their nomadic status (lack of address) or because of their performance not considered to be an artform.

Kanika Khurana is Assistant Professor of Management at the School of Management Studies, University of Mumbai, Thane Sub Campus. She completed her PhD in arts management from Shailesh J. Mehta School of Management, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay and Post Graduate Diploma in Management from Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad. She has work experience in the financial services industry as a Deputy Manager in CARE Ratings and as a performer, teacher and choreographer of the jazz and contemporary dance forms. Her research in arts management and organization studies has been published in reputed international journals.

1B - ‘The Return of the Slaves’: Performance, Labour, and Commemoration in the Elmina Dungeon of Cape Coast

Priyanka Basu, King’s College London

This paper looks at the performance-exhibition titled, ‘The Return of the Slaves’ (2015) by Ghanaian multidisciplinary ‘artist’ Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi (crazinisT artisT). In this performance, 60 local and international participants engaged in an overnight enactment without food and water within the Elmina dungeon in Cape Coast. Fiatsi delineates this performance as the ‘consumption of the body in relation to time, displacement and redefinition of cultural identity.’ The Elmina dungeon has been designated as an important site of commemoration within UNESCO’s slave route project. Both the Cape Coast and Elmina dungeons remain crucial sites of the history of Atlantic Slavery. Cultural tourism in these sites (especially in Elmina) underline the visceral reminders of slave trade that still have global resonances in contemporary human slavery, and ‘the emergence of political violence, hate cultures intolerance and prevailing crimes against humanity within and outside Africa’. Scholars such as Andrew Apter (2017) have explored the history of Atlantic Slavery in the Cape Coast Castle through the framework of capitalism, while Ananya Jahanara Kabir (2020) perceives Elmina as a postcolonial space with transoceanic creolisation in its past and present. Kabir’s explorations help to connect the Elmina township to the architectural semblances of Accra’s Jamestown—particularly the Brazil House—which witnessed the return of Tabom people from the Afro-Brazilian community to Ghana from Brazil in 1836. By linking Fiatsi’s ‘The Return of the Slaves’ in Elmina with the tangible space of Jamestown, this paper interrogates the vitality as well as fetishisation of the labouring body, feelings, and emotions in performance. It does so through the lens historicity of slave labour and how its re-enactment through cultural tourism and performance can (or cannot) generate resistance through an ‘aesthetics of abjection’ (Casalini, 2023).

Bio: Dr Priyanka Basu is a Lecturer in Performing Arts at the Department of Culture, Media and Creative Industries, King’s College London. She has previously worked as the Curator of the ‘Two Centuries of Indian Print’ project at the British Library. Her first monograph, *The Poet’s Song: ‘Folk’ and its Cultural Politics in South Asia* is coming out soon from Routledge UK (South Asian History and Cultural Series). She was a recipient of the Royal

Historical Society Workshop Grant (2023) for her project on ‘80 Years of the Bengal Famine: Decolonial Dialogues from the Global South’. She is a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society, a Working Group Coordinator at TaPRA and Co-Convenor of the Historiography Working Group at IFTR.

1B - Dear Departed: Dance in the Realms of Thanatopolitical and Sublime

Debanjali Biswas, Showtown History Centre, Blackpool

I argue for an examination of performers’ exegeses of dissent, thanatopolitics, and representation as imagined in contemporary choreographies emerging from Manipur, India. Historically, the continuum of performance in the region has spanned a range of bodily practices such as martial arts, dance from rituals, physical theatre, and experimental forms. The essay examines the interstices and interweaving of various repertoires as cited in two touring and evolving productions – *Meepao* (2022) by Nachom Arts Foundation and *Footprints in Blood* (2021) by Manipuri Nartanalaya. Moreover, it traces the need to interrogate the valences that recharge the repertoire(s) arising from sentiments of disquiet, antipathy and slow violence that has become a part of post-conflict society in Manipur. Both choreographies speak of/to those who have deceased - drawing from narratives on human cost of insurgency, migration, and crises of identity which also reflects in the ongoing ethnic violence that has varied tempi of quotidian life in the region. The choreographies toy with disruption of senses and policing of the labouring body, regard the performance space as a site to register a collective experience of dissonant harmony. To analyse the acts of bodily transfer, metaphor, social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity that are at the foundation of these choreographies, while simultaneously archiving and embodying intervention, I draw from anthropologist Nayanika Mookherjee’s conceptualisation of ‘irreconciliation’ (2022) that seeks to examine the phenomenon of refusal to forget and forgive, particularly in the face of unacknowledged pain and disenfranchised grief. This essay draws upon the interplay of resistance and receptivity, homeland and alienation – thematic constancy found in both productions. I illustrate that within the realm of collective action, choreographic ‘irreconciliation’ has been sought to work towards reconstitution and remembrance.

Bio: Debanjali Biswas is an early career researcher in performance studies and social anthropology, and a practitioner. She has completed her PhD from King’s College London as a Commonwealth Scholar. She maintains long term commitment towards performance cultures of communities from the north-eastern states of India where her ethnographic research has been at the intersections of marginality, precarity, resistance. She has recently published an essay in *The Routledge Companion to Northeast India* (2022) and essays are forthcoming in *South Asian Dance Intersections* (2023), and *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Dance* (2024). As a TaPRA Research Fellow at the Showtown History Centre (Blackpool) and a grantee of Women’s History Network (UK) she is exploring the historic collections in search of Asian performers in early twentieth-century Britain.

1B - Disclosure, Visibility, Believability: Emotional Labour and Responsibility in #MeToo Performance

Tiffany Murphy, University of Sussex

This paper seeks to interrogate the necessary emotional labour undertaken by disclosing, and witnessing, sexual/gendered trauma narratives through performance. In the aftermath of the #MeToo movement, there has been a proliferation of #MeToo performances, with many artists emboldened to share their experiences of sexual trauma. Much critical discourse testifies to the restorative potentialities of performance as a ‘site of witnessing’ (Duggan: 2012, 94), providing a means to ‘reconcile’ (Gorman: 2020, 77) with real-life trauma narratives. But, in consideration of Hochschild’s notion of emotional labour as the performance and commercialisation of emotions within work settings, what sorts of demands can be located within a performed ‘working through’ of lived trauma for a theatre production? Reflecting on my own experience as a practitioner in this field, I examine the emotional labour of disclosure undertaken by survivor/practitioners, thinking through strategies that include exposure, visibility and the tensions around believability (Banet-Weiser & Higgins: 2022), self-care/recovery and ethical responsibility for materials and audience. I analyse embodiments of trauma which are codified within labour practices, such as processes of visible-making, physical exertion and carrying out of tasks. Parallel to this, I consider the kinds of ethical concern that hover around the responsibilities placed on an audience as they become witness, acknowledging the disclosure of trauma testimony as an ‘ethical demand’ (Stuart Fisher: 2009, 114) and the possibility of (re) traumatisation due to what Judith Herman describes as trauma’s contagion (Herman: 1992, 140). Against a backdrop of wider current debate around trigger warnings, safeguarding in theatre and, more broadly, the ethics of ‘trauma dumping’, this paper hopes to open up fruitful discussion vital and urgent in the context of arts-based research.

Bio: Tiffany Murphy is a performer, theatre maker and doctoral researcher at the University of Sussex. Her PhD research proposes a queer feminist lens adopting failure as a means to engage with lived sexual/gendered trauma through performance. Tiffany completed her BA (Hons) in Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Warwick and her MA in Performance Making at Goldsmiths University of London.

2A - Women in Godly Roles: The Evolution of Gender Dynamics in the Bhaona Tradition

Stoiti Baruah, Jawaharlal Nehru University

In the traditional performance/theatre of Assam known as Bhaona, there has been a historical practice of playing gods or divine roles, which holds significant ethical implications. This practice has its roots in the religious establishment of Neo-Vaishnavism, where monks played

a crucial role in pedagogical teachings. These religious roles have traditionally been male-dominated and carried out as a part of established traditions.

However, an interesting phenomenon has emerged in the last decade where women have started taking on these religious roles in Bhaona with a strategic trajectory of professionalism, rather than merely adhering to tradition. This shift challenges existing stereotypes and initiates a transgressive act within the performance arena.

The traditional gendered labour norms in Assam, similar to many societies, have typically restricted women to roles associated with caregiving, nurturing, and domestic responsibilities. By entering the sacred domain of Bhaona, women confront and break these entrenched stereotypes. This transgression carries significance as it challenges the long-held beliefs about who can represent divinity and perform sacred roles. The decision of women to take on sacred roles professionally adds another layer of complexity to the transformation. By doing so, they move beyond being seen as occasional exceptions or token representations in the performance realm. Instead, they establish themselves as skilled professionals in a domain that was historically dominated by men. The convergence of women embracing religious roles in Bhaona and adopting a professional approach brings to light the evolution of gender dynamics in religious spaces.

This paper looks at the progression towards professionalism which reflects a change in the understanding of labour in the context of religious performances. As women take on religious roles with a strategic and professional approach, they challenge and expand the traditional definitions of labour in Neo-Vaishnavism, redefining potentialities within the performance.

Bio: Stooti Baruah is a PhD student in Theatre and Performance Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University. Her research journey is fuelled by a deep fascination with theatre, ethnography and philosophy. She is dedicated to studying theatre and performances through a philosophical lens, exploring the connections between these two disciplines. Having completed her Master's in Philosophy and M.Phil in Theatre and Performance Studies, she has developed a deep appreciation for the transformative power of theatre and its capacity to evoke profound philosophical reflections.

2A - Under a Woven Vagina: Scenic Design and the Erasure of Migrating/Labouring Bodies of Chinese Female Textile Workers in *Dao Yin* (2021)

Yingjun Wei, Trinity College Dublin

Vagina Project (VP), one of the most active Chinese grassroots feminist theatre groups based in Beijing, staged *Dao Yin* (*Saying Vagina*) in October 2021 in Beijing 5 House, an art incubator, during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Dao Yin* is a re-telling of *The Vagina Monologues* (*TVM*), a radical feminist play written and performed by North American artist/activist Eve Ensler in the late 1990s. Sharing the same methodological foundation with *TVM*, *Dao Yin* is a dramatisation of more than sixty interviews VP held with female-identifying participants about their vaginas. VP members envisioned a stage design which allows spectators to watch

the whole show about vaginas through a ‘Vagina’ – a ‘Theatre of Vagina’ – with aesthetic and thematic importance during the performance. The theatre venue was decorated with textile materials recycled from VP members and cheap fabric offcuts purchased from textile markets, dyed in red and woven together, scattering around the theatrical space and extending onto the stage.

Drawing on my latest interview with the producer of *Dao Yin* who worked with four female migrant workers in a factory outside Beijing, dyeing, braiding and weaving the ‘Theatre of Vagina’, I examine the scenic design of *Dao Yin* with a particular focus on layers of exploitation and empowerment of the female textile labouring bodies. I argue that the spatial and (reductive) semiotic transformation of the ‘Woven Vagina’ unravels the symbolic violence of theatre’s nature as a sign system, a mythmaking machine. Delivering back to the theatre in central Beijing, the gigantic pieces of red-tinted fabric, deeply rooted in textile material practices, knitting and weaving knowledge and techniques, corporeal vulnerability and precarity of female textile workers in the factory, were immediately translated/reduced to an artefact, a sensuous presence, a symbolic scenic element and a vaginal myth – representation of the urban Chinese women’s sexual liberation and empowerment. This is particularly true because neither did the female migrant workers know specifically what they were weaving for, nor did the audiences know whose hands had touched the ‘vaginal’ scenery.

Weaving together paradoxically ecological theatre-making (recycling unwanted garments) and capitalist mass production (purchasing cheap fabric wastes); feminist theatre-making (do-it-yourself poor aesthetics) and exploitation of female labouring bodies; rural women’s migrant precarity and urban Chinese women’s sexual celebration, *Dao Yin* complicates the scene of Chinese feminist theatre-making and begs the question: “what exactly is a feminist practice?”

Bio: Yingjun Wei (She/Her) is a final-year doctoral candidate in the Department of Drama at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland and an Early Career Researcher at the Trinity Long Room Hub, Trinity’s Arts and Humanities Institute. She serves as a postgrad rep for the Irish Society for Theatre Research. Her project delves into feminist theatre and performative activism in China from the early twenty-first century onwards. Notably, she investigates the Chinese retelling of *The Vagina Monologues* spanning 2003 to the present. Her work has appeared in the *European Journal of Theatre and Performance*. Forthcoming is her article on Chinese feminists’ performative acts against domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic in *Performance Research*, alongside her development of three doctoral thesis chapters into a mini-monograph for the ‘Women Theatre Makers’ Series (Cambridge University Press).

2B - Labouring Body and Protection Laws: Child Performers in Indian Circuses

Aastha Gandhi, Independent Scholar

The paper studies the relation between the ‘laboured’ body and the ‘performing’ bodies of

child performers in Indian circuses. I locate the child performer amidst the various contesting notions of labour and performance, amidst the legal debates between protection, exploitation and trafficking.

I study their performance repertoire and the physical labour performed inside the circus ring. I examine the contesting notions of labour of 'play' and labour of 'risk' which become the defining legal discourse developed to protect the child performers. The two films, *Rope in their hands* (Yadav 2004) and *Cirque de Kabul* (Guz 2019), adapt two different approaches: protection via ban and empowerment through skills, respectively, towards circus, serve as primary case studies for my paper. The dichotomy in the approach of these films is central to the understanding the idea of labour of 'play' versus labour of 'risk' in circus.

Following debates and controversies around recent modifications of child labour laws, specifically on the perception of circus as a site of child exploitation, contrasted with allowances for children working in audio-visual media, or the sports industry, I question the absence of agency of child performers in the formulation of these laws. Through two phases: pre-child labour ban, 2011 and post-child labour ban in circuses, I study the perspectives of the various stakeholders: the State, the judiciary, the laws, and the NGOs which actively petitioned for the ban, and the complete erasure of the voices of circus owners and the child performers in this debate.

Bio: Dr. Aastha Gandhi holds a Ph.D. in theatre and performance studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her area of research engages with the circus, networks, laws, and discourses of the performing body. Aastha's degree in law adds to her research which investigates negotiations of citizenship between state and judiciary, and places the circus at the centre of the debate of child labour and animal rights. She currently serves as a Member on Academic and Creative Committee for Circus and Its Others, and is an editor for the Routledge Historical Resources project on Circus and Sideshow in the Long Nineteenth Century. She also served as an Elected Student Member on the Executive Committee of International Federation for Theatre Research. She is currently writing her monograph, *A Critical History of Indian Circus: Performance, Networks, and Migration*, to be published in 2024

2B - Dancing in the Shadows: The Struggle for Artistic Agency

Shravasti Ingle, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

In the realm of Odissi dance where tradition and artistry intertwine, exist the hallowed halls of guru-shishya (teacher-student) relationship, profound dedication and unwavering commitment define the labor of aspiring Odissi dancers. The rhythmic cadence of their toil reverberates through intense training, where their bodies blend with the very essence of the dance form. Yet, under the soft tulle of tradition, a darker narrative unfolds. This abstract delves into the intimate nexus of labor, the gendered body, and the hushed echoes of exploitation that resonate within the sacred confines of the guru-shishya relationship. Gendered power dynamics, enrobed in ancient tradition, seep into the guru's role as authority.

The threads of control delicately weave themselves into the hearts of young students, as they are gently nudged into subservience. Underneath the resplendent layers of their exquisite attire, the weight of pressures consumes the aspirations of these dedicated dancers, as they navigate the labyrinth of patriarchal norms, concealing their voices beneath layers of obedience. Opportunities often dance just beyond their reach. Denied the limelight, students are left to spin in the shadows of their teachers. The established hierarchy extinguishes the flames of their potential, dimming the brilliance of their art. Disempowerment overpowers and their agency dissipates like smoke, suffocating the essence of their artistic being. This study casts a spotlight on the cloaked shadows of the guru-shishya tradition, advocating for a symphony resonating with equality and empowerment. It delves into the embodiment of students' bodies as sites of exploited labor, investigating the socio-economic and political conditions underlying this phenomenon. Adopting a multi-faceted methodological approach, the study draws from various theoretical frameworks, including historical inquiry and autoethnography, additionally it uses the feminist discourse to explore the emergence of forms of resistance stemming from the labor and power dynamics within the tradition.

Bio: Shravasti Ingle is an Odissi dancer. She received her training in Nrityagram, following the Gurukul style of learning, where she honed her skills as a dancer and also had the privilege of assisting in teaching and performing as part of her training. Along with Odissi, she has explored other dance forms and has also gained intermediate experience in theater through workshops conducted by the National School of Drama, Delhi, India. In an attempt to explore the world of performing arts academically, Shravasti is currently pursuing her PhD in Theatre and Performance Studies at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, JNU, Delhi, India. Her research topic is titled, 'The Lost Potential: Negotiating Space as a Disciple.'

2B - *Drohita*: Where is (my) Labouring/Dancing body?

Shruti Ghosh, Independent researcher and artist, Kolkata

I would like to present, a short performance piece *Drohita* (an act of dissent), at the Conference. The piece is about the struggles of the sweatshop workers on both sides of Bengal.

In July 2021, a factory in Bangladesh was destroyed in fire killing many people. This was one of the most severe industrial disasters that hit Bangladesh in the past ten years. The incident took place at a time when we were grappling with the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic across the globe. Out of despair and rage, I created a short video titled *Droho* (defiance) as my expression of mourning and solidarity with the factory workers. Owing to the restrictions imposed by Covid-19, I was confined in my home and therefore chose the common passage/stairs of our rented apartment where I performed the movements and my partner shot the video.

Two years later, now, as the world has gone back to pre-pandemic days, albeit with a difference, I want to go back to the stories of the sweatshop workers who are forced to work under inhuman conditions with poor salaries. With more factories being closed down and

unemployment escalating on both sides of Bengal, the sustenance of the workers has grown more precarious than before. As I choreograph *Drohita*, for the present conference, I revisit *Drohita* to understand my affective impulse in retrospect to ask: What kind of affective labour does an artist undergo while giving shape to her inner feelings/emotions in addressing the tragedy through a live performance? How to address the labouring body of the performer which is depicting stories of labour of another community? How do we understand labour as/of performance and performance as/of labour?

Bio: Shruti Ghosh is a Kathak dancer, choreographer, teacher and independent researcher based in Kolkata, India. She is recipient of Arts Research Grant from Indian Foundation of Arts, Bangalore (2022-2023) and is currently working on her research project on contemporary history of Kathak in Metiaburuj, Kolkata. She worked as a dance teacher and performer at Indian Cultural Centre, Embassy of India, Kazakhstan (2018-2020). Shruti has collaborated with dance, music, film and theatre artists and performed in London, Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, different parts of Kazakhstan and India. She has published (in English and Bangla) in many journals and anthologies on film music and film dance. Currently she is also touring with her solo performance piece *Khol Do* (on partition of India) in different parts of India.

3A - Backstage Workers as Metaphor

Martin Young, Birkbeck, University of London

The theatre, with its clear division between the brightly lit stage and the concealed backstage, has frequently provided writers with a metaphorical model for the structure of capitalist society in which visible spectacle obscures and yet relies on the 'hidden abode' of production. By the same token, iconoclastic performance scholars have disparaged the traditional theatre by comparing its organisational logics to those of a factory. In both these articulations, the unseen backstage worker has correspondingly stood in for the industrial proletariat.

This paper explores the use of theatrical labourers as a discursive stand-in for productive workers more broadly, taking a semiotic reading of the stage crew in the Bridge Theatre production of *Young Marx* (2017) as its starting point and drawing on nineteenth-century theatrical writing and contemporary critical scholarship. While the work of actors is frequently derided as ephemeral and insubstantial, the labour of stage hands is understood to be practical, worldly, and non-representational. It is in this capacity that they are drafted in to represent the ideal proletarian labourer.

Interrogating the ethics of this discursive manoeuvre, I argue that it reinforces normative raced and gendered conceptions of what, and who, a worker is. I further suggest that this structure of thought, in which one worker can serve metonymically as a representative of the whole heterogeneous working class, relies ultimately on the abstraction of labour that is at the heart of capitalist society. Engaging with the ambivalent semiotics of labourers in the theatre can therefore provide useful terms for interrogating how we talk about work and workers in

capitalist society.

Bio: Martin Young is a Lecturer in Theatre Studies at Birkbeck University and has worked extensively as a theatre technician. He is part of the Performance and Political Economy Research Collective, with whom he has published ‘Marxist Keywords for Performance’. His research and publications focus on the industrial organisation of theatrical labour, and he is the co-editor of a special issue of *Shakespeare Bulletin* on labour in contemporary performance.

3A - Dear England and Neoliberal Performance Management

Jaswinder (Jaz) Blackwell-Pal, Queen Mary University of London

Dear England, written by James Graham and produced by the National Theatre in London in 2023, offers a staging of neoliberal management trends which position ‘authentic performance’ as key to unlocking productivity and potential in the workplace. The play centres around the introduction of Dr Pippa Grange to the Football Association, a psychologist and performance coach who in 2017, was appointed as head of people and team development, credited with changing the organisational culture within the English football team and their world cup performance in turn. In Graham’s play, Grange represents the instrumentalization of psychology and performance in the workplace, as well as what Stella Minahan has called the ‘aesthetic turn’ in management from the 1980s onwards, where soft skills, communication, emotion and passion have been prioritised. *Dear England* positions the contributions of Grange as a counterweight to the embodied physical skill but interior opacity of the footballers themselves, whose performance on the pitch is unlocked through ‘culture’ change encouraging greater personal commitment, self-knowledge and emotional bonding amongst the team. On stage, Grange’s techniques are shown to overlap with dramatic training techniques and games themselves – including trust exercises and emotional memory, suggesting that drama-based training is central to harnessing labour performance. In turn, the play suggests that such organisational changes have the potential to heal gendered and racialised traumas, and serve towards a progressive patriotism, as represented by an emotionally open and ‘authentic’ English team. This paper argues that *Dear England* dramatizes these contemporary management turns via its focus on organisational culture coaching as a means of unlocking workers performance, overcoming the embodied, physical approach of the athletes labour via use of performance and psychological techniques.

Bio: Jaswinder is a lecturer in theatre and performance in the department of drama at Queen Mary. Her research looks at emotional labour, actor training, and the influence of theatre and drama within management and organisational studies.

3A - Directors, Disability, and (Dis)embodied Labour in Theatre

Nina Worthington, Canterbury Christ Church University

Emotional and physical labour is exerted by actors and directors in response to disability, reflecting individuals' personal process of engagement with disability; that is, their levels of disability consciousness, openness to new territory, familiarity across disabled and non-disabled communities, and shared responsibility for change. Drawing on phenomenological perspectives of theatre, this paper examines labour exerted by non-disabled directors in response to caution and confidence surrounding disability. It considers aspects of directors' embodied, critical engagement with disability that impact how theatre is reimagined towards industry-wide change. Public discourse surrounding the underrepresentation of disabled people in theatre has promoted a widely held assumption that fear is the most common response to disability in theatre among directors; Gould believes hesitancy to engage with disability is due to, 'fear that audiences will not be attracted to the work, fear that we can get the access part of it wrong for the audiences, and fear that the work will not be very good. Fear over health and safety issues' (quoted in Hutchinson 2016). Lived experiences of theatre and disability among directors, however, add detail to such longstanding views. They offer a nuanced view of what for some directors may be interpreted as fear that remains a barrier to engagement with disability; for some the labour or discomfort involved or presumed in avoiding pitfalls of disability representation and critique is too great. For others this may be considered as more calculated caution, experienced alongside growing confidence to explore non-traditional casting choices and increased accessibility in their practice. Directors' lived experiences disability examined in this paper offer an alternative view of caution about practice that is not debilitating for all, but prompts important questions of labour required of individuals to reimagine casting, script, audiences, and access in the theatre industry.

Bio: Dr Nina Worthington is a Principal Research Fellow at the Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health, Canterbury Christ Church University. She completed a PhD at Liverpool Hope University, and MRes in Directing from University of Birmingham. Nina has over 16-years' experience working in arts and media, in radio and film production, and performance in theatres, prisons, schools, and other community settings. Her interest is in lived experiences of disability in arts and industry settings.

3B - Making an Appearance: Aesthetic Labour, Stereotyping, and Freelance Performance Work

Sara Reimers, University of Bristol

Acting is an employment context defined by aesthetic labour. The "embodied capacities and attributes" that actors possess at the time they are employed are subsequently "mobilise[d], develop[ed] and commodif[ied]" by their employers in order to produce a particular dramaturgical outcome (Warhurst et al. 2000, p. 4). In the competitive world of performance work, an actor's appearance can make or break their career.

The aesthetic labour demanded of performers is complicated by the fact that, within UK

performance contexts at least, nearly all actors are freelance workers. As Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wissinger observe, “freelancers have to adapt to fluctuating aesthetic trends and different clients and commodify themselves in the absence of a corporate aesthetic” (2006, p. 774). Thus, an actor must judge how best to fashion their appearance in order to maximise their employment opportunities. In many cases, this involves conforming to a recognisable “type”. As Deborah Dean has observed, “[p]erformers will draw on the cultural currency of shared typifications and visual stereotypes to increase their chance of access to work” (Dean 2008, p. 678).

Drawing on the findings of the “Making an Appearance” research project – an AHRC Creative Economy Engagement Fellowship and research collaboration with performers’ trade union, Equity – this paper will consider how, in the precarious employment context of performance, actors’ aesthetic labour will often involve the stereotyping of the self. Analysing survey responses and focus group discussions, this paper will explore performers’ experiences of aesthetic labour, considering how actors feel about their bodies and the work they undertake to make a “castable” appearance.

Bio: Sara Reimers is Lecturer in the Department of Theatre at the University of Bristol. She studied for her AHRC-funded PhD in the Department of Drama, Theatre and Dance at Royal Holloway, University of London, where she wrote her thesis on casting and the construction of femininity. Following the award of her PhD she continued working at Royal Holloway as a Senior Teaching Fellow and subsequently as an AHRC Creative Economy Engagement Fellow, leading the “Making an Appearance” research project. Sara is also a freelance director and dramaturg.

3B - Producing Knowledge: Contemporary Dance, Cognitive Labour, and the Problem of Virtuosity

Clio Unger, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London

This paper explores stagings of cognitive labour in contemporary dance. It traces how the demand for work as ‘self-presentation’ is reflected in the contemporary discourse of cognitive labour and asks whether performance can act as a vehicle to stage the (self-)exploitation and alienation associated with working and self-presenting in late capitalism? To answer this question, I turn to Virno’s concept of ‘virtuosity’ – as an expression of the performative character of contemporary knowledge work – to explore how contemporary lecture performances stage cognitive labour (as opposed to the physical labour of dance and performance). I draw on the writings of Judith Hamera and Nicholas Ridout to establish that discussions of virtuosity in performance studies have so far over-emphasised either physical effort or non-human actors. I mobilise two lecture performances from the field of conceptual dance (Jérôme Bel’s *Véronique Doisneau* [2004] and Jochen Roller’s trilogy *Perform Performing* [2002-2004]) to show how discourses of virtuosic labour drive tensions between intellectual and physical labour, or choreography and performance, in contemporary dance. The lecture performance’s hybrid form, its oscillation between speaking and doing (in this

case dancing) allows me to explore the tensions between the two main modes of labour (mental and physical) at play. In my analysis of the two productions, I harness and problematise Virno's idea of 'servile virtuosity' ('a condition of subjugation to the logics of production') to show how these lecture performances stage a) the institutional servility of the corps de ballet dancer (in the case of Véronique Doisneau) and b) the economic servility freelance dancers and choreographers like Jochen Roller are trained to perform. Ultimately, I show that the lecture performance performs a critique in contemporary forms of (artistic) labour, while also being implicated in these modes of (self-)exploitation.

Bio: Clio Unger recently submitted her PhD thesis entitled 'Contemporary Lecture Performances and the Politics of Knowledge in Cognitive Capitalism' at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London. She holds an MA in theatre and performance studies from The Graduate Center (CUNY) and an MA in Dramaturgy from the University of Munich. Her essay 'Share Your Work: Lola Arias's Lecture Performance Series and the Artistic Cognitariat of the Global Pandemic' won the 2020 TaPRA Postgraduate Essay Prize and was published in *Contemporary Theatre Review*. Clio co-edited the *Platform* issue 'Theatres of Labour' (Vol 14, no.1, 2020).

3B - The labouring body in community choruses: exploring the value of non professional participation in professional productions.

Sarah Weston, University of Manchester

This paper will investigate contemporary trends in the United Kingdom of utilizing a 'community chorus' within professional theatre productions, exploring questions of embodied labour in relation to the non-monetary value of participation. The community chorus is comprised of an ensemble of non-professional, unpaid, local people who perform in a production alongside a cast of professional actors. Productions using community choruses have taken place in regional theatres across the United Kingdom, tying choral recruitment to the theatre's participatory and community work. Choral participation is presented as an opportunity for non professionals to experience what it is like to be in a prestigious, mainstage theatrical production, and furthermore claims to offer some of the benefits of community theatre practices. At the same time, there have been some examples of unreasonable expectations placed upon chorus members, demanding similar levels of time, commitment and skill as required from the professional actors. Drawing on a series of interviews with community chorus members, I will investigate tensions between professional and non-professional labour, cultural value, and exploitation. Unpacking the experiences of those who have provided their free embodied labour by participating in a community chorus, I will argue that participatory theatre processes must reassess the grounds on which non-professional labour is sought, ensuring that work is exchanged fairly and in line with the needs of the participants, not the professionals.

Bio: Sarah Weston is a Lecturer in Theatre Studies at the University of Manchester.

Completing her PhD at the University of Leeds in 2018, her research explores questions of voice, cultural value and community performance practices. Sarah also works as a theatre practitioner, co running Salford Community Theatre.