



#YouthTheatreTuesdays is an initiative of Youth Theatre Ireland. Due to the restrictions of movement and the gatherings of large numbers due to the COVID19 health emergency, this is a way for our community to stay connected and share practice.

Each Tuesday, youth theatre leaders come together through video conferencing to share ideas, insights and inspirational ways to keep their programmes on track.

These facilitated discussions are open to youth theatre leaders, facilitators and assistants. Each week a new area of discussion is proposed and guests are invited to submit ideas and exercises to be shared with the cohort. A volunteer takes the notes and then they are then shared with the group. These notes are more of an aid memoire rather than an extensive write up of any exercise or idea. Using the medium of Zoom software, the exercises make reference to the functionality of that app. i.e. chat boxes etc.

These are the notes from:

#YouthTheatreTuesdays – Tuesday, May 26th at 12pm

Making work online: Theatre Uncut

Proposal: Continuing with our deep dive into developing a New Form for creating meaningful work in this new self- isolating, tech reliant environment, we are delighted to welcome Emma Callander and Hannah Price, Co-Artistic Directors of Theatre Uncut, to discuss their the making of Bubble by Kieran Hurley, their first online play, and Digital Theatre generally.
<https://www.theatreuncut.com/watch>

(They will share some insights, techniques and reflections on the process and how we might move forward to continue to create meaningful work online with our youth theatre members)

THEATRE UNCUT

Theatre Uncut have been developing their unique model of global release over the last 9 years. So far over 6,500 people across 26 countries Theatre Uncut plays by playwrights including Caryl Churchill, Mark Ravenhill, Tanika

Gupta and Inua Ellams. The winner of the inaugural Theatre Uncut Political Playwriting Award, two Palestinians go dogging by Sami Ibrahim, will be co-produced at the Royal Court. The shortlisted award play The Merthyr Stigmatist by Lisa Parry will be co-produced at the Sherman Theatre Cardiff directed by Emma Callander. The company are passionate about supporting new playwrights and political theatre makers. <http://www.theatreuncut.com>

Emma Callander – Co-Artistic Director (EC)

Emma Callander joined Theatre Uncut as Co-Artistic Director in 2012. She is an award winning theatre director and currently an Associate Artist at the Traverse Theatre and a Leverhulme Fellow at the Bristol Old Vic. Emma was Resident Director at the National Theatre Scotland through Regional Theatre Young Directors Scheme, Associate Director of the Traverse Theatre from 2013 – 15 and Creative Director of BIRTH at the Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester. Her work has won Fringe First Awards and the Amnesty International Freedom of Speech Award.

Hannah Price – Co-Artistic Director (HP)

Hannah is Co-Artistic Director and Founder of Theatre Uncut. She is also a freelance theatre and immersive project director and BAFTA nominated performance director for video games, virtual reality, motion-capture and performance-capture projects. As an award winning theatre director she has directed for theatres across the UK and internationally, working in Paris, Toronto, Copenhagen, Basel and Istanbul. She is currently Creative Director of a large-scale immersive project due to reside under a London landmark for five years.

Introduction to Theatre UnCut's global reach

Theatre Uncut was created in response to the cut in public spending when the coalition came in in 2011. They asked a collection of playwrights to write short plays in response to the cuts in public spending, including Jack Thorne, Lucy Kirkwood and Mark Ravenhill, and made the plays available to anyone anywhere, including Community groups, youth theatres and schools, to perform for one week. Performances occurred all over the world, spreading these takes on UK austerity with them. In 2012 the company exploded internationally, alongside the Occupy movement, the Arab Spring, and austerity kicking in hard across Europe. Theatre Uncut commissioned playwrights to look at issues that affected their location, which again were performed all over the world, giving artists the space to explore what was going on in their country through the prism of another country.

EC: *"It came out of a time where it felt... I felt in particular very angry... it felt like people were being very unfairly targeted, in areas like disability, mobility. There was a real impetus to want to make change, a real impetus to use the*

medium that we feel is important, the medium we love, to say something, to do something, to encourage some sort of change no matter how that might manifest. I hit on an idea that galvanised a lot of people- so many people right now want to come together, to do something. Having this chat now about how digital theatre might work feels like a similar time. There is a real yearning to push past this or push WITH this. Who are we as makers? What does this mean for young people and makers moving forward...

Bubble by Kieran Hurley

Theatre Uncut's latest production, Bubble, really is an international event, with people all over engaging with the work; downloads of the digital play have taken place in over 21 countries, showing the global connectivity of the work.

Bubble makes use of low-fi cheap technology, as it is important that the work be accessible. The company use platforms like YouTube that people are already familiar with; it's not niche, people feel comfortable in those spaces. The performers of Bubble never met, they all recorded their pieces individually on their phones, and they were later edited together.

You can watch Bubble here: <https://www.theatreuncut.com/watch> . Available until June 30th 2020.

Emma discussed the form of Bubble, how it holds a theatrical conflict inside it- that online persona that you have at your fingertips may say something very different that you would say face to face. For her, Bubble opens up a sense of online debate, and issues surrounding free speech. She highlighted the importance of considering form and content when creating Digital Theatre.

Exercise: Automatic Writing

Emma sends participants off to write for 2 minutes. It can be on paper, phone, computer etc, whatever you like to write on.

"The idea is that there is no moment for pause, no moment for contemplation. In the practice of it if nothing is coming to you then just write the same word over and over again. That sense of censorship is not allowed." -Emma

First Question:

What is Digital Theatre?

Everyone writes for two minutes straight

Second Question:

How is digital theatre different from film?

Write for one minute

After writing, Emma asks for volunteers to unmute and give us some of your reflection. You can read from your writing, which is usually brilliant verbatim script, or improvise and just speak to us.

Anna Galligan taster of writing: *"something new to me, theatre rather than tv, capturing of humanity and phrases. Human condition, shared humanity, rather than character-driven which is more straight theatre... Good sense of ensemble"*

Trina McCann taster of writing: *"theatre performing online in a digital platform, spectator watching through a device... actual performance to a camera- common denominator is the virtual, the online play form. How is it different from film? You don't have a massive crew with many cameras, so it's like a simpler version?"*

Fiona Keane: *"emerging concept for me. Interested in it- strange intimacy... form the same even with innovations? Still a lack of physical presence and humans in a room.*

Live theatre: real people interacting in the same space. Digital: films individuals and threads together- lack of touch, and physical intimacy"

The Alan-Bob dichotomy

Bob Kelly: *"a compromise, an in between form that provokes in me a longing for connection, not a sense of connection. An expression of frustration. It's like blueberry pie- it reminds you of what it tastes like, but it is no longer a blueberry."*

Alan King: *"Using digital tools like cameras audio, images, picture to tell a story. Familiarising and using the language of the Internet. The modes and functions of Facebook and twitter. Creating a new forum to tell stories in the language and forms of these tools*

It's exciting and fresh and should appeal to young people. It's pioneering. It's testing its fun. Its scary./ it's immediate. It's cheap. Nothing special needed apart from a computer. We can all do it. Regardless of ability of disability"

[Wikipedia definition of Digital Theatre](#): *"Digital theatre is primarily identified by the coexistence of "live" performers and digital media in the same unbroken space with a co-present audience"*

- Do we agree with this? Not necessarily!

What can we take from this work to apply to our own practice?

[Theatre Uncut have provided a Resource on Creating Digital Theatre. Available here.](#)

EC:

The people you are working with know this world way better than we ever will- we are not here to teach young people to make digital theatre. They have those skills already, albeit at differing levels. *You need to empower, not become experts in tiktok.* Theatre is going to have to look v different- these guys will have to make the future of theatre

Relationship with audience is the thing a lot of work is skimming over at the moment; not a lot is delving into how it relates to the audience- it expects us to observe.

HP: What are the audience to the performance? What does it mean to be together examining the same thing? What is theatre in digital? Vital questions to always ask yourself as a maker- What do we think theatre is and does and what its for...

Digital theatre offers the opportunity to ask what are we asking of the audience, what we want them to be. You can't REALLY ask this in more traditional spaces (like you can in immersive work). Are we inviting the audience to observe? Participate? Engage? Immerse? (to control?!)

-Traditional theatre invites the audience to observe, and some level of immersion as everyone is in the space together. They can engage but not direct engagement

-In Digital Theatre we are asking the audience to immerse into the digital space. We include direct audience input through devices like opinion polls, so there is participation.

Let's imagine we have our group we are going to make a piece with. We're looking for ways to engage them, so we set out to make a piece about what we feel excited about right now. We consider what digital medium(s) feel right for the work: Pinterest, YouTube, text, video etc.

When we put this piece out to the world, how do we want the audience to digest it? We can put criteria on how/where the piece should be watched:

- Asking them to watch this piece on their phone while naked (v extreme)
- Only at 4am, under your duvet.... That's who will experience this piece. It brings audience to a place normal theatre cant go so easily

- Love scenes, partnerships, anything with touch... When will we get that back? So how we ask our audience digest this work can speak to those themes: Are we creating a piece about the relationship between children and parents... You have to watch on your phone, with your mum, while socially distancing. It is all about what your mam's hug feels like but you can't go closer than two meters to her. This kind of set up- It's going to do something, create a connection that potentially you don't find in film.
- The politics: say our piece is about global capitalism and our complicit involvement... Get the audience to consider the device they are watching the work on. Look at the lithium levels, touch the computer, think about the hands of the Chinese worker who will have had to make this, what did they go through to make this for me to have it... its about bursting outside of the limitations, about the usual way of thinking about theatre and film

It's not a compromise anymore- it's doing things film and regular theatre can't do

Advice to facilitators:

Rather than imagining ourselves as digital artists- it's about going back to the heart of it. Write a list of what is important to you, another of what you think you're really good at. Maybe it's things like reading situations, connecting with people in the room, getting the energy in the room going... how can these skills be transferred into a digital form? We are not interested in compromise, your responsibility as youth theatre leaders is to dig right down inside yourself as facilitators, as artists, and really connect with why you are here- why is this the thing you are doing instead of being a doctor, taking out bins... why is this what you spend your time doing? Dig deep, find those gems. How can they talk to this format? Support them with understanding of form, dramaturgy, form, etc.

- There are going to be moments of conflict, of block, but that's where you will find your answers. When you find those moments of difficulty, dig. What your groups come up with will blow your mind, your group will do things you never thought possible, but only if they have strong hands guiding them, but people full of doubt, guilt etc.

Examples of work that is happening right now:

Charli XCX

<https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-52402372>

- She's a super pop star, who has just written an album during the last 6 weeks over social media
- She doesn't care about launches, timelines etc, she wants to make when and what she wants

- She has put her whole creative process up online, sharing lyrics, artwork etc and looked for feedback. She has made the work collaborative, and changed her work based on this online feedback

Look to these artists outside of theatre, and use them as inspiration.

Charli XCX's album is called "How I'm feeling now". How are your young people feeling right now? What platform best expresses that- Pinterest, YouTube etc.

Company Three Time Capsule

<http://www.companythree.co.uk/#coronavirus-time-capsule>

- This group are making a digital time capsule of hundreds of young people's responses to Corona virus
- Each week Company Three edit the films young people are sending into them/
- They've made a map for how other groups can do this all over the world (there is a week by week version and a quicker once-off version)
- People all over the world are having this conversation at the same time...
- This offers the sense of young people feeling like they're having a global, or at least national, or at least outside their front door conversation

Discussions springing from floor questions:

Emer Casey: I'm a director of youth theatre but also an actor. I can't get my head around... as an actor, that live relationship between the actor and audience... that osmosis... it feeds the performance. It's integral to performance, the young people love this too... it's a really important part of it to them.

Emma Callander: We are in a moment that hopefully will pass. Instead of trying to make this theatre- this will never be theatre- its digital theatre- its different. It will always remind us this is not that, so we have to shift our thinking- the osmosis, which can only be in person... let's not try, by trying we have continually reinforcing the negativity. Let's hope in a year or two we are back, it's on the horizon. Instead let's look at this new form as a completely different landscape; let's explore what it is. What this crazy thing has to offer, delve into that. Super important in terms of the narrative we share with young people. We could really mess their creativeness up, by rose tinted glasses of what was possible in the good old days- instead it's

got to be about what is possible today, next week etc. it's about being as present as we possibly can.

HP: Good to reflect on gaming: audiences' heartbeats synchronize in the theatre: how do we do that digitally? A study on gamer's heart rates. Lots of synchronicity in terms of emotions and heart rates in gaming too. Loads of learning to be done from the gaming sense of community, shared experience etc. that's been in the gaming world for decades. Remember that a lot of the work we are after has already been done in different industries

- If you have a certain rhythm playing that everyone can hear, that will have an impact.
- App on iPhone called Breathe. Transcendental meditation works v well with digitally created visuals. Many many ways that we can go ok I'm reading to my audience, I want this to be a soothing moment, then I want a change... I've got light, the environment they are in ask them to do things, my own bodies...

Anna Galligan: How do you direct actors for digital theatre? How do you run a rehearsal room?

EC: Direct actors how you would normally. What is it you enjoy doing when you direct? Write all that down and translate into this form. Clear, full of research, pin things up, or empty of all furniture... encouraging their minds to be in a different place. Recreate the atmosphere in the room. Open room half an hour early, all that great pre-rehearsal chat where a lot of the great work happens?

I'm not ever going to direct sitting down, don't let yourself sink back into your default setting in the house?

Creative ways to give people the same way in- listen to a song, watching something together eat lunch together- there are ways to create the at bubble together.

Ollie Breslin: social media and all that area is really interesting or dynamic- when it's live. Once you get into recording it I think it's a different thing. FB, what ever. . When you see things happening live its like wow is this really happening in this particular moment- we watch it live, we remember it, the details of it... trying to replicate what was a live event- that's a really difficult thing to do. Wondering about creating live online work. Create the characters, the situations, but lay it out live (like Boal)... is there much of that happening?

EC:

- Because we can record we can get a bigger audience- pressure from our funders to get bigger audience numbers
- Maybe audience have moments they can choose and control along the way...
- Dora the explorer online you can choose what happens next, and that's like 20 years behind gaming. Making a choice and it playing out in a narrative format.
- That an excitement of liveness is easy- just don't record it!

- I think this market-driven, this idea of theatre being recorded to be watched over a longer period of time- Emma
- The idea we went with was totally different - live streaming and editing, watched Anna and the lecturer there, in the space and the echo chamber were all being live streamed, but that's not what funders went with. Live editing now is more tricky, though not impossible.

- Comedic videos where they have pre-recorded themselves doing something then putting it as zoom background and talking to themselves... if you go into the functionality of things you can have so much fun. Set YT the challenge of teaching us how to use something e.g. Pinterest. Who's up for making a story with a beginning middle and end on Pinterest, you've got to show me while also teaching me how to use it. Once you see tis story-telling potential that's when it will become exciting. Put it in their hands, let them teach you.

Suggested Exercise: Automatic writing, they can record themselves talking, or writing.

Q1 What scares you about the world right now?

Q2 What excites you about the world right now?

2 minutes on each- four minutes of their life- small ask. Use that as the basis of whatever they're making. They can use that audio, video themselves, written etc... they have that material to start with, that material use at your starting point, then choose a platform,

Use that material, that format, put it together; make 30 second worth of material with a beginning, middle and end. They'll come back with beautiful things, beautiful ideas. Based on conflict, excitement and fear ... form of the platform.

Alan King: Not everyone is good at improv, singing, traditional theatre arts- but we still give them a go.

Highly recommend reading [Lifelong Kindergarten Cultivating Creativity through Projects, Passion, Peers, and Play](#) by Mitchel Resnick

Other links:

Theatre Uncut have provided a Resource on Creating Digital Theatre.
Available here.

Live Stream Archive <http://livestreamarchive.co.uk/>

Floating Points Boiler Room – for composition dancers come in around
2min 30

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_lbmC5tbEA

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/pals/news/2017/nov/audience-members-hearts-beat-together-theatre>

Notes kindly written up by Christina Matthews from Droichead Youth Theatre. Additional material by Alan King, Youth Theatre Ireland.