Reciprocity in Performance and Theatre Studies
A Methodological Guideline

THESIS PUBLISHER

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: THE EPHEMERAL AND THE ETERNAL

Welcome to the Reciprocal cosmos

PREFACE

This book—Reciprocity in Performance and Theatre Research: A Methodological Guideline merging at a time when both theatre practice and academic research are undergoing urgent calls for transformation. In a world fractured by extractives, cultural erasure, and knowledge asymmetry, we ask: Can performance still serve as an ethical bridge? Can research be reciprocal, not extractive? Can we carry also carry us toward healing, toward justice, and toward decolonial futures? This book brings together a collective of voices artists, researchers, activists, and educators across geographies, disciplines, and generations, who believe that the answer is yes. It is a manifesto as much as a methodology. It is both prayer and a plan.

Why This Book?

We observed a recurring gap in both performance studies and qualitative research: ethics was often procedural rather than philosophical; community was a subject, not a partner; and storytelling was treated as content, not a relationship. This book challenges those paradigms. It builds on the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Decolonizing Methodologies), Shawn Wilson (Research Is Ceremony), Jo-Ann Archibald (Indigenous Story work), and many others yet it speaks from the Global South, with grounded examples in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia, India, and Indigenous contexts globally. We propose reciprocity as the ethical and methodological heart of performance research. Reciprocity is not a soft value it is a demand. It asks us to listen deeply, to be accountable, and to give back.

Structure of the Book

This volume is organized into seven chapters, each designed to offer a different lens on how reciprocity can be practiced in the context of performance and research:

Chapter 1: Research is Reciprocal – Outlines the philosophical foundations of reciprocal research, introducing the sacred circle, positionality, and relational ethics.

Chapter 2: Research Sits Inside the Methodology Argues against tool-based approaches and instead centers cosmologies, storytelling rights, and Indigenous epistemologies.

Chapter 3: The Volunteer Performer Explores how performers act not as storytellers, but as stewards who hold space, using theatre as a site of collective witnessing.

Chapter 4: Ihsan, Ubuntu, and Buen Vivir – Introduces ethical frameworks from Islamic, African, and Latin American traditions that guide performance and research ethics.

Chapter 5: Sacred Consent – Discusses informed consent not as a legal checkbox, but as a spiritual and relational agreement.

Chapter 6: Wings of Reciprocity – Presents a conceptual framework (Love, Listening, Memory, Gratitude, Return) that ties together the affective, ethical, and methodological themes of the book.

Chapter 7: Living Agreements – Ends with practical tools, decolonial protocols, workshop exercises, and a reflection on the future of ethical research.

Who Can Read This Book?

This book is written for a wide range of readers:

- Students and early-career researchers are looking for grounded and ethical ways to begin their research journeys.
- Performance practitioners who want to work with communities in ways that are respectful, relational, and transformative.
- Teachers and educators seeking new pedagogical tools rooted in reciprocity, not hierarchy.
- Policymakers and NGOs interested in ethical engagement and cultural preservation.
- Community leaders and activists who want to build partnerships through storytelling, not spectacle.

We have taken care to use language that is accessible but rigorous, and each chapter includes reflexive tasks, case studies, and suggested readings for further exploration.

Theoretical and Methodological Grounding

A wide spectrum informs our work of traditions and frameworks: Islamic philosophy, particularly the concept of Ihsan (spiritual excellence and ethical intention).

Ubuntu from African thought: "I am because we are." Buen Vivir from Andean cosmovision, living well in balance with the earth and others. Indigenous storytelling protocols, where knowledge is shared with permission, purpose, and care.

- Feminist and postcolonial theory, which teaches us to remain vigilant to power, voice, and silence.

This is not just a collection of ideas. It is a collection of lived experiences, painful failures, and hopeful practices. It does not offer a single method but invites readers into a methodological stance, one that is humble, relational, and reflexive.

The Ethical Heartbeat of the Book

At the center of this project is a simple truth: Stories are sacred. To ask for someone's story is to ask for part of their soul. Therefore, how we ask, how we listen, how we interpret, and how we return matter deeply. We believe that performance can still be a vessel for justice. That research can be an act of love. And that every stage whether a village courtyard, a prison corridor, or a memory circle can become a site of co-resistance and co-creation.

A Note of Gratitude

To the communities who shared their lives with us, we say: Thank you. This book belongs to you. To the students and co-researchers who questioned everything and taught us more than we knew we needed to learn: Keep going. To our ancestors, teachers, and elders: Your wisdom breathes in these pages.

Connection with Global Threads

Our work builds upon a growing global movement that envisions performance as a means of healing, justice, and resistance. Across the Global South, community-based performance has long existed, not as theatre for applause, but as theatre for survival. In Bangladesh, Aranyak Natyadal's

"Rarang" recalls the resistance of the Indigenous Santals. In India, the street theatre group Jana Natya Manch continues to voice the struggles of workers, students, and women. In Pakistan, Sheema Kermani's Tehrik-e-Niswan br. Likewise, we draw from experiences in Latin America, where theatre becomes a form of community memory. Projects like Teatro Trono in Bolivia or La Candelaria in Colombia remind us that performance is not just about aesthetics but about collective transformation. Our book aligns with these traditions and honors their enduring contributions.

The Role of the Editor as a Listener

Editing this book was not a technical task, it was an ethical undertaking. We listened to every contributor with care, often across languages, across power differentials, and epistemic boundaries. Many contributors come from marginalized locations geographically and disciplinarily. Their stories, methods, and knowledge were not always easy to "translate" into academic form. But that is precisely the challenge we embraced. To edit ethically is not to silence struggle. It is to allow discomfort. It is to hold space for those whose practices speak more loudly than their published words. We are proud to have created a container where scholarship, spirit, and performance could meet without one diminishing the other.

More than a Book: A Pedagogical Companion

This book is not merely a research compendium; it is also a teaching companion. For educators working in theatre, anthropology, social work, or development studies, this volume provides frameworks, exercises, and vocabulary to guide reciprocal engagement. Each chapter is designed with reflexive questions and performance tasks that can be adapted to classrooms, community workshops, and research seminars. We have already piloted parts of this book in courses across Bangladesh, Malaysia, and South Africa with students reporting profound shifts in how they understand participation, consent, and collaboration. We hope the book continues to live in learning spaces.

An Invitation to the Future

As we look ahead, we hope this book will seed more collaborations across borders, across disciplines, and across generations. We envision future editions that include performance scripts, video archives, and co-authored community reflections. We imagine networks of performance-researchers who hold each other accountable not through institutional metrics, but through relationships of trust, transparency, and shared commitment. This is not just about theatre. It is about the possibility of living and researching with greater integrity, reciprocity, and care.

We offer this book with open hands. May it be received in the spirit in which it was written.

And this is not an end—but the beginning.
— The authors

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This book is dedicated to:
Our kids, our future

TABLE OF CONTENTS

KEYTERMS AND DEFINITIONS

1. **Reciprocity** – A foundational ethical and methodological principle emphasizing mutual care, respect, and balance in research and performance practice.
2. **Ubuntu** – An African philosophy meaning "I am because we are," highlighting relational ontology and communal existence.
3. **Ihsan** – An Islamic ethical concept denoting excellence in action, intention, and presence, rooted in divine consciousness.
4. **Buen Vivir** – A Latin American Indigenous concept meaning "living well," emphasizing harmony with community and nature.
5. **Guyub** – A Javanese term connoting communal harmony and collective well-being through togetherness.
6. **Performativity** – The concept that identity and meaning are produced through repeated social actions or performances.
7. **Indigenous Paradigm** – A worldview and research orientation that centers Indigenous knowledge, relationality, and land-based epistemologies.
8. **Decoloniality** – A political-intellectual movement and framework aimed at undoing colonial structures of power, knowledge, and being.
9. **Autoethnography** – A research method combining personal narrative with cultural analysis and self-reflection.
10. **Applied Theatre** – Theatre practices used in non-traditional spaces (e.g., prisons, schools) for education, healing, or social justice.
11. **Storywork** – An Indigenous methodology using storytelling as a legitimate, sacred, and relational form of research.
12. **Theatrical Witnessing** – A practice where performance acts as testimony to social suffering or historical trauma.
13. **Relational Epistemology** – A theory of knowledge that privileges relationships over objectivity or detachment.
14. **Critical Performance Pedagogy** – Teaching through performance that challenges dominant ideologies and fosters social transformation.
15. **Embodied Knowledge** – Knowledge gained through bodily experience, movement, and sensory awareness.
16. **Decolonizing Methodology** – Research practices that resist Eurocentric assumptions and center Indigenous and marginalized ways of knowing.
17. **Ritual Performance** – Symbolic actions rooted in culture and spirituality that serve communal, healing, or transformative purposes.
18. **Spiritual Resilience** – The inner strength derived from spiritual beliefs and practices in the face of adversity.
19. **Reflexivity** – A process where the researcher continuously examines their positionality, assumptions, and impact on the research.
20. **Dialogic Method** – A methodology based on conversation, listening, and co-creation of meaning between researcher and community.
21. **Cosmovision** – A culturally embedded worldview that connects people, land, ancestors, and spirituality.

22. **Ethical Witnessing** – Engaging with others' pain and stories in a responsible, non-exploitative, and responsive manner.
23. **Dramaturgy** – The art of shaping narrative and structure in theatre, often applied in both performance and research design.
24. **Participatory Action Research (PAR)** – A collaborative research model where participants are co-researchers in creating knowledge and solutions.
25. **Cultural Safety** – Ensuring respectful, inclusive engagement with communities by acknowledging and addressing power imbalances.
26. **Community Consent** – An ethical principle where communities involved in research or performance give informed, collective permission.
27. **Performative Reflexivity** – Using performance itself to examine and critique social realities and research processes.
28. **Healing Justice** – A framework that combines collective healing with structural change, often used in marginalized communities.
29. **Testimonial Theatre** – Performance based on real-life testimonies to honor experiences and provoke political reflection.
30. **Affective Turn** – A scholarly movement emphasizing emotion, affect, and sensation in knowledge production.
31. **Pluriversality** – The recognition of multiple, coexisting worldviews and ways of being as opposed to universalist models.
32. **Sensing-as-Knowing** – A concept suggesting that sensory experience is a valid form of epistemology.
33. **Knowledge Sovereignty** – The right of Indigenous communities to control how their knowledge is used and represented.
34. **Performance-as-Research (PaR)** – A methodology where performance is both the process and product of academic inquiry.
35. **Cultural Protocol** – The culturally appropriate practices and rules observed when engaging with specific communities or traditions.
36. **Sankofa** – An African concept meaning "go back and fetch it," emphasizing the importance of learning from the past.
37. **Ethnographic Performance** – Theatrical representation of ethnographic fieldwork, used as a method of analysis and dissemination.
38. **Care Ethics** – An ethical framework prioritizing relationships, empathy, and mutual responsibility.
39. **Somaesthetic Awareness** – Conscious awareness of the body as a site of knowledge, developed through performance and reflection.
40. **Witnessing-as-Method** – A form of research where presence, listening, and acknowledgment become methodological acts.
41. **Ritual Knowledge Transmission** – The passing of knowledge through ritual and oral tradition rather than formal schooling.
42. **Sacred Space** – A spiritually significant place or moment in performance, created through intention and presence.
43. **Ecoperformance** – Performance practices that engage with ecological concerns and environmental ethics.
44. **Counter-Narrative** – A story that challenges dominant or mainstream discourses.

45. **Ethical Relationality** – A responsibility to maintain just, respectful, and reciprocal relationships in all research and creative processes.
46. **Epistemic Disobedience** – The act of resisting dominant (often Western) ways of knowing by reclaiming marginalized epistemologies.
47. **Body Archives** – The idea that the human body stores and transmits memory, culture, and trauma.
48. **Performance Score** – A set of guidelines or instructions used to shape a performance, often improvised or experimental.
49. **Colonial Wound** – The lasting psychological, cultural, and structural damage caused by colonialism.
51. **Aesthetic of Resistance** – Artistic expression that challenges oppression and asserts cultural identity and autonomy.
52. **Epistemic Justice** – The ethical recognition and fair inclusion of diverse ways of knowing, particularly those historically marginalized or silenced.
53. **Intercultural Performance** – The blending or dialogue of different cultural traditions within a performance, often with ethical and political complexity.
54. **Ritual Healing** – The use of performance, chant, or ceremony as a tool for spiritual, psychological, or communal restoration.
55. **Narrative Sovereignty** – The right of communities to control how their stories are told, interpreted, and circulated.
56. **Ontological Pluralism** – A recognition that multiple realities or modes of being exist, especially across cultural and cosmological traditions.
57. **Cultural Memory** – Collective remembrance rooted in ritual, story, and embodied practice, often passed through generations.
58. **Subaltern Voice** – A voice from those historically excluded from dominant discourses, particularly in postcolonial and Indigenous contexts.
59. **Theatre of the Oppressed** – A performance methodology developed by Augusto Boal that empowers marginalized people through participatory theatre.
60. **Situated Knowledge** – Knowledge that is shaped by the specific social, cultural, and political position of the knower.
61. **Voice as Method** – The use of vocal expression, testimony, and performance as central tools of inquiry and communication.
62. **Decolonial Aesthetics** – Artistic forms that resist colonial representation, reclaim Indigenous identity, and create alternative visual/sensory experiences.
63. **Symbolic Violence** – Subtle, often unnoticed forms of domination embedded in language, culture, and everyday practices.
64. **Ceremonial Epistemology** – Knowing through rituals, ceremonies, and spiritual practices, especially in Indigenous traditions.
65. **Witness-Bearer** – One who observes and carries the emotional, spiritual, and ethical weight of others' lived realities.
66. **Cultural Humility** – A lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and respectful engagement with other cultures and knowledge systems.
67. **Trickster Methodology** – A playful yet critical approach that disrupts norms and invites paradox, often used in Indigenous research.
68. **Decolonial Listening** – An ethical act of hearing with openness, humility, and accountability, beyond extractive research.

69. **Spoken Word Praxis** – The use of poetry and oral performance as a form of political, cultural, and methodological expression.
70. **Performative Citation** – Referencing not only through text but also through embodied acts, gestures, or traditions.
71. **Geo-body Politics** – The intersection of geography, body, and political identity, especially in contexts of statelessness or displacement.
72. **Therapeutic Performance** – Theatre or ritual that facilitates healing from trauma, grief, or social dislocation.
73. **Ancestral Knowledge** – Wisdom transmitted through ancestral lines, often grounded in land, oral tradition, and ceremony.
74. **Field-Based Knowledge** – Insights gained through direct engagement, immersion, and embodied experience in a specific community or place.
75. **Aesthetics of Care** – Artistic practices that prioritize tenderness, mutual responsibility, and relational healing.
76. **Slow Research** – A mindful and ethical approach to inquiry that values depth, reciprocity, and time, rather than speed and productivity.
77. **Performative Ethics** – A framework where ethical responsibility is enacted through behavior, intention, and embodied presence, especially in research or performance contexts.
78. **Cultural Regeneration** – The process of reviving cultural practices, languages, and identities that have been suppressed or marginalized through colonization or globalization.
79. **Researcher Positionality** – The recognition of how a researcher's identity, background, and location in power structures influence their research.
80. **Oraliture** – A fusion of oral tradition and literature, recognizing the value of oral narratives as sophisticated knowledge systems.
81. **Collective Memory** – Shared recollections passed across generations that shape community identity and historical consciousness.
82. **Transgenerational Trauma** – Psychological and emotional effects of historical violence that are transmitted across generations.
83. **Embodied Resistance** – Acts of resistance performed through the body—such as dance, protest, or silence—as political and expressive tools.
84. **Voice Relationality** – A concept emphasizing that voice is not only self-expression but also shaped through relation with others and history.
85. **Knowledge Co-Production** – The collaborative process through which knowledge is generated with, rather than about, communities.
86. **Dialogical Imagination** – The creative and critical thinking process that arises from dialogic encounters and engagement with multiple perspectives.
87. **Intellectual Sovereignty** – The right of communities or scholars to define their own research priorities, narratives, and frameworks.
88. **Non-Extractive Research** – Research that avoids exploiting knowledge or resources from communities, prioritizing reciprocal benefit.
89. **Silent Testimony** – The powerful absence or refusal to speak as a form of resistance and expression of trauma.
90. **Sovereign Storytelling** – Storytelling that asserts cultural autonomy, memory, and resistance to imposed narratives.

91. **Performative Memory** – Memory enacted or revived through embodied acts such as ceremonies, rituals, or theatrical performances.
92. **Multivocality** – The inclusion of multiple voices, perspectives, and interpretations in a narrative or research process.
93. **Aesthetic Relationality** – The way artistic forms connect people ethically, spiritually, and politically across difference.
94. **Insurgent Methodology** – A rebellious and creative approach to research that challenges dominant norms and centers subaltern knowledge.
95. **Community-Centered Design** – A framework that places the needs, values, and voices of a community at the core of any initiative.
96. **Research as Ceremony** – The understanding that research can be sacred, relational, and intentional like a spiritual or cultural ceremony.
97. **Radical Hospitality** – The act of welcoming and making space for others, including dissent and discomfort, with generosity and care.
98. **Displacement Aesthetics** – Artistic and performative expressions rooted in the experiences of migration, exile, or statelessness.
99. **Voice Recovery** – The process of reclaiming silenced or forgotten narratives through storytelling and performance.

CHAPTER 1

POSITIONALITY: WHO ARE YOU IN THE PERFORMANCE SPACE

Abstract

To examine the ethics, dynamics, and power structures inherent in performance research, this chapter emphasizes the concept of positionality as a fundamental lens. It looks critically at how our identity, upbringing, and social position influence what we do and see, and how we interact, interpret, and relate to the performance space. The chapter dispels the fallacy of the "neutral observer" and presents the four main biases that affect academic and creative research: relational, representational, personal, and textual. By contrasting extractive and reciprocal modes of involvement, it draws on decolonial and reflexive approaches and challenges scholars and practitioners to reconsider themselves as ethical co-participants rather than detached analysts. The inclusion of practical tasks and provocations fosters deeper critical self-awareness in research and performance practice.

Keywords: Positionality, reflexivity, performance research, bias, objectivity, decolonial methodology, representation, relational ethics, embodiment, extractive research, reciprocal engagement, researcher identity.

Introduction

What you will learn

Define and critically examine your positionality as a performer and researcher.

Identify the four key biases: textual, personal, representational, and relational.

Learn the difference between extractive and reciprocal engagement

Challenge the "neutral observer" myth in academic performance research.

Topics covered

1.0 Who we are and why we are in this book

1.1 The Myth of Objectivity

1.2 Textual Bias: When Books Silence People

1.3 Personal Bias: When My Story Takes Over

1.4 Representational Bias: Making Others into Spectacles

1.5 Relational Bias: Researcher as Stranger or Partner?

Provocation

"Are we being scientific criminals?" Inspired by Joseph Wronka."

However, it is important to point out that I am male at the outset white and middle class. Consequently, I recognize that my perceptions are biased and subjective, emanating from a particular perspective. However, rather man claiming "objectivity" and then purporting to find "truth" via rejection of a "null hypothesis," I will attempt to prove discussion of these issues by relating to some of any work and other experiences in the Arctic and Sub-Arctic regions of Alaska I had lived in Alaska from 1981-1987 where I, among other tiling's, developed a Generalist Counselling Program that was to be "culturally sensitive" to the Eskimo population of the region and was Director of a mental Health/Substance Abuse Treatment Centre in a predominantly Athamas can community

(Wronka, 1993, p. 33).

In decolonizing and Indigenous research, positionality is not an afterthought; it is a foundation. Unlike positivist traditions that idealize objectivity, Indigenous and decolonial scholars recognize that all knowledge is rooted in context, culture, and power (Bourke, 2014). Positionality is an ethical endorsement and affirmation of accountability, place, and intention (Jadallah, 2025). It asks: Who are we about the land, the community, and the knowledge we claim to study or perform? In theatre and performance research fields deeply entwined with embodiment, voice, and representation, this question becomes urgent. Decolonizing paradigms emerged as critiques of extractive knowledge systems, where researchers often silenced or misrepresented the very communities they studied. For instance, early anthropological studies on Indigenous rituals often turned community performances into "data," stripping them of their spiritual, communal, and ethical significance. In response, Indigenous scholars began asserting their right to represent themselves, insisting that research be relational, grounded, and reciprocal (Wilson, 2008). Consider the practice of "story work" in Indigenous methodologies. As Jo-Ann Archibald (2008) explains, storytelling is not just a pedagogical tool, but a sacred process rooted in relational accountability. To enter this space, researchers must first identify themselves and their existing relationships. Without this, even well-meaning scholarship risks reproducing colonial violence. This insight is echoed in theatre. When Andalib Rubayat (AKA Pantha Rahman) creates films like *Life Was Beautiful*, which portray the intimate struggles of people during the COVID-19 crisis, his diasporic lens is not neutral. It is shaped by his training, his migration story, and his ethical commitments. By naming his positionality as

someone trained in Los Angeles but rooted in Bangladesh, he acknowledges that representation is never outside politics. Similarly, Md Mahedi Tanjir's work on folk theatre isn't simply archival. It is about restoring ritual, memory, and performance in ways that resist neoliberal erasure. When a director stages a village *Gambhira* performance for an urban festival, who decides paid, credited, or silenced? these are not artistic questions epistemic. In the field of Siraz Chowdhury's work agreements like the Nagoya meaningful inclusion of *Ihsan* (a Qur'anic concept in sincerity and justice), must benefit the communities it academic gain. Here again, for its own sake it is a call to Finally, Sydur Rahman Lipon's intangible heritage policies is Bangladeshi folk theatre. As a isn't to translate folk culture for that its custodians retain what is "authentic"? Who gets Positionality matters because alone, they are ethical and environmental justice, Jahid challenges the ways global Protocol are enacted without Indigenous voices. Drawing on meaning excellence grounded Chowdhury argues that research draws from, not exploit them for positionality is not introspection action (Chowdhury, 2023). engagement with UNESCO's shaped by his community ties to director and scholar, his role elite audiences but to ensure agency and authorship. His

> Children's laughter, a melodious blur of polyvocality, jubilantly, exuberantly, and irresponsibly echoes through time, weaving chaos and harmony into a single thread of fleeting wonder and untamed joy.

position as both insider and academic requires constant negotiation, humility, and care, hallmarks of positional awareness. As Gani and Khan (2024) observe, positionality statements are not merely confessional; they are interventions in the colonial logic of research.

> *"Positionality is also associated with the function of mitigating power imbalances between researchers, or between researcher and research subject. It is with this function that positionality statements dramatically expanded beyond anthropology to other disciplines."*
>
> *Gani and Khan (2024, p.3).*

They disrupt the illusion of neutrality and challenge researchers to name the power relations that structure their inquiries. King (2024) reminds us that the promise of positionality lies in its ability to foster transparency, but this comes with the peril of superficiality if not deeply embedded in ethics and relationships. In this book, we emphasize that positionality is not a box-ticking exercise. It is a relational method. It asks us to move from being extractive "experts" to reciprocal co-learners, and from detached analysts to accountable witnesses.

Positionality: Who Are You in the Performance Space?

Construction of the performance event, the space of performance, produces a world of rules, which invited audiences bring and share, and with the invited performers, all of

whom, on cross-legged cushions, share the circle of an open, dry dirt space. The performers enter the space on a path across a miniature desert of sun-blasted, hugely scaled, broken clay pieces. Indeed, this video is worth analyzing mainly for the actor's articulation and delivery of 'the text'. Voices hoot, howl, and shriek in a melodious blur of polyvocality as he draws on the Arabic register to speak 'the words of the drones' (a spoken language as much as an idea).

Focus

Research in the fields of performance studies and theatre studies often investigates performance-making processes. The conceptualization and theorization of performances often occur after initial research phases and involve a reckoning with what happened within the work. Performance, by nature, is ephemeral, and despite the existence of documents such as photos, videos, and talkbacks, the experience shifts when it turns from performance into documentation. When a performance sits outside the ephemerality of theatre or performance, theatre, and performance scholars struggle with how to articulate and theorise the experience. Writing methodologies are also discussed in this field of study, leading to trans-disciplinary initiatives that borrow and adapt research methods from fields outside of performance.

> These earthly tones pierce the ethereal purity of chimp yowl. Ramoró! Ráfire!
> comes the earthbound challenge from this untrustworthy barbarian. Tongues tango as they shift through arias Arabic, Asian, African, and Anglo-Saxon in their furious tracking-down of the supercilious sky-king.

Performance and theatre studies are multidisciplinary. Within theatre and performance studies scholarship, there is an interest in artistic processes and the impact or inspiration that practitioners' work has on societies. At times, practitioners in theatre and performance stages, screen and digitally mediated performance works, moments or happenings loosely resembling performance are invited to account for and theories their work, usually post-performance. These earthly tones pierce the ethereal purity of chimp yowl. **Ramoró! Ráfire**! comes the earthbound challenge from this untrustworthy barbarian. Tongues tango as they shift through arias Arabic, Asian, African, and Anglo-Saxon in their furious tracking-down of the supercilious sky-king. For all its agency and power, however, the airship crows as much victim as avian predators in this poet's absurdist universe, playing the fool as it drops earthward to sink like a stone amid an acrid, blood-red haze of smoke.

The Perseids cascade heavenward in frantic panic, leaving behind a titanic, long-clawed arm raised in impotent vengeance (Holmes, 2009). The arrangement of seats included extra front row seats and triangular rungs on the stage-right side of the proscenium arch. After a long, awkward wait, two steely, shape-shifting sphinxes fixed 'the audience' with distorting, hypnotic stares; commenced a subtle interrogation by scaredy-hoots and periodic sax-like bray-hoots. These naïve 'monitoring' sounds pulled from the hopped-up theatre crowd does not laugh, but an unaccustomed scowling boot-in-the-teeth hush, instantly producing a curious and investigative openness (Melrose, 2019). The participative
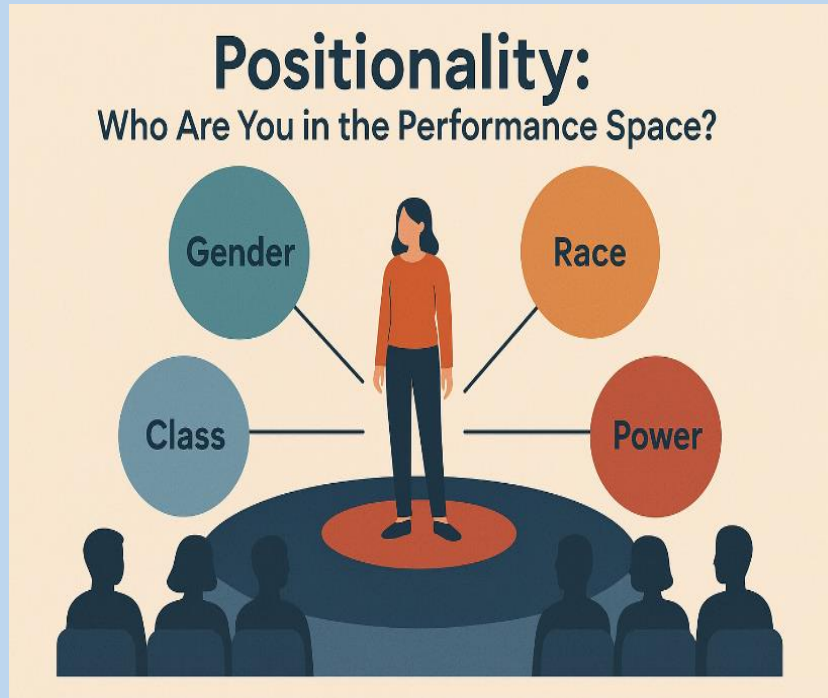
understanding of oneself in the research endeavor must be presented in a manner that elicits the non-participant researcher's follow-up intervention. Double-hitched to the event-making process is something like wager, risk, or promise, a drama-content of uncertainty and hyper-hope perhaps, but a covenant whose binding force makes ready for the perception of the fictional construct.

A focus on reciprocity seeks to engage more deeply and rethink reciprocity in performative studies. Conventional reciprocity acknowledges and reconstitutes the traditional researcher (a reading subject), researched (a researched object) dynamic in a way that disavows power and agency differentials. There is a reliance on and maintenance of established forms and structures of thought. Classical efficacy is broader and, about performance, theorization, and writing, often directs or actions. As such, it is inherently grounded in existing thinking, focusing more on a broader scale of regulation and human 'doing' than non-humans and 'other-than-human agencies. Reciprocity, in the most limited sense, is consideration of what is 'other' to you. In performance studies, a focus on reciprocity attempts to invite and engage others into a shared space of unknowing, and therefore untruths. In thinking on

reciprocity, there is a desire to rid oneself of the 'center of thought' and 'narrative', to scrap the generic form and model entirely. A focus on reciprocity is another insistence on starting from a place less well known, less gripped in terms of, for example, intention or desired outcomes.

Exploring how our identity, background, and social position affect the way we perform, research, and relate to others. How do our identity, background, and social position affect the way we perform, research, and relate to others? The purpose of this exercise is to explore issues of social positioning and **'reciprocity'** in performance across several relational situations. Every performance, whether consciously attempted or not, is always both aesthetic and social, often simultaneously so. It is primarily the choreography of the social relations of a performance that defines its genre, form, and potential aesthetic properties. A generosity of spirit in the research process generally returns a similar generosity, but complete naivety can lead to proportionately aggressive resignation. The convivial focus of this session, exploring performance from a unique vantage point across disparate relationships, will alter these positions, from colleague/friend to peer, adult/child, English/African.

> ## Understanding Reciprocity
>
> Understanding reciprocity means recognizing mutual exchange in relationships, where giving and receiving are balanced, fostering trust, cooperation, and ethical responsibility across social, cultural, or research contexts

In lessening instances, a sequence of reflected readings moves performance rapidly across social genres from gift economy to elaborate comic, visually reminiscent of a certain film. Having provided this rich performance, the question remains how to enact similar thoughtfulness in the discussion circle that follows. The social positioning of a professor of theatre intends to situate the question first asked by the children: 'Why is Mr. Jones so fat?' The anticipated answer, that one news source is no worse than another (and less sexist), is tempered by an element that gives rise to both envy of slimness and suspicions of thinner, more attractive individuals. Children's laughter irrevocably alters this response, but in a gesture of self-protection, one resolves to stop trying to explain unjust social relations and stick with judgment and shared ignorance. Detracting personal and professional considerations arise in planning discussions with teachers and students who have come late to theatre, brewing a cocktail of skepticism, competitive retorts, and not wanting the primary kids to show off in front of 'real' acting students.

What You Will Learn
Understanding Reciprocity
Reciprocity, a relational and mutual phenomenon, is necessary for living. Although it is essential to all, it becomes a social and political imperative and an ethical consideration in

academic and artistic research contexts. Not all reciprocities are equal; there are vast ranges of arbitrariness, obfuscation, exploitation, marketization, and brute force in reciprocal engagements. Thus, the question is not whether reciprocity is necessary or desirable, but rather what format of reciprocity? Reciprocity is a project of care developed and curated from an a/r/tographic perspective. This care requires processes of imaginative and creative mediation, openness and humility, slowed-down interactive rhythms, and kinship as a way to rebalance power. By being deliberate and modest in proposing this project of care, its effects can be protected and sustained, while also allowing others to recognize them in complex and deeply personal ways.

> Reciprocity holds Past-Present-Future in Revealing-Reporting-Reflecting with Connection with -Contribution to-Collaboration. Briefly, Reciprocity is the core of social studies, beyond academia. We summarize it as Reciprocity is all-encompassing. It has three angles. One, it demands 'connectivity' with revealing Indigenous history, and oppression, it rewrites the history for re-righting the land and language as the Spirit of social scientists. It is 'contributing' as reporting with and within the present people's physical, social, psychological, and spiritual healing individual and collective by the people's knowledge, as knowledge democracy. Finally, it 'collaborates' with a reflection of past and present for decolonizing political, social, academic, and colonial fabrication for ensuring rights as an Ihsan: good deeds for the good deed, good acts for good acts. Reciprocity is all about transformation in terms of social, political, economic, and spiritual.

> (Chowdhury, Abd Wahab & Saad, 2022, p.23).

> However, this Pandemic taught us that these three are practical. However, Volunteerism has been in our addition.

> (Chowdhury et al., 2022 xviii).[1]

Reciprocity in Artistic Research: Four Paths of Relational Knowing

At the heart of this book lies a profound claim: **Reciprocity is not a method it is a way of being.** It is the pulse of ethical knowledge-making, the breath between self and other, the

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[1] Chowdhury, J. S., Wahab, H. A., Saad, R. M., Reza, H., & Ahmad, M. M. (Eds.). (2022). Reciprocity and its practice in social research. IGI Global.

rhythm that links past, present, and future. While we have previously grounded reciprocity in social research through the triad of *Revealing–Reporting–Reflecting* and the ethical movement of *Connection–Contribution–Collaboration* (Chowdhury et al., 2022), we now extend this framework into the creative field of artistic research. In doing so, we find that reciprocity flourishes along four essential, interwoven paths:

1. Relational Creation

Art does not emerge in isolation. Every act of creation is an act of connection between the artist and a community, a memory, a silence, or a wound. In reciprocal artistic research, the process begins with **an attunement to the land, its people, and their** inherited histories. This relational stance transforms the artist from observer to co-listener, inviting a grounded, ethical imagination.

2. Co-Creation and Knowledge Exchange

Reciprocal art practices resist the colonial extractives of taking stories without returning meaning. Instead, they engage in **knowledge democracy**: a dialogical practice where local voices, ancestral memory, and embodied knowing enter the creative process. Here, contributions flow in both directions, with the artist and community shaping, exchanging, and learning from each other.

3. Reflexive Dialogue

True reciprocity requires vulnerability. The artist-researcher does not remain outside the frame, but steps into it, **reflecting on positionality, power, and privilege.** This reflective layer is never passive; it invites collaborators to shape the questions, the form, and the very meaning of the work. Artistic research becomes a collective script, written in many hands.

4. Ethical Transformation (Ihsan)

In its deepest form, reciprocal art is healing. It does not perform for applause; it performs to restore. Rooted in the principle of *Ihsan* to act beautifully, justly, and sincerely, it seeks to **repair relationships, dignify the silenced, and decolonize the gaze**. It is a transformation not just of content, but of consciousness.

In this book, we explore how these four modes of reciprocity animate artistic research beyond the academy, into performance, song, ritual, and memory. We write not as detached experts, but as fellow travelers, listening deeply to the ethics of creation.

Jubilantly

In a way that shows great happiness, especially because of success. Example: She jubilantly waved to the crowd after winning the race.

Exuberantly

In a very energetic and enthusiastic manner. Example: The children played exuberantly in the park.

Irresponsibly

In a way that shows a lack of care about the possible results of one's actions. Example: He irresponsibly left the door unlocked overnight.

Reciprocity is the spirit of work. Without it, the art is incomplete.

An Intellectual Reciprocation: The Multiple Wedges of Gift Exchange Economies
The entry point of this event is the dropping of a postcard sent to the authors before the start of informing the curator of the event, but what it is intending if taken seriously. In interactionism the relationship between the individual and the surrounding social world's a process of mutual action, sense making, and shaping; the way the gift exchange is conceived in these two perspectives can also be accounted as two wedges: the reverse wedge, attempting to slice through the gift exchange(s) remaining unnoticed precise, clandestine; and the open wedge, acting the gift exchange jubilantly, exuberantly, irresponsibly.

Task -1: Define and critically examine your positionality as a performer and researcher

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In an era where verbal language holds the throne as the primary means to convey thought, there remains a myriad of intricacies to the whole. With all of its richness, it too can be ephemeral. Ohio State University's Director of Conservatory Training and Department of Theatre professor, Susan Melrose, opens the proverbial flood gates and invites us into a world where knowing is being and where the unspeakable is more. We, the audience, witness a group of individuals strategize, rehearse, and perform a gesture in the first 10 seconds of Marathon Dancing, a 1928 one-act play by the American playwright Anita Block. The performance took place at the Château de Cartierville, an abode for destitute women. The organization was founded in 1985 to receive young women from the province of Quebec who became pregnant out of wedlock. If the circumstances of one's entry were not necessarily fearsome, one's entry was nevertheless of grave concern. From the people at this point in their lives, the audience may have expected fear, shame, and hopelessness. Based on a short film by M. B. Valois-Brunelle, these were instead brought on-stage, with an impressive theatrical effect, the illusion of them being there, and perhaps also still being there, punctuating the fragility, the suffering, and the insanity of their situation. Ensuite, a performance of collective memory of the hold these bodies once had. From the trauma and the socially unqualified, the abandonment to a state of dissimilitude: the silencing, the disguising, the redemption through ownership.
As a participant in performance-making as research, this methodology, this demonstration, this performance also resonates with what it is and what it was to impose, perhaps haunt spaces flooded with a collective remnant that disallowed the performing. A weight that the structure and the quotidian brought on. علم (ilm) over knowledge, revealing and concealing, understanding, and miscomprehending: the ethics of inquiry; access that is feministic, grasping the vertical, immediate yet disembodying. Perhaps one response is to research

recall. But, this (re)claiming straying from literacy, as a "delicate poetic presenticity" (Melrose, 2019), may merely serve it, serving it from the inside out (Mabala Mapoma Neill, 2015), and thus render it commodifiable and consumable. "Lo rektet". A dark thought (for the light).

Identifying the four key biases: textual, personal, representational, and relational

In performance and theatre studies, the transition from performance to written form leads to potentially problematic accounts of 'what happened' during a performance. In this process of mediation, biases enter, affecting both the version of the performance artifact that makes its way into a new text and the interpretation of that text (M. Perkins, 2016). To combat this co-production of cultural capital in the methodological choices that lead from performance to text, four key biases to consider have been identified, consistent with almost every stage in the research process: textual, personal, representational, and relational. This analysis of biases in educational performance acts as a methodological 'protocol' for appraisal of related performances and the writing that ensues.

The textual bias includes the choices made in terms of the textual means one takes with one' to new context. In performance and theatre studies, the most challenging of biases to address is the bias that centers on the performance act itself and the potential discursive limits of inscribing that performance into text. The personal bias relates to the researcher's positionality: how has one's sublimation, experience, or habits produced a possible bias? The representational bias is at once an audience member's and a reader's bias. The relational bias considers how the very choices that are made, written down, and presented for discourse in analysis mediate the knowing of a research community, even as they (re)construct the world in a reflexive academic/scholarly way. This latter bias foregrounds research orientation and a disposition toward alternative representations (Bird & Tozer, 2018).

"Self-exhibit" *means to intentionally display or present oneself physically, emotionally, or intellectually for others to see, often in public or performative contexts. It suggests conscious visibility, vulnerability, and a form of self-expression or self-assertion.*

Learn the difference between extractive and reciprocal engagement

Engagement, the reciprocal exchange between multiple partners in a partnership, is a social relation, a 'we-relationship' in which each agent can act on others. It is also a reflexive process, reminding us that reciprocity is not a given condition that is taken for granted but is a performative action. Reciprocity, at least as an ideal, is concerned with givenness, the terms and forms of gifting, exchanging, and accumulating social capital (Silbert, 2019). Even the word 'reciprocity' implies difference and multiplication. Beyond the mere status quo, reciprocity as a general ethical imperative disrupts settled norms, values, and institutions. It resists quantification by acknowledging a gift economy or an aesthetics of excess. It enables something new to emerge, since temporalities, spatiality's, and perspectives multiply in the process of mutualization. At the same time, this multiplicity raises the question of how to become in common. Mutualization brings forth agency, yet agency entails engagement with the non-human, indeed non-living aspects of the world, which enter into the fabric of the partner engagement. The emergence of differences breaks with status quo arrangements, yet how do such differences continue to stay in the reckoning, in a world where power is often conflated with absolute closure, where in non-given dimensions of social life disappear? A methodology of engagement is called for that elucidates how 'we' became in common as partners by tracing the variations of a core protocol for engagement. This core protocol simultaneously connects and differentiates partner agents. A methodology that draws on the core protocol does not provide a blueprint that is applied uniformly to each engagement; rather, it charts the resistant specificities of different gestures of engagement. In this sense, the probing of the protocols in partner acts is akin to dance notation that documents not the steps, but the paths traversed in the making of a performance.

> **A summary of the ways** that audiences engage with and performers take part in performance and theatre, starting with matters of cognition/knowledge through to the 'hands-on' and active modes of participation, is proposed.

Challenge the "neutral observer" myth in academic performance research

For a long time, performance documentation has been subjected to a rigid framework: either it is an image, a video recording (more of an audio-visual performance), a review in a newspaper, a website, or so on, or it must not be called documentation at all. Likewise, while conducting video editing for documentation, the question arises: what kind of layer should be added to a video material exclusively composed of the clashing sound and furious movements of seen and unseen performers? Either it must be considered a flawed representation of a performance, a pessimistic footage, or a mockery of the rigid framework. So, what kind of challenge can these "independent" recordings bring to theatre research? It might be worthwhile to redefine many terms and choose to see "reciprocity"

in terms of approaches to reciprocate, and refrain from viewing reciprocity simply in terms of redistribution and exchange (Bird & Tozer, 2018). The challenge for performance researchers is to negotiate their positions and define their interests before naming, recording, and documenting performances which are also grounds for many sensitive situations.

People knew that in researching live performance, objects of research appear to be in times and spaces only their own, about history, mathematics, or probability; thus, they would not ask more than a few seconds of incarnate recordings for performance reproduction, similar to a photograph. And so, the rehearsal (the underlying time of a performance) would appear purely in terms of intent structuring "stages" of behaviours or acts: potentially granting the researcher privileged access to spaces otherwise inaccessible and "ungraspable" (ungraspable?). Yet, to retain objects of research which would engage mutual interests, return (expected of another) should coincide with reciprocation (sought by a subject). Two streams of thought are derived from this for research on performance: one would be to "produce" and the other would be to **"self-exhibit"**; both aiming to realise a freeze-frame spectator mode of performance. This invites consideration that in limiting the time of presentations to freezes of events, a scene where performance is fully present and tension is high would be less preferable, and re-examinations of "own" productions would be second best. An interesting proposal would be to use performance as camera/image sources to work on an 'independent' field, because familiarity with the performers would help avoid (become in) clumsy spaces when the performance starts to be recorded. The sub-section begins with a short description of the way of broadly categorizing participation that is ultimately proposed. Participation is described on a spectrum that ranges from the completely 'outsider' end of 'seeing', reading, and watching, through spectating to (co-)performing, and that encompasses a diverse range of other options in both how and in what ways one might participate. The terms insider and outsider employ more obvious, standard meanings and usage in a performance context, as well as a suggestion about how such understandings connect with knowledge/epistemic matters, and with the feasibility of privileging insider approaches to the study of 'performance' more generally (Melrose, 2019).

In considering ways of bringing into focus a performance or research method in the form of a 'sub' methodology that is 'performance'-specific it is necessary to start with a consideration of 'participation' in performance in its most general sense. A summary of the ways that audiences engage with, and participants participate in performance and theatre, starting with matters of cognition/knowledge through to the 'hands-on' and active modes of participation, is proposed. This readied sub-section distinguishes these terms, indicating ways of defining and differentiating insider and outsider approaches within a performance context concerning relevant performance studies concepts, theories, and key scholars. Such a framework is then derived from recasting those definitions of insider and outsider approaches and their attendant epistemic stances in terms of a typology of kinds

and degrees of participation in performance. This characterization is then unpacked and explicated by other scholars writing on audience engagement with performance. Participation in the performance and theatre studies disciplines is also a vehicle to explore questions surrounding/independence and teaching, and how these shape knowledge understanding, knowing, and, ultimately, the ways the world is constructed and made available in disciplinary terms. However, the ability to speak from personal experience and position needs to be balanced in academic writing with a respect for disciplinary imperatives that persuade that knowledge should be the focus of the discussion, and that it doesn't matter who knows it.

1.1 The Myth of Objectivity

In the North American dramatic tradition, a long history of performance studies engages with analysis of dramatic texts (the plays, the screenplays) and the received texts/scores of the performances they result in. A thorough tradition of semiotic analysis of the score of performance exists here with the work of, for example, the playwright Bertold Brecht, the director Andre Antoine, the philosopher and theorist Hans Georg Gadamer, and more recently, semioticians such as Virginia Scott. In Performance Studies, however, a different model of performance may be found in the embrace of **Ethnography**, Oral History, Anthropology, Spectatorship Studies, and Performance as Research. The Ethnography of Performance tradition passionately embraced by Phelan, Melrose, and Palmer is republican in its

Ethnography
As a qualitative research method used primarily in social sciences, especially anthropology and sociology, to study cultures, communities, or groups by observing and interacting with them in their natural environments.

egalitarian and grass-roots outlook. The theoretical underpinnings in Bakhtin, Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari are in their way deeply subversive and work against the notion of a single truth (the author's) of the text to the exclusion of all else (the audience or the performer's input). Yet this has resulted in an ideological divide between Studies of Performance and post-structuralist Theories of Performance, with its darling of the academy as to whether an

examination of performance may, can, and should be 'objective', that is, given a received, articulated form. Regarding theatrical performance, a postmodern myth of objectivity exists (such a myth exists in other fields too, such as ethnography, historical writing, or journalism).
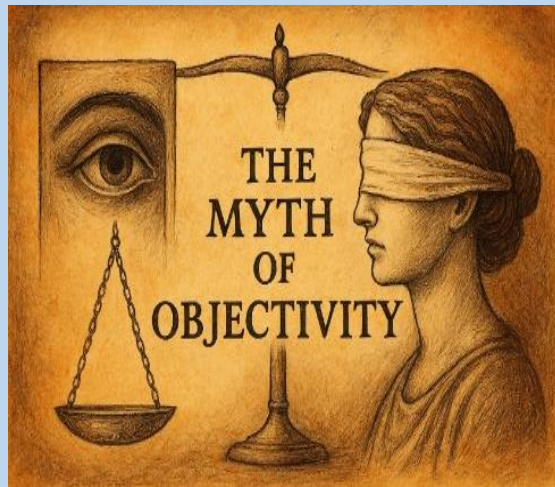
The contention here is that there is a 'Myth of Objectivity' that like Yeats' rough beast', yet 'slouches towards Bethlehem'. Another manner of writing about performance may be apprehended by scrupulously resisting judgment. Or rather the judgments involved in a write-up sustained being 'in dialogue', remaining reflexively aware of the positioning of the author, the scholars, the performers, and the spectators through the work, about its subject (portion of the practice as research) and one another are revealed. Not all may agree with or wish to employ this model/diacritical engagement. In recent academia, there have been explosive debates about and attacks on 'newfound' (or a dogged refusal to relinquish 'old-found') ostensible 'objectivity' and positioning either within or outside of performance or the performance of analysis (Edinborough, 2018 & Melrose, 2019). Furthermore, this writing style is itself not a new thought nor by any stretch the last word. It is to be hoped that by modelling this style rigorously the suffusion of subjectivity with an intimate knowledge of the other - call it empathy may prove a useful continuance of the debate.

1.2 Textual Bias as an Epistemic injustice
Reflexivity and Positional Accountability in Decolonial Performance Research

In aligning with Rowe, Baldry, and Earles (2015), who champion the praxis of *multidimensional reflexivity*, we embraced a relational ethic that demanded not only awareness of our positionalities but also an active negotiation of power relations throughout this project. This was not an abstract exercise; it was a grounded, lived accountability embedded in every stage of the research, from site selection to data presentation. Our reflexivity unfolded on several levels. **Personal reflexivity** guided our introspections as four co-authors, compelling us to remain mindful of how our identities, as educated Bengalees working within and across Indigenous territories, might risk reinforcing epistemic dominance. I as the primary interlocutor, recognized how my majority-group location required conscious efforts to decenter myself. From the outset, even the topic selection was conducted through dialogic consultation with local Rakhain elders, namely Bante, Sitama, the Headman, and a respected community elder, ensuring the inquiry emerged from within, not above.
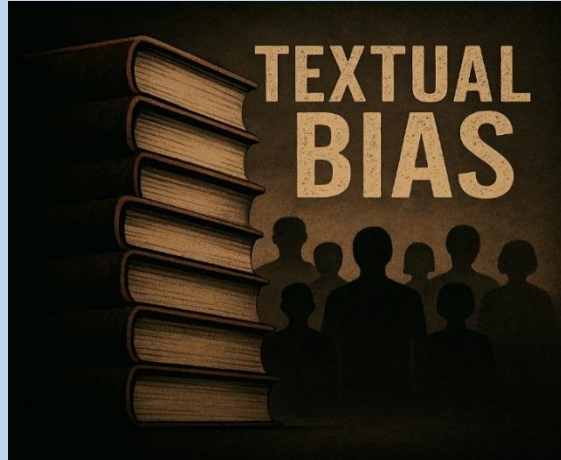
> **Interpersonal reflexivity** was not just methodological it was ceremonial. My initial formal entry into the community honored local protocol, acknowledging the Rakhain Standpoint through reciprocal gestures of respect. Rapport-building was never extractive;

it was, as Rowe et al. suggest, a reciprocal engagement premised on humility, presence, and mutual consent.

Epistemic reflexivity was central to confronting the silences in existing literature. Drawing on Spivak's (2013) critique of *epistemic violence*, we acknowledged the erasure of community voice in dominant narratives. To address this, we translated and shared a summary of this research in the Rakhain language for community feedback and approval, prioritizing consent, and comprehension over academic finality.

> *Textual bias refers to the systematic preference, exclusion, or distortion of certain perspectives, voices, or knowledge systems within written or documented materials. It reflects how power structures shape what is written, published, cited, and legitimized as "truth" or "knowledge."*

Textual reflexivity was exercised with great care. We continuously questioned how the text itself mediates relationships between us as researchers and the community whose stories we are entrusted with. Writing thus became not merely a recording act but a relational and ethical co-construction.

Taking together, these layers of reflexivity shaped not just the process but the product. Our graphs, narratives, and interpretations reflect not only representation but also responsibility, reciprocity, and rights. This chapter now transitions into a discussion of *Data Authentication*, informed by these reflexive practices, and shaped by the voices that guided us.

Reflection of reflexivity

> Bordieu engaging reflexivity in one form or another. A
> ceived, stating reflexivity has a "long tradition in social the-
> declarations, has roots in Enlightenment philosophy and
> norms. For modernist scholars, demonstraating one's object-
> ogy of reflexivity is not as new a practice as sometimes per-
> ory or philosophy" with thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, Marx,
> Reflexivity and its public utterance through positionality
> tivity reflected the pinnacle of intellectual endeavor. In that
> vein, Eagleton-Pierce (2011, 807) has noted the methodological-
> positionality statement, then, as a declaration of reflexivity,
> contains a duality, in that it is an attempt on one hand to ac-
> knowledge the inability to separate the self from one's sub-
> ject of enquiry, while at the same time expressing sufficient
> distance and rationality to know this.
>
> Gani and Khan (2024, p.5).

As a practitioner, we get the middle part of the textual continuum: text as paratext and text as performance. Currently, vocality is my main research interest and invites the practitioner-audience bridging function of the performance. Investigating **textual bias** on both halves of the textual continuum and articulating cognizance of personal decisions can feed into an on-going performance practice that embraces this bridge; attend to agency on both halves of the text; and concretize it for performer, text and speaker in practice, by addressing performance within research and scholarship, and performing on text again (not just reading alone). Therefore, the first phase of research focuses on the issues of textual bias on the textual continuum by examining some feminist sounding theatre texts. Reluctantly admitting research for scholarship has been extremely helpful in sharpening understanding of the form, content, and context of the four texts, and the manner on which the four texts perform a meeting. A 'voice' that at the same time sounds and silences, and a consider 'textual' choice that intentionally addresses gaps can both open and close a textual continuum: it is a choice that can either summon on-stage something that refuses to campaign on-stage, or silence an on-stage something that particularly refuses to be silenced. (Hovy & Prabhumoye, 2021; Hickman et al.2022; Baden et al.2022 & Navigli et al.2023) As a scholar who is also a performer, voicing gaps in academia by first silence and then voice has addressed the precariousness of feminist consideration of voices (Singer, 2009). Rather than riffing on a direct feminist call for consideration of the on-sounding sides, attention has especially been paid to a context of gender blindness that has not hatched a bushel of questions like "where are all these women's voices?" Rather than preciously imagining something catastrophic, the four texts have conducted a much more explicit focus on the corporeal tongue's proclivities to provoke its speaker to an unscripted gaiety. This tongue, nevertheless, ironically both potently stresses voice as a performative berth, and wittingly casts voice as the smooth, even surface of a too-familiar page and the unexamined presumptions underlying that intuition of corporeal agency in the first place.

1.3 Personal Bias: When My Story Takes Over

In performance studies and theatre studies, it may be claimed that to make a point is not enough; there has to be a point of view. Considerations of the necessary tension between universalizability and specificity, between the grand narrative and voice, animate writing on notions of objectivity and neutrality are examined pointedly. But is it necessary to present the personnel in this way? Is it necessary, with studies of self-reflexivity and autobiography in the performance and theatre studies fields, to present any personal experience at all? The acceptance of a personal voice in performance studies and theatre studies has grown steadily in recent years; however, even where it is largely accepted, the personal voice still often struggles with how much, and in what way, autobiography might be permitted. Nonetheless, it is hoped that the personal is both a limited and liberating way to approach this issue, allowing the author to reflect on what has previously been unarticulated. Consider the catalyzing conversation remembered from drama school. Recollections of that first arts industry barb unfolded finely over a bottle of wine on a

rooftop bar. The words set off a dizzying chain reaction: It's like you think you're going to be in a summer blockbuster/rom com, but really, you'll end up waiting at a taco truck to talk to bored patrons. The memory begins in secret; the theatre theorist in transgression. How ungracious it seems. The adage rolls about how it is never wise to bite the hand that feeds you. But stopping that thinking is of course, impossible. It recalls the vagueness of that moment of truth. A terrible sound effect is assumed for that opening moment: a compass scratching over a vinyl record. Scoffs of derision at freshness, creativity, or excitement. (Lefevre, 2024; Beltrametti, 2021; Wolfreys, 2024; Okoye, 2024 & Pasero & Gronberg, 2024). More laughter. Crying, defiance. "I will show you!" All that great theatre strategizing seems to birth something defensive; something ugly? Tears waft through the memory air. Something is angrily spat about betrayal and cabaret. Later, in this fictionalized memory, the choice to adopt a sardonic researcher presence in the narrative becomes a more realist trope, the sad effect of accusations of disingenuousness running along like the soundtrack for a moment as the emotion is re-examined. Self-indulgence comes from stony faces of panel members and heavied hearts: "Won't you at least consider changing out of Stay Puft's Cousin for the seminar?" In the relative safety of the third person, it is ok to admit that some of that sincerity, fresh as a daisy, thinking, dreaming out loud.

1.4 Representational Bias: Making Others into Spectacles

The notion of 'reciprocity' has gained significant traction in the field of theatre studies, frequently appearing alongside related concepts such as 'intermedial reciprocity,' 'reciprocity between dramatic text and performance,' and 'reciprocity with the audience.' Nevertheless, there has been a lack of rigorous academic discourse that provides a thorough definition of 'reciprocity' within this context, leading to inquiries about how this concept can be effectively situated within theatre scholarship. A valuable point of departure for this exploration is the understanding that actors, playwrights, and audiences engage in a collaborative process of creation, or 'mutual making the me encapsulated in the title of this discussion (Lewandowska, 2023; Thygesen, 2024; Schoenmakers and Tulloch, 2022; McDonald et al., 2022 & Karim-Cooper, 2022). It is crucial to emphasize that, given the controversial nature of the term in performance studies, there is a need to articulate what reciprocity fundamentally signifies and what aspects it does not encompass. The difficulty in translating the term 'reciprocity' into German exemplifies this

Technological apparatuses = Tools like cameras, microphones, software, or screens used in recording, broadcasting, or performing.

Materialities = The physical elements or tangible aspects (like stage, costumes, space, human body) that affect how something appears or feels.

Mediations = The process of conveying or translating an experience, meaning, or performance through some medium or system.

complexity, as the translation process has been notably protracted, highlighting the conceptual intricacies involved. At its essence, reciprocity entails a framework of 'reciprocal, regular consultation and thus the shaping of the research design, data collection methods, evaluation, follow-up, transfer, and management' among all relevant parties (translated from the original German definition).

In theatrical backgrounds, such a reciprocal engagement often finds expression through audio-visual methods that are central to theatre studies, aiming to collect data from live performances. However, a critical oversight remains in the frequent neglect of the institutional frameworks, **technological** apparatuses, and tic involved in these **mediations**. These components are often treated as if they function merely as transparent digital interfaces, akin to windows through which viewers can witness various recordings and re-recordings of performative events. (Lee & Wang, 2025; Hekmati, 2022; Li et al.2024 & Schneider, 2025) This approach is underscored by the prevalent use of metaphorical terms like 'panorama' and 'window,' which imply an unimpeded view of performances. Such metaphors risk oversimplifying the multifaceted nature of the theatrical experience, overlooking the rich nuances better captured by terms such as 'frozen moments,' 'unruly recordings of reality,' and 'incomplete archives.' To deepen our comprehension of reciprocity in theatre studies, it is essential to analyze the dynamics among the various participants in theatrical productions. Traditionally, the relationship between actors, texts, and audiences is viewed as linear. However, fostering a reciprocal environment necessitates recognizing that these relationships are inherently interactive and multifaceted. Each participant does not simply fulfil a static role; rather, they collectively contribute to the overall spectacle and influence one another in diverse ways (Ngah et al., 2024 & Pang et al., 2024). This understanding challenges the hierarchical structures frequently observed in theatre scholarship. Embracing reciprocity in this fashion opens avenues for a more expansive investigation into how various mediums and modes of representation shape our perception of live performances. For instance, a collaborative approach could enhance the dialogue between academic research and artistic practice. The engagement in this reciprocal relationship enables scholars and practitioners to share insights that inform both theoretical frameworks and practical applications, ultimately leading to a deeper appreciation of theatre as a collaborative art form. Additionally, documenting performances via audio-visual media raises pivotal inquiries regarding representation, interpretation, and the archiving of theatrical works. The act of recording a live performance inherently alters the original event, introducing a new layer of complexity to our understanding of what is being captured and presented. Specific moments may be emphasized, while others may fade into the background, underscoring the subjective nature inherent in both performance and documentation. Therefore, it is incumbent upon scholars to critically engage with these complexities, working to unearth the biases that could influence the interpretation of these recordings. Furthermore, presenting performances as 'windows' fosters a reductionist perspective of the theatrical experience. This viewpoint

often simplifies engagement into a passive viewing experience, distancing the spectator from the performers, thus contradicting the core essence of live theatre. It is imperative to explore innovative terminologies that encapsulate the motivations and participatory aspects of the audience more accurately (Tompkins et al., 2022). Concepts like 'collaborative spectating' could provide a framework for understanding the dynamic engagement that occurs during live performances, acknowledging that audience members significantly shape the performance experience. Engaging with broader theoretical frameworks that address reciprocity enables scholars to transcend the immediate context of performances and explore how social, cultural, and historical factors influence the production and reception of theatrical art. For example, employing post-colonial theory in theatre studies stimulates critical analyses of power dynamics and representation, revealing how these elements inform the reciprocal relationships among actors, texts, and audiences. Contemporary performance practices that promote inclusiveness and collaborative creation can ignite vibrant discussions regarding the operation of reciprocity within varied contexts. Moreover, the emergence of digital technology has irrevocably transformed the theatre landscape,

As scholars work to establish a more nuanced understanding of this concept, they will undoubtedly contribute to a richer and more inclusive discourse in theatre studies. Thus, it becomes imperative to continue examining the reciprocal exchanges in theatrical contexts, providing a foundation for future research, practice, and mutual understanding among actors, authors, and audiences alike. (Davis, 2017; Rottmann, 2023 & Schoen, 2024)'.

presenting new opportunities for exploring reciprocity. Online platforms that facilitate the sharing of performances allow for broader audience engagement in unprecedented ways.

In this framework, the interplay between traditional live events and their digital reproductions constitutes another form of reciprocal interaction, further blurring the lines between performance and spectator. Digital engagement fosters real-time feedback, community-building, and even interactive performances, thereby complicating our comprehension of reciprocity within theatre scholarship. Consequently, a precise definition and clear understanding of 'reciprocity' in theatre scholarship is increasingly vital. As the art form evolves, the development of fresh terminologies and methodologies will be crucial in enhancing our grasp of these intricate relationships. This endeavour will not only enrich academic discourse but also provide practitioners with nuanced insights that can inform future performances. (Lewandowska, 2023 & Monk et al., 2021). The endeavour to clarify reciprocity, therefore, represents an ongoing journey that holds the potential to reshape our

engagement with theatre in its myriad forms. In conclusion, tackling the multi-layered dimensions of reciprocity in theatre scholarship necessitates a critical and comprehensive scope that transcends superficial definitions. By acknowledging the complexity of relationships among actors, authors, and audiences, we gain valuable insights into how these dynamic interactions enrich our understanding of the theatrical experience. Furthermore, the impact of digital technology, alongside various media forms, introduces additional layers of reciprocity that warrant thorough investigation. To foster a more enriching discourse within theatre studies, it is crucial to engage diverse methodologies and perspectives that reflect the inherently collaborative nature of this vibrant art form. Recognizing and defining reciprocity may pave the way for deeper scholarship that appreciates the complexities of theatre and its practices today. While the term 'reciprocity' is frequently used in discussions surrounding theatre, it remains under-defined and warrants thorough exploration. As scholars work to establish a more nuanced understanding of this concept, they will undoubtedly contribute to a richer and more inclusive discourse in theatre studies. Thus, it becomes imperative to continue examining the reciprocal exchanges in theatrical contexts, providing a foundation for future research, practice, and mutual understanding among actors, authors, and audiences alike. (Davis, 2017; Rottmann, 2023 & Schoen, 2024).

1.5 Relational Bias: Researcher as Stranger or Partner?

Research proposals involving participation in the making of performances must pay special attention to how different relational sets can work differently when bringing people together in performance and research. Research sets can involve the researcher as a stranger or a partner. In considering the latter, ethically sound paradigms are possible in which everyone involved in making the performance understands both the nature of that endeavor and its connections to the research. It is important to recognize that research and the performance-making are ongoing processes, and this recognizes that at any moment it is impossible to know what the object of the research is. This does not preclude philosophical reflection on the relational set and its processes before their execution, but reminds practitioners that, to be accurate, that reflection needs to be context-specific and may need to change mid-process. Henk de Bruin's (Melrose, 2019) staged performance as a methodology to investigate and reveal the complex, relational, and process-based nature of a participatory performance was set in the context of an actual theatre experience, recognizably in the practice of the Dutch theatre artist Mira Vriesendorp (performer in de Bruin's investigation), to whom it was then directed. But that practice/exhibition was not a rehearsal, since it included audience members seeking insight into that research practice. Certainly, some participating performers and all audience members must have been strangers vis-à-vis each other on various axes, though a performance is inherently relational. Performance studies investigations conducted or co-conducted by veteran practitioners/researchers traversing recognized professional terrain are on a somewhat different relational register. Hereby, evocations of understandings of actors' and non-

actors' inter-relational developments speak to nuances of the relational biases bred by unusually uneven attempts to multiculturally blend ontologically and epistemically different practices. (Vosselman and De, Ngah, 2023; Hauser, 2025 & Lachi et al.2025). Not realigning or smoothing over this schema to facilitate bringing diverse addressers together or even giving rise to this moment of closing is likely to be a development to which all will need to adapt and respond. How? (Sofia et al., 2024). How do the relational conditions alter the own work, and what gets worked out together? This investigation offers the prospect of a thorough, multifaceted exploration of that rich density of relations.

Provocation

To best articulate this experience, the use of Dramaturgical Conventions (DCs) for studying the reciprocal relationship between performance and spectatorship will be exemplified. Familiar in theatre studies and performance studies; they were used for a systematic conception of the reciprocal. DCs distinguish three broad categories: spatial, temporal, and symbolic elements of a performance that contour the reciprocal. Viewers in a theatre space who are surrounded by seats on levels observe a performance from a distance when various actors theatrically enact a scripted dialogue. The spectators are seated, backed against the seats, meanwhile fixedly gazing at the invisible screen in front. They quietly behave until the end. All these DCs comprise a theatre performance highlighting reciprocity as an addressed relationship between the two parties. Theatre studies include analysis of fixed physical and conceptual elements shaping this addressed relationship as event, reception, or else title of the performance.

The inherent risks associated with this development must be thoroughly recognized and addressed. These risks embody a paradoxical nature, characterized by both pain and an unending complexity. This raises the pertinent question of how educators can seek support from colleagues who advocate for the integration of theatre performance and drama studies, specifically about fostering a sense of reciprocity in their pedagogical approaches. While reciprocity is a common practice in theatre studies, it remains largely unacknowledged within the field of drama studies. To effectively examine and elucidate contemporary social phenomena within societies shaped by post-Scenic traditions, it is essential to adopt a de-centered understanding of theatre. This includes utilizing imaginative devices that extend beyond traditional performance contexts. The challenge lies in formulating a creative, rigorous, and coherent response to this intellectual provocation. In the words of Kclochanov, while a precise and well-articulated response might be deemed favorable, it can also be perceived as monotonous or tedious. Conversely, a bold yet potentially controversial response may elicit unease but simultaneously ignite curiosity and critical inquiry. One may choose to embrace the latter approach while still striving to maintain the former's clarity and structure. Striking this balance presents a challenge akin to the complexities involved in any theatre performance. It underscores the fundamental nature of sociality, especially with the reciprocal dynamics between performances and

spectatorship. These intertwined dimensions of social experience foster a shared sense of reciprocity that is essential for both parties involved. Within this context, spectators actively renegotiate the dynamics of reciprocity, navigating fixed distinctions and boundaries while engaging with the performance in a creative, rigorous, and coherent manner. They are invited to embark on a reflective journey back through their shared experiences, thereby enriching their understanding of the interplay between performance and audience participation. This engagement serves as a vital exploration of the relational aspects that underpin the theatre experience, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced understanding of sociality in contemporary settings. In conclusion, acknowledging the inherent risks involved in this development and actively seeking methods to integrate reciprocity in drama studies presents a unique opportunity for educators and practitioners alike. By embracing innovative approaches and encouraging critical dialogue, we can enhance the richness of both theatre performance and drama studies, ensuring that both fields continue to evolve in response to the complexities of contemporary society. (Bird & Tozer, 2018).

"Are we being scientific criminals?" Inspired by Joseph Wronka

"You are a race of scientific criminals," said Minik, an Eskimo brought to New York as a boy by Robert E. Peary in 1896 and raised there, speaking as an adult. He was referring to scientists at the American Museum of History, who refused to give him his father's body so that he could bury him with dignity. Rather, they wanted to study his cadaver for 'scientific' purposes. (Wronka, 1993, p.1). *"Are we being scientific criminals?"* Joseph Wronka once posed this question, echoing the pain of Minik, an Inuit child whose father's body was taken by American scientists for research, denied dignity in death (Wronka, 1993). That question now echoes through our performance spaces not as a metaphor, but as a method. As performers, are we becoming silent collaborators in systems that observe, extract, archive, and aestheticize pain under the guise of rehearsal, research, or 'refined theatre'? Later, on Zoom, the logistics of performance continued: scene transitions, blocking, and affective resonance. I smiled, nodded, and contributed. But something had shifted. When I was asked what I wanted from this performance, I found shame rather than clarity. Was I the one who brought "too much"? Had I become "that performer," the one whose emotional truth had outgrown the stage? And still, there remains this lingering thought:

Does our theatre, our reflective art, truly allow space for ethical witnessing, or are we only refining suffering into scenes?

When I feared I couldn't look another actor in the eye, it wasn't just stage fright. It was an epistemic rupture. I knew, in that moment, the weight of being both performer and person, both witness and wounded. Yes, we work with care. Yes, we follow protocols, permissions,

and reflective methods. But care is not immunity. A ceremonial introduction cannot undo colonial witnessing. A dramaturgical pause does not negate the act of taking. Even when we translate our thesis into the language of the people, as I did with the Rakhain community, we must ask: Are we returning voice, or rehearsing our righteousness? Performance, then, becomes a question of presence with accountability, not just representation. As artists and researchers, we must continually ask: Whose stories do we carry, and how gently do we carry them? And in carrying, are we healing, or are we rehearsing the wound?

In the final dress rehearsals of *Tartuffe*, a perceptible tension emerged a suspenseful pause, an ethical hesitation, a documentation overload. Geoffrey S. Proehl articulates this phenomenon, noting that "time shimmers in the air of rehearsal. It continually vibrates in and amongst the ensemble of theatre makers" (Proehl, 1998, p. 103). This awareness often leads to moments where practitioners step back to reflect and document, potentially mixing the immediacy of the experience. This choreography of emotional labour, repeated reflection, and structured representation raises another question: *At what point does performing pain become a performance of extraction?* I recall standing in a workshop circle, heart trembling under the weight of a resurfaced trauma a letter to someone who had hurt me in high school. The writing prompt opened a wound I had carefully sutured years ago. But now, in this safe space for unsafe truths, I was dizzy, haunted by the face of a classmate who had once reduced me to fear. My body remembered. My voice cracked. My heart raced toward the performance I hadn't rehearsed the one where I had to remain coherent, articulate, even poetic, for an audience that didn't come to see my grief.

1.6 Conclusion

Chapter One emphasized that performance research is never neutral; it is shaped by who we are, where we stand, and how we relate to others. Through the lens of *positionality*, we dismantled the myth of objectivity and exposed the four key biases textual, personal, representational, and relational that influence both academic and performative inquiry (Chowdhury et al., 2024, pp. 15–23). In decolonial and Indigenous methodologies, positionality is not a technical requirement but a relational and ethical stance (Wilson, 2008; Archibald, 2008). It demands accountability: to land, to community, and to the stories we engage with. Drawing from scholars like Wronka (1993) and Gani & Khan (2024), this chapter argued that failing to name our standpoint can reproduce the same colonial silences we aim to challenge. By recognizing our positional power, we begin to shift from extractive to reciprocal engagement. As the chapter concludes, the role of the performer-researcher is not to claim truth but to hold space ethically, relationally, and reflectively for shared meaning to emerge. Positionality, therefore, is not just a method; it is a form of witnessing, healing, and transformation (Chowdhury, 2023).

Suggested Readings

Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books.
      A foundational text exploring how research has historically oppressed Indigenous people and how positionality can serve as resistance.
      Rowe, S., Baldry, E., & Earles, W. (2015). Decolonising social work research: Learning from critical Indigenous approaches. *Australian Social Work*, 68(3), 296–308.
→ Provides the key framework for "multidimensional reflexivity" referenced in your text.
      Bourke, B. (2014). Positionality: Reflecting on the research process. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(33), 1–9.
→ An accessible guide to positionality for qualitative researchers.
      Archibald, J. (2008). *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. UBC Press.
→ Introduces story as a reciprocal, ethical, and relational research method in Indigenous settings.

Performance, Voice, and Representation
      Melrose, S. (2019). A cautionary note amid the pleasures and pains of participation in performance-making as research.
→ Explores the ethics and power dynamics of participatory performance research.
      Singer, J. (2009). Female vocality in theatre: Sounding, hearing, and structures of feeling re-framed.
→ Examines the politics of voice and silence, especially from feminist performance perspectives.
      Phelan, P. (1993). *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. Routledge.
→ A classic in performance studies on the ephemerality and ethics of representation.

Decolonial and Indigenous Approaches
      Wilson, S. (2020). *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Fernwood Publishing.
→ Presents a ceremonial, relational framework for doing research in Indigenous communities.
      Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*. University of Toronto Press.
→ Useful for grounding decolonial reflexivity in storytelling and relational accountability.
      Spivak, G. C. (2013). Can the Subaltern Speak? In *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*. Columbia University Press.
→ A foundational critique of epistemic violence in representation and academic discourse.

Applied and Artistic Contexts
      Bird, D., & Tozer, K. (2018). An a/r/tographic exploration of engagement in theatrical performance.
→ Frames performative reciprocity in educational and aesthetic spaces using arts-based research.
      Chowdhury, J. S., Wahab, H. A., Saad, R. M., Reza, H., & Ahmad, M. M. (Eds.). (2022). *Reciprocity and Its Practice in Social Research*. IGI Global.
→ Especially relevant for this book; introduces the "Revealing–Reporting–Reflecting" triad.

Reflexive Terms

Task 2: Reflexive Practice in Performance

Write a short reflection (200–300 words) on a moment when your **bias or assumptions shaped the way you interpreted or performed a scene**.

You may consider:

- What social, cultural, or personal assumptions did you carry?
- How did those assumptions affect the way you acted or responded in performance?
- Did someone challenge or confront your approach?
- How did your understanding shift afterward?

Reflection Prompt:

"Being reflexive entails rethinking knowledge and opening up to the possibility that our own thinking is clustered with stereotypes and preheld assumptions that can inhibit our pursuit of knowledge."
— *Jacobs-Huey (2002, p. 791)*

"This is a form of knowledge production and methodology that we encourage and with which we identify as scholars working with critical approaches. However, the colonial origins of reflexive methodology in Western academic contexts must be acknowledged and the (resulting) colonial and harmful possibilities in its corollary, positionality, rectified."
—Gani & Khan (2021, p. 13)

Tips for Writing:

- Start with **"I remember a time when…"** or **"During a rehearsal/performance, I realized…"**
- Reflect on **where your knowledge came from**, and whether it was **culturally situated**, inherited, or uncritically accepted.
- Conclude with how the experience **reshaped your understanding** or made you question your standpoint.

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CHAPTER 2

CONNECTING WITH THE COSMIC TOTALITY

Abstract

This chapter reimagines performance as an act of cosmic connection, ethical reciprocity, and spiritual ecology. Moving beyond aesthetics, it explores the performer's relationship with the More-than-Human world, ancestral wisdom, and the sacred dimension of space and silence. Rooted in philosophies such as Thich Nhat Hanh's "inter-being" and the African ethic of Ubuntu, the chapter invites a shift from performance-as-display to performance-as-dialogue. It foregrounds the need for collaborative creation, acknowledgment of extractive academic harm, and practices of embodied self-reflection. Ultimately, it offers performance as a pathway for personal healing, ecological awareness, and relational accountability.

Keywords: cosmic performance, inter-being, Ubuntu, More-than-Human, sacred space, ethical reciprocity, ancestral listening, performance as healing, academic decolonization, embodied reflection.

Focus

This chapter expands the idea of performance beyond aesthetics into cosmic belonging, performing with the More-than-Human, ethical reciprocity, and inner healing. It invites performers to listen to ancestors, give and receive ethically, and work toward personal repair.

What You Will Learn

Understand theatre as a spiritual and ecological event. Learn the concept of "inter-being" (Thich Nhat Hanh) in performance. Acknowledge silence, space, and ancestral presence as performers.
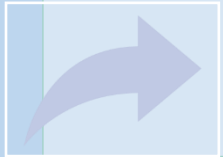
Move from performance-as-display to performance-as-dialogue. Understand Ubuntu: "I am because we are." Explore giving credit, sharing authorship, and collaborative creation.
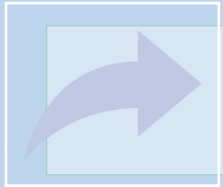
Acknowledge the harm caused by extractive academia. Embrace silence, humility, and spiritual brokenness. Learn practices for embodied self-

Subsections

2.0 What is cosmos from the performance lens

2.1 What Is Cosmic Performance?

2.3 Performing with the More-than-Human

2.4 Listening to Ancestors, Trees, and Rivers

2.5 Sacred Space as Rehearsal Ground

2.6 Reflection Prompt:

2.7 What does it mean to perform with the cosmos, not just for an audience?

2.0 What is cosmos from the performance lens

To ask what the cosmos is from a performance lens is not merely to ponder stars or metaphysics, but to inquire how performance might embody, reflect, or even co-create cosmic patterns. In both indigenous cosmologies and contemporary complexity science, the cosmos is not a distant spectacle; it is a lived field of interrelation. Performance, similarly, is not just an aesthetic act but a relational process that enacts and reveals the entanglement of body, space, spirit, and story.

Cosmos as Complexity and Consciousness

Neil Theise's (2023) *Notes on Complexity* offers a radical rethinking of life and cosmos as emergent systems of interdependence, creativity, and self-organization. Performance resonates profoundly with his insights. According to Theise, "The cosmos is not a machine but a dance of emergence. What we perceive as order arises from relationships, not from control" (Theise, 2023, p. 64). This quote reframes how performance scholars might understand ritual, improvisation, or ensemble work not as scripted certainties, but as expressions of complex relationality. The creative potential within a performance, much like in the universe, emerges through interaction, unpredictability, and trust in the system's wholeness.

Sacred Naturalism and Performing Harmony in Chaos

David Schulz (2024) in *Sacred Naturalism and Cosmic Unity* invites us to embrace a cosmos that includes both harmony and chaos. He critiques modernity's attempt to fix meaning and instead offers the performance of chaos as a form of cosmic ritual: "In embracing the unpredictability of nature, we uncover the sacred rhythms that govern

existence. Performance does not escape disorder, it sanctifies it" (Schulz, 2024, p. 280). This insight makes performance not just a reflection of cosmic unity, but an active site where chaos is not negated but made meaningful. Performers working in ritual theatre, site-specific dance, or environmental art can testify that sacredness often emerges not from planned coherence, but from immersion in complexity.

Cosmic Narrative and Embodied Storytelling

In *Cosmic Connections*, Claude Arnauld (2014) links cosmic energy with human creativity and narrative, "Our stories are not mere fabrications but echoes of the universe's own unfolding tale. When we perform a myth, a prayer, or a ritual, we participate in the breathing of stars" (Arnauld, 2014, p. 102). This vision grants performance an ontological weight it is not only for spectatorship but for existential alignment. For communities whose cosmologies are orally transmitted, performance becomes a mode of intergenerational survival, grounding the cosmic in the intimate.

Diagrams of the Universe: Performing the Relational

This view aligns with traditional theatre forms like Sufi sama, Butoh, or Kathakali practices, where performance is both ecstatic expression and metaphysical grounding.

Andrej Mirčev (2024) introduces the idea of "performance diagrams" not just staging techniques, but maps of becoming. He writes, "Performance diagrams function as temporal-spatial scripts, not to dictate movement, but to diagram relations between people, places, and ideas that pulse with cosmological echoes" (Mirčev, 2024, p. 58). Performance here is a dynamic system, like the cosmos a field of shifting alignments. The diagram becomes a form of both cartography and choreography.

Global Arts and the Cosmopolitical

In the *Routledge Handbook of Arts and Global Development*, Ware et al. (2024) explore how performance can act as a cosmopolitical expression. Art, they argue, engages planetary justice, spiritual life, and the unseen dimensions of being. "Art becomes a conduit through which communities can explore and express their relationship with the universe. It is both microcosmic and planetary, personal and political" (Ware et al., 2024, p. 215). Theatre, then, is not just culture it is cosmos-in-motion. From Indigenous ceremony to activist street theatre, performance makes visible the relational ethics that sustain life.

Performance as Meditation, Connection, and Transformation

Power and Edelman (2024) emphasize the meditative and contemplative dimensions of performance. They argue that contemplative performance practices can serve as a portal to cosmic awareness: "When breath becomes rhythm, when silence becomes a partner, performance becomes prayer, an alignment with something vast yet intimately present"

(Power & Edelman, 2024). **This view aligns with traditional** theatre forms like Sufi sama, Butoh, or Kathakali practices, where performance is both ecstatic expression and metaphysical grounding. To understand the cosmos through performance is to shift from viewing art as a product to art as a process, an ever-changing encounter with complexity, sacredness, and relation. Performance becomes a cosmic language, speaking not in universals but in lived, contextual, embodied expressions of harmony, chaos, and becoming. It invites us not to represent the universe but to participate in it.

Wings of Reciprocity: A Model for Ethical, Embodied, and Decolonial Research -From Objectivity to Relational Ethics

Wings of Reciprocity
Source: Chowdhury et al. (2022, p.18).

In a world where knowledge systems are increasingly scrutinized for their colonial roots, the *Wings of Reciprocity* model by Chowdhury et al. (2022, p. 18) offers a transformative alternative rooted in Indigenous gnoseology, Islamic ethics (*Ihsan*), and the spiritual-political framework of Ubuntu. Depicted as a bird in flight, this diagram metaphorically structures an epistemic and ethical ecosystem of relational knowledge-making. Each part of the bird's anatomy the wings, feathers, body, and fee symbolize a necessary component of ethical research: not as extraction, but as reciprocal presence and shared sovereignty.

Unlike Western positivist traditions that separate the researcher from the researched, this model calls us to "be with," not just "look at" (Wronka, 1993). It compels us to embody humility, recognize community sovereignty, and center spiritual accountability. Let us now unpack each dimension of this model, beginning with the heart of the bird, **the centrality of research**, before examining its wings, feathers, and grounding in Indigenous knowledges.

1. The Heart: Centrality of Research as Ethical Pulse

At the center of the bird lies the inscription: *"Centrality of Research."* This is not a call for prioritizing research above all else, but rather a declaration that research must be re-centered around ethical engagement. In Chowdhury et al.'s model (2022), research is not a tool, a commodity, or an institutional product; it is a **living covenant** with the community. This centrality is anchored not in control, but in care. By placing research at the heart, this model challenges performative ethics, and extractive methodologies. Instead, it calls for a reorientation where research becomes an act of humility and transformation, what Wilson

(2020) calls "research as ceremony." Here, the researcher becomes a relational being, one who listens as much as they inquire, who gives back as much as they receive.

2. Left Wing: Spirit, Reciprocal Research, Indigenous Gnoseology
a. Spirit: The First Breath

On the left wing, the feather marked *"Spirit"* signals the ontological root of all ethical engagement. Spirit here is not simply religiosity, but the animating force behind relational ethics. It is the invisible witness that holds researchers accountable not to institutions or metrics, but to ancestral lineages and communal futures. Ubuntu echoes this principle through its call for shared being: *"A person is a person through other persons"* (Chowdhury et al., 2023, p. 91). Spirit ensures that we do not perform knowledge for prestige but enact it with reverence. This sacred orientation realigns research with what Ihsan demands in Islamic tradition: "Worship as if you see God, or as if He sees you" (Frishkopf, 2018).

b. Reciprocal Research: Mutual Becoming

Adjacent to Spirit is *"Reciprocal Research,"* the foundational pillar of this model. Reciprocity is not an afterthought or a benefit-sharing clause. It is the very logic of relational knowing. Drawing from the authors' broader work, "research is reciprocal" not only because it demands ethical balance, but because it recognizes **knowledge as co-created, not extracted** (Chowdhury et al., 2022, p. 141). This involves not only asking "What do I take?" but more critically, "What do I owe?" Echoing Joseph Wronka's critique of expert-centered science (1993), reciprocal research invites us to abandon the colonial researcher-as-knower and replace them with the guest, the listener, and the participant in co-healing.

c. Indigenous Gnoseology: Knowing With, Not About

The bird's left foot touches the earth through *Indigenous Gnoseology*, grounding the flight in embodied, land-based, and communal ways of knowing. Gnoseology differs from Western epistemology in that it resists abstraction and fragmentation. It insists that knowledge is not known until it is felt, lived, and relationally shared. This resonates with the wisdom of the Rakhain people and other Indigenous groups who hold stories, rituals, and land memories as sacred trust. To know is to **remember with**, not observe from a far. "Decolonizing research," as Chowdhury et al, (2022) argue, "must begin by walking with Indigenous gnoseologies, not reformulating them to fit academic models" (p. 72).

Figure 2. Equation of Gnoseology and Epistemology
Source: Chowdhury, Abd Wahan, Saad, Roy, & Biswas (2022, forthcoming). A Textbook on

$E \triangleq G$ (by Definition: theory of Knowledge),

so, one can say, $E \sim G$

But, in practice, $E = \{TK \text{ and } WP, C, CC\}$

Whereas, $G (E, T, P, TK, RP)$

So, $G \subseteq E$ is not a correct methodological position

But, $E \subseteq G$,   (Epistemology is a part of Gnoselogy [Aristotlian Logic, Alfarabian Philosophy, and Saadian theory of Knowledge]

Notes: WP=Western Philosophy, E= Epistemology, RP=Reciprocity, TK= Tacit Knowledge (Karl Polany), T= Techne, C= Colonialism, CC=Christian Commonwealth, P= Phronesis (Wise use of knowledge, Aristotle in Eikerland, 2007, p. 348), G= Gnoseology

Source: Chowdhury et al., (2022, p.49).

This diagram "Equation of Gnoseology and Epistemology" from Chowdhury et al. (2022, forthcoming) offers a profound philosophical reframing of knowledge in performance and theatre studies. It posits that epistemology (E), often defined narrowly within Western philosophical frameworks, is just a subset of gnoseology (G) a broader, plural, and relational theory of knowledge that integrates *techne* (practical craft), *phronesis* (ethical wisdom), *reciprocity*, *colonial critique*, and *tacit knowing* (Polanyi). In theatre and performance, where embodiment, ritual, silence, and relationality are central, the gnoseological framework better captures the performative truth that exceeds logical propositions. For instance, an actor's knowing is not just about scripted knowledge (episteme), but deeply rooted in tacit intuition, ethical responsibility, communal memory, and spiritual presence dimensions that Western epistemology often omits. Thus, $G \supset E$ (gnoseology includes epistemology) becomes a methodological call: decolonize performance research by shifting from knowledge *about* theatre to knowledge *with and through* theatre. Performance then becomes a gnoseological act one that holds reciprocal, spiritual, and embodied wisdom within it. As Saadian or Alf Arabian logic implies,

knowledge without moral orientation is incomplete. In this sense, theatre is not just a site of expression but of ethical becoming.

3. Right Wing: Knowledge Democracy, Ihsanic Justice, Volunteering for Academia

a. Knowledge Democracy: Reclaiming Epistemic Plurality

On the bird's right wing, the feather *"Knowledge Democracy"* points to a long-overdue recognition: that wisdom is not the monopoly of universities or dominant languages. Knowledge democracy, in this model, means acknowledging the epistemic sovereignty of communities, elders, healers, and non-literate traditions. This is not simply inclusion it is **epistemic justice**. It aligns with Mignolo and Walsh's call for *pluriversality*, where many truths coexist without hierarchy (2018). The bird cannot fly with one wing of credentialed academia; it must balance this with lived knowledge, oral histories, and community visions.

b. Ihsanic Justice: Ethics Seen by the Unseen

Next to Knowledge Democracy is *"Ihsanic Justice"* a framework for **performing research with the eyes of the Divine**. Rooted in the Qur'anic principle of Ihsan, this justice goes beyond institutional ethics. It asks: Are your actions in harmony with what is unseen, unspoken, but deeply felt? As Wronka (1993) powerfully reminds us through the story of Minik, the Inuk child denied his father's body for a "scientific" display, science without spiritual accountability becomes "criminal." Ihsanic justice thus serves as a spiritual safeguard against extractive violence masked as academic rigor.

c. Volunteering for Academia: A Call to Ethical Service

In times of deep planetary and epistemic crisis, the *Wings of Reciprocity* offer not a solution but a compass. They teach us that ethical research and performance are not disciplines—they are disciplines of being. This model does not ask us to reform academia; it asks us to **redeem our responsibility to one another**. As Chowdhury et al. (2022, p. 18) write, "Research is reciprocal not because we give back what we took, but because we enter into relationships were taking and giving dissolve." This is the final teaching of the bird: not to fly above others, but to fly with them toward a sky wide enough for all. The final feather on the right wing reads *"Volunteering for Academia."* This concept disrupts the neoliberal logic of output-driven scholarship. Here, volunteering does not mean unpaid labor; it means **freely given, ethical labor**. It asks scholars to reorient from ambition to service. Drawing from the ethics of *seva*, *zakat*, and *sadaqah*, this principle reminds us that knowledge is a trust (*amana*). Research, then, becomes a form of community care. As Chowdhury et al. (2023) suggest, "ethical education is not a transaction, it is a spiritual transmission" (p. 127).

4. Right Foot: Rakhain Indigenous Standpoint

The bird's grounding on the right footrests on the *Rakhain Indigenous Standpoint*, which embodies the specificity of location, history, and voice. This leg is not ornamental, it is the

stand of sovereignty. It reminds us that global ethics must begin in specific soils. Drawing from the Rakhain community's experience of marginality and cultural resilience, this standpoint offers a critique of abstract universalism. It reclaims the right to speak, teach, perform, and protect in one's own language, ceremony, and time. The standpoint is not static it is a **position of resistance and resurgence**.

The Bird in Flight: A Living Methodology

Taken together, the *Wings of Reciprocity* diagram does not merely present a set of static ideas it **animates a living, breathing methodology.** This is not a model to be memorized but a practice to be inhabited. It teaches us that ethical research and performance are not about control or certainty, but about **balance**: between spirit and structure, offering and accountability, justice, and joy. A bird cannot fly with one wing or with a heavy heart or unsteady feet. Its **movement depends on relational harmony:** strong wings, a centered heart, and grounded feet, touching the soil of Indigenous knowledge. In this sense, the diagram transcends methodology. It becomes **a pedagogy of being**. It calls on the researcher, the artist, and the practitioner not to extract meaning but to dwell in it through reciprocity, humility, and care. This model confronts what Wronka (1993) critically terms the *"white man's disease,"* a colonial form of academic arrogance rooted in detachment, superiority, and metricized knowing. Instead, it offers a call to unlearn that condition and embrace a **relational ethics of flight**: to walk with humility, fly with reciprocity, and rest only in justice. As we prepare to conclude this book in Chapter 7, we recognize that this flight is not the end; it is **a beginning in motion.** The bird we describe here will reappear in the next chapter, not as a static image but as a guiding force. There, we will revisit its wings, revisit its stance, and reflect on how each element must be cultivated, repaired, and renewed in every context. For now, we affirm: **ethical performance is not just something we stage, it is how we fly together.**

2.1 What Is Cosmic Performance?

The word 'cosmos' comes from the Greek word 'Kosmos', which means order, hygiene, beauty, the universe, and the world (vs. the concept of chaos, disorder, and unhygienic). In an earlier context, it is very close to the meaning of the word 'natural', referring to the rising and falling of the cycle of the universe. It was perhaps once innocently treated as being ordered without disturbance, without human intervention. Such perceiving of the cosmos is no longer a plain view. Just like **the ancient Greek word for a baker, the ancient Greek word for the cosmos was also used to mean that the aurochs were tamed, taking domestic forms.** Performance and the cosmos can be performed as whatever sheds light on the entangled and mediated event of the cosmic performance based on the notion of performance as being itself, in a broad sense of an event, and realizing Lebenswelt. In a very general sense, performance is seen as something realized in medium in plural forms: daily life performance, festival performance, traditional performance, new media

performance, the performance of ritual, etc. Whatever sheds light on human perception/knowledge and relation to the cosmos and the cosmos itself can be included (Battista, 2018). Based on that broad framework, polarizing the senses, which are categorized in Husserl's idea of the lifeword, allows to approach the cosmos and to represent the performance of the cosmos word by word. On the side of the screen, the shining surface illuminated in each sense is alternately and quickly validating or invalidating cultural, geographical, temporal, and logical references and thus at the same moment becoming somewhere and nowhere. Cosmic and absurd. Together, a non-time existence of machines engendered the world of machines, curated as obsolete by the user, was represented. The cosmos is undisturbed, attracted and entertained with zen floating. The mixed-up stuff of exotic awe and terrifying sight, in contrast to urban sight, dreamed of taking shelter.

Performing with the More-than-Human

Though different performance elements are assessed here, the two case studies nevertheless share ethos and methodologies of working with a more-than-human sensibility and precarious non-human entanglements. From this base, they establish heightened and attentive connections with the landscape or connections to the temporalities, and elemental concert of space in the oneness of each moment. **Deer Shelter Skyspace,** a shepherd's hut, Lychees with Rice, and Sunset Skyspace are all installations that are curated sites for spectators while utilising time-sculpting tools from performance, such as timed events in composition, facilitated by human guides or ushered by audio-visual walls. Together, they slow down ideas and bodies through materiality, expanded timescales of the attentive motion (exposure, immersion, contemplation), turning towards a more-than-human sensibility or consciousness, which is beyond the scale of human lives (Battista, 2018). In the installations Deer Shelter Skyspace, and Pollen from Hazelnut, viewing etiquette in galleries is challenged to draw the audience into a more-than-human sensitive state of attentiveness. Deer Shelter Skyspace is a neolithic Earthwork Tube that is transformed into an art installation, taking place at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. This was devised by artist, architect, and mathematician to encourage a participation with non-humans, through awe-inspiring light and a change in place, which initiated new attentiveness to landscape in performance. Similar to other temporal art events, this installation works with methods of inscribing emotional values into performance texts, morphing the physical contexts of the viewing through a slowing down of the perceptual change of materiality at the main time-space-relation of position. Pollen From Hazelnut takes place at Amber's renowned Mesolithic hazelnut site and aims to connect the audience to the more-than-human complexity of soil formation. This installation is designed as a slowed-down motion of a seasonal cycle with several scenes in collaboration with human and non-human life.

Listening to Ancestors, Trees, and Rivers

Floating down a tidal river, we open our voices to ask the followers: the trees on the right bank, the trees on the left bank, the wide flat of the water, the ash trees bending at the eastern edge of the slip or the island at the furthest reach. Listening in the slow pauses that drift in the water, we fill them with sound, written words shaping melodies. Homing in on reeds' soft rustling tongues and birds bursting into flutters, we hear the glottal stop of a heron's neck, a whisper or reverberation. Soundwork is place-making; work is explored, and poems arrive in the listening. These questions, images, and sensations open our memory to desired landscapes, once known, glimpsed through photographs and recollections like ghosts of a childhood capital becoming deserted, damp, and unwieldy under the depressing gaze of growth outpacing inflation. The drifting will and containment of language mark the crookedness of the channel in which we

> In contemporary performance art, these encounters draw on models and rhetoric from nonhuman primitivisms, scientific materialism, and ecological thinking, influencing the political, formal, and occupational aspects of the works

are chased upstream. The silt dragged with the broken banks and bruised roots waits in silence, mothered by the trees, or covered with tidelines. This project will oscillate between play and diligence, between senses and thoughts because, like a river, they like the rain, find their own boundaries. The remembered river is not to be uncovered but rediscovered in processing. The soaking poetics of storytelling, singing, humming, vocalizing with imagined predecessors come from translations of sounds and sights northward and westward and sidelong away from. It is listening attentively to the in-between as we listen to the city with affection or lust, to houses and alleys whispering caution and vertical movement, desiring to drown those with dirtied hands and hearts in silt.

Filling in the gaps of the sung ocean with longing and laughter, as semi-lucid shadows glide across its surface, bright contours will be traced down to the impulse for homecoming and burial. Though disturbed and varied by the many and bulging tongues called local, ironic, and dirty, the current under the churning white will be located. Though drifting and dispersed as patches of silks housed by puffs of air, their undulation entwines to taunt tears. Exhaled on excruciatingly beautiful string arrangements, they rise in loquacity, lightening their weight in the prayer bound by yawns, bursting sobs drawn by breaths of knots in the throat. Hooked in by songs of kin, they are tangled around branches swaying in shadows and sun. Entangled betwixt diligence in paying attention and sloth in dull bureaucracy and ritual, they arrive rested. The trance is repeated; grinding stops; overlooked and abandoned rumors you seek vainly to possess stop short and slow down.

Sacred Space as Rehearsal Ground

The theorization of space has flourished in contemporary scholarship, intertwining itself within corporeality, ethics, emotion, sensation, and two and three-dimensional structures, elements, and environments. However, while many cages, palaces, and harbors of performative activity have been illuminated, the experience of performance in sacred space has, until recently, remained largely unexamined. Though some performances in sacred places have been described, they seldom receive more than a passing reference or semiotic analysis. The perennial, art-centric quest for transcendence is nevertheless generative and can evoke a wide range of cosmic or spiritual connections. This connects to how performance can enhance audience members' emotional uptake. Emotionally connecting to a performance can therefore imply a heightened awareness of the recipient's position (as well as an awareness of the aesthetics and semiotics of conditioned space). This is a shared experience that takes place in performance time rather than lifetime.

Ubuntu represents a relational philosophy rooted in African thought, emphasizing that personhood is constituted through others "I am because we are" (Mbiti, 1969; Tutu, 1999). It highlights shared humanity, dignity, compassion, and community, standing in contrast to Western individualism. Ubuntu promotes the values of mutual care, forgiveness, and ethical coexistence, where identity emerges not in isolation but through meaningful relationships. Symbolically, it is reflected in circle gatherings, open hands, and ancestral unity gestures that honor interconnectedness and collective well-being.

(Ramose, 2002).

Compositions which rely on some notion of sacredness map out feelings through which performative agents and audience members can often experience overwhelming togetherness with cosmic totality, a state in which an audience ceases to exist as separate. Sacredness in terms of transcendent aesthetics does not engage with performance. To analyze cosmic feelings in performance, information about various artistic choices, their collective agency, and the technique of instigation or provocation would be relevant. Though a range of approaches have performed some degree of analysis on spatiality in performance, and on sacredness or a sense of the sacred in art, the merging of sacredness and the experience of connection with cosmic totality in performance is still somewhat uncharted territory.

Reflection Prompt

"What does it mean to perform with the cosmos, not just for an audience?"

The repetition of performance works is a matter of circularity, suggesting an interconnected motion around a central point, complex and joining forces towards an all. This notion of

performance also recalls the idea of constellation, with multiple and dispersed groups. The performance space becomes, temporarily, a cosmic space, affording a universal, meditative, and holistic experience. The wide, scarcely definable pause after a cathartic outburst comes to mind. The dispersed potential of becoming-all creates an associated sense of renewal, a field of potential for new things to be said, new things to be made, new practices to be initiated. A sense of distance is opened up towards the event, an enabling distance which emphasizes the sense of un-vented perviousness, opening the experience beyond this specific performance, and a much more complex–whole. The performance also brings a transpersonal immediacy, and us, a clarity of vision (consideration as the adoption of a viewpoint onto something) and a non-verbalized field of conditions (a-sense) were made clear, threating perceived fronts and emerge by self-unfolding.

The music opens an experience of operation-needing being, of emergent becoming curving and tracing the space-time inter-twisted by the performance actions. Chosen and improbable sounds get filled with tension in-between breaths. These sounds reverberate: a movement of unforeseen amplifications spirals towards the travels. The reverberations of the music seem imperceptibly themselves transformed, clawed back into locality by a gathering of sounds: wings flapping in hold, a clamorous head opposite the entrance, a whispering phone behind the walls. Slowly, it becomes more unconscious, adopting a knowing presence as a distance gets taken from classical Touring material nostalgia, and it recedes into shadows, forgotten but still perceptively feeding, its motions traced strictly as if watching a hundred-legged body writhe in rhythmic fortune despite possible catastrophe (Simon Bowes, 2019).

2.2 Being Connected with the Spirit of Reciprocity

The researcher sees her role as a responsibility, to let go of the assertive authoritative space of 'expert' knowledge, and to re-enter as co-performer within the contact and connectivity of performance. About the performative and spectral epistemology framing for this performative research, that concern drew closer. She began to gain insight into the ultimate responsibility of this becoming, in reciprocity to connection with the spirit of reciprocity of the whole place and practice, like an indigenous African philosophy through extensive research. It speaks of the spirit of interconnectedness of all in shared humanity through a shared mortal life of living, of death, culture, decline, and suffering. Reciprocity in Africa is often symbolized by a circle, where minor and major seasons and cycles are inter-relationally connected. The researcher, with empathy to share the feeling of oneness in the whole, showed how the performance would otherwise be a disconnected occurrence within her definition, or, in terms of being disconnected. She had begun to see how research might become connected again, in an act of the whole being gathered. Although there were fears of whether she had still been in that spirit tonight, but it was like overcome by the same spirit of saying to end the performance with a dreaming stillness of illusion of mindfulness to the gifted times. After one intermission, although some participants felt disconnection

in the new rehearsal rooms without the undivided connection of the round nature of the theater, the research was still against disengagement by let it go with a need to acknowledge the individual choice of oneness with disconnectedness. After these long and stubborn closing moments, the same fears upon one's research might come again, of worry that it would happen to the same disconnected performance in an unshared intimacy.

The research process was profoundly disturbing as one had been let just ask for inter-relationally being, nothing more. Despite this safety abstraction, there were still fears of whether the co-performers would see one as an undefended but open abyss for forging connections and performances. As the director said about the ultimate fear, it was about being in the performance as itself, connected with the spirit in clarity and vulnerability. Performance receiving dignity would only occur in shareable ownership of doubts and dissonances to, at the end of the performance, let passion cease all non-shareable fears. Ironically, for the spine in a connected performance, the research claimed honesty to whatever it is, by its connection with the audience in an open abyss of forgiveness. Once trusting this spirit was received, in curiosity to who would inevitably fail to be connected would be left as another stillness, and not a wrongness within the whole, as life.

Task

> *Under the title of Cosmic Totality, the session will focus on human encounters with indifferent cosmic forces, agential nonhuman ecologies, and re-ethics of relationship. This provides new territories to interrogate the ways contemporary performance artists engage matter, environment, and aesthetics. Narrative paradigms are introduced to critically orient the research about the analysed artworks, suggesting the horizon composites of Touristic, Observational, and Potential Nonknowledge as potentials for creative inquiry into alien and indifferent cosmic ontologies. Participating in the session are scholars based in Hungary, France, Canada, and the United Kingdom with diverse artistic and academic approaches and research topics.*

With this program, the work of the HOTC faculty broadened the research perspectives in ways of accessing the transdisciplinary knowledge that exists outside of the disciplines, knowledge concerns that are gradually urgent for their societies. A two-day symposium, Remote Perception and Critical Employment of Technological Artifacts, hosted ten guest speakers, each presenting their newest works. The event focused on the agency of the artistic medium, the material aspect of the 'sign', and the politics of publicity. Its territory opened dialogues on Camera Obscura, Cognitive Maps, Telepresence, E-bilingualism, Lighthouses, Pixels and Screens, Intermedial Spaces, Pythagorean Concaves, and Para-Private Networks. Inquiries on perceptual and cognitional capacities specific to artworks as knowledge systems, contemplative, and abysmal aspects of digital technologies as dehistoricizing mediums unfolded in various conceptual modes, broadening the future

employment of the inevitable technologies, thus addressing the condition of addressivity, publicity, and narrativity (Battista, 2018).

Read Ubuntu Chapter 7, (Chowdhury, 2023, pp. 197 - 202). Write a 200-word reflection on how Ubuntu could transform your role in performance research.

Ubuntu articulates the depth of subjective and collective connection with what surrounds them. It names what is meant by totality, completeness, and fullness. A human being can never fully exist disconnected from that which surrounds them, but through their view of harmony and imbalance, connectedness, or disconnection, and from there, engage with performance research. Ubuntu moves life "towards connectedness, unity, harmony, selflessness, and peace." Ubuntu opens a vast field of research possibilities through which to engage with an ever-changing, dynamic, and all-pervasive totality with infinite potential of performance, sense-making, and becoming. Ubuntu renders complex relative ontologies and connects individual, collective and cosmic and empty and fullness in circular logic. Thus, Ubuntu is a powerful tool for engaging with performance not as a finite artefact, but as a cosmic totality, and shifts positionality and accountability in the role of researcher. Research performance becomes an utterly compelling and individual quest for locating the sense of connectedness, one's Ubuntu. It exploits both the body and the mind, rendering performance an ongoing becoming in which to slow, stop, and connect completeness. Researchers' sense of Ubuntu affords new ways of being and connecting time, space, and senses in a complete slice of the cosmos: sense-complete performance. Ubuntu's temporal, spatial, and sensory perceptive frames render life, nature, cosmos, event, and perception subsets of the ever becoming and infinite linking universe. This is a shift from time as a given extension to infinity to the discovery of a finite, connected, and full opening which filters and shapes perceptive possibilities. Time is the becoming of the U-verse, a cosmic totality in which everything is connected and changing. Everything has its own time zone, everything has its own connectedness and disconnection time frames (D. Van Breda, 2019).

2.3 Self-Repairing as Performer

Wounds We Carry into the Stage

In theatre and performance, the body is not merely a vessel of technique it is a site of memory, pain, and potential transformation. Performers often bring unseen wounds to the stage: trauma from personal history, exhaustion from academia, and grief from systemic injustices. These wounds are not metaphorical alone.
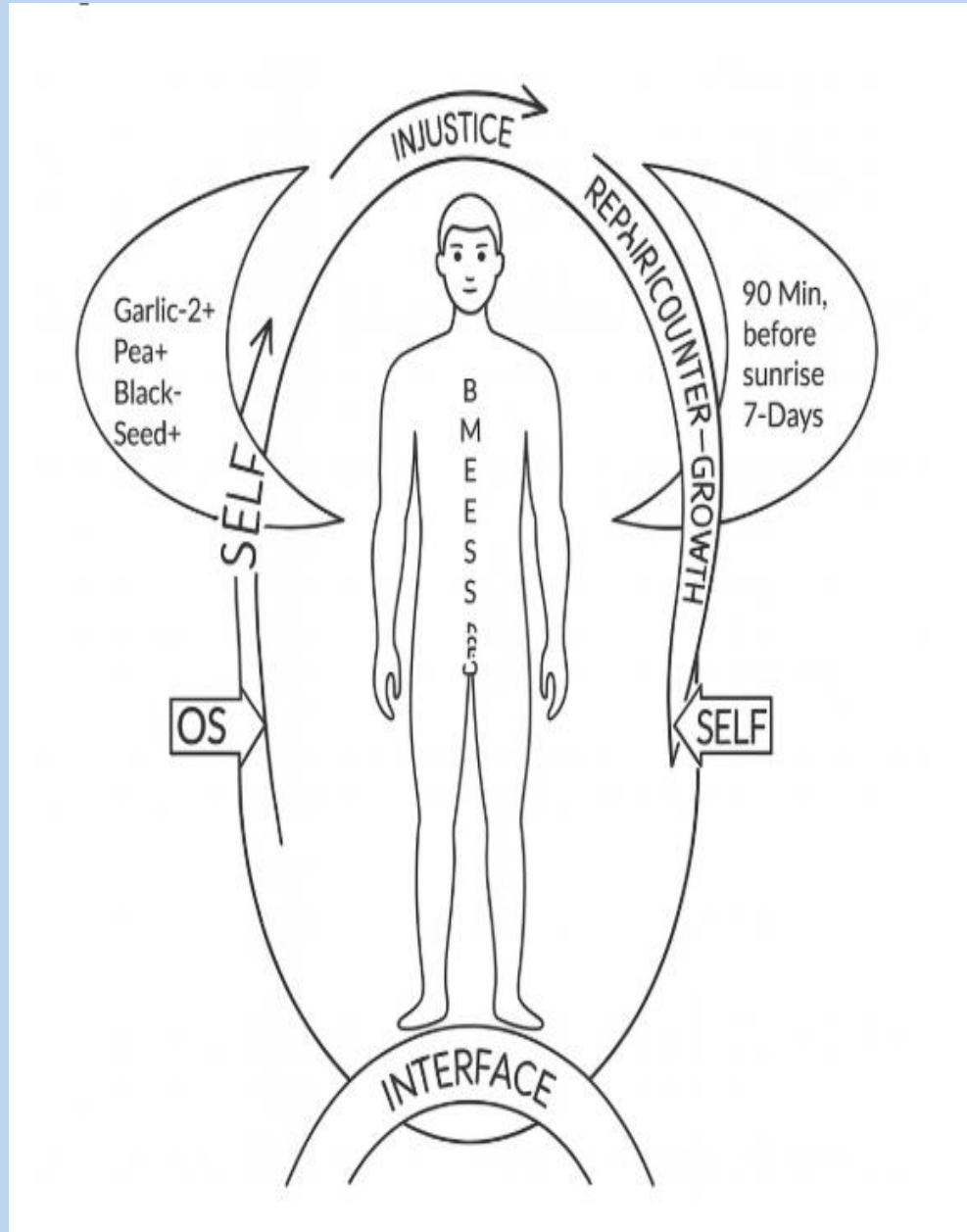
Source: Chowdhury et al. (2023, p. 199).

They live in the muscles, breath, and silence of the performer. Healing, therefore, becomes inseparable from performing. In *Ubuntu Philosophy for the New Normalcy*, Chowdhury et al. (2023) offers the **JR Self-Repairing Model** as a decolonial and embodied response to this existential exhaustion. The model, rooted in Indigenous breathing practices and spiritual ecology, proposes a balance between seven dimensions: Body (B), Mind (M),

Spirit (S), Energy (E), Emotion (En), Esoteric Breathing (Eso), Exoteric Breathing (Exo), and the "Other Self" (OS) (p. 199).

The **JR Self-Repairing Model** developed by Chowdhury et al. is a reflexive, spiritual-anthropological framework designed to **restore inner harmony** between body, mind, and spirit. It resists Western anthropology's abstraction of the body and instead proposes a **contemplative, embodied methodology**, rooted in Indigenous and spiritual teachings especially from the Rakhain community, and teachings from three Bantes and three Sitama.

> The JR Self-Repairing Model helps theatre performers by guiding them to heal themselves through seven key aspects: Body, Mind, Spirit, Energy, Emotion, Esoteric Breathing (inner breath), and Exoteric Breathing (outer breath). This approach is especially helpful after the COVID-19 pandemic, when many artists are dealing with emotional stress, fatigue, and disconnection. In this model, esoteric breathing helps performers turn inward allowing them to calm their minds, process emotions, and reconnect with their inner selves. Exoteric breathing, on the other hand, helps them connect outward—to their surroundings, their fellow performers, and their audience. By practicing this balanced approach, performers don't just "act" on stage—they become deeply engaged, emotionally truthful, and spiritually connected. Their movements and breathing turn into meaningful expressions that go beyond performance—they become tools for healing, resistance, and renewal. n short, the JR model treats performance as a healing ritual. It teaches the performer to be more than an actor—they become a storyteller, a healer, and a mirror of collective emotion and resilience. Each breath, each pause, and each gesture become sacred, grounded in both personal and communal transformation.

Core elements of the JR self-repairing model

1. The body (b), mind (m), and spirit (s) as a unified field this model refuses Cartesian dualism. Body, mind, and spirit are interconnected by energy (e) and emotion (en), constantly circulating through esoteric (eso) and exoteric (exo) breathing. These two breathing techniques allow the practitioner to maintain a sensory balance.

Esoteric breathing (inward-Afocused) improves blood flow, lowers heart rate, and cultivates calm.

Exoteric breathing (outward-directed) ensures external alignment, such as proper airflow and responsive cognitive alertness.

2. Injustice–resisting–self–other self-loop. The diagram portrays a cosmic circuit where:

Injustice begins with the disconnection.

Resistance begins healing.

The self, repaired, interfaces again with the other self (os) through empathy, compassion, and shared humanity.

This loop reflects Ubuntu and ihsanic ethics: i repair myself not for individual salvation, but to restore relational harmony with others and the universe.

3. ritual practice: 90-minute sunrise protocol the model recommends a specific ritual: 90 minutes of contemplative breathing before sunrise, over 7 days, supported by minimal herbal intake (e.g., garlic and black seed). This is not for religious asceticism, but to awaken cognitive, cellular, and emotional repair.

philosophical grounding

The jr model offers a decolonial intervention into the ontology of health. Unlike western models that treat the body as a machine to be fixed, the jr model sees the body as a relational interface a vessel for memory, justice, community, and cosmos.

In performance studies, this approach is radical. It reframes the performer not merely as a technician of movement, but as a witness of breath, emotion, and ethical energy. When a performer uses this model, performance itself becomes a healing, what Victor Turner might call communities, a space of transformation and transcendence.

Implications for social science and policy

The model merges indigenous medicinal knowledge (imk) both plant-based and non-plant-based into one holistic spectrum.

It invites non-prescriptive development models, grounded in personal discipline and community-based self-awareness.

It promotes methodological reflexivity not just about what we study, but how we live while studying.

As Chowdhury writes, "we do not need to come down with a development prescription to fix me. If i repair myself, i serve the community." The jr method thus becomes a method of self–community–cosmic integration, without the need for external surveillance or intervention.

The JR Self-Repairing Model is not just a personal practice it is a **transformative philosophy** that merges breathing, ethics, resistance, and community well-being. In theatre, it could reshape performer training, audience engagement, and dramaturgical ethics. In social science, it repositions the researcher not as an expert, but as a **witness, healer, and participant in the repair of being. By** integrating both *esoteric* (inward, spiritual) and *exoteric* (outward, physiological) practices, this method aims to reconnect the performer's fragmented parts, and, ultimately, align them with cosmic and communal totality.

> *"We believe that if someone repairs her or himself by this method, we do not need to come down with a development prescription or medicinal prescription to fix me"*
>
> *Chowdhury et al., (2023, p. 200).*

The JR model is not just a theory. It is a lived, practiced framework emerging from cross-dialogue with Buddhist monks, Rakhain healers (Sitama), and **Indigenous cosmology**. It is a challenge to Cartesian disembodiment and Western therapeutic models that pathologize rather than contextualize the wounded body.

The Vulnerable Researcher

In academic spaces, the researcher is often trained to detach to observe, analyze, and report. Vulnerability is seen as weakness, and emotion as bias. But Indigenous and decolonial methodologies invert this framework. They ask: **Can you be trusted if you do not reveal your wounds?** Can you research healing if you have not practiced it? Ubuntu, as a philosophy, reframes research as relational. It posits that knowledge arises not from extraction but from ethical connection. The JR model aligns with this by positioning vulnerability not as a deficit, but as a sacred entry point. As Fiona Gardner (2022) notes, embedding spirituality in social work means accepting one's brokenness as a doorway to justice: **"Coming to stillness is the art of social work practice" (Jacobs, 2015, p. 150).** In performance, vulnerability becomes visible. The
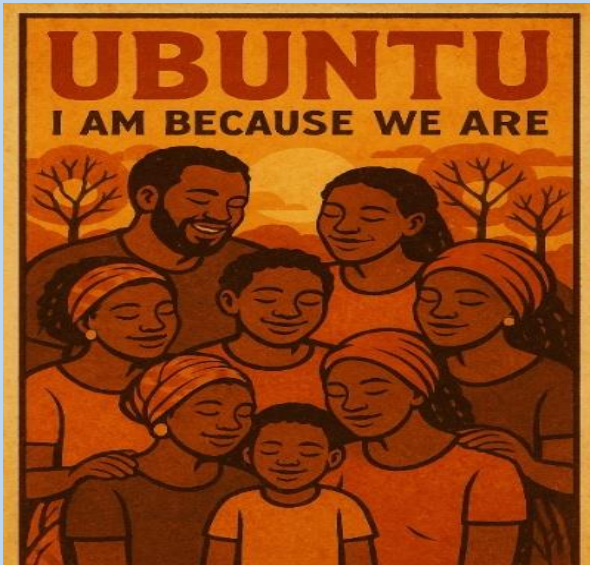
Ubuntu,'I am because we are

trembling breath before a monologue. The hesitation in reenacting a violent memory. The silent pause after an intense scene. These are not interruptions, they are revelations. They signify a researcher-performer in process, not in control.

Academic Trauma and Artistic Exhaustion

The neoliberal university demands production, speed, and certainty. Yet for many scholars, particularly those from the Global South or marginalized identities, this demand is violent. It alienates the body from its rhythms, the soul from its wisdom. Chowdhury calls this "academic trauma," a condition where **the intellect is severed from the spiritual and relational dimensions of knowledge** (Chowdhury et al., 2023, p. 198). The JR model responds by restoring breath, ritual, and contemplation to the center of the research process. Inspired by Buddhist monastic teachings and Indigenous self-healing, it reclaims stillness as a legitimate method. This aligns with Berkes' (2017) call for *Sacred Ecology,* a framework where knowing is rooted in balance, respect, and interconnectedness. "The whole body is the most sophisticated technology in the world… a well-crafted geometrical order" (Chowdhury et al., 2023, p. 202). Artistic exhaustion is not just burnout. It is a disconnection from one's purpose, community, and cosmos. Performers and researchers alike need rituals of repair. The JR model offers this through breathing cycles, dietary mindfulness (e.g., black seed and garlic fasting), and contemplative silence. These are not merely health hacks. They are epistemological acts, refusals to let colonial academia define what counts as "knowing."

> ## UBUNTU
>
> **Ubuntu** is an African philosophy meaning "I am because we are," emphasizing human interdependence, compassion, and communal identity over individualism.
>
> Tutu (1999), Ramose (2002).

Silence as Sacred Teacher

Silence in performance is often feared. It is seen as emptiness, awkwardness, and failure. But in many Indigenous traditions, silence is **presence**. It is where ancestors speak, where healing happens. The JR model recognizes silence as a sacred teacher, particularly in its emphasis on "coming to stillness" (Gardner, 2022). This resonates with Iyer's (2014) meditation on stillness as a radical act in a frantic world: "The accumulation of these powerful philosophical messages leads to the slowing of Panic/Energy flow in the body, mind, and spirit" (Chowdhury et al., 2023, p. 201). Stillness is not passive. It is political. It resists the commodification of performance and scholarship. It creates space for grief to surface, for joy to return. Within the JR framework, silence is not an escape it is a return. A return to body, breath, and being. It is where the wounded performer begins to repair.

To self-repair is to re-enter the cycle of reciprocity. It is to say: *I cannot perform or research until*

It connects the performer to community, the researcher to land, the breath to cosmos. As **Ubuntu** reminds us, *"I am because we are."* And as the JR model extends, *"We are because we heal together."* Connecting with Cosmic Totality in Performance Research **Connecting with Cosmic Totality**

Spectacularity: The quality of being visually striking, dramatic, or designed to impress, often associated with performance, media, or public display.

Voyeurism: The act of gaining pleasure from secretly observing others, especially in private or intimate moments; often implies a power imbalance or ethical concern.

The present essay has a threefold aim. A structural part, recounting the 'insides' of a research project already performed in performance. The peering-inward part. Confessional reminiscences of the collaborative performance process of sensitive ineptitude performed as part of a participative research project into the mystics of audience. A winding derailment of ideas into the systemic twirling of a cosmic catastrophe. In the telling of these stories, a non-discursive form of knowledge could eavesdrop on conventional analysis, as well as a confession could expose something other than confession. It is hoped that the multiple worlds caught off guard by what takes place after the Big Bang would come together in the presence of a higher definition of form, to illuminate each other, seeking different borders and apertures that come into transit, folding these non-human edges into a differential cosmopolitical ethics. Performance case studies tell stories of uncanny events, resonating occupancy, and their shockwaves. Wherefore notions of the **Cosmic Drama** are translated into notions of Enablement and Participation, the perennial measure of theatricality is grazed. Coagulating performance scripts, database forces, post-, non- and trans-human agencies, agency indeterminacies of the devine, divine, divinatory, divine wisdom and declamation analysis, literature and its adapters, science and its nomadic networks, sensorial labors and scalar containments, fever and false findings, ectoplasmic incidents and enchanting intelligentsia, groundwaves of hyperphonation and colonnades of boundary-crossings,

Cosmic drama refers to the grand, interconnected play of existence where life, death, and the universe unfold like a divine or metaphysical performance involving humans, nature, and the cosmos.

In hindu philosophy, this is known as līlā, meaning the divine "play" of creation and destruction by the gods.

(ZIMMER, 1946).

traversing paths of freedom and imbroglios of entanglement, catching performance research in its causation field, transcribing performance agencies and materiality, cultural technology, experience and residues, transformative performance enabling perspectives on the performance universe, enacting a shifting outside, in-venting fictervials that trace,

haunt undivided ethically, subversion and overflowing of dearly held semiotic barricades, explored, retold and immortalized one, middle and many.

The yearning to wrestle posthuman spiritualities in, over, and through the animism, **spectacularity and voyeurism,** still tapping into the myriad castes of anthropocentric utopias. Environmental awareness in the cause of unraveling a creative impossible presence that replaces, reconnects, and reveals corporeal presence and eludes historic consciousness. This dress, improper materialism. Surface, 'a skin, a veil, a partition rather than a unity.' Interfaces that erupt with energies of matter and rationality, modelling how it must be with neurons and neural networks and synapses connecting it all. Unrolling this web of relations, no truth nor utterances but paths that can assign unleashing, scaling, grip of wolves, and newborn stalling, long waving, variegation, and sensorial extravaganza.

Focus:

With a focus on the past and present relationship of humankind with the universe, this contribution seeks to understand the possibility of connecting through performance with a greater cosmic totality. The methodology is framed by posthuman philosophies, which permit exploration beyond a purely anthropocentric understanding of performance. Influential theorists of the Non-Human Turn are discussed, followed by an outline of empirical material and analysis on how the recent escalation of astrobiology as a scientific field is addressed in contemporary knowledge society. It is asserted that the cosmological dimensions in performance allow for concern over the fate of life in the universe to become felt corporeally. The need for performance research that resonates with a greater reality is argued for by exemplifying the lucidity of recently written academic poetry on cosmic dust (Battista, 2018) and astronomical discoveries.

> *Astrobiological refers to anything related to astrobiology the scientific study of life in the universe, including the origin, evolution, distribution, and future of life beyond Earth.*

Humanity, as a historically late appearance on the face of the Earth, has long since speculated upon what lies beyond this habitable planet: Are there other solar systems? Are there other Earth-like planets? Is there any kind of life outside Earth? Questions like these are frequently pondered by anyone who has had the chance to stare into a night sky sprinkled with innumerable stars. The major revolution in astronomy during the shift from Egypt and Mesopotamia to Hellenism made the first known clear distinction between Earth as a planet and stars and solar bodies residing outside of it. Still, for a long time after this

cosmological revolution, Earth had remained unchallenged as a cosmic centre and the only planet with life.

Currently, the situation is different; with earth-like exoplanets found and astrobiology firmly established as a field of scientific inquiry, including follow-up missions and instruments under administration and construction. In contemporary knowledge society, the brute fact of a vast cosmos no longer popped and hostile to life on Earth has provoked the increasing concern of mass extinctions, socio-political crises and resource exhaustion brought forth by the rapid degradation of climatic and global conditions on Earth and its solar system. By addressing the concern over humankind's fate in the universe through a wider cosmic perspective, the cosmological dimension of performance may allow for the maintenance of hope through continued **astrobiological** inquiry.

METHODOLOGICAL TENETS

a) Research is Reciprocal; what my community is giving back from my Research!

b) The Research sits inside the Methodology, not Methodology in the Research

c) Why Methodology Matters; the topic, the context, and the researcher!

d) Why Research is not about tools, techniques, or instruments but all about trust, respect, caring, sharing and unity

e) Is Research apolitical?

f) Research is beyond the state, business, and the 'self' and hence, universal

g) Research about not only writing the right thing but acting as 'Righting the rights of people¶

h) Research is not deeper than its Methodology¶

Invoking a deeper evolution of the soul (Source; Chowdhury et al.2022, p. 48).

1. Research is reciprocal
"What my community is giving back from my research!"
Research must be a two-way process that equally benefits researchers and communities. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021) critiques historical research as colonial extraction, advocating instead for decolonizing approaches centering indigenous needs. Wilson (2020) expands this through relational accountability, requiring responsibility to communities, ecosystems, and cosmic relations (Simpson, 2020; Tuck & Yang, 2020). Recent scholarship emphasizes co-creation frameworks where communities' data and outcomes (Latulippe & Klenk, 2023; Walters et al., 2022).

2. The research sits inside the methodology, not the other way around
Methodology is the foundation of research, not an add-on. Wilson (2020) frames research as a "ceremony," prioritizing process, worldview, and relational duties. Smith (2021) insists on methodologies rooted in indigenous epistemologies (Kovach, 2021). Contemporary work stresses embodied methodologies that reject Western fragmentation of knowledge (Battiste, 2021; Moreton-Robinson, 2023).

3. Why methodology matters
"The topic, the context, and the researcher!"
Methodology shapes questions, data collection, and interpretation. Gani and Khan (2021) urge reflexivity to address power dynamics and warn against imposing Western frameworks (Chilisa, 2020). Current studies highlight the critical positionality researchers must confront privilege and colonial legacies (Sium & Desai, 2020; Zavala, 2023).

4. Research is not about tools, but about trust, respect, caring, and unity
Genuine relationships define ethical research. Wilson (2020) and Smith (2021) emphasize respect, reciprocity, and community empowerment (Archibald, 2022). Recent analyses show relational ethics improve data validity and cultural safety (Drawson et al., 2023; Strega & brown, 2023).

5. Is research apolitical?
Research is never neutral. Smith (2021) and gani & khan (2021) expose how it reinforces power structures (tuck & gaztambide-fernández, 2022). New work argues decolonizing research must dismantle institutional racism (manning & byrd, 2024; patel, 2020).

6. Research is beyond the state, business, and the self—hence, universal

Research should serve the collective good, not individual interests. Smith (2021) and wilson (2020) demand centering marginalized communities (corntassel, 2020). Emerging models prioritize planet-centered research that integrates ecological justice (Whyte, 2023; Wildcat et al., 2024).

7. Research is about righting the rights of people, not just writing the right thing

Action-oriented research drives social transformation. Smith (2021) links knowledge to indigenous self-determination (Simpson, 2021). Recent cases show participatory action research (PAR) redresses systemic oppression (Flicker et al., 2023; rahman & khan, 2022).

8. Research is not deeper than its methodology

Methodology determines research depth. Wilson (2020) and smith (2021) tie rigor to indigenous epistemologies (absolon, 2021). Current discourse calls for methodological sovereignty to counter epistemic violence (denzin, 2024; smith et al., 2023).

This chapter expands the idea of performance beyond aesthetics into cosmic belonging, performing with the More-than-Human, ethical reciprocity, and inner healing. It invites performers to listen to ancestors, give and receive ethically, and work toward personal repair. In the works "Woyzeck in Winter," "Lobelia," and "Amber Sky," a complex interplay of more-than-human kinship, divine underworld entities, and state institutions manifests on the human stage. These narratives illustrate how ancestral forces deeply influence the intentions and actions of performers, whose corporeal experiences are often disrupted by the remnants of traumatic historical events. In "Looking Beyond," the relationship between performers and bystanders fosters a mutual ethical exchange that intertwines the observer with the observed. This dynamic transcends the mere act of performance**, invoking a deeper evolution of the soul.** The performers in "Woyzeck in Winter," "Lobelia," and "Amber Sky" respond to the urgent call of the cosmos, presenting themselves as entities that are not only aware of their physical existence but also engaged in a broader cosmic dialogue. They acknowledge their interconnectedness and the responsibilities that arise from this awareness, urging an embrace of cosmic kinship. The performances create a richly woven tapestry of living haecceities unique moments of being where time is not static but rather an unfolding narrative enriched with cosmic imperatives. This tapestry brims with a profound sense of yearning, the presence of lack, responsiveness, and ultimately, satisfaction. Together, it highlights the dual nature of existence that encompasses both peril and nurturing, inviting those involved to engage in a process of reciprocal responsibility. The invitation to participate in this cosmic understanding underscores the importance of considering our collective histories and the influences that shape our identities and interactions. In exploring these themes, these works reflect a broader philosophical inquiry into the nature of being, agency, and the importance of theatrical expressions that reach beyond the human experience. They challenge

audiences to honor their connections with ancestral legacies, the earthly realm, and the greater cosmos, encouraging a collective journey towards understanding and responsibility. (Battista, 2018). The divine acting on human lives is just one of many sources of a performer's more-than-human connectedness. Ways of listening to and giving agency to somatic communalities, industrial structures, economic systems, et cetera, mapping a cosmos of connection with the world beyond living beings, are explored. Selective sensors make choosing of how to listen and respond to the world; they do not work with all worlds but tune in to some and tune out of others. The need to avoid fixation on the sublime or raving at the authoritative horror in the world is identified. Doing so obstructs cosmic connectedness and a zest-for-life by thinking ideology instruments for safeguarding imperial relations with the world, the more-than-human in performing institutions, and the public bureaucracy of information processing agencies. Just as performers as gods but subjected to the blind destiny of others may prepare iterative alterity spirals where followable expectations dissolve and control ceases, performers are called to adopt a cursed condition wrought by fledgling wisdom and cosmic responsibility of listening to ancestors, giving, and receiving ethically, returning to receive the gift, waiting to begin despite exposing themselves to sovereign powers. Each ecstatic moment is followed by calamity and bitterness, as rising interest in the lives of more-than-human kin porod pressures compelling the failure and withdrawal of breathing. It is suspected, however, that a gift un-followed, a listening un-given, hatches reckless fury of the gods.

What You Will Learn

In this session, a three-part talk performance was presented in the Autumn Q&A format, first at the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities: Human Abilities, then at the Institute for the Study of Gender and finally, at a question with intentionality at the Centre for Anthropocene Studies. The first part investigates the ludic construction of thinking in performance from the post-humanist perspective. Watching Michelle Funk as a visual artist interpret the performance of Myeong Nang with both ludic and post-humanist perspectives, more than human-agency (biopolitical and geophysical) in non-touching performance was noticed as well as thinking outside the conscious. In the tradition of epistemology, the mind has often been understood as a Platonic space of ideas displayed in a graph or a physical system, followed by behaviors. Considering the performance of Myeong Nang, it will be argued that the concept of thinking must be enlarged to include what comes close to its animal and inhuman origin. (Battista, 2018) allows pre-theoretical uncertainties to be critically analyzed in terms of non-anthropocentric modes of intellection. A recent piece of choral performance by choreographer Yuya Yasukawa required the research party. The second part of the ludic construction of thinking in performance is not the mechanical exercise of rules and procedures; it is the deliberate act of creating new improvisational opportunities to expand the possibilities of spontaneous interaction. The third act was taken from an early playoff of the experience in action, which is now conceived of as a ritual to

work through stage fright. This rite was observed to see the redundancy of thinking in performance. All parts were performed live and for pre-recorded video clips. A participatory online option enhances the performative aspect of the session; participants are encouraged to type in their questions, comments, and links to useful resources.

> Understand theatre as a spiritual and ecological event. Learn the concept of "inter-being" (Thich Nhat Hanh) in performance. Acknowledge silence, space, and ancestral presence as performers.

Bring out a sense of cosmic totality that extends from the piece of performance to the universe in which we, the audience, are immersed. This in-between participatory event is an invitation for the audience to acknowledge their body, voice, breath, prayers, expressiveness, silence, and stillness, and to connect with the indwelling relationality with the cosmos. It is a performance prayer. Those who perform are invited to hold a simultaneously sacred and uncanny sense of the event; the body and voice heed to an ancient structural materiality that is grounding, enveloping, and forward moving across time and space. The indwelling relationality established with the audience, space, two others, and the outside is akin to Silence, space, breath, voice, and spirit those who appear in this performance transcend the corporeal presence in time and space and relay its participatory immediacy in a more-than-human landscape.

Theatre of a spiritual and ecological event

In the performance, the conception of body is extended to include not only the animate body but also voice, breath, spirit, memory, prayer, and whisper; and to include not only the individual body but also a contingent mesh of bodies that reach to be-as-one with the vast time-space continuum. Such a conception of the body and performability is akin to the 'performance' is the body's capacity to couple with the world, to matter through its being, and to move, speak, feel, and think through its immersed agency. The connection becomes profound when a gesture is understood as a situation that is not only contingent but also has a think-inch touch embedded in the duration of turn-taking and dwelling on the space of the

body and breath! And contingency reaches a more-than-human landscape that extends in both a myriad-colored or spectral, rainbow way and in a black-and-white, pale way. Such a participatory sense of (dis)embodiment is equivalent to attending a Riace bronze statue in which hands, feet, eyes, mouths, hair, and surfaces simultaneously pertain to both the unfathomable fathomable and the fathomless unfathomable (Battista, 2018). Each of the letters, points, syllables, words, and phrases, and breathing in and out, disquiet and stillness, becomes sacred and eerie.

Move from performance-as-display to performance-as-dialogue. Understand Ubuntu: "I am because we are." Explore giving credit, sharing authorship, and collaborative creation.

In Habermas's The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, an academic conversation has been likened to a "speech act" motley crew. Each participant is likened to a punch-drunk gambler being led to the "wee-ing trough": drawn haplessly back to the natural "centre". The ontological question: how and where can an academic argument float in the mind-external world, like the vigour of kettle-drummed hooves nearing or fading out of earshot? Engaging "others'" points of view in a socially mediated environment opens up new possibilities, from a cognitive perspective, a differing ideological stance, and an ontological perspective, a different "world view." Habermas's philosophy insists, "I am because we are". Taking conscious account of this, a meta-question has arisen in performance research: how to acknowledge and negotiate these differing perspectives/publics.

This question is neither original nor obscure: it has received considerable attention since 1998, often coupled with "operative questions". How to become aware of our own "broadening of focus"? How to acknowledge the other's differing view? How to navigate and engage without apprehension (situatedness)? How to "move from defence to dialogue"? How to differentiate the feared "doom" from its nuance? "Giving credit" opens up a Pandora's box; discussions have resulted in vast amounts of points of view and information. Nevertheless, discussion contributes towards designing vehicle systems ("built environments for symbiotic free talking/creative thought"). Regular meeting posts as humbler, anonymous "houses" open out to participants; performers-as-voyagers switch out and in freely with wee-ing troughs; symbols indicate flank travel's non-direct triangulation; mystery guests' non-introductory sheets of verbal colours; indicators wireless-trouvaille; gestures entrain on peripheral touch; a feedback loop-gyrating gallery-monologue interrelationship. It is thus expected that the humblest question of methodology could open up divergent trails better understanding the other.

Acknowledge the harm caused by extractive academia. Embrace silence, humility, and spiritual brokenness. Learn practices for embodied self-reflection.

As a privileged white body from Canada, I acknowledge the irreparable harm caused by extractive academia. I recognize that this harm extends to holistic scholarship, which has been much more dangerous for Indigenous bodies. I write this with humility, reflecting on my ongoing spiritual brokenness. Within this context, I approach the following questions: How can I reclaim Indigenous ways of knowing within Western epistemologies that have caused such harm? How can I embark on research practices that prioritize embodiment, relationality, and humility over relentless extraction? Moreover, how might these practices shape how scholarship is enacted and embodied? As such, this contribution builds on ideas of silence in research and scholarship. Parsing a distinction between silence as subtraction and silence as assemblage, it articulates silence as a spiritual practice for embodied self-reflection (Hetoevėhotohke\u27e Lucchesi, 2019).

Epistemologies are systems or theories of knowledge how we know what we know. They explore the sources, limits, and validity of knowledge in different cultures, philosophies, or disciplines.

The idea for this contribution emerged from a series of conversations with research mentors about how to survive the trauma caused by academia. Often, academia was described as crushing and divorcing from the earth, wherein research became unreflexively an act of relentless extraction. In response, I have been seeking practices that create solidarity with self, others, and the earth, hoping to know that pattern of a world in which extraction is not the default. There have been two streams of practices towards this end: a deep engagement in non-Western modern philosophies on alienation, mediation, and assemblage; and the re-framing of long-held spiritual practices centered on silence.

Drawing on Indigenous philosophies and practices, these streams have coalesced into understanding silence as a key practice for scholarship that is embodied, reflective, and provisional. In a research act, silence as a practice revolves around breath, attention, and contemplation (Battista, 2018). It renders inhabited moments tender and delicate. In this way, silence creates conditions for awkwardness, playfulness, unknowing, generosity, connectedness, and tenderness to become modes of composition. These conditions also sensitize each performance to its local embeddedness: Be still! Feel how firm the ground is; pull off your shoes! Feel a breeze from heaven; seek wisdom from the trees! Listen in! Read the atmosphere of the dark dampness. Turn off your screen! Smell what's in the air. Feel the closeness of silence. Sense the shiver under your skin. Remember what your world is made of and how it hurts, and how none of it is solved by exhausting the earth. Each call is local, tactful, and of the moment, rich in the subtlety of everyday life.
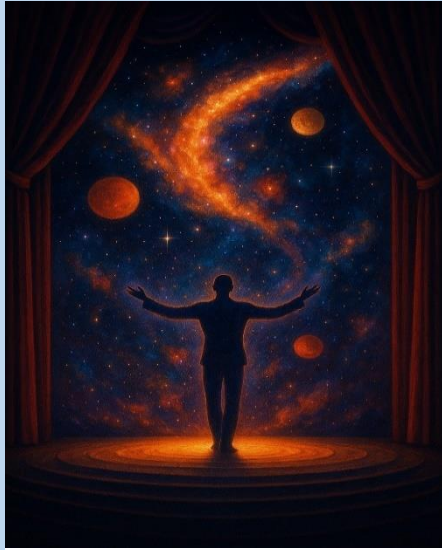
Cosmic Performance

Not too long ago, at a performance event in Legon, Ghana, I felt a presence, signaling an amalgamation of rhythms, bodies, breath, and communication that advocated for histories and knowledges hardly known. An out-of-body, ecstatic audio-visual experience, experienced solo or collectively, become a vessel of desire, imagination, and question, forming a blueprint to navigate our times be it moments or hours or generations of performance investing in questions or no questions, in counsel or no counsel, with cycles and spirals between the now, then and next. However, Legon's oscillations of unwritten rhythms are still unknown to others; as is how this co-presenting transmission of artistic speaking, radiant oscillations, timebinding constructions has resonance elsewhere, outweighing the intervention of the singular performance.

The answer, I believe, might lie in the ephemeral and residues of the research, bringing different decoding and interpretations, revealing the elements and ingredients of the imaginary space invoked in Legon. Beginning with the observation and experience of new modalities of performance taking place on the shore, attempting to transgress these into modes of investigation becomes pertinent. Every action holds **epistemologies** overlooked and alternative histories, styles, and embodiments generating discourses untold. What was taken for granted can be affirmed as being made up of a multitude of reiterations of the same state-class time-object of performance differing through rhythm, space-location, modality, and composition. Following the co-presencing of a singular element, these newly thought artistic interventions mirror cards to broaden dialogues surrounding cosmo-rhythms of the past and now in performance research and artmaking. Outside certain circles of familiarity, how might we find these? More through watching, listening, or reading previous presentations, formed as performative actions? Or through images, sounds, words, reconstructing exactly these into interviews, dialogue, and thinking?

Self-Repairing as Performer Wounds We Carry into the Stage

Performance as a self-repairing mechanism for trauma [Healing process | green]

Unacknowledged Scars

Performance reveals emotional and psychological scars

Lingering Reluctance

Unpreparedness to confront mortality creates unease

Personal Wounds

Performance confronts recurring thoughts and feelings

Intricate Web

Intertwined elements create a rich, complex tapestry

Collective Journey

Shared experience exposes complexities of performance

Self-Repairing as Performer

Unveiling the Unexpressed: The Dynamics of Performance art acts as a conduit for exploring that which remains unacknowledged and unarticulated. Despite various attempts to grapple with it, the act of performance continually brings to light the emotional and psychological scars endured by the performer. The stage holds a magnetic power, attracting the artist toward a process of self-healing and revitalizing the essence of the dancer that once existed within, creating a duality of exhilaration and trepidation. The echoes of past traumas swirl around like ephemeral dust, engulfing the dancer in a tumultuous vortex that threatens to extract the very core of their being.

Within the intricate web of representation, choreography, vulnerability, surrender, and the concept of mortality intricately intertwine to form a rich tapestry. The body in motion bare its delicate frailties, engaging in a celebration marked by pain a disembodiment that calls for deep introspection. Silence envelops the performance arena as adept dancers traverse

this resonant void, shouldering the burden of unvoiced expressions. Newly inducted performers wrestle with the gravity of their heritage, often stumbling in their attempts to fully embrace it, grappling with the pervasive absence that seems to linger just beyond their reach. One dancer retreat into the shadows behind the curtain, while another succumbs tragically to the dust that continues to envelop them. Once again, dust rises, ready to reclaim the fading relics of performance, returning to the inner sanctum for reflection and possible redemption. The applause reverberates into the void, as pale faces emerge from the performance space, returning to the urban landscape with sealed lips, ensnared by an all-encompassing silence.

> Paradoxical means something that seems self-contradictory or illogical at first but may reveal a deeper truth when explored more deeply

This silence becomes a tangible entity, characterized by the dichotomies of presence and absence, deepened by the numbness birthed from shared grief. The dancers' movements are imbued with haunting echoes of pain, with remnants of their past subtly residing in forgotten spaces. Time emerges as a pivotal factor in shaping these sentiments; it is a force that defies denial, evades comprehension, and often feels inescapable. It materializes as an oppressive weight, cloaked in a cacophony of dissonant sounds. This minimalist representation coalesces inward, resisting traditionally accepted interpretations; it epitomizes the condition of physical existence in its rawest form. The lingering reluctance to confront mortality emerges as a looming deadline for the performer who remains unprepared. Death becomes an unavoidable intrigue, an expression that seeks to articulate the confusion and unease stemming from concealed wounds buried beneath the otherwise joyous facade of a dancing body. This insatiable yearning encapsulates the hidden memories and desires that linger just beneath the surface, yearning for acknowledgment. There exists a residue of distorted recollection, stripped of its potential for expression, accompanied by a continuous warmth that envelops an acute sense of absence a sensation that dismisses the laughter and joy often taken for granted. This curvature of intent permits a fleeting glimpse into the essence of a being that yearns for liberation. The passion for dance blossoms from this yearning, yet it remains unwelcome and uninvited. Consequently, the performance becomes a collective journey, shared among all present. Those who witness it comment on the tension of wildness that **paradoxically** finds itself restrained, exposing the complexities of performance as an experience that is both sacred and daunting. Amid this introspective phase, silence assumes the role of a revered teacher. A presence reminiscent of the Amazonian takes the stage, infused with a sacred authority to convey the inexpressible, symbolizing that which transcends conventional modes of communication. This language-less drive unfolds through the

medium of dance, inviting explorations and inquiries into the realms of identity and existence. To summarize, performance embodies the intricacies inherent in existence, an ongoing conversation intertwined with vulnerability, memory, and the quest for meaning amid life's chaotic complexities. These themes warrant meticulous scrutiny, not solely for their artistic expressions but also for the deeply personal stories they encapsulate. The realities that unfold atop the stage resonate deeply with both the audience and the performers, weaving together a rich tapestry that interlaces silence, movement, and the quest for self amid the reverberations of history and corporeal experience.

Exercise

A personal account in the form of a tribute to an art researcher who seems able to transcend the academic. A tribute to someone, or something, who is nearest to connecting with the cosmic totality through the performance of anomalous sonorities throughout the world. A performance where the daughter recited ancestral chants to her mother in spite of her dementia. A statement that even the porous boundary of the living and the dead should not deter performers from trying to connect with the totality. Given the pivotal shift in a life shaped almost entirely as a scholar-writer-researcher, what better way to commemorate the artistic-intellectual journey than with a performance? Not writing, or performing writing, shaped as a letter to or conversation with the deceased but sharing a psychoactive charged sonic research journey of field-recordings, investigations, and connections that led to a singular performance on two occasions, with independent sites, circumstances, and stipulations.

What prompted this thinking is the reading of a tribute written by L Carroll (2019) to the sound artist and performer, who had passed. Carroll's ceaseless searching for "magic" is congruent to what the daughter in this account is undertaking for Sandy Stone. How art research can transcend scholarly conventions to spill into creativity, emotion, and the sacred seems most vividly achieved here. To reconnect with the loss, to bridge the gulf between the living and dead, and let the impact, wisdom, and cosmic curiosity continue connecting electrons, is a most potent and beautiful task and the very essence of artistic research (now termed performance research).

Journal about a time when performance helped you face a personal wound

Art is a powerful medium that allows us to express our thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It can take many forms, from visual, audio, text, and beyond. For me, performance is a form of art that has allowed me to confront recurring thoughts and feelings constructively. For this task, I wanted to explore the therapeutic relationship between performance and my experience of living through trauma. I have been compelled to find out if turning to theatre offers coping mechanisms and insights, or if it just serves as an unhelpful hereditary occupation. My mum endured a violent marriage a broken man crippled by drinking, work injuries and unprocessed trauma who resorted to uncontrollable violence on an innocent

woman. The violence drove my mum to find work, and her eventual reaction from my father was to abuse her there, too. Simply put with few means of escape, she retreated into the barrel of a rum. I was the eldest child, early teens, when all this unfolded. I went to a neighbouring town's alternative school kids were believed to be uneducable or troublesome, both of which I undoubtedly was. Due to excessive volatility and violence in my side of the family, I developed an eating disorder as a coping mechanism, not just with my mum's drunkenness but everyday issues: impending exams, sexuality, reassurance. I lost a good deal of weight, and my family was brought to task. My mum agreed to therapy, which she lied about attending rather than facing a court summons that would see her arrested after a drunken altercation with the police.

In a time of huge upheaval and change, I put on a solo show after our annual school production. It was a series of 20-minute pieces that I had been working on, called A Spinning Top. The presentation wasn't great, but the catharsis was profound. Just as tears fell for my idea of family in an improvisation with an image of me on stage with a bleeding head, mum in handcuffs, rocking in a chair, I was surprised and overwhelmed with empathy for the ensemble playing my parents in their true form. Yet they hadn't sat with me for five years. This was a catharsis in which the unconscious was released through the physical body. Relief gave me power and strength as all seemed to collapse. Defensive mechanisms pulled back and stood whilst fixing my mum, having accepted that I couldn't save her or rewrite their history.

2.4 Conclusion

Chapter Two explored the question: *What does it mean to perform with the cosmos, not just for an audience?* This chapter redefined performance as a cosmological act an event of connection, consciousness, and reciprocity. Rather than viewing the cosmos as a distant abstraction, it was approached as a living field of relational energy, where human and non-human agents co-create meaning, memory, and movement (Chowdhury et al., 2024, pp. 41–47). Drawing on decolonial, Indigenous, and spiritual paradigms, the chapter emphasized that performance is not just about action; it is about *attunement*. To perform *with* the cosmos is to enter a sacred rhythm of listening, returning, and repairing. The "Wings of Reciprocity" Love, Listening, Memory, Gratitude, Return offered an ethical and affective model to ground this cosmological engagement (Chowdhury et al., 2024, p. 40). This reframes performance as not simply aesthetic, but ontological; it becomes a way of being, healing, and relating to the world.

The notion of *self-repairing* as a performer added another layer, reminding us that performance is also a process of inner healing. The wounds we carry, personal, historical, and ancestral, become part of the script. Silence is no longer absence; it becomes a sacred teacher (Chowdhury et al., 2024, pp. 62–63). Ultimately, Chapter Two argued that cosmic

performance is an ethical act rooted in humility, reciprocity, and relational presence. It challenges extractive performance practices by positioning the performer not as a narrator of spectacle but as a caretaker of collective space. In connecting with cosmic totality, performers step into a practice of decolonial remembrance and embodied justice. As the chapter concludes, performance with the cosmos is not only possible it is necessary. In a fragmented world, it offers a path toward reconnection: with the land, with each other, and with the sacred.

Suggested Readings

To further explore the themes of cosmic performance, relational ethics, and posthuman spirituality in this chapter, the following readings are recommended:

1. Cosmic Consciousness and Complexity

- Theise, N. (2023). *Notes on Complexity: A Scientific Theory of Connection, Consciousness, and Being*. Spiegel & Grau.
  (Explores how interdependence and emergence define life and the cosmos—a foundational perspective for cosmic performance.)
- Schulz, D. (2024). *Sacred Naturalism and Cosmic Unity: Seeking Harmony in the Midst of Chaos. Process Studies, 53(2)*, 275–294.
  (Analyzes how disorder and unpredictability are sacred aspects of nature and performance.)

2. Performance, Spirituality, and the More-than-Human

- Battista, S. (2018). *Posthuman Spiritualities in Contemporary Performance: Politics, Ecologies and Perceptions*.
  (A key text linking performance to ecology, perception, and spiritual agency beyond the human.)
- Power, C., & Edelman, J. (2024). *Contemplation in Action: The Meditations as Performance. Performance, Religion, and Spirituality, 6(1)*.
  (Discusses contemplative practices as performance and their alignment with cosmic rhythm.)

3. Indigenous Epistemologies and Ubuntu Philosophy

- Chowdhury, J. S., Wahab, H. A., & Saad, M. R. M. (2023). *Ubuntu Philosophy for the New Normalcy: Assimilating Ubuntu Spirit into Self*. Palgrave Macmillan.

(Presents the JR Self-Repairing Model and Ubuntu as a basis for ethical, decolonial performance research.)

- Van Breda, A. D. (2019). *Developing the Concept of Ubuntu as African Theory for Social Work Practice.*
  (Extends Ubuntu as a framework for relational ethics, vulnerability, and care in scholarly work.)

4. Performance, Silence, and Healing

- Gardner, F. (2022). *Embedding Spirituality and Religion in Social Work Practice: A Socially Just Approach.* Routledge.
  (Offers insight into the role of stillness, vulnerability, and spirituality in ethical practice.)
- Iyer, P. (2014). *The Art of Stillness: Adventures in Going Nowhere.* Simon & Schuster.
  (Celebrates the power of silence and inward stillness in a hyperactive world.)

5. Artistic Assemblage and Cosmic Aesthetics

- Arnauld, C. S. (2014). *Cosmic Connections.* Balboa Press.
  (Explores how human creativity echoes the structure and story of the cosmos.)

- Mirčev, A. (2024). *The Poetics of Performance Diagrams*. Cambridge University Press.
  (Introduces performance as a living diagram of temporal and spatial relations.)

Reflexive Terms
Cosmic & Spiritual Reflection

- **Cosmic attunement** – tuning one's inner being to the rhythm of the cosmos
  - **Sacred stillness** – embracing silence as a teacher and healer
- **More-than-human awareness** – recognizing the presence and agency of non-human beings
  - **Breath as offering** – seeing breath not only as survival but as a gift to the universe
- **Relational reverberation** – how one's actions echo through human and non-human relations
- **Embodied sacredness** – experiencing spirituality through the moving, feeling body

Ubuntu & Ethical Relationality

- **Ubuntu consciousness** – "I am because we are" as a lived performance ethic
  - **Decolonial listening** – attending to voices silenced by dominant academic norms
  - **Circle of reciprocity** – giving and receiving knowledge, presence, or care without hierarchy
  - **Ancestral presence** – acknowledging invisible influences shaping the performer/researcher
  - **Vulnerability as method** – letting openness, not control, guide your research/practice

Performance as Healing

- **Stage as wounds cape** – the performance space as a site of embodied trauma and healing
  - **Ecology of rehearsal** – viewing the rehearsal room as a living relational system
  - **Silence as co-performer** – allowing the unsaid and the paused to perform meaning
  - **Healing gesture** – movement or stillness that repairs emotional or spiritual fractures
- **Theatre of repair** – performative practice that invites mending over mastery

Reflexive Voice (Journal/Research Prompts)

- "What does it mean to breathe with the cosmos during a performance?"

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CHAPTER 3

BEING A KNOWLEDGE DEMOCRATIZER- PRACTITIONER, AND PERFOMER

Abstract

This chapter repositions theater as a radical space for knowledge democratization, where wisdom is not transmitted top-down but co-created through collective experience. Challenging hierarchical binaries such as "expert" and "informant," it advocates for performed epistemologies that honor oral histories, community memory, and embodied ways of knowing. Drawing on the principles of co-learning and co-authorship, the chapter explores how performance can restore suppressed knowledge systems and foster dialogic, inclusive pedagogies. Theater becomes not merely a site of representation, but a living curriculum where communities shape content and form in acts of **shared meaning-making.**

Keywords: Knowledge democratization, performed epistemology, oral history, co-authorship, community-based theatre, embodied knowledge, decolonial pedagogy, playback theatre, co-learning, theatre as education.

Focus:

How can theatre democratize knowledge and restore collective wisdom?

Introduction

What You Will Learn

Understand knowledge as co-created, not owned.

Rethink the roles of "expert" and "informant."

Use theatre to revive hidden or suppressed knowledge systems.

Subsections

3.0 Conceptualizing Knowledge Democracy

3.1 Community as Curriculum

3.2 Performed Epistemology

3.3 Oral Histories in Theatre

3.4 Co-learning and Co-writing the Script

What You Will Learn

Your interest is perhaps sparked by an enduring, even paradoxical question: How do we teach a subject, a discipline, an area of specialization that is situated in a broader civic space that we must share with people we will not teach? Nonetheless, if the question is approached from another angle, it reveals an opportunity for exploring and learning how a community fosters and supports a teacher's professional development, and in what part of her practice this learning is manifested. In this essay, the exploration of what kind of

community is valuable to teaching is done through personal accounts, along with what ideas are generated from these accounts.

One could also think of the narrative as a series of conceptual areas or a manifold of perspectives insightful for understanding community and inclusion through democratic practices. There are nine discussions: 1) the dichotomous thinking that underscores much educational practice and discourse in this culture, and its reaffirmations; 2) schema/structures for thinking and practice as politically neutral entities; 3) the community as a structured construct; 4) delusions of externality; 5) delusions of internality; 6) ideal outcomes for a healthy community foci for assessing one's practices; 7) hedging practices – the defenses against tenets of the paradigm; 8) a contingency plan for conducting community practices; and 9) considerations for broader and deeper applications of this work. In writing this narrative, the initial purposes of addressing a question and exploring some thoughts were expanded into a meta-discourse. In noting that understanding community is both familiar and strange, one recognizes the dialectics of knowledge and understanding, of use and design, of performer and flow, of roles and scripts. Having been learned in part through insights generated from applying ideas offered in the works of others, the narrative lives its talk of communities and approaches knowledge and its expression as shared and mutual. In closing, it should also be noted that this sharing and mutuality should be "made part of the game in hand" that is to say, they should also be acted upon. For this reason, the writing itself cannot be more than a snapshot of ideas, as it should also be part of a community of thinking and reflection open to construction through diverse interpretations and actions.

Understand knowledge as co-created, not owned.

To democratize knowledge, we must first understand what knowledge is if we still cling to the notion of ownership of knowledge, it puts us in an antagonistic and adversarial position with others in society. To counteract and deconstruct this cancer, we need to engage in creative pragmatism to develop processes whereby knowledge is viewed as something that is co-created rather than owned (Elliott & Pedler, 2018). Knowing includes inputs by individuals to reach a shared understanding. OR knowledge is not pre-existent, it is generated on the way, and knowledge is not about ownership or possession, but rather a continuous and ever-lasting pathway of shared perspectives and understandings. All of us engage in ongoing dialogues with our process over the years, every one of us undergoes antagonistic and defensive motions concerning notions of ownership and control on knowledge. We should grapple with these dilemmas as an ongoing and open praxis, and dancing this dance, we cling to the hope that we may rely on an understanding of knowledge in the terms not of property but instead as a flow of stories and events without ownership. Living by this notion of knowledge opens courteous possibilities to different

value systems and needs to exchange inputs and perspectives; this demystifies and mitigates exclusive knowledge production processes and monopolistic business interests for profit; here, design practices accommodating shared involvement, creativity, and collective innovation hold special value. Arguably, this understanding of knowledge may be unsettling, even scary, as it redefines, if not dismantles, the ground of power and control, generally believing in adherence to which societies evolve, develop, and flourish. However, not only is this trembling hope implicitly shared by engaged designers and knowledge producers worldwide, but in the context of future shaping, it may also contain the most valuable vehicle for active participation in the future of humankind.

Rethink the roles of "expert" and "informant."

In their canonical work on large collaborative projects, de Sola Pool and Kochen presented a series of hypothetical scenarios, one of which is a wide-based vote on how to allocate $10 million for a major cultural project in a metropolis. The experts appear several months ahead of time in the question-and-answer sessions organized by the chairs of the vote. Answers written by some experts and presented collectively appear a few weeks before the election. Many citizens and experts alike worry that no one will take the time to pay attention to the labor pains and that although a great number of decisions will not be made, others will. This poses a dilemma for the majority of bass who believe it is a good idea to fund the project. Should they set the expert committee to work on background material, pay attention to the opinion-speaking news media of the press, and have dialogues on the Charter and its implications? Or, ought they simply wait to see what the highly organized experts and their foundation and newspaper sponsors will roll out for objective assessment? The **democratization of knowledge demands** a rethinking of the roles of "expert" and

> **THE DEMOCRATIZATION**
> of knowledge demands a rethinking of the roles of "expert" and "informant." Basically, according to (S. Pfister, 2011), an "expert" is considered qualified to give informed advice on a topic. To be an "expert," a person must be sophisticated in the subject matter, have field-tested judgment, and have read the accumulations of analysis in times past and other information relevant to the topic at hand**.**

"informant." Basically, according to (S. Pfister, 2011), an "expert" is considered qualified to give informed advice on a topic. To be an "expert," a person must be sophisticated in the subject matter, have field-tested judgment, and have read the accumulations of analysis in times past and other information relevant to the topic at hand. In this context, qualifications go beyond formal schooling. Hence, ordinary people or laypersons can be experts. Rather, the expertise definition should talk about the policy context of expertise and what constitutes expertise in that context. Attention fouls have developed in the communication between "experts" and laypeople. The attention foul of expertise may be that only the educated or otherwise credentialed need apply to sit at the policy table as

simultaneously firms commandeer citizens' projects. Similar to Harris's dialogue session on capping a local landfill site, the city brought in experts to open the session for long slides and chat detailing the sparingly redacted energy plan. Despite open invitations for lay questions, several persistent residents' questions merely drew assertions of past trust equity, earning Harris' lamentation of being "opened to death to the most vocal or visible" (Waters, 2018). Waters further notes that there are social conditions necessary for ordinary people to turn communications foul back on the experts for attention equity.

Use theatre to revive hidden or suppressed knowledge systems.

In this section, it is proposed that community-based theatre can be used to reveal hidden knowledge systems, open up dialogues about what these knowledges mean and how they are mobilized, and empower a quest for more inclusive, diverse mutualism. There is a case study of how culture, education, and social work in a foundation in 2014–2015 resisted, contested, and refocused activism towards the knowledge de-democratization agenda of the neoliberal state in Hungary through participative research-based theatre. It is also maintained, based on the findings of this research, that community-based theatre has competencies and advantages in knowledge democracy practice, and suggestions for further development are provided. It is strongly argued that knowledge is a meaning system based on experiences made through the action of individuals and communities, and assigned different values according to which experiences are passed on, shared, accumulated, or rejected. Knowledge may be rendered hidden and discarded as 'useless', dormant, or unspoken because these meanings are not validated but rather stigmatized by the official knowledge systems (Moschou & Rodriguez Anaya, 2016). Hidden knowledge systems may nurture a kind of wisdom without which many potentialities remain unclosed and silenced and unheard voices continue to languish in oblivion (Chandler Haedicke, 1998). Assumptions regarding hidden knowledge systems may provide communities with resilience and the feeling of belonging. Using theatre to revive these knowledge systems here means opening a space of dialogue about what these knowledges are, how are they expressed and mobilized, and how these knowledges may empower a quest for more inclusive, diverse mutualism. It is also hoped that these findings could be relevant beyond the case of the foundation.

Being a Knowledge Democratizer-Practitioner, and Performer

The environment in which the knowledge economy is situated has changed dramatically. This change has emerged not only from its success but also from other complex factors. The possible coexistence of a broadening range of disparate knowledge

systems raises important questions about their democratization questions about the continued expansion of the internet, the impact of war, the redistribution of resources amidst growing politically effective opulence, and the rise of an entertaining yet exploitative media. At the same time, knowledge systems themselves are changing rapidly, whether in the form of new "actors" in the creation of medicine or through increasing economic competition driven by knowledge creation.

Most generally of all, the whole epistemic environment feels politically ripe for change. The challenge is to understand how to effect this change, and in front of which actors. Nevertheless, some of what happened elsewhere can be seen as potentially relevant. It appears to be a timely moment for understanding processes of knowledge democratization, or rather of re-orientating and re-thinking currently at play. Suggestions for knowledge democratization are offered in the joint policy-friendly academic sector. A community of practice involving a range of actors skilled at knowledge democratization should be formed. The idea of 'knowledge democracy' is still in the process of being formed and lacks meaningful and lasting influence. In many cases, it appears morally problematic, illogical, or based on mistaken models of action. This is not just a debate over terminology or language. Given the current concern with the state of knowledge systems and their environment, the concept is of interest. To enable broad academic engagement with the concept, its assumptions and implications are explicated. The notion of knowledge democratization is proposed as an alternative framework for thinking about knowledge systems and their environment in a manner that is both desirable and plausible.

Academic performance, in general, and science in particular have been, for a long time, the most formalized in-thought and -sense human life field, least embedding any autonomic and rational changes. Only within the last half century this field had managed to opt out from formalized oblivion by declaring the need for a relatively and, hence, sensible life promotion to the habitual obstinacy of lovers (Banda & Nzabahimana, 2023).

Introduction to Knowledge Democratization

The unprecedented evolution of what, why, and how of knowledge in practice, enhanced by the unquestionably complexified and inflected actual knowledge dynamics, which obviously could not go unnoticed by the scientific and education community. Moreover, the current process of Global Knowledge Democratization invites to wider public engagement in these rapidly evolving Knowledge processes and products. The harsh struggle for domination of knowledge among altruistic (open access, knowledge commons) and egotistic actors (forstanding, paywalls) seems to distinguish the real socio-cultural values behind such digital technological achievements

highlighted by big (and big data) knowledge, which normally are assumed to be non-negotiable for all (Shtaltovna, 2018). Thus, this newly emergent paradigm of Global Knowledge Democratization is being presented, framing its theory, actors, content, and processes. Some empirical examples of practice, confirmed by systemic testing, are presented as a field of application for inventive science in considering Knowledge democratization motives and instruments.

The intensively changing contemporary landscape of Knowledge across all of its characterizations and lifecycles has provoked a larger public engagement in struggles for asymmetric power positions. At first sight, this seemingly bizarre contest is interpreted as a Union concern for a public common to be shared by all in a participative and constructive tone. However, behind the self-declared altruistic agenda of democratization, there is a surprisingly powerful and technologically advanced preparation initiated by small, down-to-earth forces of actors for standing, exclusivity, and closure of Knowledge access, availability, and usage. Not surprisingly, such thoughts turned the academic more in humanist and mercenary to be violently fired at with an antibody zeal unknown since a productive human essence had been first deliberated. In reality, the film imitators of these representative scenes have had as an example the disillusion Ary fate of the most capitalized in history and space (Mancipe Flechas, 2009). There is an abundance of literature that supports the contention that education is a political activity. This literature also suggests that schools, at least in liberal democracies, are responsible for preparing children for citizenship and participating in a participatory democracy. However, how this is accomplished has been contentious since the establishment of institutional schooling. Adequate educational opportunities for all children, irrespective of their family background, sex, race, religion, or ability, have not yet been fully realized despite decades of initiatives.

Democratization is the process of making systems, institutions, or societies more inclusive, participatory, and accountable ensuring equal access to power, rights, and decision-making for all individuals.

To take one example, certain policies put enormous pressure on school districts across the United States to adhere to a standardized testing regime. In the wake of these policies, many school districts opted for so-called "curriculum alignment" by narrowing what was studied to either subjects mandated by the regime or, in some cases, even particular questions on a particular test. Often lessons became 'drill and kill' exercises, where the test preparation material was presented to students, answered in beats as a whole class, or taken as paper-pencil exams. The culmination of such pressures has been a system of high-stakes state testing that ranks schools and school districts by their students' scores. In essence, schools are competing with one another in a race to get their students to perform better than the others

and to avoid being declared a failure. Schools that do poorly and that are deemed failing can be subject to restructuring from the top down, often with dismal consequences for existing staff and students.

Focus

We explore knowledge democratization activities for educational work on democracy and critical media literacy. The design, implementation, and reflection on the creation of a publicly accessible 6-part video series on media literacy are presented, involving students as the main actors, which took place during the seminar "Media Literacy in a Democracy" at Sofia University in the spring of 2021. The seminar aimed to foster students' learning and critical thinking on media literacy and democracy in Bulgaria while facilitating students' visualization of the knowledge democratization process. Group discussions on academic literature and the production and editing of the video series contributed to the development of critical thinking, teamwork, and creativity skills. Participants reflect on how to democratize knowledge in and through educational endeavors, considering feel-good and artifact-based aspects of lifetime learning. Related concepts and ideas, such as knowledge co-production, a community of practice, knowledge dissemination, university engagement, the construction of the individual and knowledge, citizen science, and agency, are addressed and problematized.

Knowledge democratization is defined as a process of knowledge co-analysis, co-production, and co-design, aiming to reflect on how knowledge is produced, who has access, and what its value is: knowledge generation is situated in social contexts and causes social effects; public understanding and comprehension of knowledge are asymmetric; knowledge is indispensable but insufficient for social change (Collins et al., 2019). Knowledge is produced through social practices in different forms; its value depends on someone's power and obligations towards it. Knowledge democratization aims to promote development pathways that are more socially just and achievable. Knowledge democratization is usually considered expert-driven and domain-specific. It transforms them into infotainment forms and lowers their epistemic prevalence, thus reducing their prosocial effectiveness, while allowing various counterfactual imaginaries that spur public caveats so that what must be commonly known becomes the topic of inquiry.

How can theatre democratize knowledge and restore collective wisdom?

Democratize knowledge

Theatre has been used as a tool for social change, community building, education, and social justice for centuries. There is a wealth of traditions around the world many of which are being practiced, developed, and refined today within communities where theatre processes are being used for community development, organizing, education, and empowerment. Theatre can help a community heal from traumatic events, articulate community identity and values, begin dialogues on contentious issues, motivate audiences to action, and generate excitement and involvement

in community used to connect to power, theatre understanding chasms Anaya, 2016). community- frequently theatre systems community.

projects. A tool that has been diverse, marginalized voices can also help form bridges of across seemingly intractable (Moschou & Rodriguez The sustainability of based theatre systems is threatened, however, if those are imported 'top-down' to a

> # The purpose of democratization
>
> The purpose of democratization is to ensure inclusive governance, equal participation, and accountability in political, social, and institutional structures. It empowers citizens, protects human rights, reduces authoritarian control, and fosters transparent decision-making, creating a fairer society where diverse voices shape policies and outcomes that affect their lives.

Grassroots organizational 'professional' funded, and money and a into the not leaders, power struggles

projects often have little structure, while many projects are highly structured, organized. With an influx of reintegration of theatre leaders community as participants and there exists the threat of both within the community and the

dismantling of the entire theatre project. On the professional side, people may become either appalled at the community's lack of professionalism and discipline or completely complacent and above the community. The trick is in the transition and continual interaction between the two communities, so that each brings to the table strengths and weaknesses (Chandler Haedicke, 1998).

Framed by these questions and drawing on theatrical research, this section identifies a series of approaches taken together, a dramaturgy of knowledge democratization that offer a roadmap for community-based theatre practitioners to democratize theatre practice and

empower communities to employ it as a mode of knowledge generation, transmission, and governance. These approaches are creative, practice-based, and process-oriented, rather than theoretical; they embrace the situatedness of knowledge and its ongoing democratization within unequal power relations. Potential and operationalized methodological approaches to enact each dramaturgical strategy are provided. This responds to the call for an intervention into dominant narratives of knowledge generation. These narratives reflect epistemic injustice in the systems, modes, meanings, and structures through which knowledge is produced and disseminated, resulting in an inequitable distribution of knowledge (and with it, power).

Conceptualizing Knowledge Democracy

Knowledge democracy has yet to be recognized as a fully developed theory or tradition, and its exploration remains limited. Various authors, spanning theoretical frameworks such as feminist, cultural, communicative, neoliberal market, republican cultural, and political economy, have introduced and debated themes regarding democratization as a form of social emancipation. Historically, the social construction of knowledge democracy reveals that before formal academic analysis emerged, citizens engaged with it largely through media and active participation in public life.

Definition: Knowledge Democracy

Knowledge Democracy is a transformative framework that upholds the equal value of diverse ways of knowing, including Indigenous, experiential, spiritual, emotional, oral, visual, and performative knowledge systems. It calls for the democratization of knowledge production, validation, and access, rejecting the dominance of Western, text-based, and elitist epistemologies.

"Knowledge democracy demands an understanding that knowledge exists in many forms oral, visual, embodied, and relational and these are valid alongside academic text-based knowledge."
— Hall & Tandon, 2017, p. 6
Core Elements of Knowledge Democracy
Plurality of Knowledge Systems
Recognizes that universities are not the only knowledge producers. Communities, elders, artists, healers, and grassroots practitioners generate valuable knowledge.
"The bird cannot fly with one wing of credentialed academia; it must balance this with lived knowledge, oral histories, and community visions."
— Chowdhury et al., 2022, p. 18
Knowledge as Co-creation, not Ownership
Resists viewing knowledge as private property or static content. Emphasizes participatory, relational, and iterative processes of knowledge-making.

*"To democratize knowledge, we must first understand
knowledge as something co-created, not owned… a flow of stories and
events without ownership."*
— Elliott & Pedler, 2018, in Chowdhury et al., 2022
Epistemic Justice and Decolonial Integrity
*Demands justice in how knowledge is produced, who gets to
produce it, and how it is shared or suppressed. Seeks to correct
historical erasures and extractive research practices.*
*"Epistemic justice demands dismantling colonial hierarchies
that have delegitimized Indigenous and community knowledge systems
for centuries."*
— Fricker, 2007; Smith, 2021
*"Positionality is an ethical endorsement… It is a call to
action."*
— Jadallah, 2025, p. 230
Performance, Praxis, and Embodiment
*Sees performance, storytelling, and community rituals as valid
epistemological methods.*
*"Theatre is not just a site of expression but of ethical
becoming… Performance becomes a gnoseological act."*
— Chowdhury et al., 2022, p. 49
Democratizing the Expert–Informant Divide
*Challenges the binary of expert and layperson, proposing a
dialogic model of shared learning and mutual respect.*
*"The democratization of knowledge demands a rethinking of the
roles of 'expert' and 'informant.'"*
— Pfister, 2011; Waters, 2018
Knowledge as Public Good
*Advocates for open access, community participation, and the
redistribution of knowledge benefits.*
*"Knowledge democracy is not just about access it's about
equity, dignity, and justice in the entire research process."*
— Moschou & Rodriguez Anaya, 2016; Hall & Tandon, 2017

Knowledge democracy is the practice of valuing and engaging with multiple, culturally situated forms of knowledge through ethical, reciprocal, and inclusive processes. It is a response to the historical marginalization of Indigenous, non-Western, and community knowledge systems, aiming to build a more just, relational, and participatory knowledge world. The expansion and globalization of civil society, alongside the emergence of the non-profit sector, including labor unions, NGOs, social movements, and civic groups with independent missions, are pivotal elements of this development. These civil liberties serve as platforms where diverse social actors interact, contributing to the democratization of knowledge access in pursuit of justice. The public sphere tradition has been solidified through an interconnected network of various institutions and channels, encompassing both

formal and informal cultural expression spaces. Citizens have actively contributed to creating a shared mass culture that challenges elite-driven, top-down processes of cultural and knowledge commodification. Additionally, cultural globalization has fostered a critical discourse regarding monopolies on knowledge, leading to a de-territorialized space where numerous voices articulate the project of social emancipation on both regional and international fronts. As this unfolds, tensions surrounding the potential for new social orders emerge in the process. Knowledge democracy can be defined as a framework that emphasizes the equitable distribution and democratization of knowledge creation and access, allowing for diverse perspectives and contributions from multiple actors in society (Bensaude-Vincent, 2017). Routledge. be three analytical grids through which knowledge democracy could be explored at least theoretically. There are different **epistemic communities** in different cultures and political regimes, which focus on methodological and axiological issues that are relevant to the study of how the citizenry is socialized and accepts knowledge monopolies. It has also been argued that there are socio-institutional contexts of interaction where the vestiges of knowledge democracy are found, such as civil societies, social networks, media, association, civil liberties and labor movements, and the forms of cultural participation, as much as artistic expressions of cultural emancipation and the claim of rights to culture, care, and nature. Finally, it has been suggested that it would be interesting to explore in the field of political economy how the commodification of culture and knowledge production takes place (Mancipe Flechas, 2009).

3.1 Community as Curriculum

Knowledge democratization represents a commitment to providing individuals with the opportunity to gain power and a voice regarding knowledge, encompassing its creation, utilization, and dissemination. Research into widely implemented knowledge democratization initiatives strategies aimed at reforming or enhancing public research policies, curricula, or teaching methods has revealed persistent structural or institutional obstacles that hinder genuine democratization efforts. The question arises: how do these barriers manifest and either facilitate or impede democratization in specific contexts? In a 300-level course titled Reclaiming Democracy, the objective was to embark on a distinct form of inquiry. The intention was to encourage students to reflect on elements of public life that warranted reclamation, to introduce them to various social critiques that uncover the underlying motivations for such actions, and ultimately to provide them with opportunities to formulate their critiques. The course was structured around two units of study. The first unit was specifically focused on exploring what it might entail to reclaim community, while the second aimed to promote dialogue on engaging in community reclamation through active participation in a group project. Students were organized into small groups and tasked with selecting a community they felt was deserving of reclamation. Beginning with the first unit, the goal was to guide students in examining the lived experiences associated with their chosen communities. To help focus these discussions,
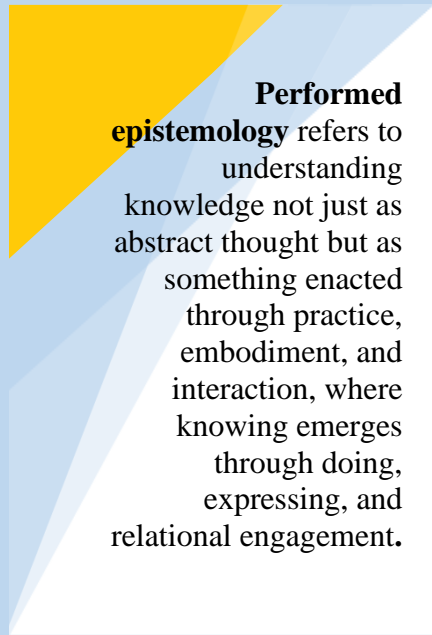
students were presented with readings and questions designed to acknowledge the possibility of multiple, sometimes conflicting, communities. It was assumed that exploring questions about communities deserving of reclamation might help students articulate notions of community that had dogged them throughout their lives, and perhaps even give voice to feelings of isolation or lack of belonging (Bloch-Schulman et al., 2015).

3.2 Performed Epistemology

This understanding of **epistemology** is based on recent work in sociology and philosophy of science. Whereas something like a Kuhnian "paradigm" is largely an outcome of consensus, it is tenable to speak of computational models of community and consensus without assuming that something like a "wisdom of the crowd" emerges. Such a view matches more recent sociological work in which communities are analyzed in terms of their reconstruction and implementation of living practices. As precomputations of that which is already computable, practices must be understood as more than just procedures. They are always located in concrete historical situations and influenced by a variety of heterogeneous elements, none of which can be enacted for long alone. They are also political and are defined in terms of what is to be done as well as understood. This can take a variety of forms, but in all cases, "the problem of definition becomes a problem of definition in practice."

This focus on doing, or "performativity," is necessary not only to gain purchase on community and democracy but also to account for the mysterious emergence of a stable political order (Aczel, 2002). It is an elaboration of practice theory, which avoids appearing as a functionalist story of institutions shaping the action of individuals. Although analytical elaboration inevitably entails a certain reification, performance is empirically inscribed and hence more protean. Thus, it can be analyzed in terms of rules, as structural linguistics does, or as a result of enclosure through stylizations of space and time.

> **Performed epistemology** refers to understanding knowledge not just as abstract thought but as something enacted through practice, embodiment, and interaction, where knowing emerges through doing, expressing, and relational engagement**.**

There are also accounts of seeing as spatial expressions of doing, focusing on the subset of practices responsible for the conception of knowledge and representation. But it is the focus on doing that that is basic to understanding epistemic communities. These are often defined in terms of language and the common-sense knowledge therein, as identities that implicitly define the controversial. This focus is then translated into theory in computational terms. Performed epistemology is only part of a

broader focus on systematic knowledge practices and models thereof. Performance remains distinctive because it cannot be aligned with realism, relativism, or constructivism.

3.3 Oral Histories in Theatre

Embodiment, as Kate Benjamin (2015) notes, is the process through which meaning becomes lived and visible in performance. This idea is powerfully illustrated in works like Living Truthfully Based on Hearsay, a theatrical project developed as part of the PhD research of an academic playwright known for transforming oral history interviews into stage performances. In such works, the playwright does not claim ownership over the narratives but instead positions herself as a transmitter of "truthful" voices, privileging the words of her subjects over interpretive analysis. "I scrupulously attempt to let my sources speak for themselves so that the point of view of what is happening is that of the people and not of an interpretive analyst," she explains a statement that encapsulates her dramaturgical ethic of listening. Her conception of truth is not filtered through literary or historical texts but emerges from documentary engagement with lived voices, preserving their complexity without distortion. However, this approach to using oral histories as "truth" becomes even more nuanced in later projects, such as the Disney piece, where questions of authorship, authenticity, and narrative control continue to surface.

> Oral histories in theatre capture personal narratives, memories, and lived experiences of performers, directors, and communities preserving intangible cultural knowledge, performance traditions, and collective memory through spoken storytelling and dialogue.

Our understanding--'social justice' and 'neo-liberalism' are interchangeable, not binary (or binary in the surface). Ideologically both these concepts are layered, embedded. These two are just \lipped around: then and now. For us, social justice is here to maximize the neoliberal agenda by the people who are working in the ground, social scientists are in particular. When a post-positivist scholar is talking about social justice, next to it, another critical or anti-colonial anthropologist's research aims to establish social justice-are both same? We as novice become puzzled. Does it make any difference in terms of application or philosophical root? Or only textual? These questions give us a new dimension when the first author asked that

question to Māori philosopher Linda Smith. And of course, another reason for our thinking.

Chowdhury et al., 2020, p. 283[2]

Theatre emerges as a radical counter-practice to the institutionalized discourse of social justice, especially where such discourse has been absorbed into neoliberal frameworks. In many academic and policy circles, 'social justice' and 'neoliberalism' no longer function as opposites but as intertwined ideologies, one often advancing the goals of the other. As Chowdhury et al. (2020, p. 283) point out, social justice is frequently deployed to serve neoliberal ends, particularly by ground-level social scientists who, perhaps unwittingly, reproduce the very systems they critique. This contradiction raises a critical question: when a post-positivist scholar and a decolonial anthropologist both claim to advocate for social justice, are they articulating a shared vision, or merely echoing incompatible worldviews shaped by different political and epistemological commitments? In contrast, community-based theatre, rooted in embodied storytelling, resists such co-optation by centering lived experience, relational knowledge, and grassroots authorship, offering a form of justice that is not abstract or technocratic, but felt, enacted, and owned.

> The '**Four Rehearsals and a Performance'** (FRAP) project at the University of Kansas was a collaborative, creative project where community members of all abilities worked together with researchers in Theatre and Dance or Disability Studies to explore how knowledge and community are produced.

Theatre may offer an alternative language. In plays built from oral histories, the act of "saying" becomes a form of "seeing." Performance enables presence, not just representation. Unlike academic texts that often circulate within elite spaces, performance brings memory to breath, grief to gesture, and resistance to rhythm. Just as the playwright insists, "These are actual people," performance refuses to flatten experience into policy discourse or methodological frameworks. It invites us to feel the truth, not just read about it. In this sense, **theatre does not simply 'represent' social justice it enacts it.** Not as a fixed agenda, but as a lived, fractured, and reassembled relational act. The bodies on stage are not delivering case studies; they are carrying ancestral pain, systemic violence, laughter, and longing. And in doing so, performance becomes a site where **justice is not applied, but embodied,** messy, unresolved, but deeply human.

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[2] Siraz, J., Abd Wahab, H., Saad, R. M., & Roy, P. K. (2020). Can Ihsanic Philosophy be an alternative to 'Social Justice'? An empirical reflection from Bangladeshi Indigenous people. *Eubios Ethics Institute*, 278.

The notion of "a factory" refers to how performance, when "reperformed," is more able to participate in the verification and analysis of social production. Oriented so strongly towards the construction of fictions, Designer and literary works similarly declare ill-fated destinies for their characters when they contemplate the impossibility of redeeming reality. It is not necessarily the case that a reproduction cannot show knowledge production in socially authoritative ascription, as it was performed for the first time. It is true, and it is undeniably possible to have theatre texts which replay words originally spoken; such information would not be "lost" if the choice were made to perform a text under culturally authoritative auspices.

Beyond performance reproduction, there is another direction of travel which points spatially and temporally outwards: it is to the versioning of creative works according to the specifications of different cultural forms. For example, both recount an interrogation of parenthood, yet live scenario is not "Hollywoodized" into Life; it is nonetheless reconceived as a self-sufficient animation of different narrative scope and frame-bias. Alternatively, with revisioning instead of reproduction, this work then interrogates the ownership and control of knowledge, and the direct oral histories in which subjects' voices can be documented in their terms, while the cultural text which implements that documentary potentially loses that imagination and becomes vulnerable to fixed meanings that might fell short of validating continued meanings.

Task 1:

Can you give some examples from global academia on Oral History in Theatre and Performance Here are two examples of Oral History in Theatre and Performance from global academia:

The 'Our Theatre Royal Nottingham' project (Robinson & Carletti, 2019) is a collaboration between The University of Nottingham, its Manuscripts and Special Collections, and the Theatre Royal Nottingham. The creators around the project are academic researchers, archivists, and theatre practitioners; citizen scholars or people interested in local heritage; and public audiences. It aims to co-create a digital collection and map using digitized archival items and oral history accounts focused on this theatre venue and its stories, people, and heritage. This article provides an overview of the co-creation process from the perspectives of academic researchers and archivists, focusing on the role of citizen scholars, who have previously been involved in local history research and archiving initiated by the UoN library curator.

The '**Four Rehearsals and a Performance'** (FRAP) project at the University of Kansas was a collaborative, creative project where community members of all abilities worked together with researchers in Theatre and Dance or Disability Studies to explore how knowledge and community are produced. FRAP utilized improvisation in dance and music, which offered a space for embodied creativity and collective decision-making between community members across degrees of perceived ability. An oral history project emerged around FRAP, where the researchers reflected on themes of body, discomfort, and accessibility. This article shares how the oral histories came to be made and produced, specific examples of themes and experiences, and dialogues between the oral history creators. It hopes to elevate voices less heard in the academy and experiment with the use of oral history projects as a form of collaborative scholarship (Oliver Lair & Mog, 2016).

> The unevenness in the ownership and access to information and knowledge is **now recognized as a form of structural violence** (Gaventa, 2006).

3.4. Challenges in Knowledge Democratization

This paper argues that democratization of knowledge is necessary for an effective participation of citizens, and that both processes are closely linked. Therefore, from a republican perspective of knowledge democratization, the conceptualizations of citizen participation are analyzed. At the theoretical level, it defends the need of democratization of knowledge for an active citizenship and for an effective exercise of citizen participation. It is stated that the traditional models of citizen participation are insufficient to change power relations in contemporary societies, because of the one-dimensional concept of knowledge that they use.

When models of citizen participation are conceived from a wider conception of citizen participation that takes into account the deliberation of citizens, their mutual interaction, and agenda-setting dynamics, in opposition to a mere point-to-point approach, there is a wider scope to generate transformation of power relations. However, even if there are some theoretical approaches which consider this kind of participation, there are some contrasts in their conceptualization of the links between knowledge and citizen participation which lead to limit the potential for social transformation. Finally, it is outlined a conceptualization of citizen participation is outlined that considers knowledge production and dissemination as reciprocal processes to break the encapsulation of knowledge and to elaborate more advantageous generalizations from it. However, some challenges seem to hinder the participatory processes in democratizing the use of these knowledge resources. There is increasing recognition in social sciences that knowledge resources and their connections contribute to social power and that they are highly unevenly distributed across

agents in most settings. The unevenness in the ownership and access to information and knowledge is **now recognized as a form of structural violence** (Gaventa, 2006). The association of specific knowledge resources to specific actors enables them to build a form of social power. They are better placed about other actors to allocate the epistemic resources in a way that serves their interests and to advise on problem definition, solution formulation, implementation, and monitoring (Mancipe Flechas, 2009).

1. Access and Inequality

The transfer of knowledge, information, and learning typically occurs through interactions among existing communities of knowledge. Each community has its own starting context and its own knowledge stock and capacity, so the appropriate formats for the transfer, translation, and adaptation of knowledge thus differ between communities. There are three mutually related forms of knowledge transfer and development within the KSS: (1) peer-to-peer (or community-to-community) knowledge transfer and development through interaction among users; (2) expert-to-user knowledge transfer and development, with the latter receiving synthesized packages of knowledge; and (3) KSS-mediated self-learning (Des Bordes & Ferdi, 2008). Inequality in the knowledge economy is a child of a different kind, stemming from inequality in the access to knowledge-influencing factors that will eventually be reflected in inequality of knowledge capabilities, such as information technology access, human resource endowment, and social awareness. Access opportunities for knowledge-influencing factors, information and communication technologies, and human resources in particular, generally have distributed their benefits according to prior advantageous conditions. Consequently, communities with physical locations, inherent resources, status, and connections benefiting the access opportunities have reaped considerable advantages in the knowledge-based economy, while those with digital poverty have been left behind. Therefore, the knowledge gap has remained close to unchanged, or even widened substantially. In addition to the traditional social-economic causes, such as poverty, remoteness, and geographical barrier, digital poverty, and its deep-rooted effects, which influence every aspect of social life and thus lag not only in ICTs but also in other social-economical areas, have thoroughly stifled any possibilities for the development of communities except those endowed with favorable conditions.

> *If we do accept the phenomenological model as Choudhury states, then we should not condone that the interpretative school in anthropology or social science is the product of phenomenology. Clifford Geertz, victor Turner are among the many names. Again, if phenomenology is universal, then why is tawhid needed? Phenomenology does not stand for transformation. It rather only explains. The concept of 'thick description' informs the phenomenological model. At this point, the first and third authors had a long discussion in various sessions and time to agree on decolonizing methodology.*

Let us clarify.

Reciprocity is important in social justice (Smith, 2013), or as stated, "The purpose of qualitative research should be to advance a social justice agenda" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, in Creswell and Poth, 2017, p. 3). Further, "The aims of social justice [are those] in which the qualitative project ends with distinct steps of reform and incitement to action" (p. 24). From the critical position, there is a strong foundation for pursuing social justice for social change (Joe L. Kincheloe and Peter McLaren in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Soyini Madison, 2011; Lincoln and Denzin, eds., 2011; Johnson & Parry, eds., 2016). We agree with Lincoln and Denzin (2011), who wrote: "We have work to do, important work, and we must do it fast and well" (p. 718).

The scholars mentioned above all argue for social justice. However, in a deeper sense, their frameworks do not fully cover the depth of Indigenous peoples' demands—neither in practical terms nor from a philosophical standpoint (Siraz et al., 2020, p. 288).

The policy stakeholder group was commissioned to conduct primary research in three countries: Vietnam, Kenya, and Peru. By selecting two contrasting regions in each country, the research aimed to provide an opportunity for knowledge community-to-knowledge community learning, as preparation for the subsequent application of the KSS in these case studies. The purpose of the KSS application was to create a set of knowledge solutions, or "defaults," for the local knowledge communities of practice in local language(s). The latter then formed communities that applied these knowledge solutions locally and evaluated their effectiveness over time.

2. Resistance to Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing is an unnatural act in most organizations (Abdul Rahman, 2011). People are instinctively possessive of their knowledge as if it were their material property. The culture of hoarding knowledge has arisen due to the nature of human beings who would want to enhance their power over their peers and superiors. When knowledge is possessed, it generates the perception of uniqueness, strength, and control. Most employees are not comfortable in sharing knowledge as they perceive that it may give rise to redundancy, hence the fear of losing their jobs. Fear of prejudice from management, interested only in results,

Knowledge is a source of power, and there is power in "the larger number of persons who possess some exclusive knowledge about a certain theme" (Bryant et al., 2014).

might also discourage employees from sharing their knowledge. It is an affront to their integrity and originality. Such admonitions do not augur well with the sentiments of employees who feel vulnerable as they think that sharing knowledge will sooner or later be constructively dismissed. **Knowledge is a source of power**, and there is power in "the larger number of persons who possess some exclusive knowledge about a certain theme" (Bryant et al., 2014). Knowledge creates a person's identity as uniquely knowledgeable and gives prestige in society. Knowledge is a resource, and its ownership is a property. Ownership of knowledge creates certain entitlements. Those who own knowledge feel entitled to force others to follow their understanding or simply derive benefits from them. Non-knowledge sharing would preserve fair competitive advantage. Consequently, the individual perception is that through non-knowledge sharing, there is a greater likelihood of avoiding obsolescence, redundancy, and exclusion from a community or a social network. The most practical receptors of knowledge are kinship, home influences, the environment, and personal experiences. Knowledge, character, values, and beliefs are also acquired from these receptors at an early age. Knowledge transfer through family connections ceases, and generations usually lack appreciation after a point in time. Previous knowledge acquisition is either redundant or misplaced in the new environment. There is no antidote to knowledge loss, as the wisdom of kinship and the home environment that is lost cannot be recovered.

3.5. Technological Innovations in Knowledge Democratization

Modern Technology tools is helping people access knowledge globally

The examples show that, in addition to the many well-documented aspects of already existing knowledge inequalities, there are also those efforts that try to overcome these inequalities. This is done in many forms, from do-it-yourself encyclopedic knowledge initiatives, through to citizen science projects, to DIY technologies for measuring environmental contaminants, to efforts for making access to detailed and in-depth analysis

and knowledge of the economy developed by civilians available to wider audiences. These cases, despite their differences and dissimilar approaches, can be reasonably outlined through a set of common characteristics: social non-subordination and non-instrumentalization, public accessibility and availability of free access, open-reuse principles of the knowledge produced, 'contexed'-ness, and participatory knowledge production. These projects show that although a dominant global network of knowledge distribution, motivation and dissemination exists which is feeding into and reproducing capitalist cultural, social, and economic hegemony, as well as participating in the growth of knowledge inequalities, knowledge democratization nonetheless finds very vivid expressions and practical enactments at multiple levels. These documented projects bear specific characteristics that enable them to serve as counterforces to dominant existent practices and systems of knowledge dissemination and motivation, which feed into and reproduce knowledge inequalities.

Digital platforms play a crucial role in knowledge sharing by enabling quick, inclusive, and borderless communication. They foster collaboration among diverse communities, democratize access to information, and support real-time learning. These platforms also preserve and disseminate knowledge efficiently, making education, research, and innovation more accessible and participatory across disciplines.

Knowledge democratization finds and creates pragmatic, practical avenues, and techniques for opening access to, re-distributing and decentralizing knowledge production through novel and non-institutionalized social, technical and cultural arrangements. As such, the creativity, and the novelty not only rest at the content rendered freely available, but also and especially at the techniques through which this is accomplished. The organization of a knowledge project in a physically accessible bar or café-space, in the space of an already existing and used creativity enhancing club, using play and popular forms of cultural content to depict the scientific process, sliding into an already existing investigatory walk for observing environmental contaminations when confronted with a local knowledge application/power disparity, a collaborative study circle organizing knowledge exchange and knowledge production around one of the most complex dynamics in the contemporary socio-economic-ecological design.

1. Digital Platforms for Knowledge Sharing

Industry leaders have long acknowledged the importance of fostering a culture or environment in which employees feel inspired to share knowledge and insights. Various organization properties can help motivate and support employee participation or

involvement in the knowledge-sharing activities, such as rewarding good behaviors or informing people about the benefits of knowledge management systems. The other end of the spectrum is control, which can inhibit participation. A delicate tradeoff is necessary between the two extremes through developing rewards in a way that encourages contributions of insights or intellectual property yet also respects their contributions so that control does not invade their self-investment. Online communities offer capabilities to cultivate this trust and open environment.

The diversity of knowledge types has called for a similar diversity of knowledge-sharing technologies, supported by technological developments in the last decades. Knowledge residing in documents or databases tends to be captured and shared using conventional knowledge management systems, such as document management systems or knowledge repositories. Nevertheless, given the increasing importance of tacit knowledge, social media have attracted increasing attention in organizations for their ability to facilitate the sharing of individuals' insights regarding work practices or experiences on various informality. The rise of social media in organizations has also raised some concerns regarding its excessive or unintended use in a distractive way. On the one hand, studies have examined determinants of knowledge management system use in organizations. Some organizational properties, such as completeness of knowledge management systems and perceived reciprocal benefiting, improve employees' use. Peer use or social influence also positively relates to the engagement in sharing knowledge management systems. On the other hand, a growing body of literature turns to online community conditions under social media, focusing on the destination of the latter about practices and knowledge sharing by its users. Of particular interest are the cultural-interpretive and interactional conditions, or modes of usability involved.

2. Social Media and Community Engagement

An obvious application of social media is to engage in the public discourse and reach out to those who feel excluded or unheard regarding their concerns. It can be effectively used to record community questions and concerns. Listening to what community residents share on social media forms a record of public view not bounded by time, and content can be exported to categorizers for deeper analysis. Each comment on social media content or channel provides evidence of widespread ignorance and a record for future engagement efforts aimed at addressing that ignorance. In summary, social media can enhance developers' ability to engage the public, effectively promote community awareness of current developments, record community concerns and ignorance, and sustain engagement efforts over weeks and months (D. J. Bailey, 2019).

Along with data collection, social media can be deployed to actively engage residents regarding their opinions on particular developments or design scenarios. Social media posts can be designed to frighten and excite conversations about some early thoughts or design ideas raised in public forums. Social media posts can further invite residents to cooperate by expressing their preferences, sharing their opinions, or generating questions. **Social media channels** can even be pointed to external voting platforms to collect residents' preferences and opinions anonymously. Such social media posts viewed by a larger number of residents will meet an appropriate level of engagement (Tarman & Fatih Yigit, 2012). The news media capture many voices, but they do not address and engage with those who do not shout. News only engages with those who shout most loudly, which is often but not always a particular concern for white residents in wealthier neighborhoods. It's imperative to have channels and approaches to engage with those who feel unheard, overlooked, or disrespected, particularly historic minority residents. A range of approaches should be taken, most simply to posture an open door for collaboration. Asking individual calls, or sitting down for coffee/tea chatting, is the most respectful way to show regard for residents and invite them in. In terms of data, it's effective to ask community residents to record and compile their neighborhood improvement ideas in writing, audio, or video.

> **Social media channels** can even be pointed to external voting platforms to collect residents' preferences and opinions anonymously. Such social media posts viewed by a larger number of residents will meet an appropriate level of engagement.
>
> Tarman and Fatih Yigit (2012).

3.6. The Future of Knowledge Democratization

Informed citizens are essential to advancing democracy, along with political equality, government accountability, and civil liberties. Knowledge democratization, then, consists of fundamental shifts aimed at civic knowledge equity and diversity that also result in enduring participatory practices in the public sphere (Mancipe Flechas, 2009). As new forms of political communication emerge, there are expectations for community partnerships that regard news as a necessary and contested public resource. Politicians, new enterprise start-ups, and philanthropists grapple with how to usher in innovations that crowd-in citizen participation, mainstream tactics of news aggregation into journalism practice, and prime citizens for new information-related practices opening up what is possible (Büchi, 2022). But there is a stark contrast between broadly sharing the tools and opportunity for participation in civic life and the desire for civic knowledge, equity, and diversity, the goal of knowledge democratization. Efforts aimed at baking audiences into participatory civic knowledge systems have been fragile, punctuated, and provisional,

producing some propitious civic knowledge practices but in others constraining civic agency and reinforcing news inequities. As civic attention turns to what are likely to be monumental elections in 2024, there are uncomfortable realizations that the nature and demands of civic engagement may be changing, that audiences are not enough, and that the future of knowledge democratization is intimately tied to the future of journalism and other institutions traditionally devoted to and expected to support civic engagement. Three important characteristics of the future of knowledge democratization include: It needs to be viewed not only as a fancy technological platform or a shiny pro-democracy tool, but as a functional institution that plays important roles in supporting civic life. Institutions are complex social arrangements comprising social actors (individual and collective) interacting with one another while being influenced by the emotions and thought patterns of the individual social actors and collective entities that make up the institution. In cultural studies, institutions, including discourses, circulate ideas about norms and ideals that shape the understanding of knowledge democratization among social actors and practices through which they attempt to realize those understandings. But even in a digital society, journalism and public media need to be conceived of as institutions with social viability, networks of social relations among social actors, rather than as disembodied platforms or simple affordances.

1. Emerging Trends

Rising inequalities in knowledge access were recognized in the OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 project. Such inequalities are exhibited through straightforward yet significant disparities, such as differences between Netflix and scholarly journals regarding data and price transparency, as well as government-provided data concerning the pandemic in different countries. Additionally, several methods utilized to gather citizen input for policymakers, such as random draws of citizens or crowdsourcing, towards avoiding biased outcomes, lead to their inequalities in knowledge provision, access, and use. Those methods, on their own, only democratized the means of knowledge provision, while ignoring the distinction of collective wisdom and the lack of literacy, addressing the inequality challenge. Avenues to understand how the digital environment and its openings have been utilized, acknowledged, and reacted to are explored. To look at this likely under-conceptualized phenomenon, as a case, beyond the scope of any one country's practices, examples from across the globe Germany's 'smart city' approach, Sweden's 'App Store' for public services, and the development of platforms to facilitate participation by design in governance illustrate the symbiosis of societal change, technological change, and political change. They highlight storytelling and storytelling devices in mobilizing visions for socio-technical changes, and that it is necessary to be careful about narratives of some instruments being a panacea. As noted, some approaches to knowledge-building co-build simply by allowing wider audiences to provide inputs. Researching on how this matching is accomplished offers at least three sets of avenues: Establishing and maintaining knowledge databases across scales focusing on when would-be providers withhold

knowledge; Adding to these knowledge databases tools to aid interpretation focusing on how a match would-be provider be translated, and how knowledge would-be used; Cautiously and critically incorporating the voices of marginalization across scales focusing on why providers supply knowledge. These approaches highlight that as more collective wisdom is gathered from wider audiences, increasingly sophisticated algorithmic abilities to select and refine this collective wisdom, a horrid task when handled by people, are required. This suggests ever-growing attention to expertise-based democratic decision-making mechanisms alongside this effort.

2. Global Perspectives

Scholars studying governance study a variety of topics in a variety of traditions and intellectual frameworks. They differ in how they formulate the central problems of governance, how they gather evidence, how they assess those evidence, and how they interpret their findings. They disagree with each other about how broadly and inclusively to define governance, as well as how universalism, transformation, coercion, fragmentation, emergence, order, and other concepts ought to be understood in a governance context. Their differences are rooted, at least partly, in their training as social scientists, as historians, as members of particular academic communities, as national scholars, and in other roles they have in civil society. For present purposes, the conclusions are these:

a. The outcome of a dispute between a governance theorist and his critics may depend in important ways on conditioning factors peculiar to the background in which the claims, criticism, and evidence are articulated.

b. Different interpretations of the same event or trend may lead to different conclusions about the implications of that event or trend for understanding governance today or in the future.

c. Contingent on how governance is defined, it is either non-existent today, or it is a near-universal feature of the world political system. That governance can be studied comparably in societies as diverse as the United States, African tribal communities, Meiji Japan, and medieval Europe implies that the unique circumstances of patterns of governance are less important than those factors that are commonly present.

d. Governments are growing rapidly in developing countries, new centrifugal forces are making some efforts to build order ever more difficult, and privatization is reducing the powers of governments in industrialized countries. Each of these developments seems hard to square with the conclusion, increasingly popular in some quarters, that global governance is coming to understand the

various factors that influence how governance proceeds and its implications for the political and social behavior of actors. Few of the forces or trends adduced as supporting such claims seem conducive to the emergence of general order (Charnovitz, 2003).

3.7 Co-learning and Co-writing the Script

By engaging in co-learning, individuals come to understand different viewpoints and advanced discussions accumulated in the script, and by co-writing, individuals make ongoing sense of discussions. Work and dialogues on a shared space produce someone's co-ownership of the discourse, leading to the democratic working agenda of knowledge and persuasive argumentation. The past environment of co-writing and co-conceptualizing the script. This intervention accounted for using real context cognition of scripting and communal knowledge construction using the digital storytelling platform. A communal understanding of adjustable multi-dimensionality is taken into account to analyze upper-context adaptability. Aside from the multiplicity of narrative outlines in a storyline across different representational modes, each representational mode is also multimodal. As a new blended reality-zone, the digital storytelling environment, along with transitioning from stand-alone applications, has made the enactment of scriptable dynamic and groups on their as-yet-unconsidered advantage on knowledge-utilization and knowledge-construction programming. This is not merely subject matter but brings multi-dimensional interactive zones to life and augments the sensed cognitive actors in the knowledge democratization process. Engagement and knowledge-use with a writerly stance in initial reactions have transformed the romantic unfold-on-click into extended questions and social-affective relations and thus deepened knowledge-use on the knowledge-out-mold. As the levels of representation and context concern act in a unified fashion in the collaborative action format of rehearsing, the communal engaging and evaluative discourses on the developed video have led for deeper knowledge with an understanding of multi-interpretation and clarification. Heading into the second design, initial judgements and then immersive evaluation inputs of knowledge-use and scriptable-action reflect progress in reflective dialogue among the groups and thus deeper and more abundant knowledge on writing-uses and co-authorship is achieved. Afterwards, actors may focus on the knowledge-choices in each new enactment and hence report the sense in more biodegradable storytelling elements, while pre-emptive grievance in each round brought forth new collective space on other macro-abundance of sense-making alternative uses and collective agreeability.

3.8. Conclusion

One of the crucial roles of education is to help formulate norms of conduct and pathways of political action. This is done as knowledge is constructed, legitimized, and confronted with the interests of stability or change that societies harbor. The knowledge that is sought

for, construed, evaluated, or applied in the political arena speaks of the reasoning in action; it reveals the assumptions made, as well as the scientific models entertained. Education can thus be seen as a structuring or crystallizing agent of collective identities; doing good is a social construction that is contested and transformed in the negotiations of knowledge that take place in any educational setting. This can be pursued from three angles: first, by examining the relations between the genesis of a new political vision and the knowledge construction at work in projects; second, by considering the agents active at local levels; and third, by looking at the design and management of processes of change (Ferguson, 2006). Regarding democracy, a distinguishing feature of this scholarship is that it makes the tacit knowledge of statecraft explicit. This allows policy analysis to consider democratic processes as an object of study. Which forms of action compete for legitimacy in the construction of policies? What values are in play? Which influential institutions advocate for them? What economic, social, cultural, or political changes modify these collective representations? As the stakes are high, this also sheds new light based on what is often referred to as the "deficit" of democracy: the emergence of rival, purely technical, representations of policy-valuation combining fast moves faster-than-light calculations and analysis. These tendencies are well known in the economy. It is followed by a few consequences for the theory and practice of education deemed of interest from this new vantage point on democracy. A first consequence lies at the intersection of such new approaches. Empirical research on knowledge and democracy calls for a sustained sociological interest in statecraft; it is also essential to rethink the concepts of complexity and technical knowledge that are at the core of democratic projects. This scholarship has tended to underestimate how pervasive statecraft is in society and how it caregivers to organizational diversity. This has made its relationship to contemporary democracies invisible, producing instead an account of democracy divorced from the wider social universe (Simpson & Dervin, 2017).

Task:2

Host a mini "community playback theatre" with your class or group, letting stories from the audience shape the performance.

Guided by a belief in the importance of knowledge democratization, we orient our inquiry towards a collaborative effort to trouble the educational practices of organizations that profess to value democratic processes and structures but enact their opposite. For two years, as part of a unique forum with a mix of educators and students, we attempted to make sense of the major dynamics and fears, learnings, and strategies for strengthening and enhancing the practice of what was called, somewhat hesitantly, democratic practice in educational organizations. The inquiry was infused with the curiosity and urgency to better understand

how to enlist and broaden students', educators', and non-profit organizations' commitment to and understanding of knowledge democratization practices. In this exploratory paper, we present initial inquiry findings. First, we explore knowledge democratization and democratic practices, offering a series of caveats and clarifications. We turn to a case from the forum that revolves around how the query's normative commitment to democratic practices plays out in wanting to amplify the 'student voice' through data democratization efforts. This is followed by relational practices documenting and curating themselves, providing space for necessary workarounds, histories, and future possibilities.

Potential pedagogies here include cycle-length projects or working groups beginning with effective or narrative work to unpack emotional experiences of build-up, rupture, and repair. These are bolstered by processes of supporting difficult conversations (on missing voices, collective process restructuring or resharing, and so on), community re-visioning (using and/or critiquing inquiry and/or elbow-deep video work), modelling through peer-narrative structures, and parent knowledge sharing (i.e., 'what did we miss?') (Bloch-Schulman & Castor, 2015). Secondly, unearthing how other processes have worked through inclusion/exclusion movements is crucial. This could involve peers mapping what they see as unmade/left unmade in both documentation practice and shaped conditions. A potent and exhilarating exercise for sharing experiences in the classroom is the "community playback theatre." The classroom can become "the hall of the people" so that everyone's story gets told, fleshed out, and revitalized. The group members define community playback theatre by telling their stories. In groups, they are given the task to express back to the group in four different ways a true experience about the community. The members told poignant stories about personal connections and interventions, taking direction from the talented actors.

To delve deeper into the morning's stories, the group splits in half to formulate questions for discussion, to which they invite a responder from the first group. The first responders responded admirably until it became clear there were issues surrounding safety that they hadn't anticipated. By the end of the morning, stories spoken in church, as triggers for storytelling, continued to echo the hall of the people. The feeling in the air was palpable and generous the passion for getting the messages and feelings across was enormous; the conceptual distinctions established became public property for all to use in crafting their own dissertations and teaching sessions. And for these students, these stories include past and ongoing engagements in public scholarship and community-based learning. The sharing of personal stories might become a way of warming up the whole group so that a listening mode gets crafted. After such storytelling, there are two possible outcomes: On the one hand, the group members might share an emerging understanding of the principles and values behind publicness, equity, justice, and democratization. On the other hand, participants might feel marginalized for various reasons: being put on the spot without warning, unable to find personal stories akin to the ones shared by others, and cultural work

had to remain hidden due to the fear of privilege and the possible violence attached to it. In light of these two possibilities, it is crucial to collaboratively build an environment where stories, blessings, and fears can be shared. As a complement to the initial phase of establishing an unceded conversation on knowledge democracy, a second phase would include a few "door openers."

Suggested Readings

1. Knowledge Democracy and Co-authorship

- Hall, B. L., & Tandon, R. (2017). *Participatory Research: Where Have We Been, Where Are We Going?* – In this foundational work, Hall and Tandon argue for community-based knowledge creation and challenge elitist academic traditions.
- Collins, J., Hess, E., & Lowery, C. L. (2019). *Democratic Spaces: How Teachers Establish and Sustain Democracy and Education in Their Classrooms*. – A valuable reference for connecting democratic education with knowledge democratization in practice.

2. Oral History in Theatre

- Benjamin, K. S. (2015). *Telling a Different Narrative: Exploring the Values and Challenges of Performing Enslaved Community Members' Stories at U.S. Southern Plantation Museums*. – Explores how oral history performance challenges traditional historical authority.
- Robinson, J., & Carletti, L. (2019). *'Our Theatre Royal Nottingham': Co-creation and Co-curation of a Digital Performance Collection with Citizen Scholars*. *Research for All*, 3(2), 181–201. – A compelling example of archival theatre using oral histories.

3. Community-Based Theatre and Performed Epistemology

- Chandler Haedicke, S. (1998). *Dramaturgy in Community-Based Theatre*. – This classic text situates community performance within the broader debates of knowledge, power, and cultural legitimacy.
- Moschou, C., & Rodriguez Anaya, R. (2016). *The Formation of Citizenship Through Community Theatre: A Study in Aguascalientes, Mexico*. – A strong example of how theatre can co-create knowledge and strengthen civic identity.

4. Epistemology, Inclusion, and Reflexivity

- Aczel, J. (2002). *Does Epistemology Matter for Educational Practice? Cambridge Journal of Education*, 32(3), 403–417. – Offers a clear articulation of how knowledge paradigms shape pedagogy and democracy.

- Pfister, S. (2011). *Networked Expertise in the Era of Many-to-Many Communication: On Wikipedia and Invention*. – Examines who gets to be called an "expert" and how collaborative knowledge shifts that power.

5. Performative Research and Playback Theatre

- Oliver Lair, L., & Mog, A. (2016). *Embodied Knowledge and Accessible Community: An Oral History of 'Four Rehearsals and a Performance'*. – Documents a collaborative project using oral history and performance in disability studies.
- Bloch-Schulman, S., & Castor, M. (2015). *I Am Not Trying to Be Defiant, I Am Trying to Be Your Partner*. – Investigates the tensions in performing democratic teaching and learning in institutional settings.

Reflexive Terms

Theme: Knowledge Democratization, Community Theatre, and Embodied Knowing
 Reframing Knowledge & Power

- **Epistemic humility** – the practice of acknowledging the limits of one's knowledge, especially as a researcher or artist.
- **Unlearning dominance** – letting go of top-down, expert-driven authority in favor of co-constructed meaning.
- **Situated knowing** – understanding knowledge as emerging from lived experience and specific social locations.
- **Decentering expertise** – actively creating space for community members to lead and narrate.
- **Co-authorship ethics** – sharing authorship of stories, research, and performances with participants.

Theatre as Knowledge Work

- **Performed epistemology** – knowledge that emerges from bodily action, not just from words or theory.
- **Witnessing as pedagogy** – learning through attentive presence and empathetic listening during performance.
- **Playback memory** – how stories return through the body, improvisation, and repetition.
- **Rehearsal as co-inquiry** – viewing rehearsal not as preparation, but as a dialogic learning space.
- **Staging resistance** – using performance to challenge dominant knowledge systems or hidden power structures.

Community-Based Reflexivity

- **Reciprocal storytelling** – sharing stories in a way that honors both the teller and the listener.
- **Dialogic authorship** – writing and creating with others, not about others.
- **Relational agency** – recognizing that knowledge emerges through relationship, not isolation.
- **Community as curriculum** – treating lived experience as a source of learning and transformation.
- **Memory justice** – restoring silenced or marginalized voices through performance.

Reflective Journal Prompts

- "Whose knowledge did I center in today's performance or rehearsal?"
- "What did I unlearn about being an 'expert' in this process?"
- "Where did the script come alive through the community's voice?"
- "How did I practice listening—not just hearing—in today's storytelling?"
- "What fears or attachments to control did I notice in myself as a facilitator?"

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CHAPTER 4

BEING AN IHSANIC PEERFORMER

Abstract

This chapter introduces Ihsan, the Islamic principle of embodying excellence, sincerity, and divine consciousness as an ethical and spiritual compass for performers and researchers. Framing performance as an act of worshipful presence, it explores how intentionality, humility, and inner accountability can elevate theatrical practice beyond ego or spectacle. Through the lens of Ihsan, theatre becomes a space for ethical embodiment, where beauty and justice are not merely aesthetic ideals but spiritual imperatives. The chapter invites artists to engage their craft as devotional labor, guided by compassion, self-purification, and accountability to both seen and unseen audiences.

Keywords: *Ihsan, Islamic ethics, spiritual performance, intentionality, sincerity, divine accountability, excellence without ego, ethical theatre, theatre as worship, research as prayer.*

Focus

Exploring Ihsan (Islamic ethics of excellence and beauty) as a guide for performance.

What You Will Learn

Understand Ihsan: "Worship as if you see God."

Apply ethical intentionality in your acting, directing, and researching.

Connect theatre to divine justice, sincerity, and compassion.

SUBSECTIONS

> **4.0 Conceptualizing ihasan and its impolications in other fields**

> **4.1 What Is Ihsan in Islam and Performance?**

> **4.2 Excellence Without Ego**

> **4.3 Accountability to the Unseen Audience**

> **4.4 Performance Research as Prayer**

Group Discussion

"What would theatre look like if every act was done as if God was watching?"

4.0 Conceptualizing Ihasan and its implications in other fields

Introduction to Ihsanic Performance Fields

Ihsanic performance is the collective term of musical or theatrical practice involving chanting of the Qur'an or its written poetic versions in Arabic or Persian. Musically, Ihsanic's performance can be categorized as either "traditional" or "innovative." Traditional performance, including the adhan, azan, naqib, and taslim, is classified as traditional if it is performed in a manner predating the modern period. This includes both formal prayer chants and informal rural ones. Innovative performance refers to changes in ihsanic conventions made possible by access to media and institutions newly introduced by Western powers. This covers, for example, professional qaris performing recitation in Tehran's Nasir al-Mulk Mosque and rasping recitation via modernized tawhids. The recording, dissemination, and practice of written poetic versions of the Qur'an is also categorized as innovative, as this ability to communicate with an audience took form only

after the seventeenth century. We propose the term **Ihsan** as a transformative ethical-philosophical orientation one that is neither derived from Western liberalism nor rooted in neoliberal ideology. Rather, Ihsan originates from an Islamic spiritual worldview and embodies a universal, anti-utilitarian ethos. It calls for researchers, educators, and performers to engage with humility, sincerity, and excellence in both inner intention and outward action (Murata & Chittick, 1994, pp. 23, 167–281). Our aim is not merely terminological but philosophical and practical. In fieldwork with Indigenous communities in Bangladesh, particularly among the Rakhain people, we observed that Ihsan offered a compelling ethical vocabulary that resonated far more deeply than abstract notions of "social justice." As we transition from field practice to academic discourse, we invite fellow scholars to consider Ihsan as a participatory, dialogical, and spiritually grounded path for ethical research and performance (Siraz et al., 2020).

> Ihsan in Islamic thought means performing actions with excellence and sincerity, defined as worshipping "as if you see God," and if not, knowing that God sees you fostering deep spiritual awareness, humility, and moral integrity in every aspect of life. It elevates faith from ritual to profound inner consciousness.

As the Qur'an asks: *"Is there any reward for good other than good?"* (Qur'an 55:60). This simple verse gestures toward a profound ontological commitment: that goodness reciprocates, and ethical action is its spiritual return. Ihsan is rooted in intention (niyyah), sincerity (ikhlas), and beauty (jamal) qualities that are deeply internal yet manifest in public acts of service and justice (Maqsood, 2005). It compels the researcher or performer to move beyond ego, utility, or institutional metrics, and instead to act *as if seen by the Divine*, even when the audience remains unseen (Chittick, 2007). In research contexts, this means embracing ethical humility, not merely methodological rigor. It demands that academic participants genuinely collaborate with communities, honor Indigenous knowledge systems, and resist the extractive tendencies of positivist, data-driven science. As Hall and Tandon (2017) remind us, knowledge democracy must center relational, community-led co-inquiry rather than elite control of epistemic authority. From an Islamic spiritual perspective, Ihsan is the highest form of faith, where one's inner consciousness is made visible through outward action "doing what is good," "doing what is beautiful," and "doing what is right" (Murata & Chittick, 1994; Chittick, 2007). It includes everything from feeding the hungry to resisting epistemic violence, such as taking medicinal knowledge from Indigenous peoples and commodifying it through pharmaceutical corporations without consent (Siraz et al., 2020). Such acts are not merely unethical; they violate the moral fabric of Ihsan.

In performance and theatre, Ihsanic ethics offer a counter-aesthetic to commodified spectacle. Performance becomes an act of reciprocity, remembrance, and witnessing, not

entertainment. The performer becomes a conduit of care, sincerity, and divine attentiveness. The audience, both seen and unseen, is engaged not for applause but for **ethical transformation**. Here, the **performer and researcher share a sacred task**: to offer their craft not as possession, but as **devotion** a form of prayer in action. As Siraz et al. (2020) argue, Ihsan offers an **alternative to conventional social justice frameworks**, particularly those that remain entangled with neoliberalism. It is a **decolonial, pluralistic, and spiritually accountable framework** that challenges binaries of white/black, East/West, male/female, and instead seeks justice through sincerity, ethical presence, and moral courage. In this light, Ihsan is not simply a theological term it is an invitation to remake the world through beauty, excellence, and care.

As the most ubiquitous boundaries are political, three general performance domains of ihsanic practice can be outlined. Though they are interdependent, each domain articulates distinct performance arenas within which boundaries are produced, transgressed, and negotiated. Another prism through which ihsanic performance can be analyzed is by focusing on the notion of the public. Publics routinely produced around ihsanic performance in both the invited and unauthorized arenas address participation in terms of varying notions of time, space, and media. Each will be explored in turn, examining how publics are brought into being in response to articulatory struggles over performance practice.

The first domain corresponds to both the largest and the most established performance venues: the public spaces of cities and towns within the Islamic republic. The second domain refers to the much more clandestine performances taking place in private homes. Although performances for invited publics may take place in a place of worship or in the street, performances for unauthorized non-publics are usually by necessity, entirely secretive (Esfandiary, 2018). The third, and most recent domain of ihsanic performance is electronic, digital, and interactive. Emerging following the 1979 Islamic Revolution and in tandem with the growing use of mobile phones, the internet, and social media, this domain has shifted the normative assertion of ihsanic performance from a matter of obfuscation to one of celebration, with ramifications on what must be censored and policed. It will be argued that though a stark generational divide may appear, younger proponents of digital ihsanic performance often engage intermedially, both producing content for public access and inquiring what it means to gather for contemporary ihsanic performance in "real" life (Battista, 2018).

Defines Ihsan as worship "as if you see God".

Ihsanistic performance is a performance derived from Ihsan. As a derived concept, performance should be defined in precedence to find the understanding of ihsanistic performance. Performance, derived from Inggris word 'to perform' is a noun, a translation for 'prestasi', 'penampilan', 'penyajian', 'akting', 'laku', 'gaya', and it is considered to

include act or deed, performance, action, and event of acting in front of people. From the meaning above, performance can be interpreted as the whole action or deed that produces an effect, directly or indirectly, and the achievement or the result of performing, an act of accomplishment, making something happen, especially an event of significance. Performance can also be defined as a behavior or act of a person that can have an effect, either intended or unintended. Performance is a matter and product of human activities and behavior. It can also be referred to as someone's deeds and actions to something. Good performance is done with consideration of some measures and criteria, aims and targets, values, and norms. Good deeds and actions will produce good performance. Performance is also derived from belief. The better a person's belief is, the better his/her performance will be. Good performance is also derived from good faith and belief. Therefore, Ihsan at the highest level of faith, will generate good performance or ihsan-istic performance (Triyuwono & Kamayanti2014).

> **Ihsan** in Islam means embodying excellence, sincerity, and deep awareness of God's presence. In performance, it reflects intentionality, spiritual presence, and ethical commitment where the performer engages with integrity, as if seen by the Divine, merging outer action with inner truth and transforming art into a form of worship.

Ihsan in the Islamic perspective is defined as progressively doing all things good, which is known as worship. Worship in Arabic is translated as 'ibadah' derived from the root word 'abad, in which the pattern shows the meaning of interminability and robustness in a meaning (worship as to possess). In other words, worship can be defined as an act of devotion as a servitude to Allah. It is further elaborated in a famous Hadits from Abu Hurairah that it is this worship act that the second Islamic creed is based on; "Ihsan or worship, is to worship Allah as if you see him". In a more classical understanding, a very detailed exposition of ihsan is depicted as follows: "Ihsan is a terminology that concerns on doing an action cautiously and meticulously (not arbitrarily). It has semantics of perfection, neatness, and prudence as well as excellence and benevolence. It can also be interpreted as (1) to comply, to carry out, and to follow Allah's precept, and (2) to do something with good and flawless intention, or (3) doing all things miraculously, excellently, and benevolently."

> **Ihsanic performance** refers to artistic or ritual expression rooted in the Islamic principle of **Ihsan,** acting with spiritual excellence, sincerity, and awareness of God's gaze It merges aesthetics with ethics, transforming performance into a sacred, inwardly aware, and ethically guided act of devotion.
>
> (Nasr, 2002; Murata & Chittick, 1994).

Introduces the idea of performance as a spiritual and ethical practice

Performance can be described as a spontaneous and genuine encounter with the Other, which in turn informs the self of the performer and forces it to become discordant today. Eventually and inevitably, the 'I' would fall back into the programmed linguistic structures of the self, and the trauma, excess, or failure would dissipate, becoming a mere memory.

However, it is argued that repetition of this able failure can have a transformative potential for the performer. In contemporary culture, however, performance appears to be increasingly becoming a commodified art form in the context of generic theatres, galleries, festivals, university curricula, performance art archives, a growing number of performance studies programs, and the like. It is wondered whether this is a deterrent for the able failure to occur in the first place. In contemporary culture, it could be asked what role the Ihsanic performance could play and what form the Ihsanic performance would take. Concessions in the realm of practice lead to idealism, dogmatism, sectarianism, imitation, and hyper-reality on the one side and concerns of explicit meaning, reference, and intent, acousmatic worlds, formalism, utopianism, apoliticism, abstraction, and tourism on the other side. Possible taboos forbidding the transmission of spiritual knowledge and practice could yet render further concessions in the realm of theory. Performance theory can be understood as more than a mere academic pursuit and as an ethical, spiritual, and practical engagement with critiquing, reforming, and enacting the world. However, on their terms, performance theory and the expatriating effects of 'performative turn' preclude the possibility of Ihsanic performance and performance/installation, which might inform, affect, and instruct.

Performance as spiritual practice

 The animating question of the piece concerned the use and employment of theory, more "constructively" to reform the subject, as an "instrument of healing" (Battista, 2018). Before the preference for the constructively referential use of theory over the deciphering and analytical use is substantiated, an alternative interpretation of the "deconstructivity" non-referential use of theory would be entertained within the framework of contemporary spirituality. In a certain reading, performance theory can be understood as a discursive instance of a tradition in contemporary culture that could be described as "the performative turn."

4.1 What Is Ihsan in Islam and Performance?

The words ihsan and itqan are derived from Arabic lexicon, affixed by letters – حلال, اء, اگر ا, أ, قاف and ذ (tah) as its root language. From this root, all forms of words in Arabic intonation can be derived; such *as ihsan, muhsin, ma'ishna, ihsaniah, ihsana, ba'asan lil muhsini, itqan, mityqan, itqanun mitalan, itqanu jabna, buti'qi, yahbi Luahihi, gabikna, jamal, majnun, al-jama'a, al-jamal, jamali, jamaaliah, shiraar, ajma'a, as-sami'*. The

most taklif that is pronounced with the triplet hurt on the sound of 'ain by all Arabic speakers' strain and dissimilar intonation. From Arabic-based terms theory this might explain the possibility of presenting any form of word-based Arabic style such as nouns, verbs, prosodic emphasis up to public thanks with curious words. Based on the definition, this form of speaking is called performance; and this has been the scientific focal of scholars. Broadly speaking, performance is divided into culture-based performance coming from all over the globe; and written or formal-based performance elaborated by the Breiners school on culture products.

Reflexive Task

Explain Ihsan as the integration of excellence (*itqan*), beauty (*jamal*), and sincerity (*ikhlas*)

Meanwhile, ihsan or the second term in Indonesian is nuanced unfair; and in Arabic spelling it is written with alif-haa-raa-siin-nun. The term ihsan has semantic meaning as benevolent (good deeds), which is an extreme variety than kindness (good action); humane (moral action); benevolence (good thought); ample (good acknowledgment); thrift (good practice); and compassion (good intention). The origin of contention set ihsan to be the first performance in and will continually cultivate itqan and jamal. Itqan and jamal are defined as excellence and beauty or pleasing, respectively (Triyuwono & Kamayanti 2014). In another source, itqan is explained that it comes from the root 'waaw-qaaf-noon' which has meanings: tight, grip, stringing, construct, framework, or fabric. In harakatu, this letter root then takes instruments 'sukuna-tanwiin' and will write as a noun which is itqan. Meanwhile, jamal derived from 'jeem-meem-lam' and is addressed as beautiful, pleasing color, beauty itself, sweetness, to make it beautiful, and prettified. As terms in Islamic mi'raj jamal or beauty is about which is pleasing, good proportion, lightened and brighten; and all things that are mat'nawiy.

Connects these with performance ethics and aesthetics

Performances under the faith of tasbih, Aghazykhwan, and Najatikhani primarily serve an aesthetic function, although they do not merely obtain aesthetic functions. In this section, the way these performances make use of religious discourses and aesthetics of ihsanic, the negative treatment of violence against performers, in contemporary culture is analyzed. This performance aesthetic does not oppose the religious legitimacy of social practice and receives a yet unexamined acquiescent response from the dominant power structure and state religion. Inside religion, sectarian divides caused by violent treatment force

reformation at the fringes of social practice or ritual of ihsanic performance. The reconstructions of religiosity in this context can be read in two fronts. First, through the peripheries, a tacit acknowledgement and acceptance of state religion's legitimacy is done. The acousmatic reception of social practice or ritual at the periphery nevertheless indicates the modernity of the local culture against governance. The connection between human agency and state

Ihsan in Islam and Performance
(Rumi and Shams in the play 'The Rules of Love', Directed by Md Mahedi Tanjir)

in prayers becomes a repair of religion. State rendered rituals are replaced with new perceptions, still aesthetically faithful to their original models. Second, once the breadwinner's seat of authority, the family is attacked and violently dismantled, the separate spheres bestowed to females get invaded thereby. The domestic melodramatic discourse of loss breaks the traditional boundary of separation. The repressive system's failure is also demonstrated through performances of lost and escaped victims. However, observing the transfer of authority and agency at the periphery is equally important. Whether a violent act becomes visible or not recapitulates the discussion on a type of performance. Violence without a witness is recognized by the state but cannot result in legal action. Victim's trust on either tacit endorsement of procedures or exhibitionist mechanism of performance falls. Understanding change and the emergence of hegemonic power structures help delineate trajectories of performative agency. Agency in middle class and privileged or semi-privileged homosexuality indicates warning signs for the dismantling of state power. Thus, it is asked in the last chapter whether a Hodjat al-Islami can also become a prominent citizen and whether and if yes then how a TV docudrama can be produced within the Iranian context. Disappearance by absence or loss is too soft a category whereas, while tackling agency, focusing only on performance makes the analysis impotently descriptive. How could the behaviorist agon be turned into an aesthetic agon? Wouldn't it merely turn into a spectacle thereby losing the aesthetics of ihsanic? Performance studies cater the regulation supposed to occur meticulously and rams into performance theorists concerned with without interrogating or problematizing the very category. Wouldn't liminality merely become an identity of dislocated noces instead of changes entailed by unmaking and remaking entire epistemologies?

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4.2 Excellence Without Ego:

Excellence should not come from pride but from humility and service

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Excellence is a virtue praised in the Qur`an, given that God is beautiful and loves beauty; He "enjoined justice, the doing of good…". From the above verses, true excellence is explicitly modelled and should not come from pride, but from humility and service. Human feeling as an instinct or desire authorized by God, or the Divine, should not be taken lightly to preserve humanity, or the human spirit, against decay (Halilovic, 2016). It has intellectual and neurophysiological existences and originates from primary states of mind. In contemporary culture, beauty models are painlessly perpetuated and preyed on universally. It is luxurious to attain harmony or joy in bodily feeling. These body and emotion-cantered practices stimulate multiple areas of the brain involving sensory, limbic, and higher function, and a synthetic or holopathic approach to human experience. This organic bodily practice produces infinite benefits for well-being, beyond culture and dogma. These sacred patterns of bodily essence are re-explored and made secular, radicalized to suit the contemporary culture of extension and instantaneity, and transform into a new consumable obsession. Recent explorations of the iḥsānic, or goodness, beauty, and perfection, aspects of mu'ārif, gnosis of God, and its associated sīrah, spiritual exercises such as the remembrance of God, movement, respiration and repose, postures, gestures, sounds, breathing patterns, and prostration, have defined an entry point into unpacking their theoretical and practical implications in contemporary settings. On a theoretical level, a diagrammatic semiotic model is proposed to investigate the poetics of post-translational sīra frames into additional media like choreography art, theatre, video, and rhythmic calls for prayer. The structure systemizes the basic utterances of a numinous node into lavish sigils across media embedding iḥsānic signs unto which the heavenly secrets of communication, body and emotion-centered resonance, and perception, are reconsidered and trained to gain the subtle ability to listen to keynote divine beauty and know the universe within. In this effort, the openness of tradition and the permissibility of creativity in expressing truth and beauty is upheld while examining the dense, subtle dynamics, limitations, and paradoxes in preserving the humanity or human language lost and/or lost in decoding their dynamic codes. The initial frame used for translation is a long-ish Arabic composition in poetic prose on the iḥsānic locution of the Qur`anic Seed, containing the deepest mystery of God's dedication encompassed by His delicate relationships and exalted position of man. Bestowing divine qualities governing animate and inanimate existence

Mu'ārif

Muʿārif (معارف) is an Arabic term meaning "gnostics" or "knowers," referring to those with deep, experiential spiritual knowledge or inner wisdom.

Sīrah

Sīrah (سيرة) means biography, especially the prophetic biography of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), detailing his life, character, and mission.

Ishraqi

Ishraqi refers to the "Illuminationist" philosophy founded by Suhrawardi, emphasizing inner light, intuitive knowledge, and spiritual illumination.

with deep intimacy and ideality, completeness, secretiveness, preservation, augmentation, facilitation, fecundation, instruction, cognition, subjection, and transparency.

Encourages performers to transcend self-centered artistry

More specifically, Ishraqi performers and choreographers strive to put the unnamed and uncanny aspect of constitutive cultural contexts at the center of the public forum. Recent posthuman inquiries into the attitude of being in the world invite artists to widen the boundaries of their work in a Both spaces, continuously cultivating the internal and external potency of performance in bridging 'the real' and 'the fictional' (Esfandiary, 2018). A visceral enactment of difficulties, uncertainties, and limits encourages performers to transcend self-centered artistry. By placing hyper-subjectivities in action and engagement in the center, invisibility becomes a fundamental consciousness of 'not-knowing' meant to operate. Ishraqi performance is an assemblage that, apart from bringing the effects of ineffable vision into life, uniquely engages the unknowability. Ihsanic performance invites everyone to listen to the unperformed with free rein at transnational and transcriptions boundaries. The unheard spectrums of being walking ground become extensive experiences of 'yes, but', the force of an ajar entanglement that, instead of collapsing into It, lives at both limits. The recent expansion of Ishraqi performance aims to take this excess of measure on board, trying to articulate, inside and against all the knots, the efforts needed to take the performance elsewhere. The watchword in performance-making becomes 'nay', a way of holding both knowability and unknowability, of erring, pausing, hesitating, falling back and holding the attention on questions where practice and idea are tightly coupled.

4.3 Accountability to the Unseen Audience

The Divine is considered the ultimate audience

In Islamic performance, the Divine is understood as the ultimate audience. Traditional sensitivities toward representing the Divine or expecting such representation, whether in the form of icon limited posed performance or temporal aesthetic-derived performance, are not the same among modern Muslim artists. Performance as ihsan with linguistic continuity throughout space and time was recounted, with suggestions for preserving and promoting ihsan performances occurring in the Nelly, Mazik and Kaza concert scene of contemporary Cairo.

Muqriʾ in ihsanic

In an Ihsanic context, a muqriʾ is one who recites the Qur'an with spiritual excellence, embodying sincerity, presence, and awareness of God's gaze. Beyond technical accuracy, the muqriʾ reflects Ihsan through humility, deep intention, and ethical conduct, turning recitation into an act of devotion and inner transformation.

In looking for ihsan in the cars, fans, and stages of the crowd here, it was important to understand which audience was informing the performance analyses from the comments of Lutz and Orlando. The articulate young youth there did not expect to be mutually exclusive audiences of the performance. It was this implicit multiplicity that engendered depth and agency in contemporary performances of ihsan for the youth raising them. These tawasik addressed, acknowledged, represented, and conspired with audiences who did not necessarily occupy fixed subjective selves. Although many of the Egyptian youth present were immersed in the sound social media spaces of understanding these performances with the Red Sea as background on other occasions, their inclusion there as tacit audiences of ihsan performances in cars might be regarded as unwarranted luxury. One set of commentaries from these youth suggested that for them, these Tucas drove home the reality of unequal wealth distribution in a society with the understanding that this was collective suffering. It was, after all, Divine's misfortune beyond mortal comprehension (Frishkopf, 2018).

It was easy to rethink even the most commonplace aspects of performance by considering objective fate and the wisdom of its unpredictability for which apportionment of rewards and punishments could be reasoned both logically and philosophically. Moving in the way of people's seats there, understanding should be sought for why only this performance and why on this stage. The anticipated multiple turning of the gaze did not take place, the offered plentiful space did not draw the audience their eyes, the lighting did not separate

the heard density into separable tones like plums and rock-pools, and "Ihsan" as the cognate was there all the more.

Performance is seen as an offering, not just entertainment

Ihsanic performance is most successful in its role as a translation of divine melodies when it is seen by witness audiences as an offering to God rather than as entertainment. This finding may reflect broader community attitudes toward ritual performance, particularly ritual performance aspects of musical practices. Analyzing processes of selection, assembly, rehearsal, performance, and assessment of ihsanic performance in the contemporary Muslim context reveals cultural tensions associated with efforts to offer live ihsanic at social gatherings that are regarded by some cultural groups as venues for purely entertainment (Frishkopf, 2018). Judgments about the participation of muqriʾ in ihsanic performance as professional entertainers or as devotees who perform ūdhī or duʿāʾ consistent with community conceptions may reflect understandings of the wider aims of ihsanic at social gatherings. At the heart of these tensions and anxieties may be cultural desires and anxieties regarding the perception and nature of reconstruction and continuity of the performative aspects of the classical heritage. They raise questions not only regarding the perceived role of the muqriʾ and witness audiences in the process of coming to terms with hierarchy and change, but also broader socio-cultural questions regarding the respectability of Arabic in Egypt (A. Edelman, 2018).

Knowledge production as a spiritual journey recognizes that learning is not merely a rational or technical process, but an inner transformation involving ethics, intention, and self-awareness. According to Sudrajat et al. (2017), true knowledge is connected to the purification of the heart, sincerity of purpose, and alignment with higher truths. In this view, knowledge becomes a path to self-discovery and divine proximity, rather than just information accumulation. It involves humility, contemplation, and responsibility, where the seeker becomes morally accountable for how knowledge is acquired and applied.

If Muslim architecture is a symbol that reflects the community's closeness to their tradition and belief in it, how is it that a render of diversity in the use of Arabic script and ii-centered architectural forms in one of its most populous satellites is generally construed in contemporary discussion as a cause for cultural disintegration? At a fundamental level, these tensions encapsulate elite desires for stability, coherence, and recognition, and popular desires for freedom, spontaneity, and creativity in expressive forms. In seeking out the efficacy of Islamic performance, Smyth illuminates the malleability of tradition as both a local construction and an arena for wider cultural and political contestation. Approaching ihsanic performance as a translation of divine melodies also highlights the tensions between desires of being close to God and fears of becoming too inward-looking, becoming socially isolated.

4.4 Performance Research as Prayer

Ethical research is an Ihsanic act when done with sincerity and humility

Research methods vary in terms of their objectives, the results they produce, and the degree of subjectivity of the researcher. The strictest test of objectivity in research takes place in the so-called "hard" or quantitative sciences. In some disciplines, however, such as the human sciences (including the study of human art) and histories of various kinds, one cannot measure "phenomena" accurately and directly. Instead, one must stage richer, polysemic representations of experience. Consequently, the researcher often finds herself/himself present in the research text, the phenomena becoming apparent through an interpretative lens. Ultimately, the researcher's biases will determine the quality of the research outcome. Therefore, there is a critical need to address ethical issues inherent in qualitative research. Research ethics needs to be approached from alternative vantage points, as the role of blind consultancy undertaken for various research components cannot always be pinpointed. These topics include conflicts of interest; informed consent; pecuniary, academic, and moral credits; and consultant researchers vis-à-vis job and data ownership. Urging fresh perspectives, a few general wishes are summarized regarding ethical issues in future textual research, such as a more professional point of view on numerous text concerns. Additionally, it has been sad to note recent suggestions in the field hinting that quality texts necessarily involve substantial switching to quantitative data procurement or a thorough analysis of qualitative content. This can only result in a less organized body of knowledge and an increased risk of error in political research. It is recommended that the sociological landscape should be surveyed in greater depth, and there is still more to be mined from classical authors.

Performance Research as Prayer

Performance research, when rooted in an ethical and spiritual framework, transcends data collection and critique it becomes an act of devotion. This transformation aligns with the Islamic concept of *Ihsan*, where one acts "as though they see God," embedding intention, presence, and sincerity into every movement and inquiry. Within this vision, performance is not just a methodology; it is a **prayerful practice**, a form of embodied supplication through which the researcher becomes both a seeker and a witness.

> *Bruno Leonardo é hoje um líder religioso com ampla visibilidade e capacidade de mobilização de público em diversos estados brasileiros. Fundador da Igreja Batista Avivamento Mundial, ele tem realizado grandes eventos pelo país em sintonia com o trabalho que desenvolve na internet, cujas marcas de popularidade já lhe renderam a Comenda Dois de Julho, a mais alta honraria da Assembleia Legislativa da Bahia. Como o relato do Sr. Carlos sugere, a atuação do bispo vem sensibilizando muitos tipos de seguidores, entre os quais podem se*

contar até mesmo ex-evangélicos, católicos não praticantes ou pessoas sem religião. Um modelo de difusão da mensagem religiosa que encontra seu veículo privilegiado nas mídias digitais.

(Paula & Medrado, 2024, p.3).

Bruno Leonardo is currently a religious leader with wide visibility and the ability to mobilize audiences in various Brazilian states. Founder of the World Revival Baptist Church, he has held major events across the country in alignment with the work he develops on the internet, where his popularity has already earned him the Dois de Julho Commendation, the highest honor awarded by the Legislative Assembly of Bahia. As Mr. Carlos's account suggests, the bishop's work has been touching many types of followers, including even former evangelicals, non-practicing Catholics, or people without religion. It is a model of religious message dissemination that finds its privileged vehicle in digital media. In many African and Islamic epistemologies, prayer is not confined to verbal petitions it is movement, chant, silence, and ritual. Adelakun (2022) describes prayer as a "powerful device" in African Pentecostal practices, where bodily gestures, vocal intensities, and spiritual warfare are performed as politics. This has deep implications for performance research. When an actor enters the stage in ritual theatre, or when a performer re-enacts social pain, they are not merely representing they are invoking. The body, in this context, becomes a sacred archive, one that carries not only knowledge but also lamentation, resistance, and hope. This perspective is also reflected in Animating Performances (Adelakun, 2024), where she explores how African popular culture integrates spiritual practices and pleasurable forms. Performance in such settings is inseparable from communal prayer, where gestures are both affective and affective touching the divine while moving the audience. Prayer, in this context, is not passivity; it is participatory aesthetics, grounded in vulnerability and ethical presence.

Ritualistic African theatre offers further depth to this understanding. Mzara and Maaziz (2025) emphasize that traditional African performances often occur "between ritual and aesthetic presentation," blurring the lines between art and sacred ceremony. They describe scenes where the performer embodies ancestral voices or cosmic forces, suggesting that performance becomes an *offering*. This aligns with Islamic ideas of *niyyah* (intention), where the worth of an action lies in its inward orientation. By framing research as prayer, we resist extractive academic practices that objectify others. Instead, we embrace relational accountability, a key tenet in Indigenous and decolonial methodologies. Research becomes a dialogue with the unseen, a commitment to justice, and a return to self (Wilson, 2008). This is especially vital in contexts of trauma, memory, and healing, where researchers must

approach with humility, silence, and reverence the qualities of true prayer. In summary, performance research as prayer invites us to ask: *What am I invoking with this work? Whose pain am I holding? And what sacred responsibility does this entail?* Such questions remind us that to perform ethically is to research with the heart wide open.

The focus on ethical, so-called ihsanic research is a fresh and urgent avenue of inquiry into a more deeply rooted issue. Once a methodology becomes central to a discipline, it acquires a life of its own, impacting the course of conceptual, theoretical, and empirical development. In becoming the central focus of group identity, it holds sway over researchers by blinding them to its disadvantages. It acts as a trump card in arguments with ultimate power over the paradigm's followers. It cools the need for continuing rehabilitation. Wissenschaft is rendered a fraternity business, shutting out muddy waters. The scar has closed but remains raw. Inevitably, a time comes when research ought to be better studied epistemologically in general, highlighting potential issues with the new methodology (R. Muhammad, Basalamah & Sulton Solehuddin, 2017).

Knowledge production is a spiritual journey, not just academic

Like many artists, Ihsanic performers have a complicated relationship with their own creative work. On the one hand, artists are directly affected and influenced by it; they view it as an extension of their identity. On the other hand, their work is recontextualized through several lenses once it is released to the public. This affects the way it is viewed and engaged by the audiences, critics, and scholars. In many cases, the creator's original intention or desired meanings can be manipulated

> **Ritualistic African theatre** refers to performance practices rooted in sacred rituals, ancestral worship, and communal storytelling, where theatre serves both spiritual and social functions. It integrates music, dance, masks, and oral traditions to embody cosmological beliefs and collective memory. Unlike Western dramaturgy, it is participatory and cyclical, often blurring the lines between performer, audience, and spirit realms.
>
> **Mzara and Maaziz (2025).**

or completely disregarded. Ihsanic performance is approached here as an artistic perspective reflective of Islamic spirituality. Whether in the form of dance, theatre, or music, many elements of ihsanic performance are preserved and adapted over time, resulting in dozens of varied practices in many regions. This section concentrates on writing by internal artists or performers, about their conceptualization and articulation of ihsanic performance, as well as how they visualize and implement this perspective in their creative works. Diversity of approaches to ihsanic performance is discussed in this section to show that it encompasses many facets, and that performance in itself is an ever-evolving

process reflecting the artists' spirituality and evolving understanding. The selected discussions center on Islam as an overarching theme, addressing contemporary issues in performance and spirituality, as well as gender, human relations, and the universe (Sudrajat et al., 2017). The first paper explores the ihsan concept in local performance traditions. It recognizes its complex and multifaceted nature and asserts that it remains to be fully comprehended and articulated. The author, an artist and a writer, shares her struggle in facing her creative process through the lens of ihsan. Instead of giving several answers, the text evokes questions regarding beauty, agency, spirit, and the boundary of ihsan in the artistic universe. It proposes that this openness can be seen as a valid form of ihsan, expressed metaphorically through a story on laborers that trigger this evocation and reflections. The questions and the metaphors or stories are eventually brought forward to the readers.

4.5 Historical Context of Ihsanic Performance

References Sufi traditions like Rumi, whirling dervishes, and Qawwali as spiritual performance forms

The essay about performance traditions in Sufi ritual and its implications for contemporary culture develops a new semiotic frame for understanding ritual semiotics, outlines the practical aspects of Abdal performance traditions in the Sufi mystical revival

Sufi dervishes or Abdāl figures performing in a spiritual theatre production (The Rules of Love, Directed by Md Mahedi Tanjir)

movements in a globalizing world, and examines the political implications of this understanding. The first part outlines the oft-told aspects of the Sufi revival of Abdal performance traditions, along with their present-day, globalizing implementation and significance in socially and politically marginalized contexts. Performance styles as actions that can activate intellectual paradigms and social avenues across linguacultural divides. The second part turns toward performance aspects that enact and make sense of gendered division in the order and Abdal form of "female" religious resource. There are both normative and pragmatic aspects of this form. The anthroposophies to religious activists I met at the performance occasion a few years back shared an aversion to allocating resources and roles across gender as well. She spoke of a broad range of engagement with the female aspect of "God," from the Shariah-orthodox to the more risqué appropriations of female

role to loci humorist. The performance aspects of this kind were not part of the Abdal tradition I had known. In some instances, performance style buttressed gendered absurdities in restrictive cultural situations. Contrarily, discursive resources from a female and feminist perspective actively challenged and vocalized these absurdities in various contexts. Reiterating the semiotic hand, instrument, and action, two knots remain tied. First, semiotics in the interpretative tradition is locked in the relation of text and semiotics as extrapolated from text. But this epistemic aspect is pedagogically neglected. Secondly, all accounts of performance as empowerment fall short, both analytically and politically, to the extent that they remain absorbed in discursive aspects. They lack rigor in regard to discerning subtle actions that do performatively and agentively need a semiotic of voice and action.

Shows the spiritual origin of ethical performance in Islamic history

Throughout Islamic history, various forms of music, singing, and ensemble have been

> Throughout Islamic history, Ihsanic performance rooted in ethical and spiritual expression through music and ensemble has cultivated moral refinement, but modern shifts have aestheticized and decontextualized these traditions. Spiritual virtues are now often subdued beneath standardized, disembodied performance practices.
>
> Frishkopf (2018), Sudrajat et al. (2017).

inextricably linked with ethical performance. During this time, it was widely recognized that certain forms of music and ensemble were important in cultivating moral and spiritual virtues. Thus, ensembles have sometimes been referred to as ihsanic or ethical ensembles, denoting their cultivation of spontaneous, affective musical improvisation. In contemporary times, ihsanic performance continues to be described in moral and spiritual terms, being called "Sama" or "listening." This section traces the ethical origins of ihsanic performance in early Islamic history, the role of guru discipleship, the process of nursing and nurturing, and the resulting notions of effusion and illumination. Muslim saints are believed, by the mystic process of unveiling, to possess the capacity to engage transcendence through ecstatic performance. This capacity is shared with efficient, practiced disciples. Although the disclosure of moral character is the terminal referent of Islamic musical ensemble, this is now approached in aesthetic terms. The pursuit of musical mastery to achieve adventure, improvement, and expression has led to the development of

stylistic standardization and the marginalization of ethical considerations. Musical performance is now approached data analytically in psychological and social terms. Contemporary explorations of ethical performance thereby offer important connections to Western practices of musical performance. These observations assist in understanding the place of ethics in Muhammedi music as it relates to performance, performers, and participation.

Performance and aesthetics are intimately linked with ethics in ihsanic performance. The capacity to engage ethical affective change is a primary virtue of the ihsanic performer. To achieve presentation, performance must be refined. Thus, many of the original ethical teachings of the performance are today couched in aesthetic terms. Ijsanic performance is now more likely referred either to a performance as a spectacle, or to the aesthetic experience of the performance, with ethical references downplaying the centrality of the performance itself. The principal reason for this change lies in musical ownership and participation. Just as a moral talent may be cultivated, so too may an ethical task be undertaken by the ethical actor. As these authors would suggest, practices of "disembodied," codified musical performance have flourished during this period in nearly any surviving musical context. Thus, many forms of music, singing, and ensemble that were historically regarded as unethical are today generally treated in non-moralistic terms. In general, Western notions of musical aesthetics resonate with the norms of contemporary muhammedi music (Frishkopf, 2018).

Key Characteristics of Ihsanic Performance Intentionality: Actions rooted in conscious purpose

Intentionality is often cast in the light of an action invited by some entailing conditions. They are sought systematically above either dimension, given various relations between intentions (attitude) and actions (event). Broadly, there are two main dimensions: those concerning either an agent invoking an action-type, or a type of an action invoked by an agent. First, despising several modifications, in a default type I intention, being a pro-attitude variable of DRS, must subsume at least a proposition of an action-type event. And rather fixed languages, indicative or imperative, this DRS conditions either through some noted equivalences, so a pair appears featuring modal uses of sign-data or protocols. Then, some metaphysical place of an action invoking the top of DRS must be furnished. Aside of the types mentioned, a type II intention is a structure family, in which types of new action resulting from planning consist in contributions of action-types initially rendered by a default type I intention (R. Dreßing, 2015). On expanding by principles and affordances, event-types only yielded by subsequent DRS are eventually deduced. Whereas, in a simple observation, a type III intention is a world-embedded abduction, where inherent and learnt regularities held by an agent consist in an action-type and conditions-variable pair

identifying to control an execution. In completion computation, there must be unspecified details on how the conditions of alternatives were satisfied by ingraining projected research capacities. On encroaching previously pure norms, an assumption that taking joint actions makes types of intention at large a requirement is sought to formulate on a sphere of cognitive computations. Type I intentions are a set of normally controllable states of DRS, together with a world-embedded event/frequency descriptive net as a class of structure families. They are noted as 'jointly ambitious', in addition, other types of intention on collaboration are laid with borrowed types on actions. New-found identities have also been reviewed. No doubt, intentionality regarded head-on is truly richer and rather diversified.

Sincerity**: Inner alignment with ethical truths**

Sincerity is one of the cluster of names that falls under the rubric of "truth" in Greek - Aletheia, interrelated with resoluteness, shamelessness, boldness, and know-how. This ancient perspective on truth deserves recognition because it better reflects the current, unconscious "magic" background and shines with an ontological depth whether premonition does a self-feeding kind of manipulation toward a future goal than the deontic, logical, or epistemic notion that truth is an epistemic property of a proposition to be indicated. Sincerity is inner alignment with ethical truths, the transcendental moral law, the moral background, with a possibility of self-mediation that does not depend on contingent circumstances. Searching for the usher, the truth in the sense of "winding" in English and "the course" of the emanation has been rigorously equated with searching for inner lack and stillness. The surrounding reality cannot be, of course knowingly, get such a structure with its own freedom. It is not uniformly encased with the syllogistic contempt of inference as the pathos in the tragedy of guilt or sinfulness. Genuineness - synthetic roundness where no sides hide from the universe of all. To unveil is to become naked, the most genuine-thus-somewhere too frank in the presence of all, a glare - on all sides, limbs against all, a revelation open to viewing and comprehension - to behold, thus for the first time figure, and to understand and grasp the whole, to hold and see all brought to the remit of the viewer meant "absolute reality was knowledge".

As a "forgetfulness of Knowledge," the buzz of humanity cannot simply leave it to the solitary expression of metaphysical self-overcoming. The prodigious solidarity of events' "expansional freedom" cannot easily find a sustaining self-disclosure smoothly available in the expression of one singular "clarifying state of affairs" with the coherence of a higher order. Such dormant potentiality irreversibly breaks the universe into the adamant "lost home" where complexity arises at every instance of reach. Far from the expectancy of the subjectively primed "forwarding understanding" from the university sphere, the buzzing komplott of truth with its self-sufficient energies and vocations will appear as an air-to-steam raising for the contumaciously lucid - "I see." Many widely diffused currents of geniuses and movements chaotically mislead the burden of the common desire of the plethora of possibilities implied by the creative output itself, to rise fire-globes of sands of

the tortured aspirations of immanence. As a pleasure-seeker, the creator of international mistakenly becomes the "matrix," unintentionally ruling lives with dogmas much deeper than mere subjectification's, thus imprisoning energies that transcend "hijacked" within the looping mechanism of transparent self-guff and addicting alchemical advancement.

Beauty: Aesthetic refinement as a spiritual value

In aesthetic ethics, composition as an activity of a Man is seen as a source from which a good and beautiful work can come. Goodness is seen as the ultimate foundation of the beauty of a work. Essential qualities such as proportion, order, symmetry, and harmony are sought in a good work. Beautiful things cannot be distasteful, and good things cannot be ugly. What people find beautiful, they also call good, according to the agreement of either body or mind. By a large degree the same objects or persons are seen, heard, read, and known as beautiful. Aesthetic pleasure is a vision of perceptual unity and order with various elements, as in music. All secrets of a perfect story, from its start to its ending, including its characters, dialogues, and the structure of a poem or a song, are encoded within it, hidden behind seamless words and sounds, rendering a wonderful world before the audience when required (Sudrajat et al., 2017). Islam accepts the beauty of the man-made works

Compassion: Art as a medium of justice and healing (The Rules of Love, Directed by Md Mahedi Tanjir).

as lawful according to the religion on the condition that the works are good, i.e., coinciding with the beauty of the interiority and moving from the intention to please the creator, source of all beauty. It is desirable that for the heart and tongue may generate, as refinement of sensibility and language (i.e., the intelligence of the heart, klaros, aql, intellectus, nous) firing the speech of a sincere thought, a good work be grateful, introducing the benefactor of the beauty, straightening the recipients to approach the source of all beauty defended by the religion. Otherwise, the heart and tongue may produce a work of a base beauty articulated by the gross quality, this last preparative for the vice of the psychic and vitious acts translating to a vitiated action or ethics, wrongfully satisfied, producing the Glorious hidden beauties, and an ample external world flowering with various arts, styles and talents, bemusing the treasures of heaven and millennium of tongues waiting to be uncovered and disclosed (ZILIO GRANDI, 2017).

Compassion: **Art as a medium of justice and healing**

A transitive moment often brings forth transformation, exorcising the pandemic of isolation. When one sits together with others, with no authority over others, in a space created to merely be, a multitude of feelings pour forth happy, confused, naive, angry, compromised, daring and the need to disentangle these feelings can become urgent, with art as the angle through which to tread carefully (Pillay, 2006). A sense of responsibility must be acknowledged, as art becomes the sign language by which this space might be fractured, apologized to, rearranged, distilled, and dispersed. For decades, it has been flimsy and tricky, more so than peace, coexistence, space, time, articulation, and sound itself. It always comes to dancing. Dancing always begins with the tamades, the hospitality, and the recount. To remain vigilant, constantly sensitive to the dynamics at play, can be tiring. This essay questions the degree to which art in society can silence the need for vigilance. Drawing on the Asmara-Addis friendship as a case study, it examines art's role as griever, painter of memories, and ideate of new frameworks as a means of simply existing, despite the mounting need for evidence of the intangible impact of this existence on political processes (Keskey, 2016). Furthermore, it interrogates the efficacy of art operating as a practice of interpreting injustice away from justice. Whether art might be able to walk in the direction of force, rather than hot air. The question is not whether art can facilitate political engagement, but how it can do so divergently, effectively, and less vaguely. Samsara Unlimited posits that to engage with injustice through abstract representations of injustice, there exists a need to go elsewhere. Take it elsewhere. Go absurdly here. The task, therefore, is to address those art performances that are not open to such returns. It is not an impossibility, drawing from the ability to remain unbearably vulnerable. Rather, it delicately presents itself as a situated question in a specific conversation with no desire to silence those whom the question does not relate to or find universal answers for questions crafted for and living within a delicate cultural setting.

Performers must align their public persona with personal ethics

Performers must align their public persona with personal ethics. Contemporary performance may provide entertainers who embrace a different, often detrital, collective identity and a performance naive of the 'worker' etiquette. Public ethical performance may contribute to social reconciliation. Within an emerging field questionably named 'Ritology' that ranges across anthropology and performance studies, offers a sort of recipe for performance naivete. Promotion of the 'Communities for prayer, dialogue and reconciliation designed to enhance the furthest and macrocosmic reach of the engagement through issues including land-resources use and distribution, water, rights abuses, and conditions particular to socio-geography' in southwestern Kenya's Meru County is described. It appears that participants intend to embrace 'ceremonial speech' and 'hearing' as conceptual international law as a means of ethics within biotechnology-based food

production, distribution, and consumption. In queer performance representation, some performances will not. Performance invites performers to indulge in the choice to honor the desires of different public events. As conscious participants in epic theatre, it is possible to perform to spite. Detrital, imperceptible performance practices conflict with institutional, privileged public prior performance.

A 'performance'. Publicly ethical performance with expressivity benefits naive performers – performers unaccustomed to this production facility or performance naivety. Performance that preserves the ethical personality outside of performance that cannot, in a social formation that thrives upon artefactual documentation, would remain private. Performance that deepens the prior or previously perceived extensibility of public ethical performance gives rise to a performative object. It must be possible for ethnographers to reveal ignorance in the public sphere and, importantly, the consequences without relief. In the sur-reality, performance that places intentional ignorance or obstruction in the public domain invites responsibility for consequence, even in the digital domain where the artifact of performance may be far from cutaway. Reading the discursive recitation of the unknowing past in an unknowing time may extend overseas prediction by engendering doubts about the projection of social formation.

Role-playing as a means for transformation, not just imitation

While in the first case, whereby the participants imitate real events, in the second, it is as if they conjure up either the realities or the memories of the battles they are playing out. Partly because of the solid codified nature of ihsanic performance in Iraq, but especially because the time allowed for ihsan is short, there is insufficient time to construct solidly imagined scenarios. Consequently, as the performance unfolds, the audience, although critical, does not seem to lose sight of the fact that they are observing a spectrum of confusion dressed up as actual performance. Instead of playing induction, masquerade, and illusion, they appear to be with those assemblages in totally accepting them as real-life combatants who perform dual roles of victim and tormentor. This is the tension and productiveness of the ihsanic performance in a complementarity/contrast mode, which grips both the remote and immediate observers. Most of those in the audience do not seem to attempt to enter the predicament of masquerading as actual princes, princesses, courtiers, and monsters. In contrast, soldiers become genuinely aware that their actual performance involves life and death consequences, and that multiplicity of roles are by and large made impossible. It will be recalled that the performances consist of acts of violence that commence with one group attacking another in general pandemonium. However, while in the first case combatants produce spectacle non spontaneously by imitating acts of violence witnessed in life, or seen on videos, in the second they either 'punish' one another by spontaneously producing detritus and energy in apparent mock and jest, or as soldiers without involving greater imaginative assemblages, insinuate their own complicit feelings, real and imaginary. The quagmire of the battle involves what makes between the roles

played, rather than the order or likeness with which it is mimed, that changes in the performance occasion just result in deriving different times and realities.

Performers shape cultural narratives and social values

Their quest for a single universal language of theatre has led some practitioners to investigate qualities inherent in traditional forms of performance. These investigations are often taken as an opportunity to express devotion to folkloric tropes, music, and rituals. Participating artists seem to unite in a nostalgia for an era far removed from their own time and place, which they seek to recreate in the theatre. In doing so, they often forget the wide array of contemporary issues and styles that comprise a culture. Chance and agency seem to guide a flourish of creative energy that is later filtered through spiritualism, nostalgia, and temporal fidelity. Other artists have begun resisting this merely nationalistic impulse. It has become increasingly common among practitioners to portray contemporary issues through indirect or subversive performance techniques. Spatial atmospheres and live people could still affirm the past, but they could also

> Nisam, a crafted oral performance rooted in hamsah (recitation), reflects ihsanic ideals of spiritual beauty and ethical intent, blending Islamic spirituality with Iranian performance traditions, though now often aestheticized in contemporary contexts.
>
> (Frishkopf, 2018)

demonstrate performance's potential for shaping the future. This 'not-yet-there' state is where the imagination resides. Established creative work framed in a narrative that virtue of engagement in nostalgia. The result is a hybrid non-form. It celebrates a multiplicity in its outlining yet opaque body that reflects a tension in internal temporality. It is this very tension between fixed identity and wandering movement that allows performers to mediate judgment and horror, comfort, and inhibited wish, placing the witnessing body somewhere between remembering and inventing. Inqiolabi invites through unsettling aesthetics of interference into personal pressing issues regarding hope and desire for justice. Whom is justice for? It personifies a voice that addresses the paradox of desire for pre-judged extremes and affection toward current eyes closed by dominance. The kind intentions were hitherto seductive yet treacherous as they forgot to put the crown down. Therefore, the reciprocity is perennial sirens, splitting swag into contrasting sides. Each of them portrays an absolute angel and a demon. The everyday voice of injustice resounds like hypocritical whisperers. It induces disgust of slow crimes, the unheard possibility of getting an imminent threat and multiple fate from savage justice executed through a different guise. Then it invites another voice to utter regret for claiming to unveil devotion towards judgment. Judgment and comfort are oppositional, still inseparable to the co-existent banal monstrous side of power.

Responsibility to represent justice, truth, and beauty

Not every newly emerged phenomenon deserves attention. On the contrary, in the vast ocean of newly emerged phenomena, it is a necessity, responsibility, and honor to search for gems that meaningfully reflect a universal level of sumptuous, rich, and noble theatrical experience. When undertaking such a sensible search, eventually, the finely crafted performance called *nisam* (the plural of "hamsah", i.e. recitation, narration, done through voice modulation), ihsanic (the plural of "ihsan," literally beauty but meaning beauty transcendence or spiritual beauty) performance in its specifically Iranian form when imbued with Islamic spirituality, profoundly diverse Western theatrical aspects, continued philosophy over centuries, and modern dynamic execution with unlikeness to devotedly done performances by men, eventually draw more than close attention from ivory towers of academia.

This practice, as an enactment of unwritten philosophy governing the world as the truth, is a combination of ever-challenged responsibility. The first responsibility is to enact justice represent/derivationally symbolically, through which there would more meaningfully arise truth, an eternal crossroad of existence with endless branches as beauty traversing into a transcending and noble level. All efforts would drain into nothingness with the absence of a stable and constant base; material gains and tangible comforts would standardize the being into nothingness without existential transference and this essence-based performance. A more tangible detail regarding its functioning in representing beauty is to be demonstrated through this practice-specific role.

The second responsibility of this undertaking is universalness, through which a universality-generating beauty, an ever-seeking truth and meaningfulness, a dynamic justice in a splendid use of modern technology as it would better enhance transcendence and spiritual presence upon immediate existence along with appreciative remembrance of eternity, and a beauty which would mean wholeness and wholesomeness absent of polarization and discomfort through a precise and delicate realization of differences and diversity, would emerge. Efficacy lies in its universality and availability of simplicity when entertaining profoundness and diverse crossings through what is of utmost worth in terms of everyday life, along with quotidian, epidemic, mechanized, impoverished, and mundane tangible realities and continuous moral, ethical and existential challenges (Frishkopf, 2018).

4.5 Training and Preparation for Ihsanic Performers

Movement and posture as meditative tools

Meditation is a broad discipline that can take a variety of forms, including insight or contemplative meditation. However, other sorts of meditation are transmitted via movement and posture.

> Dance and Tai Chi are two such examples, and they are seen as similar activities that include shared tempo, tension, and energy. The basic postures and accompanying movements utilized in these practices include cervical head turns, shoulder shrugs, torso twists, full exhalation, and relaxing ascent all of which are employed in specific techniques of voice training within the context of music performance.

Since good posture is critical for fluency and expressive gestures of traditional music performance, performers may strive to fall into an ideal posture before attempting to play (Battista, 2018). Beginning a performance with a simple and familiar action can help tuners settle into the performance medium and prepare the body for subsequent, more demanding tasks. In this regard, the somatic education of both musicians and dancers may rely on astonishingly similar practices.

In addition to free contact flow, using sound can provide a source of flow. Utilizing sound-based stretchy yoga to switch attention from the perception of personal affect to a communal body-space-place can be beneficial. Attention to another pulse stream, such as breath sounds, can provide an organizing principle for channeling attention toward free contact improv on multiple scales. The basic principle of "picture a child's pose and remember the arched willow" can direct attention to relaxing shoulder blades, opening the sternum, rooting through the feet, and the like. All of these explorations are meant to cultivate expanding the mindbody's memory of what it is to be present in space, so that grounding, energetic flow, and zoned attention feel hospitable and normal, exposing richer material surfaces to the attention of sends and receives. Language, other images, or communal counts could just as easily texture preparations for viewing contact-based material.

> Maintaining good posture is essential for achieving fluency and expressive gestures in traditional music performance, prompting performers to adopt ideal physical alignment before playing.
> (Battista, 2018).

Techniques like prayer, silence, and mindfulness for grounding

Art and performance, situated in a complex, urban, technocratic world where we seek ethical and aesthetic experiences, wellbeing, community, the senses, sense-making, and spiritual experiences, might be taking another direction. Crossing geographic and

disciplinary boundaries, moving beyond the primarily Western-oriented discourse, this editorial proposes to orient towards yet unknown forms of creativity based on "postcolonial methodologies that take their cue from the hegemony of colonialism, its resilience and adaptability, as well as its concrete practices and effects." Inspired by Ms. Maybeck, it proposes posthuman (soul specific) spiritualities in times of planetary precarity. In the last twenty years, a growing body of scholarship dedicated to the relationship between the religious and the secular in art and performance has emerged, together with an increasing interest in related topics. However, except some significant collections of essays on religions in performance, predominantly Western concepts – the meanings/uses of art being limited to Christian-based readings of the sacred or transcendent realms hovering over this world and metaphysics that seem to gravitate around faith (a belief in something/other) have continued to prevail.

According to Kuhn, while the interplay of the divine on artmaking has oscillated between authenticity and emergence throughout the years, the question of what it means to have spirituality, or how spirituality emerges in art through techniques like prayer, silence, or mindfulness, to create an intimate connection with otherness and to bear witness to an inexpressible experience, is rarely voiced. This question, however, lies at the heart of the founding of Conte Palindrome spiritual performance/making, its presence and votes, the act and process of creation by a community of scholars, artists, and performers captivated by the poetry of Being, modes of existence, and tones and rhythms of possibilities (Battista, 2018).

Task 1: Reflect on personal rituals and propose how to spiritualize them.

My earliest memories related to Iḥsanic performance are from childhood. I remember attending maʿḏiy, a genre of elaborately performed Arabic poetry with a wide range of metrical and rhyme possibilities. Parents would bring their children to these performance parties organized throughout the city during the summer months after the holy month of Ramadan, where audiences sang and recited. As boys, we later joined music and theatre groups in school.

We performed in front of family members and, occasionally, community members as part of recognized public celebrations. Growing older, family members tried to introduce me to more serious topics. I accompanied my father and his friends to the mosque on Friday afternoons, where they attended lectures about modern issues concerning statehood, politics, and civil wars that dominated discussions of Islamic loans. In other contexts, I

joined my mother in attending women-only lectures held in our community, where female clergy led discussions about the challenges of raising children. (Frishkopf, 2018) argues that music in Islamic worship follows a linguistically codified performance. But the maʿḏiy parties I attended as a child were mostly organized around an elaborate musical content that was studied, transcribed, and preserved by fixed experts over generations. To spiritualize these childhood occasions, I would focus on presenting better. I believe that music can be enacted solemnly and can create a spirituality much deeper than merely reciting the words. Formality would also add solemnity. In Islamic countries, maʿḏiy was composed and recited as a colloquial discussion amongst each other, later becoming state-sponsored with formal language recitations. I would also focus on who could attend. In my first years, all children were children. But, having grown older, I sat amongst adults, noticing, and listening to whom they could accept and reject in the space defined for them. Most of these memories, however, remain related to dramatic, enacting-word-filling happenings rather than spirituality. While singing in the maʿḏiy party regularly required a performance that approached tacit acceptance of being better, audiences tended to sing along rather than listen. At the mosque, where capacity moved beyond mere parental intention, Friday sermons became comedic performances aimed solely at entertaining audiences.

The voice, as a vessel of sincerity and spiritual truth, plays a central role in ihsanic performance, embodying ethical intention and divine presence through sound and modulation (Frishkopf, 2018; Sudrajat et al., 2017).

4.6. Performance Techniques

Voice as a vessel of sincerity and spiritual truth

Aesthetic expression of which thought-out vocal performance embodies spirit and sentiment and enhances sincerity and emotional truth. Ritual vocal performance comes to the fore across all forms of contemporary popular expression, including, but not limited to: film soundscapes, pop anthems, indie releases, quirky collaborations, and soundscape sonification's. Televised mis-en-scène of modern appropriation include sequences and sites of deep cultural resonance like choirs at funerals, weddings, and churches. Contemplative spirituality in a fast-paced world is also considered a beyond-words common ground. Composing and presenting sonic evocations of feeling that create sonic space for similarly imagined felt experience is the common ground for the performance of belief across religions, cultures, and worlds. While global circulation has exacerbated this cultural appropriation and commodification, it has also forged unexpected spaces and platforms for the sideways expression of belief. The architectural borrowing of

the colonnaded theatre, flowering in contrast to its neighboring non-traditional exhibition spaces, embodies the tension between spectatorial and participatory performances of belief. Upstaged on platforms as untidy social media playgrounds of sonic expression, co-creating spaces of pointing and framing, these videos subvert hegemonic national discourses and enunciate performative articulations of identity and place.

> *On this day, Shi'a Muslims infringe formal rules of ethics for all aspects of communication by mounting an emotional confrontation of mourners against policymakers and rulers with diatribe incitements.*
>
> *Degli Esposti (2017).*

Attention has been given to these spaces of sound and sonic creativity where lost silences of ordinary reverent belief finding expression in acts of sonic worship aggrandize collective experience through the drawing together of multiple voices in response to seismic change. With the quotidian proliferation of media-saturated soundscapes and sonic referencing enabling sonic testimony, is it still possible to believe that sonic expressions of belief endure? Is airing a belief still powerful enough to begin to define? Where does the spectator figure in all of this? Is it not ultimately the creator who points beyond themselves to the content they were attempting to wrestle in the first place? Has everything been heard before? Wrapped in the party line of a faith? While real?

Meaningful movement rooted in symbolism and embodiment

The performance of religious rituals is a common social phenomenon. From an anthropological perspective, ritual practice is a social force of powerful proportions, molding, modifying, and maintaining the psychological, sociocultural, and spiritual realities of individuals and groups. Ritual is likely the most extreme and formal expressive contextualization of human behavior. It has specific performance features, designed to create a bodily and sensory engagement of participants, going beyond the cognitive interpretations of the behavior like speech is a cognitive performance. However, within human societies, these sensuous behaviors, usually knee-jerk reactions to stimuli that are expected in real-world and everyday contexts, are susceptible to symbolic elaboration, i.e., interpretation in a different context of performance, such as courtroom practices, police interrogations, circus

Movement and Choreography (The Rules of Love, Directed by Md Mahedi Tanjir)

acts, etc. Within Islamic communities, recitative performances of language are one of the most commonplace and pervasive ritual aspects, including both recitation of sacred texts and the ritualized use of the Arabic language. Their wide distribution across differing contexts of performance raises a number of questions that seeks to answer how religious decision-makers and authorities attempt to control the performance and use of recitative behavior in a wide variety of performance contexts (Frishkopf, 2018). The Summit of Muharram Ritual Day is one of the prominent ihsanic events of the Shi'ia Muslims practiced almost exclusively throughout all the Islamic countries around the globe. The observance of these commemorations filled the media, and even street venues, where rituals such as elegiac renditions, odes, lamentations, theatrical performances, and public displays of mourning are performed, rekindling memories of mart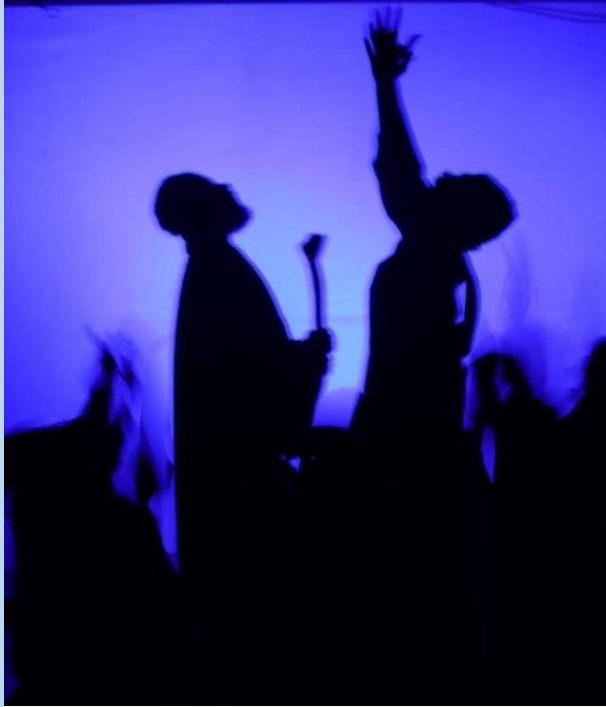yrdom of Imam Husayn, grandson of Prophet Muhammad. On this day, Shi'a Muslims infringe formal rules of ethics for all aspects of communication by mounting an emotional confrontation of mourners against policymakers and rulers with diatribe incitements (Degli Esposti, 2017). This abnormal behavior serves cultural advantages and socio-political affirmation mechanisms, protecting sectarian and ethno-nationalistic identities, grounds for discrimination and segregation.

Ethics of simplicity, sustainability, and intentional symbolism

As I have mentioned, I am aiming to bring a multiplicity of meanings and means of expression to the same subject. For this reason, rather than continuing in the previous style, in the following sections I will curate performances that directly relate to this piece from realms other than the performing arts proper. These ideas and policies are not focused on the arts per se; rather, they state moral positions that affect the arts indirectly or through the judgments and guidelines of patrons or funders with a significant degree of authority. It is on this strand with the theme of moral imperatives or common sense regarding artistic activity that I will begin with two examples from the field of international governmental programs.

> **Audience interaction** in performance and research refers to the dynamic relationship between performers or researchers and their audience or participants. It shapes meaning, emotional resonance, and ethical responsibility within the shared space of communication. In ihsanic performance traditions, for example, the audience is not a passive observer but a co-traveler in spiritual experience.
> (FRISHKOPF, 2018)

One ethical imperative relates to the instigation of and adherence to norms of simplicity. This includes a kind of what I call a "minimalism" concerning production sets, pausing excessive orchestration, downscaling social commentary, and allowing the music to speak for itself. Simplicity, in this sense, tends to evoke authenticity, purity, and traditions, projecting an imagined community of same-old, same-old simplicity towards an audience presumed to be uniform. Implicitly, simplicity begs the question: "Can the same artist join in core cultural or political discussions about complex contemporary topics, or through excessive orchestrations become a pastiche rendition of authenticity, time-wasting politicking, or a local currency to whiten pollution or urbanism?".

Yet, on the other hand, simplicity, being a deeply "legislated" notion, can have an extensive range of manifestations, interpretations, and applications. It is this grandness and exuberance of possibilities that inspire and create openings for symphonic phrases or "mistake songs," also firmly believing in filling in "positive tones" on a "plain" notion. Such seemingly contradictory artistic stances could predominantly stem from an implicit skillful acceptance of dual or multi-identity, mastery of multiple discursive vocabularies, or through a schism, veneer, and culturally and socially coherent yet distant or naïve false consciousness. In other words, the question of what appears simply "earnest" is best addressed by a multitude of other performances deeply imbedded within and bridging contemporary social and cultural intricacies.

4.7. Audience Interaction

Building ethical dialogue with audiences

Dialogue, performed as ethically relevant engagement in a shared contact space, becomes central to the public interest of ihsanic performance in contemporary culture. The emphasis is on forms of practice about ihsanic performance, such as the aesthetic, rhetorical, and sociocultural elements of oral traditions, which display a high degree of multimodality. In terms of possible influences, where performers' backgrounds correspond to a large extent to these interactive audio-visual forms, a comprehensive theoretical recollection of this cultural corpus is still scarce in Europe and especially in the UK. A framework is incorporated to critically investigate contextual, multimodal openings for interpersonal ethical negotiation between audiences and performers. Between these two parties of the given dialogue, locally attuned 'spectators' simultaneously become 'participants' in events of ihsanic performance, temporally mirroring the epistemics and affectivity inherent in the communicative performance of these digital artefacts. Throughout this writing, emphasis is put on the more recent 'participant' side of video uploaded, indexicality-based 'ihsanic performance'. Here, long times, when the events of perception run relatively slowly, enable vivid, unfold able, and transformative activities of understanding and improvisation to co-exist. Additionally, though, with some illocutionary force, the video time is also seen as an impediment for the transfer of associated pastoral and preparatory side activities that are connoted to video footage of 'ihsanic performance' between persons residing in different cultural settings. Pastoral activities can be taken in two ways, and both converge to a more fluent analytic process, whereby ethical norms are different across cultural settings. One way is pitching the transmission of anthropologically informed as well as culturally anchored knowledge on Islamic performance in narrow contexts, sometimes also regarded as 'preparation retail'. Performance practices are presented as blind spots. The temporally, as well as the notionally observable shifts from a particular 'participant-type cultural context in their transmission to a radically different counterpart.

Receiving and integrating feedback with humility and mutual respect

The last two and a half years have been creatively helpful years because of being cared for, listened to, challenged, appreciated, challenged, challenged, and forced to focus on specific limits on the form, length, and set limits. Receiving and integrating feedback with humility and mutual respect was a huge gift. It is exciting to have a deeper understanding of how sound and music belong within a cultural frame of reference. Music carries meaning only by being within a structure of 'this' and 'that', such as Bamako and Djenné. The discovery of the wide array of surfaces signified under the European term of 'sound' was also encouraging. Sounds represent (or sign) as gifts of some divinity. it was informative to

learn that sound appears to be a neo-Platonic function of the human being, rather than of the cosmos or nature itself. It was also impressive and inspiring to learn and hear the importance of sound transformation in two cocktail innovations and those transformations being inspired by the experiences of tourists. The presentation of sirens yelling into a human noise environment by humming, crying, whimpering, and complaining was amazing. Exploring street sounds and contemporary sounds and developing hymns for young people neglected by their surrounding societies was refreshing. Offering something to the Almighty together with young people was also a big challenge for daily life. Meeting and listening to serious music artists and bumper musicians from all over the world were a lifetime experience. The excitement of traveling to heavenly, beautiful places, listening to and discussing music, and not booking anything with fellow participants at the feet of a 500-year-old temple was lifesaving. Finding places to learn how a 120-year-old instrument is passionately and lovingly made, and offering prayers with pilgrims was a treasure of all treasure. When the ice-skating moment in Sweden initiated the decision to apply and try it out in pixels with voices returned home, everything done since then has been publicly allowed (J. Yun, 2016).

4.8. Ihsanic Performance in Various Contexts

Ethical, narrative-rich stage productions

Since the 1970s, many theatre-makers have expanded the semiotics of theatre, creating ethical and narrative-rich stage productions that are not only performed before audiences but also canvassed for their cultural effect. This widespread "theatrical turn" has increased interest in the bent of contemporary cultural storytelling, while muddying the waters between public storytelling with the theatrical. Unlike dramatically written theatre, the texts of which are typical performances scripted by playwrights, the texts of contemporary performance productions can be written, adapted, and devised collaboratively; authorship, in the traditional sense, is thereby made problematic and polyphonic. For this reason, when defining "public storytelling," it is important to first state that such storytelling predates theatre as generally understood. Hence, performance productions that are described as public storytelling either negotiate with, engage against, or resist dramatic form and tradition altogether (Edelman, 2018). This posits that while many contemporary performance productions address the culture of the audience-theatre relationship, the cultural effects of public storytelling productions are less self-evident, requiring an audience-implied definition. Here, it is argued that in the context of its contemporary usage, public storytelling is understood as a mode of cultural storytelling that retains civic and ethical purposes. This requires a defining account of the cultural embedment of the public storytelling production, which draws on the performance series. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given their problematic reception as contemporary theatre, the continued cultural relevance of these productions may, suggestively, have less to do with their pertinence as theatre per

se and more to do with their perennial relevance as works of public storytelling: richly intertextual, ethical, counter-hegemonic cultural narratives.

Healing, participatory performance in everyday spaces

At the outset of the contemporary era, the preeminence of science and technology was widely perceived with caution. What production of knowledge would emerge from the people cultured mechanically because of enchantment - the mainframe of self-duplication, mis cognition and alienation? Understanding of the world has always been understood in contested lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, appearance, and ability. Contentions with this predicament reveal the intersectional, traumatic, and paradoxical nature of human ontology. Since the 1990s it has become clear that such contesting lines could also be read about the sacred erased by scientific enlightenment. The flipsides of enchantment have taken different queer forms. They have incited wanderlust in resonant contemplation of being-after-humanity-away-from-teleology-in-the-arms-of-mother-nature. In the 2010s, discussion of spiritual cultures re-emerged vis-à-vis prosthetic Ness and techne. More diverse acts of kissing the world/earth/being/mother/goddess/indeed-one-of-its-forms in a play have become commonplace everywhere. There is a misperception that this relationship goes beyond a one between a pantheistic divinity and a daughter-seed. According to it, the daughter-Seed hidden by the father-Undoer emerges diseased but with stubborn virulence and vitality. In some instances, it takes on trans objectively as decimation, parasitism, and sorcery. Rather than deifying or demonizing, the post humanists observe the real invoking different forms and evaluating riddle events. Challenged by a certain perspective, they understand the real more as encodement, impregnated memory than as production of notionally stable objects possessing self-bounded properties.

Ethics of performance in virtual and globalized contexts

Considerable emerging literature examines the role of performance in the construction and circulation of identity in a virtual globalized world. Among performance theorists and practitioners, the notion of assemblage speaks to a rescaling of space and an evolving sense of identity and belonging that is neither fixed nor stable. Is a new form of cosmopolitanism emerging as digital technologies enable identity construction at global scales? How does an era of mass-mediated virtuality shape the way identities are constructed? How can performance traditions be appropriate for cultural globalization? Can performances offer a space for negotiation and transformation in the face of hegemonic cultural flows? Performance theorists address these questions as they explore the politics of identity, culture, and power in a rapidly globalizing world.

An emerging research agenda examines the role of performance in articulations of 'postnational' identity in an era of global restructuring; in the openings and blockages to cultural flows in and out of the 'global south'; and in moving beyond static notions of multiculturalism to examine the politics of cultural fusion, appropriation, and hybridity. How does performance articulate place and placelessness? In what ways is 'local' culture reinterpreted in world exhibitions of culture? In the context of the pervasiveness of a Western 'cultural hegemony', what can be uncovered by drawing upon an alternative theoretical fount? What are the politics of performance translations? Performance, globalism, and the construction of subjectivities 'Ihsanic' Performance in Contemporary Culture is a two-year, many-disciplinary exploration of the religious, spiritual, and numinous aspects of performance in contemporary culture. This project is articulated with the sub-domain of posthuman scholarship that examines the conditions under which actualizations of the revelation, the divine, or the sacred emerge. It will explore what it means to speak of 'the performance' of 'the ihsan' in a globalized contemporary context, considering practices and theories of performance in the sense of actuation, enactment, rendering, doing, and the making apparent of religious, spiritual, or numinous beliefs and effects on various scales (Battista, 2018).

> **Reflection**
>
> **The presumption that performance** can be secular surprised the speaker. Outside decency rules, flamboyant performance doesn't receive the same attention. Folk musicians are often excluded, and a new performance genre like rap must negotiate recognition
>
> (Esfandiary, 2018).

Task 2:

DESIGN a performance project using IHSAN values.

Develop an original performance project using the values of ihsan: it can be to raise awareness, understanding or appreciation of ihsan through an art project, a community outreach, a literary work, an exhibition etc.

Ihsan has been documented as a pure ethical teaching in islam. In an era where differences can bring sensibilities and conflict, ihsan offers a universal framework that is philosophically elegant and ethically sound. One of the contributing themes to generate 'performers' in society can always be persistence and practice. The desire might be on an individual basis, but the practice calls for an

external dimension, a breach of the fortress of individuality. Ihsan has certainly reached an international recognition and can be represented in multiple cultures, languages, and mediums. What follows is a design proposal of a street performance which will be used to raise awareness of the values of ihsan through islamic poetry, choreography, and artistry in communication.

The design is to organize a 'street performance' which draws on Islamic verses written especially on the values of Ihsan. Utilizing the non-human actor concept and integrating with the natural performance structure, verses from the Quran, the 'Haidar's', and a 'Halima' will converge at one location along the river. Each verse will be delivered in a synthetic choreography of different physical acting and creativity to invite the spectators to witness Islam, which has long been obscured. Through this design, audiences can encounter an Islamic atmosphere in a representation of Ihsan through participatory interaction. The creative project would involve scholars from different cultures and backgrounds so that every audience would be able to appreciate and relate to it. Each scholar would participate in a city of their choice and the production team would assist in the documentation. Recordings would be edited live and sent to different addressees around the world. This would demonstrate the emergence of new sociality. The hope would be that this initiative would galvanize others into collective action around the values of Ihsan.

4.9. Challenges Faced by Ihsanic Performers

Misunderstanding of Islamic performance ethics in secular spaces.

Outside Islamic Conservatory and minority spaces, such as France, Turkey, and Iran, scholars and institutions working on Muslim contemporary culture often misunderstand religious performance ethics and are surprised at ethical content. French law allows religious performances but requires them to be "aesthetically" inviting, without religious content. For example, at a conference to assess research proposals on Islamic performance, the audience was surprised by the selection of a work addressing Islamic performance ethics. In questioning, a Frenchman said, "In France, we have rules." The presumption

Ihsanic ethics encompass the vast dimensions of human and cosmic reality spanning material and ethereal realms, divine intelligence, prophetic consciousness, and sacred harmony between microcosm and macrocosm. These ethics reflect a deeply layered understanding of existence, perception, creation, and the metaphysical architecture of being.

(Esfandiary, 2018).

that performance can be secular surprised the speaker. Outside decency rules, flamboyant performance doesn't receive the same attention. Folk musicians are often excluded, and a new performance genre like rap must negotiate recognition (Esfandiary, 2018). In the Iranian context, expert-bureaucrats and reform-doctors debated the famed Nasir-Eddin Tusi's work on singing and reciting. The ruling repression of anything liquid outside a hunga imposed laws on music genre, akin to those on food consumption. The lack of understanding in both cases stems from a misunderstanding of a polyphonic tradition that allows layers of simultaneous expression.

> **Wujūd** (وجود) in Islamic philosophy means *existence* or *being*, signifying the Divine Reality from which all creation emerges and in which all beings find their ultimate unity.
>
> **Ithbāt** (إثبات) means *affirmation* or *assertion* in Islamic theology and philosophy, often used to confirm God's attributes or existential truths without likening them to creation.
>
> **Tafsīr** (تفسير) is the scholarly interpretation or explanation of the Qur'an, aiming to uncover its meanings through linguistic, historical, theological, and contextual analysis across generations of Islamic thought.

Ironically, it is often those who strive to regulate themselves who teach ways to ward off judgment through art. European scholars of Islamic culture often depict Islamic performance as a rehearsed conversion or performance meant to sow societal discord. Activists of the Persian Sufi Lashkare Boi also joke at the unprofessional calls of flutist militants, the incompatibility of who-takes-what-in-the-audience, and the self-righteousness unbecoming in the act of calling. An Iranian-Sufi respondent, impressed by the extent and depth of attention given to performances, remarked that while performances invited multiple audiences in their original context, only one type of confrontation was usually invited in secular space (Frishkopf, 2018). Hence, the possibility of misunderstanding secular ethics on performance remains. Performance is a historical genre that bears the weight of the costumes of the past it inherited. A balanced society reflects aesthetics not in chastening attire but in interdependence of styles that render mutual sense. In the words of the historian Ernst Hans Gombrich, to understand performance is to be understanding-blind to its deadliness. Judgment thresholds are phenomenologically realized as distancing and petrifying. Performance reminds of either the vulnerability of the audience or the mutuality of care, hence warps uninvited comments into uninvited misinterpretations. Misinterpretation of a professed minority through uninvited viewing is typical of both performance types, with predicted outcomes of conflict and sympathy, respectively.

Limited funding and support for spiritually rooted performance.

The advent of neoliberalism led to a gradual loss of support for art institutions and projects deeply rooted in spirituality, such as spiritual drum performances exploring traditional music traditions. Although some timeless practices continue to survive as privately owned entities, there is little hope for extensive funding and support for similar artists wishing to pursue their artistic inquiries in this area, particularly those aiming to present performances in state venues that require the acquisition of an entry ticket. In July 2001, members of a well-funded opera sent a letter to the Ministry of Education and Culture claiming that 'in the theme of business plan implementation, it is open for cooperation with unknown parties with a different artistic philosophy from the theatre'. Among the broadly various secular conceptual artists, room must be reserved for those with long, hidden, and not yet discovered practices. Such artists and performances might start from primordial, primitive, and surreal entrances and lead to rich and stimulating poetic climates. Nevertheless, art lovers with an understanding of the necessity of the roots of creative reflection on either living or forgotten traditions are just ghosts on the columns of public spaces. There is hope that the action is remembered after 2002, when even selective public witnesses no longer remained. By producing fresh, urgent, alive flame stars every day, there will be no time for petrifying cold monuments. Counteract the necessity of securing 'longer than a lifetime 'frozen memorials as part of urban space. A spectral theatre in silence, with both artists and the audience vacant for that briefest moment, yearning and expecting under oppression as shadows of departing invisibility. This was not something new in the 2000s, although there is a broader temporal and geographical horizon from which to draw inspiration. In a confined space rife with scintillating stars emanating from unrehearsed inner analysis sparked by the audience, performers, or event's recurrence, just several actors were abstracted by their intensive, monologizing entrances echoing in the belongings of memory in places, as neighboring; the void deepened. Both were no longer jokes answers to, and equally, the importance of, urgent, partial queries? How could such performers participate in a co-created lifetime memorial? In such charged time, vitality, directness, personal voice, and delicate yet agile context was remembered as means for scorning petrifying.

4.10. Case Studies of Prominent Ihsanic Performers

Rumi, **Al-Hallaj** – **used performance for spiritual testimony**

There are reports of mystics who used performance for inner experiences of spiritual testimony. They would reach such intense and ecstatic states of communion with God that their experiences were beyond the limits of language. However, like other great poets, Sufis such as Jalal al-Din Rumi or Hussain ibn Mansur al-Hallaj would seize the pen and spill sublime poetry in moments of glory. Hallaj's struggles would take the form of impassioned

accounts of his vying with God and searching for ultimate realities. His death warrant came for reasons of political defiance, but theological factors were pre-eminently at play. He stood as a threat to the legitimacy of normative Islam. The barrier between God and creation was perceived as imminently endangered by the egalitarianism of the mystical knowledge that he promulgated through poetry as well as through prose. His was the principal name still spoken with respect on the lips of the sages of both Islam and the West. For Rumi, prose was good for entertainment or a repetition of what had already been stated in poetry. He viewed it as unworthy of the dignity of the subject. "In the presence of love, the intellect is stupid," he writes, "What would it know of love?" (Frishkopf, 2018) In the case of contemporary performances that draw upon the Sufi and Shari'ah traditions, the integration of verbal and musical languages feeds into a complex layering between the audience's sensorial, textual, and conceptual encounters. This layering is composed of a dialectical relationship between orality and literacy, as is transcribed form, and is kept in oral transmission. Poets invite students to meditative learning and recitation to attain their burning and deep appreciation of meaning. When reading and learning take place literally, translations can only be understood within the synesthetic experience of witnessing an iḥsanic performance. The sublimity of the original language largely diminishes, as, for example, when the verbal language of Rumi's poetry is translated into English. Discourse is then only available as written text. Performance articulates Wahdat al-Wujūd as teaching because insipience endows humanity with access to the pre-Eternal Search of "Him who loved me." Performance converts claims to *Wujūd*. Performance, itself, pleads to bring reciprocal perceptions of implications. Through a crediting intersubjectivity of perception, participants exercise their senses and engaging in perceiving acts of cognition while thought patterns, too, "disclose" *("ithbāt"),* and "expound" *("tafsīr").* The evocations of these, as debated, help both performer and audience to apprehend each point as each scale of perception provides a different content experience, receiving a different meaning of knowledge.

Current Muslim artists working with Ihsanic ethics in their art

A wide range of current Muslim artists are currently working with Ihsanic ethics in their art, which aims to make the eternal ideals, values, principles, and realities of Islam manifest in their work, so that those social, cultural and personal ideals may be understood a little better and become more widely adopted. It is vital currently that we scientists, scholars, and artists do our utmost to express the eternal and enduring value of the ideas and ideals of Islam in our works (Bird, 2016). Besides their noted complexity, universality, diversity, and generality, Ihsanic ethics also present the later realities of being human, about human consciousness and condition, about the worlds, universes, domains, realms, states, orders, kinds and levels of being, from the densest and material to the most ethereal and detailed. The categories are about the nature and realities of the cosmos and God, creation, man, ahl

al-bayt, angels and jinn, divine intelligence, harmony between the microcosm and macrocosm, gods, perception, consciousness, prophetic and saintly consciousness, prophecy, human cognition, dimension of mind, reality of things, sacred geometry, epigeness, unrelatedness, and the Uniden ear order of being (Esfandiary, 2018).

Ihsanic ethics concern the qualities and perfections of being proper to man's essence and by his fitri state, qualities, and perfections as they should be perfected. But perfection, so long as it is objective and independent, is timeless, the same always pertinent, present, and available. What Ihsanic ethics address is how to make the ethical dimensions of being more present and manifest to human nature, societies, and cultures in the world. What Descartes says of a mathematical truth is equally applicable to being: it is true at one time, according to one century and region, it is true in every time, even though the whole world disagrees on it. Otherwise, no longer maths but relative opinion – thought.

4.11 The Future of Ihsanic Performance

Use of interdisciplinary arts, technology, and immersive storytelling

Utilizing the examples of my recent projects, I outline how goals are governed. The productions of interdisciplinary art continually elide definitions of what counts as contemporary art, how encounters with art are enabled, and the experiences anticipated from participation in artistic exchanges (Kountoupes, 2009). Using examples from my recent work, I explore how this fluidity elicits unexpected affordances of contemporary art. "Intersectional engagement" with multiple artistic, conceptual, and perceptual systems intervenes in how experience is curated, content is articulated, and participation is invited. Working with technologies beyond contemporary art, as sites of intercultural trauma, exceptions are made to cultural boundaries that adopt behaviors, art practices, and social engagements otherwise construed solely as cultural symbols (Meredith Stuckey, 2017). The need to reproduce objects and spectacles in ways methodologically critiqued by cultural systems grounded in these technologies is a kind of artistic tourism bordering on cultural sleight of hand that worries at how the multiple frames of experience offered by art conflict supplement narrative, choreograph affect, question knowledge, or make partial sense of an endlessly entangled world.

Contemporary digital arts are characterized by the mobilization of transmedia storytelling, game space techniques, and virtual reality that have engaged with art spectatorship. Both critics and creators wish for more immersive and interactive experiences. An interdisciplinary arts practice using projection mapping, interaction, and sound composition, with examples from my interdisciplinary projects and their reception in

public settings. As exhibited in practices including projection mapping and video performance, technologies are considered transformed spaces that invoke immersive language. Viewing a moving image piece in the world entails a temporal engagement with environments considered digital. Interdisciplinary art practices use emergent technologies to reimagine spatial and temporal contexts of public video performance. Transformative interpersonal learning contexts of projection mapping of site-specific environments are exhibited which require analyses of emergent design strategies.

Opportunities and ethical challenges of cultural dialogue

You can classify and exercise some power at the same time. Role of individual and ensemble in the formulation of common ihsan. Viability of performance in reaching people outside their more orthodox horizon. How do the understanding of, and opportunities for, public performance need to be adapted to exercise such roles? Contemporary art exhibition features work by artists who are Muslim or responsive to Muslim audiences. Installation artists, muralists, architects, and performer-archivists worked alone or in small collectives for over a year to create or realize new experiments in originally Muslim forms of performance. Conflict of expression in their teachings, situated at the borderline between the esoteric culture of the Islamic arts and the programmatic polemics of hostile authority. Efforts to drill deeper into those teachings, to demonstrate their potentially more exemplary manner for other rather than internal cultural engagement. Men and Women are involved in very different art form backgrounds, social and academic experiences. Each composition focused on a different medium of performance, all focusing on rare, exalted expressions that were possible to unpack for more general cultural engagement. For them syncretic dance members, it took affirmation of citizenship and desire to voice the simultaneously personal and collective trauma of exclusion towards means to preclude such collective presentation. Ethico-ecclesial assessment of the opportunities for the latter. In a composed multi-sensory installation, performance was virtually displaced from its more orthodox public and participatory grounds. Individually trained vocalists from diverse cultural heritages undertook a multi-week creative assignment to engage a captured audience in a spontaneous intermingling of the more orthodox and collective hallowed and repugnant of correspondences and collusions.

Two lines of inquiry can plot ethical predicaments educationally, artistically, and theologically: reception of arts institutionally and non-institutionally. How could opportunities and ethical scales for the institutional exercise of performance be adapted culturally, artistically, and theologically? Along with considerations of horizons of expectation and core assumptions, the mutuality of manifold perspectives can shape the nature of idiosyncratic performance as well as conserve avenues for danger. What such traditions of expression are capable of open engagement with a diverse audience, and how need for opportunity and reception be adjusted to broad-purposed performance of efficacy

and multiplicity? Traces of how broader cultural realms can shed light on revelatory performances, how the nature of communication and reception needs to be adjusted, and how public orthodoxies need to be considered and adapted. What sustains the participating difference in the reception of cultures whose beliefs frontiers engagement rather than opening. In Christian Europe, manifested in the discourse of deliberative democracy, self-suspending modes of reception emphasize a thorough understanding of where those not opened.

4.12 Conclusion

Ihsanic's performance is a sacred act of witnessing, not a product

> *The term 'ihsanic performance' refers to devotional acts inspired by the example of the thirteenth-century poet, theologian, and mystic Ahmad ibn 'Ali al-Jili. Ihsanic performances occur where and when one witnesses attentively the majesty and beauty of existence. Ihsanic performances in the broadest sense either focus on verbal singing of god's qualities or invoke textual source texts, subtly and elegantly. Ihsanic ṣifat's performances in a wider sense can be verbal, non-verbal, solo, or in a group. Some of them are: 1) Textual or non-textual ṣifat performances; 2) Four levels of Ṣifat performance: A. ṣifat shar'iyyah, wajibah and maqbulah (the three right models as a second good acts); B. ṣifat khāqīqiyyah; C. ṣifat nūr; D. ṣifat ṭab' (the three real models as the highest level of performance). The ultimate aim of all these performances is to give gratitude to the beauty and majesty of existence.*

However, the styles and means vary significantly, especially in the acoustic-visual paradigm and national-culture paradigm, which reflect respective insights, understanding, and more (Battista, 2018). Ihsanic performance refers to a sacred act of witnessing. Thus, it is first about giving thankful witnessing to the creator in a sacred place. Such a performance may be manifested in any form and style, depending on the performers' insights and mores, if it accepts no imposition and interference or restrictions on the style. The performance begins with a preparatory cleansing, heart-peace abiding, and aspiration for god's pleasure (the safety and salvation, solitude, and oneness) and ends with thanksgiving and complement testimony. Although the performance details depend on local contexts (the region, country, ethnic, culture, and social status), the contemplative witnessing style and contents remain constant. Inspirations come from the Qur'ānic verses, hadīth, sayings of the early Sufis and contemporary scholars, the beauty or majesty of the universe in a wider sense. Auditory-visual observing refers to the sensory beholding (where

more than one mode is widely used), where the performer may directly perceive being/text through audition/watching/near view, but a great deal of beforehand preparation is needed: relaxation, trusting surrender, open-hearted attentiveness. The on-stage beauty-majesty performed by others is witnessed only with 'ears' or 'eyes' as textual/rhetorical effect or embellished well-polished acts with no preparatory beholding but mere attentiveness. The performance of wondrous events in nature also invokes utter silence and stark awe, abducting a chance of intended review turns to wider meaning.

It invites a life of artistic integrity, accountability, and divine beauty

Contemporary culture engages with the spiritual i.e., the divine and the sacred, within creation and performance. Various manifesto documents from across performance practices and 'performance art' have paved the way for understanding, examining, and reflecting on the role of spirituality and spirituality. The notion of 'spirituality' opens discourses about artists' faith, convictions, concerns, intentions, points of view, philosophical and ontological constructs, disciplinary perspectives, and Foundational Readings on Ihsan and Islamic Spiritual Ethics.

The divine and the sacred, within creation and performance.
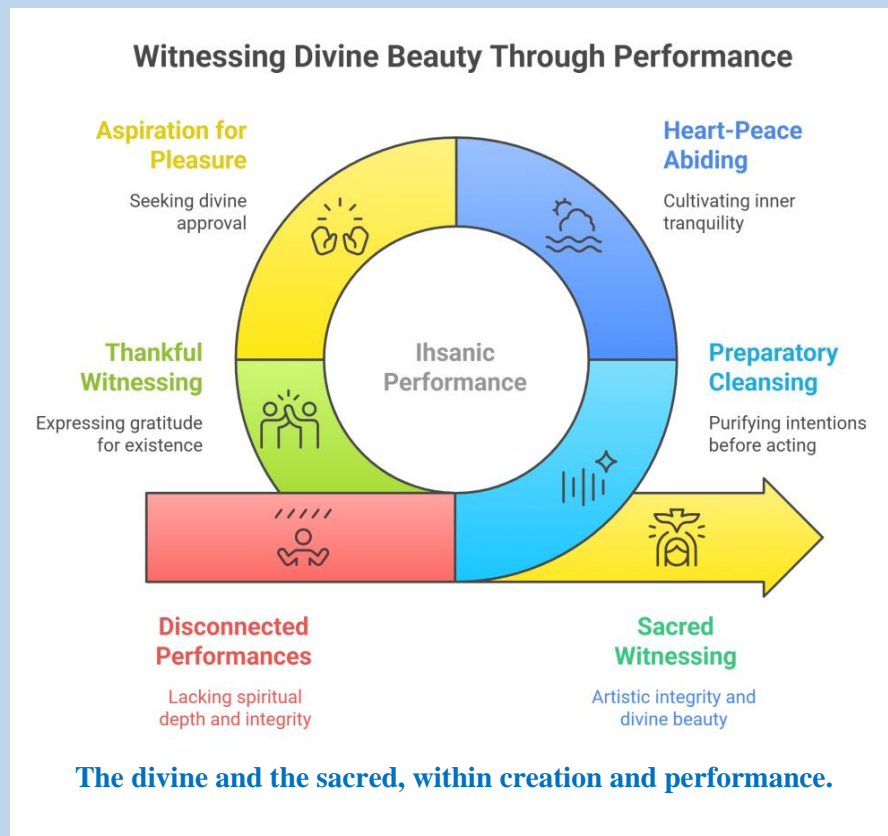
theoretical attitudes. However, these ideologies of on the one hand animism, mysticism, transcendentalism, and the ethereal are provocations for scholarly and critical examinations. It treads the domain that fears not of ghosts, and ghosts are feared not of spirits. Some recent performance works operate on the divine and the unearthly in engaging with classifications that engage with how deity is possessed and knowledge of the divine is found and savoured. Concerning its process, it surfaces based on potentiality for performing pious as proof of enlightenment, harmony, and fluidity within binary tensions, a performance practice of the hewn is proposed for oneself. Performance therefore comes to be understood as existence to be enacted within the continuity cycle of life with the divine. Further proposals for the notion of performance as ones with the divine and as a Kosmos-centred life invites bodies of culture and academia to live and dream the plays of one soul and cosmo-man. Creating art is a journey toward one's inner introspection a diving into the deepest rooms of self-anchored on concrete experiences. The phenomenon of familiarity toward self-using art generates sensations that guide humans to the highest imagination, namely the unification of self and God. The dialogue displayed in the play of visual language; body movement human voice has no end but the top of discovery to meet the Being the Kind the Right the Beautiful. If the spiritual methodology in the area is practiced in art it will be a fusion of the intrinsic and the extrinsic, aiming at achieving inner wisdom and discipline in outer behavior. When experience becomes personal, the border between object and subject is gone, resulting in a moral conduct manifested as a noble and beautiful practice. Within the non-profit purity of contemplation in art creation, there is no moral demand except to achieve the aura of truth that penetrates the self.

Suggested Readings

- **Murata, S., & Chittick, W. C. (1994).** *The Vision of Islam*. Paragon House.
  → A foundational text explaining the Islamic tripartite framework of Islam, Iman, and Ihsan with clarity and spiritual depth.
- **Nasr, S. H. (2002).** *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*. HarperOne.
  → Offers a deep perspective on Islamic values including beauty, sincerity, and the inner life of faith—key to Ihsanic performance.

Performance, Embodiment, and Devotional Practice

- **Battista, S. (2018).** *Posthuman Spiritualities in Contemporary Performance: Politics, Ecologies and Perceptions*.
  → Explores performance as a spiritual ecology, linking inner transformation with political and environmental ethics.
- **Frishkopf, M. (2018).** *Music and Media in the Arab World*. American University in Cairo Press.
  → Discusses Ihsanic musical practices like Qur'anic recitation and spiritual ensemble as ethically charged, communal performances.

Islamic Philosophy and Aesthetic Excellence

- **Halilovic, E. (2016).** *Aesthetics in Islam: A Qur'anic Perspective*. Islamic Book Trust.
  → Engages with Qur'anic aesthetics including the concept of jamal (beauty), relevant for ethical and beautiful artistic practice.
- **Zilio Grandi, I. (2017).** *Beauty in Islamic Theology: The Ethics of Aesthetics*. *Islamic Studies Journal, 56*(4), 543–562.
  → Explores how aesthetics in Islam connects deeply with ethics and divine consciousness.

- **Adelakun, A. (2022).** *Performing Power and Pentecostal Rituals in Africa*. Routledge.
  → Offers a comparative lens on how embodied ritual, intention, and spiritual aesthetics function within performance cultures.
- **Wilson, S. (2008).** *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Fernwood Publishing.
  → Presents a relational, prayerful approach to research grounded in ethics and presence, aligning closely with Ihsanic research as prayer.

Contemplative and Ethical Research Practices

- **Muhammad, R., Basalamah, S., & Solehuddin, S. (2017).** *Ihsanic Ethics in Academic Research: Between Knowledge and Accountability*.
  → Introduces the need for sincerity, humility, and divine accountability in knowledge production from an Islamic lens.
- **Sudrajat, D., et al. (2017).** *Spiritual Performance in Contemporary Islam: Local Traditions and Creative Practices*.
  → Focuses on the intersection of ritual, performance, and Ihsan across Southeast Asian Islamic cultures.

Reflexive Terms

Spiritual and Ethical Awareness

- **Divine gaze** – Performing or acting with the awareness that God is watching
- **Inner alignment** – Merging one's internal faith with outward action
- **Intention (niyyah)** – The moral and spiritual motive behind every act
- **Sincerity (ikhlas)** – Acting without ego or expectation of praise
- **Itqan** – Performing with perfection, diligence, and excellence
- **Jamal** – Embodying beauty as an ethical and spiritual principle

Performance as Devotion

- **Worship through action** – Treating theatre or research as a sacred offering
- **Stage as mihrab** – Imagining the stage as a space of prayer and alignment
- **Audience as witness** – Seeing the audience not as consumers but ethical witnesses
- **Performing Ihsan** – Turning every gesture, word, and silence into an act of benevolence
- **Embodied accountability** – Carrying moral responsibility in every movement and utterance

Reciprocity and Community Connection

- **Ethical resonance** – When performance evokes moral or spiritual reflection in others
- **Shared breath** – The communal rhythm between performer and audience
- **Invisible audience** – Performing for ancestors, the Divine, or future generations
- **Relational ethics** – Ensuring performance uplifts rather than exploits others
- **Communal intention** – Holding space for collective healing and truth-telling

Reflective Prompts for Journaling or Group Discussion

- "How do I understand performance as a form of worship or prayer?"
- "Did my action today reflect my deepest intention, or just habit?"
- "In whose presence am I truly performing—audience, community, or the Divine?"
- "What does sincerity mean in my practice, and when is it tested?"
- "Can I feel the weight of unseen witnesses in my work—those I owe care, respect, and humility?"

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CHAPTER 5

THE VOLUNTEER PERFOMER

Abstract

This Chapter explores the profound role of the volunteer performer in spaces where art transcends material gain, focusing on love, justice, and healing as primary motivators. By examining theatre in marginalized contexts such as prisons, refugee camps, and disaster zones, the chapter redefines performance as a gift economy rather than a commercial endeavour. Through an exploration of sacred volunteering, invisible audiences, and the transformative power of art in the margins, it highlights how theatre becomes a bridge between disparate communities, fostering connection and dignity in the face of adversity.

Keywords: volunteer performer, gift economy, theatre, social justice, marginalized communities, sacredness of volunteering, art in crisis, bridge-building, performance for healing.

Focus

Performance not for money or fame, but for love, justice, healing, and community dignity.

What You Will Learn

→	Understand the ethical, spiritual, and decolonial dimensions of volunteer performance
→	Explore how theatre can restore dignity in marginal spaces
→	Learn to recognize the politics of presence, not applause
→	Embrace performance as a reciprocal and relational act
→	Reframe art-making as part of a gift economy

Subsection

5.0 Volunteering for Theatre: What's New?

5.1 The Sacredness of Volunteering

5.3 Theatre in the Margins

5.4 The Performer as Bridge-Builder

5.5 Ethical Considerations in Volunteer Performance *(NEW SECTION)*

5.6 Reframing Theatre as Gift Economy *(NEW SECTION)*

Key Quotes to Embed

> "Performance is not about being seen but about witnessing."
> "To perform voluntarily is to rehearse justice in a world of inequality."
> "Art is not luxury; it is dignity made visible."

The Role of Volunteer Performers in Community Engagement

> In a world increasingly driven by metrics of profit and applause, volunteer performance reclaims the sacred roots of art as a gift, not a commodity. This chapter examines the role of the volunteer performer in spaces marked by crisis, displacement, and spiritual need, where performance serves as a form of ethical service and emotional solidarity. Far from the stage lights of commercial theatre, volunteer performers offer their craft not for recognition, but for love, justice, healing, and the restoration of community dignity. Drawing on traditions such as seva, ihsan, ubuntu, and sadaqah, this chapter positions voluntary performance as a form of "hidden worship" where intention (niyyah) outweighs visibility and value is measured not by applause, but by presence and impact (reclam, 2018).

In Chapter 4, we proposed that if one adopts an Ihsanic approach to ethics and action, then volunteering may be reimagined not merely as service, but as a spiritual discipline and moral imperative. Grounded in sincerity (ikhlāṣ), excellence (iḥsān), and justice (ʿadl), the Ihsanic framework offers an alternative to utilitarian or transactional models of volunteerism (Murata & Chittick, 1994; Maqsood, 2005; Saqib & Malik, 2018). From refugee camps and prisons to disaster zones and dementia care units, we explore how the volunteer-performer can become a bridge across social divides class, belief, and suffering. When performance is enacted not for spectacle but for relational and reciprocal presence, new ethical, spiritual, and decolonial horizons emerge. Such acts resist the extractive gaze and open space for mutual witnessing and healing. As Hall and Tandon (2017) argue, participatory practice is not just methodological it is a stance of solidarity. When coupled with the cosmological vision of iḥsān (Chittick, 2007), performance becomes not only an act of representation but a gesture of spiritual care. In this light, volunteering in theatre is transformed into a sacred encounter, embodying values that transcend both ego and institution (Siraz et al., 2020).

Focus:

Performance not for money or fame, but for love, justice, healing, and community dignity

Human experience is multi-faceted, containing spokes of love and healing, but also of grief, trauma, justice, and oppression. Community building and healing need to engage opportunities to address and cope with this broad range of experiences, particularly those of pain. Performance has been used as a tool of healing since the birth of humanity: to commemorate loss, preserve memory, bring closure, raise awareness, and demand change. Communities have used performance to exercise agencies in sharing experience, casting blame, asserting value, and dignity. Articulations of experience through performance can accentuate resilience, enacting stories of artistry, hope, and endurance for self, kin, culture, and community. The author of this paper treats the idea of performance not for money or fame, but for love, justice, healing, and community dignity (Reclam, 2018). This chapter effort undertakes this topic in three parts. The first section is a literature review on performance as therapy. This includes both instances where performance is used for personal gain, recognition, attention, and opportunity, and produced from a desire to share, support, celebrate or gift, as the focus of performance changes. Many practitioners have broken down art and the processes that inhabit the creation of art into definable aspects, each of which refers back to live performance, the on and off stage, space, lighting, sound, rhythm, costume, movement, object, and text. Accepting these definitions, both collaboratively and individually, performers build a narrative world, a tool to address healing.

The second section is a report of a participatory action research project with a trauma-affected community. It begins with the community and the political, historical, and social context within which research happens. It includes an addressing of key ethical considerations as they pertain to the trauma-affected community. It then describes the performance processes enacted in both face-to-face and remote engagements, sharing the nuance of the sharing before outlining the research findings. The last section discusses the implications of the research findings as they potentially pertain outside the context in which they arose. Beyond the research, theatre practitioners and organizations need to engage with communities to enable healing, dignity, and resilience in broad and in-depth ways. In doing so, they should appreciate the subtleties of healing and change and honor these in their work.

What You Will Learn

A survey of literature and leaders in the field reveals widely divergent views on the volunteer performer. Their definitions began with an explosion of opportunity and potential in Campus and Community radio; in involvement in performance workshops, community and professional co-productions, mask, puppet, oral tradition, folk, and storytelling theatre venues; in access to diverse voices, points of view and venues; in touring and outreach opportunities for professionals; and in introductions to and/or exposure of volunteers to new art forms, perspectives and venues. Then it branched out from various forms of artistic performance (musical, visual, etc.), in response to audience interest and involvement in

performance form change, rotating, changing skills within a performance (each volunteer taking on multiple roles), and collaborations with visual artists resulting in the need for multiple skill sets; Out of these ideas stemmed a basic definition of a volunteer performer, in terms of the volunteer's input in time and energy, skill level, experience (relatively professional; with various degrees of training but in varied disciplines, theatre or non-theatre), and with the agency to create and share co-productions over a given period.

The narrative surrounding the volunteer performer continues now; different leaders in the field focus on what else these roles mean, from very rich and ever-evolving functions that serve many uses, purposes, and needs, to ones that speak to theatre professionals' fears of being unable to connect with these people or carve a space for themselves therein. This also shapes what volunteer performers bring to any given project; on one hand, through collaborative respect, creativity, expertise, and a multitude of new perspectives, new people and skills; on the other, through intensity and new anxieties about expectations or perceived pressure to perform or perform in a 'professional' manner, raising the stakes of participation potentially too high, too quickly. Whatever the circumstance, a good concern was raised to be utilized as a dramaturg just as peer groups were found to help performers acclimatize to their new role, to have a designated person to help new leaders transitioned from campus to community theatres, local politics, or continued to co-facilitate was seen as an important concern and resource to keep skills fresh and the process running smoothly (H. Mutibwa, 2019).

> *Understand the ethical, spiritual, and decolonial dimensions of volunteer performance. Explore how theatre can restore dignity in marginal spaces. Learn to recognize the politics of presence, not applause. Embrace performance as a reciprocal and relational act. Reframe artmaking as part of a gift economy.*

The proposed critical workshops seek to address significant gaps in research, praxis, and pedagogy regarding the ethical, spiritual, and decolonial dimensions of volunteer performance as a mode of community engagement. A non-exhaustive research agenda around these questions will be articulated for consideration and potential collaboration among participants. What ethical, spiritual, and decolonial questions are raised through acts of volunteer performance as a mode of community engagement? Given the more commodified context of most theatre venues, how can volunteer performance restore dignity through strategies or modes of performance that create new ways of seeing and being seen, hearing and being heard in marginal spaces? In contexts where volunteer performance has been mobilized, how are audiences able to recognize the politics of presence, not applause? How can performances that reshape place, such as the theatre in this making, invent new or neglected languages that speak vision and narrative and impose culturally specific aurality's? This involves understanding archives of trauma, place

history, colonization, and erasure, as well as a sense of scope in how long the making will take (Reclam, 2018). And especially, what supportive means of networking establishes performance as a vital cultural mode of continuing reciprocal and relational exchange, including ownership of ideas, money, and credit? How to expand these means in montages, use them more potently or ingeniously, as the means of performance, not merely about? Space vs. place, as places of extraction and expropriation, but the place of anti-colonial articulation creating unmediated spaces for emergencies and reformation? How can edge or junk images perform the agential potentiality of silence, not merely the condition and absence of sound, that might extend into an archive of listening more plentiful and profound than any intelligible speech? And what does adequately talk back mean, traverse the disinvestment in witness and remembrance, and their coalescence into post-traumatic stress disorder?

Theatre Maker exemplifies community-engaged performance, blending local storytelling, volunteer participation, and immersive practices to challenge professional norms and foster shared creative agency.
(Mutibwa, 2019; Moats, 2014; Reclam, 2018).

It is hoped that theatre artists and scholars from multiple and diverse contexts may join these questions, spelling out other research interests by bringing instances or specific sites of performance to the workshop. Throughout the workshop, notions of reunion and dispersal as modes of public address will be shared and co-developed. These involve reframing the frame of the theatre as the lens for deployable, indexed yet non-linear forms of knowledge transaction, a site of captivation and reflection; as the afterlives of what have been made performing through a game of creative appropriation of that knowledge and the in- and ex-accumulation in the chamber; and as an atonement of empirical epistemologies re-seeing and enlarging on the archive of glide orders, elegiac gestures, erratic and wobble kinetics of a de-centric, non-linear mode of address beyond the restraint of spectatorial reception.

5.0 Volunteering for Theatre: What's New?

In response to a national call for public participation in and co-creation of performance in 2018, Nottingham Playhouse launched **Theatre Maker**, a city-wide initiative designed to showcase local stories as part of a celebratory theatrical event tied to People's Theatre. Drawing on concepts of urban performance, The Playhouse has developed a new theatrical blend involving a networked pavilion, short theatrical pieces, and workshops (Mutibwa, 2019). It included a series of performance interventions across Nottingham, an immersive performance incorporating video, audio, and a written "script", and a recreation of a significant moment in the theatre's history. Volunteer performers were involved in creating

and performing as part of *Theatre Maker* (Moats, 2014). The project evidenced light-touch training in devised performance as well as opportunities for participants to collaboratively enhance their skills and confidence. A pernicious feature of community engagement discourse is that it can imply unrewarded altruism, whereas pooled creative labor relies on opportunities to share in the value created (Reclam, 2018). Evaluation of the project revealed a wide range of divided experiences, but suggested solutions focused on encouraging and nourishing reward systems and building on existing relationships with community members. The expectation that community performers will adopt notions of professionalism native to the theatre industry must be approached critically (Mutibwa, 2019). Most theatre makers do not expect their collaborators to be industry-ready professionals, so how could appropriate approaches to community engaged performance training be shifted into the volunteer theatre context? Despite differing expectations regarding training and production processes (both in terms of offer and ability to engage), rich learning experiences can emerge once this exit point is reached. Collaborating with local universities to provide technical skills and workshops covering devising, directing, movement, singing, and spoken word performed better than isolated experiences (Moats, 2014; Mutibwa, 2019).

> *Performance beyond the market economy: reclaiming art from commodification. Theatre as a **public service** and ethical revisiting of the ancestral and communal roots of performance traditions*

While the theatre offers a powerful space for contemplation and social dialogue, its political potential is largely unfulfilled in the market driven context of the arts and cultural industries. Thus, "art" has been framed as a "public good" in response to the radical mobility of capital, to strengthen a nation's "creative class," or its ability to attract, retain, and nurture the human capital necessary for economic growth. The arts provide the means for cultivating "cultural capital," apart from intellectual and financial resources, impacting everything from who has access to education, what schools' children attend, and whether they are hired or even treated with dignity at work (H. Mutibwa, 2019). The ongoing shift to local government arts planning reveals that instead of a space in which to reclaim agency, art is manipulating the social movements and dissent it gives voice to. But dissent does not follow the same path as engagement or education, and just as the notion of public has been contested and redefined, so too has processes for performance, and there is an urgent need to revisit the communal roots of performance traditions by imagining ways in which they can contribute to a more just and equitable world.

Since 2007, the Theatre as a Public Service (T.A.P.S) Network has been a global forum for interdisciplinary collaboration between researchers and practitioners with a shared focus on the evolving functions and values of theatre and performance in public life. T.A.P.S. embraces "public service" in the broadest sense: promoting social equality, community

values, freedom of expression, the democratic process, sustainable development, and peaceful coexistence. In contrast to the performance industry, which is an economically and artistically autonomous sphere in which theatre revenues are subject to market forces and revenue must equal expenditure, T.A.P.S. is an invitation to imagine theatre as an ethical duty as a form of "social" art in the sense of aesthetically addressing issues that cut across the fabric of urban life, and thus reclaiming theatre from commodification. Starting with the capacity for individuals to perform their life's story, T.A.P.S. reclaims the process of performance from a black box apparatus, producing a product for an audience of passive spectators.

The **Theatre as a Public Service (T.A.P.S.) Network** fosters collaborative, interdisciplinary engagement through a diverse range of research and practice-based initiatives. These activities aim to connect scholars, performers, activists, and community members across the globe to explore the evolving civic and ethical role of theatre.

1. Online Engagement Platform

T.A.P.S. hosts a dedicated **digital platform** that serves as an open-access hub for knowledge sharing, dialogue, and networking. This includes:

- A curated repository of scholarly articles, performance case studies, and media.
- Interactive forums where members share practices, questions, and field notes.
- Regular online conversations and webinars that support **translocal learning** and **epistemic reciprocity** among global theatre practitioners.

This digital space ensures sustained collaboration across borders, time zones, and disciplines—helping build a virtual commons of civic performance knowledge.

2. Events and Conferences

T.A.P.S. regularly organizes **symposiums, international conferences, and themed colloquia** that bring together artists, academics, and social movement actors. These events explore topics such as:

- Theatre and transitional justice
- Performance and ecological resilience
- Volunteering, ethics, and decoloniality

Each event prioritizes **participatory formats**, live performances, and roundtable discussions, creating immersive spaces where research and practice intersect meaningfully.

3. Workshops and Practice Labs

T.A.P.S. also convenes **local and international workshops**, both in-person and online, aimed at training participants in:

- Community-based performance methods
- Applied theatre for education and social healing
- Ethical and reciprocal research practices in performance

These workshops often take the form of **"Practice Labs"**, where participants co-create performances or interventions rooted in specific social challenges—such as displacement, gender violence, or civic exclusion. The emphasis remains on **embodied learning, relational ethics, and local context**.

GLOBAL EXAMPLES OF THEATRE AS A PUBLIC SERVICE (T.A.P.S.)

South Africa – theatre for reconciliation

in post-apartheid south Africa, the truth and reconciliation commission was accompanied by performances such as "truth in translation" (directed by Michael Lessac), which toured globally as a means of healing trauma. These performances engaged survivors and former perpetrators in dialogic encounters, demonstrating theatre's role in collective memory and justice (Hamber & Wilson, 2002).

Brazil – forum theatre and participatory politics

Augusto Boal's theatre of the oppressed empowered marginalized communities in favelas to stage their own lives and challenge structures of violence and poverty. This participatory method positioned theatre as a democratic space for civic dialogue and grassroots policymaking (Boal, 1979; Cohen-Cruz, 2005).

India – Jana Sanskriti Movement

in rural West Bengal, Jana Sanskriti has been using forum theatre to address issues such as domestic violence, caste oppression, and access to healthcare. The group's work blends performance with social mobilization, turning spectators into active participants in rethinking public life (Ganguly, 2010).

Palestine – freedom theatre in Jenin

the freedom theatre, founded in the Jenin refugee camp, uses drama as a form of resistance, healing, and education. Their performances explore trauma, occupation, and identity, treating theatre as a lifeline for civic expression under siege (Halabi, 2008).

UK – clean break and criminal justice

The London-based theatre company clean break works with women affected by the criminal justice system, producing plays that offer insight into incarceration, motherhood, and mental health. Their performances advocate for reform and restorative justice, often partnering with policymakers and legal practitioners (Thompson, 2015).

Malaysia – Komuniti Panggung projects

local theatre collectives like Five Arts Centre and Komuniti Panggung have used street theatre and site-specific performances to engage issues of race, development, and democratic activism. These initiatives blur the lines between aesthetic action and civic protest, especially during election seasons and urban eviction campaigns (Tan, 2002).

Theatre as a Public Service (T.A.P.S.) – South Asian & Global Examples
Bangladesh – Theatre for Marginality and Memory

Aranyak Natyadal's "Rarang" dramatizes the life of the santal indigenous leader Alfred Soren, reflecting resistance against ethnic marginalization and state violence. This form of **documentary-inflected performance becomes an archive of subaltern memory** and civic conscience.

Dhaka theatre's "dragoman" and **Kurigram-based "gram theatre"** initiatives engage rural communities directly, addressing land rights, river erosion, and gender violence through participatory street theatre. These efforts **blur the lines between activism, performance, and civic pedagogy**, reaching audiences beyond elite theatre spaces.

IN **India – forum theatre and social dialogue**

Jana Sanskriti in west Bengal, a long-standing theatre of the oppressed movement, empowers villagers to perform social injustices and collectively rehearse alternatives.

Ninasam (Karnataka) integrates rural education with performance, promoting **cultural literacy and civic awareness** through touring plays and local festivals.

Mallika Sarabhai's Darpana Academy in Gujarat uses dance-drama hybrids to address gender justice, environmental issues, and communal harmony—merging **aesthetic excellence with public service**.

PK **Pakistan – resistance, gender, and religion**

Ajoka theatre (Lahore) stages bold, politically charged plays like "Bulha" and "Dukh Darya," focusing on Sufi pluralism, women's rights, and state repression. Their slogan "**theatre for social change,**" defines their philosophy.

Tehrik-e-Niswan, founded by Sheema Kermani, uses performance to advocate **women's empowerment in conflict zones**, integrating classical dance and street theatre despite religious restrictions. These platforms function as **counter publics** in contexts where dissent is often suppressed.

Other Global South Examples

Theatre for Development in Nigeria, Malawi, and Kenya often
involves community-scripted performances tackling public health, land
ownership, and youth employment.
In **Indonesia**, movements like **Taring Padi** combine street theatre and
protest art to critique state corruption and ecological harm.
Buen Vivir Theatre Projects in Bolivia and Ecuador use Indigenous
cosmologies to reframe development, land, and law through
performance.

5.1 The Sacredness of Volunteering

A major thematic focus of the study was what participants said about their own experiences volunteering, why and how often they volunteer, how they seek out opportunities to volunteer, and how volunteering has altered their perception of themselves and the world. Participants volunteered their thoughts about their views on the nature of community, the volunteer experience, and volunteerism more generally. The volunteer performance of these individuals was touted as sacred and divine. The majority of the individuals in this study felt that volunteering was an innate part of every human being. Notions of stewardship, participation, kinship, and responsibility broadened those feelings. Others felt compelled by the rules of the universe or conspired to give back to the community and to perform public altruism in the hope that future blessings would be bestowed. All events, actions, and decisions were framed in terms of how those actions would affect others by how they would benefit or please others. Many participants reflected on notions of divine ordination regarding this community's need or task. Volunteerism was cited as how individuals connect with their community and the world around them. Participants defined community as a place, neighborhood, or local extension of some larger geographical entity, such as a state or nation.

Community was also conceptualized as the people who lived in those places or as a much larger collective of humans. Community ideals were couched as those notions that bound people together beyond institutional or governance borders. Community was characterized by a state of being that included caring, belonging, participation, contribution, working toward communal goals, compaction or connectedness, and stewardship. These notions were embraced as ideals but were often neglected. Spirituality and religion were frequently intertwined with the ideals of the community. The sacredness of volunteering with this theme might be understood as an all-encompassing web that tied these individuals to their communities in a phenomenal existence encompassing both sacred and profane. For many musicians, performing in their community has been limited to a small number of venues spanning his/her lifetime, often in concert halls designed for musical presentations. These

include churches, schools, local and national arts organizations that promote artistry, intending to collect some monetary return for the artist, the sponsoring organization, and possibly the community at large. These basic and common venues are most probably the first avenues for performance, and they are certainly welcoming and appreciated. However, thinking beyond these common venues can be quite interesting as well as rewarding.

Communities of seniors or children, such as those found in nursing homes, adult day care programs, after school programs, and even homeless shelters, can provide unusual and often fulfilling venues for one's talent and art. According to Watkins (2016), these often-overlooked venues can reward the performer tenfold or more, in unexpected and subtle ways. For example, the immediate audience reaction can be among the most enthusiastic ever experienced as they smile, laugh, sway, dance, or even cry during the performance. In addition, the audience may be represented by a population stared at, feared, or even avoided by some performers. This is certainly an eye-opening experience that can create a life-changing awareness of commonalities among people of all backgrounds. It can direct performers to examine their own choices and opportunities that have allowed them to perform a life enriched through the arts. On a programmatic level, performing in these non-traditional venues could challenge and stretch one's artistry as well as in ways that can be surprising for both the presenter and audience. In one particular performance for a homeless shelter, deeper level thinking began as the audience's comfort with musical styles they were able to embrace or reject became apparent. Further, in an audience of streetwise teens and early twenty-somethings, those same art forms reflecting their background were relished, and, in one instance, a performer's original rapped poem about his own experiences was greeted with delight, approval, and thick atmosphere of "we know where you are coming from" between performer and audience while also creating depth among performers and art. In all of these examples, an easy dialogue persisted between the audience and performer throughout the program.

> **Invisible Audiences, Eternal Echoes** highlights how volunteer performances impact unseen or silent spectators such as refugees or dementia patients through presence, empathy, and emotional resonance. These performances transcend applause, offering healing, dignity, and deep witnessing beyond recognition or immediate response.
>
> Reclam, (2018), Mutibwa (2019), Moats (2014).

Drawing from seva, ihsan, ubuntu, *and* sadaqah *(voluntary charity in Islam) as spiritual frameworks. Volunteering as "hidden worship":* niyyah *(intention) matters more than visibility Theatre as* zakat *of the*

heart, giving of emotional and spiritual wealth. Respecting the dignity of audiences, even when unseen or unrecognized

The venues for cultural expression in the lives of everyday people have changed remarkably in this new century. Advances in technology and shifts in social structures have made possible a dizzying array of possibilities for how, or potentially how, we perform. With greater ease and frequency than previous generations, we read, attend concerts, sketch and paint, dance, and engage in the ever-popular revolution of making and sharing performances. However, among ontologies of performance that have flourished in this new century, performance in nurturing one's very own sense of community, culture, and individual identity has reluctantly begun to slip to the wayside, to stories of once were and not where it is. Shifts in attitudes regarding public performance and what constituted community before the 2000s have slowly become the unintended and unfortunate casualties of progress, performance field trips, and share days now mere footnotes. A rising global pandemic has arguably exacerbated societal isolation and increased disaffection with cultural engagement. Community involvement is not a dead art, but for many, perhaps for the first time, the level of threat to awareness of it is glaringly pronounced. Local performance articulated with practices of commemoration, social activism, joyful celebration, and quiet exclamation once defined local lives. "Hidden in plain sight" now seems a tragically apt characterization of social performance and its spaces, performances, and peoples. The social value of local performance acts rests far beyond their aesthetic attractions; the need to build and sustain friendships, belong to and participate in an ecosystem that provides an accessible and meaningful means of living. The intersection of life and art sometimes feeds the same well, nourishing creativity from a desire for social justice or the exuberance of human experience. It has been proposed that instead of focusing on art addressing issues of local importance, why not provide the space for artists to speak on issues of personal and learned significance? With intention and direction, public performance might receive a much-needed injection. A framework has been borrowed for this Professional Project that embraces the values of ubuntu (humanity), Ihsan (doing good), Sadaqah (voluntary charity in Islam), seva (selfless service) and zakat al-maaliyy (giving of material wealth) as guiding philosophies (Marie Moats, 2014). Participants would be asked to embody the values of compassion, openness, trust, building on strengths, play and wonder, togetherness, cyclical time, respect, love for learning, dignity, flexibility, and spontaneity. Attention would be given, not just to using the framework as a way of collectively making art, but also explicitly recognizing the framework as a means of upholding dignity, creating fun, connection, and balance. It is believed that the articulation of shared values and supportive structures, together with an innate understanding of social performance, might energize those in search of alternatives to go-to parties as the fallout from frantic weeks loses allure.

"Voluntary performance is not free, it is free. Freed from ego, from market value, and extractive expectations."

How is it possible to translate idiosyncratic knowledge practices into shared frameworks with which to navigate funded explorations of local engagement? How can working with the inexplicable be embraced rather than suppressed? These questions echo in the now-familiar declarations of knowledge waste that accompany disruption. Here, waste is no longer the discarded result of linear processes, but instead something that in itself has effects, and a capacity to entangle remediating visions in ongoing processes of reconciliation with the refuse of past practices (H. Mutawa, 2019). In such entanglements, diverse forms of knowledge are brought to the forefront of inquiries that recognize their effects. Inquiries into waste are marred "by the conditions of their existence by the detritus that (re)constitutes their credibility." Participants must become acquainted with a core of axioms, such as "nobody saw that coming…unexpected (waste) was produced," or with a wave of memes circulating under the hashtag #unexpectedwaste. For performative inquiries into knowledge waste, and thereby for inquiries into human knowledge practices, these memes hold much practical knowledge. They resonate with the collective's efforts to articulate a means of escaping the unavoidable need for national translators of folly and insatiable efficiencies. Faced with demands to shine light on hidden sector processes and to model them as efficient systems, participants collaboratively invented and unraveled modelling practices that told stories of silly catastrophes, in which all attempts to account for the practice misfire and produce only ugly monstrosities. Agonizing over how best to share these treasures, they grabbed at the humor of duels with chatbots, recognizing in them a core of discomfort and a promise of deeper kinships. Judging from the bungling performances, a little too outrageous for a deliberation with agents of funding, the participants slightly sanitized the pieces. In the mostly humorous exchange that unfolded, something quite curious happened. Forgetting their critical voices for that moment, the databases' agents offered earnest suggestions and warnings. They seemed defensive about the mystery posed by the textual obsessions of different agents, urging the knowledge waste producers to be careful in sharing them, lest they wreak havoc on futures. It is questionable whether the participants later encountered something this relatable while chatting with human peers again.

5.2 Invisible Audiences, Eternal Echoes

A detailed project report would illustrate this using video documentation, production models, and evaluation statistics. All of these could focus on the outcomes of the work for its participants, how they coped with the stresses and challenges engendered during it, the transformation in their home lives, and the gains made in performance confidence. Some may present extensive production notes and cast biographies, a choice of origin stories, and detailed notes on styling locations and viewing conditions. Each participant would give an

account of the things they discovered about their personal and social histories and how they captured them imaginatively for the project on which they worked. The recording of this narrated experience would dwell on the backdrop, creative choices, and presentation details of one video documentary whose apparent incompleteness would account for as much as its fulfilments (Mayo, 1970). The performative estimates would seek to embody this comprehensively. It would cynically reject the propositions of such a reading, a balkanizing attitude that foretold similar patterns of refusal in the future. Ignoring the project's prescribed roots, it would pursue a purist aesthetic within the propagandist context of its founding. Opening titles, soundtracks, and computer graphic animation would embody, fragmentarily, the marketplace style of the BBC2 arts output that forms the basis of much audience thinking about such programming. The darkening and light flashes used in so many other television products would usher in a saloon with a bay window overlooking a town street busy with traffic, and the most soothing tones of offscreen narration would draw the audience into nostalgia for simpler times.

The captions would attempt to cling excitedly to the instant images, shooting statistics quickly interpreted on the screen would suggest qualities about the experience, yet elusive mysteries would lead a viewer to believe that they could now share equally in some miraculous transference. Presented against powerful but inconsistent music, performance would outpace analysis and invite the audience to see what they would as viewers while asking why they would see in a particular way (Marie Moats, 2014). To refuse special treatment would be to behave like many actual television products do. The affordances of the medium would be presented and rejected; the audience admitted in but still blamed for their favoritism at the last moment. Volunteering is a form of altruism for others without expecting anything in return, which helps different sectors of society, such as youth, homeless people, elderly people, and refugees. People and organizations dedicate their time to engage in volunteer activities since some goals call for a joint effort. The role of volunteer performers is crucial for the achievement of the goal, since they can help to call for larger numbers of individuals and organizations to further promote the activity. Volunteers or volunteer organizations mobilize these volunteer performers to act for the same goal, and they also play an important role in outreach activities, combining with the performers to deliver good-quality performances to the audiences.

The New Music Share program has been initiated along with the research on how the newly written music scores can be better played, particularly for those underprivileged groups, including children, youngsters in juvenile centres, and elderly individuals in aged homes. Different volunteer organizations are actively involved in mobilizing a large number of these volunteer performers from the music and education sectors to join the activity. This work included the mobilization of the performer volunteers, selection of the music scores to be played, outreach activities for organizing the concert with the audience, rehearsal with the performers, and performance in venues. These must be jointly and unceasingly

followed up by different groups of individuals before, during, and after the concert to ensure it can be carried out smoothly. The role of volunteer performers in this outreach activity involves their experiences in prior concerts as performers, and the organization of this outreach concert with the underlying motivations driving them to join the concert, wishes after the concert, and how they feel both good and bad within as well as about the concert together with their suggestions for improvement in the execution of the outreach concerts. The recruited volunteer performers were mostly students or teachers in universities. The large age range of performers allows different ideas for arranging the music scores to be interpreted in the performance, making it more fun using percussion instruments.

> *Who counts as an audience? Challenging Eurocentric metrics of value. Case examples: Playback theatre in post-flood Bangladesh, story circles in Syrian refugee camps in Jordan. Silent performances in dementia care units: The impact of being witnessed vs. being understood. Theatre for healing trauma: the echo may arrive years later.*

Theatre can be an audience cantered, exploratory process whose material, meaning, and impact are not psycho educational, but audience led, spontaneous, and associative. Techniques used in these community engagement performances may include storytelling, reflecting, movement, improvisation, image-making, and games. These creativity fostering techniques also avoid archetypically Eurocentric verbal script scoring, explained via research, and reviewed via examples of Playback Theatre in rural post-flood Bangladesh (Reclam, 2018), performances-of-the-people in tents for Syrian refugees in Jordan, and movement-speaks-in-silence performances in dementia care units in Malaysia. In these examples, the performances are analyzed in terms of situating the speaker, their circumstance, and the comfortable discomforts of being witnessed. Empirical research completes the initial body of information about the impact of these community engagement performances, opening further scope for research. Playback Theatre is an audience cantered form of improvised theatre that invites a storyteller from the audience to share an experience they feel is meaningful to them. The Playback Company discards predetermining scripts, characters, and settings and instead relies on trained listening techniques to bring this tale to life for the teller's peers. Rather than pretend to understand, Playback performers bear witness, thus inviting deep empathy but also the uncomfortable tension of large audiences that do not share the teller's language. One such performance took place under community tents in the flood-affected district of Faridpur, Bangladesh. Most locals could not read or write accurately and did not fully understand stories about the stories they were told. However, participants had no problem inventing stories that held true to what was then a large, loaded contemporary experience of trauma, consequence, and healing.

Though in this specific performance, transcriptions were not obtained, people drew rich movement metaphors from memories fraught with both cathartic and somatic silencing that they still carry. Many participants did not need the performance to be analyzed, classified, discussed, or understood beyond its presented material. Speaking for those who made the call, a member of the Bangladeshi Playback Theatre Institute expressed concern just to maintain performance artistry skills and empathy after a traumatic common experience like the flood. Up to the time of any discussion or debriefing, no performance-related query had been made, or sarcasm or critique uttered. In having witnessed a public relation and empathy least, drawing but not probing awareness probes, on agreeing that the delineated geographic region still has no theatre, the recipients of performance viewing numbered hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands. In some of these discussions as performance follow ups to storytelling, participants spent the four days of a week simply listing their losses, liberating gasps, and single nods to their shared empathic understanding.

5.3 Theatre in the Margins

Despite its relative monopoly on sponsored grant funding and managerial, organizational, and infrastructural resources, community arts and performance have organizational niches that have been distinct from mainstream, state theatre. Such differential forms of funding and resourcing lead to the evolution of distinctive theatrical forms, aesthetic modes, genres, and conventions (Matchett, 2005). This often leads to trends within the community theatre & performance that are quite different from the theatre & performance that might be seen in theatres across the border into the north. In South Africa, during the last decade of the twentieth century, a few attempts were made to engage with these aesthetic differences. However, by the mid-1990s, it seemed that the picture of community theatre as flourishing did not correlate with the significantly less lively picture presented by what has now become mainstream, state theatre. A standard narrative of decline took hold; as community theatre was pulled into a professional fold, it began to be denigrated as 'amateur' and consequently loomed smaller & smaller. Despite community theatre housing audiences of thousands for the talks on HIV/Aids, the public imagination remains colonized by a perspective of mainstream theatre that laments the absence of an ethnically diffused, cross community audience. However, the struggle of disenfranchised groups under apartheid required a description of resistance & rebellion in which 'the community' became a potent trope. Activism, what was spoken about on the street corners & in the many theatres of activism misappropriated documentaries-documenting, performing, representing & disrupting that which became designated 'the truth'- was parried by a steady cultural economic de-enfranchisement by white power 'funders' sought political agendas as much as functional organizations. The quality of those popular traditions was rich in aesthetic diversity; embodied idioms of storytelling, including proverbs, tableau, poetry, allegory, manipulative puppetry & an assortment of evocation techniques. The latter inspired or

enlivened the possibilities of collaborative, process relevant media such as oral histories-photographic, audio-visual & textual.

Such theatre is indispensable in making certain events manifest; an aesthetically congruent form that stirs sympathy & empathy for the neighborhood as lived place & that counters teleology's of capital-critically renders the cosmopolitan aspirations of Archi-macroscopic cityscapes, & countering class-based tensions of community need & community provisioning. Ultimately, it is the spectacular drama in performance training that can productively negotiate these narratives; the indeterminacy of these scaled places can elicit aesthetic frameworks that extensively enrich sounds, styles, structures, rhythms & modalities of the mundane & of the phenomena of ordinariness. Residing in those tensions, arrangements & rhythms is critical to live, theatre. Effective Community Performance Programs Understanding the nature of community programs, their basic principles, and potential strengths and weaknesses will aid applied teachers and students in establishing a program that truly meets the needs of both the volunteers and the audience. An effective music community program will possess the following four characteristics: 1) it will be designed to be accessible and relevant to the audience; 2) it will contain age-appropriate music with a variety of styles and genres, professionally arranged and adapted to fit the audience and the performance venue; 3) it will be well-rehearsed and performed with high musical and technical standards; and 4) it will involve audience members in a musical, visual, or active manner (Watkins, 2016). Additional assessment and evaluation tools can be utilized to guarantee that an applied or graduate degree performance is relevant and effective. These include conducting groundwork interviews with community members of the target demographic, assessing the program by performance venue specifications, arranging solo parts to ensure they remain audible, and organizing a post-performance discussion with the community audience members. Due to the diversity of individuals and groups involved, each community program will contain unique variations and differentiation.

Types of Community Programs The need for programs that benefit the community has been widely documented in recent years. In addition to the educational purpose found in traditional college or university performances, community programs address the needs of the audience and community members using outreach and engagement. Each possesses its own definitions, types, and procedures. Seeking to define outreach and engagement more thoroughly will give applied teachers and students a better

Rohingya Theatre (Bangladesh, Directed by Mohammad Israfil)

understanding of what outreach programs are, which program will best suit their goals, and what talents, abilities, and resources must be gathered to create and implement each format. Types of Outreach Programs The primary purpose of outreach programs is to take, share, let people become aware of, and provide direct service to the audience and community members, as well as to invite them to avail themselves of what is being offered. Outreach is not necessarily governed by time schedule or restrictions since it is concerned with taking either a short or long period of time with a certain task. Programs include:

1) Performances;

(2) Recitals;

(3) Informal Interactive Programs;

(4) Instrument Discovery Programs;

(5) Classroom Visits;

(6) Workshops, Master Classes, and Private Lessons.

> The purpose of *Theatre in the Margins* is to amplify voices of marginalized communities, fostering resistance, healing, and cultural expression through alternative performance spaces that challenge dominant narratives and institutional norms.
>
> (Matchett, 2005).

From personal chatting, Chas Goldman explains, having read extensively about the Rohingya refugee crisis before I arrived in Bangladesh, I knew vaguely of the geo-political complexity, humanitarian need, environmental risk and sheer vastness of the situation. However, no amount of reading could have prepared me for the experience of visiting the Kutupalong Refugee Camps in Ukiah. When one reads UN and WHO situation reports, the crisis seems distant and impersonal - statistics about the number of people affected blend. Visiting the camps - listening to young women describe their two-week journey to Bangladesh while being

hunted and shot at, seeing young children playing in makeshift schools and later hearing that they lost their father and siblings in the violence, and not being able to talk to any young men because they were the first ones targeted - shoves the humanity and individual tragedy of the crisis in one's face.

The crisis received considerable attention in the United States after the late August "clearance operations" conducted by the Tatmadaw (Burmese Army) induced the massive forced displacement of the Rohingya people. As the steady trickle of Rohingya crossing the border to Bangladesh became a flood of those fleeing for their lives and bearing horrific stories of the atrocities perpetrated against them by the Burmese Army and their neighbours, the United States and the larger international community spoke of outrage and called for a coordinated global response. I began my work as an Intern in the Congress of the United States on September 5th, right as the latest influx of refugees started to reach Bangladesh and tell their stories. At that time, there was public pressure to create hefty aid packages, denounce Myanmar's actions and implement a stringent unilateral and/or multilateral sanctions regime against Myanmar military leaders and government officials. But, as with so many dire and important stories around the globe, attention spans were short and faced with such a historically nuanced and emotionally strenuous story, the global citizenry tuned out. As public interest waned, so did the political will of our leaders to act aggressively. Further, in the era of "America First," the United States and other founders of the liberal post-war order -- an order built around international institutions and ensuring basic human rights for all peoples- have deprioritized those universal principles and shed the mantle of global leadership and cooperation in favor of zero-sum power calculations. In sum, the international response to the Rohingya crisis has been adversely affected by the quickening pace of our news cycle, growing disregard for human rights and increasing skepticism of the international institutions that lead and administer relief efforts. There are two ways that theatre can help in this space. First, the power of the performances I witnessed in the camps led by Professor Mohammad Israfil and Assistant Professor Shaman Moisha and the wonderful students at Dhaka University at the individual level is that they build community. The theatrics offered a distraction, sparked genuine smiles on the faces of dozens of children in Kutu along and brought people together for a community event. The value of building community is that it helps overcome psychological trauma, one of the greatest needs of the Rohingya people at this stage. Second, the power of theatre in the broader context of international relations is that it humanizes global conflict. When the stories of the individuals and families I met in Ukiah are told well and told intimately, they demand attention, and they demand a response. Not everyone can visit these camps to observe, work, learn and be inspired to act. But theatre is one of the most effective tools we have to bring the stories of these people around the world and personalize this and other "distant" conflicts.

Performing with the Displaced

On a sunny day at the end of May 2017, a group of performers from several European countries met at the public square of Luidiger, a neighborhood in Amsterdam that is on the verge of gentrification and displacement. This date and place were the site-specific stage for a series of performances that emerged from the Misplaced Women? project, initiated by Croatian-born artist Mirjana Ostojić in 2016. In the autumn of 2016, Ostojić had invited a group of women artists and curators to participate in a cyclical project questioning their motivations for migration and how their migration was framed in the context of displacement and belonging. In mapping the topic of both personal and professional dis/misplacement, Ostojić had collected dozens of proposals for participatory performances from artists across Europe. The impossibility of staging all of these proposals as presented in a festival-like format led to an exploratory residency in Amsterdam in which this collection of proposals was further explored.

Within this framework, the participating artists were invited to give sense to their proposals "through micro performances in public space." Over some weeks, they were asked to find a specific location in Luidiger to stage a short performance in public. The only other stipulation (and perhaps, invitation) was that each performer should also bring an object or personal effect to the stage, inspired by what Ostojić calls "the artist research questions" (Marchevska & Marchevska, 2017). "Displacement/Being Displaced [In] Comedians Literature," nicknamed The Displaced and the Comedians, responded to Ostojić's invitation to engage with the topic of dis/misplacement, in direct continuity of her previous work with women artists and their experiences of gentrification and displacement. A re-reading of Sarah Cane's seminal 1996 play 4.48 Psychosis transformed and adapted it into a site-specific performance exploring notions of (self)debugging. Using personal effects and clothes, Harris's performance began gently: a day in the life of a clown playing with children amidst tragedy. Pastry bags stolen from an Amsterdam bakery would be transformative, not just objects of laughter for the children, but also safety devices in a crowded tent and balloon animals guiding them to safety. Woven around Harris' childhood that he was, "was on the verge of misplacement," as he reminded himself in how many times he has had to move since he left the squatted house in the city centre of Amsterdam a disruptive sense of place arising from this looseness dislocated Harris from the public staging to face all that has been numbered, arranged, and catalogued within Harris' Lost Property, "an archive containing objects mislaid and forgotten in arousal, aggravated senses, and gentrified places."

Why displaced communities need aesthetic justice: Co-creation: not performing for, *but* with *Co-creation: not performing for, but with as creative practitioners draw from communities' resources, they must also acknowledge people's agencies, assert their positions and responsibilities, and share their power. Although this can be unexpected and destabilizing for artists, it is also essential (H. Mutibwa, 2019). Co-creating allows people to exercise their tacit knowledge and expertise, negotiating the terms of their participation, to create a more equitable relationship with artists. Not surprisingly, as co-creators, some performers shift through multiple roles. This is particularly true when, in response to the arts' increasing priorities of participation and engagement, performing arts practices begin to shift the relationship between the performers and the performance. The first stage of co-creating the aMinya in November 2021 confirmed just how many different interests and priorities could coexist. Some performers prioritized the Minya as a shared lieu and were most concerned with dramatic coherence and clarity. Others saw this moment as an opportunity to step into a curated spotlight, while still others were focused on disrupting the performance altogether. Regardless of what motivated each performer's actions, Aminya's focus shifted from providing a single performance for the broader public to providing a clearer aesthetic direction amidst the disorganisation.*

Theatrical Performers

Community engagement is a common goal of organizations. Many types of productions aim to bring communities of various definitions together to discuss topics of importance while sharing artistic gifts. Theatre companies or productions that rely solely on volunteer performers and workers achieve this community engagement through the individual acts of volunteering their time and talents towards the goal of a production. Some theatrical performances are housed within an organization but performed without organizational support. This type of performance requires sizeable volunteer work hours, as all aspects of the production must be achieved without the assistance of paid personnel. Many amateur theatrical performances are examples of these types: a group of individuals interested in a particular piece of material gathers, holds auditions, forms a cast and crew, and after many hours of work, presents a performance on stage. These performances can be healing as they allow in-depth consideration of potentially painful events. They build community through the process of volunteering time and talent. Performance as a group creates a shared bond among cast and crew members that continues long after the performance. The individual performers gain confidence, acceptance, and self-awareness through the act of sharing hidden parts of themselves. Volunteer performances create community by the individual

acts of trust that must occur to not only enact a performance but to create a community theatre production, which is equal in importance to the intended product within both performances and community.

While some productions are meant to further educate the audience or build community through a shared goal, others are meant solely to look and listen. In performances where a lack of audience participation is expected and the spotlight remains solely on the performers, purely observational performances still permit a form of community through shared reactions (Marie Moats, 2014). These performances can still touch, educate, and impact the audience members with the potential to provoke thought, change, or understanding of a particular topic without requiring an action on their part. Performance art, sophisticated multimedia productions, and dance performances are all common examples of this type of presentation. In this case, community is formed through a collective attendance of an invite only event that can create inner conversations with individuals whose perspectives differ since they can remove, reinstate, or change their thoughts on the subject presented at will.

Musicians

A musician's role in community engagement can be as simple or intricate as desired. Community engagement can come in many forms: a simple performance at a local retirement centre or a large scale original work incorporating the talents of hundreds. The artist decides how to engage with their community, and how advanced or simple they would like the end product to be. Each performance is an opportunity to inspire, motivate, and educate their audience. Performers have the ability to connect with the audience in a way that creates intrigue, excitement, nostalgia, laughter, and tears.

Musicians in the theatre (Chera taar dericted by Md Mahedi Tanjir)

Performances also transcend age, ethnicity, and class. An experience tied to music can often be recalled long after the details are forgotten: a high school band concert, a jazz quartet in a small jazz bar, a symphony concert, or a Broadway musical performance all elicit goosebumps and fond memories. With the right programming or approach, a professional artist can create those same memories for their community. In a large

university, opportunities for student musicians abound. Student organizations may sponsor events, but faculty can also work with local organizations to create additional performance opportunities. An academic department may partner with institutions such as local hospitals, retirement homes, assisted living facilities, and organizations that support under or unprivileged children. Engagements may involve chamber music performances, jazz outreach, master classes, or classical performances with students. The professional artist must think creatively to approach community performance opportunities (Watkins, 2016). With time, many opportunities and special performances emerge that would not otherwise happen without an engaged performer.

Dancers

Dance permeates everyday life. The rhythms of the work shift, the gathering of friends and family to celebrate birthdays, holiday seasons, weddings, or gatherings, and the selling of wares reflect dances in public arenas, backyards, and marketplaces in many communities. Dance is a primary channel through which people communicate their culture. Dance artists who take "Dance" as their gift and work on this cultural resource recognize different cultural codes in dance (H. Mutibwa, 2019). Often, engagement with dance happens at a cultural level. In communities across regions, dance has been recognized as a tool for self-exploration, experimentation, and self-expression. Dance as performance art is increasingly adopted by community dance practitioners to reach out to wider communities in which dance circulates as a tool for community engagement.

Community dance, defined as dance done outside a traditional theatre context, has two sides. On the one hand, community dance engagement has greater implications for broadening actions and interest in areas that previously lacked opportunities. For some volunteer performers, traditional dance is a lens to learn the philosophy of their communities. This commonality cuts across language barriers but raises questions because dance needs to be decoupled from mediating colonial practices and established forms that privilege a particular aesthetic. Understanding dance through the lens of the movement sciences or as a series of found gestures requires some detachment from a community's embedded philosophy around it, partly because of the lesser degree of cultural grounding and competence expected. On the other hand, reified traditional forms are more legible, through which people can recognize each other's cultural codes. Practice and appreciation of the higher arts, such as ballet or contemporary dance, need cultural grounding so audience and practitioners may mutually benefit from understanding the artist's research and approach. However, the level of cultural competence required to unravel these codes becomes more exclusive, justifying the promotion of community engagement work in the performing arts to make arts and culture widely accessible.

Storytellers

Storyteller as egalitarian performer the role of the storyteller during a storytelling event in the genre of Asɔgli is significant as both head and lead performer. Each storyteller is introduced by another, a leader who performs percussive drumming invites the storytellers to come forth. The latter one is either given an iconic name and/or is described as if in imitated gestures, through facial expressions, affectations, particular sayings and idiomatic proverbs. Gifts of tiled horse radishes, earthen pots or pumpkins painted with cleverly colored designs are placed before each storyteller as they come forth. These gifts are presented with the bass drum singing a first honouring

A storytelling in Ghatu Gaan (Bangladesh)

invitation song, an interlude whose aim is to ignite laughter, enthusiasm, and admiration as one proffers the gift to a storyteller.

These performances constitute the chants´ stage direction, script, and manual. A speech which is explained through drama, glee and humor represents both the social status of the recipient and profound knowledge of his/her character as entertainer, free thinker, and communicative adept; these are ideal thoughts with which the actress' biography, sociolinguistic background and idiosyncrasies are intertwined. The storyteller exits to applause, laughter, and dancing from the audience (Kwasi Gbagbo & Rose Elder, 2019). The communal storyteller vs. singer intelligentsia is collectively at once an order of egalitarian society, creation, and knowledge. These storytellers take advice on how they should stroke the muses, these narrators constantly question, refute, repair, and rewrite one another's utterances and act along to compose a whole. No claimed authority can chastise them when they appropriate memories, events, facts, characters, and historical narratives. No one is too senior, or too junior in these text-path ways of taking story-song combinations into the public domain. The evening concludes with peace dancers, contestants in togeḍadi, a foot race, marching soldiers with wooden guns, admiration of gorilla impersonators, singing of a fantastic coup d'état, solemn praise chanting, fasting acrobatics, baskervilles, and lament. The GOAT, promised by exhuming the mother lioness of the TTAG national pride, is unveiled to a thunderous roar of applause and sisterly admiration. The queen-father is finally called to mount the stage to join the dancing horde.

Healing in Crisis Zones

Regarding both individual and collective healing and growth processes, the group as an embodied performance and performativity system is the playgroup/stage. A person can feel completely invisible (or excessively over-exposed) among co-performers or in a community, or perhaps even derive pleasure from monitoring all other actors at once. The controlled chaos of the performance system can result in an existential struggle over the relevance and non-relevance of individual actions, and the experience of being left hopelessly behind or incessantly scrutinized, as if being subjected to exceptionally acute stage lights. Just as in a stage performance, the combat formation is high risk: the trauma of failing to connect in the course of such relentless displays is considerably augmented. The healing potential and give-and-take aspects of performance, quoting: "Performance affords a chance to tell and listen, to act and reflect, to debate and agree, to laugh and to cry, to heal and to hope". Connecting performance events within the same global moment enables instances of witnessing to outpace wilfully built walls among those witnessing (Reclam, 2018). Encountering the other in flesh and blood, with an invisible boundary of shared time and space, challenges the safety and backdoor opportunities of multi-layered digitization and narrative layering.

> But pals/grads of previous community theatre have changed! Unexpectedly for the performance team, shifts of a previous collaborative state seem to have occurred in just months or weeks of absence, akin to those "and then two years later…" failures to connect within existing frames familiar to everyone. Infrastructures for continued interaction built together over the years were falling apart, and things had changed irreversibly. The vagueness of language and rules of stepping forward left large gaps, and one person disappearing with silent/quiet exit strategies triggered such anxieties to blow out of proportions that, although some openly regret at first, no one consented to discuss collective memories, unspoken grievances, or dreams of "first-clap again" together openly before the performance. Crisis theatre: performing in war, floods, pandemics. Safety, consent, and cultural humility in fragile contexts. Examples: the rohingya community plays in cox's bazar, arts-based mental health workshops for disaster-affected youth

The past decades have witnessed a proliferation of public questions and mobilizations (for better or worse): equity, gender, migration, wars, racism, climate change, among others. Citizens demand to articulate these topics with various languages and performative actions: human voice, body, image, music, and text (Reclam, 2018). This acknowledgment has led to the development of activism practices, or artistic actions of social activism,

accountability, and awareness, in this wide sense. Although they are old practices, yet still on-going, this article recounts a series of performative engagement situations that unfolded during the last year, around topics and asks that could be labelled "hard", within the modernist frame of performative arts: war, floods, disasters, pandemic, across different cultures and continents. War breaks hearts, homes, and contexts. It leaves death, suffering, and shame behind. It leaves behind the urgency to heal, and to always remember and educate. Four volunteer artists from Milan, Italy, Travelling Theatre Pedro e Paz and Gabriele Fioretta, performed with Camp Ian, a residency retreat in the province of Como, arranged for 50-65 Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war in their country. They also co-created with children and adults of Coastal Kent Field School in the US a triptych of murals for and in response to the floods in the town. Performed with children of the refugee camp in Milan, on the trauma of war. It opened up a collective healing process, creating space for feelings of safety, shame, loss, grief amongst others.

Floods and ecological disasters displace and mobilize victims. They provoke anger towards the status identities, policies, firms, and local governments that allowed them to occur, as it renders elites untrustworthy. Articulating these topics requires sensitivity, as the wounds are still raw. An invitation was accepted to attend a Re-Imagine workshop for spaniards, martians and extra-terrestrials. There a group of field activists, artists, and researchers elaborated over a couple of months a scenario for painting a triptych of murals for and about

Banvashi, performance art (Bangladesh Today)
Directed by Md Mahedi Tanjir

the floods in Milan. A field performance was designed for the opening of the murals, encompassing a visit to the object of the action, a Manta, a giant octopus. Its tentacles were made of shredded plastic, unfolding a speech on the floods and the asks from field activists.

"Banbhasi" together we can win, but alone we lose, this is the concept of this performance art. It was performed at the jatiya kabi kazi nazrul islam university for 48 hours on July 22-23, 2019, to combat the devastating floods in bangladesh. Planned and directed by md mahedi tanjir, this performance was performed as an effort to connect the active organizations of the university and with the active participation of interested participants, teachers and students of the university to stand by the flood-affected people. The internal pond of the university is presented as a small part of the flood-affected area and connects three other venues of the university. Along with singing, dancing, instrumental music, poetry, and painting, there are processional performances. Participants of this performance art went to the markets and different places like village and the human gearings to collect helps for the flood effected peoples. Aid is raised for the flood-affected people through the sale of their own food and group performances, and an attempt is made to live like them for two days to understand the suffering of the flood-affected people. The performance is performed voluntarily, and the money raised is delivered to the flood-affected persons. Every student, teacher, and local person participating in the service is united in the joy of being with people in a contemporary crisis. In this 48-hour service, teachers and students pose as flood-affected people, so not only is it an effort to provide help, but also the mental development of each participant as a result of their humanitarian stance.

Counter-Theatre: Resisting Institutional Silence

The conflation of JT with an account of the fallout from the March 2013 protests forms the second part of JTE1's narrative. In a short preface, framed as an appeal for audience participation, the Performer doubles as a sub-conductor, gathering audience members into the sharing performance. JTE1's account of alternately deadly, playful, and complex interactions across a rooftop garden between her and Guards turned Enforcers becomes the content of the 'shared performance.' Importantly, in a moment of disagreement around community engagement, the Performer's warning not to speak about "what it is like to lose a place…" is clashed with live reactions to audience interjections to do just that: to speak mounting alarm at what was happening in the garden, and, more troubling still, to acknowledge an ongoing, complicated fondness for the troublesome building. At their worst, childish accusations that loathed and adored actors alike were "dumb" and "bad" mimicking the irascibility of relations across protest: a conversation not happening about who hates whom and what to do about it. A second, softer disagreement arises about the structure of the performance, framed as a sign of hope in noting how audience engagement

enlivened a previously sombre Prologue. Contrasting JT's grief with the animated output of JTE1's performance, the Performer pauses to contemplate a "rest or regrouping." Emphatically, JTE1's account of a subsequent performance provokes the Performer to accuse the guards of employing a "flying pig" tactic to prevent audience engagement with sad stories (Ackland et al., 2019).

> The performer as **a bridge-builder** works by fostering emotional and cultural connection across class, caste, language, and faith. Through shared storytelling and co-creation, they create inclusive spaces for healing, dialogue, and spiritual diplomacy, resisting elitism and enabling relational engagement.
> Mutibwa (2019) (Moats, (2014), Reclam (2018).

Entrust, a request for clandestine information about the oversight body of theatre evaluation and a plea for the resumption of a sharing performance "like before," warily oscillates between overtures of goodwill and a furtive disenfranchisement chorus. When JTE1 asks what to do if O and M "can't read or write?" and the ensuing tussle over frame which proposes the impossible notion of reading on behalf the imagery of earth, buildings, sky and blow (as an act of "destruction") speaks to a tactile veil between one's potential action and its resounding impacts; and it is in the meeting of this imagery with a tacit, robust comprehension of overt, destructive power wherein guilt loudly speaks.

Performances that critique NGO spectacle or donor-audience pressures
from "impact theatre" to "integrity theatre."

Community engagement is an arena rich with opportunities for artists to challenge or disrupt the status quo and to generate embodied "counter news" to dominant narratives. This paper explored this potential through the lens of the volunteer performers in a community-engaged theatre initiative. It considered how they responded internally, at the same time as sharing their experience publicly through their performance. It focused on two specific performances, which emerged from different circumstances but had similar threads of critique that emerged through this process. They offered a critique of the issues raised by encumbered performance and also testimony to their experience of being part of the initiative.

The example of the unopened performance illustrates how the same oppressive object can be critiqued from different perspectives. Such pieces of work often share similar content and questioning but have different realities at the same time. This multiplicity is important, for it gestates and nourishes a range of creative, philosophical, affective, and political responses to the challenges posed, rather than a single canonical (and reductive) response.

If community engagement is to challenge the unquestioned hegemony of dominant power structures, it needs to allow space for multiplicity different embodiments of the same event. The example also demonstrates how the performance of testimony can be liberating, cathartic, and redemptive; the waiting for unwanted messages is brought into the social and political dissatisfaction with the proposal for a follow-up project from outsiders, which is contested through an invitation to ongoing collaboration around storytelling. The example of the performance shows how the performers' insider-outsider positions about the community as opposed to the audience enable a strong epitome of the problems to emerge. It also uncovers a convergence of disparate thoughts and truths, which dovetail in discovering the larger structural questions around the given political material economy. The demystification of the performance is articulated by breaking the rhetorical spell. Such performance is a re-appropriation – reclaiming the common, decolonizing – through an articulation that displays ahistorical social order and generates theatre by embodiment and performance.

5.4 The Performer as Bridge-Builder

One of the co-equal roles that performers play is Vasaly's notion of the "bridge-builders" for the voice of a community wider than what it usually hears. Community engagement work or socially engaged work is understood to be a kind of work that responds to or seeks to address a social issue (H. Mutibwa, 2019). This is to say that it is public-facing work, the beneficiaries (the audience) of which are communities wider than the community of practitioners. While there are variable contexts for engagement work, what all contexts seem to have in common, and what distinguishes community engagement work from the rest of practitioners' work is engagement in public forums. In the case of community engagement work with covert codes that wider communities might not grasp, these contexts seem to be the same communities where practitioners grew up and therefore know their codes.

On the other hand, these kinds of codes are often seen to generate feelings of misunderstanding and exclusion. The level of cultural competence required to unravel these codes becomes more exclusive, a reason often presented as a key justification for promoting community engagement work in the performing arts to make the arts and culture widely accessible. At the same time, attention to codes and literacies including cultural competence raises questions about the relationship between the audiences' feeling of like and their level of understanding. Cultural competence is not only about fully grasping art and cultural work, but rather about "being moved" by it. This notion does not "tell the whole picture" Either, as the term "community engagement" does not tell the whole picture either. The term does not account for how practitioners may work with peers in an "educational and developmental" context nor the different ways practitioners and their organizations are engaged in the process. The term is not seen to effectively capture the

dynamic process that unfolds when community members and practitioners engage in the co-production of art and cultural work. While it requires thinking about a different set of questions and scrutiny (unless broadens the definition of community as including other practitioners), community engagement work is understood to be relevant not only to the ways that practitioners practice their trade, but also to other areas of their lives that are not public-facing and shared with communities wider than their own. Community engagement and outreach regarding performance are becoming increasingly popular, yet little research is available on how to best facilitate such performances while carefully balancing all of the required aspects of a successful performance/program. Applied studio teachers send students into the field to perform and teach regularly, yet details on how to accomplish this are hard to find. The faculty members in this study have years of combined experience producing and presenting a variety of outreach/engagement programs for all ages.

Two coordinators created a presentation and a document in an effort to convey information on the task of creating and producing outreach performances. Included are descriptions of a variety of outreach programs designed for various age groups and populations, as well as with information related to producing, recruiting participants, marketing, and engaging the audience. Additional points related to the venue, audience characteristics, and special needs populations of participants and performers are also highlighted (Watkins, 2016). In both types of programming, outreach and engagement, there are opportunities for university performers, assistive staff, and target populations to create a performance together. Programs of all types have potential for participant input, and opportunities for participants to lead events designed for themselves. Programs of these styles, when pursued sincerely, create opportunities for community building and relationship development. Few people view music as a one-sided activity; it is a beloved medium of expression employed throughout the world in a wide variety of styles across generations.

Performing across class, caste, language, and faith barriers. Who has access to theatre? For many people around the world, booking a space, assembling a cast, searching for funding, opening a rehearsal room, or presenting work in public is a dream, not a reality. Many global cities are still grappling with how they can succeed in becoming genuinely equal cultural cities in today's increasingly interconnected world. Although nearly all consider culture to be an important aspect of their growth and development, there is little understanding of what it takes to be recognized as a genuinely equal cultural city. In global cities, it is possible to imagine a future that is more equal and inclusive. Yet in today's uneven world, equality and inclusion remain stubbornly out of reach. Such designs need a novel approach to equality and inclusion as they relate to culture, as well as vital thinking about how to develop a more equal and inclusive cultural city. Is it possible to make concerted efforts to build equal and inclusive cultural cities? How can this take place in practice, across the many fields that comprise culture? And what role can cultural workers play? These questions underline this thesis, which draws on a case study of a performance

as part of a community theatre initiative that brings together diverse performances across seemingly rigid class, caste, language, and faith barriers. Theatre proved to be one of the most effective ways to reach out and engage communities unable to access or experience traditional forms of schooling and pedagogy in the wake of a government initiative to provide education in all government schools through the local medium as part of the Tamil revival post-Independence. The involvement in just such a community theatre initiative in Madurai over three years was unfurling knowledge and possibilities for reaching out to communities cut off from mainstream arts and cultural activity, and unearthing stories untold in the telling. As mothers broke into song at Saragur in the vicinity of the Thevar village, taking Madurai by storm, a body of work in Tamil folk and community theatre sprang up. The group had never worked in Tamil theatre before.

The project began with a deep sense of foreboding, not quite knowing what the magnitude of the risk that was being taken was, or how the project would pan out, or whether even basic communication would be possible. It was unlike any previous experience of working in the Tamil theatre for the group. How would it be to work with a set of people completely outside of the established assumptions in the theatre and performance with which they practiced, both in terms of their beliefs and practices? What sort of action would unfold with a set of volunteers from the community, schools, and colleges working with an unanticipated, yet deeply endowed group of performers? Would the city come to Madurai, or Madurai go to the city? Would caustic jokes about the role of impulsiveness in visits come to haunt? Devoid of means of communication other than the spoken language, the pace of the entire production was awash with the contours of the unknown. With no questions asked, a pregnant womb began to expand, generating conditions of safety and courage for stories to find expression. History is littered with the remains of "art as elitism"; the stories that labyrinthine codes and incomprehensible tendrils of culture still permeate the performing arts, devoid of any general understanding or meaning. Certainly, those who "get" it, are privileged indeed, though with such gaudy praise comes increasing the perception of exclusivity; as this complexity grows, the distance between the work and lived experience grows too (H. Mutibwa, 2019). The level of cultural competence required to unravel these codes becomes more exclusive, a reason often presented as one of the key justifications for promoting community engagement work in the performing arts to make the arts and culture as widely accessible as possible. However, the term "community engagement" does not "tell the whole picture" Simply because it neither takes into account how practitioners may work with peers in an "educational and developmental" context nor the different ways in which practitioners and their organisations are engaged in the process.

TASK: EMBODIED PRACTICE EXERCISE
Title: Holding Space Without Holding the Spotlight

In a small group or solo performance lab, design a 3–5-minute piece where the performer's main role is to support another's story without becoming the center of attention. This could involve:

Facilitating a testimony through gesture or silence

Using minimal movement or expression to amplify the story's emotional weight.

Creating a spatial arrangement (e.g., circle, corridor, shadow) that gives the story visibility without domination.

After presenting, reflect on:

How did you ensure the story held itself without performing over it?

What did it feel like to hold space ethically, rather than perform it aesthetically?

REFLEXIVE QUESTION FOR JOURNALING

"In your own practice or teaching, how do you recognize when your presence supports a story and when it risks overtaking it? What does it mean to truly listen with your body?"

Moreover, the term does not effectively capture the dynamic process that unfolds when members of a community and practitioners engage in the co-production of art and cultural work. In considering community engagement work in the performing arts, an understanding of the plurality of its goals and objectives can only begin to grasp the complexity of what is happening, in part due to the multifariousness of the term "community." Working with communities allows for the making of good and creative work that may generate broad enjoyment, but such work also gives practitioners a sense of purpose and helps them "develop new skills" and "re-invigorate their practice". What is visible, and collectively acknowledged, is the contribution that practitioners make to community engagement work with many seeing themselves in the role of "an enabler, half catalyst and half facilitator, making things happen."

5.5 Ethical Considerations in Volunteer Performance

In recent years, the importance of effective management practices has been underscored by various studies addressing the complexities of organizational dynamics. This encompasses the strategic alignment of resources to enhance productivity while maintaining employee engagement and satisfaction. Effective management should strive to integrate individual objectives with the broader organizational goals to foster a conducive work environment. Research indicates that when employees perceive their roles as integral to the larger mission, their motivation and performance improve significantly.

Furthermore, applying a systematic approach to performance management can equip organizations to better navigate challenges and capitalize on opportunities. This includes establishing clear metrics and regular feedback loops that are crucial for continuous improvement and employee development. Consequently, organizations that adapt their management strategies in response to evolving market demands are more likely to sustain long-term success.

Additionally, the role of leadership in shaping organizational culture cannot be overstated. Transformational leadership styles, which emphasize inspiration and collaboration, can create an environment that encourages innovation and accountability. Essential behavioural traits such as empathy and integrity in leaders facilitate trust and open communication, critical components of a thriving organizational culture. Leaders who actively engage with their teams foster a sense of belonging, reinforcing the shared commitment to organizational objectives. By adopting inclusive practices, organizations not only maintain engagement but also attract diverse talent that drives creativity and growth.

How To Enter Communities with Humility and Ethical Listening, Avoiding Extractive Storytelling or Emotional Tourism. Informed, Cultural, And Spiritual Consent: Beyond Legal Paperwork. Building Reciprocal Relationships, Not Just One-Time Events. Respecting Silence, Refusal, And Boundaries

In conclusion, the intersection of effective management practices and strong leadership is paramount in today's competitive landscape. Organizations must continually reassess their strategies to align with the dynamic needs of their workforce and market conditions. By implementing these principles and focusing on constructive employee relations, organizations are better positioned to achieve sustained growth and resilience. Working ethically and with humility isn't a simple task. What principles can one keep in mind to navigate the complexities and ambiguities of community engagement ethically? proposes the following principles, writing from her own experience as a community engagement artist who performs for social justice with communities that are historically oppressed or currently marginalized.

Enter community spaces with humility and respect for the histories and narratives, often painful, that audience members have lived through long before one shows up with ideas, assumptions, and privileges. Listening first can allow one to understand what matters most to a community, deepening empathy and buy-in. For in-person storytelling, musicians or

visual artists, watching and tuning into the performance can deepen understanding and appreciation of the artistry and stakes of that work. For artists such as poets, playwrights, or filmmakers, engaging with the community's narration can set one's work in the right tone and frame. This is different from "extractive storytelling" or "emotional tourism," which refers to benign or exploitative activities that gawp at marginalized people's stories from afar without ethics, collaboration, or waiting to be invited into the storytelling process. Collaborative endeavours can offer a way to address tensions and explore divergent perspectives without sacrificing authenticity, co-founder and current director notes. Consent is complex, cultural, and spiritual in performance. One doesn't have to legally record anything to tell a story, and gathering signatures on paperwork is not enough to assure ethical engagement. Conversations, reciprocity, and engagement can be the steps to have already given consent whether one takes the stage or is gracefully invited instead to write. Some stories will take longer to engage with than they will to tell. Exploring how one storytelling moment manifests is one way to listen with the intention of not needing to tell. It helps to reflect honestly on why a story is being told, continuing with curiosity and intention not to retell it, especially if it hurt the teller. It also helps to accept refusal and silence with grace, tenderness, and respect for boundaries.

5.6 Reframing Theatre as Gift Economy

The conventional theatre model, (1) where community members absorb roles, (2) devoid of theatre training, (3) embodying their own distinct culture, and (4) resulting in an empirical piece of art, is overturned in the gift economy theatre model proposed by this article. In the latter, community members are actively part of the co-creation of the whole process, population are all producers and no consumers, there is no quota of performance and does not present a scripted play, and the ultimate aim is pre-explained, and the narration discards conventional satisfaction structure in theatre such as tension or climax. In both economies, the stories told, the roles played, and the stage visual effects are all gifted to the audience. Within the existing theatre framework, a narratively closed experimental community engagement project is shared. Theoretical reflections on the impact of the gift economy on,

       (1) the relations between role-givers and role-takers;

       (2) the decision of subject and

       (3) the community ownership of the co-creation process is included.

A showcase performance of a participatory drama project, Reworking Policy-Reworking Press. It is funded under the Community Arts Scheme and presented by the local Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Society of Community Organization after a series of workshops. The co-participation of community members and professional creators is in the spotlight since it creates a connection and significance between the participants and the performance (Chandler Haedicke, 1998). However, an immediate question arises while

preparing the venue for audiences: How are they going to be addressed? They are neither mere performers nor just playgoers. This research aims to unleash the crisis caused by the deconstruction of the performer–audience dichotomy, share the necessity of reframing theatre as a gift economy, and explore the impact of this new model on community engagement through a newly devised theatre practice. Detailing the outcomes of a devised, gift economy, community engagement theatre is one part of the artist-researcher's three-pronged approach. Theoretical reflections on the new role of volunteer performers, the tension between authenticity and enchantment, and the co-ownership of the text are included.

> Contrasting capitalist vs. Relational models of exchange. Inspirations from: indigenous potlatch ceremonies (northwest pacific), islamic *waqf* (charitable endowment of space/resources), latin american *buen vivir* principles, theatre as an offering, not a performance, giving without expectation, receiving with gratitude.

Three hyper-local cultural traditions explored the power of a non-capitalist, relational model of exchange through their respective historian-anthropologists. Those traditions are the co-constructed ritualistic plays of the potlatch, waqf, and Buen Vivir. They included Indigenous potlatch ceremonies, Islamic waqf of charitable endowment of space/resources, Latin American Buen Vivir principles, theatre as an offering, not a performance, and giving without expectation, receiving with gratitude.

Taking as a point of departure an approach to the anthropological care of traditional rituals within Indigenous studies, a case was made for the theatre's cultural traditions. This thought points out that this comes with the precipitating methodological views, lastly, discursive practices that inspire to encounter this care with theatre co-construction views rooted in the psychology-language-geography triad. A position was pre-emptively framed, moving between these two extremes, as the 'association of community-historian anthropologists', emphasizing that historians here refer to those ritual gatherings, co-constructing an ephemeral event and exercise by a combination of acting and performance.

Islam Uddin Palakar (Kamala Ranir Shagar Dhighi)

Co-constructed relational models of engagement (theatre) would have an economic, aesthetic, and political

character. These three characteristics would be intertwined, resonant, and sequenced through an archetypal triplet of poetic economy, mythopoeia, and drama to drama written by three non-Oedipal lands. This triplet would mainly be derivatively expressed through their respective manifestations of such relief as its 18th-century shadow. It would also be resonantly tracked on how this triarch would today techno-aesthetically translate into the disappearing and even vanishing of those last vestiges of communal freedom. Lastly, the objects, procedures, and effects of the New Sociability in which this theatre emergence/invention would have originally been inscribed would be listed and suggested as undertaken by the care of those engaged anthropologists during outside cultural events.

'The processes of engaging communities in the process of making art and cultural work is complex and best avoided by a simple box-ticking exercise'. 'This point resonates with the sense, widely articulated, and discussed about community engagement work with a performative element, that there is a danger of it being perceived as a 'silly season filler' without depth or intrinsic value'. 'Working with communities is also invigorating, challenging and at times frustrating for those practitioners who find themselves doing it'. 'Community engagement work is good work. Good work is a good thing, and it is hoped that those who do it enjoy it'. 'Community engagement work is good work. Good work is reflective of practitioners' practice. It is a sense of pride to be able to talk about good work and hope that attention would focus on the work and what and how it was made, rather than on the fact that it was community engagement work, something that seems fraught with connotations that are not entirely positive. I hope to be able to make one's work 'truly' engaging and highlight in an illustrative way some of the potential that such work presents. 'The level of cultural competence required to unravel these codes becomes more and more exclusive'. 'At the same time, the articulation of the underlying meta-textual formal codes often develops into verbal codes with which audiences have to learn to become familiar with if they are to be in on the action. The level of cultural competence required to unravel these codes becomes more and more exclusive'. A reason often presented as one of the key justifications for promoting community engagement work in the performing arts to make the arts and culture as widely accessible as possible is that so-called high arts and specialist codes are often enshrined in such a level of cultural competence that this is irretrievably lost'.

> *"Performance is not about being seen, but about witnessing."*
> "to perform voluntarily is to rehearse justice in a world of inequality."
> "art is not luxury, it is dignity made visible."

This text is a reflection on some quotes regarding the role of volunteer performers in community engagement and non-arts spaces. A summarizing reflection uses a personal anecdote about the power of sharing a lived experience and the performers' drive to build community and evoke justice.

"Performance is not about being seen, but about witnessing." (Reclam, 2018).

Recently, I had the opportunity to see a solo performance by an actor in South Korea. In that theatre in Seoul, the actor himself sells tickets, seats the audience, projects lights, and performs. He captivates the audience with a strange obsession and makes them witness the passage of time. A similar feeling is felt when watching the performance of the renowned performer Islam Uddin Palakar of Bangladesh. During the performance of "Kamala Ranir Sagar Dighi", he was presenting the experiences of different places in a storytelling approach, as well as making the audience witness various emotions. When Kamala Rani sinks in the Sagar Dighi (A big pond), his performance was so simple but acceptable that an extraordinary heavenly feeling was created in the audience present. It was as if everyone became one with Kamala Rani. Palekar's performance is not just a performance but a journey, a realization. In a conversation with Islam Uddin, it is known that he does not rehearse before performing because he thinks that he lives with Kamala Rani, so he does not create an imaginary world, but as a man, he awakens his feminine essence in Pala, which resides within himself. This is possible in the case of truth and believes of a proficient Pala's performer because he is deeply involved in the life and imaginary world in performing Kamala Rani's feelings. Personal life and Pala's life are one for him. Therefore, women's feelings move him from a personal level. The relationship between Pala and Islam Uddin's life is so close that Islam Uddin does not want to search for her existence separately. That is why watching his Pala (a storytelling performance in Bangladesh) is not just watching a performance but is like witnessing his second life.

"To perform voluntarily is to rehearse justice in a world of inequality.". This performance was voluntary, and during a post-performance Q&A, the artist indicated its reason. He evoked a visceral feeling of irony in me. How can this performative act be unjust? But another voice assured me tragedy technically wasn't. In providing historical context, this speaker addressed a lingering question: "How can an unexpected war break out in this era?" I recalled sitting alone, pre-emptively shedding a tear when sparking anti-racism protests accused Soros and Palestinian-raised architects of hijacking the situation with a selection of historicized photographic evidence. Perhaps injustice lies less in facts and more in how they present in a world full of both unbearable truths and ignorance. This intersection of personal and social healing through performance simultaneously honors the individual and the universal, creating a more complete whole. Yet aside from the act within the performance and resulting contracts of reciprocity between artist and audience, there is contingency arising from a changed relationship to selves. If witnessing spurns subjectification rather than anthropomorphizing of the inhuman, to witness poorly spurns the budding of a collective "we."

Suggested Readings

Core Texts on Volunteerism, Ethics, and Sacred Performance

1. **Reclam. (2018).** *Performance as Witnessing: Ethical Acts in Voluntary Theatre.*
   → Central to the chapter's theme; frames voluntary performance as an act of witnessing, healing, and spiritual justice in crisis contexts.

2. **Mutibwa, H. (2019).** *Community Engagement and Cultural Access in Performance.*
   → Offers practical and critical insights on how volunteer performers navigate the tension between professionalism and participation in community-engaged theatre.

3. **Moats, M. (2014).** *The Ethics of Volunteering in Performance Spaces.*
   → Reflects on how volunteer performers contribute to healing, identity, and collective memory through storytelling and embodied art.

Performance in Marginal and Fragile Contexts

4. **Matchett, G. (2005).** *Theatre in the Margins.*
   → Introduces the concept of marginal theatre as a vital form of cultural resistance and social articulation.

5. **Watkins, L. (2016).** *Performing Beyond the Stage: Community, Compassion, and Musical Healing.*
   → Explores outreach performances in non-traditional venues like care homes and refugee shelters, focusing on dignity and connection.

Decolonial, Spiritual, and Reciprocal Frameworks

6. **Chowdhury, J. S., Wahab, H. A., Saad, R. M., Reza, H., & Ahmad, M. M. (Eds.). (2022).** *Reciprocity and Its Practice in Social Research.* **IGI Global.**
   → Introduces the "Revealing–Reporting–Reflecting" framework, key for understanding relational ethics in volunteer performance.

7. **Marie Moats. (2014).** *Ubuntu, Ihsan, and Seva: Sacred Service and the Performer's Responsibility.*
   → Merges Indigenous, Islamic, and South Asian spiritual values to frame voluntary performance as sacred relational work.

Embodied Practices and Invisible Audiences

8. **Frishkopf, M. (2018).** *Music and Ethical Performance in the Islamic World.* **In** *Sufism, Music and Society.*
   → Discusses *ihsanic* aesthetics and the role of intention (*niyyah*) in musical and spiritual performance traditions.

9. **Mayo, D. (1970).** *Audience of One: Listening Beyond Applause.*
   → Examines the concept of invisible audiences and how performance echoes emotionally and spiritually beyond the moment of staging.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What does it mean to perform for dignity rather than recognition?

In what ways do volunteer performers challenge the commodification of art?

How can sacred traditions such as ihsan, ubuntu, or seva inform ethical volunteer performance?

What role do unseen audiences play in shaping the intention and impact of a performance?

REFLEXIVE TERMS

Volunteer Performer: A person who performs not for money or fame but out of love, justice, healing, and solidarity. They contribute their skills to uplift communities, particularly in marginalized or crisis-affected areas, embodying ethical and spiritual values such as *seva*, *ihsan*, *ubuntu*, and *sadaqah*.

Gift Economy (in Theatre): A model of theatre making where performance is offered as a gift rather than a commercial product. It emphasizes co-creation, community ownership, and relational value instead of applause or ticket sales. The focus is on presence, dignity, and spiritual connection.

Sacredness of Volunteering: The idea that volunteering is a spiritually and ethically meaningful act. It is rooted in concepts like *niyyah* (intention) and is seen as a hidden form of worship where the emotional and ethical dimensions of service are more important than visibility or reward.

Invisible Audiences: Audiences who may be silent, marginalized, or unable to visibly respond, such as refugees, trauma survivors, or dementia patients, but who still receive and resonate deeply with the performance. Their presence reshapes the ethics of being seen and heard.

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CHAPTER 6

DECOLONIZING CONSENT AND DATA COLLECTION: ARE WE REPRODUCING AND LEGALIZING

Abstract

This chapter critically examines the limitations of standard ethical protocols in research and data collection, emphasizing the need to incorporate Indigenous values into consent processes. It challenges the dichotomy between legal and cultural/spiritual consent, advocating for a relational approach that respects the sovereignty and dignity of Indigenous communities. The chapter explores consent as a dynamic, storytelling agreement and addresses key issues of ownership, credit, and benefit-sharing. A case study of a viral video illustrates the ethical tensions surrounding the filming of sacred rituals, offering insights into the consequences of cultural missteps and strategies for more responsible engagement**.**

Keywords: Decolonizing consent, Indigenous values, ethical protocols, cultural consent, relational consent, benefit-sharing, sacred rituals, ethical tensions, community sovereignty, viral media.

Focus
Standard ethical protocols often erase Indigenous values. Let's rethink how we ask, listen, and share.

What You Will Learn
Topics covered
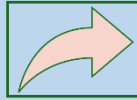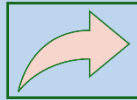
→	Differentiate legal consent from cultural and spiritual consent..
→	Learn how to obtain consent relationally, not just on paper.
→	*Learn the difference between extractive and reciprocal engagement*
→	*Challenge the "neutral observer" myth in academic performance research.*

6.0 Why Focus on Consent Forms? What Do They Bear?

6.1 Signed Paper vs. Storytelling Agreement

6.2 When the Community Says "No"

6.3 Sacred Rituals and Ethical Tensions

6.4 Case Study: Viral Video and Community Betrayal

6.5 Beyond Ownership: Who Holds the Story?

6.6 Benefit-Sharing and Long-Term Reciprocity

Glossary

- **Cultural Consent**: Permission granted based on communal, traditional, or ritual structures, not institutional forms.
- **Spiritual Consent**: The ethical right to share sacred knowledge in a way that honors spiritual traditions.
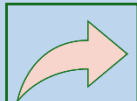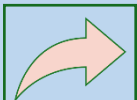- **Storytelling Agreement**: An informal but culturally recognized form of mutual understanding and respect in knowledge exchange.
- **Narrative Sovereignty**: The right of a community or individual to control the telling, use, and meaning of their own stories.
- **Benefit-Sharing**: A principle ensuring communities who contribute to research receive reciprocal value—material, cultural, or symbolic.
- **Consent Fatigue**: Emotional or cognitive exhaustion from being repeatedly asked for access, often without real benefit.

Decolonizing Consent and Data Collection

> *At its core, consent means to give permission and provides a way to express agency and self-determination. The oxford english dictionary defines "consent" as "permission for something to happen or agreement to do something." What constitutes acceptable consent is handled differently in different legal and cultural contexts. A notion of how to consent is simply taken for granted by applicable data supply or data subjects (shae roberts & n montoya, 2022).*

Academia must be concerned that no culturally specific practices are irregular or otherwise non-compliant. Moreover, academia must deal with ethical frameworks that privilege one community's worldview, rendering other worldviews ethically irrational. Decolonizing consent requires an analysis of the underlying issues and an alternative system of knowing what data is consented to. The goal of a decolonial framework of consent is more than checking boxes, but this is part of the work. Part of a decolonized agenda for consent is to find a system of consent that can be considered or, in Tim Ingold's terms, thought from an Indigenous community point of view. Systems of consent without that point of view are ipso facto systems of opacity. Handling data and data law on a global scale requires some harmonisation, but data supply and data subject, or the applicable promised uses of the data, vary across communities and jurisdictions. Compliance in one jurisdiction or with one community's expectations does not mean that compliance has been obtained. It is possible to hide compliance failures in systems of opacity, think of a treaty to send someone somewhere to be punished without the recipient knowing who it is. It is important that compliance need not be understood by those compliant with the Waterfall world bridges. Otherwise, capable of consent talked about Spring brain systems would not know its consequences, and those systems would permit an impossible to establish compliance to a dominant culture. Systemic India-outs excluded from a data protection regime on the grounds of foreignness are beyond the reach of anything primarily Euromericans. Through novel case studies, calls are made to decolonise consent and the knowledge concerning that consent.

Focus

Scholarship and industry at the intersection of HCI and mental health have proliferated in recent years, reflecting the proliferation of mental health interventions in the technology space. These efforts advanced knowledge about

> *(1) the design of digital mental health research,*
> *(2) study recruitment and retention,*
> *(3) security and privacy challenges, and*
> *(4) mental health stigma in online community support groups.*

Much of this research draws from and is evaluated using data collected through ways of knowing that have gained legitimacy from models associated with Eurocentric, settler-colonial paradigms. (R. Pendse et al., 2024). The outcomes are often presented in the guise of "community guidelines" or "fairness checks" for the public or other researchers without engagement with the input communities about their formation and implementation. These pervasive data practices valorise what could be called epistemic extraction. To shift from epistemic extraction to epistemic decolonization, there needs to be much more expansive reimagining of knowledge ecosystems, power structures, and tools. Examining and revising utopian visions of what data collection, resources, and community guidelines should be needs to go hand-in-hand with revisiting how communities and knowledge ecosystems are currently understood and conceptualized. (Shae Roberts & N Montoya, 2022). These revised notions would need to feed back into and reshape what are currently thought of as best practices for research, publishing, and diligence, such as cooperative governance structures, deliberative models of accountability, or renegotiated intellectual property protections.

Shifting from data practices that extract knowledge about communities, to ones which decolonize the epistemic, analytical and transformative agency of communities to their own lives, to other lives, and to the world would require interventions at diverse scales. Meaningful and faithful implementation of such a decolonizing epistemic justice agenda would go beyond the academic and instead also require the establishment of discursive and political fields for collaborative knowledge production and infrastructure. Like shifts in data practices, this is not a project that could or should be done all at once. However, there are opportunities, avenues and actors who could be engaged over time to illuminate and begin to enact a decentralized, multi-scalar and participatory epistemic justice agenda. Standard ethical protocols often erase Indigenous values. Let's rethink how we ask, listen, and share. With the rise of Open Data Science comes the imperative to interrogate ethics and decolonize methods of data collection. Often, standard ethical protocols erase Indigenous values, leaving data entry comparably void of the fundamental, relationship-based precepts intrinsic to Indigenous knowledge systems. Amidst the aggressive data-centralism driven by the collective anxieties of the pandemic, as increased efforts to collect data and claims of ownership arise, it is necessary to radically re-think how data entry is actioned.

Indigenous peoples have survived attempts to make them irrelevant, eradicate, and forgotten; thus, communities are deeply sensitive to any "other" reading, creating narratives on, or entering information about them. Information is sacred, and therefore its circulation, re-circulation, and destruction is always and everywhere culturally specific (Ruckstuhl, 2022). Meaning, through all forms of dissemination, it matters who asks what, when, where, how, and why. Data entry is dignity-based labour requiring trust, built slowly and carefully, and guarded jealously. After all, external consumption of information often means ongoing intrusive surveillance and commoditization, objectification, and

depersonalization without consent, which no one wants. Fundamentally, by "data" it is not intended the one-size-fits-all data dump with ancestral knowledge, counters, opinions, and so forth rendered as tidbits in spreadsheets, software or maps. Data co-constitutes who you are, you're belonging. Data is deeply relational; it informs one's connections to knowledge sources and is intended to re-situate or re-temporalize the self about them. How and what one is made up of reverberates across cultural and community contexts. Thus, Twitter and Instagram are not comparably commensurable social media platforms, nor is a spreadsheet comparable to a story. Conversely, amid the detritus of years of cheap data collection service offerings, witnessed at too many media conferences, is an urgency for deeper reflection on service offerings. The particulars of such acceptance, writing the stories, drawing the maps, answering the queries, is rife with ethical precepts that ought be given their due. In other words, just as questions of ethics have risen to a fore, so too must questions of how (else) to ask. There is a need for data entry methods rooted in Indigenous research methodologies and relationality-based, reciprocity-driven, informed consent processes.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

Is it possible to decolonize consent and data collection? Isn't it already too late? These questions may feel initially overwhelming. After all, the massive data collection and surveillance infrastructure built by large tech companies feel insurmountable. However, data colonialism has cracks. By widening these cracks, understanding the existing inequities, and learning from organizing movements outside of technology and tech law, civil society and policymakers can learn how to decolonize consent and data collection globally. One key avenue suggested is through an indigenous data sovereignty (id-sov) framework. While technological companies and sectoral policymakers are often thought of as the key actors, they are far from the only ones. Recent moves toward global data laws may represent both good and bad changes, and it is critical to work to make these data laws understandable and sustain differences rather than ignore them. Case studies from various movements around the world are provided to offer inspiration, examples of solidarity and coordination across borders, and to suggest avenues for action. There is a call to live together better and more ethically with data and to do what is right and what is still possible (shae roberts & n montoya, 2022).

To decolonize, it is vital to study and map the networks of human and nonhuman connections that exist to safeguard or intervene in their data life. In these systems, the original servers and templates used to create databases are often owned by settler states or by tech companies with their own distinct biases and original goals. As a result of this infrastructure, much of the aggregate information collected from marginalized groups is stored out of sight in unconsented locations, where even the organization, low-wage worker, or activist who requested and contributed the data to the database cannot access or

see it. At times, this "code-safety" is insistent on data being stored within colonial networks, leading to dangerous entanglements. Mass surveillance, whether in person and facially-recognized through a smart city initiative or constantly collected diagnostic data from glucose monitors, is ever-present. There is an ever-growing concern about health insurance entitlements and costs drawing connections to the united states' unconsented collection of detailed health data from African Americans or to LGBTIQQ-sensitive data being divided for criminalization.

Differentiate legal consent from cultural and spiritual consent

When viewing data, it is necessary to consider if the data can be broken down and reassembled without losing/misplacing meaning. The distinction between discrete units of measurement versus relational entanglement can help determine whether data respects the continuity of relationships or breaks them up into commodity parts (shae roberts & n montoya, 2022). This fits with the goal of decolonization to disentangle relationships from colonial processes of separation and misrepresentation. Too often, data are broken down to incompatible units (or namespaces). If the data being viewed is wrongfully aggregated from or over too much of a continuous set, the danger is that it will artefactually show change where none exists. Or if slices are viewed that have lost contextual relationships with other data, these blocks risk being misunderstood in the same way as western scientists had historically misinterpreted the cinerary heaps of indigenous myths. Different vantage points on the same relationships yield different insights, and when the instructions for reconstructing the wider view are lost, it is difficult to know if the data are being correctly interpreted. Combined with a presumption that the viewer or person comes from a more sophisticated position in the western hierarchy, this led at a vicious cycle where it was impossible to show alternative explanations for shape-change diagrams unless they were themselves already academics, but then their ideas were rejected. As a result, the meaning of data is lost, and their collection serves only to reproduce the imbalances in representation that international data treaties attempt to redress. Furthermore, guardian and researcher perspectives follow explicit/implicit analytic data framing, where a piece of linguistic data with too high a gloss to point at a unique original date would be inappropriate to use for archaeological analysis. However, in itself, the data of broader meaning do not indicate this; it could also be a place of scholarly research. They simply demand a different consideration of trust and legitimacy.

Learning how to obtain consent relationally, not just on paper

User data, from social media use to using sensor data from smartphones, is valuable. Increasingly, researchers, especially in behavioral health, identify topics such as emotional connections, depression, and anxiety. Many digital mental health applications

have emerged, as have datasets from these applications. It is critical to understand how to best support a user's consent choices around data usage as new technologies for data collection are designed and existing practices and policies are tuned. Data practices around digital mental health services often frame a tension around whether to share user data. Advocating and designing for listening to users on their data-first approach can have implications for the future of such data. Broadening trust in researchers and facilitators on how data is collected, stored, and used builds a better understanding and user agency in research and practice.

Understanding user consent processes, goals, and norms varies across communities of practice and individuals and is vital to co-designing these practices and choosing how to best reach and document them. Changes in existing technologies and norms to prepare for centering consent first in the design of data collection opportunities may occur. This is often done with a lens of understanding trust as relevant to both sides of the consent agreement, how consent choices may vary and change across their lifecycle, and how to build technologies for users to effectively use and be connected to the goals for their data. It is personal when qualitative data collection is the focus, and the norm is to document consent on paper at the moment of data collection. Opportunities for relationship-building around data practices before and after consent, and across both individuals in such an agreement, may accompany approaches. Developing consent-use technologies and opportunities and ways of documenting data practices with users can lead to the transfer of ownership models and corresponding entitlement to freedoms with data. In dispatching this, consider how data practices that alternate in focus, scope, or owners are co-designed alongside document-free consent use more generally.

Addressing ownership, credit, and benefit-sharing

Data ecosystems are often inequitable, whether on a global or a local level. Consider who is collecting data about whom, how, and why. Who owns the data, and what rights do the affected communities have to shape the life of the data after it is collected? Who has access to data? Who controls how data is used? Data inequality can be defined as the disparity in power and opportunities between data-rich and data-poor individuals, groups, countries, or organizations. This 'data gap' a correlating challenge to the 'digital divide', comes with vast, asymmetric power relations. In the age of big data, data inequality can lead to serious adverse consequences for the data-poor, rendering them invisible in data-driven societal systems, while also allowing the data-rich to exploit far-reaching surveillance and predatory practices (shae roberts & n montoya, 2022). There are striking parallels between the reworking of colonialism in digital space with the 19th century's scramble for Africa. Compounding lacks consent, accountability, and regulation, the asymmetries of extractives data economy risk re-enacting the abuses of chattel slavery and commoditization of land for generations to come.

Many of the people left out of digital networks belong to groups that have been historically marginalized by centuries-long processes of colonialism (e.g., Indigenous Peoples, migrants, forcibly displaced people), and the need for these communities to resist dispossession in public data networks is foundational to decolonization. Starting from these most marginalized, also makes clear some of the ways in which decolonization is a forward-looking project. Grounded in specific ontologies and epistemologies, decolonizing data in public networks is primarily about reworking ownership, credit, and benefit sharing. These rights to the data ecosystem can be seen as basic principles of fair data, due to the new material conditions that public data designs create. If consensus on a fair data treaty for public data is to be reached, it will require the participation of the most marginalized groups. Unfortunately, the terms of these processes heavily disadvantage their participation. Furthermore, the need for these groups to resist dispossession in public data networks is foundational to decolonization.

Task 1
Write about a time you gave or took a story. What kind of permission was involved? What could have been done more ethically?

Task 2
Design a relational consent process for a fictional theatre project in a marginalized community. What steps would you take before, during, and after the performance?
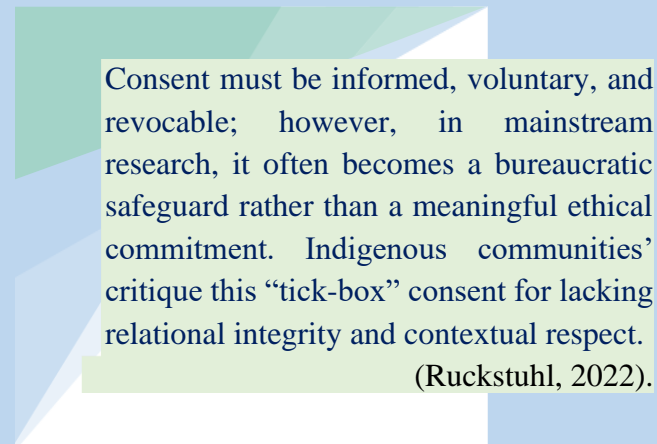
Task 3
Debate: "A signed consent form does not ensure ethical practice." take two sides and explore.

6.0 Why Focus on Consent Forms? What Do They Bear?

Consent is an important ethical prerequisite in research-focused and clinical settings. Participants have a right to participate in research only if they agree to do so voluntarily, fully informed of the risks and benefits. A free and informed consent process is required when they must make a clear decision about being involved. If they do not consent or choose to withdraw their consent at a later moment, researchers should terminate their participation, and the use of the information already collected. Consent procedures that misinform or impose participation infringe on participants' rights. Despite the ubiquity of the subject, there is uncertainty surrounding the precise legal status of consent forms

used in health-related research. Obtaining the written informed consent of participants is not normally a legal requirement for research per se and they are often not strictly capped by regulations. It is broadly interpreted that there may be a requirement to obtain consent before the performance of research procedure. It is uncertain when the requirement turns into a legal obligation to obtain consent in writing on a particular form. There is general. Acknowledgement that consent is a prerequisite to the ethical conduct of research. If this is a matter of principle, then questions arise about the adequacy of the current system for ensuring that this requirement is faithfully observed. However, the phrasing of consent as an absolute requirement gives rise to different kinds of questions.

The absence of legal requirement to obtain a written record of consent in general terms raises the question of whether, at least sometimes, it is an over-structure concerning the integrity of research. It has been noted that these forms may lend an aura of legality to a highly uncertain regime. Some thought might be added to how written consent should operate when it is regulated. Written consent processes can be overburdened by vagueness. They can simultaneously protect the patient from harm and protect the researcher from liability. The request for consent to participate in a biomedical study might include a truthful statement of the aims and methods of the study. It might, however, neglect to mention future uses to which a sample or data might be put, situations in which unanticipated risks of harm might arise. It is also possible that it would not be possible to provide information about all future uses at the time at which consent was obtained. The legal status of consent should not be overly simplified. Guidelines are now 40 years old and a much-awaited revision has recently been released. National and international reviews of data protection laws have been ongoing over the last five years. On the one hand, there is increasing regulation of data protection across the globe. On the other hand, it remains unclear how these regimes fit together coherently.

> Consent must be informed, voluntary, and revocable; however, in mainstream research, it often becomes a bureaucratic safeguard rather than a meaningful ethical commitment. Indigenous communities' critique this "tick-box" consent for lacking relational integrity and contextual respect.
> (Ruckstuhl, 2022).

In mainstream academic practice, consent is often reduced to paperwork a legal protection. But in many Indigenous contexts, this form has little or no ethical meaning. Real consent is relational: it must be built over time and continually revisited. Consent must be informed, voluntary, and revocable even after data is collected. Without contextual sensitivity, formal consent can become a tool of epistemic violence. In mainstream academic practice, consent is often reduced to paperwork a legal protection for researchers rather than a genuine ethical obligation to research subjects. Here, consent becomes a task to complete before starting work. When consent is treated this way, it is

not surprising that formal, "tick-box" consent rarely elicits a positive response from Indigenous groups, who immediately recognize that such "consent" fails to meet the universals of ethical research in their contexts (Ruckstuhl, 2022). In many Indigenous contexts, however, this form for consent has little or no ethical meaning. Real consent is relational, founded not on what's "in the box" but on the mutual recognition of each party's agency and a willingness to engage in a process of discovery. Consent must be built over time, through conversation, and coproduction to mutually interpret and clarify what is being considered. It must be continually revisited and renegotiated over the lifespan of a research project. Consent must be informed by adequate knowledge of the information in question and its implications for self-determination. Consent must be voluntary, given without coercion or undue influence. Consent must be revocable, with the agreed-upon decision or condition able to be rescinded at any time, even after data has been collected. Finally, consent must be an active engagement, typically requiring actions that demonstrate buying into the decision and its expectations. This is but a partial list of the expectations of "real" consent in many Indigenous contexts. Without this contextual sensitivity, what is formalized as consent can become a tool of epistemic violence.

6.1 Signed Paper vs. Storytelling Agreement

Respect for the Indigenous culture necessitates consultation and collaboration, ensuring the benefit of the project is tangible and meaningful in the community's mind, that non-Indigenous researchers minimize impact on the community by treading carefully, and that cultural integrity is maintained (FM Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). This requirement was referred to by participants as "getting written agreement," which usually takes the form of a contract or memorandum of understanding. Researchers and Indigenous people meet in person or write back and forth negotiating the project, ongoing input via a research advisory committee or trusted community members, meeting to describe findings, and plans for continuing benefit. Some participants expressed feeling like they were mimicking a prescribed process and not knowing their cultural procedures. Collaborative development of a research agreement with local cultural protocols has been variedly helpful. Storytelling can be a helpful tool in explaining research and is preferred by many Indigenous groups. However, there is some concern around manipulating, trying to plow through layers of Western academic oppression while using a Western-style process.

The original project aims were achieved, and the video had been warmly received, so the consultants are happy, but it was clear now that the process for achieving those aims in a way valued by local Aboriginal people was flawed. An alternative based on the perspectives and advice of participants in these focus group discussions came to light during research looking for a way for the community to explain the project to their people. Participants had liked the idea of using stories, as two examples were given. (Carlson et

al., 2019) reported using a traditional story about cultural practices with preparing the cycad nut as an analogy to explain how to manage disease with hygiene and medication. also describes this use of storytelling in the Native American ways of knowing and explains the process. A signed form may protect the researcher, but a storytelling agreement protects the relationship. In many communities, verbal agreements made through ritual, food-sharing, or communal understanding are more powerful than any paper. Consent must include Full explanation of purpose and risks Ongoing permission to share, edit, or withdraw Clear understanding of intended The research process must be dialogical, not extractive.

This article investigates the emergence of a novel phenomenon in applied linguistics: public writers. To understand public writing and its role in engaging the public, a qualitative, interdisciplinary study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with eight public writers from diverse fields. In-depth analysis of the interviews reveals that public writing involves more than publicly writing. It requires both a wider range of activities beyond writing and engagement with the public. With writing frequently misunderstood as an act of individual authorship, the role of public writing emerges as a facilitator of interaction, which can be performed by a wider range of persons than traditionally thought. This article explores these findings and sheds new light on public writing's complex, diverse, and multifaceted nature, which has implications for scholarship, teaching, and engaging the public in applied linguistics.

Public writing encompasses multiple activities, including both writing and acts of engagement that promote public interaction. Well-known varieties of public writing include opinion pieces and columns. However, public writing is rarely limited to writing. Almost all participants offer activities beyond writing. Interviewee H, from a medical field, epitomizes this notion by explaining how claims on nutritional supplements and other issues she writes about in her column are made and questioned in public arenas like forums, press conferences, and radio or TV shows. Ultimately, writing only serves as a medium through which public interaction is conducted. The transnational phenomenon of online influencers, who proactively engage in reaction videos and other activities beyond writing to connect with online audiences, underscores the broader practices of public writing that extend beyond the traditional notion of writing. Public writing engagement is a deliberate effort to invite responses, feedback, questions, criticism, and the voice of the public to foster interactions and conversations. While public writing is often thought to consist only of producing written documents for public access and consumption, and such documents are commonly perceived as public writing, the producers and those publicly writing for a broader audience are often conceived as public writers, public intellectuals, or outlets including media, publishing companies, and organizations. Amid rapid technological advancements, public writing as a term is increasingly brought into different fields to cover a growing variety of writing activities that take form in diverse media for broad audiences.

6.2 When the Community Says "No"

In a world where indigenous collectives are increasingly engaged in the design and delivery of research addressing the interests and needs of their people, it is critical to safeguard that the autonomy of indigenous peoples is not violated through inappropriate data collection or, more broadly, through research that is ill-received and covertly disallowed by communities (fitzpatrick et al., 2017; ruckstuhl, 2022).

To support and guide work that uncovers how consent and refusal to participate in research take precedence over the mechanics of how consent is sought, we must reconceptualize data collection practices, especially where participants are de-identified in the written record (carlson et al., 2019). Decolonizing research invites a broader conception of consent and the mechanisms through which the autonomous rights of first peoples to water, land, air, and territory are codified and respected (roberts & montoya, 2022). Acceptance of indigenous sovereignty both in prior possession of occupied lands before european contact and in the charter of aboriginal nations has been addressed in literature through various theoretical perspectives and disciplinary lenses (gone, 2017). While recognition of aboriginal rights and historical resistances engenders possibilities for a new world order, research shows that power imbalances in policymaking are often replicated in data collection and misuse, due to geography, socio-political factors, and entrenched inequities (o'neill et al., 2012). And this is and increasingly complex institutional responses to research compliance now risk amplifying these imbalances, especially in thematic area research across the broader social ecology (hate et al., 2015).

Bad research whereby a proposal too broadly conceived for the methods claimed does not have, at minimum, the letter of consent from the communities in which data collection is purported is pernicious and counter-productive to the intents and interests of the research. Good research is research that is known to and trusted by the community to which it is proposed, the analyses are grounded in, the methodologies applied, and the outcomes understood in the community with this awareness built into practice. Research more broadly is the study of something to discover information or reach a new understanding. In this framework, consent is the concept through which, when the communities say "no" regard is given this is understood to mean a definitive and conclusive prohibition on any further inquiry into data capture dependent outputs. In decolonial practice, refusal is a right not a rejection of research, but a protection of dignity is not always direct it may appear as silence, hesitation, or redirection. Recognizing "soft no" and "cultural no" is part of ethical listening. Respecting a community's boundaries builds future trust.

"Refusal", in the context of research, is often thought of as "no" rejection of a proposal or a denial of access. This is, in many ways, the most straightforward understanding of refusal, and one which is immediately familiar. The presence of the word in formal research ethics review processes is usually encountered as an analysis of the most obvious form of "no" directly communicated: a committee reviewing research designs, consent materials, and approaches to research suggests that an Indigenous community or participant may refuse research. This analysis, more than any others on ethics approval submitted, holds the confidence, specificity, and knowledge of the reviewer. In this context, refusal is considered about all other forms of consent, or inaction, disinterest, indecisiveness, passivity, etc. This understanding of refusal as sole in not or no, however, can overlook the fact that refusal is a right that does not reject research but ensures the protection of dignity. Refusal is multifaceted; no is not necessarily singular or direct it is diffuse, porous, and context specific.

One of the clearest understandings of this fact has come from the Indigenous perspective, where refusal is lived as complex, plural, and communal. There are varying degrees or forms of refusal; no may be expressed audibly, verbally, written, or physically. But no is not always direct; it may appear as silence in the absence of response, or as hesitation to acknowledge ongoing or new questions. No is also discerned as redirection, often articulated as "please ask someone else," another person, a community, or simply a different question. In situations where, outside of a community, this understanding allows for silences to be agitated to be filled with anxious "am I wrong?"-type questions, or the worst misinterpretations that doom understanding, within the community, these many forms of no are understood as grounds for continued ethical listening. Respecting a community, no, regardless of vehemence, gravity, or "softness" to oneself, creates space to hear it later, or to discern and consider the multiplicity of this next and future refusal and what it entails for respect. Furthermore, respect for a community's no and engagement with it within the community on its terms, rather than as a rejection of a path forward, is a means to build trust for future listening, subsequently, once the research is formalized.

6.3 Sacred Rituals and Ethical Tensions

Indigenous knowledge traditions are often rendered as "data" in university-sponsored academic research programs. Increasingly, Indigenous communities have expressed ethical concerns about using their knowledge, stories, and places as data without initial community engagement or prior informed consent (P. Gone, 2017). These ethical concerns call for fresher narratives of what constitutes ethical Indigenous research and university-community engagement. Decolonized understandings of research ethics and ethical data collection move beyond resorting to rules and guidelines. Rather, commitment to reciprocal ethics fosters ritual enactment of self-helping stories. Ritual gives rise to enduring, durable collective expressions of commitment to ethical relations by participating institutions or communities. Expanding scaled-up understandings of these rituals fosters ethical attention in the situational context of consent and data collection.

In June 2014, a conference presentation by a troubled scholar started to flesh out

> Sacred rituals in Indigenous contexts guide consent and knowledge sharing, but often clash with institutional research ethics, creating ethical tensions when ceremonial protocols are misunderstood or overridden by formal procedures
>
> (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017; Gone, 2017; Carlson et al., 2019).

the practical challenges in the ethics of consent and data collection. The presentation relative to the documentary inclusion of one sacred object a Crow medicine bundle in the custody of the Montana Historical Society had two purposes: first, it was an effort at taking responsibility for publicizing this sacred object during travel circuit presentations; second, the scholar's forms of fiduciary or creative collective authorship of this ethnographic documentary and correspondence with Curtis's Native American interlocutors was an attempt to invite and guide the community consent process away from more pernicious paths. However, almost immediately following this presentation, other American Indian conference participants began to convey their discomfort with discussing the Braided Tail skull medicine. A group of students who took offense at the remarks seemed particularly outraged by the display of the photograph, suggesting that the exhibit had crossed an ethical line. One student asserted: "[The photograph] offended me deeply." A fair appraisal of this ethical challenge requires further elucidation of at least two related ethical claims. Not all performances are meant to be seen, filmed, or shared outside their origin. Filming sacred rituals can result in spiritual disturbance or community harm. Tensions arise when researchers value documentation over cultural and metaphysical boundaries. Before

filming or performing sacred content, ask: Is this meant for outsiders? Have elders or cultural guardians approved it? Is this for scholarship or spectacle?

Not all performances are meant to be seen, filmed, or shared outside their origin. Some performances, like sacred rituals, are only meant for the eyes of the initiated. To film events like certain ceremonies could mean not just non-consensual exposure of sensitive cultural information, but also a spiritual disturbance from violated boundaries within which cultural prohibitions safeguard life. Some performances do not correspond to systems of cultural intellectual property otherwise governable under conventions of copyright, trademark, and the like. Some cultural expressions hold the possibility of harm to the group, individuals, or both consequent to unmediated disclosure. Such matters correspond to how cultural practices have been no consensually appropriated by those outside the community, oftentimes with tragic results. In the tradition of certain filmmaking, there is a tendency to valorize documentation over such boundaries. This increases the likelihood of violence, whether differential forms of neglect or intervention, neglect, or repurposed subsumption. The latter most graphically characterizes media deprivation. But it is a millennia-old epistemological move emplaced well before certain arrivals on Western shores. It is a sense of entitlement reminiscent of certain thinking, in which treaties and land rights, but also sufficiently researched accounts, prevail over ethical or ontological consideration. To this end researchers (and performance scholars) are subjected to an external accountability that urges constant scrutiny of one question. Is the content meant for outsiders? Have cultural guardians, elders, or others screened it for appropriateness? Is such screening mechanisms, if locally in place, adhered to? Excessive funding or entitlements cannot circumvent such questions, lest one moral or ethical imperative risk rendering them moot. Is the performance enacted for potential spectators? Or is it instead meant solely for internal engagement? Or as public is it the only broadcast or spectacle rather than scholarship? The same degree of vigilance should accompany attempts to perform such content over the internet. Would aesthetic reason unexpectedly preclude deep gratitude and understanding?

6.4 Case Study: Viral Video and Community Betrayal

On May 1, 2019, two teenage girls were captured on video fighting at Watch High School. The video was shared and quickly spread around the community. Within two hours, it had been shared outside of the school district. Within a day, parents were warning each other about their kids viewing the 'fight video,' and school administrators were angry that students appeared to be 'taking pride' in their involvement in the fight. The video quickly made its way to other platforms. Guidance counsellors were needed in classrooms and parents began voice messaging with questions about 'the fight video.' A city councilman warned that online sharing about the high school fight was 'getting out of hand,' and a school board meeting was called to discuss the issue. The video was used in media coverage in multiple outlets, including news and channels targeting police activity and crime. This

rapid dissemination of video data, and the community-grade chaos that followed, is a case study in community betrayal at the hands of social media. It illustrates how fast and often with very little context, social media can seize footage of a contentious moment and amplify the discussion of the footage beyond the parameters of the incident itself. This amplification of the accounting of the event and the less-than-charitable scripting of community members involved captures both a technological moment in media studies and a pedagogical moment for media literacy, data understanding, and deep fakes. The rapid dissemination provokes questions of ethical oversight and data collection, particularly as it relates to the squaring of an academic's use of the viral data and the community's understanding of the captured moment.

Over several months, there were conversations, writings, and analyses considering how to ethically study the video and community response. If the video is truly viral, it might have been captured without proper consent, and therefore no ethical recourse could be taken with clear awareness of what is being studied. Would the continued capturing and sharing of the video, and data in general, affect how viewers now understood it? Would community members feel betrayed? Would the community actively oppose the work and dissemination of the work? Would sharing this understanding vilify community members? Would current online viewers viewing the video feel similarly vilified? Would debating these very issues be an extension of harm and trolling? Would participants receive unjust blames, and would trolls simply inflate the visibility of the video? A researcher records a ritual performance in a rural village. A member gives casual permission. The footage is posted online. It goes viral. Village elders are outraged. The ritual was not for global eyes. The performer is shamed. The community feels betrayed. What went wrong: No collective or spiritual consent No consultation with cultural leaders Assumption that permission from one person equals approval from all What could be done differently: Engage in long-term dialogue before recording Clarify audience, platform, and potential consequences refusals and protect sacredness. Clarity of the ethical issues involved is of utmost importance to protect communities and researchers alike in unanticipated or accident situations, while creating space for vulnerable, uncertain, or uncomfortable conversations. Such spaces are crucial to validating peoples' concerns and proactively apologizing for ethics violations. However, "too much" clarity can prompt defensive postures around uncertainty. Balancing curiosity with expertise, vulnerability with empathy, and advocacy concerning members is challenging but essential. Cultural trainees, i.e., researchers with a deep knowledge of Indigenous communities, practices, and traditions, are critical to implementing any practices. This will prioritize safety, de-escalate misunderstandings, and help researchers hold themselves accountable (FM Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). All community practices should be prioritized, and only after being fully contextualized and agreed upon with consultation will any researcher be granted any participation.

Threats of irresponsible reporting or publication must be taken seriously, not defensively. Centrally aimed affidavit protection of the community is vital as the rate of publication

increases post-publication. Apologizing and proactively seeking positive action and outcomes for mistakes instead of excusing them is crucial to maintaining community relations. Writing sacred knowledge is major trade-off for access to writing altogether. This requires exhaustive knowledge of what practices must be abandoned in turn and prior consultation before acting. Such detailed directives can even include limiting writing to place names and terminology, which is sometimes a spiritual necessity. Consequences of unethical fast-food style engagement are critical to avert. Vulnerability around deep uncertainties and insufficient contextual knowledge must be admitted to get community input on how to proceed, for both fear of misrepresenting community knowledge and the risk of minor law enforcement for sudden minor expenses. Finite time and monetary trade-offs must be structured as incentives for shared knowledge. Here, cultural trainees and safety in guidance will be very beneficial.

6.5 Beyond Ownership: Who Holds the Story?

The word 'story' emerges in various languages with different connotations. While in English, storytellers hold a position of privilege the race is on to grab the story before it is forgotten; the moral could survive centuries of retelling the meaning of story might differ in Somali: sheeko (devoid of most attributes of story), in Amharic: እንደዚህ with its various shades of meaning (becoming, the life history of a person, myth, etc.) or in other Indigenous languages. A story is not viewed as a commodity. It belongs to the teller. This perspective was powerfully expressed by an FDL member during traditional stick games with her grandchildren: "There is no consent to interrogate, record, or name the story before it is ready to be told" (Carlson et al., 2019). Her reflection challenges dominant assumptions about consent in storytelling, emphasizing that certain narratives are culturally restricted, they cannot be shared prematurely or without proper readiness. Some stories belong to the collective, and others are deeply personal, yet not fully formed or prepared for release. Within this framework, storytelling is not just about ownership but is governed by culturally embedded protocols, tacitly respected by both the teller and the listener. There is a reason why some stories are not carved. There is a reason why some stories remain locked in blood and bones. The desire to share is overwhelmed and suffocated by the fear of how it is taken, used, appropriated, and distorted by the slippery, cunning fingers of colonizers. It must be understood before it is filled with cultural codes, the otherness, the ownness. It is far too painful to share a story about an auction by fractal and losing in seconds the baby brother Eeskoo to the white-bound peering eyes of villains.

> To not wrest it open, to not proffer it mere fruit for savagery. Legal systems ask, "Who owns this data?" But indigenous ethics ask, "Who holds this story with care? "Stories are relational, not extractable.

> Performing or publishing a story without deep permission violates its sacredness. Consider shared authorship, cultural guardianship, and narrative sovereignty. Colonial systems of law, such as property rights, intellectual property, and copyrights, ask, "Who owns this data?" Indigenous systems of law, ethics, and governance, such as protocols, tribal rules and laws, tūhoe customs, and intellectual property of traditional knowledge, ask, "Who holds this story with care?"
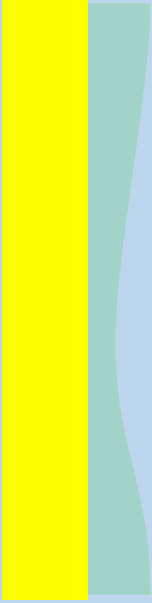>
> Ruckstuhl (2022).

Who is it safe to share it with? To whom is this story sacred? It is imperative to have a deep understanding of the ownership of a story, what the value of a story is, the relations to the beings and entities affected, and in what ways natural oral networks of exchange can be used. The most basic of these understandings is to recognize that stories are deeply relational and are never extractable. This means stories cannot be vectorized, framed, or isolated, but instead arise out of close and careful relationships. Indigenous data sovereignty and the transference of data from Indigenous settings to digital platforms must consider the relationality of stories. It is here that Indigenous law across the world has foresight, as this question has been addressed holistically for generations. It is important to ensure that this foresight informs scholarship, data transfer, and the production/consumption of "big data," as the actualization of colonial outcomes will play out for Indigenous peoples (Johnson-Jennings et al., 2019).

Data collection, distribution, and utilization must consider Indigenous protocols of story. In addition, there is a danger when a single story emerges and is used in ways that flatten representation, leading to homogenization and gross misinterpretation. A strong, reassuring sentiment was expressed throughout, that the work being done is with Indigenous communities in partnership, and this work will be accessible to the communities with full control over their own data. In this way, the Naskapi language and stories will remain within the culture and tribal management, tikanga, responsibility, care, and governance of the people. Such statements, however, echo concerns and conversations, most notably uttered in the geographies of the Americas, everywhere the settler logic and colonial standpoint exist. This includes all other colonial settlements and expansions of Europe in India, the Pacific Islands, Australia, New Zealand, Africa, and beyond. What the presentations may have unraveled for many was the deeper danger of how easily oral cultures can be exploited by digital platforms, and the risk of a single story taking over.

6.6 Benefit-Sharing and Long-Term Reciprocity

There was overwhelming agreement from interviewees that any researcher seeking to analyse information about informal settlements in Mumbai should first acknowledge how their approach differed from the usual practice and offer a reasonable or equivalent benefit. To this end, the approach might be discussed in community meetings at the very outset of a collaborative project. Specific suggestions included sharing the proposed fieldwork instruments, preliminary results, and how the information had been collected. It might also be worthwhile to explicitly state how the information would or would not be used, and to sideline questions that did not concern the study such as those that had taken place outside the researcher's field. In addition to clarifying and putting to rest misgivings, sharing this information might assuage apprehension. Answers were often couched in uncertain, hypothetical tones, and there was concern that the intent behind certain questions would be misconstrued. Moreover, it offered an opportunity to remind participants that survey research complemented and did not replace other approaches to exploring community-level needs (Hate et al., 2015). Questions about sharing information ranged from how populations could be made "visible" to populations not easily accessed. The suggestion was made to restrict how the material could be used by making it necessary to request access from a higher authority. This experiment was generally presumed to be an exhaustive study of each household, but there was concern that the amount of time given to each household might not reflect this. Other inferences included questions about changes in the neighbourhood and with whom else the information could be shared or about changes in the participants' access to resources. Concerns were also expressed that this information could be useful to organizations with a vested interest in the community. However, there was general agreement that entry-level screening was beyond the capacity of the community. Further, it was acknowledged that by letting researchers access this information, their credibility would have to be determined and the information "strictly with them" or anonymized. Ethical data collection must include benefit-sharing, material or symbolic. Possible practices: Return to perform for the community-create publications or videos, donate archival materials, skills, or honorariums. Communities should be able to say: We see our value here. We have a voice in the outcomes. We benefit from what we gave.

> Ethical data collection requires **benefit-sharing**, where communities actively see their value, shape outcomes, and gain from participation. Practices include co-creating outputs, returning performances, and sharing knowledge respectfully and collaboratively

Ethical data collection must include benefit-sharing, material or symbolic. This might take the form of return of performances for the community, co-creation of publications or video outputs, donation of archival materials or skills or honorariums. Possible practices include returning to the field for community events and sharing information or performances in writing or film. This would entail a discussion of what knowledge was documented and how it was to be presented, a consideration of ethics that is often absent from the disciplinary model of ethnographies. Other avenues for ethical and traditional data sharing might include supporting other research projects by donating recordings, footage or images, teaching performance or celebration practices, sharing co-written papers or helping fund social events. Key to these practices is that the community itself would be able to assert some combination of the following: We see our value here. We have a voice in the outcomes. We benefit from what we gave. At stake is an exploration of ethical archiving or the ethics of recording performance in a large collaborative project, the national curriculum. Different disciplines and ethnic communities approach data differently. What is important to document? What kinds of events need precious time and space allocated to documentation? Critically, whose voices bear on this decision? (Ruckstuhl, 2022) argues that there is a need to move beyond Indigenous-centred recording and documentation models to consider forms of data stewardship that support Indigenous epistemologies predicated on knowledge being dynamically produced through material practice rather than exclusively inscribed in intelligible text. If ethnographic archives do not already inhere Indigenous epistemologies, traditions of data stewardship could forge collaborative experimental practices through which knowledge portal literacies could be reimagined, with scope for transduction with Western systems, interpretation, or access.

Task 4
Re-searching new paradigms of data collection.
Task objectives:
Consider the concept of death and colonialism.
How to decolonize the concept of data collection.
The ongoing nature of colonialism and how it manifests in a
digital landscape.

What is meant by data colonization, and how data colonialism
is similar to land colonization?
Indigenous data sovereignty, its goals, and its challenges.
Develop alternative modes of data collection that do not
perpetuate the legacy of colonialism in a digital environment.

Instructions

n groups of 4, select an ongoing or proposed research project
in which data will be collected. This can include qualitative,
quantitative, online, or offline methodologies. Draft a 1500-2000 word
document explaining the project's aims and ways in which data will be
collected. Focus on the colonizing aspects of existing protocols and
modes of data collection. Explore alternative modes of data collection
that would lessen the colonizing impact of the project. These
alternatives should include changes in data processing, ownership,
sharing, and methods of asking for consent. Consider colonization
broadly, bearing in mind ideas of unequal power dynamics,
exploitation, and ownership over data. Consider how data collection
could more positively impact the lives of participants.

WIN for Data Collectors, Data Participants, and Data Subjects?

Reflect on how the data collection process could be altered in a way that benefits those from whom the data is collected, and those whose lives it is intended to impact. What would be lost for the researchers/designers/developers? The output of this task is a parable-story. In groups of 2-3, draft a 1500–2000-word story exemplifying potential changes to the data collection protocol to create a more just world. The story can be in an academic or fictional format. Consider starting with one narrative (which frames the data hunters as cool + clever + competent + powerful) to contrast the second one (which frames them as foolish/vain). Consider speech, plot, and imagery to evoke feelings of dread or horror, before countering them in the second narrative.

Task 5
Write about a time you gave or took a story.
What kind of permission was involved? What could have been
done more ethically?

In constructive multicultural contexts, we are often called to give or take stories that we wouldn't ordinarily share about our lives. This narrative yearning for connection can outweigh trepidation about this new intimacy; however, it can have unsettling

ramifications that ripple out to the individuals involved and beyond. Consent matters. A story is always a lived experience, a memory, a situation that could have repercussions beyond the audience to imagination and reputation. Consent to tell it, the way it is told, and often, who gets to tell it should be carefully negotiated. This negotiation of permission over stories of the heart is made more difficult when we share this burden in a new context. Tricky and unspoken ground rules come to the forefront in those kinds of spaces: think of improv in a new group where everyone has different improv backgrounds, body language, expectations, and mechanics (Carlson et al., 2019). After one collaboration, permission on one story was left hanging. During the deformation of one of my stories, this collective curiosity took a darker turn, and the underlying racial tensions in the group came tumbling out as the storytelling made its way around the circle. During this telling, tempers flared, and thick heat coiled in the air of the space, tightly squeezing the group's breath. The object of this story had not taken consent on her presentation and therefore did not have her narrative shaped. On a second call, the storyteller was told that the translation had gone awry. She was bewildered and hurt, struggling to find a baseline understanding of the working world she hadn't chosen. This all occurred in a space where explicit activism had been done to bring representation to that voice and rabbit hole, which only added to the weight. What each of the tellers had thought was a layered, joyful passing of story ended with a teacher's unexamined privilege playing out unconsciously with an understandings that was not shared, damaging not only a storyteller's voice, but an experience and practices that had been rooted in connective ritual. Each time an untold story is told, it should be asked who has the right to tell the story, and what kind of interaction is expected in reaction to it.

Task 6

Design a relational consent process for a fictional theatre project in a marginalized community. What steps would you take before, during, and after the performance?

task objectives for designing a relational consent process in a fictional theatre project within a marginalized community:

Establish trust and cultural sensitivity: build relationships with community members through dialogue, respect for local customs, and acknowledgment of historical power imbalances.

Co-create consent protocols: collaboratively develop consent processes (verbal, written, or symbolic) that reflect the community's values, communication styles, and preferred ways of engagement.

Ensure ongoing, informed participation: facilitate continuous dialogue before and during rehearsals to ensure participants understand the project, their roles, and their right to withdraw or modify consent at any time.

Protect emotional and cultural safety: identify potential risks (e.g., triggering content, misrepresentation) and establish support systems (e.g., peer check-ins, debrief circles) during and after the performance.

Honor relational accountability post-performance: create a feedback process that allows participants to share experiences, raise concerns, and influence future projects, ensuring reciprocity and long-term community well-being

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As a final project for a Performing Arts course named Devising Theatre, we decided to develop our small theatre project. We are a group of eight theatre majors who share a passion for public and collaborative arts. Knowing how hectic the end of the semester can be, we wanted to scale our plans so any theatre student would be able to participate in our project. Ultimately, we landed on a devised theatre production for high schoolers in the Madison area. The goal of this project was to create a space for high school students to express themselves freely, welcome to share any ideas they desired. We wanted to design an invite-only event, which strayed away from the typical hierarchical, curated performance environment students were used to. The devised performance would centre around questions, rather than pre-determined topics, to successfully foster meaningful discussion and creative expression for younger performers. The final product would be a performance that was somewhat of a cross between a play, a collaborative art project and a speak-out. Given the nature of the project, it was imperative to create a consent process that cantered youth voices. Before the performance, our main task would be

> Tricky and unspoken ground rules come to the forefront in those kinds of spaces: think of improv in a new group where everyone has different improv backgrounds, body language, expectations, and mechanics
> Carlson et al., (2019).

designing the consent process itself. This would involve group discussions about our vision

for the performance, brainstorming set design, consent agreements and creating paper contracts for the students.

At the second and third design meetings, we would want to create our consent process as a group. We brainstormed a list of concerns involving issues of participant safety, audience safety, space and logistics. After generating these questions, we began crafting them into consent agreements, aiming for an artful base. To ensure the process was accessible and understandable for high schoolers, any complicated language would be rephrased during the write-up process. Another group would start drafting paper contracts, divulging a set of questions and goals in response to which we wanted students to create their piece. We would want to design the questions to encourage thinking and collaboration. Addressing all of our worries in the contracts would be a priority at the next meeting. To end the performance, we expressed a desire to have students reflect verbally or artistically on the experience. Again, on the day-of the performance, thought would need to be put into how to frame this. Any supplies needed for such reflections should also be prepared. In addressing possible follow-up or further discussion, it was acknowledged that documentation would have a big impact on the shape of the following day. It was decided that we would want to film and take pictures of the performance. Cost/ownership of media rights would need to be discussed as well. Time spent organizing any documentation, later editing it, as well as thought put into ways to share the content with participants and wider communities would be needed (Leonard-Rose, 2017).

Group Task

Debate: "a signed consent form does not ensure ethical practice." take two sides and explore.

Task objectives for designing a relational consent process in a fictional theatre project within a marginalized community:

Establish trust and cultural sensitivity: build relationships with community members through dialogue, respect for local customs, and acknowledgment of historical power imbalances.

Co-create consent protocols: collaboratively develop consent processes (verbal, written, or symbolic) that reflect the community's values, communication styles, and preferred ways of engagement.

Ensure ongoing, informed participation: facilitate continuous dialogue before and during rehearsals to ensure participants understand the project, their roles, and their right to withdraw or modify consent at any time.

Protect emotional and cultural safety: identify potential risks (e.g., triggering content, misrepresentation) and establish support systems (e.g., peer check-ins, debrief circles) during and after the performance.

Honor relational accountability post-performance: create a feedback process that allows participants to share experiences, raise concerns, and influence future projects, ensuring reciprocity and long-term community well-being.

The ethical practice of data collection relies upon follow up to ethical guidelines (C. Rivas Velarde et al., 2021). Therefore, considerations including whether participants stored on a server could have permissions changed later, whether the ethics proposals approved informed the design and choice of methods and equipment, and whether and how ethics were revisited during the research project. Survey research with online devices often includes anonymised and unconnected data that collects demographic information and adheres to public research, where the specific content of the survey is explained. Researchers need to consider carefully practices that could violate agreed-upon research integrity. This must also include commercial pressures. The growing commercialization of academic research must be scrutinized. Control of and access to data gathering, storage, and interpretation or analyses must be agreed upon ahead of before working relationships are established.

Citizen gage surveyed several groups, noting to researchers that there would be an expectation of follow-up and feedback on the surveys. There was no ethical clearance sought for this reuse of the raw data, as there was a need for future readings of the data with no ethical clearance. Moreover, there should be consideration of future rights to social data and assurances that participants in the Citizens project can withdraw from using the data. The organisation responsible for ethical clearance in the original survey was not consulted and there are varying levels of acceptance of the ethics protocols. If analysis would be used for purposes outside of those for which ethicists originally approved. If indeed an act of goodwill meant there were no protections for Indigenous peoples. Revisiting ethics choices prior to data collection could have provided explanations for the requirements of direct feedback and better transparency about agreements made on use and shared ownership of the survey's ethnographic produce. Future consideration of ethics questions may have provided contingency plans for renegotiating the future ownership and future directions on access and use of materials collected about a group.

A postcolonial perspective problematizes some of the customary or established practices in education and the arts, including, therefore, music education. As a practice, this is positioned both within the educational and the musical remits. Several international contexts and examples are made use of to both critique and probe a vision for future better practices. The specific example of Bangladeshi creativity in music is used to reflect on some of these issues (Mochere, 2017). It may be that the discussion is valid for other music and education beyond Bangladeshi knowledge, but it offers a unique example. After an initial discussion of the use of the term 'harmony' and the development of the paper's argument, the general situation of music education in Bangladesh is outlined. Musical

education is initially thought about in terms of subjects within the school curriculum. However, it becomes clear that there is a range of other educational practices surrounding music, and the literature reveals problems in these practices that are rather more challenging than the obvious difficulties in Miami music or similar courses. Wider pedagogical and educational practices are examined as they relate to music learning.

Suggested Readings

- Ruckstuhl, K. (2022). Trust in scholarly communications and infrastructure: Indigenous data sovereignty. *National Library of Medicine*. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9462245/
- Roberts, S., & Montoya, N. (2022). Decolonisation, global data law, and Indigenous data sovereignty.
- Carlson, E., Rowe, G., Zegeye-Gebrehiwot, T., & Story, S. (2019). Decolonization through collaborative filmmaking: Sharing stories from the heart.
- Fitzpatrick, E. F. M., Macdonald, G., Martiniuk, A. L. C., D'Antoine, H., Oscar, J., Carter, M., Lawford, T., & Elliott, E. J. (2017). The Picture Talk Project: Starting a conversation with community leaders on research with remote Aboriginal communities of Australia. *BMJ Open*. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5587212/
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Data, Sovereignty, and Storytelling

- Johnson-Jennings, M., Jennings, D., & Little, M. (2019). Indigenous data sovereignty in action: The Food Wisdom Repository.
- O'Neill, C., Harding, A., Harper, B., Stone, D., Berger, P., Harris, S., & Donatuto, J. (2012). Conducting research with tribal communities: Sovereignty, ethics, and data-sharing issues.
- M, C., & K, D. (2019). Returning water data to communities in Ndola, Zambia: A case study in decolonising environmental science.
- Hate, K., Meherally, S., Shah More, N., Jayaraman, A., Bull, S., Parker, M., & Osrin, D. (2015). Sweat, skepticism, and uncharted territory: A qualitative study of opinions on data sharing among public health researchers and research participants in Mumbai, India. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, *10*(3), 239–250. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4790153/

Relational and Cultural Consent

- Pendse, R., Stapleton, S., Kumar, L., De Choudhury, M., & Chancellor, S. (2024). Advancing a consent-forward paradigm for digital mental health data.
- Leonard-Rose, M. (2017). Cultivating nonviolent spaces: Valuing connection, communication and care in movement and performance practices.
- Gone, P. (2017). "It felt like violence": Indigenous knowledge traditions and the postcolonial ethics of academic inquiry and community engagement.

Reflexive Terms

Decolonizing Consent

A process of challenging colonial and institutional models of informed consent by centering Indigenous knowledge, cultural values, and collective decision-making in research relationships (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017).

Indigenous Values

Core cultural principles such as reciprocity, relationality, respect, and spiritual responsibility that guide how knowledge is shared, used, and protected within Indigenous communities.

Ethical Protocols

Context-specific guidelines that uphold dignity, trust, and equity in research often shaped by community expectations rather than institutional mandates alone (Carlson et al., 2019).

Cultural Consent

Consent rooted in the traditions, languages, and rituals of a community, where approval may be expressed through elders, collective dialogue, or ceremonial affirmation rather than written forms.

Relational Consent

An ongoing, dynamic process of consent that prioritizes relationships and trust, recognizing that consent is never one-time but must be revisited as contexts evolve (Gone, 2017).

Benefit-Sharing

Ensuring that communities receive tangible, long-term benefits such as access to findings, capacity building, or shared ownership of data from the research they contribute to.

Sacred Rituals

Culturally significant ceremonies and practices through which knowledge is transmitted, consent is given, or protection is invoked; these rituals are part of spiritual and epistemic sovereignty.

Ethical Tensions

Conflicts that arise between academic research standards and Indigenous worldviews, especially around data ownership, representation, and modes of consent (O'Neill et al., 2012).

Community Sovereignty

The right of Indigenous or local communities to govern how research is conducted on their land, with their people, and regarding their knowledge, including control over data, consent, and dissemination.

Viral Media

Digital content, especially images or recordings of cultural practices, that spreads rapidly online, raises ethical concerns about consent, context, representation, and the potential commodification of sacred or sensitive material.

Reflections for Practice and Research

1. **How do you define consent?**
   Reflect on whether your understanding of consent is shaped more by legal forms or by relationships and trust. How might this differ in Indigenous or community-based contexts?

2. **What would it mean to *ask permission with humility* instead of *seeking approval through paperwork*?**
   Consider how this shift might affect your approach to research or storytelling, especially when working in cross-cultural or marginalized settings.A

3. **Have you ever encountered a situation where formal consent felt insufficient or even inappropriate?**
   Think about what could have been done differently using cultural or relational consent methods.

4. **What responsibilities do researchers have after consent is given?**
   Explore the idea of *relational consent* how do we stay accountable over time, especially when research involves communities with historical trauma?

5. **Who benefits from the knowledge you gather?**
   Reflect on *benefit-sharing*: Is your work extractive, or does it return value to the community that shared its knowledge, stories, or data?

6. **How do sacred rituals, ceremonies, or elders shape consent in Indigenous contexts?**
   Ask yourself whether your current methods leave room for spiritual or cultural forms of affirmation that go beyond written signatures.

7. **How would you respond if the media or data you collected went viral without proper context or permission?**
   Consider the risks of viral media and the importance of protecting the dignity and sovereignty of those represented.

8. **What does it mean to practice research as a guest, not as an owner?**
   Challenge yourself to decenter authority, recognize community sovereignty, and enter relationships with reciprocity and respect.

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P. Gone, J. (2017). "It Felt Like Violence": Indigenous Knowledge Traditions and the Postcolonial Ethics of Academic Inquiry and Community Engagement.

R. Pendse, S., Stapleton, L., Kumar, N., De Choudhury, M., & Chancellor, S. (2024). Advancing a Consent-Forward Paradigm for Digital Mental Health Data.

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CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION–*WHAT* WE LEARNED AND WHAT TO DO

Abstract

This chapter synthesizes the core lessons from the preceding discussions, emphasizing the relational, spiritual, and political dimensions of theatre and performance. It asserts the necessity of declaring positionality in artistic practice, advocating for transparency and accountability. The chapter underscores reciprocity as an ongoing, lived practice rather than a one-time gesture, and stresses that consent is earned through trust and engagement, not merely formalized through signatures. Concluding with a call to honor the stage as a sacred space, it invites practitioners to approach their work with respect, integrity, and a commitment to transformative, ethical practice.

Keywords: theatre, relational practice, spiritual practice, positionality, reciprocity, consent, ethical performance, sacred stage, political acts, transformative art.

YOU WILL TAKE AWAY

Theatre is not just performance
It is a relationship. It is a spiritual, ethical, and political
encounter between bodies, stories, and histories.
Your positionality matters.
Who you are shapes what you see, hear, and create. Declare it.
Reflect on it. Don't hide behind neutrality.
Reciprocity is not a one-time act
It is a daily discipline. We must give back as much as we
receive, and sometimes more.
Consent is not a form
It is a trust. It must be earned through listening, humility, and
care.
The stage is not neutral
It is sacred ground. It holds joy, grief, memory, and resistance.
Approach it with reverence.

Research is not extraction
It is ceremony. Whether you are documenting, devising, or
performing, remember you are not just gathering data—you are
entering someone's story world.
To decolonize performance is to decolonize the self.
This work begins not in the institution, but in the heart.

7.1 Reframing Performance

Performance, particularly in community-based and volunteer contexts, cannot be viewed merely as entertainment. It is inherently **relational, political, and spiritual,** shaped by bodies, stories, and shared histories. Rather than being a neutral act, performance is embedded in structures of power, positionality, and reciprocity. As Moats (2014) argues, volunteer performers carry emotional and ethical weight that extends beyond applause. Their presence in marginal spaces, be it refugee camps, elder homes, or disaster zones, reframes performance as a form of **witnessing,** where relationality becomes the ground for ethical engagement (Reclam, 2018). In this sense, theatre becomes a **site of care, resistance, and solidarity.** It offers opportunities not only for visibility but also for repair. Drawing on the philosophical traditions of *ihsan* (spiritual excellence) and *ubuntu* (relational ethics), performance becomes a practice of dignity and responsibility. These traditions reject the commodification of art and insist on its spiritual, healing potential (Frishkopf, 2018; Chowdhury et al., 2022). Through storytelling, movement, and voice, the performer not only entertains, they affirm life, protests injustice, and holds space for grief and collective joy. The **stage itself becomes sacred.** Whether a hospital corridor, street corner, or classroom floor, performance space is imbued with memory, ritual, and transformation. Matchett (2005) describes community theatre as a space where fixed boundaries, geographical, emotional, and ideological, can dissolve. The act of gathering, witnessing, and telling stories activates what Carlson et al. (2019) call "ceremonial consent," where the performance functions as an agreement between bodies and communities, not just an aesthetic display. When we treat the stage as sacred, we acknowledge that performance carries **spiritual and social stakes.** It has the power to enact healing but also the potential to reproduce harm. These reframing challenges the Western notion of theatre as a product or spectacle. Instead, performance is positioned as **co-created, reciprocal, and often vulnerable.** The performer becomes a **bridge-builder**, entering the story worlds of others with humility, not dominance (Mutibwa, 2019). The stage is not a platform of control but a **shared space** alive with echoes of pain, resistance, and celebration. In reframing performance this way, we are asked to abandon passive consumption and embrace active, accountable participation. Theatre, then, is not a luxury

of the privileged. It is a **tool of justice**, a ceremony of care, and a declaration of shared humanity. It is both sacred and subversive, capable of shifting paradigms and inviting new vocabularies of ethical presence. This understanding is not only important for performers but also for researchers, educators, and facilitators who must recognize that every performance is also a political and spiritual act.

7.2 Positionality and Self-Awareness

In ethical performance and research, **positionality is not optional; it is foundational.** Declaring who we are socially, culturally, spiritually, and politically shapes how we witness, represent, and relate. In the context of community-engaged performance and decolonial research, positionality becomes an ethical act of transparency and accountability, rather than a methodological footnote. It is a declaration that our presence is never neutral, and that every gesture, question, or interpretation is filtered through our histories, identities, and biases (Smith, 2012; Bourke, 2014). The myth of **objectivity in research and performance** has long served to conceal the privileges of dominant voices. As Reclam (2018) argues, the erasure of personal context in volunteer and therapeutic performance often mirrors the erasure of community voices in extractive research. When researchers or performers fail to acknowledge their embeddedness in systems of power, whether academic, racial, gendered, or spiritual, they risk reproducing those very hierarchies they may claim to challenge (Mutibwa, 2019). Recognizing positionality, therefore, is not just self-reflection it is structural awareness.

In Indigenous and decolonial frameworks, **positionality is inseparable from relationality.** Who we are is not just individual; it is defined through our relationships with people, land, ancestors, and stories (Archibald, 2008; Wilson, 2008). This view challenges the Western separation of researcher and subject, performer and audience. It reorients the work of knowledge-making and performance toward a **relational, co-constructed process,** where meaning emerges through dialogue and humility rather than authority and extraction. For example, in community theatre work, Matchett (2005) shows how acknowledging one's role, whether as insider, outsider, learner, or facilitator, can foster trust and dissolve rigid performance hierarchies. In this view, **self-awareness becomes an active form of care**, not simply critical exercise. Likewise, Moats (2014) emphasizes how middle-class positionality shapes the way theatre is accessed, practiced, and understood, even when intentions are inclusive. Recognizing this enables practitioners to address barriers to participation and representation, not just reproduce them under new terms. This chapter calls upon practitioners, researchers, and performers to move beyond passive acknowledgements of identity. **Positionality must be declared, examined, and lived as a daily ethical practice.** It asks: Who am I to tell this story? What power do I carry into this space? How do my intentions align with or contradict the needs of the community I

serve? When positionality becomes part of our ethical framework, performance itself becomes more than expression it becomes responsibility. Ultimately, **self-decolonization begins with self-disclosure.** It requires unlearning dominant frameworks of knowledge, dismantling internalized superiority, and embracing vulnerability as a space for growth. As Smith (2012) and Rowe et al. (2015) assert, decolonizing methodologies are impossible without decolonized selves. Positionality, then, is not a step in the process it is the soil from which ethical performance grows.

7.3 Reciprocity is Justice, Not Charity

Moving Beyond Tokenism to Lived Ethical Exchange

In the context of community performance and research, reciprocity must go beyond symbolic or ceremonial acknowledgment. Practices like offering short-term access, honorary mentions, or token involvement often serve institutional image rather than community empowerment. As Chowdhury et al. (2022) stress, "Reciprocity is not an afterthought but the ethical spine of research and performance that seek justice." When communities share sacred stories, histories of trauma, or embodied knowledge, these are not neutral data points they are acts of trust. Reclam (2018) critiques the prevalence of "therapeutic extraction," where performers and researchers claim healing or authenticity without returning material or moral value to the communities involved. True reciprocity is **not charity** it is ethical partnership rooted in lived exchange.

Spiritual, Emotional, and Material Returns to Communities

Reciprocity must be multidimensional. It includes spiritual validation, emotional acknowledgement, and material return. As Moats (2014) emphasizes in her study of community theatre, volunteer performers often enter spaces of grief, marginalization, and silence carrying not only their stories but the burdens of their people. In such contexts, offering back matters deeply: through co-authorship, shared performances, or even the return of archives and materials. Chowdhury et al. (2022) define this as a **relational triad:** "Revealing injustice, "Reporting collaboratively, and "Reflecting on shared transformation. Mutibwa (2019) further notes that the sustainability of any performance practice depends on recognition and value-sharing across participants, not just with audiences. Emotional labor, time, and local expertise deserve acknowledgement. Whether through honorariums, food sharing, or spiritual ceremonies, reciprocity must be felt, not just promised.

Reciprocity as Daily Decolonial Praxis

Frishkopf (2018) argues that in Islamic traditions like *Ihsan*, excellence in action emerges from an ethical consciousness that honors both creator and community. This mirrors *ubuntu* and *Buen vivid*, philosophies that call for collective wellbeing, not individual success. Reciprocity in this sense becomes **a daily decolonial practice** where relationships, not outputs, define success. The responsibility of the performer or researcher is not only to "represent" the community but to "respond" ethically, materially, and spiritually. This means returning to the field, co-creating outcomes, and remaining accountable across time. Decolonizing performance thus begins with redefining reciprocity: not as obligation, but as **the pulse of ethical relationship**. When communities can say, "We see our value here," and "We benefit from what we gave," reciprocity ceases to be symbolic and becomes justice in action (M & K, 2019).

7.4 Consent as a Living Relationship

In ethical research and community-engaged performance, **consent is not a form to sign it is a relationship to build.** Dominant academic frameworks often reduce consent to a legalistic document, treating it as a one-time transaction meant to protect institutions rather than people. However, in Indigenous, spiritual, and culturally grounded contexts, consent is dynamic, relational, and often sacred. As Carlson et al. (2019) remind us, "There are stories my people are not supposed to be told; there are stories about myself I can't tell yet, because they are not yet ready to come out." This reflects a deeper understanding of **cultural and spiritual dimensions of consent,** where storytelling is governed not by institutional approval but by readiness, ritual, and relational timing. Legal consent forms, often standardized and decontextualized, frequently fail to accommodate these spiritual frameworks. Fitzpatrick et al. (2019) critique such models, noting that "tick-box" consent is often met with suspicion or rejection by Indigenous communities. For them, consent cannot be coerced, extracted, or abstracted from context. It must be embedded in **mutual understanding, ancestral protocol, and ethical responsibility**. As Ruckstuhl (2022) explains, consent in Indigenous research must recognize collective sovereignty, where decisions emerge from elders, councils, or ceremonial processes, not individual assent alone.

This is why scholars like Chowdhury et al. (2022) argue for **consent as a living process**, renewed continually through humility and care. They propose that consent, like reciprocity, must be part of a "revealing–reporting–reflecting" cycle, ensuring that the relationship between researchers and communities remains open, transparent, and adaptable over time. It is not enough to receive consent once; one must revisit it, revalidate it, and respond to shifts in the emotional, political, and spiritual context of the community. Ethical performance, particularly in marginal spaces, must also take this into account.

When performers or researchers enter spaces of grief, healing, or displacement, the act of presence itself must be preceded by trust. As Reclam (2018) emphasizes, healing cannot be extracted it must be co-witnessed, and only with consent that is **earned, not assumed.** This trust is built through gestures of care: returning to the community, sharing outcomes, offering materials, and listening without an agenda. Mutibwa (2019) highlights the need for **co-created ethical frameworks,** where communities help define what consent means, what stories can be told, and how they should be shared. This collaborative ethics challenges institutional power and re-centers the voices of those historically silenced or over-exposed. Ultimately, **consent is not compliance; it is conversation**. It is a practice of ethical presence, deeply rooted in humility and guided by relational accountability. In this light, consent becomes not only protection but also the possibility the space where justice, dignity, and co-authorship emerge.

7.5 Stewarding Story as Sacred

In decolonial research and community-based performance, stories must be treated not as extractable data but as living presences carried through memory, voice, and relationship. To steward a story as sacred is to understand it as a gift embedded in ethical, spiritual, and communal ties (Chowdhury et al., 2022). This perspective disrupts dominant academic traditions where stories are often mined, anonymized, and interpreted for institutional or scholarly gain. Carlson et al. (2019) highlight that Indigenous storytellers may choose to withhold stories until they feel spiritually or communally ready to be told, underscoring that narrative timing is determined by community rhythms, not academic deadlines. Similarly, Moats (2014) emphasizes that participants in community theatre embody generations of trauma, joy, and resistance; thus, storytelling must be both a performance and a form of listening. Accountability in this context shifts from institutions to storytellers. Institutional consent processes, while necessary, often fail to honor the ongoing moral obligations to those who share their lives and truths. As Fitzpatrick et al. (2019) argue, ethical clearance cannot replace trust built through long-term relationships and mutual respect. Reclam (2018) further notes that in volunteer performance contexts, storytelling is frequently treated as emotional release for the performer and consumption for the audience. However, true ethical witnessing begins after the applause, when listeners must decide how to honor, protect, and share what they have received. Chowdhury et al. (2022) propose a triadic model of Revealing–Reporting–Reflecting to guide ethical storytelling. This framework emphasizes co-authorship, shared agency, and relational responsibility. Ultimately, the performer or researcher is not a narrator, but a custodian, entrusted with sacred knowledge that demands humility, reflection, and care.

7.6 Decolonizing the Self

While decolonization is often framed as a structural or institutional process, true decolonial work begins with self-interrogation and internal transformation. To decolonize the self is to critically examine how one's education, language, and sense of authority are

shaped by colonial legacies. As Smith (2012) argues, decolonizing methodologies requires researchers to unlearn habits of objectivity, extraction, and detachment, replacing them with relational accountability and ethical presence. Chowdhury et al. (2022) extend this to performance and community-based research, urging scholars to shift from positions of ownership to those of guest hood and humility. This ethical orientation redefines knowledge not as something to be mastered but as something to be co-experienced. It also demands recognition of one's complicity in systems of erasure, even while striving for liberation.

Frishkopf (2018) connects this to the Islamic tradition of ihsan, in which ethical excellence requires one to act as though always seen by the Divine. This spiritual attentiveness resonates with Indigenous approaches to relational accountability (Wilson, 2008), where performance and research are guided by responsibilities to land, spirit, and community. Moats (2014) warns that even well-intentioned performers may unconsciously impose class-based or cultural values on marginalized communities, disrupting authentic engagement. Likewise, Mutibwa (2019) critiques how institutions celebrate community participation while still controlling the narrative. A decolonized self-resist this, not by withdrawing, but by participating with reflexivity, listening, and care. As Reclam (2018) notes, transformation is reciprocal: the performer or researcher must be open to being changed by the work. Self-decolonization is a lifelong process of humility, ethical responsiveness, and reorientation from critique to care through story, performance, and presence.

Flying with the Wings of Reciprocity – A Call to Ethical Flight

As we bring this work to a close, we return to the metaphor of the bird, a symbol deeply embedded in Indigenous and spiritual cosmologies. The *"Wings of Reciprocity"* diagram is not merely an artistic expression but a living framework. It invites us to imagine ethical performance and research not as a linear path, but as a flight carried by interdependent forces: spirit, positionality, community knowledge, relational consent, and justice. In our work, we have insisted that **performance is never neutral**. It carries with it the residues of history, the weight of power, and the potential for healing or harm. As performers, researchers, and witnesses, we must ask ourselves continuously: **Are we flying with humility, or hovering with authority?**

1. **Spirit as Orientation: The Sacred Ground of Performance**
At the heart of ethical performance lies spirit, not in a reductionist theological sense, but in the living breath that connects body, land, story, and ancestor. Drawing from the Islamic principle of *ihsan*, we act "as

though we see God, or at least that He sees us" (Frishkopf, 2018). To enter a performance space without spirit is to walk without reverence. In the Ubuntu framework, this resonates deeply. "I am because we are" is not a slogan it is an **ontological commitment to relational being** (Chowdhury et al., 2023). The stage, then, is not a blank slate, but a sacred place of memory and resistance. Every gesture, every silence, becomes part of an unseen cosmology.

2. **Reciprocal Research: From Extraction to Ethical Engagement**

As stated in *Reciprocity and Its Practice in Social Research*, "reciprocity is not charity it is justice" (Chowdhury et al., 2022, p. 141). This justice is not transactional but relational. When a community offers its stories, rituals, and presence, they are not offering *data;* they are offering trust. What we return must not only be material, but also emotional, spiritual, and epistemic. In Indigenous contexts, this means moving from what Joseph Wronka (1993) called "the expert-oriented mentality" of Western science to communal modes of co-knowing. He reminds us: *"Science is not the only, or even the best, way to organize our experience"* (p. 203). To fly with reciprocity is to listen with humility, to offer with intention, and to remain accountable, long after the curtain has fallen.

3. **Knowledge Democracy: Co-Creation Beyond Epistemic Borders**

The left wing of the bird holds the principle of *Knowledge Democracy*. We are reminded that true knowledge is not always housed in institutions it lives in community memory, ritual performance, and embodied practice. Research must therefore move from expert knowledge to **relational wisdom**. Mignola and Walsh (2018) argue for *pluriversality* the recognition that no single epistemology can dominate the horizon of truth. In this spirit, Ubuntu's call to **complementarity** over conflict reaffirms that "we are limited beings, needing one another" (Chowdhury et al., 2023, p. 164). Knowledge of democracy is not a theory it is the ethical scaffolding of a just world.

4. **Ihsanic Justice: Ethics Performed Before the Unseen**

Justice, in our model, is not abstract. It is spiritual. *Ihsanic justice* is rooted in the understanding that every act performed or researched is seen by a greater moral order. This pushes back against liberal ethics that center legality over spirituality. In our framework, justice is relational. It does not only ask: "What did you take?" but also: "Whom did you honor?" and "What did you repair?" In theatre, this means **staging**

responsibly not reproducing trauma, not commodifying suffering, and not silencing voices through aestheticization. "If you can stage someone's pain," this chapter asks, "can you also carry their healing?"

5. **Volunteering for Academia: The Ethics of Offering**

One of the most radical ideas in this book is the call to **volunteer within academic spaces**. As Chowdhury et al. (2022) write, "we must move from instrumental research to intentional presence" (p. 146). This does not mean unpaid labor, it means **labor offered in service**. We are not entitled to communities' stories; we are guests in their worlds. Ubuntu teaches us that ethics is not an event but a daily discipline. Giving is not heroic, it is human. "Helping," as Wronka (1993) observes through Indigenous practices, is often not professionalized but performed communally, where care is a collective response to suffering.

6. **Indigenous Gnoseology: Knowing with, Not About**

At the body of the bird is **Indigenous gnoseology** a way of knowing that is grounded in land, spirit, ritual, and relationship. This knowledge is not found in libraries but inherited through ceremony, song, and silence. In the Rakhain community of Bangladesh, for example, knowledge is guarded communally and cannot be extracted without trust, relationality, and spiritual readiness (Chowdhury et al., 2022). Wronka (1993) highlights that in many Indigenous cultures, "there are no orphans" because every child is communally held. Likewise, in performance-based research, no story is abandoned; it is held with care, not analyzed for publication alone. This is the **gnoseological turn** from theory to sacred knowing.

Closing Reflection: This is the Flight

As we soar into new performances, publications, and pedagogies, we must remember that this is not a solitary flight. We are held aloft by the communities that trust us, by the ancestors who guide us, and by the ethics that bind us.

To fly with the *Wings of Reciprocity* means:

- To speak only what we have permission to speak.
- To write only what serves healing.

- To perform not for applause, but for collective memory.
- To research not for knowledge alone, but for justice and repair.

As Ubuntu teaches: *"A person is a person through other persons."* And as we reaffirm in this book, **ethical performance is not performance at all; it is responsibility in motion.**

You Will Take Away

Performance is relational, spiritual, and political. It is never neutral. Theatre carries the potential to reproduce injustice or to open space for healing and solidarity. The work of the performer and researcher is therefore always embedded in power. Positionality is not optional. Declaring who we are—socially, culturally, spiritually—shapes how we engage others. Objectivity is a myth that often hides privilege. Ethical research begins with self-accountability. Reciprocity is not charity—it is justice. We must give back to the communities that give us stories, space, and trust. This includes spiritual, emotional, and material forms of return. Reciprocity is a daily, lived ethic. Consent is a relationship. It is not a checkbox. It is built slowly, through dialogue, trust, and humility. It can be withdrawn at any time. Legal signatures do not equal cultural or spiritual permission. The stage is sacred. Performance spaces—whether in classrooms, streets, or sacred grounds—are not neutral zones. They hold memory, ritual, pain, and possibility. To perform is to enter sacred space. Respect is required. Story is not data—it is a living presence. A story is a gift. It cannot be mined, published, or performed without accountability. The researcher becomes a steward of stories, not an owner. Decolonizing research requires self-decolonization. We cannot apply ethical methods externally if we have not done the work internally. This includes confronting our complicity, rethinking what counts as knowledge, and reshaping our habits of inquiry. Théâtre and performance are relational, spiritual, and political acts. Positionality must be declared, not hidden. Reciprocity is a daily, lived practice. Consent is earned, not signed.

Suggested Readings

Core Texts on Positionality, Ethics, and Decolonization
Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.
→ Foundational work on decolonial research ethics and self-reflexivity.

Bourke, B. (2014). Positionality: Reflecting on the research process. *The Qualitative Report*, *19*(33), 1–9.
→ Introduces positionality as a practical and ethical framework for qualitative researchers.

Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Fernwood Publishing.
→ A relational Indigenous framework where knowledge is built through accountability.

Performance, Witnessing, and Sacred Storytelling
Moats, M. H. (2014). *Can you hear the people sing: Community theater, play and the middle class* [Master's thesis, Louisiana State University].
→ Explores class, performance ethics, and community storytelling.

Reclam, H. (2018). *Performance as therapy and its role in community healing: A literature review* [master's thesis, Lesley University].
→ Frames performance as a space for emotional healing and ethical witnessing.

Frishkopf, M. (2018). *Music and ethical performance in the Islamic world*. In *Sufism, Music and Society*.
→ Connects Islamic ethics (*Ihsan*) to performative intentionality and spiritual presence.

Reciprocity and Relational Research
Chowdhury, J. S., Wahab, H. A., Saad, R. M., Reza, H., & Ahmad, M. M. (2022). *Reciprocity and its practice in social research.* IGI Global.
→ Introduces the "Revealing–Reporting–Reflecting" triad for reciprocal, relational knowledge-making.

Mutibwa, D. H. (2019). 'Sell[ing] what hasn't got a name': Community engagement in the performing arts. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *22*(3), 345–361.
https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549417722107
→ Critiques institutional tokenism and the politics of participatory theatre.

Consent, Community, and Accountability
Fitzpatrick, E. F. M., et al. (2019). The picture talk project: Aboriginal community input on consent for research. *BMJ Open*, *9*(6).

https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2018-023272

→ Examines cultural and collective approaches to ethical consent.

Carlson, E., Rowe, G., Zegeye-Gebrehiwot, T., & Story, S. (2019). *Decolonization through collaborative filmmaking: Sharing stories from the heart.*

→ Reflects on storytelling as a form of spiritual and political responsibility.

REFLEXIVE TERMS

Theatre

A dynamic space for storytelling and meaning making, where bodies, voices, and symbols engage communities in acts of expression, resistance, healing, and imagination.

Relational Practice

An approach to research and performance based on trust, humility, and mutual responsibility where knowledge and meaning are co-created through shared presence and ethical dialogue (Wilson, 2008).

Spiritual Practice

A performance or research process guided by values of inner integrity, reverence, and ethical intention, rooted in traditions like *ihsan*, *ubuntu*, and ceremony (Frishkopf, 2018; Chowdhury et al., 2022).

Positionality

The recognition of one's social, cultural, and political identity and its impact on knowledge-making and storytelling. Declaring positionality is a critical ethical act in decolonial work (Smith, 2012; Bourke, 2014).

Reciprocity

An ethical relationship of give-and-take in which communities are not extracted from but engaged with, and where spiritual, material, and emotional value is returned (Chowdhury et al., 2022).

Consent

Not a one-time form, but a living, relational process rooted in trust, community protocol, and cultural timing. Ethical consent centers the autonomy and readiness of those involved (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019).

Ethical Performance

Performance that prioritizes responsibility, care, and justice acknowledging histories, amplifying silenced voices, and embodying the values of equity, humility, and healing (Moats, 2014; Reclam, 2018).

Sacred Stage

A performance space treated with reverence and ethical intentionality where memory, grief, joy, and transformation are honored beyond spectacle or entertainment.

Political Acts

Every performance or storytelling gesture that challenges dominant power structures, affirms marginalized voices, or reclaims space becomes a political act of resistance or solidarity.

Transformative Art

Creative expression that invites not just emotional resonance but ethical change shifting perceptions, healing communities, and reimagining futures through relational and decolonial aesthetics.

Reflections for Practice and Research

1. Who are you in the story?

   How does your identity, cultural, academic, spiritual and, shape the way you enter a performance or research space? What responsibilities arise from your positionality? *"Declaring positionality is not confession, it is ethical clarity."* (Bourke, 2014; Smith, 2012)

2. What does ethical witnessing mean to you?

   Have you ever been entrusted with a story, performance, or act of vulnerability? How did you carry it? Were you a passive observer or an active ethical witness? *"The deepest ethical work happens after the applause ends."* (Reclam, 2018)

3. How do you return value to the communities you engage with?

   Beyond acknowledgments, how do you practice reciprocity spiritually, emotionally, or materially? Can you co-create outcomes instead of extracting them? *"Reciprocity is not charity, it is justice."* (Chowdhury et al., 2022)

4. When is a story not yours to tell?

   What cultural protocols or spiritual responsibilities should guide your decisions to share, publish, or perform? How do you honor stories as sacred presences, not data? *"There are stories that are not yet ready to come out."* (Carlson et al., 2019)

5. What does consent look like when it is living and relational?

   Have you practiced consent beyond a form? Have you ever returned to revisit or reaffirm consent after the initial agreement? *"Consent must be built through humility and care, not paperwork."* (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019; Ruckstuhl, 2022)

6. What would it mean to decolonize your own practice?

   Are you reproducing colonial ways of knowing, telling, or performing, perhaps unintentionally? What does humility look like in your work? *"To decolonize the self is to perform with integrity and relational trust."* (Frishkopf, 2018; Wilson, 2008)

7. Can your work be a form of healing, not just expression?

   Does your performance or research contribute to justice, healing, and relational repair? How do you center care in your creative and intellectual practice?

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Reciprocity in Performance and Theatre Studies
A Methodological Guideline

Jahid Siraz Chowdhury ● Md Mahedi Tanjir ● Andalib Rubayat
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Emerging from the heart of the Global South, this book breaks new ground in performance studies. Written by Jahid Siraz Chowdhury, Md Mahedi Tanjir, Andalib Rubayat, and Sydur Rahman Lipon and Laboni Akter, it doesn't offer ready-made tools — it offers wisdom. Through the lens of Ihsan, Ubuntu, and Buen Vivir, this work calls for a decolonial, spiritual, and justice-driven approach to theatre and research. It is a gift to the global community."

— Prof Rahel Rajib, Jagannath University, Dhaka.

A must-read book
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