

Arts Chats #1

Shifting to Digital, Obscuring Equity

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SPEAKERS

Claire Hopkinson, Ravi Jain, Daniel Carter, Jacqueline Qua Hiansen, Marion Newman, Anisa Tejpar

Claire Hopkinson 00:00

I guess we'll get going, there may be a few other people joining us but I wanted to say good afternoon, welcome to the very first Arts Chats. I'm Claire Hopkinson, the Director & CEO of Toronto Arts Council and Toronto Arts Foundation and I'm really pleased to have you join us in this new discussion series that centres the voices of artists and arts workers. As part of Toronto Arts Foundation's ongoing research into the importance of the arts in city and community building, these arts chats will bring together a diverse array of speakers from a variety of disciplines throughout the month of March. Together the artists will discuss timely, understudied issues that affect them, their practice and the impact that their work has on audiences, consumers and communities. Collectively these discussions will help guide the foundation's research strategy towards supporting advocacy, programming and community building efforts across Toronto and throughout the arts sector as a whole. Toronto Arts Foundation acknowledges the diversity of the First Peoples of this area and recognizes the territories of the Wendat, the Anishnaabe nation, the Haudeshonee confederacy and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Today, Toronto is still the home to many Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island and around the world and we are grateful to have this opportunity to work, to live and to meet on this territory. Arts Chats is made possible and available to you through the generosity of our donors at the foundation, we are very grateful for their ongoing support of our work and we invite you all to be part of our programs. After the session you'll receive a follow up email with a link to a feedback survey as well as information on how you can be part of and you can contribute to our ongoing community based work and our suite of COVID-19 response effort initiatives. These initiatives are really helping artists and arts organizations with mitigation, resilience and recovery during the pandemic and of course includes today's Arts Chats. In today's discussion: Shifting to Digital, Obscuring Equity, our panelists will discuss how the art sector focused its efforts on the massive shift of virtual modes of creation and delivery and the ways that this has affected long standing issues of equity. Leading this discussion is the

brilliant Ravi Jain, the founding Artistic Director of Why Not Theatre. Ravi is a Toronto based stage director and a multi award-winning artist known for making politically bold and accessible theatrical experiences in both small indie productions and large theatres. He has truly established himself as an artistic leader for his inventive productions, international producing collaborations and innovative producing models which truly are aimed to better support emerging artists make money for their art. So we're so grateful to you, Ravi and to also all of our panelists for their insights today. So Ravi without further ado, over to you.

Ravi Jain 03:38

Thank you so much Claire. Hi everybody out there in Zoom land. Thank you for joining us on potentially your lunch breaks. I know Zoom can be exhausting, so thank you all for being here and with us. Today we have four amazing panelists. Before I introduce them we're going to just, to say we're going to try to have a conversation and have a free flowing conversation, there won't be a Q&A after and just to say, it's always weird when people are watching people have a conversation, so we're going to try to speak in draft, we're going to try to be as honest in this conversation as we can be knowing that we're watched and there can be silence, we're all human. A huge shout out to Marcia who is our ASL interpreter for today and Karen who joined us who I think they're working out the captioning services. So I'm going to introduce the panelists and then I'll just kind of give a framework for our conversation and then we'll just dive in. So I'm going to introduce them, and they're going to turn on their cameras when I say their name, it's gonna be amazing choreography. Daniel Carter who is a theatre artist and arts manager (nice entrance). He is the Interim Program Director at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre and the General Manager of the Paprika Festival. As an arts manager, Daniel has worked with various companies including Visual Arts Mississauga, Summerworks and Theatre Direct as well as with the WE Festival. Daniel has performed with companies such as Buddies in Bad Times, Pandemic, Dopolavoro Teatrale, Compass Theatre. He was a member of Factory Theatre's playwriting program, the Foundry, as well as House and Body's playwright initiative. He sits on the Humber College advisory committee and committee for their Arts Administration and Cultural Management program. Welcome Daniel. Our next panelist is Marian Newman who is (.....) Kwagiulth, Stó:lo, English, Irish, Scottish mezzo-soprano. Marian Newman; she's been acclaimed for her roles in Barber, Carmen and Missing and was nominated for a Dora award in [Chenna dese?] Recently she has been working on rising to the expectations of her talented and respected colleagues who continue to give her opportunities to share her voice as a speaker, teacher, facilitator, advisor and dramaturg for various institutions and arts organizations across Canada. She is a proud co-founder of Amplified Opera. Upcoming appearances include Migrations and her debut with the Welsh National Opera. Thank you for being here, our international superstar friend. Next is Anisa Tejpar. Dora Mavor (Moore) award winner Anisa Tejpar is a dancer, choreographer, producer and contributor. She's a graduate of Canada's National Ballet School and she's performed on works by leading choreographers internationally as well as produced work for Human Body Expression and her commercial entertainment firm Hit and Run Dance. Currently she assists Guillaume Côté; Côté

Danse, with new creations and choreographs extensively for film and television. Anisa is on the board of directors for Canada's National Ballet School and volunteers for Dancing With Parkinson's Canada. She's also training to become an intimacy choreographer and coordinator for stage and screen. Welcome Anisa, thanks so much for being here. And last but not least Jacqueline Quah Hyun Sin who is the Acting Manager of Inclusion at the Royal Ontario Museum. She oversees the ROM's Inclusion and Community Engagement portfolio including the ROM Community Access Network program, the ROM in my Backyard program and the Museum accessibility. In her role she works across the museum and with over 100 community partners to break down barriers to access and co-create inclusive and welcoming museum experiences. Welcome Jacqueline, thank you so much for all the work you all do. So excited to have you all here. I'm going to just give us a little bit of context and then we'll dive in. Continuing the multiplicity of introductions. COVID brought waves of complicated and seismic shifts to conversations around power and privilege in the arts community. First wave we can say was about income precarity, a second wave of massive racial reckoning, a third wave of disparity of experiences during COVID in relation to that racial reckoning and a fourth wave we could say of mental health and isolation and waves and waves and waves that we can identify and so many feelings and and primarily that really highlighted inequity. And so from very early on in the pandemic there was a quick move from a lot of performing arts institutions in the community to shift to online: the digital being a place where a lot of institutions in particular sought out some kind of normalcy; a way to engage with audiences and keep programming going. Now in many places this digital shift was applauded and it was seen as the future of the performing arts, and in many other ways this solution actually excluded more people. It exacerbated more inequities and it has been, people have seen it as a distraction to the real issues of inequities that continue to permeate the field. So today we're going to discuss with these four amazing panelists who I've introduced; some who are inside institutions, some who are outside of institutions about how they've been impacted this year and have a discussion around: Has digital addressed inequities or is it a distraction that amplifies them? So that's our start so I just want to start off just by getting us kind of rolling to think about or just talk about some of the examples of digital engagements that you have either experienced or run or been part of in this past year. And I'll just kind of open up the floor to folks.

Daniel Carter 10:09

I'll pick up the ball, thanks. When we first went into lockdown, a year ago in March, we kind of quickly rebounded with this Instagram Live series Queer, Far, Wherever You Are, and since then we did probably, two large-ish, digital sharings. One during our Pride season, Queer Pride Inside and then another in December with TO Live Taylor Mac a lot faster than putting up a stage show. But a huge learning curve and knowing how to work together.

Ravi Jain 10:59

Awesome, thank you. Jacqueline?

Jacqueline Qua-Hiansen 11:05

At the ROM we do a lot of programming with community partners, often at the museum. And the shift to digital I think has been interesting in that, to your point, Ravi, it alleviates some of the inequities but it also highlights other inequities. So a couple of programs that we shifted from the physical space to digital space is a creative writing workshop series with InkWell Workshops for people with lived experiences of mental health. Previously, you know, we would take them to the museum and then do creative writing in a classroom. And now we just shifted it all online. I also work with Youth Rising Above to shift or discover a new program online, that's a youth skills development workshop series that, again, used to be in the museum within the galleries, and has now shifted to Zoom. And in a way, it's alleviated the inequities of access, because it's allowed us to reach a broader audience. You know, we are a museum that serves the whole of an area, but the reality is, because of our physical location, only certain parts of the area are able to visit on a regular basis. So putting our content, putting our programs in the digital space, alleviates that. But the flip side, you know, there are all these other inequities that have to do with digital programming like technology, glitches, access to the internet, access to good internet, the privilege of being able to be in a space where you can fully engage in a program without having to worry about roommates or kids. Right. So it's all of these interlocking things that are coming into play, and that we're really feeling our way through right now.

Ravi Jain 13:02

Thank you for bringing up so many of those issues that come up in this shift. Marian, Anisa, I'd love to bring you in to just share.

Anisa Tejpar 13:10

Yeah, just spinning off what Jacqueline said, as an independent creator, and as someone who is in charge of a lot of their own content to start with the shift to digital, I mean, yes. Are you reaching more people? Sure, are you reaching people you wouldn't reach before? For sure. But to what end and for what. For many of us, it's work, it's a job, it's what we do for a living. So, to rig up your phone and for me, dance in a park to post on Instagram for free, it's a lot of labor and the learning of how to do that. I'm not a filmmaker, I'm not a digital content creator. So what do I do? I either put up a not so great product that I'm not intensely proud of, because it's not at the level that I would like to showcase my work and myself. Or I hire someone with the expertise, but how do I pay them? And even if I were to pay them and could find funds or funding, am I really able to put in this kind of labor and time into learning an entirely new skill when I have responsibilities as a parent, as a caregiver, as a wife as all the things, all the hats that we all wear? And how long will that take? I think I'm in a large group of people who have grown to hate the word "pivot." But if we were to pivot, how fast could we pivot? I mean, could it be day to day I don't have an institution or a large community of people to support me in this way and they're all busy supporting others or supporting themselves or trying to make this

happen. There's this pivot to digital. And then I go back to also Is this the way that my skills and my art form has meant to be viewed? Does it land the same? Does it matter as much as it would if we were all sharing space in a room, when it happened once and you saw it that one time that community experience of watching something, the breadth of the performer, the breadth of the audience, in whatever kind of space you're doing it, whether it's in a park or in a proscenium theatre, you know, I've been doing programming and many of us have been doing programming in many places, but that live experience is where my experience and talents land. So to then be now an Instagram star.... Because I don't know or tik tok or whatever (laughs)

Ravi Jain 13:37

That's why I'm in this business!

Anisa Tejpar 15:55

Right? I mean, not that it's a bad thing. Listen, I like it just as much as the next guy. But yeah, I guess it poses all these questions of, what am I actually trying to get out of this? And what am I trying to get out of this shift? And how does that serve as my work, my bank account, my future life? What does that equal and often I come up with: not much, but that's, I guess, what the independent person is struggling with, and I guess I'm speaking for myself, but I think I'm speaking for many as well.

Ravi Jain 16:30

That's awesome. That's so much great information. And just to bring Marian in, it makes me think about just in terms of the pivot, you know, Marian, just to share that when the mistakes are also online, they're there for a long time. (laughs)

Marian Newman 16:44

Yeah, I have said yes as an individual artist, representing my company, to various different digital offerings that had pivoted from live performances that were intended. But I'm not used to seeing myself in performance. And it's been quite a lesson to realize that I'm not made for film, or at least, not made for seeing myself, I should say, I prefer not to have that immediate feedback. But there are also lessons to be learned which are valuable, which I can take forward into live performance. And we can do that, again. As a member of A.O. I came on to the team right as the pandemic began. We had a meeting in April, I was doing a gig until March when I was back in town. And we had meant to start our meetings. And so we had to move to Zoom meetings. And suddenly, we were getting postponements and shutdowns for all of our individual work. And that actually gave us a lot of time to get to know each other and to take it slow. And to figure out what is Amplified Opera, what is it exactly that we want to offer and that we benefit from knowing each other a lot better and having communication skills with each other. So I think just figuring out, we all knew that there were things about the industry, the opera industry that we don't love, as well as many things we do. And so, wanting to do things differently, we

need a time to figure out what that means. And how will that play out when we can be in business again. And also as for People of Color, we've all been asked to be on some different panels to give master classes to help diversify what is being offered to the many. And so we've supported each other in that work and the discussions that we've had with each other and just done what we can to make space to download afterward if something was frustrating or to lift up, when we really needed to hear that.

Ravi Jain 19:03

That's awesome. It's awesome that you're able to take the time to really develop your own internal relationships and ask questions. And, you know, I'm curious kind of building on Anisa your question: What am I trying to get out of this shift? I think something building on that for me. I'm really curious about everybody's thoughts, in terms of digital engagement. And was that what we needed to be doing? For me, we had this one moment for the entire arts community, the entire world, but then the microcosm of arts communities across the country and in North America, all trying to get on the same page for, in a real way (ish), and to look and talk about white supremacy and to really engage with these questions and these problems and these systems and these dynamics of privilege and we saw the inequities and the imbalances. And, you know, I'm curious, did digital allow us to engage and make the shifts that were needed to make those changes? Or was it a way to preserve status quo, and pretend like it could all be well, and obviously, you all use it for different ways, internal reflection, shifting to go online to engage, potentially your community who is vulnerable, and you need to create a space for them to access different communities. So absolutely. There's a million things going on. But, I guess my question is, did digital allow us to do the work that needed to be done, especially as artists of color who are constantly asked to fix things? Did we get what we needed to get out of this shift, knowing it's not over?

Marian Newman 20:45

If I may, I think that what this shift gave us was an opportunity to really take the time to say "what if we told them our own stories?" What does that look like if we're leading the way? And companies who are struggling with how to engage meaningfully with the communities that have been not given space traditionally. This is an opportunity for us to say, this is how we would tell our story if we're allowed to lead. And I was invited by Calgary opera to come in and dramaturg a piece. And I have never been asked that before. But I realized that lots of experiences that I've had have led me to a place where I know how to work with community. And so by bringing in the right people, we can build a piece together. And they gave us three weeks in the space and then some lead up time on zoom. And we started creating a piece that is basically for us, that we can invite what's considered the "regular audience" into, but that isn't just tailored for them. It's so that we can tell our own story in our own way. And I think that just being given that opportunity has been a chance for us to gain confidence to

realize that when we are asked for our opinion, we really are allowed to give it and that is a positive part of this whole thing is just learning to use our voices.

Ravi Jain 22:16

Thank you for that.

Anisa Tejpar 22:18

I totally agree Marian. I think there have been so many people picking up batons and really running with them. But to answer your question, Ravi, I think it's both. I do think also there have been a lot of people just trying to preserve their careers, preserve the organization, and to not, become dinosaurs, become extinct in this time. And there's been a lot of stuff thrown at the wall. And some of it's successful, some of it isn't, but some of it is I think just holding on with a really tight grip. But yeah, I like Marion's answer better.

Daniel Carter 23:02

Yeah, and I would say it's both. But I think--the pressure to produce is very real. And the sort of consequences of not continuously or even, periodically, putting things out putting out products to engage with, you do see a decline in donors and donations and funding support. I mean, right now, it's also theater operation grants season. And we have to plan something for next year. And it's like, I don't even know, man, what are we... when are we coming back? Who knows? So I think it's, yes, but also, kind of being stuck to continue, and ensure that these companies, these institutions, our programming could exist 2-3-5 years down the road.

Ravi Jain 24:19

Yeah, that's super interesting.

Jacqueline Qua Hiansen 24:21

I completely agree with Daniel, I think that we see in the news how hard the arts industry and arts organizations have been hit by this pandemic. Museums I think have it a bit easier than theatre companies because our space allows for more physical distancing. But, museums all over the US mostly in the news who are having to shut down, we're having to sell artworks and I can't help looking for the future and being like, where will Canadian museums be headed? Because we do rely on these donor dollars, we do rely on these admission fees, these memberships, and everyone right now is struggling. And when people are struggling to put food on the table, to pay their rent, arts unfortunately, are one of the things that gets set aside, not saying that's the wrong decision, you need to put food on the table. It's just, I think the pandemic is making us, making everyone rethink their priorities, whether it's the donation priorities or entertainment priorities or self care priorities. And what I worry about is, that the conversation will continue to be like, an either-or conversation, whether it's digital events versus

in-person events, as if that's the real dichotomy, right? Because it shouldn't be just one or the other. I think the pandemic has proven that institutions and artists can provide both if audiences have a hunger for both for all sorts of reasons. And I worry that down the road these number crunchers would be like, "Oh, look, it's so much cheaper to put the production on Zoom, than it is to put in the theater." And no! There's so much more that goes into what people need.

Ravi Jain 26:37

Yes, please, Marian.

Marian Newman 26:39

I've been hearing that cities are emptying as people go to find places where they can have some green space to be outdoors, with some distance where it's not as expensive perhaps. And it makes me think, I mean, obviously, I'm very arts minded. But is it because the art that glues it all together is not available? In the same way?

Jacqueline Qua Hiansen 27:07

Yeah, outside my role at the ROM, I love going to theater shows. One of my favorite parts about living in Toronto was able to just drop by Buddies or you know, or Mirvish or Why Not Theatre, all these other places, and just check out all these cool shows. I remember, right before the pandemic hit I went to Factory Theatre for.. It was called Lady Sunrise, about the Asian community in Vancouver? And it hurts to think that I can't do that, for the foreseeable future. That sounds kind of dire. It can feel kind of dire sometimes, as an arts lover, and an arts administrator.

Anisa Tejpar 27:53

Yeah, well, I mean, Marion, on your point, and Jacqueline as well, I just moved out of the city. Like I, as an artist, I bought a house in the West of Toronto, which we haven't moved into yet. But, because of these exact reasons, I used to want to be in the center of all things to experience all the things from, you know, restaurants, to theaters, to museums, to you know, being able to be a hop, skip, and a jump from all the things for my work. And now, it doesn't matter as much anymore to me. It matters more to be in a space that works for my family. And I don't hate the reprioritization in my own life, and making sure work is work and life is life and not that they're separated, but that they maybe aren't the same thing. But that's a personal choice, and the fact that it just made it a lot easier, knowing that I wasn't going to have to race the theater anytime soon. Which is sad, actually, that maybe will work out?.. Life choices

Ravi Jain 28:58

But this is great. And it builds for me the question Jacqueline proposed in terms of what people are asking, which is, how do I prioritize? And I think that's what I'm thinking about in this conversation with

regards to our sector, and how do we prioritize? You know, we know that the arts living wage is below the poverty line, we know that people of color are disproportionately affected, in the arts community, Black and Indigenous in particular, we know.. we know these things are real, and in that how can we figure out what our priorities are as a community as we're trying to figure out the way forward and address artists like Anisa, who has to leave because Toronto's way too expensive? And I know there are tons of factors that you've got to juggle. But I guess, have we been engaging in that, have we really been thinking harder about when we come back? You know, Daniel, your question was so good, you have the sticky notes, I gotta plan a season, I have to figure this out, you know, you definitely have those real pressures. And at the same time the pressure of .. what does it look like when we get back? And who does it look like and Marian to your.. Who's leading? Whose voices? Who has the money?

Jacqueline Qua Hiansen 30:25

That's the , I think the question that many of the arts don't want to say out loud, Ravi. But that's a question we're all dealing with. Right?

Ravi Jain 30:35

I'm being recorded!

Jacqueline Qua Hiansen 30:38

Well, it's like, I don't know, I feel like in the arts, there's always this whole sense of, we're doing it for the love of the arts, we're doing it because we want to share knowledge. And it's true, we do. But there's reality. You know, rent has to be paid. The dinosaurs have to be kept cool. So money is a reality, we're all living with. And, I think it's important to have this conversation and bring it out to life. Right? Just to your point Ravi.. BIPOC artists, disabled artists, deaf artists, artists living or who grew up in poverty. You know, there are all these systemic barriers that have to be addressed and that have to be crushed down. And earlier you asked about, you know, we had this one moment, early in the pandemic, where we were all looking at the white supremacy, and trying to fix it. And with all respect, I would challenge that we had that one moment, I think we've had many moments over the last few years, you know, where everyone's like, we're all in this together, you know, (Ravi adds "bye!") we have your white supremacy, right. And then something else happens. And then a new issue comes up.. not a new issue, sorry.. a new subject comes to light. And all of a sudden, this first subject has fallen by the wayside. You know, all these institutions, all of these companies came forward. And we're like, we believe that Black lives matter. How many of these companies have left people in leadership on the board and decision making roles? Right? And how much longer will this conversation continue before someone's like, you know, well, Black lives do matter, but so do these lives. And so does this concern, it's horrifically, a constant by cycle that I wish I knew how we can break out of.

Ravi Jain 32:45

Anyone want to pick up? Marian? Daniel?

Marian Newman 32:48

Keeping the dinosaurs cool. Like, that's gonna keep rolling my mind. That's amazing. I'm thinking about how to shift. I guess what watching things on digital has taught me is that it's really about the equipment you have at home. And not even whether I mean, yes, definitely. Do you have access to internet to begin with, but what speakers do you have on your thing if you're watching something that is used to being in an acoustic space? And I think, initially, there are a lot of thoughts of like, how can we include digital in what we're doing when we get back to being in spaces. But I think now I'm thinking more about how really just letting it be simple, and letting it just be what it was. It's something that I'm really craving. And I think that is a gift that's been given to me to realize that we don't have to make it bigger and louder and faster. What we do in an acoustic space as people is already enough.

Ravi Jain 33:56

Daniel, I thought you were gonna say something. The chat is blowing up, y'all. I'm doing a terrible job of doing that. So if you can talk I'm going to be if I look distracted, I'm scrolling through the chat to try to uplift some voices here.

Daniel Carter 34:08

Sure, sure. There's kind of two points from Jacqueline, what you said and Marianne as well. Like I feel institutions are also under a microscope right now. And we're being watched. Which institution hasn't put out a statement in June? And how are we actually going to engage with that statement and manifest it? And so many things have happened since June 2020, in institutions with changes in leadership and re-disbursing resources, funding into communities, artists of color. But I think one thing to also keep in mind, when we start opening up, again, we're going to be opening up at a different scale. And the real question is going to be, how are institutions using those resources, both for themselves, but also for artists and outside of their institution? And I think that's really going to be the key moment, I think the question I'm sort of thinking of is, how has this time allowed institutions, decision makers to rethink the resources that they have at hand? And how are they going to re distribute that?

Ravi Jain 35:54

Anyone want to pick up on that, Anisa, I'm curious from an independent point of view what you think about that?

Anisa Tejpar 36:01

Well, yes, I don't work for institutions. So I can't speak to that. Sometimes, I think in a course correction, things become more complicated for a hot minute. And we're in that hot minute. Right?

And we have been before, as Jacqueline put so well, but I sometimes feel like the pendulum swings at a wild pace. And it's very confusing, when you are someone who is not only seeking out funding, but also, you know, pursuing organizations for partnerships, pursuing corporate sponsorship, or individual donors or anything like that, which I have the opportunity to do all the time, which is great. But, it's not easy to know how it's gonna swing in the real lot of challenge in figuring out who and what to target and what, and then yes, and then your work gets changed because of it. Because then you're creating work based on what you can fund, not based on what you're actually pursuing as an artist or your collective is or your organization is, because you're just trying to, as Daniel says, you just kind of do something. Just trying to make something. You're just trying to be out there. There's pressure, you don't want to get out of the game, and that is ego and all those other things that we don't like about ourselves, but it's also how do you continue to make when you don't know if you can afford to make it? I mean, I'm saying that's very bad, and very all over the place, but..

Ravi Jain 38:00

I think that's bang, I'm sorry, to cut you off, please, please.

Anisa Tejpar 38:02

Oh, no, no, no, thank thank you for the support Ravi. I just, I sometimes I'm like, do we make a show about being South Asian? Is that what we're gonna do now? Because I feel like that would get funding. And then on the other hand, if I don't make a work about being South Asian, then I'm not an ally to my own people?

Ravi Jain 38:29

So you're, you're opening up the other can of worms, sorry.

Anisa Tejpar 38:34

Sorry. is that a big can?

Ravi Jain 38:35

Yeah.

Anisa Tejpar 38:38

Like, is it just because I come from a mixed heritage am I then somehow an advocate just by definition, and, maybe Yes, because I'm living the experience? And maybe No, because I want to make work about, I don't know, pens and chairs? Like, I don't know. It's so all over the place but then when it comes to funding when it comes to getting money selling work sometimes and some other things work other times, and you're kind of lost no matter what. Sorry, again, I didn't say that super great.

Ravi Jain 39:11

I'm going to try to sandwich sort of two questions that are coming to mind, Marion, did you have a point, did you want to say something?

Marian Newman 39:15

I just want to say I love that can of worms, because it reminds me that those of us who are from colonized places who are colonized people, while our own cultures were being removed, so we don't actually know as much about them as we ought to. We were being given language and art that is from another culture, that we can call it our own. And we have every right to be performing that if that's what we choose to do.

Ravi Jain 39:42

Amen.

Anisa Tejpar 39:43

Thank you for that.

Ravi Jain 39:46

But, wow, we could I mean, we could go in so many different directions right now. I'm just thinking, Okay, okay. But I want to come back to one of the comments in the chat: "Digital feudalism is about means and resources and structured control of the same." So kind of building on some ideas around equipment and access and this digital spirit being a kind of place.. another space, another kind of institution, and I think a question I have building on Daniel's comment about resource, Anisa is: Who should lead? Who should be leading this conversation right now? Marion, you kind of talked about, you found this opportunity that your voice now, you could be authentic and have your voice. And I guess the two questions I sort of want to pin together here is: not only Who should lead and where the resources should be to lead the conversation but also to speak about that from a place of acknowledging as it was called in to the space earlier about how you all as artists are often put into the position where you have to be an educator and an artist, and so in leading, in thinking about resources and getting them to people... who should be leading and being empowered, and can that leadership and empowerment be artistic as much as it is about education or in a way kind of engaging with the tension of what you both were just talking about: identity versus artistic kind of output. I hope that made sense, I see head nods and I throw the ball up

Jacqueline Qua Hiansen 41:31

So personal bias informs my answer. I will say I think the people who should lead the conversation are those who've historically been left out. Marion you said earlier about all these new opportunities that going digital has made available. And think if we're going to open new opportunities, if we're going to

make space for new forms of engagement, then we should give space for people who haven't had those opportunities before to step up, and that's a very broad spectrum. There are a lot of communities who haven't been given the space before, there are a lot of groups doing great work who don't have as much access to resources because they don't have the audiences, they don't have the resources - ironically enough - to get more resources. But then, you get the flip side of what Anisa and Marion were talking about of the double-edged sword of "authenticity," because then when you're saying "we want to amplify 'X,Y,Z' voices," then you're putting pressure on people from these communities to stand up and be like: "I'm 'X,Y,Z' identities," and is that really where we want to go? I've seen these conversations on Twitter about the "own voices" hashtag and books where people say you know this book is "own voices" because it speaks about their lived experiences. But now people are having to self identify about their lived experiences when they might not necessarily want to. And then you know, it's all.. Anisa, you spoke about funders. But even just in terms of self expression feel like there's more of a pressure on people from marginalized communities to be authentic and what authentic is, is such a broad spectrum that it's impossible, I think to be "big A" authentic, about all your identities

Ravi Jain 44:02

Does anyone want to pick up on that at all?

Marian Newman 44:03

Yeah I'm reminded of Yvette Nolan's teaching to me that there's this hierarchy that is a pyramid and if we turn it on its side and round it out it becomes a circle and if the leadership is made into a circle where we can see each other face to face we have an opportunity for everyone who's in that current hierarchy to actually speak and to share their ideas and their valuable assets that they weren't necessarily hired for or haven't been looked to before. I think that this leadership or speaking up that I've been able to do right now is because I'm not busy learning roles and performing then. And that's something I really miss doing and I've probably been asked to speak a lot before but just didn't have the capacity to really hear it and to understand that, my opinion was already being valued. I think that a lot of what has been holding us back is that pyramid. And in thinking that we have to keep listening to the same bosses who don't necessarily know about our experiences because they've had for so long, and they haven't thought to see what we contribute, because that's just not how it's usually been done. And I want to move forward into a space where we can lead differently. Where that means hearing from everybody, it means for me also trying to pay everybody equally. So instead of putting, like two people at the top of a company who make all the bucks, what if that were shared more equally, so that so that everybody can actually afford to keep doing this, so that the artists are not valued at the bottom of it all, according to what a union has decided is enough money to make a week, because of the size of the house, I mean, the work is the same no matter where we're being seen. And honestly if it's a smaller house, you're being seen more up close. So your work needs to be more precise. Flip side of

that, for an opera singer is, you have to be a lot louder if you're in a bigger house. But there's just I think, there's a lot of room for re-examining what we are putting our dollars into, and how we're valuing those who aren't actually producing the art itself. But the ones who are running it all. So it's become so business minded, that we're not hearing from artists of how could it be different, I think we have a lot of ideas that, we've been afraid to share, I would say because we might not be hired back if we're too mouthy.

Anisa Tejpar 46:56

Let's also remember that as artists, and art makers, and arts curators, and you know, just everyone in the job, we've all worn a bazillion hats over the years, everybody has been a part of so many different parts of the production, the project, the installation, whatever it is, that our voices are informed. We're not, not capable. You know, we're not just a pretty voice on stage or the pretty body on stage. So that, you know, it's not just that, and I don't know one artist that hasn't worn several hats. So if asked the question with the availability to be honest, and the potential for change, I think artists can handle the task and can handle it actually, with a lot of I don't wanna use the word grace, because that's the wrong word. But with a lot of strength of character and with a lot of vision, I think for what can be different. I agree with you, Marian 100%.

Ravi Jain 47:56

Can I ask, do you think that this digital space, because we can't be together and we all need to be engaging? Are we having more honest conversation? Are we actually doing that? Go Marian, your head's nodding fast!

Marian Newman 48:11

I totally am. I was much more measured, I guess in my approach to begin with and I did a lot more listening, because I had a lot to learn. But through gathering information from wise people who were speaking up, I'm starting to form my own ideas and to shape them, or shape how I speak about them, according to who is easiest to listen to, who draws everyone in. I think that that is a big thing. I forgot that I want to say this earlier is that if you let people of colour lead, we're not going to get rid of everyone who has been leading. It's just about sharing that space where you know, I'm not gonna kick you out. You do still have really valuable skills and input.

Ravi Jain 49:07

(theatrically winking) Yes, I agree with Marion! (stares blankly, laughs) No, I'm kidding. Finish your point, please please. That's the point. It's true. I mean, you know, just in terms of being honest, having more honest conversation, are we feeling like the fear of retribution is not there, is the power dynamic, actually shifting. Are you.... sorry, who was that?

Jacqueline Qua Hiansen 49:34

Me... I hesitate to say that power dynamic is shifting but the digital space allows for more intimacy in some ways. So instead of, having frank conversations in the hallway, where anyone can just drop by, we can have frank conversations on Zoom where, you know, only my cat would be around. So there's a certain opportunity to be honest that may not have been present when you're speaking within the institutional space. The flip side, of course, is that there's also a forced intimacy in that, you know, now so many people are seeing my white wall And they don't really have much choice in terms of who I can let into my appointment. Because all of our meetings are now online, from the privacy of my home, right, so it's both like, yeah, I can I feel like I can be more open, because of where I am. But at the same time, I feel like I want to be less open because of where I am. Weird tension.

Anisa Tejpar 51:02

But it does just it's so quick. But just because of the pandemic, I also think that even those people at the you know, quote, unquote, top, I think everyone has been shaken a bit, just because everything has changed. And I think that has allowed for a bit of more vulnerability, and maybe a little more listening. So back to Marion's point, I do think I'm having more frank conversations with people that I wouldn't be able to have had, possibly before because of the Go-Go-Go mode, and everybody was succeeding, or, you know, whatever. But now, because everyone got a bit rocked, everyone's kind of looking around trying to figure out what the best new way could be, especially when we're thinking about not going back into large spaces for a bit, and maybe doing this meeting of Digital and Live at some point, or whatever it is, I think people are more likely to hear or listen more thoughtfully.

Ravi Jain 52:03

I'm just conscious of wrapping up. But there's one comment in here that just kind of ties back to this point around leadership and Marian what you said around, you know, wanting to pay people better. And one of the things I think with all of this, that for me has been crucial in all of the different areas of conversation, whether it be mental health, income inequity, racial justice, all of them are really about the health of our community, and the awful, unhealthy practices that we have. And money is a big part of that, and thinking about how, you know, with this leadership, Anisa, that gets rocked, how do we talk about also, capacity for different organizations, that we're often thinking about the capacity of institutions. But when we think of smaller companies, where it tends to be the diverse leadership, it's hard to retain talent. I'm sure Amplified Opera wants to pay artists the same that the Canadian Opera Company can pay, but your budget is only so much. And how to retain talent, how to actually build artists that you invest in and how to recognize who's been propping up the community? Who's been developing talent? And how, yeah, how does arts ecology work more holistically and think about? Who's doing the work? And I feel like I've heard that a lot in so many different circles, who's doing the invisible work, whether it's women, whether it's Black people, Indigenous people, whether it's people, the people who bear the cost of the labor, as was mentioned on the call, in a lot of instances, in order

for things to work, and that, for me is kind of an underlying thought... sorry to leave people with, but I'd love you to chime in on that, just in terms of this conversation about where do we want to be and how do we get there? I don't know if that resonates

Jacqueline Qua Hiansen 54:11

It does from a large institutional perspective because the digital space I think, has shifted opportunities to people who know how to work in the digital space, whereas if you look at, big institutions, museums, theatre companies, there are so many staff who don't work in digital spaces, where jobs are predicated on being in a physical space. And these are often where you'll find a lot of BIPOC folks, for example, frontline workers, ushers, people who welcome people into spaces. And if we're talking about priorities because of all of these shifts we have to make sure that people in these roles are not left behind as we get all excited about the digital spaces.

Ravi Jain 55:13

Well said. I'm gonna have to wrap us there. I can't thank you all so much Daniel, Marian, Anisa, Jacqueline: you're all amazing. I hope everybody follows you on Instagram and we turn one of us into some kind of Instagram star. I think that would really make this worth everyone's time. No the conversation was. I've got to just do a little closing on behalf of Toronto Arts Foundation. Again, huge thank you not only to our panelists but also of course to Marcia our amazing ASL interpreter and Karen who we didn't get to see from but she was doing closed captioning... they were doing closed captioning, excuse me. Thanks to all of you who were with us for the conversation. Thank you so much, on behalf of Toronto Arts Foundation, thanks to the donors who made this series possible. Follow all of our organizations well if you want to know who we are, also artists and happy to accept a donation. Next week's session is "What is Success: Impact Measurements and Creative Practice" moderated by the Foundation's Research and Impact Manager, the incredible Shawn Newman. This discussion, with four new panelists will focus on the strategies that the sector has been using in the last year to understand impact but also the struggles to understand success in this new environment, and how our current context is reshaping conversations about impact. So check that one out. More information about Arts Chats and other foundation initiatives as well as opportunities to donate to the Foundation's work is available online on the website: torontoartsfoundation.org. And I'm sure Buddies in Bad Times, Opera Amplified, the ROM, Anisa Tejpar's Hit and Run and Why Not Theatre are all websites you should go to. All of them must have a donate link because, why the heck not? Beautiful artists are beautiful people, thank you all so much for this great conversation and I hope to see you all soon. Everyone's literally ready to go to the next Zoom, so I don't even know why we're still hanging around. Thank you all so much, it was really great and thanks to all of you who were putting stuff in the chat I couldn't manage it. It was at capacity but thanks for participating.