

Town Hall: How Do We Rebuild Better?

June 16, 2020

With Jumatatu Poe and Gable Roelofsen, chaired by Gate Artistic Director Ellen McDougall and assisted by Gate Associate Director Yasmin Hafesji.

ELLEN: Thanks for joining us, everyone! Super exciting to see so many faces. I'm actually just going to start with a bit of practical things. The first of which is just to ask everyone who isn't on the panel if you wouldn't mind switching off your video, so if you go to the top right hand corner of your screen, and just hit "stop video" that would be great. Not because we don't want to see your faces, that is fab. Just to enable us to more clearly see the BSL interpreters who are with us today, Lauren and Anna, do you want to give us a wave? Hi! Hi to both of you, thanks for being with us. For anyone that is using the interpretation today, if you want to pin the videos hopefully that's clear now, you can see where the screens are. There is going to be closed captions on the call today from Joanne. Do you want to say hi. Just in case you have not used closed captions before, if you go to the bottom of your screen and see where it says closed captions, there's a little arrow pointing upwards and you can put "show subtitle" and then that should appear at the bottom of your screen. If anyone is struggling with that, pop any questions that you might have about it into the chat, and Yasmin give us a wave.

YASMIN: Hello!

ELLEN: We'll keep an eye on that for my practical, technical questions that you might have as we go along. We are going to keep the video off just so it's easier for you to see us as we start this. But in the second half of the Town Hall, there will be a moment to ask questions. So if you want to ask a question, please feel free to turn on your video to ask the question. Also if you prefer not to and you want to ask a question in the chat, Yasmin will keep an eye on that and can ask any questions on your behalf if you prefer that.

A couple of other little things to say before we start. It would be great if people could change or update their names on the screen so again, if you go to the three blue dots in the top right hand corner, you can hit rename and if you wouldn't mind sharing your name, role if you are comfortable and pronouns, that'd be brill. I'll give you all a chance to do that now. For anyone just joining us, if you are not on the panel, could I ask that you switch off your video which is using the three blue dots and just put "stop video". Great. I think I've covered all of the practical details. Yasmin have I missed anything out?

YASMIN: I don't think so.

ELLEN: Brill, thank you.

So, I just want to start first by introducing myself, I'm Ellen, the artistic director at the Gate, my pronouns are she her and I would like to welcome Jumatatu Poe and Gable Roelofsen to the town Hall entitled "How Do We Rebuild Better". Hi Jumatatu and Gable, do you want to say hi?

JUMATATU: Hello, good day!

GABLE: Hello, everybody.

ELLEN: So a few things, then I'm going to hand over. So this series, How do we Rebuild Better started with a conversation at the Yard a few weeks ago in a panel discussion that started to talk about some of the changes we need to make within the theatre industry. Since then, the necessity of that has become even more undeniable. The economic picture of our future remains unclear while the deep inequalities in which our industry is built are in sharper focus than ever. Two specific things have happened since that then which I want to draw attention to. The first is the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in response to the murder

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of George Floyd and so many others, both here and in the States which has sharpened our focus on the pandemic of racism at play, both in our industry and our country.

I'm really aware of the heavy toll that has taken on black people in particular at this time.

Also, within our industry, the freelancer task force has been set up to try to empower the freelance community who represent over 70% of our industry to ensure that their voices are better represented in conversations around change at every level. So I guess with both of those things in mind, I want to try to ensure that this space is one in which we can meet and connect with each other. I also know that Zoom can feel very impersonal and a challenging space to speak up in, so please feel free to engage in whatever way feels comfortable and just to reiterate, Yasmin will keep an eye on the chat for any questions and if you have asked a question and it hasn't been answered, don't feel bad posting things twice in case we miss it.

OK. So this specific Town Hall is an opportunity for us to widen the lens of our conversations, to take a moment to think through the challenges we are facing within an international context so I'm really thrilled to have Jumatatu and Gable with us today. They are doing incredible work on this topic of rebuilding and rethinking and also as artists in their own right.

This moment has made it suddenly possible for us to meet one another across borders so I'm so thrilled that Jumatatu is here from the States today and Gable from the Netherlands.

Time zones and all of that at play! So, rather than me waffling on even longer than I already have, and offering you a biography of each of the amazing artists that would inevitably fall short, I've asked them both to speak for a bit about their work and how they've been affected by this moment. Then I'll ask them each a few further questions to open up the conversation and then we'll hand over to you to take the space, ask any questions you might have for each other. We've got just under 90 minutes, we are going to finish at about 6.30, so, first over to you, Jumatatu.

JUMATATU: Good day, everybody. I would like to quickly before I begin with my introduction to invite us all to join me in massaging the palm of your hand with itself like this, with your finger tips, generating a little bit of heat. And then, I'm thinking a lot about how this moment of pandemic, especially if we live alone, means that we might not have access to touch in the same way that we may be used to. And so I'm going to invite us to, with these warm finger beds, just to find different surfaces of your skin, I'm using my face so you can see, gently press into feeling your skin touch itself then gently ease away, just giving a bit of sensitivity to yourself and thinking of this as a moment to give yourself a little bit of affection.

And a little bit of healing touch.

Good day, everyone, and I hope there is good to be found in it. My name is Jumatatu Poe, Jumatatu is Kiswahili and means Monday. My middle name means one who searches for the truth. I'm a black person with light brown skin with a moustache on my face, wearing an orange pullover and with my twisted hair placed high on my head in the head band.

I am based in Lenapehoking, in the area that is currently known as Philadelphia.

I am an artist, choreographer and performer. I'm an educator, I'm an organiser.

This all shows up in the work that I create in collaboration with teams of mostly other black queer people, those who identify as artists and those who do not. I create space within black performance forms and aesthetics for black queer future, fabulating alternate or unreal narratives of history and imagined futures, creates the space of nuance, subtlety and happiness in relationship to narratives that are frequently so rooted in realities of extreme loss, invisibility or hyper-visibility

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and erasure.

My work chiefly dialogues with black queer alien artists, alien within black communities for markers of queerness, alien within experimental art communities for exotic and dangerous markers of blackness. In past work, I have partnered with activists engaged in direct action work, and with consultants and organisations for queer youth of colour. For this past decade, I have been co-creating with Jermone Donte Beacham, the Let 'Em Move You series of performance and visual works around J-Sette performance and culture. J-Sette, also called Majorette emerges from the innovation of black femme artists as majorettes and historically black colleges and universities and as squads of queer femme men for performances that have traditionally taken place on the dance floors, in gay clubs throughout the southern region of what is currently called the United States. Donte and I approached the form as a court tradition, containing within it ideas about societal form formation, hierarchy and established of a society within relationship to larger ecosystems. Over the past decade, we have developed this series works within a community of black femme and black queer artists. We had been planning a tour for several months of 2020 with both confirmed and nearly confirmed plans to tour and conduct residencies in about 10 cities throughout the country. For some context, I will give a little information on what it means to have planned this tour. In order to create the touring work itself, which has a touring cast of seven dancers, a DJ and lighting designer who also performs, we raised about \$280,000, raised almost all of it from private foundations who contributed the funds as grant money. Two of these foundations also have separate application processes in which art presenters can apply in order to subsidise the costs to tour this work. Nine of these presenters who had applied to receive touring subsidies also contributed small commissioning fees toward the project in the amounts of \$2,000 or \$3,000, smaller amounts of funding also came from contingency lines built into the budgets of other touring

projects that I had created and performed. And from cities and state agencies who are offered small amounts of support. Although access to this money is somewhat indirect for artists who're also freelancers or self-employed and, speaking of freelancers, all of the artists working on this project including myself have been contracted as freelancers, this means that our wages are not taxed right away and that some portion of our expected tax contribution can be written off in relationship to our business expenses.

It also means that those who employ us are not paying for our employment, unemployment insurance, social security or workers' compensation if we are injured on the job.

Because I personally directly enter into direct contract with the presenting organisations, I then enter into contract with the collaborators who work with me.

We have assigned our weekly wages at \$1,050 and our normal hourly wages at \$26.25. In comparison to other freelance performer wages of the country, these felt like solid wages that were often also higher than the wages that collaborators received in other part-time freelance work. For example, in the service industry.

However, this must be measured against the lack of security and benefits that the classification of the freelancer holds. The weekly and hourly wages were established in relation to a \$42,000 annual salary. All of my budgets are posted on my website with information about the breakdown of wages if anyone would like to look at these further and I can drop that information into the chat.

Now, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, eventually, all of the performances that were almost contracted were cancelled or postponed. The way in which it was dealt felt very much like an after-thought, like, oh, which had little actionable institutional empathy for the very insecure social position of the freelancer. Most of the cancellations or postponements were first offered without mention of financial contribution to the work that we'd already done to prepare for the touring we expected to do. The earliest of which was supposed to start just a couple of weeks before national lockdown was implemented and the cancellations became official.

Some presenters have offered to pay a portion of the fee at the time we were originally expecting to install our residencies and performances. With the remaining portion to be paid at the time of performance. Eventual

postponed performance.

A smaller portion too of the presenters have actually instituted measures to pay some amount as a cancellation fee, the most generous offer for that was 50%. With the expressed intention to fund-raise toward paying the entire performance fee at the time of postponement. However, in relationship to our artists' peers in the field of non-profit performance touring, this is far from the norm. Many have experienced straight cancellation with no institutional intention to pay any of the expected fees.

Of course, the design of predatory practices that feed upon the fragile and most insecure in the system are systemic, built into the design of capitalism and resolving this will be a much larger task to address than can simply be resolved within the non-profit arts system itself.

Resolution demands reparations for black and indigenous folks for the legacies of colonialism and enforced enslavement in this country. And the evolution of racist and colonialist policies into contemporary iterations.

It demands the adoption of national policies like universal health care and childcare, universal basic income and universal access to public higher education.

It requires a significant consciousness shift to implement ideologies that assert the valuing of life and the mattering of life over and above profit.

Among other things, I'm an artist because I believe in the transformative power of imagination and among other things I'm an organiser because I believe that we can realise that imagination toward a better world for all of us.

ELLEN: Thank you so much. That's really great to hear, such a fulsome introduction to the context of this moment and your outlook. Thank you. I'm going to hand over to Gable now and then I'll come back with some more questions. Thanks, Gable.

GABLE: Thank you for opening Jumatatu. And thank you Ellen and Yasmine and Joanne and everyone at the Gate for taking care of this conversation and thank you all to everybody here on the Zoom for having a little patience with me because English is not my first language. So, I might be slow and I didn't write it down so I will have a lot of ahs and ums.

The Corona situation - erm, I'm in Amsterdam. Although I run a company in

Maastricht so I really had to make a decision to go in lockdown situation so make decision to go to my own house or move in with my boyfriend. So this is my practical situation. In the Netherlands, we just sort of going out of lockdown, and I don't want to bore you a lot with what happened during the lockdown because it was me just surviving and writing a play actually but especially since the Black Lives Matter protest also reached Amsterdam, that came at the same moment when we started sort of loosening the lockdown and we were allowed to go back into the cafes and restaurants again. For me, it was a highly symbolic moment because everybody, I feel, did a lot of reflection or a lot of, spent a lot of time with all the themes, all the big life themes and suddenly, is when we started loosening up the lockdown, all of those things sort of surfaced in a very major way.

In the last few weeks, I've been, and I do really relate it to Corona in a sense and I really like the whole idea that we were really aware of micro-decisions during Corona. I really feel that all the other matters that showed up. We had a big, big discussion the last few weeks around a new company and the way the institution dealt with it and I was involved in community organising and in having a public debate around this in the same week that we were, for the first time, with a big group in the street again around Black Lives Matter protests that have a very specific Dutch contexting, of course because of our colonial history specifically.

So I really am interested in making micro-decisions on the other things that are not Corona, maybe we can use the moment to sort of reflect on all the decision-making. So I really liked the invitation to talk about rebuilding

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better. I'm also a, sorry, I am really hopeful, there is a new awareness but also there are moments of discouragements and being depressed because when the money is evaporating from the system like is happening right now, also I see a lot of old powers doing a caricature of doubling down of the old behaviour. So I really am interested in when we start to exchange later, to really also talk about self-care, the care for us as a community, and also cherish the hopefulness, but also be realistic because we need a lot of realism also to enable us to be able to take care of each. I'm interested to have an exchange about this. Let me say something about my company. My company is called Het Geluid Maastricht and I run it with my older sister Romy. I was thinking during the Corona reflection time, that it's not a coincidence. When we went to a very fairly classical drama school, we were trained as actors and I think we are proper actors but we didn't get the work we desired after graduating.

We were at that time not aware that how our sense of otherness in this community was part of that and it was more systemic than personal.

So we started out of also an intersection of problems because I, as a young actor experienced a very terrible #MeToo situation. Romy, because we have half Indonesian, we are the Dutch are the former colonisers of Indonesia and one million people in the Netherlands have their heritage in that colonial history. Romy looks more on the Asian side and she's a marvellous actress, but to work, it was very difficult to get cast. So we decided to work with this precariousness and move away from the centre, move away from Amsterdam and in our hometown Maastricht, we have started a company called Het Geluid Maastricht which works on the intersection between different art forms, between the institutions and communities and between the classical music and sort of community art and communal strategies.

It took us ten years to build our own strategies. We worked with the resistance we met and slowly we are now a very autonomous sovereign-owned company which can work on our own values with institutions which is always a tough thing to do, which is another interesting subject to talk about later. To share something concretely about the work - we loved crises before Corona! When we had the financial crisis, we had our own mobile chip stand where we worked around-the-clock making shows in the mobile chip stand because the Dutch government asked the artists for entrepreneurship and they had a sort of level of amount of money you should bring in yourself by being an entrepreneur and we made fun of it by having mobile chip stands.

When we had the refugee crisis in 2015, we did a project around local Maastricht carnival tradition by re-designing a carnival together with local new Maastricht people and old Maastricht people. And, recently, a year ago, we did with a museum food bank and the food bank and museum we founded a choir through that. So normally we are very good at crises, but this time surprisingly, I really felt it needed introspection and we needed to go deeper. So this time, the first responder mode that helped us a lot in our creative work, we decided not to attack it in the first responder mode. I really dived in writing a play about colonial history. I'm in a project with an amazing British writer director Jude Christian who is familiar to the Gate. We are both writing a play together about our shared colonial history of the UK and the Netherlands and also Jude and my sister, we all have a Chinese Malaysian or a Chinese Indonesian grandmother, so the play is about that.

Of course, it's got a lot of connections with the Black Lives Matter coming to the surface because I really think we, as a Dutch nation, should really dismantle and really take our history apart and look at it in the face in order to have a more diverse here and now.

Yes, to round up for now. The other thing I am involved with, is the need for legacy and the need for legacy is a group of performing arts professionals, young and older, who are of colour or not of colour but are all invested in checking the performing arts archives of the Netherlands on their blind spots and take the blind spots away.

And, as the need for legacy group, we also are fighting to have all the theatre and drama schools to have their theatre history department have a more inclusive way of telling the story. I point this out in relationship to building better because I really think it's also, we work a lot of, or we think a lot about software but we also

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need to work on the hardware of the theatre community I think in the sense that we need to dismantle the blind spots in our history.

The last week, the American theatre scene boasted a letter called We See You and we did a Dutch version which was posted and supported by a thousand Dutch performing artists of colour yesterday. I really feel this was really also building up from the Corona stress so it's a moment the talk about rebuilding better and I'm looking forward to the rest of the conversation.

ELLEN: Thank you, Gable. Great to just get that. I'm sure there are lots of questions starting to bubble already from what both of you have shared, so many interesting points to pick up on and discuss further. I've got a couple of questions, just to kind of go a little bit deeper on some of those. So I'll start, but everyone listening, please do feel free now to start posting questions into the chat so we can open this up and hear your voices in this conversation as we go.

So, the first thing I wanted to ask a little more about is a question for you, Jumatatu - I first came across your work actually only a few weeks ago. I saw a poster that you were developing, an artist bill of rights in response to this moment or at least that had come to the surface in this moment. And, as we spoke about the other week, a lot of the conversations here have been about recognising structural inequalities in our industry with a specific focus on the

rights of freelancers.

I would love if you could all the to us a little bit about that process which I know you are still in and what is in the documents so far and how has it been to start developing that?

JUMATATU: Yes. In the chat right now, for those interested, I'll drop a link to the group which houses this document, the document is called Creating New Futures, working guidelines for ethics and equity within the... within presenting dance and performance. God! Such a... I mean that kind of long windedness of the title, just get ready, it's 141-page document that includes lots of artists' testimonials from the perspective of artists who're in direct contract with presenting institutions who'd then subcontract other artists. From the perspective of artists who work for other artists, from the perspective of artists who run centres in relationship to the economy of their art and also from the perspective of designers and technicians working within and in performance specifically.

There were a group of ten of us; artists, arts managers and presenters that came together in a kind of frenzy. I mean it was a significant frenzy within which we came together to create this document over the course of between three and four weeks. We interviewed a lot of artists, we interviewed presenters, right now we are finding that one of the, one of the important voices that is significantly missing from the document is the voice of funders from private institutions. We are considering the work that we did to create this initial version of the document which is largely looking at those structural inequalities that first were kind of micro-linked to the cancellations, the culture of cancellation that had come out of the onset of the COVID pandemic and the public health crisis as a result of that and the economic crisis as a result of those. But beyond that, beyond those immediate effects of the pandemic, also looking at other pandemics that have long been affecting our country, what is currently called the US, and how what was showing up during the COVID cancellations was so embedded in what had been showing up since we'd been artists and long before that.

So the document... it's not serving as a kind of political how-to, and that's not the function and I don't think that that will ultimately be the function of what this collective is of creating new futures, which right now we are considering this phase 1 of our work to have been completed and the phase 1 working group will kind of take ourselves out of the positions of prominence within the collective so that other people can occupy those positions and, from here, in these later phases, I think that the work of the collective will largely be about dreaming and

imagining new possibilities but that has to be done in partnership with folks that are organising, which there are lots of different collectives and individuals and organisers who've been doing the work to shift policy, to shift ideology, to shift institutional practices.

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These concerns are systemic, so it needs to come from everywhere. From all angles. Yes, so that is a little bit about what we have been working on. It needs to be done in partnership with institutional overhaul, adjustment, reform, destabilisation, deconstruction, burning down, you know, all those things that will happen together. But that where we are mostly interested is the work of this rigorous dreaming, of this rigorous imagining.

ELLEN: That's wonderful phrase to hold on to, rigorous dreaming and rigorous imagining, as an activity! Something that I think is really under-valued.

Do you have, just to pick up on that a little further, how do you structure your conversations with that as a focus or how do you, what does that mean to you practically?

JUMATATU: It's such a good question and I feel like it's largely and necessarily in discovery. The group of ten people that came together around this creation of this document, most of us didn't have personal relationships in advance of coming together around this, and we are still very much building those relationships. Coming together at the speed of emergency created a certain kind of trust but it also created a certain kind of furthering of white supremacist value structures that are rooted within perfectionism and urgency and it's important to acknowledge that too, that that pace also reinforced some of those things. So, as we are continuing forward, we need to be invested in slow development. Moving at the speed of trust which is a quote that I'm taking from Adrian Marie Brown who wrote Emerging Strategy. That needs to be prioritised so that we can commit to what we have talked about which is this horizontal structure of leadership.

That means that... it doesn't necessarily mean always Unison, always consensus, but it means that we are taking the time to get people to understand or knowing that, you know like if there is not that time as a whole group collective, that maybe there are Caucuses, like for white folks who're newer to a radical conceptualisation of race and racial violence within the country, maybe having a caucus so that those folks can talk together about it so that some conversations can proceed and not have to be stalled by the fact that we are not all yet on the

same page and we won't be.

I think that yes, this is... I mean this is work that's been going on for long before us and we are a part of it and I think that what our assertion right now is this importance of moving slowly so that we can establish something that does feel like it can respect the values of horizontal leadership.

Is that getting at your question?

ELLEN: Massively, yes, yes. I think this idea about pace and rhythm and, you know, what this moment has done, it feels it speeds us up and slows us down and paying attention to the speed with which our world's changed and how much that also speeded up thinking but also the huge change that we are looking at, I think it's very easy to feel daunted by all of the things that need to change if we are working at this pace, how can we possibly...

JUMATATU: Right. I do think that one thing that has come up, because it's, yes, I think that I relate to that so much, the fast and the slow, vacillating between those two. What we have learned and we continue to learn is that it's so important that the leadership is coming from black and indigenous wisdom because especially in the ways that racial violence has affected this country. I mean, we have been in it, you know, like we have been in it for generations and to be able to see a way forward from here, it's so important that that leadership is held at the centre of our movement in the directions that we are going to move.

ELLEN: Yes. Yes.

JUMATATU: Listening to the voices of those that are most marginalised.

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ELLEN: Yes. Thank you. Just to go back to you, Gable, for a second. I wanted to pick up on something that you began to speak about in your introduction, again just to expand a little bit further on some of the work that you have done, and I know that you spoke about the idea of being outside big institutions or positioning yourself as working or beginning from outside those major structures and I wonder if you can speak a bit about how your work has started to dismantle the way they think about their work? And how your relationships with those institutions has shifted as a result of that?

GABLE: I started by saying I am hopeful and depressed at the same time. I do feel things are opening up and people are only starting to listen because I have been working at institutions where people are very inspired to talk to me and work

with our group but at the same time, they are very pragmatic, not to say opportunistic so sometimes programming us is giving them a good feeling and it's a short cut for doing the actual work.

I stopped pretending that I'm on the... I'm actually ambivalent about this, but I try to stop to pretend that I am on a stairway to the big institutions and at the same time, I'm interacting with these old narratives, these histories, and I want to get out of precariousness and have a life. So, you are in a way playing the game and work with the resistances, those companies meet now and we are actually specialised in the precariousness and making artistic concepts out of resistances. So yes, we have been doing this. And it ain't all bad but I don't know if the historic route towards being in an institution is the best way. It's a double bind.

ELLEN: Yes. I remember you speaking to me a while ago about, maybe it was the chip van project and how it felt like it had begun to change the conversation. When you look back on that, does that now fall into the category of it feeling like more of an opportunistic tokenistic gesture on behalf of that institution than something that then you saw kind of real shifts?

GABLE: Yes. That was completely our own project because we had been co-producing with bigger structures but at the same time we have been building our own company, we have our own board and funding in place right now so we have been very privileged and during this Corona times you feel we are privileged and the paradoxes that we have built this privilege by very inventively dealing with all those resistances so that mobile chip stands show I'm really proud of that which completely produced by ourselves and in a way it was also a ticket to ride in the sense that institutions invited us for talks after seeing the show. By really producing it in Maastricht which is a small interesting cultural town but not very big. It's a university town so there are a lot of, there is an interesting crowd to see our shows. But really producing shows on our own turf, besides going to Vienna or Berlin or bigger places elsewhere, was really wholesome in the sense that we'd build our own strength and take care of our own selves artistically by working at home.

ELLEN: Yes. Thank you. I guess just to focus in on the economic question for a moment, Jumata, you gave us a very sobering picture of how cancellations in the moment of lockdown happened in your country and the wider context of just how normal or not that was which was super clear. Gable, I would love to know a bit more about the financial position, the funding structure I suppose that you had pre-pandemic and then what happened in

the pandemic because it felt like here in a similar way, perhaps not as extreme as what Jumatatu spoke to, but certainly for some people it was, it felt really exposed how vulnerable freelancers were, that the state support came very, very late, lots of people didn't qualify for the support and then it raises questions about the funding and structures around being a freelancer in the future and in this topic of rebuilding better, what things might we want to put in place. One thing that often comes up in these conversations is a kind of shift of focus towards European continental European countries where we believe that is much more substantial government recognition of the arts and artists and I don't know whether you feel that as we look towards you as these beacons of hope but I don't know whether that is how you experience it or indeed what the specificities of that are for you. It would be great to know about where you are at in that context.

GABLE: What is so lovely, these things are never as they seem...

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ELLEN: Damn it!

GABLE: We think of Germany and think that is heaven, then in some cities, opera singers I know, or artists I know, couldn't apply to budgets there because it's going to institutions, but at least they have in Germany, a sort of rhetoric that is really pro the arts. We as a country are in the middle between the Germans and Anglo-Saxon world where we have a more obvious struggle between the sort of old Social Democratic consistency and a fast populism. As a nation we are becoming more precarious I think. I'm a freelancer myself so our company is, there are not a lot of companies who can afford to have a full ensemble. In Germany they have big theatres and everything is sucked up by big theatres in a way, all the energy, all the money, and we have a very democratised country but it means that also the structures are very flexible, once in a few year, a new company starts and it's fresh, exciting progressive country, but it doesn't have a long-staying power, so things are also precarious here in a way. We at our company have been lucky in the sense that we have a funder of provinces that said, you can keep your money for this year and you don't have to perform for it. So at least we are in a very lucky place and what we try to do is not ask money from other organisations because we had enough to just survive. Although because we know other festivals that booked us are also precarious so we try to work with the privilege in a way and all the freelancers we asked to be in shows or work around shows, we try to pay them for doing other work. That was specifically luckily possible because we have a designer who liked re-designing our

office space and stuff. So we have been very much doing that. There are a lot of young artists who're not in institutions that are in the same situation, I think in the US or the UK, that they are just in-between all the rules and are very precarious.

ELLEN: Yes. Thank you. So we have got just over half an hour left, so I just want to reach out to everyone who is listening again and just to say please feel free to ask questions. Is there anyone that would like to ask anything right now? I'll just give people a moment. There is a question from Char in the chat. Jumatatu, can you talk a bit more about where you are up to with phase 2 of Creating New Futures?

JUMATATU: Thank you for that question. It's at a really confusing point right now because, as I mentioned, the phase 1, the ten members of the original working group, we are trying to transition ourselves at the speed that it takes to transition ourselves out of these positions of prominence. That is largely because once we start, because all ten of us had had various histories with large national funders, when we were talking about this initially on Facebook, some large private funders were paying attention and so two of them reached out to us to fund this first stage of work.

Already we know that there is going to be a pool of money to support phase 2. It's important that, especially that phase 2 is populated by folks that can provide different perspectives but especially folks that wouldn't generate the interest of national funders maybe if they were having these conversations on Facebook.

It's important that they are included at the front of these conversations. So right now, where we are is trying to figure out how that transition will happen. And it's confusing. I think one of the ways that we are going to approach it is watching for the folks who are vocal, the vocal folks within the group that we have, we have a slack chat, what are they called, a slack group for creating new futures as well, looking at the rhythm, innovation that comes up from that. And seeing if those folks are folks that we can target to be this next group of leadership.

I think that the problem that that runs into is there's a wonderful concept called Time Poverty which I have seen referenced by the Black Womans' Collective, I will find it and post it in the chat in a bit.. The ability to structure our time at the beginning of the pandemic in a way that supported us being able to spend countless hours of time on this document, even before we knew that it was going to be funded which none of us were expecting, that ability, not everybody was

able, I work with collaborators who at the onset of the pandemic needed to rush out and get essential jobs that are classified as essential, you know. So, the ability to be able to structure our lives to do this thinking for some of us we can make the investment and trust that the money to

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pay for that label will come in one way or another. For others, we need the promise of the compensation for that labour upfront so that we can create the space in our lives to be able to do that. That is also something that we are thinking about as we can sometimes get seduced into looking at, oh this person is saying these great things, offering this innovation. So we are trying to create different avenues for people to show their interest and also trying to be as transparent as possible about how much money we have, about the fact that there is money, that it's a finite resource that the values that we have about who really needs to be leading this work right now and a lot of trust in ourselves, in our ability to facilitate this transition and... in this community, these various communities of artists and makers that we are a part of and organisers that the transition will be difficult to facilitate but that it's possible and that it doesn't need to come from us saying, you, you, you and you, you know, which... so yes, it's confusing, that's where we are right now, there's still so many question marks but there's a lot of belief that accompanies that. If the person who asked this, Char, if you have any suggestions for places to look for some leadership around this, please send them our way as well.

ELLEN: Thank you. Question from Zoe which I guess is a little bit more directed to me - how is The Gate including the local borough in building back better? Thank you Zoe. I mean, I will speak to this, but I don't want to take up too much space because I want to ensure that Gable and Jumatatu can answer any further questions, but we have some relationships with local partners including Harrow Club, Migrants Organise, the Westway Trust and we are having regular meetings about where they are at and those conversations, we also do have a conversation with our actual borough of Kensington and Chelsea, but for anyone that knows anything about that borough, it's a closed conversation so we don't get a huge amount of support from them. But yes, we do work with our partner organisations, and Zoe if you want to pick that conversation up with me later, I'm happy to speak to you in more detail about that. Yasmin is here to help which is great.

YASMIN: Another question from Hannah which says, can you talk a bit more about that great phrase 'moving at the speed of trust'?

JUMATATU: That was from Hannah? That's not my phrase, I didn't come up with it, it's from a book called Emergent Strategy by an author named Adrian Marie Brown. Essentially, it's about finding the inspiration for the rhythm at which things need to happen by considering an array of options, considering natural impulses coming from the way that your body is constructed and the way that your reflexes respond, considering the rhythm of the flowers growing, the way that there is growth and development in the ecosystem around, considering of course the rhythms of institution, considering all of these things in relationship together and then paying attention to what feels, how it feels like your ability to invest trust, to invest belief in something is related to all of that. And then following that and trusting that, that rhythm, that instinct there.

I hope that is helpful and I definitely recommend... I see somebody is putting the book into the camera. ELLEN: Thank you, Liz. Wonderful summary, thank you. Gable, you had your hand up?

GABLE: Yes. I am also very inspired by Adrian Marie Brown and I would love to connect to how you started Jumatatu in the way you touched your face and I would like to introduce the topic of expression because I've been dividing my time between the classical music, opera and communal spaces, so public spaces in my city. And I think one of the things I'm sure about is that beyond and Jumatatu also referred to the performance level anxiety we always get historically imposed on us in the theatre, what can release us and take care of ourselves and of each other is checking our expression or checking that it's not only the brain talking, it's also the body and also the breath. I'm really interested in also the fact that Adrian Marie Brown has a sense of the sensual, in a way that is not only sexual but it's about life energy and I think we all need this in the kind of heavy work we do and the precarious position we are in as artists that we should take care of ourselves and each other in a very visceral way that is about nurturing our expression. It's the not always about making it soft or kind, if it's angry it's angry. But that will give us, as individuals, but also as a community our staying power because when we talk about rebuilding better, we will have really tough blows about what I was talking about in the beginning, people doubling down on old shit. In the face of that kind of troublesome caricature of sexism,

racism and all intersectional things, we should take care of ourselves and so I'm

excited about taking care of bringing other expressions into the world. So you can still do Shakespeare but really check the kind of energy it brings into the world, the kind of expressions it brings into the world. It's not only reproducing our own wants to be at the top or the sports or the gymnastics of it, I'm very interested about this, it relates to the energy we bring on the stage, we bring into other spaces we perform or the tables or the seats we take.

Especially in the work, or the need for legacy, I find that we have been talking with the archives, the schools, but most of all, it's important to have a WhatsApp group or Facebook group where we can just meet in kinship or in sort of as kindred spirits who all know from one perspective or another the pressure we walk around with and expression can also help us release that pressure in a very healthy productive way. That is the quest for me.

ELLEN: Yes, thank you.

YASMIN: Another question from Rhian, in Holland, theatres often have a fixed core of actors and creatives, whereas in London theatre seems more organised around theatres. How do you think these structures affect the freelance funded debate?

ELLEN: I think you are referring to the ensemble structures and the kind of idea of permanent employment for artists and around organisations whereas here we tend to have a core staff then employ artists on a freelance basis. Have I got that right, Rhian? Thank you, great.

GABLE: In the Netherlands, it's the same. We only have one company that has an ensemble. Bigger theatre companies, there's... we don't have a big separation between actors and creators, so we have more companies who do classical plays with theatre text, that is a change, and but even companies who have fixed .. might have been a change, a difference, but I don't think. I think the position of freelancers, I think 80-90% of the Dutch theatre people are freelancers.

ELLEN: Is there a conversation in... I see. I suppose one of the things is that it does feel like a conversation, is this idea of an ensemble or working in that way. Is that something discussed in Holland as a way that might shift to a more equitable kind of safe model of employment for artists?

GABLE: Yes. I literally had a coffee meeting with someone sort of speaking about this. Speaking about leadership. It would be lovely to have groups of people leading organisations but we are not there yet. What I also feel, there is a lot of

interesting people who decide, I don't want to go into this toxic leadership environment and those people are often more interesting leaders at the moment. So we should be structuring institutions so more interesting people feel welcome to apply or fight for a place in those seats.

ELLEN: Yes. Thank you.

YASMIN: Nina asks: How can we have a conversation about the future of our industry when it's classified as non-essential? A footnote is, can we rebuild in a way that makes the arts essential, how can we shift and challenge that definition?

ELLEN: Great question.

JUMATATU: I am in a different part of the world but I think this question is bringing to mind a quote from an artist named Amara Tabor-Smith who says that she is a death doula for the patriarchy. I think about how right now it is important for artists to function as largely as death doulas for a lot of, like Gable you were talking about a lot of the institutions that need to close, a lot of these leaders of institutions that need to be out of leadership right now, a lot of these methods of working that do not the serve us and then need to die, as there are, as life doulas are bringing to life other forces. But I think that there's... I mean for... first of all, I think that

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the valuation of art, like the valuation of life and I'll speak specifically from this context is something that needs to be, I'm ideologically asserted and educated and this has to be implemented into educational systems, be implemented into person-to-person conversation. It's hard to implement it politically because there's just such vast devaluation of life and of those creative forces.

But in terms of being essential, I think that there are... I'm thinking about all of the... aside from the creative work I'm thinking about how so many different artists' colleagues have combined the work of artistry with the work of activism and that there is an essential need for that type of policy re-haul right now that is again, it's, you know, because it's demanding change, it's not going to be easy to convince the federal or state support of it because it's threatening to that support.

But in terms of convincing a large mass of people support, it feels like that because of the power that's evidenced through the movements, it feels like that

can be a powerful force right now. What is the relationship between artists and the organising that is happening? There is an organisation here in New York called Performance-based New York where, before the pandemic started, they installed an experiment in which they kind of handed over the operation of the organisation to a collective of artists. So these artists are making decisions about annual budgets, making decisions about programming, etc. So when the pandemic hit, they shifted their focus to becoming a mutual aid organisation providing mutual aid support. In the way that like there's... in utilising the building to house this work, there's also creative activity happening in the building and so you know folks that come to receive or to give mutual aid, they're also immersed in a world of collective making that is happening around this essential activity of providing the joy.

I think that there's... that is how I am thinking about it. The art that is essential right now is all of it because that creative thinking is important and it's also the art that is implicated and invested in this organising work that is so crucial.

GABLE: I really agree. I love that after the question comes up off being non-essential you come up with the metaphor of the Jeweller in the sense that while people are doubling down on the status of the theatre. You shouldn't actually double down on the visceral side of the theatre and sort of the transitioning power of the theatre. So in response, I should not, I think we should not internalise the rhetoric of them being non-essential. The last few months also showed how essential we are to people, the live experience, the need for touch, the need for exchange that is spiritual. But it would be also interesting to not stop at a hopeful horizon about this but have a very good and clear actionist game plan about how you are going to, in the face of all this old-fashioned stuff, really devise artistic strategies by implementing stuff that people do in other areas. So, we should also be very clear minded in how do you translate it into our profession and not just saying, oh, it's Jeweller. But I think we're really essential.

ELLEN: Yes. Thank you. Let's go to the next question.

YASMIN: Amelia says, it would be good to hear about your thoughts on supporting well-being and mental health in the future, also do you think the scarcity mindset will increase as large institutions cut budgets and how can we navigate that?

GABLE: Yes. It will be rough when the money will evaporate. People will be doubling down. So we need to double down on care and look out for each

other. But it will be rough.

JUMATATU: I worry that that is going to follow the most marginalised of us, the hardest. Right now, there's all these actions to defund the police around the country (which I support – I'm an abolitionist) and alongside that, I'm also concerned about it, in this moment of economic crisis, when inevitably, "petty crime" is going to increase and maybe other kinds of smaller economic crimes will increase because people need that the most significant community of victims is going to be those that have the least. And so how to... I mean like you were saying Gable, institutions and communities of care on vast communal levels but then also ensure that there's

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money passing directly from government into the households and the hands of people so that yes, I mean God, I relate to what you were saying that vacillation between being depressed and being hopeful. It's just... we are at the beginning right now.

ELLEN: One thing I want to add, I don't want to hold up the conversation too much, but just relating back to your point about the power in activism and its relationship with art at this time and knowing that one of the things that is happening in terms of being inside an institution is that while we look ahead and know that things are going to get harder, it means massive decisions are being made about how money is allocated. So, the chances are that there would be a doubling down on old values. That's definitely possible and we'd be naive to think that that isn't at play. But I guess what I want to acknowledge as well is while there is this shifting happening in this reallocation and a kind of questioning of the system, this idea about reparations that you mentioned at the beginning, Jumatatu, recognising the historic defunding of certain communities and identities within our system, it feels as though there is also a moment where things have been destabilised or loosened or unravelled a little bit. And pushing that agenda through these movements and conversations feels like we have got as much a chance now as ever to get that on those agendas. Perhaps I'm being optimistic here but I just guess I would just, I'm aware that in moments of transition, perhaps that's where things can go, rather than in moments where we think we know the system, we know the future, everything is stable. Small offer. But let's carry on. Yasmin?

YASMIN: Question for Jumatatu from Rachel who asks; What has this moment taught you about how you might need to work in the future?

JUMATATU: Yes! Thank you for that question! So many things. Even still my economic structure as an artist is built around a predatory economy of touring which is not the way that it's practiced right now, it's very infrequently healthy for the environment, it's built around these also oppressive predatory relationships with "communities". I'm putting quotes around that because I think that sometimes that word is just thrown around and that lots of times people don't know what they are talking about when they are saying communities. But right now social practice art is very of the moment in the US and I think also in Europe. It feels like it manifests in different ways.

But that the... it feels like this can often be approached as a gimmick which doesn't do any service to the folks in the communities doing this labour which often is uncompensated as well. I'm thinking a lot about my relationship to touring. I learn a lot from being in different places, a lot from travelling. It's contributed so much to my humanity I think and it's been so destructive at the same time. Even in our better attempts to do it ethically as possible, we are participating in an industry of disruption and destruction. I have a lot of questions about that. I was working on fund-raising for a project before the pandemic in which I with was going to be working with black and indigenous communities from the US and Brazil, because I also spend a significant amount of time there. It feels like right now I'm kind of following a call to take some space from making any decisions about anything because I'm sensitive to the fact that I'm still in the middle of a pandemic, I'm still traumatised and I don't want to be making any life decisions from being a fugitive of this trauma. I want to allow myself to digest what is going on, to be able to make better decisions. Because it doesn't feel like I'll be able to do that in the way that feels justified right now. But yes, that in relationship to a lot of things, since I've been working as an artist, I've always been transparent with the resources and the money that goes into it and how that is reflected in the collaborative communities of which I'm a part.

The strategy of trying to find a good wage in comparison to what the market wages are, it doesn't feel like there is any justice to trying to figure out how to work from a framework that is really empowering folks to self-determine. Which is what I would like to be able to do. So yes, I have a lot of questions.

ELLEN: Thank you. Thank you Rachel. We have probably got time for one

more question. YASMIN: A question from Joanna: Is there any way to work

with organisations that have benefitted from

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lockdown or our changed way of life for example with through streaming services or Zoom, to help with theatrical recovery and make sure that people can be included at their own pace, for example, people who're shielding or won't be able to come to theatres in person for a while?

ELLEN: Yes. Thanks Joanna . Gable, or Jumatatu, do either of you want to respond? I can say a small thing. Yes, Jumatatu, go ahead.

JUMATATU: I was really just going to say a small thing which I don't even know if it's a good idea for people to be going into theatres at all right now or in the foreseeable future. Yes.

ELLEN: Yes. There's definitely an idea, just in terms of the funding question, I think that one kind of little hopeful thought that I know is in discussion that is happening at the moment is, in this country, there's a kind of an idea that the subsidised sector develops, or gives artists opportunities at the beginning of their career, gives them the opportunity to develop and then they are picked up by more commercial theatre companies but also by TV and film and the subsidised sector never see any of the economic benefit from the artists provide for the theatre. There is the opening up of the discussion about the tax or the repaying the work to recognise that the, where the artists have had the opportunity to develop their skills. So, I hope that is sort of answering a bit of your question, Joanna . Great. Before we wrap up, anything that we have missed or anything else that anyone would like to say or ask, Yasmin?

YASMIN: I don't think so, unless I've missed something, please repost any questions in the chat.

ELLEN: OK. Great. Well, I feel like we could continue for... I mean it's been an incredibly rich conversation and I just want to say a huge thank you Jumatatu and Gable for being with us today. For everyone who has joined and everyone who has asked questions. And also thank you to Lauren, Anna and Joanne for making this conversation as accessible as possible. It's brilliant to have all of you with us today and thank you Yasmin for helping facilitate and setting all of this up for us. Fantastic job. Thank you everybody. Can we turn on our videos before we go so we can see each other's faces? Bye everyone.

JUMATATU: Keep in touch.

GABLE: Yes, definitely.

ELLEN: We'll share contact details on our website. There's also, yes, website links for Gable and Jumatatu there already. Thanks, everyone.