

**PROJECTS / PROCESSES**

**WHO'S AFRAID OF  
DOCUMENTARY THEATRE?**

ANUJA GHOSALKAR &  
KAI TUCHMANN

**DE-DECIDING HISTORY**

SOUMYABRATA CHOUDHURY



# PROJECTS / PROCESSES VOLUME III

Series Editor: Senjuti Mukherjee

## **Who's Afraid of Documentary Theatre?**

Anuja Ghosalkar & Kai Tuchmann

## **De-Deciding History**

Soumyabrata Choudhury





Image of an LED ticker announcing the schedule of Connecting Realities at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Anuja Ghosalkar and Kai Tuchmann.

**Connecting Realities:  
A Symposium on Theatre  
and its Realities**

***Curated by*** Anuja Ghosalkar &  
Kai Tuchmann

***Venue*** Old Goa Institute of  
Management

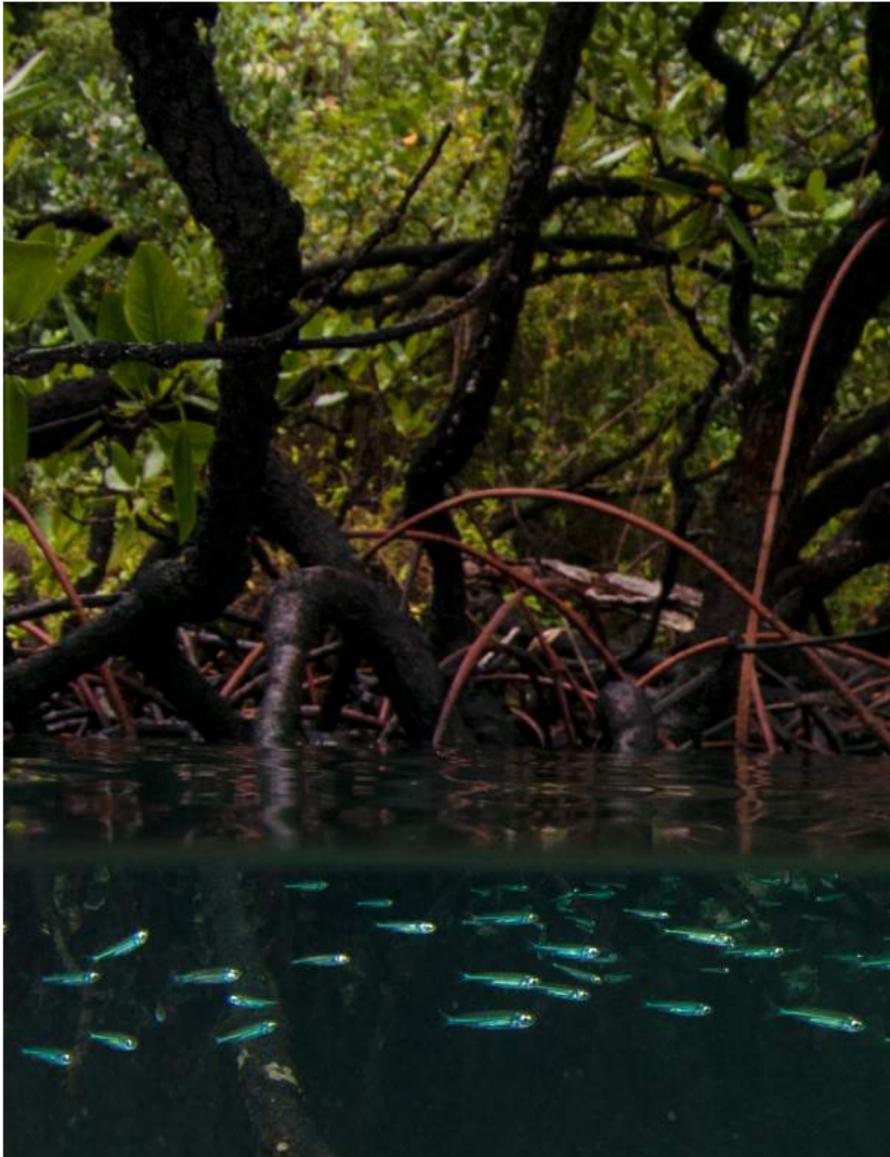


Image: Umeed Mistry



## Curatorial Note

**Panelists, Presenters & Performers** *A. Mangai; Amitesh Grover; Anuja Ghosalkar; Arvind Narrain; Ashutosh Potdar; Ayesha Susan Thomas; Björn Ketels; Dhammarakshit Randive, Pravin Kundalik Khare & Siddharth Yashwant Baviskar; Diya Naidu; Geetanjali Kulkarni & Sameena Dalwai; Kai Tuchmann; Kiran Kumar; Ranjit Kandalgaonkar; Rustom Bharucha; Sameena Dalwai; Sharmishtha Saha; Smriti Rajgarhia; Soumyabrata Chowdhury; Venkat Srinivasan; Y. S. Alone; Zhao Chuan; Zuleikha Chaudhari*

**Curators** *Anuja Ghosalkar & Kai Tuchmann*

A theatre that stands in close relationship to real events in the world is the starting point for our two-and-half day meeting. Such a ‘Theatre of the Real’ to borrow a phrase from academic Carol Martin, has been known by varied terms during different times and places—Documentary theatre, Verbatim theatre, Newspaper theatre, Reenactment theatre—to mention a few.

We invite performers, scholars of performance, visual artists, lawyers, activists from the human rights field, journalists, and educators to engage with our audience through performances, presentations, concerts and lectures. Through conversations and exchange we hope to transcend disciplinary boundaries, and examine Indian and Asian performance practices, both traditional and contemporary, that relate to performing reality.

Such a concentrated and multi-perspective reflection on Theatre of the Real in India, is to our knowledge the first of its kind. Therefore our impetus of Connecting Realities, aims not only on links between

theatre and reality but is an expression of our desires as artists and curators to establish a platform on and through which people from diverse backgrounds can engage with each other, sans professional and social hierarchies.

Given the current socio-political milieu—times of rising nationalism, mass extinction of species, widespread reliance on Artificial Intelligence and a market centric arts environment that blunts radical aesthetic thought—this dialogue of practitioners is vital. We choose to present our symposium through an image of the mangroves in Lat creek in Koh Klang in Thailand. It embodies a complex network of ecosystems, that protects coastal areas from erosion, storms and Tsunamis. The mangroves are in-between spaces that connect the sea to the land—a simultaneous site of transition and connection. Our endeavor through Connecting Realities, is to occupy a place, that is transitional and yet captures a changing landscape of theatre and its contested realities.

This symposium is an extension from Starting Realities, a workshop series curated by Anuja Ghosalkar and Kai Tuchmann, that began in mid 2018 and has hosted international artists like Boris Nikitin and Rimini Protokoll among others. Many of the participants of Connecting Realities have attended our workshops or have been thought partners over the past two years.

Website: <https://connectingrealities.org/>



Curators Kai Tuchmann (left) and Anuja Ghosalkar (right) at Connecting Realities. Photograph by Anuja Ghosalkar.



Image of Soumyabrata Choudhury's closing lecture "De-Deciding History" at Connecting Realities. Photograph by Anuja Ghosalkar.

# Who's Afraid of Documentary Theatre?

ANUJA GHOSALKAR & KAI TUCHMANN

Soumyabrata Choudhury's "De-deciding History" was the closing lecture of "Connecting Realities"—its function is two-fold. One, to highlight the thematics that evolved during the symposium. Two, as a rigorous, complex, multi-layered critique of the symposium and its intent. As analysis this is a vital discourse on the still emerging theories and practices of Documentary theatre in India. This introduction contextualises Choudhury's talk and reflects on a critical aspect—his persistence in using the word and concept of "Documentary theatre" rather than "Theatre of the Real".

From December 18 to December 20 2019, we, Kai Tuchmann and Anuja Ghosalkar, curated a three-day symposium titled, "Connecting Realities - A symposium on Theatre and its Realities" as part of the fourth edition of Serendipity Arts Festival in Goa. A theatre that stands in close relationship to real events in the world was the starting point for this three-day meeting. Such a "Theatre of the Real" to borrow a phrase from performance scholar Carol Martin, has been known by varied terms during different times and places—Documentary theatre, Verbatim theatre, Newspaper theatre, Reenactment theatre—to mention a few. Such a concentrated and multi-perspective reflection on Theatre of the Real in India, was to our knowledge the first of its kind. We invited performers, scholars of performance, visual artists, lawyers, human rights activists, journalists, and educators to engage with our audience and us. Through conversations and exchange the symposium's design was such that it could examine questions relating to performing reality, both traditional and contemporary, in Indian and Asian performance practices.

## PROJECTS / PROCESSES

Through the year and during the planning of our symposium we oscillated between the terms “Documentary Theatre” and “Theatre of the Real.” This was deliberate on our part, because our workshop series to build audiences (Starting Realities<sup>1</sup>) and the symposium were meant to be sites on and through which to test both these loaded and contested terms. Eventually, we subtitled “Connecting Realities” an enquiry into “Theatre and its Realities”, thus referring to the above described concept of a “Theatre of the Real”. Our use of this reference was grounded in our belief that it has the potential to claim a space for a particular form of theatre that is relatively free of national (or nationalist) theatre historiography. We wanted to turn Carol Martin’s concept of a “theatre of the real” into a framework of a cross-cultural dialogue on a particular form of theatre that takes as its point of departure, real materials in the process of performance making. We particularly wanted to avoid the talk about geographical or culturally anchored terms like “Documentary Theatre” or “Verbatim theatre”, which are founded in their national theatre histories, Germany and United Kingdom respectively.

By reclaiming and reiterating the word and concept of Documentary theatre, in his closing lecture Choudhury offered a resolute substantiation of the term “Documentary Theatre” (often strongly rooted in German history of violence and reflection) by pointing to Indian society which is stratified with the “document” being the privilege of the moneyed and few. Choudhury’s text clearly bears testimony to the fact that our symposium coincided with the onset of the biggest people’s protests in recent Indian history—against the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), that is rooted in the National Registry of Citizens (NRC). Internal migration, natural and man-made disasters particularly affect and target marginalised and displaced populations who will struggle to produce evidence of ancestry. This circumstance became the dominant backdrop of our symposium—that our opening speaker Rustom Bharucha called “a perverse Documentary Theatre of the Sate”. Which thence turned the question around—if and how a revision of the aesthetics and histories of Documentary Theatre could turn into a protest against

the systematic deligitimisation of human existence.

Choudhury's reclaiming of the term and concept of Documentary Theatre challenges current trends especially among Western artists and scholars who disconnect their practices of making or theorising from the word and tradition of "Documentary Theatre". Daniel Wetzels, co-founder of the theatre-label Rimini Protokoll, gave a talk significantly titled "The End of Documentary Theatre" in August 2019 at Goethe-Institut, Mumbai. Further, the very existence of Carol Martins' concept of a "Theatre of the Real" underlines this trend of disconnecting intellectual practices concerned with representing reality from the tradition and vocabulary of Documentary Theatre.

Therefore Soumyabrata Choudhury's closing remarks at *Connecting Realities* brings attention to a certain anxiety connected to the word "Documentary Theatre"; an anxiety we both also have not been free of. What are the origins of this anxiety? To a large extent it might be rooted in certain dominant idioms of critique—such as postcolonial discourse around art histories and poststructuralist assumptions on politics and agency that too easily render art forms as suspicious. Another constitutive element of this anxiety might be the logic of an aesthetic market which is primarily interested in accumulating invention, rather than re-interpreting artistic forms of the past. We see in Choudhury's reading of "Documentary Theatre" a powerful manifestation of what we could call with Rita Felski a mode of postcritical engagement.<sup>2</sup> Instead of giving into a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Felski), Choudhury stresses the cross-temporal potential of Documentary Theatre that enables its practitioners, audiences, and interpreters to bring new things to the light in our contemporary situation. He allows us to imagine what Documentary Theatre can be, if one permits it to unfold. In this regard we want to focus on two aspects of Choudhury's talk.

First, he describes Documentary Theatre not as a genre, but as a movement. In doing so he stresses the interdisciplinarity inherent to this practice of theatre—a unique in-between space constituted

## PROJECTS / PROCESSES

by a large array of different discourses: sciences, arts, journalism etc. Further, the idea of documentary theatre as a movement also emphasises the necessity of kin-making across time and space—without it no artistic practice could evolve, acquire momentum or take a stand against injustice.

Second, Choudhury places the idea of documentary theatre in relation to a mass media society. This concept can be traced back prominently to one of the founding figures of German Documentary Theatre—Peter Weiss, who describes in “The Material and the Models: Notes towards a definition of documentary theatre”<sup>3</sup> an understanding of documentary theatre as an alternative public sphere—within this sphere, Weiss assigns a specific role to performance, namely protesting media violence and its dehumanising effect. Choudhury’s extrapolation of this understanding of Documentary Theatre as a kind of New Media Theatre (theatre with and about new media) is highly relevant to us. Given the new algorithm of reality construction in our age of computation that transforms real experiences into mediated experiences that are stored in databases—the idea of a theatre whose technical and aesthetic commitments are about working with documents and documentation—calls for a revisiting.

We see Choudhury’s closing note as an invitation to such a revisit. His invitation is simultaneous with an understanding of documentation, that one should not identify with a mere inventory of the media induced physical terror, but rather with Heiner Müller’s concept of beauty: understood as a possible end of all terror.



Image of Rustom Bharucha's opening lecture "Questioning the Protocols and Possibilities of Documentary Theatre: A Dramaturgical Perspective" at Connecting Realities. Photograph by The Lumiere Project.

# De-Deciding History

SOUMYABRATA CHOUDHURY

## Towards a Collective Intelligence

Let me start by acknowledging how the magnificent closing performance of the symposium by Ayesha Susan Thomas titled *The Flabby-Breasted Virgin and Other Sordid Tales: A reading of the female body in Indian medical textbooks*<sup>4</sup> makes my task a little easier. I can almost flow into the form of intelligence that this performance has generated, and move through that intelligence for five-seven minutes. In an informal conversation with Kai and Anuja, the chief organisers of this symposium, I had mentioned how I appreciate the way the entire symposium began with a comic spirit of things, even before Rustom Bharucha in his keynote address “Questioning the Protocols and Possibilities of Documentary Theatre: A dramaturgical perspective” made a fantastic introductory clarification of the terrain. Normally, comic would be considered as something which is not serious. Here, I use the word to the contrary. To me, the comic is the most serious form of theater, or it holds the most significant potential of theater. The comic is a form of collective intelligence. This is the aspect that was executed so vividly and realistically in the last performance to my delight, making my task much easier.

Of course, I cannot explore this particular form of intelligence without already moving to another performance. Reflecting upon the performance *Jagar Samtecha*<sup>5</sup> by the Ambedkarite group Yalgaar Sanskrutik Manch, I have to bring up *prabuddh*, which was the word Ambedkar used to denote intelligence in his last work *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. Usually, *prabuddh* is translated as enlightened. I prefer



Still from a performance work-in-progress: "Archipelago Archives Exhibit #o: About Archipelago Archives" by Kiran Kumar at Connecting Realities. Photograph by The Lumiere Project.



Stills from a performance by Ayesha Susan Thomas titled "The Flabby-Breasted Virgin and other sordid tales: A reading of the female body in Indian medical textbooks" at Connecting Realities. Photographs by The Lumiere Project.

the word intelligence because that not only give us a sense of the faculty of light or the metaphor of light, instead, it gives us a sense of doing things with our hands and not just our heads. This establishes that intelligence can be lived and not merely “thought”. So, I would like to translate the word *prabuddh* as intelligence, which was resonating in the music that we saw and heard today in the morning. In my closing notes, I’d like to highlight a few things that especially struck me, among the many exciting ideas I’ve come across during the span of this symposium.

### **From Theatre of the Real to Documentary Theatre**

The first thing is a factual point I would like to consider with respect to this nomenclature of documentary theater. Rustom Bharucha simultaneously provided us with a scholarly, contemporary and lucid understanding of the ground on the first day. He also highlighted that the question of the European origin of the title of documentary theater is actually not merely a label. The term is not merely a slogan: it is indeed a movement. If we are thinking of documentary theater within and beyond this festival, including Kai and Anuja’s long period of work in the field, and the documentary theatre workshop and public talk they organised at JNU during ongoing student strike and protests, then it surely becomes part of some sort of a movement.<sup>6</sup> To begin with let’s agree that documentary theater is neither a slogan nor a genre. It is not even a conceptual or theoretical category; rather, it is a movement. Only under the wide canopy of a movement, can such intelligence, enthusiasm, as well as the extremely sobering and critical attention to detail (that we saw in the closing performance) be salvaged. And this first point, for me, is something that has been building up since the workshop at JNU under the most difficult circumstances.

My second point pertains to a central and dominant, even conventional form of documentary theater and this is the legal or the court form. This relationship of law and documentary theatre was the subject of the first panel titled *Jan Sunawayi / People’s Court-*



Stills from a performance by Yalgaar Sanskrutik Manch titled, “जागर समतेचा, साहिरी जलसा / Jagar Samtecha (The People’s Awakening)” at Connecting Realities.  
Photographs by The Lumiere Project.

*Testimonials as Documentary Practice*<sup>7</sup> that I was part of. Curiously, in the Germany of 1960s, one of the first steps towards a documentary theater movement involved re-opening the court files of certain moments from history: The Second World War, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and most importantly, the genocide of the European Jews, The Auschwitz and so on. Re-opening the archives was the first step of this movement. In that sense, documentary theater contains some sort of an imperative as it asks us to reopen the files. Why does one reopen the files from the past? One does this because many things remain unresolved while the problem persists. The documentary theater is also the theater of problems. Therefore, the initial question arising from this theatre deals with identifying our contemporary problems. At this juncture, let us not excessively concern ourselves with defining a documentary theater. Whatever be this definition, one has to think more about revisiting the document. Surely, no one will dispute that a whole host of problems that appeared to be resolved in the past have suddenly been exposed as unresolved. Under these circumstances, one re-enters the archive and re-reads the document that has been the long-term political rationale of the documentary theater. That is one essential perspective within our own context. The other aspect of this theatre deals with the questions raised in the last panel: the evidentiary question of the real as well as the spatial and temporal context of it. And here and now is not something we can necessarily locate in an exact historical or geographical manner. This is again a problematic real which cannot even be documented as yet. Should one summarise this entire schema in a pedagogical way and title its trajectory as “From Documentary Theater to Theater of the Real”?<sup>8</sup> Well, maybe this schema is useful but I would like to differ with this schematisation a little bit. I would say that the theater of the real is at the very heart of documentary theater. That is the move I would make.

My claim is situated in the emergence of the modern times, in the last fifty years of the documentary theater, on the grounds that the documentary theater takes decisions already made in history as its premise or starting point. Documentary theatre raises and wishes to

## PROJECTS / PROCESSES

answer many restless questions: Who was responsible for Auschwitz? Who was responsible for the Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombings? Who was responsible for the Indian Partition? It attempts to de-decide certain widely accepted decisions, or perhaps “notions” is a better word maybe, of history. That is the first move this theater makes. Does de-deciding great historical chronicles subsequently re-decide history? Of course, it doesn’t. Even if theatre nurses the illusion that it has great powers over citizens, the medium isn’t an adequate place to re-decide the narratives behind the great problems in history. I remember a scene from István Szabó’s film *Mephisto* where the character of the influential actor-hero from Nazi Germany Gustaf Gründgens (played by the Austrian actor Klaus Maria Brandauer) when confronted by the real power of the Nazi officers in an eerie sequence shot in an empty stadium, defends himself by saying “But I am only an actor...”. This line has been emblematic of the delusional power of the theater, its heroes and actors.<sup>9</sup> Following from this, documentary theater must also be necessarily a weak medium. In fact, all intelligence is also a kind of weakness. This sobering weakness in the nature of documentary theater, allows it to de-decide but not re-decide anything. But a whole range of knowledge, intelligence, re-evaluation, and collective critical work opens up within the space of this de-decision and its aftermath. It’s worth noting that this opening up does not necessarily take place only through re-opening the document. A further question must be asked, a question that came up in the panel titled “Archives and Anti-disciplinarity”<sup>10</sup> today, pertaining to the relationship of the document to theater as creative labour. Therefore, let us re-phrase this question within the context of modern theatre where a similar debate came up in Europe during the 1970s: is the dramatic form adequate to performing the documentary? German philosopher Theodor Adorno thought that the dramatic form or the ordinary literary narrative form was not adequate. He was deeply against the documentary theater. But, he did make a crucial comment. Referring to Auschwitz and the genocide of the Jews, he points out how the real of the Holocaust is prohibited to ordinary literature or ordinary literary representation. In a way, the real stands prohibited. We cannot presume to capture the real, while the

document is intrinsically seen as possessing the ambition of capturing reality. But the prohibited real frustrates such an ambition.

### **Media, Space and Closure**

From this, we can deduce the following possibilities: the real might become permanently prohibited. If this does happen, then the real gains the problematic aura of a myth. This leads to the paradox of a historically persecuted community identifying with its victimhood in such a way that it becomes a permanent victim and the victimhood itself changes from a real historical experience to a mythical image. In this regard, the documentary theatre refuses to let the archive be dormant. They disturb the archive, intervene in it and use it. One of the greatest keywords of the archive and the theater is use. Is it vulgar to use something? Is it degraded or is this what an active intelligence is? Is it mainly utilitarian to use or could it be creative? Documentary theater makes these questions concrete and vivid. Between the sixties and now, the movement has shifted out of the dramatic mode and into a space, which the German writer and dramaturge Hans-Thies Lehmann investigates in relation to the “media society”.<sup>11</sup> While drama is supposed to be a medium of representing problems in a bound space, today all dramatic theatre is contaminated by the very mediality of a medium and virtual reality. Instead of the limits of a bound space, it is the outlines of a theatre that becomes ill-defined, theatricality becomes infinite and uncontrollable. While drama is always an incomplete closure, it is nevertheless a closure. After all, the performances that we enjoyed so much were ephemeral, limited and bound by the space we occupied together. So the moment this de-spatialisation happens in a media society, there is indeed a certain constitutive disruption of the traditional dramatic form. Does that mean we abandon documentary theater? This symposium and its performances themselves establish that there is much to be gained, enjoyed and investigated within the realm of documentary theater. Lehmann pertinently analyses the media in contemporary society to be more than a space where we perceive an imitated reality and

## PROJECTS / PROCESSES

arrive at political judgments about it. Instead, it is a space where the very politics of perception stages itself. Currently, the experience of politics is the very experience of the medium itself. Hence, documentary theater doesn't only document theater through the given media (whether lighting, camera, etc.) but the various media themselves become subjects of an auto-documentation, an automatic expression which always seems to be going out of human control. So this limit experience of media society as the experience of an Anthropocene can be contrasted with the conventional dramatic form of the court play or the legal model of a documentary theatre. So, the controlled and governed model of documentation in more traditional forms of theatre has to be counterpointed by this contemporary proliferation of hyper-perceptual loci that describes new and hybrid objects in a way where the medium of description and description itself cannot be distinguished anymore.

### The Heroic Actor

The last point that might be raised concerns the remnants of the traditional heroic figure within the context I have been exploring. During a public talk at the documentary theatre workshop facilitated by Kai Tuchmann and Anuja Ghosalkar at JNU, I attempted to speculate about the existence of the documentary actor. For example, when I watched Geetanjali Kulkarni in the Marathi film *Court*, I reflected to myself how she was a “documentary actor”.<sup>12</sup> To come back to the central question, what is a document? It is a kind of zero degree “object”. The presentation of a document embodied as a gesture and an act of speech is still thought to be a pure objective material meant for our argumentative discussions. In the film *Court*, this is what Geetanjali Kulkarni achieved as an actor. And this has to be explored in an ironic way because Geetanjali was not necessarily enacting the role of a public prosecutor through any Brechtian model of alienation. While she appeared to embody a zero-degree or neutral persona of a generic legal and documentary kind, the character she played was essentially partisan. This public prosecutor was entirely partisan to the State



Stills from a performance by Geetanjali Kulkarni, Hitesh Porje and Sameena Dalwai titled "December 1992" at Connecting Realities. Photographs by The Lumiere Project.



Still from a performance by Ayesha Susan Thomas titled "The Flabby-Breasted Virgin and other sordid tales: A reading of the female body in Indian medical textbooks" at Connecting Realities. Photograph by The Lumiere Project.



## PROJECTS / PROCESSES

apparatus. The neutrality is deceptive, it is ideological.

While knowledge is apparently enclosed in a document as a neutral entity, it is actually always implicated in a partisan subjective position. In the last performance, we witnessed how a so-called neutral Biology textbook could be deeply implicated in a partisan religio-cultural ideological system. In a way, de-decision to de-neutralisation is the desired trajectory that this symposium on documentary theatre places before us. The actor is constantly implicated in this trajectory while being continuously displaced from objective documentary functions to ideological or political subject-positions. This displacement can also be articulated “feministically” and the last performance was a vivid testimony to this. To return to “Jan Sunawayi”, one of the initial panels, it is here that Sameena Dalwai made a very pertinent intervention.<sup>13</sup> She highlighted how we find women’s voices articulating legal situations in very particular forms of narration, testimonies and stories over and above the general and abstract tenor of a legal argument. To me, this aspect of women’s discourse is a way of speaking against and beyond the patriarchal generality of both law and theatre. While we behave as if the law is general and neutral, the legal experience is always particular, and in this case, a woman’s experience. Therefore, all men who experience the particular force of law share a woman’s experience and all women who participate from the side of law as power, essentially have to take on male positions. Again this is a feminist critique of “neutrality” of the legal document and the legal position. Similarly, the question of acting is also a question of transmuting the fundamental position of the actor, which is heroic and male. So, the actress has to be reborn within the logic of the documentary theater in a new way.

This, to me, is a tremendously difficult, exciting and an imminent possibility in the wake of this symposium. To recall the last performance again: I would insist that it was not only a representative performance of the vitality of the festival but also a connective and energetic continuation from the earlier performances. As we arrive at the end of the festival, prepared to leave the city, I will



Image of the panel titled “Archives and Anti-disciplinarity” at Connecting Realities. Photograph by The Lumiere Project.



Image of the panel titled “Jan Sunawayi (People’s Court)—Testimonials as Documentary Practice” at Connecting Realities. Photograph by The Lumiere Project.

## PROJECTS / PROCESSES

carry a connective spark with a community that participated in an experiment of fun and thought. In different ways all of us will carry this feeling as we leave this place. This feeling or this trigger is not merely related to the question of the document; it is as much a feeling about a possible theatre itself. We don't merely summarise the proceedings by speaking of a trajectory from documentary theater to theater of the real. We must also attend to the real of theater itself. The real of theatre concerns us as much as a theater of the real or the documentation of the reality outside. This is no less a problem of documentary theater than that of historical reality.

### Documents of Existence

Having said that, we cannot conclude on this note. Today, here and now the document doesn't belong to the archive, it belongs to the power of the State and to very specific figures representing the State. I would not hesitate to say that the document belongs to Amit Shah, the Home Minister of India. Alternatively, the document today does not carry stamps of anonymous bureaucrats; instead, it carries the stamps of well-known faces, figures, and names. There are new actors, new heroes, and new men of the state. So, it is something we cannot afford to not say. To that extent, we need to tear the document away from some people—without tearing it. Our job then today is to make documents illegal, not as documents of the state, but documents of existence. All existence, I think, is constitutively illegal. No state can ever capture existence, because existence is either too much or too little, too grand, or too weak to be captured. So, in a sense, too intelligent for the State to understand. In the light of this, I would rather not talk about post-documentary theater. To talk of a post-documentary theater would be to cop-out. Instead I will say documentary theatre, only documentary theatre... that is, a theater-to-come.

Thank you very much.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Starting Realities is a series of Documentary Theatre Workshops, curated by Anuja Ghosalkar and Kai Tuchmann, that features proponents of Theatre from across the world. The series started in 2018 and included artists like Zhao Chuan, Boris Nikitin and Rimini Protokoll.

<sup>2</sup> Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Peter Weiss “The material and the models: Notes towards a definition of documentary theatre”, in: *Theatre Quarterly*, no. 1 (1971): 41-43.

<sup>4</sup> Ayesha Susan Thomas’ *The Flabby-Breasted Virgin and Other Sordid Tales: A reading of the female body in Indian medical textbooks* was the final work-in-progress performance shared at Connecting Realities.

<sup>5</sup> Performances by Yalgaar Sanskrutik Manch use the Indian Constitution and varied folk music forms of Maharashtra. Their lyrics ranged from poems of Sant Tukaram Jyotiba Phule to songs about current issues.

<sup>6</sup> From the 10-12 December 2019, Anuja Ghosalkar and Kai Tuchmann conducted a documentary theater workshop with 15 students of the School of Arts & Aesthetics (SAA), JNU. On 11 December, a public talk on the theme of documentary theater was held outside the main SAA building which was attended by several students as well as faculty. The talk was chaired by Soumyabrata Choudhury. The reason the talk was held outside is significant—for the entire duration of this workshop the University was in lockdown and there was no access to rooms because of the ongoing student strike, against the proposed fee hike by administration.

## PROJECTS / PROCESSES

<sup>7</sup> This refers to the panel titled, *Jan Sunawayi / People's Court-Testimonials as Documentary Practice*, in which overlaps between the Jan Sunawayi form and the theatre were reflected on—especially documentary theatre. In addition to Prof. Choudhury this panel included: Zuleikha Chaudhari, Sameena Dalwai and Arvind Narrain.

<sup>8</sup> Carol Martin, *Theatre of the Real* (Palgrave Macmillan: 2013).

<sup>9</sup> *Mephisto*, directed by István Szabó (1981), 2 hours 25 minutes.

<sup>10</sup> Here Prof. Choudhury is referring to the panel which brought together the artistic practices of the research engineer-archivist Venkat Srinivasan, the visual artist- researcher Ranjit Kandalgaonkar and of the performer-director Amitesh Grover.

<sup>11</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> *Court*, directed by Chaitanya Tamhane (2015), 1 hour 56 minutes. Geetanjali Kulkarni played the role of the public prosecutor in this film was also a part of the documentary theater symposium Connecting Realities, where she and her collaborator Sameena Dalwai performed a new piece “December 1992”.

<sup>13</sup> Sameena Dalwai was part of the panel on *Jan Sunawayi / People's Court-Testimonials as Documentary Practice*.

## Biographies

**Anuja Ghosalkar** is the founder of Drama Queen—a Documentary theatre company, evolving a unique form of theatre in India since 2015. Her practice focuses on personal histories, archival absences, and blurring the hierarchies between audience and performer—to extend the idea of theatre to create audacious work.

Iterations around form and process, modes of (social) media, sites, technologies, reclaiming narratives on gender and intimacy are critical to her performance making and pedagogy.

As artist-in-residence at Art Lab Gnesta, Sweden she created her debut show, *Lady Anandi* which travelled extensively across India, and showcased independently in Berlin and Stockholm. Her performances and workshops have been programmed by University of Oxford, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Serendipity Arts Festival, National Centre for Biological Sciences, Forum Transregionale – ZMO, First Post, Kerala Museum, FLAME University among others. Anuja is the co-curator of the international workshop series on Documentary Theatre with her German collaborator—that programmed artists like Boris Nikitin, Rimini Protokoll, Zhao Chuan, and Gobsquad. As visiting faculty at Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology since 2016, she leads practice-based pedagogy. In the past, she was programme officer at India Foundation for the Arts, film programmer for Experimenta and India researcher for University of Westminster. She is an Art Think South Asia Fellow (2017-18) and has written on film and performance for *Nang Magazine*, *Art India*, *Bioscope*, *Hakara*, *Scroll*, and *Ladies Finger*.

## PROJECTS/PROCESSES

**Kai Tuchmann** is a director and dramaturge whose theatre works circle around the very specific relationship that theatre claims with events in the real world. In this context Kai is interested in theatre's division between spectators and performers—which turns theatre into a paradigmatic site of reality construction. His works engage in particular with the question of how technologies of theatre, ranging from acting techniques to the utilisation of new media in performance, contribute to the production of truth claims and reality effects. Kai is developing his approach of theatre in close collaboration with artists from China and India. His stagings and dramaturgies were invited, among others, to I Dance Hong Kong, Seoul Marginal Theatre Festival, Zürcher Theaterspektakel, Kunstfest Weimar, Festival d'Automne à Paris, Wuzhen Theatre Festival, Asia Society New York, and OCAT Shenzhen. Thematically, these works examine, among other things, the afterlife of the Cultural Revolution in present-day China, the effects of urban development on the population of migrant workers, and the application of digital technologies.

Kai studied Directing at Drama Academy Ernst Busch, Berlin. He is a member of Beijing's Central Academy of Drama – Dramaturgy Faculty, where he develops, together with Li Yanan, the curriculum for the first Dramaturgy program in Asia. He has taught and lectured at Beijing University, University of California Santa Cruz, Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi. Currently he is a Fulbright Scholar at The Graduate Center, City University New York. Kai published articles and chapter contributions on dramaturgy and documentary theatre in several books (eg. for Routledge and the Brecht Yearbook) and he has written for *Theatre Times* and the German weekly *Der Freitag*.

**Soumyabrata Choudhury** is Associate Professor at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharal Nehru University. He has previously taught at CSSSC, Kolkata, and has been a fellow at CSDS, Delhi and IAS, Shimla. Choudhury is the author of *Theatre, Number, Event: Three Studies on the Relationship between Sovereignty, Power and Truth* (2013) and *Ambedkar and Other Immortals: An Untouchable Research Programme* (2018). His latest book is *Now It's Come To Distances: Notes on Coronavirus and Shaheen Bagh, Association and Isolation* (2020). He has also acted and directed in a number of performances across the country for the last thirty years. His latest performance was an adaptation of Franz Kafka's story *A report to the Academy* at the Expression Lab, Pune, in July 2019.

## PROJECTS / PROCESSES

Projects / Processes 2019

Who's Afraid of Documentary Theatre?

by Anuja Ghosalkar & Kai Tuchmann

De-Deciding History by Soumyabrata Choudhury

Series Editor: Senjuti Mukherjee

Managing Editor: Nandita Jaishankar

Copy editor: Arushi Vats

Cover design: Aman Srivastava

Layout: Aman Srivastava & Mallika Joshi

Projects/Processes as an initiative is conceptualised and supported by Mr. S. K. Munjal, Founder Patron, Serendipity Arts Foundation and Ms. Smriti Rajgarhia, Director, Serendipity Arts Foundation.

Text ©Serendipity Arts Foundation and the Author. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any manner without written permission from the Publisher, except in the context of reviews. Images ©Serendipity Arts Festival, unless stated otherwise.

Published by



**SERENDIPITY**  
**ARTS** MUNJAL INITIATIVE  
FOR CREATIVITY

Serendipity Arts Foundation

264, Okhla Industrial Estate

New Delhi 110020

Tel: +91 11 49044659

For more information, visit [www.serendipityarts.org](http://www.serendipityarts.org) and  
[www.serendipityartsfestival.com](http://www.serendipityartsfestival.com)



# PROJECTS

/

# PROCESSES

Who's Afraid of Documentary  
Theatre?

/ Anuja Ghosalkar & Kai Tuchmann

De-Deciding History

/ Soumyabrata Choudhury



SERENDIPITY  
ARTS  
FESTIVAL