

# Ontological Crisis of Theatre

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*“How hard is it, when everything encourages us to sleep, though we may look about us with conscious, clinging eyes, to wake and yet look about us as in a dream, with eyes that no longer know their function and whose gaze is turned inward.”*

- Antonin Artaud, 1958

It's been more than hundred days; the world is gloomily struck by the pandemic called COVID-19. The only way to live with this pandemic is through social distancing or physical distancing. The world is facing several crises, be it medical, agrarian, migration or financial deficit. Crushed under the weight of this essential crisis is the ontological crisis of theatre. Theatre has been the sole purpose of existence for many, who, during this pandemic are struggling with existential crisis and staring into a foggy future<sup>1</sup>. The world of theatre has forced shut its doors to its artists, keeping the governmental policies in mind. A dark cloud of fear and uncertainty threatens the existence of the theatre community. Theatre being

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1 On 24 March 2020, the Government of India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi ordered a nationwide lockdown for 21 days, limiting movement of the entire 1.3 billion population of India as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 pandemic in India. (Gettleman, Jeffrey, and Schultz 2020) It was ordered after a 14-hour voluntary public curfew on 22 March, followed by the enforcement of a series of regulations in the country's COVID-19 affected regions. The lockdown was placed when the number of confirmed positive coronavirus cases in India was approximately 500. However, the lockdown for performing arts began much earlier than the rest of the sectors. From March 13 2020, Chief Minister of Maharashtra Uddhav Thackeray announced that the government has invoked the Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897 to tackle the virus outbreak and Theatres, gyms to be shut in Mumbai along with five other cities in Maharashtra over coronavirus until further notice. From 13th March 2020 until now stages are empty, devoid of any shows or even rehearsals; the ghost light is left on for the stage in the hope that one day artist and audience would return to the theatre.

a highly individually artistic effort, is a cluster of both unorganised and organised theatre groups. From amateur to highly professional ones, from ticketed to free sponsored shows, be it at the rural or urban level; are now standing on a continuously shifting precipice. This paper attempts to look at the ontological crisis of theatre to thrive in the rapidly 'digitizing world' and the impossibility to adapt to the new form of 'virtual world'. The paper in the first section: Osmosis of Theatre looks at the shifting grounds of theatre in times of lockdown during COVID-19 and examines the 'shared experience' of theatre. In the second section: Theatre and Being, the paper explores the dilemma of the artists and their existential crisis without the art of theatre making. And in the third section: Visual and the Visceral, the paper sheds light upon the visual and experiential elements of theatre audience that are transcending the role of written theatre.

## **Osmosis of Theatre**

*"The message from the industry is clear. If grassroots theater dies, what else dies with it?"*

*(Lewis, 2020)*

"Theatre is about being together, being in community together, experiencing stories together," Simon Godwin, the artistic director at the Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, D.C. told ABC News (Parks, 2020). The only remedy prescribed to fight this virus so far, has been an end to socializing. This raises the question for existence of theatre, artist and the innumerable people associated with this art form. With COVID-19 declared as a pandemic, social distancing being thrust upon the citizens by every country, the theatres have shut down with no economic package to combat this merciless decision. In India, no recognition is given to the art form that is serving people even in the current lockdown situation. It is merely considered as time pass or an entertaining mechanism over digital platforms. Although, in a country like Germany, a press release shared

by the ministry of culture reports in Frankfurter Allgemeine<sup>2</sup>, a staggering €50 billion (\$54 billion) in backing will be provided specifically to small businesses and freelancers, including those from the cultural, creative, and media sectors. Grütters emphasized that many artists have shown particular creative power in the crisis, which reached the audience with the help of digital technology - "We couldn't have stimulated these many new ideas on the net with the cleverest of programs." She had the impression that "very many have now directly understood the importance of culture". Culture is not a location factor and not a luxury that you can only afford in good times: "Culture is an expression of humanity." If this has seeped in German minds, we are far away from any such thought. The Ministry of Culture has been absolutely silent with regards to performing arts, as if it is the last thing to think about. In India efforts have been made by independent organizations<sup>3</sup> and they are doing whatever they can in their capacity, to support the theatre artistes. However, the industry is way too large in India and, the 'new normal' for performing arts is distant, almost invisible.

While imagining the new normal concerning the performing arts, the question remains - Will it ever open? If yes, when? Would there be hundreds of us sitting in an auditorium in the dark, sharing the experience of a collective reality, an imaginary world as real as outside? When will it be that we will spend time together, rehearsing and creating performance pieces? Or, are we imagining an auditorium where the audience pass through thermal scanning and, are allowed only with masks and gloves? Will we be able to have the same experience of theatre as we did then, with audience wearing masks? Theatre is an emotional exercise where stories are shared, that compels people to laugh, to cry, to reflect on life and provoke their status quo. This emotional exercise is possible when the

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2 "The scene is affected as much as possible," said Grütters (CDU) to the "RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland" (Tuesday). The damage caused by more than 80,000 cancelled events alone is estimated at 1.25 billion euros. She hopes that with the aid package passed by the Federal Cabinet on Monday "everyone will survive," said Grütters.

3 A small group of independent artistes and individuals working with the arts namely, Aneesh Pradhan (musician and scholar) , Arundhati Ghosh (cultural practitioner), Mona Irani (producer & casting director), Rahul Vohra (actor, director & arts consultant), Sameera Iyengar (cultural practitioner) and Shubha Mudgal (musician) has come up with a plan to raise Rs. 35 lakhs through a campaign titled ADAA (Assistance for Disaster Affected Artistes). Other than AIDAA , Prasad Kambli is working towards gathering donations for supporting the Marathi Theatre makers and technicians. There are several such independent efforts made to support the artists at an individual level. However, there is no initiative from the Government of India.

audience reacts through silence, cough, eyes, gestures, facial expressions and bodily reactions. These minute reactions of the audience in the dark silent room, echoes to the performers performing the piece. The performer decodes them like an osmosis of sensual experiences and paces, heightens, accelerates, pauses, adjusts the performance to suit that particular audience as if, it's a language of theatre – only understood by those present there.

Theatre is not static, nor is every day the same show. Theatre rediscovers itself every day, in a way unlike yesterday with its making and unmaking of language, style and form so as to touch the audience like never before. Will it be the same to run a performance with the audience wearing masks or will it look like a dystopian theatre of crony capitalist era? Also, who will risk running a show and who will come to watch it? Who will dictate the terms to run a performance and most importantly, when? And till then, whenever that happens exists the 'now'. Is there a 'now' for theatre workers?

Theatre was possible because people could come together, a group of people telling stories to another one, usually the audience listening to it, watching them. Theatre is an art form that brings people together to celebrate, think, shed collective tears, laugh infectiously, challenge and provoke their ideologies. Needless to say, that theatre is an immemorial art or, probably it could be dated back to the Greeks, 6th Century B.C. In late 14 Century. Theatre <sup>4</sup> was defined as an "open air place in ancient times for viewing spectacles and plays," from Old French *theatre* (12c., Modern French *théâtre*), and directly from Latin *theatrum* "play-house, theatre; stage; spectators in a *theatre*" (source also of Spanish, Italian *teatro*), from Greek *theatron* "theatre; the people in the theatre; a show, a spectacle," literally "place for viewing," from *theasthai* "to behold" (related to *thea* "a view, a seeing; a seat in the theatre," *theates* "spectator") +- *tron*, suffix denoting place". (Etymonline n.d.) Theatre is seeing in a specific space – a space that is ritualized and has its own norms. Theatre brought people together. It was the only place where the higher and lower caste, upper and lower class boundaries were blurred and all were equal in this space. "Theatre is the place people come to see the truth about life and the social situation. The theatre is a spiritual and social

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4 "Index", Etymonline, Accessed May 2, 2020 ,[www.etymonline.com/word/theatre](http://www.etymonline.com/word/theatre).

X-ray of its time. The theatre was created to tell people the truth about life and the social situation". (Adler 2001)

The ritual of coming together is an integral part of theatre. Theatre is not possible without an audience. The artist creating a theatre piece finds its meaning only in the presence of the audience. Theatre is ephemeral, there is nothing that remains the same. The act is momentary, unique and limited; it's there for a moment and vanishes in the other. Nothing is repetitive and every performance is different. If theatre is so organic and so ritualistic, how is it possible to replicate it to any other form but live performance?

Theatre is a shared reality, whatever happens in the auditorium is as much personal, as social. The audience member finds the experiences of the actors to be subjective and sheds tears to the tragedy of the protagonist. The tragedy of the protagonist and the agony of the individual are no more personal as theatre transcends the personal and underneath the subjectivity of the expression, there lies an objectivity of cohesion in the audience. The lines of performance are blurred, no sooner the audience finds themselves entangled in the web of the story, forgetting their identity and where they belong to.

Theatre provides as escapism, from our everyday reality into another world where one reflects and contemplates. Theatre provides alternate perspectives, meanings and the deconstruction of lived reality. It provides to the artist experiences of the unlived lives through the characters they play. Theatre becomes a vibrational space, where the audience and actor feed on each other's energy and precisely the reason why this won't be possible in any other medium but live performance. Theatre is live, and that's very important. Is it possible to create this live experience through digital platforms? Theatre is amongst the oldest art forms that has survived until now, though it was predicted to die with the beginning of the television era, the waves in cinema, the rise of internet and finally the digital platforms growing on an unprecedented scale. Despite all this, theatre persisted. The world over it's more than hundred days, since the theatres have shut, the question is distressing - what about these theatre artists and the

art? The question only leaves us staring into a void<sup>5</sup>.

## Theatre and 'Being'

Since human beings started to live in communities, they felt an innate desire to communicate, to share their stories, things that they understood. Therefore, stories, myths and legends were passed through oral literature and hero stones. Nomadic life moved to settled agriculturalist and finally building urban spaces. The passion to tell stories, to share experiences survived and then were taken to the stage. From the need to communicate, to share concerns of the state, was born the Greek theatre. Stories came to stage and all that remained throughout was the act of 'ritual'.

Theatre is a form not only limited to self-expression but, it is an act of purgation of the soul. The artist and the audience, both are part of a cathartic process of living an experience that is equally sublime and thought provoking. Through living that experience, the artist is able to liberate himself in such a space. Stage of Theatre is the only possible space which makes it possible to live such an experience, for the artist and the audience. In the shared space of theatre, the rules and regulations are unlike the real world, it's a place where dreams, memories, fantasies, incomplete thoughts, actions unimagined and thoughts uncensored manifest to a live audience by providing everyone present with the opportunity to live the 'unlived life'.

Real life deprives us of the possibility of rehearsals and the opportunity to tread upon paths, to experiment life freely without the angst of consequences involved, behind every choice that we make. Theatre becomes this safe playground to trust the co-workers and the audience, to go on such a journey of experimentation,

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5 'Even today, there are more than 1,500 play performances in a month in the four main languages: Hindi, English, Gujarati and Marathi (you can now add Telugu, Kannada and Konkani to this list). This beats the monolingual theatre culture of New York or London or Berlin, hands down. The top Marathi and Gujarati plays net Rs.2.5 lakh at the box office for a single show,' stated Ramu Ramanathan in an article in Livemint in 2015. It's been more than 90 days, since theatres shut down in Maharashtra, the question is distressing what about these 3000 play performances? If this question is extended to India, the question leaves us staring into a void.

living different lives otherwise unimaginable (in real) and to fulfil the void of real life. In such a way, theatre becomes a space of emotional healing for the artist and the audience, as it makes them feel liberated from the burden of un-lived lives, at least momentarily, if not forever. Theatre makes existence bearable.

“When I live I do not feel myself live. But when I act, it is then that I feel myself exist”. (Artaud 1976) “Artaud felt that his true self had been stolen at birth due to the eternally changing and unfolding nature of time, yet, he felt that theatre could provide a totality and unity to life that has been otherwise lost.” (Johnston 2006) Theatre to Artaud and to the theatre artists today, is a space to feel alive and liberated. Without this space, life becomes monotonous, dictated, repetitive and largely meaningless. The world of randomness and absurdity found its expression in theatre. Theatre is largely a project of meaning, making in highly absurd, and a world which we call real. It is the world of theatre that instead of telling us ‘how to be’, lets us embrace the quality of ‘being as we are’ and, with the ‘possibility of knowing the being’.

‘Being’ which was misunderstood for a long time, as a static thing separated from the world and consciousness, came under phenomenological gaze in the early 20th century and has been reinterpreted by Husserl, Garfinkel, Stumpf, Schutz and Heidegger. With the renewed understanding of consciousness in Phenomenology and questioning of ‘Realism’ in theatre by the 20th century theatre makers such as Artaud, Vesovold, Maiakovskii, Leman, Ionesco and many others, theatre was becoming more visual and less textual, more absurd and less real, more dreamlike and less life like characters. Theatre was becoming a space for liberating the ‘self’ which was becoming sluggish, mechanical and inhuman in the age of capitalism. Artaud wanted to return a sense of ‘Being’ through the potency and force of theatre. Beckett embraced the absurd, toned down the language and, was more interested in talking about the ‘Self’ in his plays.

“Heidegger’s compound term ‘Being-in-the-world’ (*In-der-Welt-sein*), which is an indispensable characteristic of *Dasein*, emphasises the fundamental unity between what is called the self, the world and time.” (Johnston, 2006) Heidegger’s ‘Being-in-the-world’ comes closer to explaining the sociability of theatre where, the ‘live’ is necessary. Without the stage/theatre the artist can’t exist. It is only

within the performing space that the artists exist. Without theatre, there is no artist who can experience the existence of the performer/character. Without the artist, the art ceases to exist and becomes a nostalgia of the past (like it is now when theatre is non-existent). “Heidegger wanted to uncover Being—the experience of *Dasein* as intimately entwined with the world. In this sense, one might interpret Artaud’s vision for the theatre as a practical investigation of ‘Being’”. (Johnston 2006)

The real world is absurd, plagued by instability, irrationality and insane logic of sciences. Everything in this real world is beyond our control and we are merely creatures of limited free will, meant to suffer and participate in the random logic of this world. Theatre is a place where we can release those forces to alter life itself. “The theatre is the unique moment of expression felt, not by the intellect in clear and rational thought, rather it is experienced in a bodily and sensuously immanent way in the theatre space itself.” (Artaud 1976) The theatre space is crucial for transformation of the person into the performer and, of the clerk or a sales executive sitting in the audience, into a participative spectator to experience the synesthetic of ‘Being-there-in-the-moment’. These theatrical spaces are meticulously designed to make such an experience possible. The designation and creation of such places is highly a charged matter. “Greek tragedy originated in religious sites, around the altars to the God Dionysus. Japanese Kabuki theatre, by contrast, originated in the dry riverbeds of Kyoto, a place of disrepute. In London, the Globe Theatre, along with most other theatres, was forced to take residence outside the City of London on the South Side of the Thames.” (Lagaay et al. 2014) In Mumbai, Traditional Theatres were often located in proximity to the railway station, so that they were easily accessible to the working class patrons. Theatre is this embodied space, which transported the performer and the patron into a world of memories, dreams, distant past and even future. “Physical presence is part of the essence of theatre; so is occupying a common space”, (Hughes 2020) All experiences lived in the theatre qualify as ‘being there’ from an embodied perspective, and replication of this experience of embodiment of space, isn’t possible outside the ‘theatre space’. The theatre is precisely a place for making meaning from experiences whilst giving value, pleasure, insight and potential transformation to our everyday lives. In such a process, we (humans) come to see ourselves not as ‘things’, but as beings with unique qualities of Being

and existence. The virtual medium isn't the world of theatre <sup>6</sup>, it's another world and therefore the theatre artists are unable to fit themselves as 'being-in-the-virtual-theatre'. Further, accepting no difference between art and existence, Antonin Artaud stated that "If I am a poet or an actor, it's not so I can write or recite poetry, it's so I can live it." (Artaud 1958) Theatre therefore is existence and when it ceases to exist, it slides down into a black hole, putting the lives of all those who participate in this art at stake into a void of non-existence wiping their dreams, memories, thought; in-short 'their life'.

## The Visual and the Visceral

If 20th century started grappling with 'Being-in-the-theatre-world' in the approaches of phenomenology, performance studies and pedagogical changes in theatre, it also witnessed the rise of visual language in theatre while the power of written word was becoming obscure. Along with Meyerhold, other directors developed approaches that advanced visual imagery, the dominance of non-verbal over word and descriptiveness, the use of decorative design as a way of expressing the emotional state of the characters and the atmosphere. "The naturalistic theatre has conducted a never-ending search for the fourth wall which has led it into a whole series of absurdities. The theatre fell into the hands of fabricants who tried to make everything 'just like real life', and turned the stage into some sort of antique shop." (Meyerhold 1969) If Meyerhold found the stage to be some sort of antique shop filled with properties and set design belonging to an ossified time period, then Ionesco found language, as limiting the experience of the viewer.

"As our knowledge becomes separated from life, our culture no longer contains

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6 Most of the artists, rather almost all in India are paid as per the number of play performances. With no revenue for the last three months, a handful of the actors who were capable to learn the digital technology did create a play or two at home and some read poems, nazms, short stories and plays online. Some of these digital performances were ticketed through insider or bookmyshow and some were free. However, most of them who used this platform were veteran actors from Hindi, Marathi and English theatre. Many of theatre companies from Maharashtra remain silent in the hope of returning to real stage one day. There are thespians who have no choice but to pause for now and there are those who are finding alternative ways to make and spread theatre. There are artists who are gearing to package tools of theatre to suit the new mediums, but how long would it be successful, only time can tell!

ourselves (or only insignificant part of ourselves), for it forms a 'social' context into which we are not integrated. So, the problem becomes that of bringing our life back into contact with our culture, making it a living culture once again. To achieve this, we shall first have to kill 'the respect for what is written down in black and white' ..... To break up our language so that it can be put together again in order to re-establish contact with 'the absolute', or, as I should prefer to say, 'with multiple reality'; it is imperative to 'push human beings again towards seeing themselves as they really are". (Ionesco 1958) There was a shift in the communication form, and stark visuals came to be used in theatre to communicate something which the spoken word would kill with its constitution. Absurd Theatre, Theatre of Cruelty, Immersive Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, Performance Art, Expressionist Theatre and Physical Theatre were creating a visual vocabulary in place of the written one or to enhance the minimal verbal communication. Written and spoken language was becoming a barrier, more than a means of communication. Language was concealing rather than revealing, very often the act of labelling, defining, constituting with written word was widening the gap of 'what is being said' to 'what is to be said'. The word, which became "not a strong enough tool to reveal inner dialogue" (Meyerhold 1969) was replaced with plastic movement. It was the pattern of the actors' movements, which formed the scene that helped the spectator not only to observe the development of the plot, but also to delve into the subtext. Theatre was moving towards becoming a synesthetic experience from a cognitive or intellectual one. It was attempting to discuss the 'being' and language was falling short of it.

Visual vocabulary came to use in myriad ways to reveal the subtext of what was embedded between the lines. Gestural hieroglyphics came to be used as means of communicating the unsaid and unspoken territories of the unconscious. Scenography was developing in different theatre practices across the world. Theatre makers such as Tadeusz Kantor, Peter Handke, Sergei Eisenstein and many others worked in creating a visual sensory experience in the shared space. Their work formed the approaches, where the distance between the visible and verbal expression, the importance of visual imagery as a sense-making element of the performance increased significantly, and the stage elements acquired the qualities of a character. Spontaneity was favoured and artists' bodies found as much importance as their voice. There was a strong urge to do away with

making theatre that is highly verbose as, often verbal theatre failed to explain the absurd, the ephemeral and the visceral. “Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems only to destroy everything interesting; that is, all that is great and important? (As it were, all the buildings, leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble.) What we are destroying is nothing but house of cards, and we are clearing up the ground of language on which we stand.” (Wittgenstein 1958) Theatre is therefore, not only a pre-mediated and carefully written dramatic play, but also an experience of embodied space felt through various sensual, visual and visceral ways. One of the most important features of such performances is the marked shift of focus from the actor playing the role or a character on the stage, to the experience of a shared social reality/space, the collective experience of ‘being-in-the-theatre’. “This is the anxiety that roils and percolates, mixed with all the sadness and futility. What theatre people do is put on a show; what audience members do is gather. It’s ritual; it’s reflex. It is also, in any conventional sense, largely inoperable right now”. (Hughes 2020)

Is it possible to create this ‘shared experience’ of the ‘sublime and the visceral’ through digital platforms? Is it possible to create the ambience of live theatre through live streaming? Is it possible to feel the same shared reality with live telecast? Is it possible to transmit the silence of an auditorium, the pregnant pauses, the beauty of breath, via virtual platforms? Is it possible to take the spectator on an inner voyage with online theatre? Is it to say that Cine Plays don’t work and something is inherently wrong with live streaming of plays, be it on National or International scale? “I think for those who can watch it online, I think it’s a good thing, but, it’s kind of like, watching a movie on TV is great, but going to a movie theatre is exceptional and then you go to live theatre is the greatest. I mean, you see everybody, action, live, all the mistakes, everything, you see it 3D. It’s awesome and there’s just to me the pinnacle of an experience of entertainment is the theatre” says Ric Stiegman, board member of Stained Glass Theatre. (Rivera 2020) The online platforms of the digital world are not equipped to provide the shared space that theatre space did, where objects become characters and human beings participate in a process of freeing themselves from the shackles of uncontrolled reality. The collective participation on digital platforms lacks the cohesive spirit that is created in the physical - psychic theatre space. Digital platforms provide anonymity to the viewers rather than

solidarity. Therefore, theatre for its very own reason of being (*Dasein*) a shared space will not be malleable enough to suit digital platforms. It's an art form and a business that depends on creating emotional experiences for those present in the space. Arts journalist Laura Collins-Hughes laments on the death of theatre. She describes her experience of watching the filmed version of Hamilton as “The Hamilton <sup>7</sup> movie, a thrilling and democratizing testament to the power of stage performance, can't capture the soul of theatre, because that soul lives in the room”. (Hughes 2020)

Theatre is a living organism and it is a social body formed by hundreds of those collected in theatre, thinking and reflecting at the same time, to the same experience in a similar and yet unique way. Theatre is a live experience, a breathing art, a sacred space and the truth is that none of this can be replicated, adjusted or altered in any form to suit digital media. The lungs of this organism are interconnectedness, without this socializing, theatre will find it difficult to breathe. Theatre is a language of the body, the voice, the gestures, a magic spell woven by the human soul and only comprehensible to all those present in that sacred space. This magic of theatre cannot be created on digital platforms. Even when it comes to films, the festival director of Cannes Film Festival Thierry Fremaux is absolutely hesitant and says it's impossible to move to the digital platform. He believes “Directors of ‘films’ are driven by the idea of showing their movies on a big screen and sharing them with others at events like festivals, not for their works to end up on an iPhone” (Keslassy 2020)

With an uncertain future and the unending lockdown, the theatre fraternity like others, are finding it impossible to comprehend even the present. Theatre is a live art and nothing is living anymore. Theatre companies can't pay their people for work they have not done. Also, do theatre companies in India have capital?

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7 Hamilton is the musical premiered on Broadway in 2015. A filmed version of it is streaming on Disney+.

Therefore, it's becoming impossible to not lay off people to preserve capital <sup>8</sup>. The concern is to be able to find these artists and resources who simply believe in passion and give their best of abilities to make theatre possible. There are innumerable folk theatre groups of Jatra, Bharud, Dashavatar, Tamasha, Kathakali, Theeyam, Pandavani, Yakshagana, Maanch, Nautanki, Bhavaai, Bhaona, Swang, etc and innumerable small theatre companies in the metropolitan cities of the country who have zero capital and function on the basis of per show. Michael Strickland, founder of the Lighting Production Company, best puts it: "Each day I discover that few people understand that live entertainment production firms and their people are sitting at zero income." (Rivero 2020)

## **Towards a Faint Future**

"So, it's not overdramatic to speak of grief, a freighted word that we associate most with death, but that is simply the sorrow that comes with heavy loss. For some of us who depend on the theatre for sustenance – creative, spiritual, economic, all of the above – that is the term to describe what we feel in this time of limbo". (Hughes 2020) The impact of COVID-19 lockdown on the society is unprecedented and nobody can say precisely when we will return to normal public life. The lockdown time of COVID-19 has plagued the world of theatre with uncertainty and dense foggy future. If human is a social animal and social distancing is the new normal, without the social what's left is only animal. Theatre is possible because of the coming together of people. Even if social distancing norms are followed, a show cannot run for one third of the auditorium capacity. Theatre always served a platform to talk about injustice. Although, theatre is an art form to express the abject poverty, grief, injustice and alienation, today theatre itself

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8 On the scale of large theatre festivals, the organisers of the 15th edition of the Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards (META) announced that the festival, slated to take off in March 2020 to be been postponed. Similarly, the Akhil Bharatiya Natyaparishad announced via a widely circulated official communiqué, that this year's Marathi Natya Sannelan has been postponed. As far as the world is concerned, Experts predict that COVID-19 will cut US\$12 billion out of the entertainment industry in the United States alone. Global entertainment giant Cirque du Soleil shut down 44 shows worldwide and will not reopen until January 2021. Covid 19 has far reaching impacts on Indian theatre and the world at large. However, with UK and US the coping mechanisms are different. The National Theatre London has moved on to livestreaming plays free on Youtube and seeking donations. So is the case with Complicite, Schaubühne, Plays in the House, Martha Dance Company, Irish Repertory theatre, The Metropolitan Opera, etc. Some of them are offering it free for viewing and some are ticketed ranging from 10\$ to 25\$.

suffers from an inexpressible syndrome. The artist is left feeling an emptiness, a void about the future, and an anxiety about the probability of one. COVID-19 is an epistemological crisis of the contemporary world and an ontological crisis of theatre. Though there is also a possibility of a virtual theatre, once the live element is taken out, it ceases to be theatre; it will be a newer form for a newer medium. Very possibly, it can be cost effective medium to create theatre, where producers don't need to worry if the auditorium will go full house. Also, the audience might find it convenient to sit at home and enjoy this new theatre without having to wade through traffic of the maximum city, saving time, energy and probably even ticket cost. Theatre artists might start packaging new theatre for these newer times. But 'for how long', is a question that none can answer or predict for now. Also, 'being-in-the theatre' loses its existence without the theatre space. The shared experience of living the un-lived life no more exists; making life a tedious affair with the abject absurdity of the world relegates us to confinements and caged existence. Further, theatre isn't only about actors, it's a life lived in the shadows: thankless, unseen, and hidden away in the process of making a play. From set designers, to makeup artists, musicians, costume designers, backstage, logistics team, graphic artists, director, writer, scenographer, dancers, light-person and several innumerable people who multitask in this resource deprived art form, making the most of whatever they could find, are drowned in financial worry and loneliness. For an art form that thrives on collaboration, the very act of socially distancing from people is an act of severing their umbilical cord to the world. It's not just theatre, it's a living ecosystem. Distancing is depriving them of their living existence, 'being-in-the-theatre' thus, creating an ontological crisis of theatre. Poetry, Painting, Writing, Composing Music are largely individual arts that can continue in isolation. But theatre exists because of the world that we inhabit, and theatre is possible because it is a collaborative art which can only happen 'in being with others / the world'.

To conclude, theatre which is not just utterances of written word and scripted dramas but, rather a sensory experience which has no place to take shape in digital form. Theatre is a fresco in motion and is made on a stage in such a way that it cannot be moved. The 'Last Judgement of Michelangelo' can be seen at home in printed form or on a computer screen or even in 360 VR but, is it the same experience as seeing it in person at the Sistine Chapel? Theatre is a breathing and

living art made up of life. This fresco cannot be moved anywhere else. We can only hope for the interconnectedness of beings once again. Time and again we could be filled with grief over our losses and enraged by the apathetic nature of political leaders, but once again we must together, dream of a shared reality, for there could be a beacon of hope that pierces through that void, in the belief that when all this is over, we shall be all dressed up in the most intoxicating colours, on a phantasmagorical set and performing to an invigorating audience.

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