

セミナー終了後に、シャクティダランさんのレクチャー英語版を、協力のネリダ・ランドさんが採録したものです。研修の一助になればと考え、掲載いたします。

① 9月16日（金） Day1 16th Sep.

[It's] lovely to meet everyone on Zoom, and it's a great privilege to be able to talk to you all about this play and be part of how it gets introduced to Japan. I just want to begin by acknowledging the traditional country that I'm on, which is the land of the Wangal clan of the Dharug nation. That's the Aboriginal country that I'm on. And there's an idea among the Aboriginal people of Australia of The Dreaming, which is an incredibly powerful concept that the world ceases to exist if we don't tell stories about it. And I love this idea because it means that storytelling is part of our caretaker role of this planet, and that's a concept that's been around for over 75,000 years here, and I'm not sure that we've come up with a better one than that since. And I think it's a good question to return to in our artistic practice: do the stories that we tell take good care of the place we're in? It's a question I'll return to later in the talk.

(VIDEO)

That was some images from "Counting and Cracking" from our first season in 2019 in Sydney.

My whole adult life, my uncle has been asking me to get a real job. I'm Sri Lankan Tamil heritage, and in our community it's quite unusual to have someone be an artist as their job. And we're supposed to be achieving our economic potential, particularly if we're smart, and being an artist is not the best way to do that.

When "Counting and Cracking" opened in 2019, my uncle came to opening night, and when this play finished about four generations of a Sri Lankan-Australian family, he was the first person to stand up and applaud. This wasn't necessarily a "proud uncle" moment. In my community, praise is not very common, and criticism is rather common. So him standing up is a really big deal, and in that moment his ideas of what was culturally and economically possible in Australia were turned on their head. And after 15 years of asking me the same question every week, he hasn't asked me to get a real job since he's seen the show. I find this really interesting because a story made that change in him. I'm not sure anything else in this world

can change people in the same way. It's a unique power we have to fundamentally change a person's idea of what is possible after a few hours in a dark space being entertained.

“Counting and Cracking” was also economically successful in the sense that it sold out before opening night, and the people who came to the show were from many different walks of life. Theatre lovers came, but also many people from the Sri Lankan community of Australia who had never gone to the theatre before. But also many different people came who don't normally go to the theatre – school teachers, and doctors, and bankers, and trades people.

And it's a story that stays with people. Actors keep telling me, sending me messages about how they got stopped in the airport, for example, for someone to talk to them about the show. Or when they're catching a train or when they're standing in a queue somewhere for a coffee.

But all of this is for a show that really shouldn't have happened and is a very different kind of show to what normally happens in Australia. And that's what I'm going to talk about, is how we made this very different type of show happen, and the luck we had along the way, and the model we used for that.

So, before “Counting and Cracking”, I was what we call a community artist. When I was 20, I founded a company called Curious Works, and we operate out of a place in Australia called Western Sydney. And Western Sydney is in the suburbs of Sydney, away from the city center, and it's the kind of place where, when we walk from our office to a local café to get a coffee, the people we pass on the way will come from almost every country on Earth. And over the years, the 15 years I spent there, we developed a model of supporting communities to tell their own stories. These are mostly Aboriginal and migrant and refugee communities.

Our model would [be to] work for a very long time with a particular community in a particular place, somewhere between seven to nine years, and focus on building, identifying cultural leaders local to that area, and building their capacity to replace our role as artists in that community and taking it over for the long term.

(PHOTO)

That's us on the red carpet at Sydney Film Festival, which is the main film festival in Sydney, where a micro-budget feature film that that community made about its story there, and they're all doing the symbol for Western Sydney.

And so that was what I did for a long time. I helped other people tell their stories. And then I hit my late 20's, and I felt that I couldn't really understand myself or keep going unless I better understood my past. I had grown up not knowing my history, both my family history and also Sri Lanka's history. My mother and my parents had never really talked about it, and I really got to a point in my life where I wanted to learn more.

(PHOTO)

Because I was an artist, I had a great privilege, which is that I was able to try and find out more about my family history by doing a project about it. But my mother refused to talk to me about Sri Lanka, and she told me that doing a project about it was a very stupid idea. At this point, I only knew the given story of Sri Lanka, and what my community was like. It's the story that you'll find in the history books, or in the mass media, or in political speeches. That's the story of a divided country. A place which had a many-decade war between the two major cultural groups there, the Sinhalese and the Tamils. It's a story in which those communities are also divided, in the diasporas around the world; or they're very assimilated, they've lost a lot of their Sri Lankan roots and have Westernized. Now I could have written that play. I could have written a play about the Sri Lankan story that everyone assumed, and was set in the history books, and that could have been my path. But because I was a community artist, I took a very different path. Instead, I did what I knew best, which was I started talking to my community. And by talking I really mean listening, a lot of listening. I listened to dozens of people over the course of many years. People who'd come as refugees to Australia, when they'd just finished their shift at the fruit market; ex-politicians in sports clubs in elite suburbs in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka; and my great-aunt "Chinni", over her table in the suburbs of London, over lots of games of Scrabble and meals of curry. Eventually I went back to Sri Lanka against my mother's wishes. I still have family there, and I think they took pity on me. I still remember my uncle giving me a cardboard, a shoe box, a cardboard shoe box, full of my great-grandfather's letters. And we spent about a week reading them out to each other. I learned that my great-grandfather was born into a farmer's life, living in the north of Sri Lanka, and went to an English boarding school, and then went to Oxford University in the UK, and eventually came back to Sri Lanka and joined the first post-independence Cabinet as a politician. In his early professional life he was a champion for equality, and he tried to unite the country. On his deathbed, he was heartbroken as this country was breaking out into civil war – and he'd become a political realist, someone who had given up on the government being able to protect its minorities.

And this story that I had no idea about was my own family's story, and simultaneously I realized that it was both the story of my family but also the story of my country. That's when I started to realize what could become "Counting and Cracking", and that in telling the story of a family, you could also tell the story of a country. Every time I talked to a Sri Lankan here or around the world, I would hear incredible stories like this, that weren't written in our history books. And then the project changed. It wasn't about me trying to find out about my roots, it was a project that would try to honor these most dearly held truths that these wonderfully intelligent and thoughtful and humble humans were giving me in these conversations. And I started to realize that the quiet voices - the people who really live and understand nuance, who live in the grey rather than black and white, who have empathy with all sides in a conflict - had been drowned out by the loudest voices in our community, and that my job was to give power to those quiet voices. And the more I talked, one thing that was common between everyone, that I realized, was that Sri Lanka was not a divided country. Whether it be marriages, or businesses, or communities, people from different cultural groups in that country all lived side by side. In Colombo you can walk down a street which has a temple next to a mosque next to a church. And I learned what actually divided our country, which was the politics of division. It became expedient in Sri Lanka to win political power by creating divisions between people. The consequences of those politics of division eventually became violence, and eventually became war.

That was when I had my second lightbulb moment about "Counting and Cracking", because I realized that the story of Sri Lanka is a cautionary tale for other countries around the world. There are many different countries around the world now that are using the politics of division to win power, and that should be condemned, which meant that the show would not just be for the Sri Lankan community, but for a wider community which would all gather together. During the process of writing the work, one thing that we realized was that we can use specificity to reach through to the universal. We all love, but this is how my particular community loves. We all have families that break apart and reunite, but this is how my community does it. We all find redemption, we can all heal, we can all belong somewhere, but this is how healing works for us. In every step of developing the work, from the writing, direction, all the way, marketing, we always thought of multiple audiences; both the very, very specific message for the Sri Lankan community, but also for the wider community, and how to bring those groups together.

At this point, my mother was still refusing to engage with the project, the Australian story in "Counting and Cracking" was still the story of the dislocation of losing a homeland. As

migrants we often feel we don't fully belong in the country we've come to, but we no longer belong to the country we've left. But something changed for me after a number of the work[s] I did with Aboriginal communities around the country. One of my dear friends is called Rosealee Pearson, she's on the left in that photo. I was having a beer with her one day in a pub in Sydney and I told her that they had done DNA tests between people in South Asia and Aboriginal people from northern Australia and found a DNA connection from 4,000 years ago. And Rosie said to me that that was her family that they'd tested for their DNA. And I kind of felt time and space dissolve, and here we were sitting having a beer in Sydney, and maybe our ancestors met and exchanged their own things 4,000 years ago. And when I think about people from South Asia coming to Australia over the course of the last 4,000 years for trade, and I think of the Aboriginal communities I've been welcomed into and found solidarity with, I knew that was a place that I could be, I feel a sense of belonging to Australia. And in the play, there's a character, Siddhartha, who is able to find a sense of belonging to Australia, because of the relationship he has with Lily, an Aboriginal Australian. But it also gives him a vision of someone who is strong enough with their culture to hold on to it. That gives him the strength to reunite his family and hold on to his culture too.

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I finished the first draft of the play, and I sent it to my mother by email. She didn't say anything to me in person, but it must have had an impact on her, because she stopped saying it was a stupid idea. And then Belvoir Theatre, one of the biggest theatre companies in Australia, took an interest in the play after Eamon Flack, who's now the Artistic Director there, read the first draft of the play. And when we started doing development workshops for it, they invited my mother, and she didn't say no. And she started to reveal all sorts of things about our family history, and what she went through in these development workshops, because it was strangers asking her. For example, she said to someone in one of the workshops that if she'd just stayed for two more weeks - when we decided to leave Sri Lanka - that if she'd stayed for two more weeks she probably never would have left. Because the play was starting to open up and heal my mother, I started to put that narrative into the play itself, and the play started to change because of my mother's reaction to the early draft. And the play became something that was not only about how a family can be forced to leave their homeland and come to a new place, but also about how slowly that new place can start to heal that family and reunite it again. There were things that my mother was opening up about even weeks before the play opened that I was still putting into the script. These were things that she could only say, though, because of the script, and so the show and life were in a kind of dance with each other, where each was changing the other. The world was changing the show, and the show was changing the world.

(PHOTO)

The person on the right is the character of Aacha. The person on the left is the character of Young Radha. Aacha is wearing a very specific type of sari. It's a special 8-yard sari, which is how my great-grandmother used to wear it, and people of her generation across Sri Lanka used to wear it, but they don't wear it that way anymore. The way we made that sari was that my mother went back to the people who took us, who first took care of us in India after we left Sri Lanka when war broke out, who now were running a sari business, and she got that sari custom made. So even the act of making a costume for a character in the show is also an act of healing for the person who's making it. There's a scene in the show that's set in 1956, and one of the cast members, when we went into rehearsals, came up to me after we rehearsed that scene and said something to me. He said, "this play is the closest I get to hanging out with my grandparents in Sri Lanka.", because he never got to meet them because of the war. But because the play covers such a vast time period in its canvas, being in that show and rehearsing that scene made him feel like he was able to hang out with his grandparents. It was through little moments like this that we began to realize that this play had a power, and that our role was to be a custodian of that power, to take care of it as it started to reach an audience.

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(BREAK)

The thing about the power that this show had was that it kept getting bigger. Belvoir got involved, who are one of the key theatre companies here, Sydney Festival got involved, and it started being treated like a more mainstream Australian show. The casting process took four years, because there are 16 actors who do this show, well, in the version we did in Sydney, and they ended up coming from six different countries. This is because of the different languages that they had to speak, the different ages we had to find, the different ethnicities, etc. Between the 16 performers and the three live musicians there was a cast of 19, and there'd never been a show that big before in Australia about a migrant story. Everyone was of South Asian appearance, there was one indigenous Australian actor, and for a group of brown people to tell an Australian story on that scale was totally different, and we were very excited by that. I was still terrified, though, of how audiences would react, and I really had no idea how the show would go with audiences, because there had never been a show like that before in Australia, so we had nothing to look at from the past to get a sense of what would happen. And something really amazing happened during the season, in terms of the reactions of the audiences. Firstly, it got really well reviewed, and it won lots of awards, and

people gave a standing ovation every night, but that was important because we were doing something new, and we didn't want the industry to think that it should not be done and wasn't possible. This was proof that this kind of work could be possible and could be successful, which meant that more people could do it in the future.

But more importantly, it was quite a profound experience for the local Sri Lankan community. It was a version of our history and our journey as migrants that Sinhalese and Tamil, and Burgher and Muslim could all come together and surround; that all members of our community could come to this show and find something of themselves in it. That doesn't mean that everyone agreed with everything in the show, but no one walked out. And in a war-torn community that is a big achievement, because it means that everyone was proud of that show – even though they didn't agree with everything, they were proud. And I think that's a bigger achievement than consensus. If people can be proud of something and gather around it, even if they disagree with small parts of it, that's how we build the steps towards peace. And this is something theatre can do that film can't do and most other mediums can't do in the arts. Theatre forces an audience to gather around a work, and the relationship is between live bodies, actors, and the audience working together as one entity. It's a living, changing human experience inside a collective, and that kind of group experience is something that you can only gain through a theatrical experience. And we came to realize that the play was giving people who'd gone through the events in the show, and lived through the war in Sri Lanka, a chance to heal, and over the course of the play, which goes for 3 ½ hours, it's a safe space for someone to meet their hidden traumas or their buried traumas, and come to terms with it, and slowly heal as part of the group. The character in the play called Radha, the mother, is a middle-aged woman, but over the course of the play you see how incredible she is as a human and how incredible her life has been. And I remember one Anglo-Australian coming to me after one show and saying to me "I'm never going to look at a middle-aged woman at a bus stop the same way again." Inside everyone we walk past on the street is a hidden universe, and if theatre can help us understand that every person out there holds that universe inside them, then that's a special thing. One person wrote in a blog post after the show that she hopes the show can travel the world and heal the hidden wounds of people like her. Luckily, we were able to do that this year. The show toured to the UK, to Edinburgh Festival, and then to Birmingham.

In Australia, night after night seeing our story told in the public eye turned into an act of belonging. Our story was part of the Australian story and we really felt like in this publi-

cization of it that we finally belonged in Australia, and we were being recognized. And in going overseas to Edinburgh and Birmingham, it felt like our story was given a global stage. It was nice to have that attention at that time because Sri Lanka is going through a very difficult time at the moment. It was interesting to see the reasons that people wanted the show to travel to the UK. I think Australian diplomatic organizations wanted to present what this modern version of the Australian story could be. Edinburgh Festival was founded by a refugee, a Jewish refugee from the Holocaust, and they wanted to celebrate the role that refugees played in building some of the most important institutions and businesses and the fabric of cities around the world. And in Birmingham, they used that show to bring many people into the theatre that had never gone to the theatre before. So, it's a show that can travel to different parts of the world and bring in people who are different from the usual theatre-going audience.

For me, the show has also changed me personally. I realized, that before “Counting and Cracking”, there was a version of myself that I would conduct in private, which was the full version of myself; but in public I would only conduct a performance of myself. Being an artist and doing a very personal work is a very strange experience, because suddenly the kind of person you are with only your very closest friends or your partner or your lover, you're suddenly showing that version to tens of thousands of people. For someone whose life had been about helping other communities tell their stories up until that moment that was a really big change for me. And for migrant communities, there's a very similar parallel journey. Quite often a migrant community inside the community will be their full selves, but in the wider society they'll try and fit in to that society and not present their full selves but change their behavior to fit in as much as they can. “Counting and Cracking” ended up being an exercise in vulnerability, both for myself and for my community. Because the show is not in any way a performance for anyone else where we change who we are for anyone else or for an audience. It has all the ugliness of our community, as well as all the wonderful and joyous parts of it, too. And it has all of those dearly held truths that those people told me in those very first conversations I had 10 or 15 years ago starting the process for this project. But in the end, people saw their own families and their own communities through ours. They saw our story and they connected to it no matter what part of the world they were from. And this for me was a really wonderful proof of the power of vulnerability. It's terrifying and scary, but ultimately it is perhaps the only way we have for humans from very different walks of life to connect with each other and realize that they're the same. And theatre is one of the best ways we can take advantage of this possibility.

I just want to spend the last five minutes taking a step back and talking about how this type of storytelling works, and why we set up a company, Co-Curious, to keep doing more projects like this. The global advertising industry is worth well over a trillion dollars, and its value is rising exponentially. In this digital world the line between in, and news and art and politics are becoming very blurred. You know, social media in the not-too-recent past elected a celebrity, Donald Trump, to be the President of the United States of America. At the turn of the century the World Bank interviewed over 100,000 people who lived on less than a dollar a day and asked them what their biggest barrier was to breaking down their own disadvantage. And in the top three statements for all of those people was “having a voice”. As storytellers we do entertain, but we do more than that, whether we like it or not. The stories we tell each other are the key factor in affecting how people subconsciously think and therefore how they act. So if we decide to tell stories for a living, it’s like putting on boxing gloves and getting in the ring for the battle of ideas. Co-Curious and this process of working with communities to tell their stories is a way to give the least powerful voices in our society an opportunity to have a powerful role to play in that boxing ring of ideas, battle of ideas. Essentially, the mantra is to consult with the community at the heart of your story first, and to keep going back to them over the course of developing that story and letting their response to the work change and affect what that story is. Those human relationships are not just how you find out the story, they’re also the guardians of the story as it changes, they help you find your cast, they help with set design, costume, they’re the champions of the work once it finds its audience. It means that the act of putting on a work of theatre is a collective process, and between each of us that process is about recovering our humanity. And that’s what we’re hoping to do with Co-Curious with our future projects, and to do it at the same scale as the most powerful voices in our industry so that the least powerful voices can have just as much of a spotlight on them as anyone else in our society.

That’s it from me. Thank you so much for listening for so long on Zoom. It’s not as fun as listening in person. I’m really intrigued by the context and meaning of this work in the Japanese context, and very appreciative of the chance to bring it to you all. Thank you so much for listening.

Q&A

Q1. *What is the general opinion about Tamil people studying Sinhalese?*

People who are in Sri Lanka, or in the diaspora, or both? It depends where in Sri Lanka they live. In the north of Sri Lanka there's an area called Jaffna and the Vanni, where you can get by just knowing Tamil but in the rest of Sri Lanka you would have to know Sinhalese as well as Tamil, if you were a Tamil Sri Lankan. It used to be quite common to know English, Tamil, and Sinhalese, and then the government policy from 1956 onwards made Sinhalese the official language and put a lot of the way the country works around Sinhalese, which the play explores. But everyone would know a basic version of Sinhalese.

I think that typically [those who left Sri Lanka] know the country's language that they're migrating to, plus their cultural language. So, for example, in Australia mostly English and Tamil; and then more and more with each generation, less Tamil is being passed on until eventually it becomes just English.

Q2. *Previously, you likened expressing your own truth to fighting in a boxing ring. Does it really involve that much damage or pain?*

I think it's more that all the stories that our society tells determine how people think and act, and to change that means fighting the dominant way we tell the stories. So that's why I like the allegory or symbolism of the fight. Because you have to think about it like that in order to enact the change. I like the idea that it could be because it damages you, but if we were to continue that symbolism then we would say that the way to fight back isn't by damaging them just as much back but perhaps by convincing them to take off the boxing gloves.

Q3. *Could you explain about the audition process of finding 16 actors from six countries?*

I basically cast the show on WhatsApp. And it was about messaging, finding independent artists around the world in independent arts circles, about who might be appropriate for the roles that we're looking for that they know. So the character of Apah was played by an actor

called Prakash Belawadi, who's actually a famous villain in Bollywood films. But when he's not acting, he's an activist, particularly around environmental issues in India, and before he was an actor, he was a journalist for a long time. So the things that the character of Apah goes through in the play, who's the politician, are real for him. He understands them, because he has worked at the interface of democracy for a lot of his life, which is really important in portraying the character, because he doesn't portray it as rhetoric or something removed, but as real life. And because he's worked in Bollywood, he's used to working in multiple languages, so learning the languages necessary for this play was not unusual for him. And for each actor in the show, we had to find that specific a type of person. That's why it took so long.

Q4. *How much do the theatres in Australia involve themselves with production? The impression we have from your talk is that the theatre was closely involved in the development process. In Japan, the role of theatres is mostly to hiring out the space and they are not really involved in the developing the plays.*

There are venues in Australia that just hire out their venue, that does exist, but there is also quite a number of theatre companies who develop work in-house and present that work, and they present it at their venue. A company like Belvoir puts on nine shows a year in their own theatre, which is called Belvoir Theatre, and they program those works, that annual year of works, and that year of works will have a combination of new writing, existing plays, and collaboration with other theatre companies around the country. But, yeah, just as much if not more of their business is about developing work as it is about being a venue.

Q5. *You said that it's unusual in Tamil culture to choose to be an artist, but why did you choose to work in theatre? [In contrast with the type of theatre work that you do] what's your opinion of more commercial theatre?*

My mother is a Bharatanatyam dancer, which is a form of classical Indian dance, which Sri Lankan Tamils have a close connection to. She gave up that profession when she married, but she actually divorced my father and then took it up again, because that was her main vocational practice and the only thing she could do as a job. So I helped a lot with her dance company backstage and I think I learned at a very young age that the stage could be a sacred space where anything is possible. And I was never really able to let go of that idea in my mind or my heart. And I did the right thing, and I did a journalism degree and worked as a

journalist for a little while, but actually knew that I always wanted to be an artist and have that relationship with the stage and went back to that. When I finished university, that's when I set up my own company and did that, but everyone in my family was pretty angry at me. But now they're okay with it.

In terms of the second question, it's not like I have a problem per se with art for money's sake only, I understand why people do what they do. But I don't think it's possible to have an innocent story. Quite often, the kind of story that can most easily make the most money puts forward dominant ideas about our society that are damaging to some people in society and continue the status quo way of thinking. That's what I think needs to be interrogated. There's nothing wrong with making a show that heals people and entertains them and makes lots of money, too. But I think it's the relationship between a story and the effect it has in a society that should always be interrogated.

Q6. *How long did it take to write "Counting and Cracking" and how long was the rehearsal process?*

It took about ten years to write, but that's mainly because of how long the interview process was and the research process. And leaving enough time for people to respond to early versions of the work and for that to change how future versions of the work developed.

The rehearsal process was really long by Australian standards but was still pretty short considering the scale of the show. I think it was about ten weeks. Usually in Australia we only do four or five weeks. I don't think I'll ever get ten weeks again in my life.

Spending that long in rehearsal must enable new discoveries.

Yes. Constantly. For example, there are six languages in the play, and what we do is, whenever someone speaks in a language that's not English, that would simultaneously be translated by another actor. So things like that, we had an idea going into rehearsals, but we didn't know until we tried it on the floor whether it would work or not, and how it would work.

Q7. *The story has a Turkish Australian character, Ismet. During your interview process did you actually come across a Western Asian character like that?*

My mother never spoke about what happened in Sri Lanka when we were meeting people for dinner or out in public. And if people tried to ask her politely, it would be easy for her to say that she wasn't going to answer, or to change the subject. But when people were very cheeky with her and shared of themselves what they'd been through but also had fun about it, and could their strength, she would open up. And that would only happen in the most unusual of circumstances, like when a plumber was over to fix the toilet, or someone was helping cutting down a tree that was hanging over our fence. There's this really interesting solidarity that can exist between migrants who have been through a lot of pain but have survived it and have got to the point where they can even laugh about it. And when that solidarity is felt with someone, even if you've only just met them, you can end up sharing things with them that you've never told anyone. And I was really interested in the theatrical possibilities of that, and saw that happening with my Mum, and invented Ismet to play that role in the show.

You've just make me realize something really nice which is my Mum, the reason she didn't want me to look into this or talk about it was because the pain of leaving was so much for her that she buried that pain to come to Australia, but the play has opened her up again and helped her heal her relationship with Sri Lanka, and now she's starting to get into a place where she can be at peace with that and also laugh about it. And so maybe she will play that role with someone else that she meets and help them on that journey, just like the Ismet-type person did for her.

② 9月18日（日） Day3 18th Sep.

Shakthi's feedback on the reading:

I just wanted to say firstly that it's evident how much care everyone has taken and in engaging with this work - I don't know if you have this phrase in Japan, but in Australia we say it's a "deep dive", it really means immersing yourself, especially for all of you, in something that's completely different for you, and it's so clear that you have done that with care and respect and curiosity. I wanted to say thank you for that. It's a wonderful aspect of humanity that theatre brings out to engage in difference in that way, and to say thank you for that.

The second thing I wanted to say is that I was really..... it's very interesting for me to experience the reading, because you did a really good job of capturing the essence of each of the characters. Like the strength of the women, and the curiosity of Siddhartha, the nobleness of Hasa and the tragedy of Apah. It's fascinating for me because there is a melding of those archetypes and how they exist in a Japanese context, and then seeing them come together with what they are on the page in a Sri Lankan context. That is a very fascinating exchange, and it was a really wonderful reading and you've all done such an excellent job.

I was simultaneously watching something very familiar and very new, which is a bizarre and wonderful experience, so thanks!

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Q & A

Q1. Shakthi, if you were going to direct the play, what would be the scene you would be most interested in?

It's an interesting question. I think for me at the moment the wedding scene is the most interesting one for me, because I think it mirrors where a lot of situations are in the world at the moment, where we are at a crossroads, and we can go either way. And I think in the wedding scene, in the play, that Sri Lanka can go the way of peace or go the way of war, and I feel with things like climate change, and division and unity, that many countries in the world are at a similar type of crossroads at the moment. So that speaks to me at the moment. And the fact that the path we take is not chosen for us, but we choose it and how to bring

that out when staging the scene.

I think in a Japanese context, I don't know which scene, but I think it would be a really interesting process to be able to discuss with you all what aspects of the play can relate very closely to Japanese society and what don't. And the bits that do relate closely, how to present them in a way that engages the audience deeply to see the connections between us all. And the bits that don't, how to use theatre to really immerse yourself in another culture – and to have both those things happen simultaneously during a show would be a really fascinating experience.

Q2. *The role of Radha's parents was key, they were the reason why she was able to migrate to Australia, but her mother only appears briefly and her father not at all. It would probably have been difficult to include them more in "Counting and Cracking", but do you have any interest in writing a play about their story at some point?*

Sure, yeah, of course, I know what their story is, and I've got it in my head. I already know what their story is. I was really fascinated by the idea that – I came up with this theory while researching the play – that families move in a cycle of about four generations. The first generation, who are still poor, there's always a generation that makes its riches. Then the children of that generation grow up in that wealth, and they are free to spend it as they wish. They, you know, they can travel the world and have the world as their oyster – which is Radha's parents. And the next generation have to choose between their roots and what their wealth has brought them, and often either expand their wealth or lose it all. The fourth generation have to start all over again, in building a home and deciding what's next. The other thing to add is that by showing that Radha's parents are happy to travel the world and do whatever they enjoy, then I get to show more specifically what type of migrant Radha ended up being. She didn't leave Sri Lanka because she wanted to, she left because she felt she was forced to, and in Western multi-cultural countries that's an aspect of being a migrant that's not properly understood. And the common narrative is that migrants come to the West for economic reasons, and we don't talk enough about the extreme circumstances that force people to leave their homelands enough. That contrast between Radha and her parents allowed me to show that specific type of migrant story for Radha.

Q3. *Was it difficult to find actors of Tamil heritage who could also do traditional dancing? In the audition process, how many actors in total did you consider? What was the most important thing you looked for in choosing your 16 actors?*

We auditioned hundreds of people over four years. It was a really exhaustive process. I don't know what it's like in Japanese culture in various communities there, but for Sri Lankan Tamil culture – and for Indian Tamil culture, we share the same language - it's very common for young people to learn traditional art forms, whether it be traditional dance or traditional music. And in particular, women learning traditional dance. It's called Bharatanatyam, that dance form, and so it's not hard to find actors who've also learned a little bit of that. However, the task of putting on this play meant that we didn't want to do any single one part of it not well, and so finding someone who could act the role of young Radha – which is a very tough role – and dance well, in terms of showing what our culture is capable of and what our ancestral art forms are, and also act and dance at the same time, because she's not dancing blankly..... was more difficult. But yeah. There're very few people who can do all of those things. In terms of choosing who to cast, there were very big demands in terms of the basic needs because the people had to do certain languages or fit the age range and that kind of stuff. But after all that, it was about the type of person they were, that was just as important as the type of actor they were. We needed an ensemble that was deeply collaborative, and humble, and good at listening, because the show in terms of its purpose needed the kinds of humans who know how to discuss something and find the nuance in it rather than argue about who is right. Part of the magic of the show is that there were Sri Lankans involved in it who would otherwise probably never be in a room together, and then found that we could have a wonderful time together.

And then, in terms of the craft of the work, it was also very important that they be that kind of human because the set we did for the show is a playing space for the show. It's not a literal representation of the spaces the show inhabits. The entire world of the show in terms of all the different scenes, whether it be a window in an apartment or the front porch of a home in Sri Lanka, everything as pulled off by the actors. So the actors did everything together, and they have just as big a role doing that as they doing playing the character they play in the show. And so we had to make sure we had an ensemble who was up for that task, in terms of the craft and the form of the theatre.

For example, the person who played Nihinsa in the show, her mother asked her not to do the show, because, she said, "how can you trust a Tamil writer?". And she read the script

and loved it and she wanted to do the show, so she did it. They're not taught in school what happened in 1983, so what happens in Act III of the play isn't taught in school in Sri Lanka. It's an ignored part of the history they're trying to hide it. So she learned about her country's history for the first time doing the play, and now with all the things that are happening in Sri Lanka, the incredible protest movement that's happening there, that actor is there every day at the protests, which is an enormous change from the person she was before she did the play in the first place. So the types of people who were willing to go on those kinds of journeys, we had to find those kinds of people.

Q4. *Both Rhada and Apah at different times say the line "One equals zero point nine nine nine nine nine....." What's your intended meaning or message in including this line?*

I just find it to be a very beautiful mathematical equation. To me that mathematical equation represents if you say zero point nine nine nine, if you say the nines enough times, then you're inching ever closer to equaling one, and an infinite amount of them does equal one. And yet at the same time there is always a gap, it's like an unreachable goal. I think it's a wonderful encapsulation of the idea that it is worth working our way towards a worthwhile destination – not because of the destination, but because the working towards it is what life is about.

Q5. *"Ms. Marvel", a series on Disney +, is about a second generation Pakistani. It seems very similar to "Counting and Cracking", and I wonder if they stole it off you.*

I should watch it. Thank you for the tip!

Q6. *In the story, only the characters of Radha and Thirru have different actors playing them in their younger and older versions. What was the background to that choice?*

Young Radha and Older Radha..... there's something theatre can do, that we can't do in our world, the real world, which is present time in a non-linear fashion. And the idea of..... in the show, we actually brought older Radha on during the scene where Sunil buys the house from Younger Radha, and when Sunil says, "Where are you going to?", or something like that at the end of the scene, when Younger Radha says "Australia", she says it to Older Radha.

For me this is a really magical moment that only theatre can do, and it's where you erase the distance between two time periods and between two countries. Myself and Eamon wanted to have – Eamon's the director and Associate Writer of the show, and Artistic Director of Belvoir, we worked really closely on this show for many years – we really wanted to have a moment where that happened in the show and for it to be placed as powerfully as possible, and to put forward the idea that no one particular time period is more important than the other; this idea that the present and the future is always more important than the past, to contend with that idea, and have a past, present and future as all equal.

And the theatre is also very silly in the sense that we do really crazy things to have four or five perfect seconds on stage, and so for me it's worth having a Younger and Older Radha just to have those five seconds on stage where they get to be together and to suggest all of those things.

The last aspect of that is that both of those characters, Radha and Thirru, more than the others, are almost two different people when they're their younger and older selves, in the sense that Radha buries who she used to be with the pain of leaving Sri Lanka and becomes very emotionally closed off, where she was once open and connected with the people around her. And Thirru spends 21 years in jail and is a shell of a person compared to who he was and the potential that awaited him before he was wrongly put in jail. We felt that two different actors put forward how big that change is better. But I think it's a choice as well to focus on the love story aspect of the show, and you could easily have a very different version of this show staged, for example, where you wanted to focus on that kind of difference with all of the actors who have big time periods – Hasa, the priest, and that would put forward a different central archetype for the show. So there's these different possibilities depending on how a person might choose to direct it.

Q7. *Apah has a long speech which includes a line about “counting and cracking” that becomes the title of the play. What's the message that you wanted to focus on in this speech?*

So, “Democracy means the counting of heads within limits and the cracking of heads beyond those limits” is stolen from my great-grandfather. It's a line from one of his letters that one of my uncles showed me that day in Colombo when I was researching the play. When my uncle and I were reading the letters to each other in Sri Lanka and that phrase was read it

really struck me, and it seemed to summarize the Tamil struggle and the struggle of many minorities around the world. And I felt I had to contend with that and do that idea justice. So in some ways the entire play is my attempt to send a letter in play format back to the ghost of my great-grandfather, to do his idea justice. For me, what the idea means is that we can work within the system and be part of society and count on society's institutions protecting us because humans are deep-down want everyone to be safe and equal and protected. I think that's the first half of that phrase. And then the second half of that phrase I think is about, if we are put in a position where we can no longer count on society's institutions to keep us safe or protect us, then we will be forced to defend ourselves, even though we don't want to, and it is a human right to stand up for one's own basic dignity if no one else will give it to you. But the act of standing up for one's own rights through self-defense can have unintended consequences. It can lead to violence which one did not support or want to happen, and I think, if you come full circle with the idea, where it lands for me is that democracy can't be taken for granted. It has to be nurtured every day in order for it to work for us. And to corrode any of its parts or systems where we start to lose trust in it has devastating consequences. So I hope the audience are left wondering where their line is drawn between nurturing the system to be better vs. self-defense and standing up for their own dignity. And I think it's one of the most complex questions facing all of us at this point in global history, and I'd like that each person comes away from the play with a very different answer, based on who they are, to where they draw that line.

It was a joy to meet you all and to be a part of this and thank you for engaging with it. With luck one day it'll be on in Japan.