File: **fi3390a1 -- Jadé Jo Silvia audio_only**
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START AUDIO

Jadé: I think that if we're talking about privilege in the world, I wonder about the connections and the disconnections. Privilege is not just something that is entrenched in immersivity, it's actually entrenched in the arts in general.

I think there was a Labour Party initiative and it was called 'Acting Up'. What was interesting about that, in terms of breaking the class ceiling, was that it was treating everything as a leaky pipeline, and you were able to see all the stages at which working-class people fall through the gaps.

That was starting from primary school, to secondary school, to drama school or not. And then to things like having to get an agent and then to casting and then being typecast into very narrow roles for working-class people, low-paid roles.

And that's even if working-class people become quite established. So, it's important to mention that it's not something that's peculiar to immersive theatre, not at all. And the other thing is, I want to declare at the top of this talk that I'm not going to have an objective distance from the things that we're talking about, and I want to be really clear about that.

So, in academic terms, I suppose, I'm an embedded subject, meaning that I am absolutely of that world. I'm not an objective outside perspective with the privilege of being an observer. The stuff

that we're talking about is the stuff that's made up my life and the stuff of my experiences and of my memories.

Silvia: I think, I suppose, being practitioners, we are necessarily embedded. Like, we are going to have a point of view because it's our practice. So, I suppose it will definitely not be a rational, academic, kind of, look at privilege in general, but our own experiences. So, yes.

Jo: Yes. But that is an important position to come at this from, though. The position of subjective experience but where you can critique what is occurring within that experience, which is valid, is absolutely valid.

Silvia: Can I just say something, just to be immediately annoying and controversial? I find, and I have to say this, that I find this conversation or, like- I'm always questioning the validity of things like that and how much there is an incredible amount of privilege in being part or being allowed to have time to discuss certain things that the academia, sort of, like, places there and then invites people to come in. Sometimes, of course, it's always important to talk about things. It's important to raise awareness and all of that but sometimes, I wonder- I mean, once we talked about it (Laughter) where is it going to go?

You know, who really cares? Do the practitioners that find it difficult because of their lack of privilege- are they going to, sort of, even have access to this? I suppose I'm talking about privilege within this privileged academic world. (Laughter). You know. Sorry. I just had to say it as my general point of view regarding this, you know- It's important to have conversations but then I also

wonder- But then, what happens once the conversations have happened? I'm sorry. There it is.

Jadé: Yes, I think that's absolutely right. I think there is something a bit bourgeois about being able to sit around and have conversations like this.

Jo: Absolutely, Silvia.

Jadé: But I also feel a little bit old, actually, and I feel like I'm getting to a stage where I am looking back more than I'm looking forward. And in that sense, it's important to me to be able to articulate what I've done with my work and what it's meant in the context of a scene overall. And, particularly as a brown-skinned woman, what I can offer as an example to other brown-skinned women that are coming after. How can I position myself a little bit more upfront. Like, be seen.

Throughout all my career, I've been very shy. I've been very hidden and that is also partly to do with working in male partnerships. I tend to be in the background. I don't go to meetings. I'm not really the face of the company. I'm not talking about performing because I have also been a performer, which has put me right on stage, but I'm not the one talking about process. I'm not the one that people email. I'm not the one that people phone. I'm not at the front of the company in that sense.

So, I've always felt… I struggle with anxiety, but now that I've hit 50 a couple of months ago, I've felt a shift. I have felt a real shift in myself, on an emotional level: looking at legacy, I want to be able to be on the panels now. I want to do the keynote speeches. I want to, even though it's horrible to me. I feel like I have to because I

want to add to that discussion about it. It doesn't always have to be a white middle-class cisgender bloke that is up there. I'm just so sick of seeing panels with white middle-class men on them and so this talk that we're doing is my 50th year of trying to be more public facing.

Silvia: Yes. No, I mean, I think it's great to be visible and visibility and recognition are big things, aren't they? It does make a difference whether you put yourself out there and talk about issues or not, but then, sometimes, as a practitioner, I'd rather it was my work that spoke about those things than panels. But then, there is a validity. I'm sorry. I'm not saying all of this is for nothing. I'm just saying, as a practitioner, how much I actually find all of this slightly, like, jarring because I much prefer not necessarily talking about, you know, the problem with gender in performance, but just as a woman, go out and do great work.

But then, I also recognise that it's important to talk about things like that, and it is important to put your name forward because, in my experience, sometimes, having worked with male directors, writers, it does tend to become that they are the leaders in the work and the woman is, sort of, following, even though it isn't necessarily true in practice. But that's how it is perceived.

Jadé: There is something important there about you taking ownership of the work and the discussion of the work as well. It is important to take a position of power within that analysis, because the creation of the work is for a wider audience. The work does speak for itself, certainly with both of your practices, that work generates discussion and analysis and is highly regarded in public and academic contexts. I understand what

you're saying about how it is a privilege to engage in academic discussion and analysis, but that is taking action as well. There is a relationship and there is an exchange that goes on here that does lead to action and that's kind of what you're saying.

The work that you produce (and maybe we'll get onto that), and how much your personal experience and your political leanings become really relevant within the work that you create is, in itself, speaking to this end. So, that's something that we can come back to. But I think there is something there about the artist taking the space and owning the work and discussing their work, rather than other people doing that for them. I think there is an important relationship there that, in the arts and specifically in performance, is, on the whole, really respected.

But it's interesting because, talking about the white cis male, middle-class panels: it's usually academics as well. So, by being present and leading the debate and defining what that debate is, there is an action within that act of discussion.

Silvia: I suppose, actually, it wasn't about whether you should be part of discussions like that, and whether there is a validity in actually creating the discussions and being present in them. I suppose I was only pointing out how interesting it is that we're talking about privilege from, like, already, you know, within a very privileged platform. That's all. [Jadé 00:12:44], you look very… (Laughter)

Jadé: Yes. Yes, of course. I mean, you're completely right. We are. This is a moment of privilege, being acted out. I don't come from privilege. That's the thing. I don't come from it. I don't think you do either. And I worry about that discourse making people who don't come from privilege even less likely to step

up and take that space. I think it's really important that we are seen to be taking up the spaces that are traditionally occupied by a certain kind of person, like Jo said. Traditionally, all the oxygen gets sucked up. I've now got to elbow my way in and it takes the confidence that it's taken me my whole life to build.

I was not born or brought up with that level of confidence. It has taken me an embarrassingly long time. Such a long time that I feel a certain amount of shame. I feel a certain amount of sadness about how long that's taken. So, yes. I'm definitely in agreement with you, but I also feel like there's a level of having earned it, which is different to having been given it.

Silvia: Sure.

Jo: Yes.

Jadé: And I don't know why that's making me think of identity politics in some way, because I think with what you're saying, Silvia, in my case, it's also having to be quite careful of not being used. I think that might be what you're talking about. That there are these institutions like academia, that's only one example, which have all the infrastructure and the power, etc. And then when they want to look cool or look woke or look right on, they're inviting cool or woke or right on people in the hope of smashing their image a little bit, and I think, it's all-

Like, institutions don't really exist. People exist and what I do - I don't know if you do this as well - but I look very carefully at who it is that's inviting me. And if I get a sense that their heart isn't in the right place… With PIN Network, I felt like there was a well-meaningness, but you have to be really careful, as artists, as

women, as brown-skinned people, not to be used as signifiers of how modern (Laughter) – “How modern of you,” - how modern institutions are. And that’s a problem for me because that creates marginalisation on another level.

I can’t just be there. I would never go somewhere that was inviting me as a practitioner but didn’t know my work. Didn’t know my work, didn’t appreciate it, didn’t like it, didn’t believe in it, or it was the work that they wanted to find problematic. As opposed to me, you know, me, the body. And as a woman, that is just such a tricky line. And that is a problem because, there’s been a lot of identity politics creating a certain kind of marginalisation, hasn’t there?

There’s been a lot of talk. People much more eloquent than me are talking about it, about how funding which is specifically for BAME artists is not actually very helpful. In my early days, in the ‘90s, when that started - funds that were directly for establishing diverse artists - it created a silo. It created this, kind of, “Oh…”. It just wasn’t helpful, at all. It was supposed to represent the interests of minority or marginalised groups, right? But then it was generally defined according to very abstract categories like gender or race. Then, later, it was much more about disability and later about trans issues.

And so, in some ways, my early work was already forced to relate to ethnicity and gender. And that was problematic because it took me quite a long time to transcend that into the work that I’m not able to do which is to be free. Like, to be able to start from zero is actually a really privileged position. And that’s what I feel like all these other people have. I have a chip on my shoulder, that they already get to start from zero. Does that make sense, what I’m saying?

Silvia: Yes. You're already boxed into something, in a way, because you have, very, very loosely, the privilege of having access to certain funding, and it's- you know, I'm saying it on purpose. Obviously, there's no privilege there. It's just that there is that funding. But yes. No, I can totally understand. I mean, I find- You know, one thing that I certainly found and felt are the difficulties as a foreigner to be taken seriously in the UK, and that might happen everywhere in the world. It's not that it's a UK problem, but it's being a foreigner.

Like, at the beginning, not speaking the language all that well, therefore you can't really access certain things like The Arts Council because they require a very specific language. And, in fact, within that, it's a language within the language because it's not just about being able to speak proper English. It's about being able to understand the actual language that they want to hear. They want to hear certain things. So, you need to know what those things are and be able to express those ways of expressing your idea. So, I found, at the beginning, being a foreigner, people wouldn't take you seriously, at all.

I mean, even getting a job is difficult, as a foreigner. (Laughter) You know, you're not given the same opportunities because you might not be able- Even people that I was working with really closely, I wasn't allowed to write an email to a particular person because I might have a grammar mistake in it. You know, I'm sure people will understand. I'm Italian and I might make some mistakes and as long as I'm saying the things that you need to know, then it doesn't really matter if there's a grammar mistake within that.

But that was quite- you know, I spent months being tortured about my pronunciation and, as you know, I've fallen back into being a bit more Italian, because they had to pronounce things in a very particular way, whenever I was performing. And again,

I'm, like, "But I am Italian." I don't have to fool people into thinking I'm not Italian. I am Italian, it doesn't matter all that much, especially because we weren't doing Shakespeare. So, my first, kind of, difficulty was the privilege of being UK-born as opposed to being a foreigner.

Jadé: Yes.

Jo: It strikes me that you're both picking up here, though, on something around the privilege of discourse, of knowing the correct discourse and being part of that group, and the power that that gives you and you're absolutely right. Filling in the funding form is knowing how to play that game. Taking part in a panel is knowing how to contribute to a certain type of discussion in a certain type of format. And I think it's possible to- I think there are ways in which there is a shifting of how those panels might be run and so on, but there is something very relevant there about who owns the discourse, who is leading on it, who is setting that agenda as well, and perhaps that's something that we'll come back to again.

I'd be really interested in your talking more- Because earlier, Jadé, you mentioned it in relation to working with male co-directors. You, often, in the past, were the one who wasn't the one spoken to. Could you talk a little more about that in terms of-? You intimated that it was by choice. That it was at a point at which you felt less- If I'm understanding you right, is that because you were choosing to stay in the background? Or was it because you were actually being ignored in that respect?

Jadé: The problem was that it was a mix of them both, I think. Because if I'd been more bolshy and more confident, then I would have just refused to be ignored. But really, the coupling of the two things meant that I just became very invisible. And I think this is a very, very Asian-looking - I mean, I'm Arab, actually, but in terms of how I present in the UK, a lot of people just assume that I'm Asian. So, for an Asian-presenting woman, the problem of invisibility is a very real one. There are lots of tropes. One of them is just that we're very quiet and passive and not opinionated.

I think that stereotype really carries with me unless I force myself to participate. And sometimes I'm over-participating because I'm over-compensating and trying to take a place. I think it doesn't help if you're working in a duet. What is slightly different to Silvia, perhaps, is that Jorge is also the producer of the company. So, in some ways, he is the one. He is the one that has to go and pitch our work. He is the one that's taking responsibility for that. And that's not something that I'm very good at doing, but he's very good at representing what we're about and talking to our partners and things like that.

However, he's good at it because people have taken him seriously all his life. I'm not good at it because no-one has really listened to me all my life. So, all those things are like the chicken and the egg, aren't they? You just don't know which came first, but certainly, they work together. Like, this last year, I've been coming to the PIN Network things. Ordinarily, I wouldn't have. I wouldn't have met you. I wouldn't have been there. I would have just not gone, but recently I've been forcing myself out of a slightly more hermetic lifestyle where I work with small teams.

I tend to work with the same people again, over and over again, because with those people that I've worked with for more than ten years now - some people, like, fifteen years – I don't have to get to know

somebody and get them to get over what stereotype they might have of me. And the stereotypes can be very different. There's a lot of projection. There's a lot of projection on women, anyway. You have probably seen that in your life as women. I think we have to deal with projection all the fucking time. Ooh… all the time.

Dealing with projections is problematic, and so working with the same people over and over again means I can just get straight to the work and not have to deal with a lot of that nonsense.

Jo: It's interesting, as well, because what you're picking up on there is also something related to those experiences around operational structures and business management, versus those experiences of artistic collaboration, which you might want to expand on as well. Silvia, did you want to come in on that point?

Silvia: Well, I would like to say, in general- And to be honest, you were cutting out a lot, Jo. So, I'm not super-sure about- But I'm going to go ahead anyway because I do tend to do it.

Jadé: Yes, that's what I did. I just went ahead with what I thought you said. (Laughter)

Silvia: I'm just going to go and say something. I do like to say, and I think I actually really believe that, that most of the time, I would prefer, always, working with a woman over a man. But not because the man will necessarily tend to want to impose himself. I just find women much more effective and practical

and quick, and it's much easier to have arguments with women. I don't know. I think being more, you know, definitely Italian, I do go into, kind of, massive discussions that get quite fiery. But with a woman, I find I can do that and then it will be alright. I find the man immediately closes off and gets really frightened by the possibility of a heated debate, whilst the woman would go for it. So, I tend to enjoy those better.

Jo: And apologies for stopping you mid-flow, but is that also something- And again, this relates to what Jadé was saying there about projections and expectations. Is that not something to do with perceptions of angry women and that being seen as a negative rather than something that is about getting stuff done and having a very clear vision and knowing what you need and want, as well as also- You know, we're all human beings who sometimes lose it because we're a bit stressed.

Silvia: And we all project, all the time. You know, I project as a woman and we're always constantly doing that, but definitely, definitely. Passion often gets mistaken for aggression, but it's just passion and enthusiasm.

Jo: It also reminds me of something that Jadé said before, way back when we were chatting at another point, about the, "Why should I be nice?" Why, just because I'm a woman, should there be this perception of the way in which I function, which isn't- Because, of course, it is important to be kind and to create good working spaces, but-

Jadé: Yes, yes.

Jo: That relates to something to do with the fact that the woman- the moment- someone who identifies- The moment a woman is seen to be- You used the term before. Bolshy. The moment a woman is seen to be assertive, to have a clear line of- To not play those gender games of niceness in order to get something, there is a discomfort around that. Jadé, do you want to talk a bit more about that?

Jadé: Oh, yes. (Laughter) Definitely. I come from a training background where the way of being led… I come, culturally, from a very strict proscribed way of teaching physicality, so with my cultural background, how we learn is very much like you copy the master and you copy and copy and copy, and you do it like the master says, and you don't speak, you don't have a voice, you are the student, just get on with it, and you work really hard. And I also trained in the [check recording] and that was the same thing. It was very, very Russian, hardcore. If you weren't breaking bones, you weren't working hard enough. I got all my training and leader persona from those experiences.

So, when I used to train people - and I did train people a lot - I had this reputation as a taskmaster and I was a taskmaster. I totally owned that. That was the way that I led and the way I achieved a lot of very high results. Looking back now, I feel that that was a very dubious practice that I was involved in. It could be construed as reckless with people's bodies, not very responsible, definitely not caring, and I, in the end, also did break my back very, very badly.

So coming from that world and having this kind of persona meant that I also was an accomplice in this projection onto me

and I had that reputation. Then people would come from far and wide to experience this reputation. But the problem, really, was that this was something I'd learned. I noticed, over and over again, that when people were speaking about the male leaders, who were similar, there was a, kind of, positivity around how they described men who led like that as well. There was a positivity around it, like, "Oh, he really knows what he wants and he really goes for it. He really leads," and da-da-da.

And then I notice the vocabulary around me, doing the same sort of thing, is, "Oh, she's a taskmaster. Oh, she doesn't take any shit." It was slightly negative and kind of like, "Oh, no," and my favourite one, as in my least favourite, was, "Oh, she's really scary. She's, like, really scary." And I'm, like, "Okay." Thing is, I'll take it because I was owning that side of me that existed, but what I did feel confused about was why it was different when I did it, compared to my male counterparts, and there weren't very many other women who got to my level of leading, really. Very few. So, I was always, even in training, pitting myself against other men.

So, if we're running or climbing or jumping or doing acrobatics or whatever - I didn't have other women around me. I just didn't. There were always only other men trained with men. And then we all got older, moved away, did our own things, became leaders in our own rights, and I noticed this pattern of really gendered language around leadership. I'm not defending the leadership style but I'm just saying that there is a real difference in how I was spoken about. By other women as well, not just by other men. By other women.

I remember that there was an article that I had to say something about in Total Theatre, and the woman who had written the article… It was a really great article. It was lovely. It

was about one of our processes in Brazil, blah-blah-blah, but she called me a taskmaster in it, and I emailed her and I said, “Don’t do that because I think it’s rude, and I wonder, if I were a man, if you would have written that.” And she changed it. Maybe I was being over-sensitive. I don’t know.

Jo: Out of interest, what was it changed to?

Jadé: I have no idea. I can’t remember. I can’t remember. That is a good question, though, Jo.

Jo: I mean, we’ve been talking broadly about experiences in the arts industry in general and academia in general, which is part of that arts industry when your academic practice is within the arts. But I am interested in what your individual experiences are within the immersive industry within, as it is now being called, but specifically in terms of your more recent practice and, kind of, in instruction-based work, work that incorporates- Both of you incorporate digital technologies in your practice in really exciting ways to, kind of, establish this sense of intimacy.

So, if we could be a little bit more specific about what your experiences have been in terms of balance, privilege. Just in relation to this conversation, what they have been in this specific type of practice.

Silvia: I don’t know if we’re talking, still, about gender or not and, sorry, also going a little bit back to what I was saying about preferring working with women, I have experienced this thing where the industry, sort of, when you are working with a man

will tend to think that the man is the leader in the company, and that keeps happening over and over, despite the fact that we are both really pushing towards making people aware that it is both of us who are leading on projects, or were leading on projects because that's when I was working with Rotozaza. Now I don't work with Rotozaza anymore and Rotozaza was me and Anthony Hampton and I now work as myself and collaborate with different people, which I find works much better for me – clearer and simpler, in a way.

But definitely, I still come across, I still come across presentations of our shows like 'Etiquette' where it is 'Ant Hampton's Etiquette' or 'Rotozaza, Ant Hampton's company' which is obviously not- I know it's not because Anthony is pushing himself. It's just how it is perceived because, you know- Also because we started with me as the performer and him as the director. But that doesn't really- You know, when it devised theatre, performer and director doesn't really mean- The company is the combination of performer and director.

So, I do still come across that which is quite interesting and I find this kind of thing happening much more in theatre than in more technology-based performance where actually I find – even though, in the general stereotype of it, it's quite male – there are loads of women doing really amazing stuff with video and technology. And there is- Maybe because it's a different world, a completely different world, a younger world, maybe, in a way, that's it's still- It's not stuck in those, sort of, preconceptions and therefore a woman has got just as much relevance as a man does. That would be my experience.

Jadé: Yes. I think I agree with Silvia on all of those three main points. First of all, if you work in a duet with a man, the man always gets the questions asked of them and you're bypassed. I am

quite lucky to work with someone who is really dedicated to making sure that credit comes to me when it's due and that my name is equally on there. He's very persistent in confronting other people's biases. We've been in situations a lot where we've gone to visit a venue, and they always come to him and say, "Where do you want this? What do you want? How do you want this?" and he always says, "Can you please go and ask Jadé?"

And he has to be really defiant because he could easily answer the question. The question could be really stupid but he will purposely not answer it and he will say, "Can you go and talk to Jadé? She's the director. Could you go and speak to her, please?" And they're, like, "Oh…" and that's just constant. That's a thing that I appreciate, because it points it out to the person. Rather than me coming in and going, "Excuse me, I think you'll find, you have to ask me," and pointing it out myself. It's actually stronger, in some ways - it's still the white-presenting male that is buffering between me and public space, me and the outside world. So, in some ways, I still end up relying on him, and that's just the way it is.

So, that's quite tricky. As you know, it's been quite difficult to be considered the director. Just by saying the words 'the director', somebody who looks like me just doesn't come to people's minds, at all. With technologists, though, there is something a bit different. I work mainly with sound technology so the sound designers and sound technologists that I work with - I don't know if I've just lucked out with who I've ended up with but they are both very, very interested, actually, in my ideas, and I think that's the key. I think it's about being recognised for your mind and your ideas.

Further to that, I would like to posit the suggestion that the work that we do is somehow necessarily… There is a feminised aspect to it, and I

think that that's really appreciated by people who don't have that vision. So I think that perhaps there's something essentially failing in the way that we work, around communication, around listening – if it's instructional work. It always is around listening.

It's around questions and more subtle, you might say softer, qualities. I's not '"Bish, bash, bosh. Action." There's something around encouraging people's humanity to come to the fore and vulnerabilities to come to the fore. Perhaps that is something that the technologists that I work with appreciate in terms of the working environment that I create as well. Also the experience that I bring, as a woman, as a mother, as somebody who is quite influenced by that… I'm quite interested in being a woman and a lot of that comes through in the work. So, I think some of the technologists that I work with don't have that point of view and they actually appreciate that point of view.

Silvia: You know- Sorry, as you were talking, it just struck me that it's not, in fact- most of the time, it's not the collaborators. It's just the world, the industry and the perception that comes from the outside. It's not the people you're working with.

Jadé: Yes.

Silvia: It's the prejudice of the outside, in a way, and then, as you were saying, just the last point, I just suddenly had this voice of this technician guy who was working on a show- I mean, it was part of the technical team at a festival. I was doing my [condo 00:46:58] and he was completely, like, "Oh, my God. This is, like-," He was really into it. But instead of saying, "This is

great," he said, "You are mad." (Laughter) And, "You are mad," I get so much. Mainly, people just think I'm mad.

Jadé: That is interesting. Because that is the feminised version of genius.

Silvia: Yes, buy why do I have to be mad?

Jadé: Well, yes. Yes, that sense…

Silvia: It's really an interesting thing because I hadn't thought about it and, as you were talking, it clicked and it was, like, "Yes, he did say 'You are mad.'" Why? Because I did something really complex which it took him a very long time to process. He could not understand how 12 different tracks, including a video, some of them [radio headphones 00:47:51], some of them on iPhones, could all be synchronised and how you were going to do it using ___ and I was just, like, "Well, yes. I mean, it's not a sign of madness but-," (Laughter) That's the kind of [Crosstalk 00:48:08].

Jadé: Yes, yes.

Silvia: ___ collaborated. You know, it's- brilliant collaborators and always beautiful to work with them, actually, whether they're a man or a female. Even though I have a predisposition for loving female collaborators, I also have brilliant male

collaborators. But it is an interesting thing. And you are very lucky in that, that Jorge is really so committed-

Jadé: So pro.

Silvia: …to pushing that, to saying to the outside, “No, actually. She’s not mad. She’s a brilliant director,” and that’s the work that should be done constantly.

Jadé: Yes, and that’s really problematic, isn’t it? That, yet again, I’m still relying on a white male to buffer that relationship. Even though it’s beneficent. This is something that Jorge says that I think is really beautiful: if you have privilege, you use it beneficently. Be generous with it. I think that he does that on my behalf. But working with a male co-director and going to meetings and stuff, what’s beginning to happen is that, when we pitch, we’re kind of balancing each other out.

It’s very deep and relies on the psychology of wanting your mum and dad, somehow. There’s this father figure and - it doesn’t have to be gendered. Sometimes, the woman is the father figure and the man is the mother figure. In our case, it happens to be that the father figure is the one that reassures. He has a very - Well, you know him, he has a very calming and reassuring presence. He’s very diplomatic. He’s smart. He is logical. He is not mad. (Laughter) He’s un-mad. (Laughter) He is everything that people need to feel safe, and then comes me.

I’m a bit pushy and maybe try to be a lot stronger with pushing the boundaries of what the project can do and trying to be a little bit more punk within our limitations and pushing them and being a bit more bolshy, a bit more rude. But it’s also the spark that they need

to not be bored. So, you have these feminine and masculine, old-fashioned ways of looking at these trades, that we perform. I feel that: are we performing this? I think I'm quite interested in when things become performed.

When I speak about class, I suddenly have this feeling that I am performing my working class-ness. Or if I'm talking about my ethnicity, I have a feeling that I'm performing it, or I'm performing my female-ness. It's just very interesting when these things become part of a presentation and when they are used for… I don't know. Growing up, in the way that I did, I had to have lots of different ways… When someone phones and then your mum has a posh voice for the phone and she doesn't talk like that, no-one talks like that, actually, but there's a posh voice.

It's a bit like that for me, in the sense that I have to adapt to where I am constantly. Constantly. I have to adapt to certain spaces. Everywhere, I would allow myself to perform a certain aspect of myself… It's all about navigating constantly. It's quite tiring. You have to read the room really, really quickly. You have to convince people that you belong there, even when you feel like you don't.

You have to deal with walking into big spaces and being asked… One of the things that I get really annoyed about recently is when people, generally gatekeepers like security guards or receptionists - You've walked into somewhere posh, where it doesn't look like you should belong. Especially if I'm not dressed up. I mean, that has a lot to do with it. These institutions have people guarding, and they'll say things like, "Yes, can I help you?" A bit like, "You don't belong here. You're lost, clearly," instead of, "Who are you here to see?" Which is what Jorge would get. I get, "Yes, can I help you?" (Laughter) It's those really subtle differences that are actually

weird because if we return to this idea of institutions, that I'm quite interested in, what they represent, the very institutions that immersive… When I started out working, it was about having this freedom to be a bit punk- When I say punk, I'm not talking about mohicans and green hair and stuff. I'm just talking about being able to be free to have that feeling of being anti-establishment. In the beginning, that just meant making more site-specific work, the non-narrative work.

So, it's non-literary. It's a very physical theatre-style of work, and all of that was quite punk because it was giving a middle finger to the establishment. The establishment, in a super-general sense, was anything that had the word 'royal' in it, or drama schools, or the National Theatre, or reviewers from The Telegraph, or whatever. So, in that sense immersivity, in the beginning, was located for me in squatting culture and making experimental music.

That's actually how I got into that world, through experimental music and making what, in those days, was more like multimedia work, performance art-style stuff. And it was very, very, very DIY. And it had to be DIY. It had to be DIY because we didn't have anything. Didn't have anything. And that, coupled with the connection to Grotowski, was a total revelation because that was taking the audience and actor relationship to another level.

But, come full circle to now, what I think we see is that it's just like conventional theatre in the sense that the same kind of privileged group, like white middle-class men, are able to occupy spaces with their work which, in some cases, is really… They tend to be able to get away with much more shit work than you or I could, Silvia. I think that when a posh white bloke is saying to you, "Look at my work. Isn't it amazing," everyone's like, "Oh, yes. Well,

you're a posh white guy. You must know what you're talking about."

Whereas when I'm coming along with my work, or a foreigner is coming along with her work and we say, "Look at our work," you'd better be good. You'd better be more than good, to be taken seriously because they are shortcutting to the top. And when I say 'the top', what do I mean? I mean, venues. Funding. Festivals. Gigs. They were able to get a seat at those tables where we were still continuing to make and make and make and make and work our arses off and build a reputation. And my name, Persis-Jadé Maravala, is not the sort of name that was instilling confidence in people. It didn't open doors. I didn't have connections at the National Theatre. I didn't have any connections at all.

So, that sense of rebelling against those institutions is interesting because those very institutions are now offering workshops in our methodology and they have the power and the ability to become a space that offers learning about immersive practice. Whilst, all the time, it was actually their own stagnant and hierarchical design faults that pushed us into making work outside of that, and so become a marginalised art form. All I'm trying to say is that those spaces are problematic because they do exclude certain people. And when I say 'certain people' I mean brown people and I mean poor people, and they exclude them from feeling welcome.

Now, I can walk into those spaces and I demand to be welcomed. My posture is different. I've earned my stripes. But back up to twenty years ago or even ten years ago, there was a constant feeling of impostor syndrome. "This is not anything that I could belong to. I'm very much here as a gate-crasher." There's just lots of irony around what the dominant culture is and how we rebelled against it and, now, how alternative culture has just been co-

opted by the mainstream, which means there is no alternative anymore.

Silvia: And it's going to be quite apparent, even more so now, in the current situation, where theatres will not be able to put on their big productions that made them look really good and now, suddenly, our kind of theatre is being wanted. I find that really interesting as in, you know, kind of infuriating at the same time because the original push to do things in cafes, in supermarkets, in conference rooms but not in the theatre was exactly the- I don't need the theatre. I don't want to have to deal with technicians. I don't want to have to do all of that. I want to be able to put whatever I make anywhere that will work anywhere, without me having to go through that middle man, you know, kind of thing.

And really, actually, not having to deal with technicians and the whole big, kind of, team of whatever theatre, whatever roles they had within that, you know, like- that was really important for me. To be able to be independent. To be able to take my car with Gemma and drive through the city without having to ask anything of anyone. And now that will probably become the new mainstream, which is great in one way but also really troubling when you come across an industry which is used to, for example – sorry, going back to gender – considering man as the one that invented something or came up with something or is the important- You know.

For me, it will be very important- Yes, anyway. Sorry. I'm just saying, how interesting. You come from a certain place, exactly to go against that, and now we're in a situation where exactly the kind of theatre we make will be really the kind of theatre that people will be looking at. So, all sorts of people will be making it and I keep my fingers crossed that it's not all just

going to go down the pan and become this, kind of- You know, like immersive theatre, in a way, has become so commercial, to the point that I cannot stand even saying that I make immersive theatre.

Really, because people understand certain boxes but I don't like it because it has now become synonymous with something that is very commercial, which is not the beginning of the idea.

Jadé: Totally not, yes.

Jo: You've brought the conversation around there to thinking around the responsibility of these big institutions. Those in positions of power and their responsibility in allowing for representation and a broader representation, not only more female practitioners, you know, giving that space to female practitioners but also, as you were saying, cultural backgrounds and that incorporates class. It incorporates colour, ethnicity, and this is something that's really important and really does need to be addressed.

But you're also leading, there, into this idea of appropriation when something becomes mainstream. It is appropriated and the voices that are referred to once that appropriation has taken place… And I think that might be a useful place to finish off, to draw our conversation to a close. I know, Jadé, you have mentioned cultural appropriation existing within the form when there is then the additional appropriation of the form itself by the mainstream, and the challenges that exist there.

Or, do you see that this is the opportunity for representation to be addressed? You know, you're saying that we are living in a time, under Covid-19, where this type of work – interactive work, construction-

based work, work that is familiar and uses digital platforms – is coming into its own, in some respects. Is this a space of opportunity or not?

Silvia: I think it's definitely a space of opportunity and a dangerous space at the same time because it's one where, actually- Sorry, as I started off saying, "What's the point of this conversation?" and now, at the end of this conversation, I'm going to say, "There's the point of these kinds of conversations." To make sure that we can remember where things come from, also, because that could be quite important, that we don't just now say, "Oh, great. Then let's have…" You know, whatever. Some big name making, like, some instruction-based Internet- which they will, and it's totally fine.

Jadé: Yes, they will. If it hasn't already happened, yes.

Silvia: So, there. At the end of this conversation, I go back to saying, actually, there is where it's important to be present and to remind people not to let things fall without knowledge of where they come from.

Jadé: Yes. Coming from Silvia, the way you're saying it. Something that gets me quite annoyed, is this idea that some white, middle-class guy has discovered something or invented something that actually has been borrowed or has an incredible history behind it. And I think it is about colonialism, really. We're living in this world after 500 years of colonialism and the culture of colonialism is now the dominant culture. White dominance tells us that this practice or body-related

knowledge… My work is a lot more rooted in body as well as technology. I work a lot with human-to-human interaction and there's a lot of bodily influence in that. Things like ritual. Things like eye-contact. You know, all those things that we were told previously were somehow a bit primitive or a bit invasive, or it's hippie, or it's lame.

It is always degraded, in some way, but I think in the case of immersive, we see how there is this pick-and-mix approach to choosing what bits can be stolen and what bits can be used. I've been writing about this and hoping to make something out of it. This idea of commodifying and sexing-up practices that are really, really old is something that the West does very well. It also relates to things looking like personalisation but it is personalisation en masse. Where participants don't have any more agency than choosing between a red door and a blue door, but they all, say, end up in the same fucking corridor.

I think that colonialised culture, which is now a dominant culture, is a very white, Euro-centric or Western-centric way of being. That decides what is the standard. That decides what is the norm. The way I work, we're all the time encouraging behaviours that are more aligned with the cultures that Jorge and I come from. Jorge is white-presenting, but comes from a black country. And I come from the cultures that I come from and we have a certain amount of cultural practices that are part of our backgrounds, our origins, a way of being embodied with each other.

A way of physically navigating space, for example. A way of creating intimacy that might be profound but not sexual. Bodies in public space. All of those kinds of enculturated knowledges, all of those inherent knowledges we've put into our work. When you see spaces now that are considered to be spaces of culture, there's always an idea… You'll always see the kind of person that is attracted to the latest cool thing to go

to. When we did ‘Hotel Medea’, for example, by the time it got to Southbank, it was really attracting thrill-seeking culture vulture-type people who wanted to be cool and trendy, who wanted to be there because they wanted to be ahead of the game.

They’d heard about this all-night show and what we realised was that they were just there for being there’s sake. They weren’t there because they were interested in the idea of it or interested in the myth of Medea or anything as profound as that. It was to tick it off their list. Like, “Oh, yes. Done that. That’s cool, that means I’m cool.” I remember specifically performing that show and there are moments that get very dense, and they get very thoughtful, or it gets very sparse, and in those moments, I saw those audiences and they would be bored. They were bored.

Yes, it’s just this feeling of, the higher up I go, the more successful I become, the whiter my world is, and I was losing the kinds of people that I made the work with and for, in the beginning. They weren’t able to- weren’t coming anymore. And we were really fighting with Southbank to keep those prices really low, and we do have a policy of keeping our prices either free or very, very low. But the fact that it was located at the Southbank meant that a certain type of person would come.

The body-based work, I’m not sure, in Covid, how that’s going to work out for us because it’s very much about rescuing the knowhow, the knowledge of body-related practices and hoping that it’s something that people are going to appreciate more, post-Covid. As opposed to going, “Oh, yes, but actually, why go out ever again? I can just do everything and experience culture on my laptop and maybe I never need to go and hang out in a room with other bodies ever again.” I think it could go either way, really. I’m not sure.

Jo: I think it's proving that that need for human connection, physical human connection for conviviality, for a sense of the collective of communality, whether that be in an intimate one-on-one experience or whether that be in a larger group, I think this current situation is proving that we need it. It's proving that there is a space for work that does function effectively in these contexts, but there is also a need, a desire to keep that work that is very human, very physical, that plays with the experiential and all of the possibilities that that affords.

We need to draw it to a close now. Is it useful to ask what do we do with our privilege? Now, if we want to see- Or, what are the changes that we want to see?

Silvia: This one is a difficult one to improvise because you might have to write it. I didn't hear the question.

Jadé: Me too.

Silvia: Well, read it out loud. Oh, no. But you've recorded it on your side so the question is there for the viewers, but not for us.

Jadé: Yes. I didn't hear it.

Jo: A closing statement. Okay. (Laughter) I mean, maybe it's not that. Maybe it's about what is the ideal? What do we hope for? What do you hope for, for your future practice and for those artists who are coming through? What do you hope will change? What do you want to see change?

Jadé: I'd quite like to think about the systemic problems. The systemic economic and cultural positions of the class system. It's a really tricky one. There are so many different levels that I think change needs to happen on. For myself, I can only say that the change I hope that I can make is by being more public-facing. For people to be able to see that someone who was on the dole for as long as I was, somebody who doesn't come from privilege, has earned her place here. And that means providing ways in for other younger artists, I suppose.

I think that's what I'm trying to do with the more educational side of the company. Giving people confidence, and also being unpopular, and making sure that that's alright, as a woman, to not be nice. To be very ethical and have a sense of decency and not confuse that with being nice. So, that's the other thing I'd like to change.

And mostly, it's about encouraging people to get out of the fucking way because there's no point in everyone clamouring to get to the top and trying to let more people have the same rights to get to the top when there just isn't space because no-one moves out of the way. So, a whole re-thinking of the shape of what decision-making, at a national level, looks like for culture.

Silvia: Yes. Sounds good. I don't know if I can add. That sounds great. I mean, I think it'd be great, yes, for institutions to be braver and not to follow, I think, and to be also more knowledgeable. Braver and more knowledgeable would be brilliant. (Laughter)

Jo: Fantastic. That's a brilliant place to end. Positive.

Silvia: Excellent.

Jadé: So, do you want to stop-.

END AUDIO

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