

Radical Collaboration and Generative Practices for the production of Labyrinth: Defining Humanity

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***Labyrinth: Defining Humanity
Beijing International Fringe
Festival***

***Playwrights: Mei Ann Teo and
Company, Lauren Yee, writer***

Director: Mei Ann Teo

***Scenic & Costume Designer:
Melpomene Katakalos***

***Lighting Designer: Xingying
Peng***

Projection Designer: Tian Zhao

Labyrinth Working Statement

"Human beings are not born once and for all on the day their mothers give birth to them, but

... life obliges them over and over again to give birth to themselves." GG Marquez In this work, we are inspired by the ways in which we have ability to reify our own origins through the process of reflection as an individual and communal act. How can we practice continual awakening and

renewal of perspective in this time of consumption and living for the sake of comfort? We believe that this process is one that comes only from deep personal reflection. As theatre makers, we revel in community and believe that profound connection is made when the meeting is made with individuals who have access to this practice of contemplation. Why is this theatre? The Greek word "theatron," which the word "theater" is derived from, means A PLACE OF SEEING. What happens in most theatre productions is the process of modelling - where actors perform characters with whom the audience might have resonance. They play out their lives, and we watch their specific reasons for action. We see them as a model for us, as a stand-in for us, perhaps experiencing what we already have - or never will - as a way to connect us to the rules of human behaviour through observation. We are interested in the audience member having the creative power of SEEING WITHIN without the explicit models of characters and actors on stage. We wonder what are the possibilities for the human imagination when given prompts as opposed to model. We hope to inspire our audience to reflect deeply on their lives in order to be present in the now, and to face their future. We are collecting sources and impulses from our international community of family, friends, and acquaintances in order to build an ever-growing Collective Hive Mind that seeks to determine humanity's history through personal memory. We believe in

the specificity of diverse experience as a component to understand the epic nature of the human being.

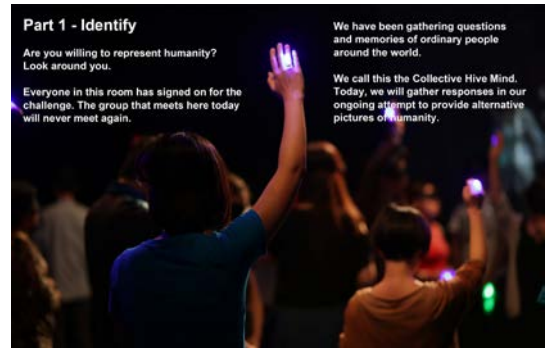
Preparation

Meng Jinghui, artistic director of the Beijing International Fringe Festival, personally invited our creative team to create a new piece for the 2014 season. Although we had very limited means, we looked at this unexpected offer as a chance to explore an idea we had for some time: What is the bare minimum we need to make theatre? At this point, we returned to our design-based method of creation based on the questions and nature of humanity. We worked within the principles of *radical collaboration* where all artistic identities are removed: EVERYONE is a maker, EVERYONE has a voice, ALL ideas and experiments are welcome.

Labyrinth is a unique piece where the audience makes the play. Before the performative parts of the piece were invented, we collected answers from a widely-distributed survey asking questions designed to take a person through the journey of their own inner life. We used the responses to create the basis for what would happen during the play. This piece asks the audience to become and make the play by inviting them to consider and act on their own humanity, both individually and collectively, by exploring a series of environments.

Part 1 - Identify

When the audience enters the space, they are surrounded by a low-lit white surround covered in video feed of questions and answers from the survey.



Part 1 - Identify

Are you willing to represent humanity?
Look around you.

Everyone in this room has signed on for the challenge. The group that meets here today will never meet again.

We have been gathering questions and memories of ordinary people around the world.

We call this the Collective Hive Mind. Today, we will gather responses in our ongoing attempt to provide alternative pictures of humanity.

Part 2 – Activate Stations

As they acclimate to the space, they are then led in smaller groups through the “stations” for different experiences we called Sound, Map of Important Questions, Rice Hopes, Family Meal, and Wishes. Throughout all these experiences, there is a live feed camera roaming the space, broadcasting live on the surrounding walls.



Part 2 - Activate

Now we invite you through 5 stations that explore who we are on an individual level and what our values are as a group.

The 5 stations are:
Sound
Map of Important Questions
Rice Hopes
Family Meal
Wishes

Sound
cooking
subway ride home
mother calming her child
chanting
silence

What does home look like to you?
家在哪里
在哪里

Map of Important Questions

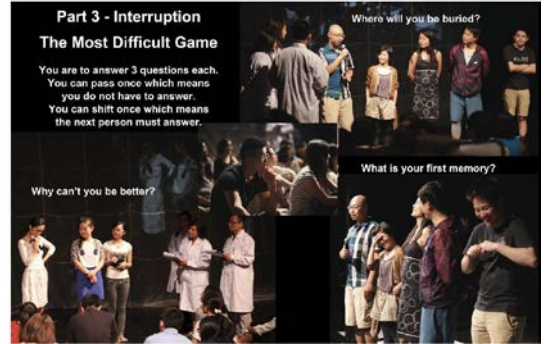
The map is currently blank.
What are the most important questions - both big and small - facing humanity today?
Write those questions down.
If you see a connection and similarities between two questions, draw a line between these two questions.

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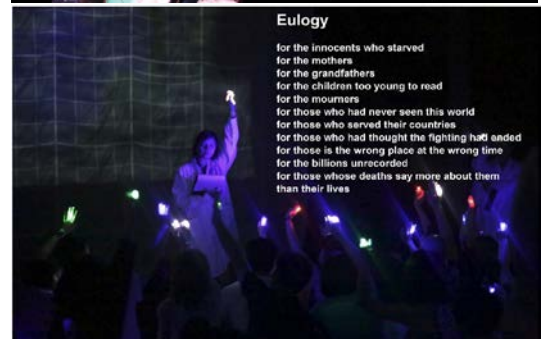
Part 3 – Interruption

As the audience groups cycle through the station experiences, an alarm sounds, and all activity is interrupted. All groups come to the centre of the space to play The Most Difficult Game. Individuals volunteer without knowing what the questions will be. They follow the rules listed below, and answer questions which can seem very difficult or impossible to answer, especially in front of a room of strangers. These questions were taken directly from the survey we created at the start of our process.

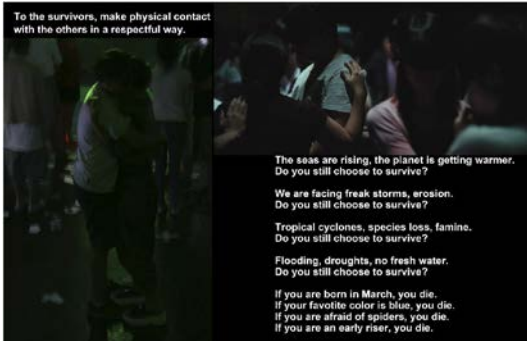


Part 4 - Apocalypse

Suddenly, and apocalyptic event occurs where audience members are eliminated from participation either voluntarily or randomly as they “die.” As they “die” and move into audience seating, they see that only a few are left underneath a parachute shelter. These survivors are left to consider the last question: What will you bring to help build humanity?



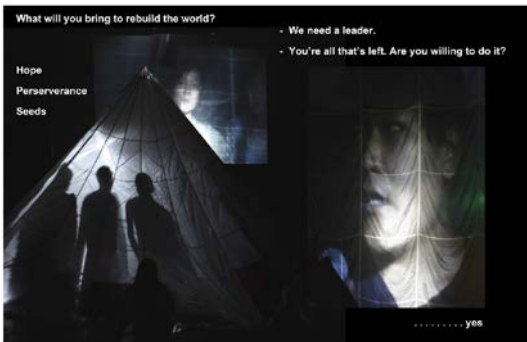
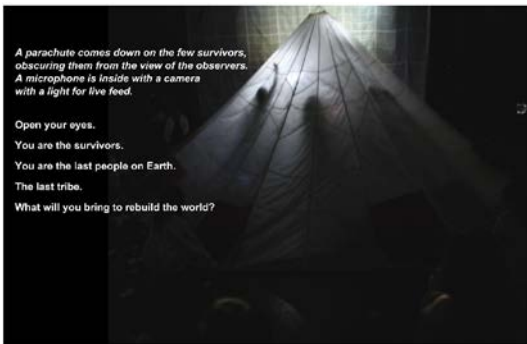
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[Link](#) to an English translation of the television interview with China News

People's Daily Article: [English Translation](#), [Original Article in Chinese](#)

Review by Liu Fang: [English Translation](#), [Original Article in Chinese](#)



Press

This unique immersive experience garnered a lot attention from both audiences and press. *Labyrinth: Defining Humanity* was featured on the Chinese evening news as well as the Chinese national newspaper and a number of online news outlets. It was ranked in the top eight shows of the entire festival with over fifty productions adjudicated.