

Transcript of Poplar Union's Creative Social – Wednesday 1st July 2020 via Zoom

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

That should be working! Cool, so just to introduce you a little bit and then about how the event is going to run, so I'm Beth, the Artistic Director at Poplar Union, which since the 16th March like many other, well pretty much all other venues has sadly been closed due to Covid-19. But we are still very much active and we've got a lovely online programme of events ranging from workshops and things like that, through to health and well-being activities and then more creative opportunities like what we are doing today, trying to keep in touch with our lovely artistic community that we miss and miss working with. So that's sort of us, so do check out Poplar Union's website to shamelessly plug us at the beginning to see what we've got going on.

We've got 4 incredible speakers with us today. We've got the brilliant Chuck Blue Lowry, Anna MacDonald, Fam Islam and Vijay Patel, who will all be sharing their wisdom and knowledge with you during the session.

We also would love to welcome your questions. Normally this event happens live in our studio and is very chatty and relaxed so we want to try and create that vibe as much as we possibly can, so we have the lovely Emily from Poplar Union [Emily waves], moderating the chat so please do send in your questions. You don't have to wait until the end, just as and when they come up whilst people are speaking do send your questions through. All we would ask is if you are asking a question to a specific speaker, if you just pop their name at the start, so just say like 'Beth: what time is it' don't ask that question! but just pop their name at the beginning or if you are asking something that is kind of an open thing or more of a thought or provocation just put 'anyone' at the beginning or something along those lines so we know that it's not for a specific person.

I think that is all I need to say really about us and how the event is going to run. We will try to keep to our timings, so we should be wrapping up at around 4pm. Let's see how we go. I will also add that this is the first sort of larger scale Zoom at Poplar Union have done, so we will all be very forgiving and kind with any tech issues that hopefully won't emerge but I mean, who knows doing live TV, let's see what happens.

But enough from me, I am now going to hand over to our first speaker who is the wonderful Chuck Blue Lowry. Who might also win the prize for coolest name [laughter]. So just a bit of context I guess, so we go to know Chuck through another artist who we have worked with and was a previous panellist at a social, called Paula Varjack, who I think is here, so hey Paula, nice to see you. And Chuck is going to be talking all about social practice at a social distance, and how we can keep working together. Like I say these are crazy times and it's hard to say positive and collaborative but Chuck is going to tell us exactly how you do that [laughter], so no pressure, you're going to fix everything! So enough from me and I will now hand over to Chuck.

Speaking: Chuck Blue Lowry, panellist

Great, thank you very much and if you could just make me host as well, marvellous, thanks Beth, great. Hi everyone, I'm Chuck. I'm an artist and filmmaker and I specialise in mainly in inter-generational work and social practice. I going to get some slides up so please do let me know if you can or can't see these things, give me one second! Screen share...ok that should be a thing and that should be a thing - can everybody see that? [Beth gives thumbs up]. Marvellous! Thanks guys. So I'm going to talk through some of the different projects I've been working on during lockdown. Many of

which are continuations of projects that started prior to Covid, that we've had to adapt a lot to kind of keep the projects running.

So a little bit about me, I'm also an associate artist with Magic Me, which is the UK's leading intergenerational arts charity. They do lots of work bringing older and younger people together. But I'm also one half of Varjack Lowry, and Paula Varjack is somewhere within the chat today, so shout outs to Paula for being fab. So my practice is basically all about collaboration. It's about working with participants, it's working with organisations and working with other artists, to lead workshops and make art works with and about people essentially. Those are usually shown in public spaces such as theatres, galleries and cinemas.

And here are just some of the projects I have worked on. [Talking about slides] So obviously if we break it down, basically my work is about being with people; it's about meeting with them, talking with them, devising work, filming, rehearsing and then sharing with even more people. So you can see why social distance and social practice probably don't go hand in hand and don't seem like a very obvious fit as a way of developing work, um, so like so many artists I know this is my representation of social distance by the way, she's keeping a good gap between her and other people on the tube!

With that in mind I realised I had to really rethink my practice asap if I was going to sustain myself during this period of time, which I think pretty much every other artist I know has gone through that same like arghhh moment but we seem to be finding our way some of us now. Umm, so I'm going to talk through three examples of work that I've made during lockdown to illustrate some of the ways that I've continued to adapt and collaborate during this time.

So going to start off with I, Melania, which is a project I am making with performance artist Paula Varjack. So a little bit about the project - we started, this is our first kind of proper collaboration together as a new company. We got some Arts Council funding, we were part of Barbican Open Labs scheme this year; it was super exciting, we were developing a show which is all about, um foreignness and acceptability and the cost of belonging. So both Paula and I have foreign mothers and British fathers, so we were kind of interested in what makes some form of foreigners more acceptable than others basically. Anyway so it was all going really well and we were having a great time and were about half way through our project when Covid set in and we were all told we need to stay inside. So this was the week before our showcase at the Barbican and we had two weeks left of residency that we were meant to do at Slung Low in Leeds and Battersea Arts Centre. So obviously with the venue closures these weren't going to happen as planned, so we decided to shift it all into a kind of online virtual space instead. So here is a screen shot of from one of our first workshops together. As you can see, twinning is a key part of our collaboration, so we would often wear complimentary outfits and colours to like get us in the zone and feel like we were connecting even at a distance.

Basically we set up Zoom accounts for the first time, which now feels like Zoom has become my life, but at first we were like trying to figure out how it would all work. We also put our phones on speaker and also sent each other a load of links. We set a schedule for ourselves everyday that kind of followed how we would usually work in a workshop scenario or in a residency space. So we would start with a check in, do a warm up then set ourselves timed tasks and challenges throughout the day and also gave ourselves plenty of breaks. We basically made sure to yeah, just kind of try to continue with our practice as we usually would, but we kind of discovered a few things along the way that had to change. So this is a little example of what my screen set up would usually be like - we'd have some editing software, we'd have documents that we would share to each other, we'd read the news everyday to give us some idea of how relevant our themes still felt at this time and

we would also wear some of our costume element, like our Melania Trump wigs, just to kind of keep that sense of performativity going as well.

So we basically as well really quickly figured out that Zoom fatigue is a real thing, so thank you everyone for logging on to Zoom today, because I know how exhausting it can feel sometimes. But what we found is that different activities worked better in different spaces. So for example, our check in, we would always do on the phone in the morning, because then we could pop it on speaker, we could have our cup of tea, we could not be staring at our screens and it just gave us a bit of separation between the check in space and a working space, which felt quite important. It felt just a bit less tense, but then we would do our morning warm up, so we would send each other links for little YouTube videos to work with and we had both done a workshop with JJ Revlon doing some voguing classes so most of our warm ups involved a bit of duck walking and loads of femme sass to just like get us in our bodies and get us moving around our rooms. So that felt like a really exciting way to feel a bit physical at the beginning of the day, um, and then we would get into our Zoom session and start making the work.

What we found as well that was really really useful was just engaging in as much online content as possible, so we did a great workshop with Bryony Kimmings and we also watched loads of performances live, that had been made on Zoom, just to get a little bit of inspiration I guess for how we could work in an interesting way during this time, kind of push the boundaries of what was possible in this space. Yeas, we were actually really surprised by how effective it was and also for our collaboration it felt like a truly collaborative experience because we were both figuring it out together for the first time, navigating new technology that we hadn't really worked with before and it just gave us a real freedom to try things out from scratch. And we got through loads of work and by the end of the week we showed our dramaturg what we'd done and she was like, oh my God, you've done so much! You've basically made your script in this time, so it just proved to us that this could be an effective way of working.

I then took this through into another project that I'm working on with Paula, which is called Yard Youth, which started with Paula leading this series of workshops for young people every Monday evening. It was meant to be a theatre project but obviously with the shift we decided that film would maybe be a better output for the group, given the circumstances. So I was brought in and we took some of the learnings into these workshops that we were running with kids aged between like 11 and 14 and what I found initially really strange was meeting and facilitating a group for the first time in this space, in the same way that for some of us it's the first time we've met today in this space. It's really hard to get a full sense of a person like in this little contained screen, but it's also very exposing right, because usually you'd meet in a neutral space like, you'd meet in a theatre space or a care home or a school, just somewhere that's kind of a neutral space where everyone can enter and give as much or as little of themselves in the session, whereas here, you are beamed into people's rooms, their lives in a much more exposing way that usual. So I think with that in mind we were really cautious of how to approach some of the check ins with the young people, so they didn't feel too put on the spot or too vulnerable, um so we played a lot of word association games, which actually was really interesting because we would start off with something like leaf, and would find by the end of it they started kind of bringing up things that were really present and live to them but in an abstracted way, so they might say schoolwork, stress, boredom, heat, like they started bringing up these words and phrases, which were so, such an interesting insight into how they were feeling without putting them on the spot basically.

Also what I found really fun about working with young people in this space in particular was how they just have a totally creative reaction to the technology, like a small group of the young people

had figured out how to turn their cameras upside down, so that they could spin around like a washing machine on Zoom! I still haven't figured out how they done it, but they created their own little washing machine crew and they would all move around the screen and it just gave you loads of inspiration for how you can push creative ideas in this space as well.

And then the final project I want to wrap up on, because I am probably running way over time, is um a project that I've been doing with Magic Me, which I mentioned earlier is an intergenerational arts charity, and I was working with them on what's called their Arts and Ages programme, which essentially brings together older people who are usually in care settings or in sheltered housing with younger people usually in Primary school age and get them to do creative projects together and this has run for a number of years. I was halfway through making a giant board game of Guess Who with about twenty older and younger people together when Covid hit. So we had to think about how we can keep these two groups that are actually becoming quite isolated, connected and making creative responses together.

What we found was that the most effective way of doing it was just providing them with a whole range of options of how they could receive activities but also how they could respond to them. And what I found was that not all of them would have access to the technology that we use in the two previous projects I spoke about, so we had to get a little bit creative as to how we could get these message out, so we found that printing off packs that we could send to people directly with a stamped envelope inside, so that they could respond that way really helped, we also sent email versions, downloadable copies but also we did phone calls where we would talk through the activities with people.

Eventually we got loads of mobile phones delivered to the care homes, so that care staff could document projects with the older people, which was a really brilliant scheme and just helps keep them connected not just with the creativity of the project but also with friends and family in a more kind of face to face way. But equally we found having phone calls with people where you can chat through with them, talk through the activity pack and you are both looking at the same thing still gives you a real sense of connection. And equally they could then take a photo, they could draw a picture, write something [poor audio connection on the recording - undecipherable speech] it's gone a little bit blurry, that's fine - yeah and essentially the main learnings that I've found, I think that my connection has dropped off!

Ok I think that the main learnings that I've found was just that, you can hear me ok!, is that you need to have a little bit of flexibility, you need to know when to let go of stuff as well because you can't do your practice in exactly the same was as you have before, so it's like figuring out what's really important to keep, what can you let go of and then also thinking about what do I want to carry forward. One thing that I've found is that it's really a great way to think about connecting with quite isolated people - and those people will still be isolated after this experience, even when most of us will come through to going back to kind of social activities in a normal way, is how can we keep these conversations going so that we can keep collaborating.

Yeah that's kind of where I'm at! I hope some of that was useful, I'm going to try and stop sharing my screen, one sec, stop share. Fab, and I am now going to make Vijay the host, there we go! Thanks everyone!

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

Thanks so much, Chuck. We can all imagine the rapturous applause that is now going on, wave wave wave, um thank you, that was great and I think, yeah, there is already so much in there that I think

will be of use especially one of the things that really stuck out to me is this idea of also having, of taking these different, doing different things in different virtual spaces, so why a phone call is more appropriate than a Zoom call and a WhatsApp message is better than a phone call of whatever it might be. So um yeah, I think that's definitely not what Zoom wants to hear us say [laughter], but yeah it's great.

Just a reminder as well that if anything there struck a chord or you want to know more later on today, please do be posting in the chat, it can even be like talk more about this please!

Cool, great, so we will now move swiftly on to our second speaker today, which is the brilliant Fam Islam, who has now disappeared, so we will just move on! We, I first sort of met Fam actually speaking on another panel for a brilliant author and podcaster and all round brilliant woman, a lady called Sangeeta Pillai, who is here! We are representing here today, which is great! So, yeah, Fam is going to talk to us about dance and how that has been helping them through the lockdown and various other things, so I will mute my mic and handover to the brilliant Fam, thank you very much.

Speaking: Fam Islam, panellist

Ah well thank you very much, thank you so much for actually asking me to be part of this, I had major major impostor syndrome, I was reading through the list of who was going to be speaking and yeah, it was all a bit daunting but. you know, Beth, thanks for the persistent, but in a nice way, thank you,, thank you! Yeah, so I am they/them, that's my pronouns and yeah I think it's interesting to hear what Chuck had to say about the switch, yes social distance sort of switch and how we are communicating with each other now.

But the thing is I've been working online for five years, so I've been working alone in my flat for five years and have been actually been using Zoom for like maybe four, three years - actually Zoom was at an exhibition that I was working at like maybe ten, nine years ago promoting the software. Umm, but yeah, its been interesting to see how people talk about Zoom fatigue umm and well its actually kind of I don't know whether I suffer from Zoom fatigue, but I, because I've become so desensitised to it now, umm as well as having Instagram Live - like as soon as lockdown happened, everyone was on live and it was so overwhelming, umm, and then also you have the umm you're not feeling creative enough or whatever you are putting out there isn't useful anymore because somebody else is putting out better content than you.

So it took a little bit of time for me to catch up with my own thoughts and stop beating myself down and I saw that across the board, even with people who were putting out really great content, umm, but er yeah, before lock down, working online um, I was able to hook up with friends and say hey, after work let's go for a drink, let's go for a dance and that was my outlet, you know it was physical interaction is my outlet, I was guaranteed to have a dance like every week or every two weeks, but when lock down happened it was like ok right, I've got to do this, I've got to do this on my own, I've got to have a laugh and a dance on my own somehow.

Before I knew it my anxiety had increased tenfold, because now everyone was available, everyone was like messaging me saying hey Fam, you want to catch up? Let's catch up - and these are people I've tried to catch up with like for ages you know, and now all of a sudden everyone is ready, and I'm like, dude, I'm still working. You know even today, I had to like snuck away from work, they don't actually know that I'm doing this, um er, yeah so I found that quite difficult to navigate and yeah I'm also a bit of a night owl, so I'm up at different hours and I've got a friend who is joined us here from New York right now, and this is my friend that we are in constant contact with each other and something Chuck mentioned as well about matching outfits to feel like you are connecting, and I'm

connecting with my friend from all the across the pond right there and we are both wearing cowboy hats and doing silly dances and stuff! Um what I quickly realised during this lock down was um, my anxiety increased - I've got like a major depressive history I guess, I've had mental breakdowns and it just went up tenfold during this lock down and somehow even though I've got therapy, I've got an understanding about what meditation can be good for, how yoga can be useful, how chatting to somebody can be useful, none of these things were, have or were working, to decrease my anxiety.

And doing, having my therapy sessions, I was speaking to friends and I realised quite quickly that actually there's something called somatic healing, err, that I didn't realise that I was doing. What I found myself doing was dancing every afternoon on Instagram, ummm like and this is not exactly choreographed I'm not a I'm not a professional or anything but you know I've got some moves. So being able to be on Instagram and just be this ridiculous person that is dancing in my stories you know, who's watching? God knows, and all of a sudden, I was getting messages saying hi Fam, you are bringing me life, thanks so much for like doing these dance videos. [Beth wrote in the chat that Fam is a great dances], Ahhh thanks [laughter] Umm yeah, it was really releasing so I was having these anxiety attacks and when I say anxiety I mean like my body sweating, I'm, um, actually let's talk about somatic experience - so the anxiety itself has manifested physically where actually the skin on my arms, my chest and my face starts to burn, it feels like someone has a lighter up against my skin, so my anxiety, I might not actually feel it in my chest or my breathing, I might just start feeling it in my sweat or my skin burning, my neck aches, so I'm always like clicking my neck. Umm, and then the tightness of breathing feeling absolutely overwhelmed, can't be in a meeting, I mean having an anxiety attack during a financial meeting at work is not, is not ideal so being able to switch off and leave the meeting and go and make a cup of tea and have a dance was a mad release.

I didn't realise that's what I was doing, I didn't realise that was somatic, part of somatic healing, it was like literal energy flicking off and that's how my therapist was describing it, umm, and I didn't realise that's what I was doing, so I started doing a little bit more research and a friend of mine had already mentioned somatic experiences, somatic healing, so I looked into it a bit more and I realised that that's exactly what I've been doing, been dancing off anxiety um and panic attacks and actually last, what was it, last week or just over a week ago I had a really bad episode where I ended up in hospital errm because I gave myself a fake heart attack, umm, umm but the doctor couldn't understand cause the doctor was like yeah your heart is all fine, your blood count is all fine, everything is absolutely fine and I was like ok, this is again, part of the somatic experience where you are experiencing pain in your body umm because you are not allowing yourself to release your anxiety, you're not allowing yourself to release that stress or recognise the stress anxiety what has triggered that trauma to cause this paralysing anxiety basically.

So yeah, dancing has been a part of that and finding other physical ways of navigating err anxiety during lock down because I can't go out clubbing init! [laughter] And yeah, chatting to, chatting with my mate, they are Aunty Sugar right now on Zoom but their Instagram is @mx_sugar_mamasota - basically with them I've been able to unpack quite a lot of things as well, so on Instagram we like got together and started talking about queer politics, you know racial politics and our next one will be about accountability. All these sorts of things are like processes and umm, yeah processing all of that anxiety and all of that stress and trauma cause like with what's happening with Black Lives Matter, that was another like spike in my mental health and my body, it was just big, Sugar can vouch for that, it's been a somatic experience really like seeing what's happening in the news and how people are talking about it, some people are rejecting Black Lives Matter and that's just like you know spiked a lot of anxiety and stuff. Friendships have been lost and yeah, there's a lot of grief, err, yeah, anyways I think er I've chatted enough about stress and panic and anxiety [laughter]!

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

No that's great, thanks so much Fam, that's really great and thank you for being so candid as well in umm - oh wow, people are clapping - yeah you can do a reaction down at the bottom [clapping hands reaction on Zoom] Oh my God, I mean, I'll just clap! Umm but thank you and yeah it's definitely something I've obviously doing, but I do at Poplar Union, like we work very closely with a lot of artists, whether they are theatre makers, or filmmakers or dancers and it is this thing around it's quiet unnatural for people generally, like pretty across the board in creative industries that it's in us usually to be moving, it's not a desk job, it's not a 9-5, and now we're just like very static and I can, yeah, I can definitely relate to that kind of impulse to move as this sort of healing process umm, so yeah, everyone have a dance in your kitchen and check out Fam on Instagram, because it is like incredibly uplifting watching someone dance (@mercury_dun).

Speaking: Fam Islam, panellist

Yeah I mean I've started calling out people who have been silent about Black Lives Matter, so I was just like doing my awesome dance moves and then you see an amazing caption saying 'your silence is violence' guys, you know, exactly, like that and share that, yeah, great!

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

Ah well you are getting a lot of love on the chat as well, which is great. Umm cool, so brilliant well we are powering our way through these speakers and we have another one, and our next speaker is the brilliant Vijay Patel, who I think Vijay, we met way back a few years ago now - Poplar Union does a what we are trying to make an annual festival called A Mindful Mess festival, which is an exploration of the mind and mental health, but also a real celebration of neuro-diversity and sort of advocating for a bit of yeah, change around that and how people perceive neuro-diversity.

Umm so I don't want to start talking over Vijay when he is by far an expert in this field, but I will hand over to him and I believe you should already be the host Vijay, so you are good to go.

Speaking: Vijay Patel, panellist

Thank you Chuck! Hello everyone, I'm Vijay, um I'm an artist - that word feels weird to say given that for three months I haven't felt like I haven't been an artist, but I have still been an artist, so I'm a performance artist, live artist, cabaret artist umm kind of a mixture of all three and or others, so I use interdisciplinary you know for that! The work I make is kind of around cultural identity, so I look within my own body and within my identity to find out what kind of stories I can tell. So I use cultural identity to kind of encapsulate that.

For a bit of context my first show was called 'Pull the Trigger', and it was about, based kind of around my Dad's err shop, Indian corner shop and like my role as the son in that and working within that environment, working in kind of the Indian cultural context and then adding in kind of queerness into that and adding other elements, which kind of make that kind of space a bit more complex and conversations around more kind of complex. And it's err, it's light-hearted, it's fun, it's playful, it's got its moments err, but it's kind of like my way in to exploring how my identity crosses space with contexts in my life when I was a child, how I can kind of resonate that kind of thing - and there's stuff about the Ugandan Asian expulsion, why Indian British Asians exist in this country, why particularly my generation err exists you know in the 90s why we're like British Asian and why that's kind of a stem from the 70s and Idi Amin and Uganda.

Umm and then I moved on to making my second show, which is called 'Sometimes I Leave', so err just putting this here now, that I have Asperger's, so it kind of affects social communications so things like this is very, very difficult to navigate sometimes, err but I'm learning my way through it very slowly. Umm so 'Sometimes I Leave' is, was a show made um kind of stemming from my experience of having Asperger's syndrome erm and the fact that sometimes I need to leave spaces and it's fine to do that, so if I've decided to go somewhere and then 10 minutes later I decide that that wasn't right for me, then it's ok to leave, but the anxiety fuelling around also that I might need to leave and I might need to tell people that I might need to leave, so how do I set that up? So the whole show became this kind of mess of like thoughts I guess - I say mess in a very kind of light-hearted way, because I see mess as something really beautiful when it comes to neuro-divergence, I think that we can be beautifully messy, errm and I like to embrace that in myself. It might not be something that is shared, but that's how I see mess, so sometimes I need is a very kind of wish-wash of things that gets to a point at the end, umm, but it was a really useful exercise because making that show meant that I needed to think about access needs for myself in making it, creating boundaries and creating space so that I could kind of umm take care while I was revisiting things that were particularly, might be quite triggering or sometimes a bit traumatic to experience, so this is why in this talk that I was going to say I was going to talk about the arts industry with access needs, because it took me, so two years ago um I was making this show and I realised that umm my particular access needs, well how do I convey them for example when I'm working with organisations and venues, I was thinking how do I have that conversation without individually telling each person I work with that I have Asperger's and these things I struggle with, and how best to support me; because I truly believe that people do want to support neuro-divergence a lot of the time, it's more about the way of getting it from that person to the other person, the communication is really hard and quite traumatic, so and often the labour is on the person with the neuro-divergent, neuro-diversity, so it's very hard to kind of make, have that conversation I found personally.

So what I did was I created an access document, which I'm going to share, while I'm going to talk through it as I share it, because it makes more sense that way. Can everyone see that? [thumbs up in screens] Err ooh, sorry! Just going to go to the top. Yep, so I've called this one Disability Awareness Document, it can also be called an access rider and a lot of people have made these things, so I've seen quite a lot from neuro-divergent colleagues and other people in the arts who have made similar things.

So it seems to be a thing that people really want to do and really want to work out how to make that communication a little easier, so that you can just send this to somebody and say this is my thing. So I've broken it down with things like, the little things, well I say little, the sub things that kind of affect me in kind of day to day experiences, in work contexts umm and so, I kind of just say this is the thing and this is how you can support me, this is what would be great from you. So you know, things might be umm a quiet room if I get overwhelmed, so letting an organisation know before I work with them that I might get overwhelmed and I might need a bit of a breakout room or a quiet space to go to.

That's just an example, but it was, there was a labour in making this, but not as much as telling each person that I work with that I have Asperger's and I need these things. I've drastically in the last two years I've seen that just drop completely and there is so much less labour on me now. So I thought it was useful to make it ermm and as soon as I started sending it round it was just loads of people being like I'm so, so thankful that you've sent this round - so much support from allies and people who are neuro-divergent to be like, I just wanted to know these things and people who haven't had that chat with me were suddenly able to support me in a different way, and the way that was coming from me; it wasn't how they thought I should be supported it was what support I actually

need, because that was yeah, and I think umm when I worked with you Beth and Poplar Union, it was very early days of this document being created, so I think you were one of the first people to really accommodate those spaces. Umm and I'm happy to share this with some people and I think Beth, if this is going somewhere, I'm happy for it to be kind of, because at some point I was thinking of making it public anyway because I'm happy to be transparent about these things and I don't know, you know, it's just I haven't really found the vehicle for it to be transparent yet, so one day it will be transparent and I'm happy to share it with you all now for coming here, because I think if it helps somebody who is neuro-divergent who wants to create their own document, I think it's a resource that should be and can be shared, because I based this off another neuro-divergent artist umm who has said the same, it's kind of passing around and people creating their own versions and formats for this to be shared.

And I also think about how this could translate err post Covid, so now I'm thinking, so I created this document two years ago, Covid happens all my work got cancelled as everyone else did who had to work in a room, and I now was then trying to think how, what my access needs look like when I'm working at home. Because it's a whole new thing. I'm actually going to stop sharing my screen now, but I'm happy to send this through at a later date, just so I can see everyone. umm yeah, so that I'm still working out because we are only three months in I think it's still quite hard to like Fam was saying just now about Zoom fatigue and maybe not experiencing it, I'm not sure if I experience it or not yet, I don't know if it's the right thing to say that that's it, but it might be. I think as time goes on then I'll know what the main triggering points are, but I think it's very hard and it takes time to like look within yourself and find out what triggers anxiety sometimes. So I think I'm just sitting with that for a bit rather than forcing it. Umm but I'm working on making a kind of like Covid edition, which I can maybe send to people who are I work with on Zoom, and to kind of just other colleagues and also neuro-divergent artists and people that I'm in circles with, so that I can share this document and say I've made a Covid edition would that be useful to you? So I've had people having chats with me on like social media and emails, just to be like I really want to create this document. Um funnily enough, well not funnily enough, sounds really awful to say, no err with umm, as Covid has happened, I've had more emails from people really wanting to create a document like this and that just reflects what kind of time we are living in, right now, in terms of mental health and in terms of supporting neuro-divergence and supporting people who feel isolated and lonely, like I want to be there for those people, so I was like as much time as I can possibly dedicate to supporting people making those things you know, I'm still working on it.

But I think it's something that you know like I say, as this document moves on I really think that it's going to kind of umm, spiral out so that people will support more people and groups of people will support more people and I really think that it's something that will develop and more people will be aware of it and more people will create their own.

So yeah, I'm just thinking about what access needs look like after Covid really and during this time and after - so I'm like do I have to make one after as well, do I make a third edition a post Covid edition of the access document. Maybe I do, maybe I don't need to, maybe I go back to the old one but now I'm thinking maybe things won't ever go back to how they were, so I might need a new one. So it's very much following my life and I'm glad it's with me, it's got its own embodiment, you know it's very much a thing that I hold close to me, so it follows every kind of bit in my life and nothing more important than err creating one for a pandemic when you are trying to support yourself and work and yeah look after yourself. So I think it's very much self care 101 for me, umm amongst Netflix and amongst ice cream and amongst other things, but umm yeah, ermm and just on that as well, umm at the moment I'm currently on the National Freelance Task force, which I'm not sure if

everyone in this room is aware of but it's a task force set up err by Fuel Theatre and it's got a hundred and I think it's 138 venues supporting a freelancer each, err to be part of it and the freelancers have complete autonomy over that task force, we are all leading this thing, which is very scary and very nerve-wracking, but we are trying to make changes and lobby for better conditions for freelancers after this pandemic umm and as much as we possibly can we're just like fighting for change.

And I've just started umm a conversation with another neuro-divergent freelancer on the task force about creating umm errr better changes umm better conditions for freelancers neuro-divergent freelancers in arts organisations and venues, hoping that access conditions will just be put in place you know and where that leads, so we're just very very early days we literally started it yesterday so I don't have a lot to talk about on that, um but if you follow me on Twitter there's a whole post about it, which has a lot more information, so my Twitter I can put that in the chat as well if anyone wants to check it out (@vpateltheatre) umm it gives you a little bit more information about what we are doing and where we might be going so there's going to be loads of developments on that and we're really hoping to connect with as many neuro-divergent freelancers as possible, to gather the information as I always thing stronger together, I think it's really important to reach out to everyone and let everyone else have their say and that the conditions are set by the neuro-divergent freelancers, because we're the ones who will be working in those spaces, so I think it's really really important err to um fight for better change.

I think that might be a good line to like leave it on - fight for better change [laughter] in all of us.

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

That's great, thanks so much Vijay, big virtual round of applause for you. Oh yeah, do I need to change the host, if you pop it over to Anna that would be great. Err I love Sangeeta has just put in the thread CLAPS! that might be a new way to applause anyway, just yell the word claps. Thank you to everyone who gave claps, that's really great.

Err that was great, thanks Vijay and yeah I think it's an interesting and always an ongoing conversation around access and for us as a venue it's striking that balance between kind of what Vijay was saying around like you want to learn from the neuro-diverse artists and collaborators that you work with but you also don't want to put all of that work on them, as if it's their issue to sort out and that there's a real responsibility for venues to be educating themselves. Yeah, I think it's really important that it's not all the labour can't be on the people who are experiencing that thing, it really needs to be accommodated, exactly, in a space where you can fight for change like the task force is one of them, it's now a vehicle I'm like right, let's do this, the time is now, yeah, we need to support this now err, yeah. Yeah exactly, I mean I can speak from first hand experience of working with Vijay and other artists, there's a brilliant artist that I know Vijay has collaborated with umm called Daniel Oliver, who is well worth checking out as well umm and yeah we've learnt huge amounts through collaborating with you. So there's also that of that, it's the same we could be talking about Black Lives Matter with this, like you have to take that responsibility to educate yourselves and not just rely on the people it affects, but that will only happen through you know, diverse programming, making sure that those people are in the room and being seen and represented.

But speaking of which, and speaking of access it was actually err a question that our next speaker um put to us at our last Creative's Social which was around venues working with young refugees or sort of vulnerable groups, that it was such a brilliant question that Anna ended up being invited to speak on the panel, because I thought this lady shouldn't be in the audience, she should be up here

chatting, so I won't go on for too long again, but just to introduce Anna MacDonald from Play for Progress, who are an incredible organisation that we've had the absolute privilege of working with at Poplar Union and continue to collaborate with, umm but Anna can tell you more about herself and yeah, so I will hand over to our final speaker, do keep your questions coming in and your comments and support for our speakers, which is lovely. But yeah, over to Anna.

Anna you are muted! It wouldn't be a Zoom unless someone started talking with their microphone off. There's always one! Thank you, thanks for giving us that joy of being able to go Anna, your microphone isn't on [laughter] I will now hand over to Anna.

Speaking: Anna MacDonald, panellist

Thank you! I've already had a quick chat with the other speakers to say that if I go too Scottish at any point, feel free to raise your hand, umm I've been talking a lot to people at home today, so it might be, it might be, the force will be strong today!

Erm so as Beth said I co-founded Play for Progress, which is an organisation which works with unaccompanied refugee children, so young people that arrive in the country who are under 18 and they are alone. And this is obviously an incredibly isolated group and that's what I'm going to talk about today, art in isolation. So this group aren't just on their own, they are often working in either their second or third language and there's sometimes huge cultural barriers to overcome and often they are fleeing or there's a series of events happened to cause them to leave where they are going and journey to the UK, has left them quite traumatised and before Covid, nobody was discussing isolation and now everybody has missed family or missed an important event or plans have gone away, so it's now at the front of everyone's mind, um and in the past three months as Covid has kind of swept the globe it's been really interesting to see how people have reached out to the arts to anchor them, so whether your poison is comedy or writing or music or visual arts or dance, people have really been seeking solace in the arts.

And I mean we shouldn't be surprised by this, this is people have been doing this since day dot, you know we have seen that humanity has always creatively expressed how they are feeling and err for want of a better word the arts is a great tool and I know that is a horrible word and it doesn't encompass and it's shoe-horning in and it doesn't talk about what that really means, but the arts is a great tool for communication and expressing how you are feeling. Umm, the fact that it's non-verbal, it's a brilliant form of non-verbal communication, which if you are walking into a room with ten teenagers, teenagers not being the most talkative group anyway, if you are walking into a room with ten teenagers who all speak a different language um, non-verbal communication is vital. And it also, you don't have to have a big conscious journey, a big process to make art, you can just do it for fun and it takes the pressure off words, because words are clumsy and they don't really manage to communicate what you are feeling, otherwise with the arts you can be properly emotive, you can be angry through music, you can feel guilt through a picture, or you can have unadulterated joy, escapism creativeness for, for just for fun!

Umm and that's something else that's been really interesting to watch over this Covid time is people virtually reaching out sing together, dance together and write together and try and learn that song that their Dad used to sing, or go back to the dancing they used to do as a kid, because you were so right Fam, when you were talking about that joy of getting it out, or pick up an instrument you've not played since high school because you remember the fun it was with friends, um and Play for Progress has moved online as well - anytime we would have a physical class, so we have a class on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, we have online offerings, so two of these are public facing and one

is just for the Play for Progress community. Umm and the reason we made two of them public is because we also want to support the community that have supported us and we want to share what we are learning and the reason we have one that is private is also just to support more of the young people and keep it entirely young people focused.

And continuing this work during a time, because as Beth said everything has stopped but it's so important to keep platforming what we are doing in the arts. And I mean that financially, and it's probably a pertinent time to say that Play for Progress pays all of its staff, that is one of our founding principles, everyone's got to eat, everyone's got to pay rent, but also to value it and recognise the contribution that the art makes to wellness, the holistic contribution it makes and everything that Play for Progress does is therapeutically grounded, we are very clear on that. But for me, when this, when we decided that this was a way forward that was a real learning point.

My background is medical, I was an accident and emergency doctor for years, so to think of wellness in a non-clinical manner was a really steep learning curve for me, I had to do a lot of reading, but wellness through community, wellness through trust and communication, wellness through building relationships, which is the complete opposite of isolation; and I think that this has been massively highlighted again during this Covid pandemic but Play for Progress has been using the arts to breakdown isolation since we started, that's been our founding principle, so. We initially started with one music class on a Friday night, so you would get young people coming in - we work at the Refugee Council's children's section so that's sort of our 'feeder' organisation, so we are in a space they already know, we make it very open and friendly and always make sure the door is clear - we are very careful to have a quiet space, Vijay, that's something that we learned quite early on that a lot of these kids sometimes just need to stand back or sit down or sometimes they come and sleep umm and I don't think our chat is that bad! So, sometimes that space is, or maybe it is, sometimes that space is just needed; and what they are doing is meeting a couple of tutors, meeting some young people who are going through the same thing and they are just building community. Creating trust. Taking the opportunity to talk to us about other things, about their age assessment, about their immigration case, about their housing, about college, and then maybe they hear that we do a class on a Thursday night - a recording, arranging and writing class, um where you can bring music from home and you can share it and it can be seen by the people you are with and by your current community. Then they record it and add in, forgive this, 'contemporary' beats in it, in this accent it just doesn't work! And suddenly what we are doing is combining memories, who you are, fundamentally with where you are now to create your new identity. So you can move forward with that, with an understanding of who you are and where you have come from and feel seen, which is so important.

Um and then maybe they go to our creative arts therapy class, which is run by drama therapists, and exactly as you said Fam, is all about and I think, Chuck, you said as well, it's about getting back into your body. Um a lot of the work around trauma shows that you are really disconnected from your body, so it's about mindfulness and we have a lot of guest artist that come to that and that's just another way to build our community out to breakdown misconceptions about this group outside of our immediate community - share the message.

From there one of these young people might be identified as someone who needs some more one to one therapy, so they go to our one to one therapy group. Or maybe they are struggling at college, so they go to our Education department, or maybe they are taking this opportunity to talk to us about their age assessment case or their immigration case and they need help, they need someone to go to their psychiatric appointment with them; and suddenly the lines between what is art and what is community and what is community and what is art are blurred. And that is also reducing

isolation. Um the advocacy influence things really interesting, because you need to build the community and the trust to get to the place where these kids will bring these things to you, these things that fall between the cracks and this is where the external community and the bigger organisations come in, very much Vijay, like what you were talking about with your document and being aware of where the responsibility lies so you can take that to these organisations, these bigger organisations and if they adopt it, if they set that precedent then it makes it much easier to filter that down and that is for things like accessibility, also for political stances as well, it's really interesting and as the kind of global community - as one of the other things about Covid is that I think it has allowed us to pause and have a look around and start looking at what needs to be done, umm and as the global community is doing that and we saw these bigger organisations putting their exhibitions and collections online, as a reaction to the need for that in the community, we are also looking to the smaller institutions - and I use institutions just to mean arts centres and community centres um like Poplar Union. Umm who are going to get an honourable mention here, because Poplar Union for Play for Progress have gone above and beyond they are constantly offering us ticket opportunities, space, workshop opportunities, they even had one of our young people um work at their cafe for work experience, which you know for him, he's got a new skill, he's now got a reference, he's widened his community and he's got something he can put on his CV if he's ever applying for a job. And that's, he wouldn't get that unless he was integrated into the community, that is definitely art building community, building art. So I think art in isolation is a bit of a misnomer because as soon as you hum a tune, as soon as you pick up a paintbrush, as soon as you sit to read or write you are connecting and sharing in your learning from others from what's gone before or what's around you. Um and even if you do feel alone in that moment, humanity is there. If you are learning a tune or you are reading a book you can feel the presence and I mean it has been there since again since day dot, so it may surprise but every time we are doing that we are creating, we are collaborating, we are sharing and we are learning, um so I know this was called art in isolation, actually I think art builds community and community builds art and art builds community and community builds art and so on and so on and so on.

And I'm going to finish just by saying thanks to Beth and Poplar Union for organising this, it's been brilliant and I have so enjoyed listening to what everyone else has been talking about - and there is so much overlap as well it's amazing.

I'm going to try and share a video, now this wasn't overly successful earlier, so I'm just going to play a wee bit of it, but the reason I want to share it is because it brings together everything I've just sort of mentioning. Its this exhibition is currently still on at the Croydon Clock Tower, who are a local arts organisation for Play for Progress in Croydon, who are incredibly supportive.

Um the mural is done in collaboration with Atima Art, the block painting was done in our cat classes with Demar Kanut who is a Syrian artist, the photography is by Emma Brown, who took these photographs as a series of anonymous portraits at a residential and the music, which you may or may not be able to hear is from a roar class and there are some other bits of art, which are the public's reaction to the exhibition. I will also put the link to this in the chat so you can see it properly. Just, just so you get a taster, let me try and do this. I've got to go into advanced, which you know, anyone who knows me knows that that's tricky! Ok, here we go. Oh, let's see if this works [music with lyrics playing on the video] I'm just going to jump forward so that you see the end. [music with lyrics playing on the video] So I'll pop the link in the chat so you can have a proper look.

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

Ok great, thank you so much Anna, another huge round of applause and claps, errr that was really really great and um, yeah, it really speaks to a lot of the work and the conversations we have around like you say, people often ask us when we say we oh Poplar Union, we are an arts and community space, or we are a community arts space and people say oh like so what's your arts programme and what's your community programme, and it's like, well you can kind of draw very blurry lines between them, but really the two are always informing the other, umm yeah and I don't know that you can call something, like I feel like that community element should just be inherent in the idea of an arts space, it is for a community, umm and that's for all arts spaces should be, um but yeah, that was great and thank you for being so kind about us as well, its yeah, the pleasure is ours.

Umm but yeah, I mean, that was all of our speakers, errrm we now have the sort of open floor - just to check, is everyone still seeing and hearing ok because Emily, who was sort of moderating this is saying she is having some problems, ok, I think it's just Emily so I'm just going to let her know - errr but, yeah so we welcome questions.

A few people have been commenting bits and pieces but also not just from our audience here, and thank you to everyone for sort of sticking with us and it's lovely to have so many people still here, but even amongst panellists if anyone has any points or anything they want to raise for each other umm, now is the time!

And we can do it very officially through the chat or given that we have quite manageable numbers, so if anyone does just want to un-mute and ask a question verbally, they are more than welcome to.

Speaking: Anna MacDonald, panellist

I had a question for Chuck about the giant Guess Who - is that going to be available to the public at any point?

Speaking: Chuck Blue Lowry, panellist

So yeah, the giant Guess Who sadly is on pause at the moment umm and we are not sure when we will be able to get back on it, but all of the participants who are involved in it are now making a video art piece, which uses some of the layering - basically they did like lots of series of layers of portraits, so we did loads of different backdrops, like different marbling techniques, we took photographs, we collaged with each member of the group, their face became part of it - and we were going to do a big guessing game, but some of the elements of that will feature now in the film piece instead, but I'm really hoping if we can get back into care homes, if we can get back into Primary schools, we will be able to finish it off with everybody, but yeah, that's it - we've kind of shifted on, but they are still involved with each other, which is the really important thing.

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

Any other questions? Or provocations from anyone? I mean maybe everyone, our speakers have just solved all problems relating to arts under lockdown so there's nothing left to explain! We know what's happening! But yeah!

Speaking: Anna MacDonald, panellist

I think it's really interesting how much, I don't know about everyone else but pause for Play for Progress has meant that we can really do, these horrible corporate terms, but deep dive on our governance and make sure that all of that is up to date and really start looking at things that we've

maybe done but now we're looking at, oh we could add this, or that would be great, so looking for a silver lining in Covid I would say, maybe that's one?!

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

Yeah I agree, even at Poplar Union we are finding the similar thing of, I was speaking with one of our colleagues, our Music Programmer, and he was sort of saying you know we are potentially going to be closed possibly through until like October and remain working from home and things like that, so he was like if your main role is programming events, you know, what do I do and I was like you know we can really take advantage of this time, inevitably a lot of arts organisations whether you are a venue or a company you are often way under staffed, over capacity and everything else, but now we do have that time at least to kind of reflect on things and give the time yeah, whether its looking at your governance, the structures you are working with, just being in touch with artists - that's been a really nice thing, that having that time to just drop an email or phone call to people that we've worked with to check in with how they are doing, or people who should have been performing live but obviously we've had to postpone, just having that time to be sustaining those relationships umm has been a really huge thing and especially letting freelancers know that you are not on your own umm we are still here, still thinking about you, umm but yeah.

Clara has just commented yeah, just having that time to actually focus on what projects work, how to move forwards. So I think yeah through all the kind of fear of what's going to happen to the arts industry coming out of this, there is some optimism that I think it's also, we've kind of had a bit of a retreat at the moment, so hopefully we'll come back fighting, fighting fit. Aunty Sugar, friend of Fam has commented asking: Now that more people are watching your videos, Fam, do you feel a pressure to post them? [laughs] we've shamelessly plugged you throughout this, I hope you do, I want more videos.

Speaking: Fam Islam, panellist

You know what, that's a actually a really good question and even though we speak nearly every single day, er they haven't asked me this, but yeah, I mean I think it's an unspoken already known thing between me and Sugar. Umm but yeah, I think there's because, so errr, so I started looking at the way that I was dancing as dance therapy. Before it was just dancing, I would just dance like a flaming idiot, on the dance floor really just moving, just dance umm, but I mean I also used to dance when I came home or like, like if I've got a weekend and I'm cleaning the house just dancing the way, umm, watching dance videos - I've always loved to dance, it's just this weird thing I mean, I've posted about it um on my Instagram this little story about part of my I remember some of my childhood, there's some cute parts of it where I spent time with my siblings um and we'd watch the chart toppers like you know every weekend you know like Top of the Pops and like we'd just go mad and then there's our favourite band is um who is it?, New Kids on the Block and yeah for some reason my sister used to like bribe me to dance, she'd like well you need to dance in order to get this so, or like why don't you just dance - so I'd dance and I have these memories of where I thought I was really great and I still feel like that sometimes umm but yeah realising I'd been doing it as a part of therapy, it's therapeutic - I like completely lose myself in it.

A friend of mine who is in Toronto, they've actually got a band they are called Lal, um that's my shameless Bengali plug there, they are Bengali and based in Toronto and they were just messaging me one day and listen, we love the way that you dance, why don't you just film yourself dancing and dance over our new track. So I did myself up, I danced, I filmed and I just completely just forgot about panic attacks about all the shitty trauma or all the stuff that's going on with my family, all the

shit that I'm feeling internally, like there's a lot of internalised abuse that I'm inflicting on myself that I don't realise, until after I've had a panic attack. Umm but yeah I'm realising that when I'm filming, I'm performing - I didn't realise that I'm a performer.

So my friend Nix, she goes like yeah you're a performer yeah you're an artist or whatever, and I'm like no no no I'm not nahh, let's not put any labels on this, um and that allows me to just produce, well I say produce, it just allows me to dance and film and shamelessly put myself up on my Instagram stories and it's been an amazing release just to dance and to have people say hey Fam, that was really, that was really fun or it's the highlight of my day, I love watching you dance. The pressure then, yeah I guess there is some bit of pressure there um but not really because I've just been doing it for myself, literally just for myself it's not for anybody else it's just dancing. I love the fact that people love it umm and watch it err and then we talk about it, but I've only just done it for myself, so I do it when I really feel like I need to dance, like ok I'm feeling really 90s today or 80s and I just dance um and put it out there, but yeah there was a slight, there was a moment and I was like ok shit maybe I need to post this, or do maybe I need to do something, but that just takes away from the release, it becomes a chore, I don't want it to become a chore.

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

Yeah I think there's something really like there's that thing around authenticity as well, that would stop I think if you're like oh God, it's been two days since I last posted a video of me dancing and it's like it's the idea of it being a therapy means it must not become another thing that you can feel like you can sort of fail at or or umm yeah, not deliver on and I think the pressure to produce generally is something that I've had so many, I think most conversations I've had with artists that we work with since the lockdown began, so many of them conclude with this thing around I just feel like I should be making things but I don't feel in any way creative or I just literally don't have the resources, I don't have the space to make something or the skills to make digital art. This whole thing around suddenly everyone has to know how to make something for an online audience or for you know whatever medium you choose to use in lockdown.

Speaking: Fam Islam, panellist

Banana bread!

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

Yeah, exactly oh you haven't made banana bread? You've failed at lockdown, or like this whole thing of how to do lockdown 'well', and it's like there is no way, we don't need this to become like another battle to beat ourselves up for. Umm but yeah another question as well talking about coming out of lockdown, for you, Vijay, about um do you have any advice for autistic people or neuro-divergent people who are nervous about coming out into the world after lockdown?

Speaking: Vijay Patel, panellist

Hmmm umm yeah so I've got this thing, I've had, so basically in 'Sometimes I Leave' the show about Asperger's, I've got a bit built into that in the format of the show, which is a Q&A and we do Q&As like live with a different audience every time, so umm during the show, and this has come up to me in the moment before and I think my response is probably the same where I feel a little bit mmmm, because of the spectrum and the wide spectrum of autism and Asperger's, I feel kind of strange, I don't know what the word is about myself giving advice, like direct advice, like cause something that works for me might not work for another person, for example and I'm kind of mindful of everyone's kind of care needs and what it will look like after lockdown, like how people will re-emerge.

And I imagine that that will take time and it will be different for each person, each neuro-divergent or autistic person coming out lockdown. Umm but I think err the best kind of advice I can probably say is just to be gentle with yourself, give yourself lots and lots of time, umm and also just to kind of umm if you've got somebody who is also neuro-divergent to talk to that's really great, um but also what other resources are out there, umm and I think yeah I would probably just say things like errr I think just take lots of care and see what kind of look in within yourself and see what kind of care you need to be able to resurface again or re-emerge or whatever that looks like.

These terms are like so different and they are so you know, they vary from person to person. I've heard like new norm, like re-emerging, I've heard all these different terminologies, which means kind of getting out of this thing. Because we've never been in this situation before I'm like I don't even know what that looks like coming out of it, coming out into the other side, I'm like what's the other side look like? Because I've just forgotten what life looks like, this is my life. I stare at walls an awful lot errm I don't know if anyone else does or not, but I caught myself doing it the other day and stopped myself. Errm I had to have this chat with myself, about, stop like seriously and then I realised that that's totally, that is totally normal, that is whatever normal is, that is what I do and just responding to what you were saying Fam, and also Beth, about these things that we're like producing things, content, I had this very very strange thing and I think Beth will really thank me for talking about this, I had this very kind of errm I don't know if it's a phase, maybe it's still going, so as soon as lockdown happened errr I remember going to my room and thinking I wonder if my housemates would realise if I just dress all in orange, like my orange t-shirt, orange joggers, and a green hat and just lay on the kitchen floor, I wonder if anyone will realise that I'm a dropped carrot!

So I was going to do it and just lay on the floor and not tell anyone and wait until someone asked me what are you, and then I'd just have to say I'm a dropped carrot, but I could be waiting there ages before someone comes into the kitchen, so I decided not to do that, but it ended up - I took one photo of it and put it on lockdown and wondered if anyone has noticed I'm a dropped carrot yet, like my housemate just took a photo of me on the kitchen floor and then all of a sudden there were requests for vegetables and I thought ohm what have I started here! And it became a series of me dressing up as different vegetables around my kitchen just like getting a different you know different locations and I started being adventurous with it, there was one about an aubergine that had fallen out of the fridge and it was like, did she fall or was she pushed? And it was like a soap opera in the fridge and I was like this is all the content I'm generating right now and it became my life and then I realised that, well I've got to do something else with my life, I cant' you know, errr I nearly started rebranding my website as vegetable artist, it was it nearly took over my life very nearly and umm I often think it's going to resurface. Sorry I just went off on a tangent there!

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

No I'm so glad you did, I didn't know if you would want me to like out this phase you went through but when Fam was talking about it I was like this is exactly like Vijay's vegetable - maybe you should rebrand as 'Vegay', yeah, Vegay Patel

Speaking: Vijay Patel, panellist

someone's already.

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

Ahh damn, they beat me too it –

Speaking: Vijay Patel, panellist

ah I think you did actually, I think it was you!

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

Noo, I refuse to believe this, I'm too excited - vegetable as well - Huh???

Speaking: Vijay Patel, panellist

I think that you requested a vegetable as well?

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

Oh without a doubt, I'm passionate about vegetables

Speaking: Vijay Patel, panellist

There's so many on the list, there's like a beige collection

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

we are getting a lot of love for fashionable veggie moments umm in the comments. Umm yeah, there was another performance artist called Martin O'Brian who he early on in lockdown was doing, he has a shark puppet and he uses sharks in his work and he's a big shark fan, and he was lip-syncing with the shark puppet everyday and taking requests, and I you can see these things that began really early on and then they just quietly go and I think it's because the people doing it are like I can't get to the point where this is expected of me everyday.

Speaking: Chuck Blue Lowry, panellist

Yeah I had exactly the same thing, I did a series with my Mum at the beginning of lockdown, because obviously we hadn't seen each other like most people for a really really long time and we both really love colour, like I always wear colour everyday, so we started setting each other like colour themes from like and matching outfits essentially and then we'd post pictures up. And at first we went through like the whole rainbow and it was great and I had an outfit for every colour and then we started to have to get a bit more abstract, because we've like done all the colours now so then like we were getting all these random requests through and like the thing is at first it was really fun and we felt really connected and it was great, but then it was like when people are like oh what are you going to wear tomorrow, I was like I don't know, it's when the pressure starts piling on and on those things that are initially just a fun, yeah we kind of took a step back but then yeah eventually, maybe all the colours and vegetables will become like its own little series, contained but yeah, it was good fun.

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

Cool, err we've got another question from Sangeeta asking for all of the panellists: what would you like to take from your lockdown life into your normal post lockdown life? Is there anything that you've learnt that's good for you or your creative life? So anyone who wants to jump in.

Speaking: Anna MacDonald, panellist

I think it goes back to what Clara was saying earlier, just if you build everything up so you are going so fast that you can't assess anything so you're getting everything done but you're only just getting it done and actually that's not the healthiest productive most efficient way to run anything or live life, so I think it's going to be about recognising that you don't have to fill every second and actually there needs to be some space.

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

Yeah I definitely agree with that. Chuck, were you going to.

Speaking: Chuck Blue Lowry, panellist

Yeah I second what Anna was saying, I feel like this was the first time in a long time that I've, especially at the beginning where I was able to go what kind of work do I want to make on my own terms, because I think so often because we all need to pay our bills do you end up doing projects as and when they get offered to you, which obviously is amazing and it's great to get those opportunities but I think sometimes in the making and hitting briefs you can kind of lose what it the sense of what the kind of work you want to make and artist you want to be. Um so I think I've really benefited from having a bit of time to dip into other areas of my practice and umm you know, I did a bit of life drawing, I haven't done that since I was like, I don't know, sixteen, but it was so soothing to me to reconnect with things that I just enjoy and making for the sake of making, rather than because you have to hit a deadline or you have to share it with anyone. Umm but then also the other big learning for me is just thinking about the, although I had an awareness and was thinking about working with people in isolation prior to this, simply because working with older people that comes with the territory, but this has just given me so many more tools for doing that in a much more meaningful way, and yeah I want to try and keep that going umm as time progresses and not lose sight of it in the joy of getting to meet people face to face because that won't be everyone's experience.

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

Great, umm any other questions? We don't have anything else in the chat, but if anyone wants to either say anything or ask a question.

Speaking: Vijay Patel, panellist

I can add something to Sangeeta's question - yeah - I guess I'm kind of yeah struggling between what a normal post lockdown life looks like and what it is and I think I'm still trying to work out what that is in my head, umm but similarly to err Chuck, I think this has given me some time to think about the work that I have made and the art that I've really wanted to produce but I was getting lost in like touring and making a new show and that being almost like an expectation you've got to keep at it, got to write a new show, tour that one for a while and make a new one and it's like I felt like I was at a point just before lockdown where that was becoming the cycle, there was nothing else, whereas now I've where it all stopped I've now gone back to the drawing board and said what kind of things are important to me and some fantastic opportunities have arised like the task force where I'm able to champion neuro-divergent voices and try and fight for like advocate for better changes and conditions, which is like a big part of you know, my kind of thoughts and activism, which I wasn't getting time to do because I was constantly on the road or constantly making a new show. So I think I will try and slow down, try and think about different ways of working and that it doesn't always have to look the same. So I think whatever that looks like and how it will present and manifest itself, who knows, but hopefully that's helpful to add.

Speaking: Fam Islam, panellist

I was going to second that part that you mentioned Vijay, about like what's normal, umm I don't even know anymore and and err actually I think I said this a while ago as well, but let's not go back to normal, umm normal is what got us into this bloody mess in the first place, umm so I found myself err looking at the company I work for right now and just looking at the way we address people or

how we hire people umm, are we just perpetuating the same systems that our governments are perpetuating, which is you're just a number. Umm how do we accommodate umm how do we understand you better, so that actually you can work healthier and be happier at work and therefore the company is happier, right? So it's like having these conversations or being a little bit more err mindful by just err reaching out and educating and or just me like thinking about ok, so what is it that I can bring to the table at work? Umm let's talk about gender, let's talk about umm why don't we ask people what's your preferred pronoun, you know, why don't we ask people how do you prefer your name to be said or spelt, you know, errm just these small things and like seeing everyone switch during the lockdown and how they are dealing with it at home, health and safety and stuff, yeah we talk about err physical health and safety at work oh is your chair levelled enough or is your eye line in sight with your monitor correct and all that sort of stuff, but you're not actually checking in with mental health, you know and that needs to be, that really needs to be talked about more and taking days off for mental health reasons not make up a reason ahh I've got a cold or a headache, you know, actually I'm just not doing too great today, I've got high anxiety and I can't be on that call. Umm so yeah, I guess that's what I've taken from this, I hope that we don't go back to normal, umm and I hope that we address diversity, err well inclusivity at workplace is better than we are now, yeah.

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

For sure, yeah I definitely second this idea of there's a strangeness in you thought what was happening before this was normal, eughh ok, so - yeah exactly - sort of yeah, that's interesting. Um yeah I think that's unless there's something another a burning question, but I think the idea of the 'new normal' it was never normal before err is quite a provocative and exciting place to finish. Umm but do, Anna, go ahead, you're on mute! [laughter]

Speaking: Anna MacDonald, panellist

This is a random request, but we have a young person who is really incredible musician and erm is really keen to have a G Clarinet, so not a normal clarinet, because we've got loads of them, but he specifically wants a G Clarinet which is very common in Turkey, he's Kurdish, um so I'm just putting this out there on the off chance that anybody has one, unlikely, or knows somebody that has one, also unlikely, just chancing my arm just in case!

Speaking: Beth Watton, Artistic Director of Poplar Union

I don't but I will keep my ear to the ground and to the air for the sweet sounds of a G Clarinet playing.

Great, well thank you everyone, thank you everyone for attending and listening and for all your brilliant questions and yeah claps and expressions of support and of course huge huge thank you to Chuck, Fam, Vijay and Anna for their incredibly insightful words so yeah, lots of claps for them.

Oh and thank you to Clara for thanking us! There's a huge big ball of thanks umm, I yep if you want to hear more about any of our speaker's work um it should I believe still be on our website, but don't hesitate to get in touch.

In fact if anyone, Chuck, Fam, Vijay, Anna, if you want to put like Twitter handles or websites or anything in the chat please do and we can list them. So this recording will go up on YouTube and we can just put links underneath to all of the relevant websites and social media, things like that. Thank you to Emily for monitoring all of your questions and taking time to be with us today as well and yeah, do keep an eye on Poplar Union's website, we've got a whole array of events coming up.

We've got gigs every Friday night on our Instagram, we've got an incredible dance collaboration made in the day and you watch it the day that it was made on the 16th July from CAJ Collab, so yeah loads of things coming up and do follow us on all the social blah blah blah! Have a lovely rest of your day, thank you for being with us and I will now end yet another Zoom meeting and have a good day! Thanks everyone, thank you!