

Theatre Forum

Wednesday 13 April 2022

What are we going to do about the performing arts?

Finished Reports

Improbable



Building a stronger
performing arts
community in Ireland.

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INTRODUCTION

On 13 April 2022 56 responded to an invitation sent out by Theatre Forum by attending an Open Space event to discuss the question: *What are we going to do about the performing arts?*

Open Space Technology (OST) is a great way for groups to think, talk and take action together. Participants self-organise to create their own agenda on the day with free-flowing conversations about what's needed to create positive change.

After the Improbable facilitator, Pauline Mayers, opened the space the participants were invited to call sessions on whatever was alive in them at that moment. The result was 33 sessions across 4 hour-long time slots across the day that explored themes of audiences, diversity and wellbeing.



Here's a full list of those sessions:

- Where have the audiences gone? Will they come back?
- How do we get audiences off the couch, out of the house and out to shows again?
- How do we have access to venues?
- Managing instability
- The possibility of multidisciplinary / cross-disciplined?
- Is any theatre non-political?
- How do we support parents in the arts?
- Artform collaboration?
- How do we make work with no money?
- How to compete with Netflix?
- Perf arts what is good and not so good? Past, present and future.

- How to re-create interest in arts?
- In person digital hybrid - what's next?
- Accents. Accenteism. Intersections
- Equality & inclusion. What might we have forgotten?
- An actors' centre for everybody!
- Can the performing arts inspire climate action?
- How can actors survive when there are no plays for them?
- Are we avoiding the hard political questions?
- Where are the clowns?
- Clinically vulnerable. Did we forget?!
- Are We Ok?
- Engaging a more diverse audience
- Actions not questions
- Brave. Relevant?
- What do we love about the Irish arts scene?!
- Putting the artists in charge
- Burnout healing
- Touring: How to get great art everywhere?
- Art. What the fuck is that about?
- Collaboration over competition with everyone (artists audiences). How?
- Step Outside
- Leaving it better than we found it

The document you are about to read is a collection of the reports written by participants who attended the Open Space event. The reports have not been edited or curated in any way and are presented as they were on Wednesday 20 April 2022. We hope that these ideas, provocations, themes and questions may be picked up by participants at (or organisers of) future events.



Can the performing arts inspire climate action

Who called this session: Catriona Fallon

Who participated in this session: Catriona Fallon, Cliodhna Noonan, Irma McLoughlin, Pierce McNee

Celebrating what we're trying to protect

Changing the narrative

How can the arts help to change the narrative and amplify this

Organisations celebrating the work they do and from a sustainability point of view and sharing this

Can sets be repurposed?

Theatre Green Book

Start small

Don't put off becoming more sustainable

Not everyone can do everything but everyone can do something

Are We Ok?

Who called this session: Julie Kelleher

Who participated in this session: JK, Ruairí Ó Donnabháin, Lesley Conroy, Martin Murphy, Maria Fleming, Favour, Declan Gorman, Tom Creed, Maura O'Keeffe, Gemma Gallagher, Carolyn Brown, Mary Boland, Dominic Campbell

1. We're not ok!
2. Reflection time has shrunk, for everyone: independent artists, people working for funding bodies, arts centres and other arts orgs. The reflection time offered by Open Space is really valuable!
3. Thoughts: arts orgs and funders perceive a tension between our responsibilities to artists and the making of art, and responsibilities to audiences; audiences are there to justify the artists; people need to have fun; recognise the value of your time: it's not about the fee it's about the value; be a bit more rock'n'roll; enjoy the work; imagine if rent was only payable once a year; what impact Basic Income for Artists will have on the sector, on individual artists' practice and on producing practices
4. Questions: Can we pause for a second and think about whether the (funding) system we have is working for *anyone*? Could multi-annual funding agreements be threaded right through the sector to support longterm planning and mitigate against the frantic pedalling? Our systems + pay and conditions are governed by overarching systems (we summoned the post-colonial ghost) – what is the cost of our complicity with these systems? Is it our job to resist? Space to be vulnerable – who has access to this?
5. Nourishing things: spending time with animals; swimming in the sea; Gaeilge; Solitude; Live performance; good plays; time with the tribe(s); movies; gathering and talking; performing for people again; - BITCOIN LOL -
6. Closing thought from Lesley: actually, we're ok :), but things are not ok.

Step Outside

Who called this session: Lucy Medlycott

It was asked if during the last two years anyone had created work outside. Was it by choice? What did you do? How was the experience? Things that were learned. Would you do it again?

Everyone present had some experience of working outside in the last two years, with varying results.

Some challenges that were encountered:

- The transmission of voice
- The counting of audience numbers
- The weather
- Noise pollution
- H&S redtape

Some things that were observed:

- Requires a different skillset as a performance artist
- Public access was highly valued
- Accessibility across generational divides
- Freedom for families to move about without fear of offending other audience members
- Taking something from inside and placing it outside was a worry
- Location/Location/Location – as in where a place is positioned and considered is critical – how an audience access the place, where they accumulate, what else is around the place in terms of infrastructure etc etc are all vital considerations

Things that were enormously valued:

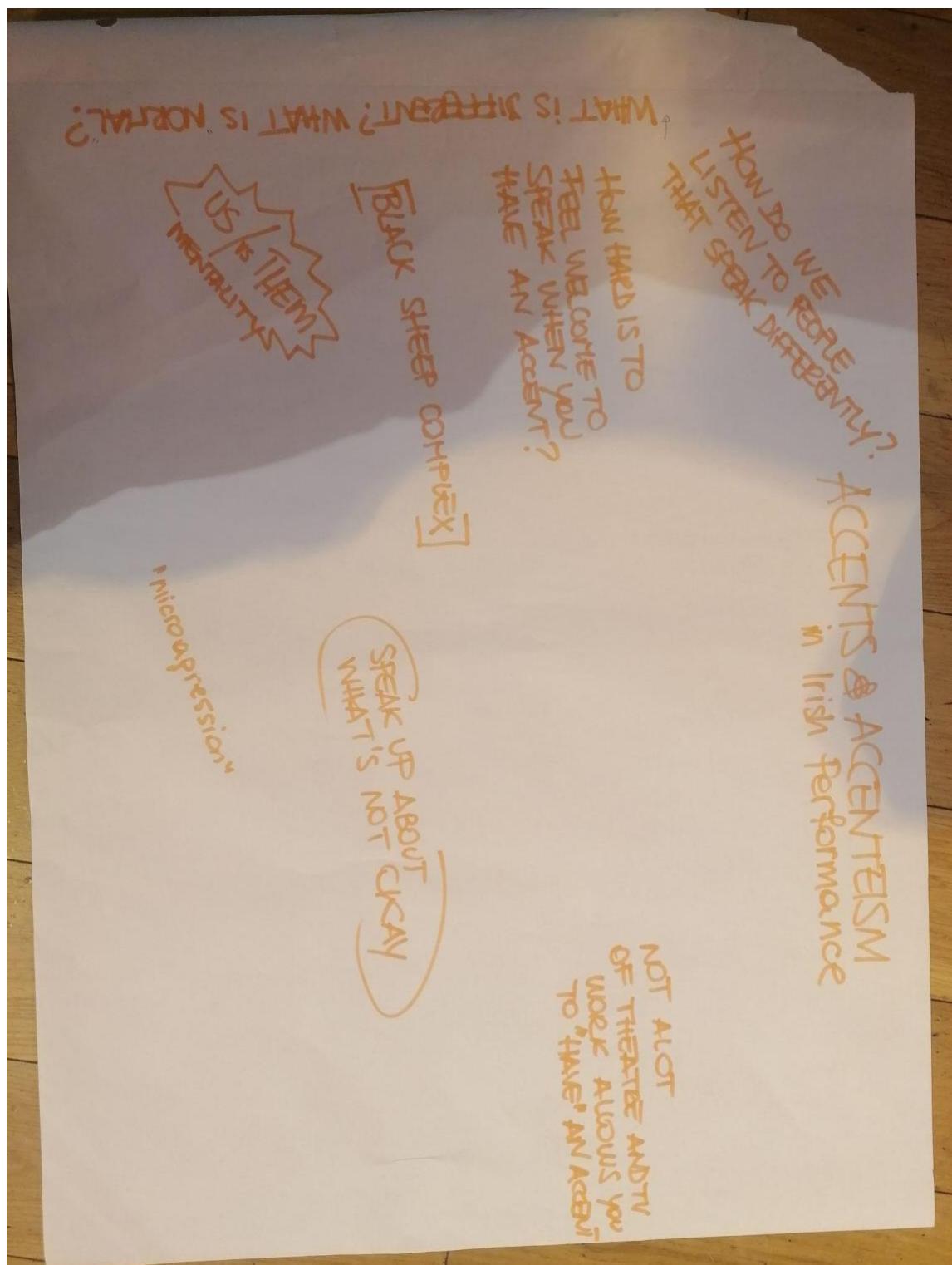
- Connects the art and the artists with the place and with the community
- Transforms the relationship that is held with a place
- Brings diverse communities together
- Creates conversations between strangers

A question arose around what happened to the funding for public outdoor arts infrastructure? This turned into a discussion on the pros and cons of existing bandstands, proposed amphitheatres and more. Many expressed worry around permanent fixed infrastructure in an outdoor place which will attract inappropriate use. Several discussed the possibilities of that funding being invested into temporary infrastructure such as carpets, beanbags, benches, barriers, sound equipment etc.

When asked if they would do it again answers ranged from Yes most definitely, to probably not. Final thoughts included more to be learned and understood about working in the outdoors and the skill and understanding required should not be underestimated.

Accents in Irish performance

Who called this session: Romi Cruanas



Clinically Vulnerable (did we forget?)

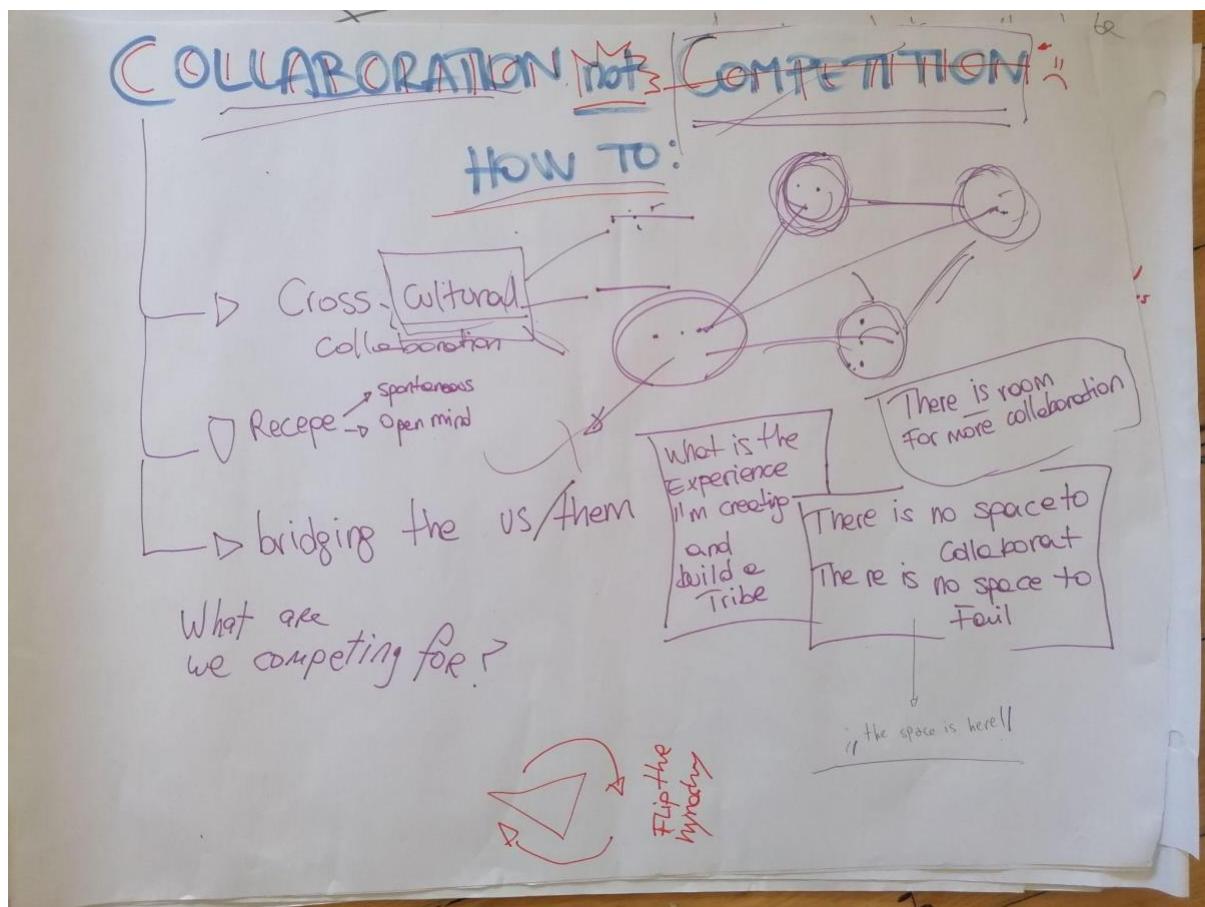
Who called this session: Gemma G

No one came to this session, so I reflected. I will say what's on my mind. The fact that this is me alone reflects how I feel the subject of the session is meant to provoke. We are leaving many people behind, both audience and workers who have long term conditions and who do not feel comfortable going back to normal!

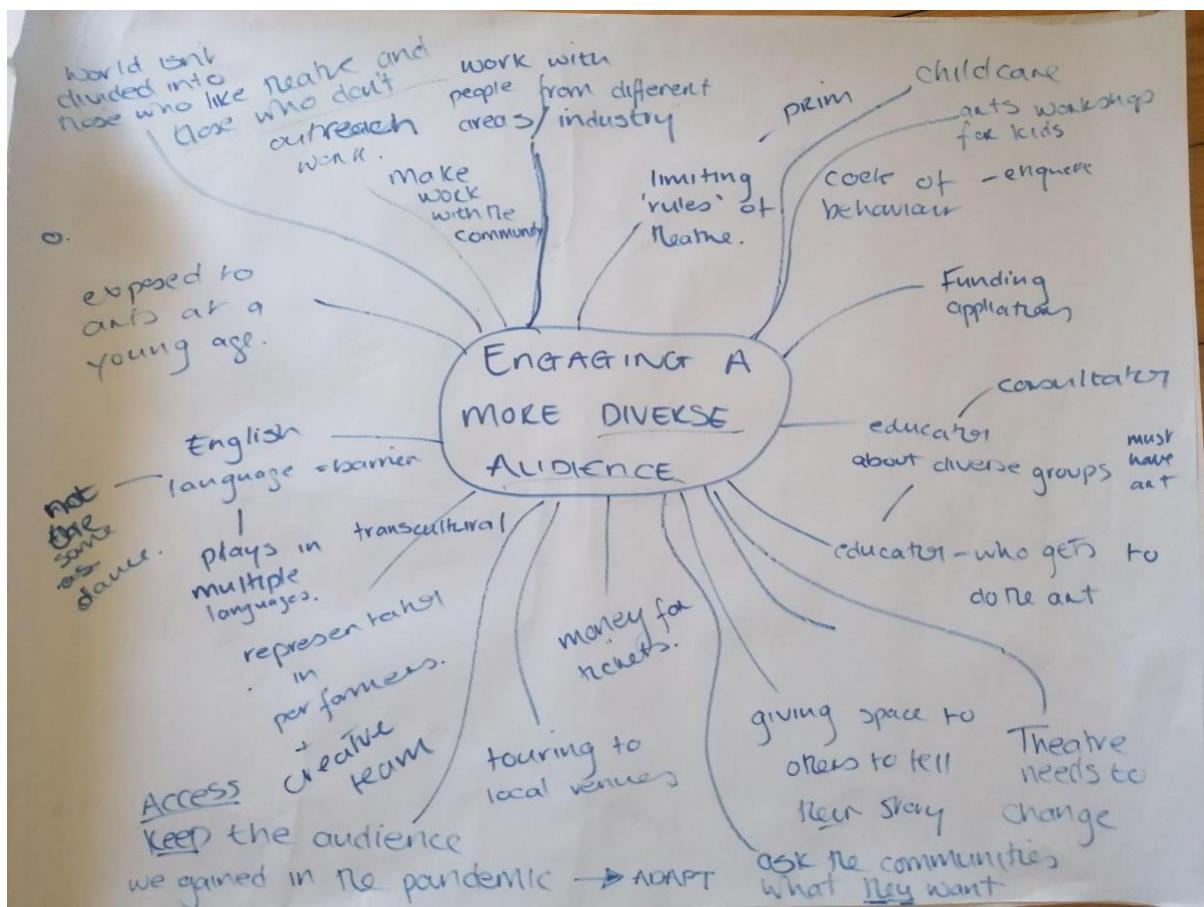
Socially distanced and masked provision is an access issue. If it is ignored we are perpetuating a climate of survival of the fittest in our industry.

Thank you.

Collaboration not Competition



Engaging a more diverse audience



How can we support parents in the arts?

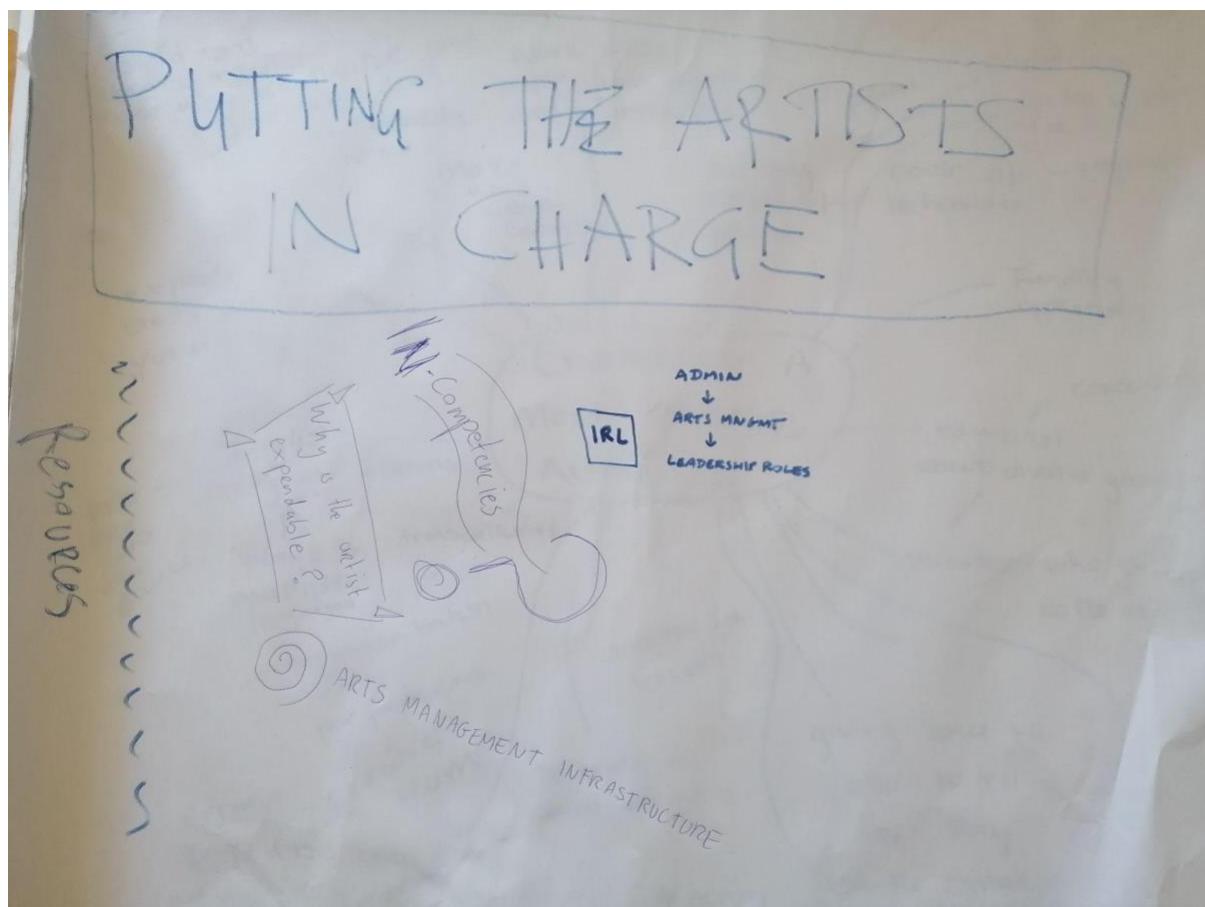
Who called this session: Aisling Steed

- Need more space in venues for children friendly space (creche?)
- Shared creche - venues
- Network of parents
- Visibility - rehearsal room
 - Allowing kids in the room

Is any theatre non-political?



Putting the artists in charge



Untitled Notes

most energising / creative
for practitioners... &
as process of developing
work?

Opera & circus.

Recent Cesi V tutti in
London had circus in it.

STAYING EXCITED

Keep expectations low!

BEING AN ACTIVE CITIZEN

EMBRACE INSTABILITY!

SURVIVORS

- Passion + flexibility
- Living with instability

BUSINESS?

Resource sharing

→ documenting things
cheaply

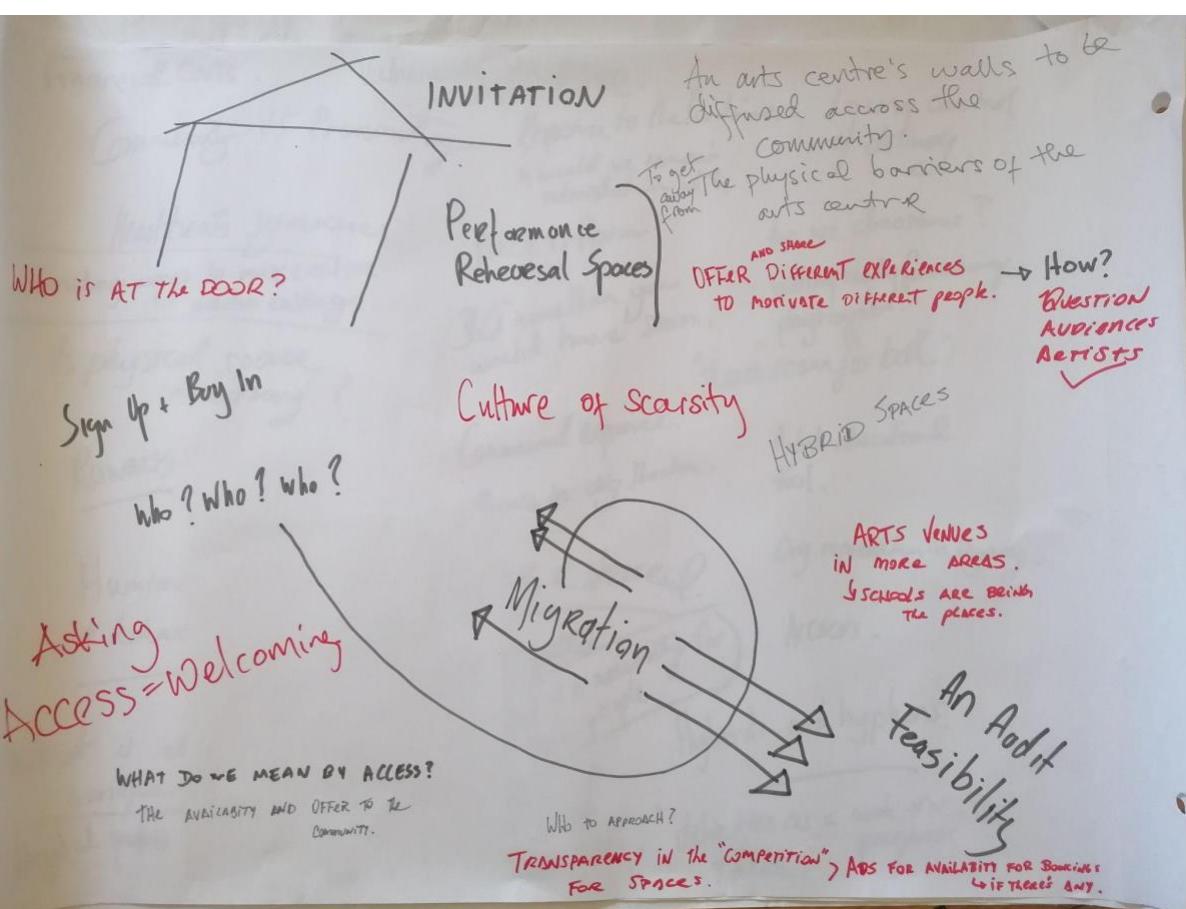
COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

access
how do we evolve?

The hustle?

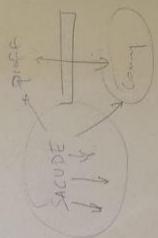
"UBI"/BIA
as artists;
basic income
+ what that
acknowledgment
means

going to
see things
(that are good!)



what are the possibilities?

collaboration OR multi-disciplinary
solo work.



engaging ALL of the senses

• experiences - IMMERSIVE

more likely to be inclusive as well.

changing roles - eg. an opera director
working with actors.

or a circus artist directed by a theatre director

- NEW POSSIBILITIES.

Jack of all trades master of none?

Does industry want to 'box' us -
over-categorise? Are you an
actor or musician?

Isn't multi-disciplinary work

Financial costs.

Vulnerability of ~~real~~ live.

Community VS. Proximity.

Response to the Pandemic.

Losing control
of delivery.

Heartbeats synchronise.

Finding ways to mix creative
media onstage.

Piece vs. form

Are we dinosaurs?

Is physical space
necessary?

360° more than you
would have seen.

- Getting ready for nothing
plays again.
"There's room for both."

Rawness

Concurrent experience.

Artist educational
tool.

Humanist response to
a technical revolution.

Dig. representation in legacy.

What is at the core?

a unique thing. sense of community.

Digital pushes the access problem
away

Theatrical etiquette:
(Digital is a necessity for
some people.)

Access.

Hybrids and hyphens.

Inclusion. definition as a work-in-
progress
+ fixed..