

# Some Reflective Notes on Directing the Online Auto-Ethnotheatre<sup>1</sup> *See You Zoom*<sup>2</sup> - An Account of the Lives of Hongkongers in the Dramatic 2020

**Estella Wong**

The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, Hong Kong

## Summary

This article accounts the director's reflection on the creating and performing of the auto-ethnotheatre *See You Zoom* series (February-October 2020), through the video-conferencing software Zoom during the staying home period due to COVID-19. Driven by an urge to connect community people under the cumulative impact of the social unrest and the pandemic since mid-2019, the director started this creative journey, encountered challenges, and gained insights of devising, rehearsing and staging auto-ethnotheatre entirely through Zoom. Three aspects of online theatre-making were reflected: (i) working with actors without their physical presence (ii) playing with the public and private spaces, and (iii) managing the engagement of Zoom participatory-audience.

*Keywords:* audience participation, auto-ethnotheatre, connection, COVID-19, directing online-live interactive performance, Zoom theatre

Email: [estellawong@hkapa.edu](mailto:estellawong@hkapa.edu)

## In a Time of Disconnection

In Jan 2020, to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Hong Kong Government announced a series of measures including the delay of education establishments from resuming school after Chinese New Year until mid-Feb, setting up quarantine facilities, implementing border control, cancelling large-scale events and closing down various public facilities (The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region [HKSAR Government] The Information Services Department, 2020). Special work arrangement for government departments until early Feb was also announced shortly after (HKSAR Government The Information Services Department, 2020). Tertiary institutions switched to online teaching, some organisations and companies requested their staff to work from home.

The scenario reminded many Hong Kong people of our painful history of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003 which caused a few hundred tragic deaths. Yet we could not have guessed COVID-19 has surpassed it in terms of duration and impact. At the time I was writing this (Jan 2021), Hong Kong was still in its fourth pandemic wave (Ting et al., 2020). With schools and public facilities (including of course, theatres) closing and reopening, online and face-to-face teaching alternatively taking place, our everyday work, family and social routines have been constantly altering. Hongkongers, just like all people around the world, are now quite familiar with the “new normal”.

I vividly remember my strong feeling early 2020, when we were not yet so used to this normality, that the connection between people was fading away. For me, this disconnection was not only caused by the “social distancing” in the pandemic but also the social unrest events that had been happening since June 2019 before the pandemic outbreak. As widely reported internationally, numerous protests broke out with tear gas being used frequently causing injuries, public transport was re-scheduled, classes from kindergarten to tertiary levels were suspended and etc. Invisible tensions caused by opposite political views and different ideologies amongst

the general public, friends and family members also intensified. A research released by the HKFYG Youth Research Centre (2019) on “Strengthening Intergenerational Understanding” in Dec 2019 showed the major reason for youth-parents conflict was “the recent social events/political stance” since June 2019. What has been the experience of Hongkongers, facing the disruptive loop of “social unrest and pandemic” in our everyday lives? Another recent survey conducted by the University of Hong Kong (2020) studied the cumulative impact of the anti-government protests and the coronavirus pandemic between February and July 2019 on people’s mental health. Choy of *The South China Morning Post* (2020) reported the findings that “Some three-quarters of Hongkongers are harbouring negative thoughts in the aftermath of last year’s social unrest and amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, with young people suffering significantly more from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depressive symptoms” (para.1) . In such an intense social situation, as a theatre-maker residing in this city, a question kept returning to me, “What is the experience like to be living in Hong Kong amidst all these?”

## **The Creative Journey and the Challenges**

Bearing this question in mind, I looked at the calendar on the wall, realising that I had locked myself up at home for four full days already but my friends said it was nothing comparable to them. That was February 2020 when we first started fighting COVID-19. The painful memory of SARS seventeen years ago was still vivid causing many Hongkongers to be extremely self-disciplined and cautious this time. Staying home was one effective measure yet a major change for many people when it was done days and weeks on end.

Previously, when the social incidents were happening, travelling around town was not totally the same due to road blocks and etc, but still more like usual than during the strict social distancing under the pandemic. Busy streets were then empty, so as the food and toilet paper shelves in the supermarkets. People were anxiously queuing up for hours just to seize a

few masks. Noisy MTR compartments became quiet. As a native Hong Kong born, I have never seen my home city like this, an extreme contrast to the crowded roads filled with heated protesters just a few months ago. I looked out from the window and saw people walking alone. The idea of creating a small scale ethnotheatre (we labelled it as “mini-ethnotheatre”) to reach out and connect emerged.

    Paget describes ethnographic performance as a genre which is “native, artful, subtle, imaginative, interpretive, and dialogical” (cited in Sallis, 2009). This sense of the dialogic is distinctive. Ethnographic practices might best be understood as a dialogue in which performers and audience engage in an equal exchange (Cozart et al, 2003:53). This focus on the possibility of dialogue is present in descriptions of ethnodrama and ethnographic performance and performance ethnography but appears less in descriptions of community theatre, theatre of fact, verbatim and documentary theatres. (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010, p. 25)

Indeed, I have long been drawn to the “dialogical” feature of ethnographic performance and it echoed much to my instinct to use this particular art form to reach out and connect to others in Hong Kong during this particular hard time. The post-performance workshop ran by *Alice Hoy is not a building - Women in academia*, an ethnographic performance created by four female then current and former students and staff<sup>3</sup> in the Faculty of Education University of Melbourne I attended in IDEA 2007 Hong Kong was an inspiring example of how the dialogue between performers/researchers and the audience could be done. I fully resonate with how the “Alice” team perceived the importance of audience in their auto-ethnographic performances:

    In our ongoing investigation we have discovered that the role of the audience is critical. The development and construction of a research outcome that is not only aesthetic in nature, but temporal, dynamic and dialogic, recreated anew each time it is performed, invites a reconsideration of the processes of interpretation and analysis that lie at the heart of all research. (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010, p. 103)

The equally strong emphasis of audience participation formed the most important common feature in my mini-ethnotheatre. Though, under a different context with a different intention particularly on “connecting in a time of disconnection”, the dialogic process in my attempted performance was deliberately inserted throughout the whole performance process, which was different from the post-performance workshop format of *Alice Hoy is not a building*, I would elaborate this later in this writing.

Up to then in late Feb 2020, the creative concept of an interactive mini-ethnotheatre became more concrete. As the initiator, I started to work as the researcher/devising director with a group of four researchers/devising performers through video conferencing software as people remained quite self-disciplined and stayed home at that time. I was extremely delighted to gain the full support of our team on transforming the meeting platform of Zoom into our performance platform as Zoom theatre. Due to the interactive nature of our performance, we decided to keep it “live” instead of a pre-recorded performance. That marked the beginning of the zero-budget creative journey of an online interactive live auto-ethnotheatre series with *See You Zoom - an account of the lives of Hongkongers* as prequel, premiered in April and May 2020 for 4 performances open to general public. The response was very much beyond our expectation and led to an immediate re-run of 3 more performances in a week’s time (The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, 2020). A month later in June 2020, this series was spotted by the local heritage art hub Tai Kwun which commissioned our interquel *See You Zoom Again* for 10 performances showing in Sept and Oct 2020 as part of her *On Stage Online* programme (Tai Kwun, n.d.). In essence, the first episode *See You Zoom* features four Hongkongers of different social roles: (1) Sharon: a full-time theatre-maker, drama educator and a daughter (2) Willis: a part time I.T. employee, freelancer and a single middle-aged man (3) Lisa: a new immigrant, housewife and a teaching assistant (4) Kuen: a secondary school teacher, a father and a son. The second episode *See You Zoom Again* features them half a year later, except that Sharon was replaced (due to schedule clash) by Dai-kim: a full-time drama student and a youth. The content was about their experiences, everyday lives and thoughts during this historical period of

Hong Kong. Audience could select and interact with their chosen performers according to their interest and concerns throughout the performance.

**Figure 1**

*Promotional material of See You Zoom re-run*



**Figure 2**

*E-leaflet of See You Zoom Again*



The team and I were highly gratified by the enthusiastic response of our online interactive performances, while at the same time pondering and reflecting upon the challenges we encountered during this particular creative process. Facing a future of new normal and as predicted by the WHO about a probably “even tougher” pandemic situation in the northern hemisphere

this year with the contagious coronavirus variant being detected (Nebahay & Miller, 2021). The reflection serves as the team's reference for further exploration in the new form and points to discuss with peers.

## 1. Absence of the physical body: Working with actors

Obviously, "absence of the physical body" during home quarantine was the largest problem of all in creating theatre, especially building autobiographical ones *collectively*. In the pandemic situation, our entire creative process (of *See You Zoom* amidst the first wave and largely *See You Zoom Again* amidst the third) from preliminary meetings, to sharing researched materials, our own stories, feelings and experiences, to exploration, to analysis, to generating further data, to rehearsals, to performance were implemented...ALL THROUGH ZOOM. The biggest difficulty I faced was the same as online teaching: feeling distanced! The lack of human closeness, everything felt "indirect". As an autobiographical theatre director, I had to be able to identify the tiny subtle changes within or between actors, as by nature, "autobiographies are often fragile, delicate, and intimate places" (Belliveau & Lea, 2016, p.187), it was my responsibility to handle with great care the vulnerable or sensitive feelings attached to the actors' personal stories and experiences. But on a 2D-rectangular computer screen, our human senses were deprived and only "visual" and "auditory" were left for communication, not to mention these senses were limited by the quality of the webcams, mics and Wi-Fi.

Norris (2009) pointed out that "Trust, play and change" are three significant and intricately bound elements in a collective playbuilding process, which all depend on the team's effective interpersonal communication:

By playing, we push our own conceptual boundaries as we (re)look and (re)search our lives. The spirit of play supports an openness to the unknown, to change...The ability to play with others requires a high degree of trust. One will not articulate her/his works in progress in a hostile atmosphere. (p. 60)

Trust was indeed central especially in our case as social issues were inevitably involved with “a degree of personal discomfort” and “cognitive dissonance” expected (Norris, 2009, p.61) in this kind of process. Apart from the deprived human senses affecting the interpersonal communication, the discussion of Khaner and Linds (2015), though under a different context from a creative process, on the significance of somatic experience, embodiment and corporeal existence/co-existence upon thoughts-deepening and reflection also applies to this particular journey. Compared to my usual devising practice, in both *See You Zoom* and *See You Zoom Again* which were entirely rehearsed on Zoom, the team has relied much more on verbal or written language and relied much less on physical collaboration under this restricted creative condition for sharing, describing, analysing, discussing and reflecting upon personal stories, photos, writings, drawings and etc, especially in the first half of the devising process. More visual and symbolic elements were involved in the second half which somewhat balanced out the whole process. But still, what we were lacking was the somatic embodied experiences and mutual energy exchange in our physical co-existence, which could result in a very different kind of self-exploration, examination and reflection of one’s own stories. Physical existence was usually taken for granted when we were in the “old normal” with numerous theatre exercises, devising and rehearsal techniques available for our free selection. Actors’ physical co-existence creates a unique and powerful interaction which not only form the foundation for “play and change”, but also enhances the “duo” effect as a concept borrowed from Norris (2009) on collective playbuilding:

Rather than strictly being an autoethnographic study, playbuilding is more like duoethnography (Norris, 2008a; Norris & Sawyer, 2004), whereby teams of researchers not only tell but also interrogate their stories. (p. 24)

The interrogation or even questioning of one’s own stories allows the actors to perceive them from different perspectives. It helps to reduce self-indulgence and invites a more open-minded attitude for equal conversation as a basic requirement for any authentic connection with our audiences.



With all these desirable values being weakened due to the absence of physicality, how could we replace our corporeal existence with other kinds of experience? Or is it even possible? It remains the most challenging aspect if unfortunately, we have to rehearse ENTIRELY online again in the future. Indeed, this experience of the deprivation of physical co-existence only reconfirms its utmost significance in creating auto-ethnographic performances, and I realised how sinful I have been by not utilising it the fullest during the good old normal times. The creative team's physicality will definitely be my prioritised area for further exploration in the upcoming online live auto-ethnotheatre projects.

## **2. Space: The director's playground**

A performance space (any place in the open air or indoors deliberately selected to establish a particular actor-spectator relationship) is never neutral... For me, the effectiveness of a performing space consisted in its capacity to arouse in the spectator a double perception: it was a recognisable space (a theatre, a church, a gym) and, at the same time, a potential space, ready to divest itself of its identity in order to be transformed by the forces of the performance. (Barba, 2010, p. 45)

Another aspect of the "absence of physicality" was the alteration of performance venues -- without the physical performance venue, one important theatrical element has been changed immensely: space. The relationship between the acting area and the audience area becomes very different in an online theatre. To some extent, the theatre-makers' freedom to play in the space is restricted. However, the virtual space could be extremely interesting and not necessarily a limitation.

In Feb 2020, when I first considered transforming the video conferencing platform Zoom into a performance space, I was immediately attracted by its "breakout room" function. To me, it represented an invaluable fluidity between "public" and "private" spaces in our theatre space, which was not always easily achieved as in real physical venues. The interchange or "playing

around” between these two spaces could be functional, artistic or a mixture of both creating different meanings. The time needed for this interchange could also be largely compressed in virtual space compared to real physical spaces. To me, “space” is by far the most exciting theatrical element to play with in online theatre-making.

In both *See You Zoom* and *See You Zoom Again*, the “breakout room” function allowed our participatory-audience to make choices of which stories to follow and could swap in no time if needed. Within the short 1.5 hours of performance time, our participants were free to select, among the four cases, which characters’ journey to follow and carry out a dialogue with the character in a small group all having made the same investment. Participatory-audience make decisions based on their interest, concern or resonance with a particular character allowing a more homogeneous and intimate atmosphere for the interactive process to take place. The conversation led by the character in each room could be more focused and a deeper exchange within the small group was made possible. At a broader level, the sequencing of character selection, plot combination, contrast of experiences, interactive conversations, rhythm within each space and timing between public/private spaces would altogether create a unique aesthetic journey for each audience member in the performance attended.

The “private space” in each breakout room was also a literal one, as the participatory-audience would actually enter the physical private space of the characters’ study room/bedroom/washroom where their personal stories and thoughts were shared. The spheres of the performance space and the actor’s personal space were oddly overlapped in *See You Zoom*, that the team had literally created a “home theatre”, as one of our actors commented in the show. And interestingly, this overlapping has brought a double meaning to this particular piece of ethnotheatre – “home” was a place many people were locked up in during the pandemic and where they faced unprecedented experiences: WFH (work from home), non-stop Zoom meetings, children’s homeschooling became a burden to working parents, dynamics changes between family members as a result of the prolonged home-staying time,

new personal habits developed and etc. “Home” affected us in the most unexpected way than it did pre-pandemic and that was exactly what many of our characters’ stories in *See You Zoom* and *See You Zoom Again* were about.

As the director, I had decided to make use of the 2D screen frame cinematographically through multiple cameras capturing, so that the physical home our participant-audience entered was not only an environmental space the character lived in, but also as a *metaphor* to symbolise the characters’ situation. An example was shown in Figure 3 showing the spatial arrangement created on screen, capturing the typical crowded living condition of Hongkongers, while also symbolising (in this section of the narrative) the omni-directional pressures this character faced and his struggling for some tiny “breathing space” at various levels in this city during these hard times. Having considered the vital role of spaces in the online theatre, I have actually invited a scenographer to join the creative team of *See You Zoom Again*, attempting to further explore this aesthetic aspect which is to me, the most exciting aspect of all.

**Figure 3**

*A scene from See You Zoom*



The co-existence of actors and audience in the overlapped performance space/private space and the ethnographically typical/particular spatial images of Hongkongers as a communal group have created layers of meanings for the connections to take place.

### **3. Audience participation: Connecting with our audience**

Since the creative concept of See You Zoom was initiated by the idea of “connecting in a time of disconnection”, I considered the audience participation the most important element and goal to be explored in this online theatre. Our previous experience in producing participatory theatre told us that audience members had different expectations and levels of readiness towards participatory performance. Therefore, how to design a “stress-free” yet stimulating participatory journey for our audience was one of our biggest challenges. The choice between turning on/off their mics and cams during the performance was certainly available and the options of sharing or not, speaking on mics or writing in the “chat box” during interactive sessions were also given throughout the whole interactive process.

To some extent, audience participation in online theatre was “safer” than in a physical one, as the participatory-audience could easily “hide” oneself completely by simply switching off the webcam, or chose to communicate merely through typing words in the chat box or speaking on mics with cam off and etc. S/he could use a pseudonym and even change it anytime throughout the performance. In a nutshell, due to the absence of physicality, the participatory-audience has almost total control over his/her own privacy which is quite hard to achieve in the old normal live theatre performing in a confined physical space.

In other words, the physical presence of the audience in a pre-arranged physical space determined by the production team can be perceived as a behaviour, in which the audience has given up some control of his privacy or autonomy to the production team with or without awareness of it. The features of Zoom have made the concealment of identity much easier than

that in a physical live theatre. This very unique characteristic of live online theatre -- “total separation of the physical spaces of the live performers’ from the audience’s”, on the one hand allows the audience’s complete control of personal privacy *even* in a participatory theatre, yet on the other hand creates a tendency for disengagement from the online performance. The production team could no longer hold the audience’s attention by darkening the house light nor ensuring a non-disturbed environment as in a normal cinema or theatre venue. The challenge was thus twofold, namely the aesthetic aspect and the participatory aspect.

In a Hong Kong critic’s review published in the Taiwan magazine *Performing Arts Review* in June 2020, Chan (2020) comments both aspects under the paragraph titled “Zoom into other’s room, a new form of participatory theatre”:

The designed strategies during the 90-minute *See You Zoom* actually highly enhanced the involvement and maintained the audience’s engagement. After viewing the brief introduction of the four story-sharers<sup>4</sup>, the audience has to choose which two they wanted to know more, and through the breakout room function, the audience entered the virtual space of each story-sharer’s physical room exploring in-depth, learning about his/her life experiences and feelings during the pandemic. The reveal and self-account in the raw room emphasised the authenticity and sense of presence in the scene. The several cameras set in the room allowed swapping of perspectives on the screen, revealing the creator’s intention to non-verbal expressions through multiple camera angles. There was also some poetic capturing of our everyday life such as the close-up shot of a watering tap symbolising the suppressed emotions<sup>5</sup>.

As mentioned earlier in this article, the participatory and interactive sections were inserted throughout the performance attempting to create more dialogues and thus connection during the process. I totally agree with White (2013) on his support to the notion of “protection into emotion” urged by

Bolton (1984), and considered it extremely relevant to our performance as the authentic social content during this hard time might be personal, sensitive and create emotional vulnerability to many. The unique performance-audience relationship in auto-ethnotheatre, as described by Saldana (2011) that “unlike the experience of fictional theatre, we are not as audiences “suspending disbelief”; in auto-ethnotheatre, we are “assuming belief” (p.24) intensified the need for protection for our audience due to its authentic nature.

Our advantage as an online theatre, as explained earlier, was the audience’s total control of involvement and privacy, but the disadvantage was the easy withdrawal of commitment in the desired two-way communication. How to design the participatory activities in a progressive way to enhance a deeper level of involvement “rather than simply to ensure participation” as suggested by White (2013, p.94) was an important aspect to consider especially in participatory ethnotheatre, again due to its authentic nature.

*See You Zoom* series attempted to approach progressive participation by assigning a fictional frame of “are\_you\_OK.com” to audience members as the entry point into the performance through the role of “assessors”. The functional role gradually faded away as the audience learned more about the characters and when the conversation between them and the characters became more direct, two-way and self-reflective. The challenge here, comes back to the balancing between the form-ed (e.g. rehearsed narratives) and form-less (e.g. free conversation) elements in the online participatory theatre. The time allocation of, say, the discussion between audience members and the character, was a big challenge in this performance, as we had to address the engagement vs disengagement, aesthetic vs participatory expectations, authentic vs fictional and protective strategies vs depth of participation within a very tight timeframe of 90 minutes.

After the preview, premiere and re-run of *See You Zoom*, we have received around 40 filled questionnaires and here are some positive feedback from audience<sup>6</sup>:

I feel respected and a sense of freedom with the choices we could make. (audience 1, questionnaire, 27 April 2020)

...on the cold platform of Zoom, unexpectedly we could hear the live stories of people living in the pandemic. It was very heartwarming and let me ask myself: am I ok? (audience 2, questionnaire, 12 May 2020)

I like the way the show explored and shared the topic of “are you ok?” through discussing the pandemic. We kind of breakthrough our isolated sphere, to understand others around us and our present situation...it explores “people” and “social situations” effectively through the theme of pandemic. (audience 3, questionnaire, 1 May 2020)

Certainly, we have also received some negative feedback regarding confusion of task instructions, restricted modes of participation and insufficient time thus depth of interaction:

Four stories to choose from, truthful sharing, this feeling of being invited into a person’s home was very different from my other theatre going experience...but the interactive and participatory time was too short, it ended before we had organised our thoughts. (audience 4, questionnaire, 27 April 2020)

Theatre critics Chan (2020) also comments in the review:

...as the audience members were basically hiding their faces (normal practice in zoom learning), the force exerted by the story-sharer to encourage the audience’s participation and ability to respond to audiences’ immediate needs were the challenge the story-sharers had to face in each performance. (para. 6)

I considered these comments very useful in our first exploration of this participatory auto-ethnotheatre. In fact, in some sense, these seemed also positive to me as they showed the strong urge of the audience to express their

views, thoughts, feelings and situations during the performance. I must admit that I underestimated the openness, spectrum of readiness (i.e. from very low to very strong urge to share) and expectation of our audiences who had willingly signed up as “participatory-audience” in the first place. Examples being some audience members did not participate at all despite frequent prompting, while some enthusiastically turned on their mics and webcams to share, even being joined by their children.

After this first experimental attempt regarding audience participation in this particular form, we attempted to address the audiences’ feedback in the development of our second episode (interquel *See You Zoom Again*). We included more carefully facilitated guidance in the fictional-framed session and new tasks to enhance association to Hongkongers’ situation as observed by the audience members. We have also lengthened interactive time in each session, encouraged participatory-audience to communicate through mics and cams, designed an additional 1-hour post-performance art workshop to allow audience members to share more freely and have more time to reflect/process their various experiences in the past year through art-making (see Figure 4). Dramaturgically, I employed a common metaphor (i.e. butterfly) across all characters instead of being different for each one as in episode one, aiming at the audience’s better understanding of the other non-selected characters in the final scene when audiences’ collective views were presented.



Figure 4

Artwork of audience members made in post-performance workshop



In both productions, my common goal was to enhance the self-reflection of participatory-audience, so that they could exchange views or feelings with the characters and other audience members in the same room through metaphorical images as a protective and safe distance in the potentially personal and sensitive hard times. However, looking back, I sometimes wondered if I should push the audiences a step forward from their comfort zones under the relatively “safe” context of the online theatre. I then realised that I, as a member of the Hongkong community, am myself so bothered and exhausted by the overwhelming societal confrontation and pandemic traumatic experiences we all went through the previous year that this avoidance was manifested in my participatory design in this show. This leads me to reflect on the limitation or effect of the researcher/director being a member of the studied community in the auto-ethnographic performance s/he directs. Ackroyd and O’Toole (2010) discussed the “researchers’ voice” in various case studies, that there were always struggles on how explicit the role should be in the ethnodrama. Interestingly, in the case of the *See You Zoom* series, my struggle was also on how much I could step out of my own comfort zone so that I could facilitate the same for our participatory-audience.

## Reminder to Myself

Before having done enough experiments in creating participatory auto-ethnotheatre, my team and I were thrown into the experiments of online ones. The new challenges of producing participatory auto-ethnotheatre online however, have brought me exciting incentives especially when I saw *See You Zoom* and *See You Zoom Again* joined by overseas Hongkongers who could not be able to connect with other communal members through theatre in global lockdown while emotional support was needed most. Thankful notes to us were posted on social media and text messages were received. With all the shortcomings and flaws to be improved in the future, let me leave myself a small post-it note:

While rehearsing, each decision of mine had consequences for the dramaturgy of the actors, for my dramaturgy and for that of the spectators who were still not present. These three dramaturgies flowed contiguously but autonomously through my work. I could not neglect these three loyalties, although they reciprocally inhibited each other during the creative process. (Barba, 2010, p.185)

Estella, please learn to dance this delicate trio!

## Acknowledgement

*See You Zoom* and *See You Zoom Again* would not be made possible without the dedicated contributions of the five auto-ethnotheatre devising actors Chan Hiu-yan (Dai-kim), Chen Li-wah Lisa, Fung Sai-kuen, Wong Yat-hei Willis, Yau Shui-man Sharon. Facilitators Wong Ka-ye Carrie, Lam Kin-kong, Kwok Chuek-ling Jacqueline, Choi Ling Chi, technician Hung Ka-chak and the whole production team for their great effort and contributions to the performances. My special thanks to Prof. Poon Wai Sum, the Dean of the School of Drama and Eddy Zee of Tai Kwun who have offered the first and the second episodes enormous support respectively. Wholeheartedly, I also thank IATC(HK) for selecting *See You Zoom* as one of the Featured Works of

IATC(HK) Critics Awards 2020, it meant so much to me and my team.

## Notes

- 1 It refers to the kind of ethnotheatre that the performers are both the informants and researchers.
- 2 *See You Zoom* was selected as one of the Featured Works of IATC(HK) Critics Awards 2020 in April 2021. Retrieved April 13, 2021, from [http://www.iatc.com.hk/doc/104677?fbclid=IwAR17jYdsc91knNAd7oZt3xnBZ6tUXfnAdkMFV4N\\_S54FBW6\\_LGppFVsqKYU](http://www.iatc.com.hk/doc/104677?fbclid=IwAR17jYdsc91knNAd7oZt3xnBZ6tUXfnAdkMFV4N_S54FBW6_LGppFVsqKYU)
- 3 The ethnographic performance was created by Dr. Jane Melissa Bird, Dr. Katriona Jane Donelan, late Dr. Christine Sinclair, Dr. Prudence Wales.
- 4 “Story-sharers” described by Chan in her review equals the “characters” as described by the author in this article.
- 5 English translated from the original Chinese text by Estella Wong.
- 6 English translated from the original Chinese text by Estella Wong.

## References

- Ackroyd, J., & O’Toole, J. (2010). *Performing research: Tensions, triumphs and trade-offs of ethnodrama*. Trentham Books.
- Barba, E. (2010). *On directing and dramaturgy: Burning the house*. Routledge.
- Belliveau, G., & Lea, G. W. (Eds.). (2016). *Research-based theatre: An artistic methodology*. Intellect.
- Bolton, G. (1984). *Drama as education: an argument for placing drama at the centre of the curriculum*. Longman.
- Chan, K. (2020, June). 微型自述Zoom進港人生活《聽搖滾的北京猿人》廣播重現 [A mini auto-ethnotheatre Zooms into the life of Hongkongers “The Phenomenon of Man: REVOLVER” Broadcast Reproduction]. *Performing Arts Review*, 330, 20
- Choy, G. (2020, August 06). One-two punch of protests, coronavirus playing havoc with mental health in Hong Kong, study finds. *South China Morning Post*. <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/3096326/one-two-punch-protests-coronavirus-playing-havoc>
- Cozart, S, Gordon, J, Gunzenhauser, M, Mckinney, M and Patterson, J. (2003). Disrupting dialogue: Envisioning performance ethnography for research and evaluation. *Educational Foundations*, 17(2), 53-79.
- Khaner, T., & Linds, W. (2015). Playing in entangled spaces: Exploring ethnical know-how through embodied inquiry. In *Playing in a house of mirrors: Applied Theatre as reflective practice* (pp. 127-150). Sense Publishers.
- Nebehay, S., & Miller, J. (2021, January 13). Second year of pandemic ‘could even be

- tougher': WHO. *CTV News*. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/second-year-of-pandemic-could-even-be-tougher-who-1.5265156>
- Norris, J. (2009). *Playbuilding as qualitative research: A participatory arts-based approach*. Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Norris, J. (2020). Shifting perspectives and practices: Mirror Theatre's stop/start/continue evolution. *Canadian Theatre Review*, 181, 56-60.
- Saldana, J. (2011). *Ethnotheatre: Research from page to stage*. Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Sallis, R. (2009). *Investigating boys and masculinities in mixed school drama classes* [Unpublished PhD thesis]. The University of Melbourne.
- Tai Kwun. (n.d.). *See you Zoom again*. <https://www.taikwun.hk/en/programme/detail/see-you-zoom-again/641>
- The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region [HKSAR Government] The Information Services Department. (2020, January 28). *Special work arrangement for government departments*. Press Releases. <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202001/28/P2020012800310.htm>
- The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region [HKSAR Government] The Information Services Department. (2020, January 26). *CE announces activation of Emergency Response Level in relation to novel coronavirus infection (with photo)*. Press Releases. <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202001/26/P2020012600087.htm?fontSize=1>
- The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. (2020, May 06). "See You Zoom" is returning soon! [Image attached] [Status update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/HKAPA.edu/posts/10158081000623654/>
- The University of Hong Kong Department of Psychiatry. (2020, August 06). *Cumulative impact of protracted social conflicts and COVID-19 pandemic adds up to aggravate PTSD and Depressive symptoms in Hong Kong*. [https://www.psychiatry.hku.hk/flow\\_press.html](https://www.psychiatry.hku.hk/flow_press.html)
- Ting, V., Cheung, E., & Low, Z. (2020, December 30). Hong Kong fourth wave: mandatory Covid-19 testing ordered at 43 residential buildings under tighter policy as 54 new cases confirmed. *South China Morning Post*. <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/3115799/hong-kong-fourth-wave-city-residents-warned>
- White, G. (2013). *Audience participation in theatre: Aesthetics of the invitation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Youth Research Centre. (2019). *Strengthening intergenerational understanding*. The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups. <https://yrc.hkfyg.org.hk/en/2019/12/10/strengthening-intergenerational-understanding/>

此為上文摘要中譯

# 線上自傳式人種誌劇 *See You Zoom* 的導演反思筆記——香港人在戲劇 性的2020年下的生活

黃婉萍

香港 · 香港演藝學院

## 摘要

作者在2019冠狀病毒病自願居家隔離期間，透過視頻會議軟件Zoom來創作和演出自傳式人種誌劇*See You Zoom*系列（2020年2月至10月）。本文為作者以導演身份對此創作的反思。自2019年中以來，在社會事件和疫情的持續影響下，作者基於渴望聯繫社區內不同人士而開展了這一創作旅程，並在途中遇上種種挑戰。透過是次經驗，作者對於全程在Zoom上編作、排練和進行現場演出有所發現及洞察。作者在以下三方面反思了線上劇場建構：(i) 在未能與演員實體同場的情況下共同創作 (ii) 運用公共和私人空間的關係，以及 (iii) 管理Zoom觀眾的參與度。

**關鍵詞：**2019冠狀病毒病、Zoom劇場、自傳式人種誌劇、導演在線實時互動演出、聯繫、觀眾參與

電郵：estellawong@hkapa.edu

（翻譯：胡麗琪）