Surrogate Surfaces, Day 3

A broadcast by Surfatial, the collective of Satya Gummuluri, Malavika Rajnarayan and me, 11 December 2014. Watch on YouTube

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I made this transcript by machine from the recording and corrected it against the recording's description and my own records. I have not checked the words by ear. I checked a sample of the speaker names by ear, and corrected those I heard differently. [?] marks a word still in doubt and [unclear] a passage that could not be made out. A speaker is named only where the broadcast's screen or the recording's own words say who is speaking. Fillers such as "uh" and "um" are left out. Times are from the start of the recording.

A name followed by (?) was read from the screen at a moment when it changed from one speaker to the next, so the turn may belong partly or wholly to the speaker before or after.

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00:01 SATYA Surfatial has just joined.

00:04 PRAYAS Yeah we couldn't hear each other. I think we had a, we had a kind of a...

00:12 SPEAKER 1 Parallel universe moment.

00:14 PRAYAS (?) Yeah, just like— we ha- we have to have that, I think, once every season. So I had just narrated the first trigger

00:27 Okay.

00:28 Which was based on Sam's position— the position that he'd introduced yesterday, which is you know, the relationship between the surrogate and the, and our idea of who we might be. So the trigger I'll just repeat the description: if the currentness of our act is who we happen to be, then who does our memory belong to? So, you know, if each past experience is becoming a surrogate in that sense

01:07 PRAYAS (?) Yeah.

01:07 PRAYAS (?) Then the, then our past in that sense doesn't belong to us.

01:16 SATYA But we are talking about currentness, so where does past come from?

01:20 PRAYAS So, I mean, the memory. So in the sense our construct of ourself involves time, right? So in that so i- within the flatness of the construct of ourselves

01:40 We can, we have this notion of having been around and having experienced other things and, you know, having prior knowledge of the scene.

01:53 SATYA Okay, somehow I had this feeling from yesterday that, and also, you know, from what I had heard from Sam, that being in the present moment actually means that nothing else exists. you know, the actor on stage is only the act and nothing else exists, so there isn't a memory... the actor is carrying the memories, but... so I mean, somehow currentness for me contains the memories, but yet is a flat surface.

02:30 PRAYAS Right. I mean we have in the past spoken— I mean I think in the, in previous study groups we have spoken of currentness as something which is very minute, which is very narrow, as very micro and which is sharp. But I have— I mean, recently I've been thinking that, you know, the past and the future both can be thought of as belonging to this moment as well. So in that sense, the duration of the moment actually... it might not be— we might not be able to define that so easily. In the sense

03:33 PRAYAS (?) Right.

03:33 PRAYAS (?) My experience of a moment might be fore- might last forever. I mean, it might last a very long time at least, right? So...

03:46 SATYA Right. You know, somehow I'm stuck with this image of a flat surface performing for an audience, and that flat surface is not allowed to have a depth because it has been scripted and it has a very linear narrative. It has been—

04:04 PRAYAS Yeah, so I mean I am, I agree with that. So let's say, let's not, let's not imagine a depth, let's stay with the flat, flatness of the cur- you know, of the current the way you disc- you are describing it. But let's say the time past and the time that has yet to come, they're casting a shadow on this flat surface. You know, so even if we are entirely— I mean, we actually... you know, our eve- what we associate and know as being in the here and now is not as sharp and isolated from the time past and the time that is yet to come. They cast a shadow at least, if not, if not... and in that shadow, for example, memory resides, and in the shadow of the future potential resides, and...

05:23 SATYA Right, even if we are a character in a script, there— it does have a history and it does have a future, that character.

05:29 PRAYAS Yeah, and to deny that might be, you know, jump— jumping to a conclusion very fast, that is, you know fixing the notion of the duration of a moment. I think we should maybe leave that a bit loose.

05:53 SATYA (?) Okay.

05:55 PRAYAS (?) Only—

05:56 MALAVIKA Does it apply to the memory as well? Are you trying to say that the memory you're referring to is both the enacted memory as well as the actor's memory?

06:13 PRAYAS Let's say we only talk about of one of these, you know, which is the enacted memory. Let's say the actor does not have any inside. I mean, that's what we were that's where we started from— one of the positions where we started from yesterday, and let's say we don't need to deviate from there. But even the enacted memory, so what allows me to continue the act that I have initiated with you, for example

06:51 Has something to do with the enacted memory, knowledge of the enacted memory, and remaining in a way faithful to that.

07:05 SATYA (?) So there is an assumption of a script.

07:09 PRAYAS Yeah, the— I mean the script is unavoidable seemingly to me. I mean it's like I don't know if we can shake it off.

07:21 SATYA (?) Right.

07:22 MALAVIKA What happens if you enact the script again and again many times? I mean like, if we, if we talk of a routine— yesterday we were talking of a kind of a behavioural routine as something that we otherwise fall back onto. So there is a routine that we follow in a social context as opposed to something when we are on our own. So in this, if you take that routine to— an everyday routine to be an enacted space, and when that's repeated, doesn't that accumulate a set of memories as well, and of enacted memories? So every time you, while acting, you also know that you have done the same thing before and you're doing it again, and it's not really the same.

08:22 PRAYAS Right. I mean actually the nature of the— I mean, I think what you're talking about is the, is the loop, right? I mean, the— what happens when acts loop, and what happens when you are enacting not just once, but many times, the, a given routine, right? I mean that's what you're...

08:48 MALAVIKA Yes.

08:49 PRAYAS Yeah, so in a, in a— the nature of the loop actually might be just another I mean expansive thing that we could get into. And I mean I'm not talk— I'm not saying that it's a, it's a deviation, I'm saying that's a, it's a very welcome potential that, you know, we can explore here

09:19 Because the loop has this way of ha- has this form which I mean after you have looped a certain number of times, you don't really know the beginnings and ends very clearly, in the sense —

09:34 MALAVIKA Yeah, exactly.

09:37 PRAYAS Any point in the loop can be seen as a looping point

09:42 MALAVIKA Yeah.

09:43 PRAYAS As a beginning and end point.

09:44 MALAVIKA (?) Yeah.

09:45 PRAYAS And what, and what you were mentioning is also the accumulation of the, of the layers of these loops

09:56 And how that affects the...

10:00 ...how that adds another dimension of memory to the actors. I mean that—

10:07 SATYA Or a loss of memory, because if you're in the loop, you can just follow the routine. You don't even need to have memory.

10:16 PRAYAS (?) How is that?

10:18 SATYA The actor's only following the script, is—is not even aware of the—it's like motor memory. I mean, I don't even have to put an effort anymore. motor memory just takes over. So there is no memory there, and it's just a flow, like, you know, I'm just doing without even thinking.

10:38 PRAYAS Right. but what is this? What is this motor memory for the actor?

10:45 SATYA (?) So we talked about a loop where we are talking about repetition.

10:49 SATYA (?) Yeah.

10:50 Right? Repetition, after a while, if there is no change of any kind, and you just do it automatically.

11:02 MALAVIKA Right. But I'm saying that —

11:02 That's the thing, [unclear] change is, I—I don't know it's very hard to not have change.

11:11 SATYA Right. I under—I—

11:13 PRAYAS I mean, at least in this—

11:13 SATYA —know that. Yeah, that's true.

11:14 PRAYAS At least in the script. Satya, are you referring to the co—the—the consistent nature of the script or the consistent nature of the enactment?

11:26 SATYA No, of the script.

11:28 PRAYAS Yeah. So Malavika, in the script we can imagine that it remains static, right? I mean, that's—that's a loop, like when you loop the—loop a song, for example it's a loop only if the song remains the same. Otherwise, it's a playlist.

11:46 PRAYAS (?) Correct.

11:47 MALAVIKA No. If you—

11:47 SATYA (?) If it's different versions—

11:49 MALAVIKA (?) —take it away from—see, we're talking of memory in terms of an enactment and an actor. So I am not taking it into a mechanical sense at all. I'm—I'm only interested in the moment from a human perspective.

12:11 PRAYAS Okay. I'm—I mean, I—

12:12 SATYA (?) And are you saying that—sorry. Are you saying that every time the actor acts, the script is the same, but the actor's act is different every time? There's some memory that adds on to it.

12:23 MALAVIKA (?) Yes.

12:24 MALAVIKA (?) Right.

12:24 MALAVIKA (?) I—I would imagine so.

12:26 SATYA (?) Yeah, I would agree with that, yeah.

12:28 MALAVIKA (?) And if that is the case, then, you know, I don't know how we're going to look at this aspect of memory.

12:39 SATYA (?) No, but then that's the memory, right? Every time you have a memory of the previous act, and you know that something has to be tweaked, so there is a change in the act the next time.

12:54 PRAYAS I mean I don't really know if this is so much of a memory factor, you know, as something else. Like you know, if you—if you for example, you—if we just take how we live, for example, yeah, you know, how we live our life and things might seem to be happening in the same way over and over again. And that—that only gives us a sense of familiar—familiarity towards a discomfort, in the sense you know, that we know that how this is going to pan out, but —

13:44 PRAYAS (?) Right.

13:45 —we also know that we have to do what we have to do. I mean, there is a—

13:55 SATYA So then what is the memory here?

13:58 PRAYAS Yeah, so that's what I'm saying. So is it so much of a memory— is it the—is the repetition of the loop so much, is it so much about the memory, or is it something else?

14:14 MALAVIKA But I thought you were trying to place memory.

14:16 MALAVIKA (?) Right.

14:17 PRAYAS (?) No, but, yeah, but not the me—not the—not the memory of the loop that —I mean, I had not factored that in, actually. You I think suggested this.

14:38 MALAVIKA Mmm.

14:39 PRAYAS And I mean, I'm—I'm basically, yeah, I'm saying that I'm not sure if this—if the—if the recurrence, if the—if the loop, if the happening again and again of the—of the enactment is adding another layer of memory, or it's adding something else. You know, which is—

15:02 SATYA It does add a layer of memory because, I mean, there is something to take forward. If you're playing the same song again and again, or if you're performing the same act again and again, there is something that you're learning from the past. Even in your routine of the life, when we do the same thing again and again, but, you know, like Einstein said, if we—it's like, you know, you realize that something can be changed and that'll make things better, so you try to do something different the next time. So there is that factor of memory, and that's to reduce your own discomfort.

15:36 PRAYAS Right. I mean, I'm—I'm basically I'm running with this, I don't know where we'll end up. But I am saying that let's say we like when you repeat a song, when you loop a song, which is the example that you just mentioned then you can actually forget the song, right? So, when a song has looped, for example, for fifty odd times, I mean when you leave it looping all night, then you can lose sense of the repetition of the repeated sounds being a song.

16:17 SATYA (?) So now the memory is of the obs—of the viewer then. Of the listener.

16:25 PRAYAS Yeah. So yeah. The—the loops accumulate in the—in the audience, in the listener, in the viewer. but I'm not sure if I wo—I would think the contrary, that the—the more the many—the more it loops, the more we lose a sense lose the sense of coherence that we have on the narrative. And—

16:54 Yeah.

16:56 MALAVIKA (?) It's true. That is true, yeah. I—I do agree with that, yeah.

17:03 SATYA Or you could—it's like Groundhog Day. You are aware that it's happening, you know, and it's the same thing again and again. You're trying to break out of it.

17:12 PRAYAS Yeah, and that's the—that's the kind of dream that we are you know locked in. in the sense, we don't really know if we are ever going to be able to wake up.

17:38 So Sam, do you have anything to add to this? Because we are basically building up on what you brought in yesterday.

17:47 MOSES SAM (?) Okay.

17:49 PRAYAS (?) So I mean, I'll just quickly recap. So what you were talking about yesterday, between the—the relationship between the surrogate surface and the sense of self —

18:03 If we just take that so if the currentness of our act is who we happen to be, then who does our memory belong to? So, just before we shift to the next trigger, if you just want to add something. Who does our memory belong to then, if we—if we don't—if the—if you know, did you get it? I mean—

18:28 MOSES SAM Yeah, I get it. But who does this self belong to?

18:33 PRAYAS (?) Who does the self belong to?

18:38 PRAYAS (?) Yeah, is that what you said?

18:40 MOSES SAM (?) Yeah. I mean, if you're asking who does the memory belong to, I'm asking who does the self belong to.

18:44 PRAYAS Yeah. No, so does the memory belong to the self?

18:52 MOSES SAM No, I'm saying the self is—the self itself belongs to someone else.

18:58 PRAYAS Oh, whom does the self belong to?

19:01 Who is the someone else?

19:04 MOSES SAM No, it's the same person. So that—so if you look at the—that as a third entity that at—at that particular point in time and space, becomes the self of that personality.

19:19 MOSES SAM (?) Right.

19:20 And at a different point in time, you know, with a different set of values and a different set of moral code, and that becomes the surrogate surface as well, you know.

19:32 PRAYAS Right. So the whom does the self belong to in the—in what you just said?

19:42 MOSES SAM (?) I don't know. if we can have a name for the third entity. No, I'm—I'm just thinking of self and the surrogate surface. The self is also a surface then.

19:56 PRAYAS The self is—

19:57 SATYA I think, Sam, what you said yesterday, how I understood—

20:00 SATYA (?) When the act is happening, the actor is the self.

20:05 MOSES SAM Right. When the act is happening, if the actor doesn't know or if she is fully conscious that this act is happening

20:14 MOSES SAM (?) Yeah.

20:14 MOSES SAM (?) Then that self becomes the actor.

20:17 SATYA (?) Right.

20:21 MOSES SAM Right. So if the actor is that conscious of this particular act of the self, then the actor would be conscious of the surrogate surface also.

20:34 Right?

20:35 PRAYAS So the surrogate surface belong— belongs to the self. Is that what you're saying?

20:43 MOSES SAM No, the surrogate surface belongs to the conscious actor.

20:51 PRAYAS But whom do the memories belong to then?

20:56 MOSES SAM (?) Memories are surrogate surfaces, right?

20:59 INDER (?) Yeah.

21:00 MOSES SAM (?) Haan.

21:02 PRAYAS Okay. So you're saying the memories belong to the actor

21:06 MOSES SAM Right.

21:06 PRAYAS And the sense of self is the experience of the actor.

21:10 MOSES SAM Right.

21:11 PRAYAS So okay. So then we move to the second trigger.
21:17 Okay.
21:18 PRAYAS (?) Is a—
21:19 *laughter*
21:21 Is our personal act separate from the collective enactment?
21:28 MOSES SAM (?) Right.
21:29 PRAYAS Or— and do we care do we care more for it?
21:34 MALAVIKA (?) For what?
21:36 PRAYAS Do we care more— yeah. should I repeat?
21:42 MALAVIKA Do we care more for what? I didn't understand the—
21:45 PRAYAS Yeah. so is our personal act
21:48 Yeah.
21:48 Separate from the collective enactment?
21:51 PRAYAS (?) Mm.
21:52 And if so, do we care more for it? So, do we care more for our personal act than we do for the collective enactment?
22:01 MALAVIKA I see.
22:06 SATYA The easy answer is yes. We do care more for the personal enactment.
22:11 PRAYAS But you know we are not going to be able to act, for example, I mean, our act is going to break if the collective enactment breaks.
22:23 MOSES SAM I think what determines what would be a interesting question. Like, the personal act determines the collective enactment, or we put up this personal act because of the pressure from the collective enactment?
22:37 MALAVIKA It's the same case of the guest and host that we were discussing yesterday, and they are interchangeable, I think.
22:44 PRAYAS No, the guest and host were in the perspective of the actor.
22:48 MOSES SAM Actor, correct.
22:50 MALAVIKA But I— I'm saying it can be applied here as well. So the personal act and the collective enactment
22:56 MOSES SAM Mm-
22:57 MALAVIKA (?) Are in many ways like the guest and host. So sometimes the personal act is determined by the collective enactment, and in— at other times the collective enactment is determined by the personal act. [unclear]
23:14 PRAYAS No, but what are we more attached to? What do we care more about is—
23:20 MOSES SAM Personal.
23:20 PRAYAS Actually it's a— it's a— yeah, it's a— that's a strategic question, because if we care more for the personal act—
23:31 SATYA I mean, why would we care for the collective act?
23:32 PRAYAS Then like we— like—
23:35 SATYA Why— why would we care for the collective act? What does it do for us?
23:39 INDER No, our personal act is dependent on it at some level.
23:43 MALAVIKA No— okay, yeah.
23:47 MALAVIKA (?) No, not at—
23:48 MOSES SAM (?) At a very basic level, you know, at— at every level.
23:51 PRAYAS No, it is— no. It's not— it is determined maybe, yeah.
23:55 PRAYAS (?) It cannot exist in isolation.
23:56 *laughter*

23:59 SATYA But it doesn't matter what the— we cannot— we know that we cannot control the collective. What we can only control is ourselves.

24:06 MOSES SAM Wait, why can't it happen in...

24:10 INDER [unclear]

24:14 PRAYAS Haan, Inder, are you saying something?

24:19 Haan, okay. Yeah, sorry Sam. Yeah, continue.

24:22 MOSES SAM (?) No, I'm saying if we look at personal enactments as discrete instances, and the collection or the summation of these discrete instances would be the collective enactment, right? So the personal act is not dependent on the collective enactment; it's just the summation.

24:46 PRAYAS A summation— how is that a—

24:46 SATYA But doesn't the—

24:53 PRAYAS (?) No, what were you saying Satya? Sorry for interrupting.

24:56 SATYA Oh no. no I was... I forgot, sorry.

25:04 PRAYAS No, but Sam, how— how is the personal act a summation of the collective act?

25:10 MOSES SAM No. The collective act— I'm not sure if it's summation or if it's.. I'm not sure if it's the AND or the OR, you know, the logical AND OR. OR is summation and is a multiplication. So the— the collective enactment is... if you look at the logical thing, then it's an AND, which is multiplication mathematically. But if you look at it on the other side, it is just a summation of all the personal enactments that every individual puts up, right? In that particular confined space, I guess.

25:55 No, all I'm trying to say is personal enactment is not dependent on the collective enactment, but the personal act could be influenced by the collective enactment.

26:07 Yeah.

26:11 SPEAKER 2 So it could be influenced, but the...

26:17 PRAYAS [unclear] can [unclear]

26:19 MALAVIKA (?) Yes, I'm— I'm— I— I listened to that. I am kind of thinking about it, that— that it's not dependent, but can be influenced.

26:30 PRAYAS Haan, matlab I don't really know if the collective is literally a— a collective of all the individual acts, you know. It's— it's not maybe it's not a subset and a set kind of thing, because the environment

26:52 Mm-

26:52 Even without the actors, you know, has some qualities.

27:01 Right? So... even— even the collective act would at some level be continuous even if the actors are absent.

27:14 SATYA So you are— you are including the environment within the collection, which is— I— I was more considering that the actors coming together... Do you remember that cartoon called Swimmy? Does anyone remember it?

27:28 MOSES SAM (?) Swimmy?

27:30 SATYA Swimmy, right? Films Division, long time ago. There were all these little fishes, they form a big fish.

27:35 PRAYAS Okay.

27:36 SATYA (?) That's what I'm thinking of collective act as.

27:39 SATYA (?) Right. No —

27:40 MOSES SAM (?) There can't be a collective act without an actor.

27:44 SATYA Sorry?

27:46 MOSES SAM No, I'm saying there can't be a collective enactment without an actor.

27:51 MOSES SAM (?) Yeah.

27:52 PRAYAS No, there can be, because let's say what is— where— where are the actors standing? They're standing on something that we can think of as a stage, something, you know, whatever kind— I'm not talking of the formal stage, but some stage.

28:09 Mm-

28:10 Now.. there's a— there's a backdrop, has a foreground, has a background. So it— it is a landscape. It is an environment.

28:22 MOSES SAM Yeah, then that landscape becomes an actor, right?

28:28 PRAYAS (?) No, but does it? or —

28:32 SATYA Why not?

28:32 I mean, it can influence the act. I mean, I— I can feel inspired in some venues more than I feel inspired in other venues, so I can see how the environment can influence.

28:42 MOSES SAM (?) No, I'm considering the environment also as an actor.

28:49 INDER I could see that. I could see it also as an actor.

28:50 SATYA (?) I mean—

28:53 MALAVIKA Yeah, that's what I understand as a collective enactment.

28:59 SATYA (?) Okay, assume— let's assume that it's an actor in the collective.

29:07 PRAYAS .. I mean, but it— it is more— it has ambient qualities which I would not be able to, you know associate with qualities of an actor. Like, an actor is individual...

29:30 PRAYAS (?) Not necessarily, right? Like, for example—

29:32 SATYA And not—

29:33 I'm sorry. If I feel like this actor whom I am acting with, I find that person to be a warm, inviting presence. So I'm feeling a presence of the other actor. And that could be even the ambience. There is a warm, inviting ambience in this place, which I'm sensing as a presence.

29:53 PRAYAS Right.

29:56 SATYA So in that sense, the environment is also an actor.

30:00 PRAYAS Okay. Right. So then where does that—

30:04 MOSES SAM But we have to define what are the parameters that constitute an actor.

30:09 SATYA Which is, I mean, I feel like— we can— we cannot even define another individual. An— an— an actor is a collection of attributes.

30:24 MOSES SAM Yeah, we can't define, but we judge, you know.

30:27 SATYA Fine, but what I'm saying is if you consider the environment also as a collection of attributes—

30:32 SATYA (?) -huh.

30:33 —that way it is also an actor, and where does that take us was what Prayas you asked, and the — I was thinking that if we take that as the collective enactment and now we look at the individual actor, then is the act separate? That's the question.

30:50 MOSES SAM (?) Ah, see, that's a nice question.

30:55 PRAYAS Right. So what does that....

31:02 PRAYAS (?) What's the act?

31:05 What's the act?

31:11 PRAYAS (?) What's the act?

31:13 MOSES SAM No, what did you say, Satya?

31:17 Sorry, could you repeat that?

31:19 PRAYAS Sam, I.. yeah.

31:25 MOSES SAM (?) Satya, can you repeat the question that you asked?

31:30 SATYA (?) So, I just extrapolated what we just said into the question that Prayas had for trigger two, in that: is our personal act separate from the collective enactment, if we are taking collective enactment to include the environment also?

31:45 MOSES SAM -huh.

31:47 SATYA Then what is.. are we separate?

31:56 MALAVIKA So you're separating the self again? From the enactment?

32:03 SATYA Right. That's how I would see it, yeah.

32:08 MALAVIKA (?) So but as—

32:11 Self and the enactment, within the enactment, and that's the point of... that the self and the enactment merge.

32:23 MOSES SAM The self and enactment merge. Yeah, alright.

32:27 MALAVIKA So we — I thought that's what we ended with yesterday and we kind of started with that again today.

32:35 Right.

32:36 So, if— if we are — so why would you again—

32:40 INDER (?) Separate them.

32:41 MALAVIKA Separate [unclear]—

32:41 MOSES SAM [unclear] again separate.

32:43 SATYA (?) No, because that's a collective enactment, right? Like, there's more than one actor now.

32:47 PRAYAS Yeah. So I mean the collective enactment and the personal enactment—

32:53 SATYA (?) Right.

32:54 PRAYAS —are definitely I mean, can be thought of as separate entities. I mean, at this point it's a question, but I mean we can— we can model them as separate entities because yeah, we were talking about a personal scale yesterday, and we have zoomed out.

33:23 MALAVIKA Don't they meet at the point of the enactment?

33:31 PRAYAS The what Sam was describing yesterday was the point of meeting in the personal act.

33:38 MALAVIKA No, I'm saying so you— we've already established that the— a point of enactment and the self happen at the same time. And—

33:54 PRAYAS (?) Right.

33:55 MALAVIKA —when that is you know, happening, and if you're now bringing in a collective enactment, I would see it as one encounter with another. It's again an enactment. So, I— at the point of enactment, for me, is a merging of all these, whether it is the collective or the self or the personal or...

34:28 SATYA But isn't there a distinction between two actors interacting with each other versus all of these actors interacting together, and that— the envelope of that?

34:40 MALAVIKA It depends on whether you are defining acting as an active articulation. I mean, listening is also acting. Receiving is also an act— an enactment to that extent.

34:57 SATYA I don't know if I would take... listening as an act. I— I feel that's more passive. That's—

35:06 PRAYAS Yeah, I mean you could say that you can act like you're listening.

35:11 *laughter and banging sound*

35:17 PRAYAS (?) But how would you listen as an act?

35:24 SATYA Unless that's built into the script.

35:26 PRAYAS Yeah, I mean, but exactly, and in the— if you're enacting the script, you would act like you're listening still.

35:35 MOSES SAM (?) Precisely, yeah.

35:38 MOSES SAM (?) So —

35:39 MALAVIKA (?) No, I mean, it's— it's nothing but a sensory— you're not shutting off your senses.

35:46 SATYA But one is a deliberate acting out, whereas the other one is a— like one is deliberately sending signals, the other one is in a receiving mode where signals are just coming in—

36:00 PRAYAS I mean some.. yeah Malavika, I think what you're talking about is a— is an act is an act of listening which involves an inside, that I think when we start thinking of actors as persons, as—

36:21 Yeah.

36:22 —people then we are assuming that, you know, they have a inside, and for the purposes of this discussion, we are talking of actors as entities who don't have an inside. I mean, I'm just saying —

36:39 MALAVIKA If you're talking— so, if you— if you're talking of collective enactment as, and— and, you know, drawing parallels with an environment, so now the— an environment does not necessarily have to be insightful and active in perceiving, receiving, listening, whatever. And—

36:58 SATYA (?) Actually, that's a very good point, because then the audience also becomes the environment, and the listener becomes an actor in that sense, yeah.

37:02 MALAVIKA (?) Yeah.

37:05 You can't ensure that deliberate rec— receiving from the environment. But you never know what is being received.

37:14 PRAYAS So that is where the construction is being— is being held, in that sense. What you're saying—

37:21 Yes.

37:22 —is so in the memory of the viewer, in the— and the memory is, let's say, what all I've— I've managed to hold on to so, which is by listening to it, right? that's the— so the whole construction depends on it. The enactment depends on the memory of the audience, because that's where it is— that's what is holding it together.

37:55 MALAVIKA (?) I don't know if you— if— if I would call that a memory, but the presence of the environment is what is holding it together. Because an act in absolute vacuum is... of no consequence, in— in my opinion, I mean. We— we wouldn't be— you can't go any further.

38:23 PRAYAS I mean yeah, consequence is a whole different parameter. I mean what we have what— what we know, so it would not be an act so much, right? In the sense—

38:41 MALAVIKA Exactly, that's what I was saying, yeah.

38:43 PRAYAS Yeah. So, it's if I'm doing something in a— in a room where— in an empty room, and I do something else, you know, if I do random things which are unconnected—

38:55 PRAYAS (?) Mm-

38:57 —then I can actually get away with it without any— I don't need to stick to the script.

39:05 MALAVIKA (?) Yes.

39:06 PRAYAS Mm- So, we jump to the third trigger for the day, which is very— which is actually which is yeah, four words: what limits an actor?

39:28 MALAVIKA (?) Nothing.

39:30 SATYA Everything.

39:32 *laughter*

39:33 MOSES SAM (?) Memories. Memories of limits.

39:36 It's too much consciousness that limits an actor.

39:42 SATYA (?) If the theater is on fire, the actor will be limited.

39:46 *laughter*

39:47 MOSES SAM No, I think internally, I mean. Not the— we are not talking about the external circumstances, right?

39:53 SATYA (?) No, but we are talking about environment and collective, so that will play now.

39:57 MOSES SAM That— that also, okay. —

40:01 PRAYAS Yeah, the act will break if the stage is on fire.

40:04 SATYA Mm.

40:05 MOSES SAM No, what if that's part of the act?

40:08 MALAVIKA (?) No, it won't. It's not a limit. It will— it's still a stimulus to act upon that moment.

40:16 SATYA (?) Yeah.

40:16 SATYA (?) Right, until the final break happens.

40:20 MOSES SAM Right. See, it's again consciousness, right? Like if— if cricketers are too conscious that they could die out of a— from a short ball, then they won't go out and play, right? But the —

40:37 PRAYAS Yeah. No, so I will elaborate the question a little bit. So can— can an actor act as anything? Can I act anything out, or there are limits to what I can enact because of something that has to do something with who I am? —

41:06 MOSES SAM Yeah. And that's why— I mean again I will say the same thing. It's the conscious memory of the self that could limit an actor. And that conscious memory could come from you know, your knowledge, could come from societal barricades, it could come from your value system, it could come from your nature, it could come from your nurture. so if you're too conscious about the memory of yourself, then that limits an actor, that's what I think.

41:44 PRAYAS Right. So I mean, conscious let's say— so what is what is the conscious actor? I mean, where does consciousness actually come in, into— in the whole acting process, right? [unclear] that you're actually forgetting all of what you're saying that the actor will be conscious about? So, the degrees of consciousness would actually be inversely relate— or inversely or directly related to the degrees of ability to— of forgetting?

42:24 MOSES SAM Haan, but I mean, we can also look at it this way, right? Like completely enlightened yogis, they don't do anything, they don't act, right? They don't put on an act.

42:32 Absolutely.

42:36 But the flip side is that if they think that minimalist act is the ultimate act...

42:47 PRAYAS (?) Okay.

42:55 I mean who is the enlightened actor? I mean—

43:00 SATYA See, I could also say that an enlightened actor is one who is so well aware of what is going on that they are not— it doesn't even affect them. So, like Sam you said about the cricketer going out, and if you're conscious of what you're doing, it doesn't work. But I can turn it around saying that when I'm in a state of flow, I am so hyper-conscious—

43:23 MOSES SAM Right.

43:24 SATYA —that it doesn't affect me.

43:27 MOSES SAM That's true. I mean, like I said so we can look at it two ways, right? Like, either you're too conscious that you're afraid to put on an act, or you're too conscious that you don't put on an act, but you're very aware that you're not putting on an act, you're just being yourself, and that becomes the ultimate act. So, you don't really know if the actor is completely conscious of the ultimate act, that he or she is not putting on an act, or if the actor is conscious to an extent that he or she is afraid to put on an act.

44:11 PRAYAS Yeah, but Sam, I'm not sure if we can qua—

44:25 SATYA (?) Hello, Surfatial?

44:31 MOSES SAM Prayas?

44:42 SPEAKER 2 I don't know, maybe— to the question, what limits an actor?

45:00 PRAYAS (?) Haan, so Malavika, you tell us. So what do you think of [unclear]—

45:05 Can you hear me?

45:07 MOSES SAM Yes sir, tell me sir.

45:09 PRAYAS Yeah. No, so I was just commenting on you know can we qualify acts with being ultimate or being ordinary in that sense?

45:25 MOSES SAM Can we qualify... I mean—

45:29 PRAYAS Because if we get into that discussion, then it will be a very, like you know, we don't know who— who can certify an act—

45:38 PRAYAS (?) Exactly. Yeah.

45:39 —to be ordinary, and, you know, that will just go into a— something that's dependent on— on third-party kind of validation.

45:49 MOSES SAM Right. It's very subjective.

45:51 SATYA (?) But if you— if you go back to the question of what limits the actor, from what I heard from Sam is consciousness could limit an actor.

46:00 MOSES SAM Consciousness could limit an actor, but at the same time consciousness, like complete— I don't know, consciousness and enlightenment, let's call it that. Consciousness could limit an actor, and enlightenment could [unclear] an actor to not to put on an act, I don't know.

46:21 SATYA (?) That's a limit, actually.

46:23 MOSES SAM That's a limit? No when I say not to put on an act, it's—

46:29 SATYA No, I understand, I understand. I'm just sort of spinning the word.

46:44 SPEAKER 2 Sorry Prayas, you're cutting out again.

46:47 PRAYAS (?) Is enlightenment just a specific kind of act?

46:54 MOSES SAM I don't know which comes first. Okay, so, I don't know if this specific kind of act brings enlightenment, or enlightenment brings this act.

47:07 PRAYAS (?) No, because I— I mean, I'm just being very cautious here in— in going into this vocabulary set of—

47:16 MOSES SAM Yeah.

47:17 PRAYAS —of enlightenment—

47:19 MOSES SAM Yeah.

47:20 PRAYAS —and ultimate acts, because that takes us in a— into a zone which is —

47:27 MOSES SAM Really subjective.

47:29 PRAYAS — subjective or you know, based on special experience that we cannot open up to general experience easily, right? I mean—

47:41 Right.

47:42 —so that's a matter of privilege. If you are— if you have experienced it, you have; if you haven't, you haven't.

47:48 MOSES SAM (?) Okay, then let's go back to the question: so what limits an actor?

47:52 PRAYAS (?) Yeah.

47:54 MALAVIKA (?) Yeah, even I don't see how enlightenment can fit into this context of an act, because enlightenment, the way I understand it, is something you acquire. It's— it's— it's not an act, it's not— it's not something actively deliberated.

48:15 MOSES SAM Right. I mean, there's no act, which means you're true to yourself. You know, the self—

48:24 MOSES SAM (?) If there's no act, the act is limited, right?

48:27 .. I mean, if you look at act as a negative thing, then limiting it is the best thing to do, right?

48:39 SATYA Right. Yeah.

48:40 Yeah.

48:43 SATYA (?) Why?

48:44 PRAYAS But we are— but we are not looking at an act as a negative thing. I think we are looking at— as a— at an— as— at an act as the only thing.

48:55 MOSES SAM Okay.

48:56 PRAYAS I mean, in the sense that all we are doing is acting.

49:00 MOSES SAM (?) Correct.

49:01 PRAYAS (?) And that is the ordinary you know, state of affairs.

49:09 MOSES SAM (?) Right. Shakespeare.

49:12 INDER (?) Prayas?

49:14 PRAYAS (?) Haan ji.

49:15 INDER May I add something here?

49:16 MOSES SAM Yes.

49:17 MOSES SAM (?) Yeah, please.

49:18 INDER I think it will be little confusing. Do you hear me?

49:24 PRAYAS Yes, we can hear you very clearly.

49:26 INDER Because I think the life in general has something for everybody to act out. You know, to carry out the day, and everybody works out with their memories, with their skills, with their, you know, whatever they inherit from their past, and how they— their presentness is worked out for their livelihood, okay? So, in that sense, everybody is an actor. But I think, a departure takes place...

50:00 The moment we start thinking of acting as a discipline

50:04 INDER (?) Mm-

50:05 You know, that will be easier to handle if we, if I'm correctly understanding it. Because if everything is act, then we may talk about an engineer on the road or a cobbler on the road. We are only, I think, talking about the actor on the stage, or who has a script, or who's improvising or interacting with the audience and jelling this, the role with the self and bringing out something new, right? Or making an act imperfect or perfect or whatever. But I think the act, right? The actor on the stage has something to offer in terms of his or her experience, or where from they come. So the, so the actor is limited in that sense, but I think he is less limited than what the person on the ground is doing vis-à-vis with his or her acting to make his, a livelihood out of his skills. Because the actor on the stage is can fearlessly improvise and go anywhere, start being creative, and start making masks, you know?

51:18 INDER (?) [unclear]

51:20 Start working with masks. So the limitation on the ground, for example, a worker is working at a particular site, and he or she has particular skill to make a chair from his memory. So he has a limited access to improvise. Because...

51:37 [unclear]

51:38 Haan. Because, but on the, but the actor on the stage can go anywhere if the director or allows him or her to do what they want to do.

51:45 PRAYAS No, but Inder, we are we are looking at the we are looking at our environment in a way that there is no possibility of being authentic, right? So there is no possibility of being who you are. So in that sense, everything is an act.

52:13 INDER What is...

52:14 INDER (?) Yeah, basically there's no stage, so [unclear].

52:17 Prayas, I am only interested that what is this everything which you are saying.

52:21 PRAYAS I mean each state of being, each relation—

52:24 INDER Where? Where? Where? I mean, you are on the table working, worker is on somewhere on the roadside. Where? Everything is what? How do you define everything?

52:33 PRAYAS So our sense of self, our sense, our psyche in that sense, our the, who we, who we think of as ourselves.

52:42 INDER No, I'm saying that are you representational in this right now? For example, the person who is working somewhere, a farmer, let us say on the ground, who has a particular skills from his ancestors to make some vegetable, right?

52:56 Right.

52:57 INDER (?) So are we talking on his behalf here?

53:00 PRAYAS No, so I would say that his, the farmer's impression that or the farmer's experience that the farmer can only be a farmer because of his lineage or history

53:20 That is based on a set of beliefs and that is an act, in that sense. So...

53:26 MALAVIKA That's [unclear] for you to—

53:27 INDER (?) We have already said, we have already... I am already convinced on one thing, that everybody is carrying out an act.

53:35 Yeah.

53:35 Even a beggar, even a beggar is doing it on the, outside the temple or anywhere, right?

53:39 Right.

53:40 Pandit or Maulana, everybody is putting up a kind of a mask to work out a livelihood, you know, it's very simple. The politicians do, everybody does.

53:48 PRAYAS (?) Yeah, that's very simple, yeah.

53:50 INDER That is... I am, I am thinking about, let us say an actor is an artist. Let us say when a poet writes a poem, so the poem is very closely jelled with the self of the person. And we are, we are being taken to a different kind of a depth where, when you are talking about the refractions, the refractions take place there endlessly. And we are mesmerized, or we are, we are taken away into different kind of a zone of time and space, which actually does not happen on the ground, right? But

54:27 PRAYAS Yeah.

54:28 INDER But the paradox is, since the differences between the art and the life have collapsed at many, various levels, so we are, we are going back to a simple living. Simple living, let us say a garbage collector on the railway track. So the kind of life which he is going through is amazing and is giving us an endless horizon of possibilities and the, and the anecdotes which the person can give us. It's quite a rich life out there. So we really don't know what is the script there.

55:03 Because the script is constantly improvising. So it's not a question of being limited or it's not a question of being who is judging whom or what is authentic thing. For me, if we make it a little bit simplified, because if we are talking about the entire life what we are doing, everybody doing something in their own spaces, I think it will be interesting if we little focus on the acting part of it, you know? How we actually, how we actually look at the discipline, you know? How we are doing it in, let us say in schools where we act, and what are the limitations there. Let us say I think of Rajesh Khanna, for example. Rajesh Khanna was a very successful actor. But I think, you know, from a distance judging him, he had a failure in his life. So the, so his successes in his career didn't work out well when he was working with his spouse or his children. He failed as an, as a— but it's again a judgment from a distance. So the limitations of actor don't help the person to overcome the problems which one faces in the life. But at the same time, the, what he provided to the, to the society or on the screen, you know, what kind of new flowers he created on the water in terms of a projection on the screen in cinema halls, he was a wonderful actor. He gave smiles to everybody. So I really don't know again the director-actor split here, and then of course the question of performance art comes where there is no script actually. So for me these are crisscrossing from acting to life forces and then how to, how to balance the whole [unclear].

56:44 PRAYAS Yeah, so I mean I would I would think that, you know, the artist, the artist, if you want to talk about the artist, or the actor on the screen or actor on the stage they're all they're all kinds of acts, right? So in the sense, why would one prefer to identify as an actor rather than as an artist? Because if you're an actor, you can always act like you're an artist. Like, you know, so an art— being an artist is only a specific kind of act. So the

57:21 The only skill involved in actually producing experience is acting, and then you can potentially apply that skill to anything that you want, any role that you want to assume.

57:45 MALAVIKA But I think what he is trying to say is he's speaking of acting as a discipline. And I do agree with his point of view and what he said, because how do you make another person, a person who is not an actor on the screen or, you know, anybody else, aware of that potential of the act? I don't know. So we are having this discussion here about what an act can be or how you determine or define it. But in all pragmatic, at all pragmatic levels the awareness of that is happening only by performers.

58:38 PRAYAS Right, because we because generally in common, in common cultural exchange or whatever, the sense that we are really distinct people with a distinct history and a distinct— I mean, we actually come from somewhere and we have a reason for being who we are that is a very firmly held belief.

59:07 INDER No, look, Prayas, what I'm saying is you know, there is, there is really an absence of any script for a porn star, you know, a star who goes to work out in a, in a small porn, pornographic industry, right?

59:26 Yeah.

59:26 There is an absence of script. So there is a difference between a, let us say, sex worker. A sex worker also comes out to meet his client or her client, and there's a mask. You know, it's, it is something which is worked out very carefully. There's a skill there. There is some sort of a technique to handle this kind of a work, right? So similarly, there is a difference there. So in case of a porn star, she's working without a sta— without a script, and or he or she is getting some

01:00:00 ...money for being something and they are knowing that there is a camera behind them and they are working out something, right?

01:00:06 INDER (?) But...

01:00:07 And in case of a, in case of a, in case of a sex worker, there is no camera there. So there is, there is also some emoluments or some money is generated by the act. In both the cases, there is some sort of an act. But there is a huge difference there. There is a difference because the, because the sex worker is like any other worker. The kind of mask which a sex worker is putting up on her or his face is also the mask which is, which we can, we encounter at many, various levels: in offices, in our homes, with our, in our relationships, right? But when we talk about as an act, let us take about cinema also, where the person comes out with a particular kind of a skill and goes on the stage. And what happens there when the script and the body start gelling together, merging together. That is, I think, the debate. That is where we can think about how to balance this and with what is happening on ground in life. That is, I think, where, that can be very, you know, etymologically it can be very interesting. I don't know how.

01:01:20 PRAYAS But why do you say that the porn star doesn't have a script? I would assume that the that pornography is a very deeply scripted format of content. It's very deeply scripted.

01:01:35 INDER [unclear] you can, see there, I think most, we all see porn. Where is the script there? There is no dialogues. They simply go on the bed and start working. The camera is working...

01:01:45 PRAYAS (?) No, by script, by script I mean a specific set of directions.

01:01:51 INDER No, the camera is working there, not the, not the, not the actors. The camera is actually the script there. Camera is creating kind of a script there. It is a camera which is moving on the...

01:02:00 PRAYAS No, but we can't you can't you can't you can't be saying that it's genuine emotions being portrayed in pornography. I mean, it's obviously scripted.

01:02:10 INDER I didn't say, I didn't say genuine. Script, it is everywhere, it's on the sex... You see, scripted is in what sense? That what we, what as a product which comes to us, that is scripted. What we see on the, as a script, as a product, in our mobile phones or in, on anywhere else, in the, in the internet also, is scripted, because there is a particular industry which is directing it

on a, the camera is put in a particular way. So the script is decided, the angle is decided by the director there, not by the porn star. So how much of the self actually merges with the with the act is number one. Number second thing is how much the actor actually also works out on the, in the cinema also. Let us say small actor who is very good, very good actor, but his or her role is to carry the briefcase from one end of the road to the another, end of the road. So what kind of personality is actually merging there? So the nuances, the collective, the combination, the convergence of so many nuances, so many nuances make one product called film. And then again, how much we dissect in our own way and analyze that who is doing what, how to judge the actor. It is really mind-boggling to make a deep analysis of a film, because so many, so many forces go into the making of film. Even on the stage, how many people work behind the stage? The worker, the stage, the cobbler, the carpenter who makes the stage, the designer, the makeup person, the what happens in the green room in the as a process. So everything, how much one actually, you know, how much the audience encounters what happens on the stage actually, very little. Similarly, that happens in the sex... Let us say sex worker is somewhere working somewhere, but he or she may be having a family back home. How they are working, how they are balancing their life with what is, how much they actually hide what they are doing on the stage. That can happen even in any trade. So every kind of work is not explainable or shared with the people all the time.

01:04:19 PRAYAS Right. So Inder ji, basically you are trying to distinguish the acts which are which are performed as a, as a maybe as a compulsion or as a, as a strategy for survival or some, or a, or as a result of a negotiation between power hierarchies, right? And the acts which are voluntary and are done for the benefit of an audience. Yeah? Right? Did I capture it correctly?

01:05:05 INDER No, I see Prayas. I think, see, acting is a, is skilled work, right? People go for, to school to learn the acting. They go through the you know, exercises, limbs and the sound box and, you know, everything is done in a proper way for a couple of years, you know. I'm, I have not been through, but I know my friends. They go vigorously through a particular training and learn the craft called acting, right? So they go there to make a living actually. They want to make some life out of it, you know. It is not only the passion. One begins with a passion, but that is quite a vague thing. But the serious actors actually work it out professionally and they know their job well, how to make money out of it. That is very, that is the ground reality of it. Very, I mean, the enthusiasm part, the, what, when you actually like particular profession out of sheer love of it is entirely different matter. Then we can talk about when someone designs or creates—that's why the Joseph Beuys is saying everybody is an artist. He was actually saying that when a person, the architect or an engineer or everybody is an artist, when the person invests his or her creativity into the product, so that it is, it crosses the threshold of what it was expected or what the, what the conventional parameters were there, and the person when it, when he crosses, the creative, the creative forces actually enhance the capability of that product. The same thing happens on the stage also. Every, it happens everywhere. But what I am saying is that if we are, if we are talking in a, in a very holistic say, you know, entire thing, the way Joseph Beuys was talking about, that the entire life, in anthropological say, that every life force is a, is a, is a creative force. But I am saying that to balance the debate with a, with something what we are talking as acting as a discipline, as a serious faculty, which enables a person to become more creative than what is available on the ground. That's what, that's what we have a project called City as Studio. In that, in that project where the Raqs Media Collective was initiative, I was one of the mentors there. We were debating how to bring different disciplines on the same platform, number one. Number second thing was that how to understand the City as Studio, that where we can go suddenly somewhere and understand the departures which are taking place on the ground, and dig a little bit deeper on the reality and understand how a person is beyond the visible self on the roads. That can only happen when we, when we, when we enter into some sort of encounters with the, with the forces on ground. So it can happen anywhere. It can happen on stage also, it can happen in life also. But I think the, when we use the word actor, you know, what limits an actor—for example, the last frame which we are talking about—the

limits of an, what limits an actor is basically if they are, they are confined by their spaces, by their given spaces. The moment actor crosses that, the line, they can, they can experience the potential which is latently embedded in their, in their beings.

01:08:25 PRAYAS (?) So actors are limited by familiarity by spaces that they're familiar to.

01:08:32 INDER Yeah, by the, by their Lakshman Rekhas, you know. If there is a...

01:08:35 PRAYAS (?) Right.

01:08:36 INDER The proscenium is there. If the stage actor is there, I mean, there is limited space, you know. The architecture decides most of it. So the moment the same actor can go on the road-side and do something else, the potential of that actor will increase, enhance. So similarly, if a, if a cobbler is given a chance to go to New York and learn more skills, this, his capability will increase.

01:08:56 PRAYAS (?) Yeah.

01:08:57 So this...

01:08:57 Okay that makes sense to me. Sam, what do you, what do you think? Satya Malavika, do you, do you think we can close this session with this with this point that we have arrived at, that, you know what limits an actor is the familiar frame, the familiar space, and crossing that would basically extend the potential? You know, so can we, can we stay there and...

01:09:32 MALAVIKA Yeah, that makes sense. I have a few more triggers from after listening to what Inder said. I was also thinking of this aspect of skill and whether the skill can be looked at as a script.

01:09:47 PRAYAS Right. So can you please share those triggers so we can have them for tomorrow?

01:09:53 MALAVIKA Okay, sure.

01:09:54 PRAYAS So we can.. So if Sam Satya, if you want to share any triggers...

01:10:00 If Chetan you want to share something, Inder if you want to share, please feel free.

01:10:06 Sounds good.

01:10:06 Just email me sentences which I can, you know, put into the design and..

01:10:12 PRAYAS (?) Yeah.

01:10:12 PRAYAS (?) ...just share.

01:10:13 MALAVIKA (?) Yeah.

01:10:14 INDER Okay.

01:10:14 That sounds great.

01:10:15 PRAYAS Great. thanks everyone for being online. we'll meet again tomorrow at 9:00 p.m.

01:10:20 INDER Okay.

01:10:21 INDER (?) Yeah.

01:10:21 INDER (?) Thank you.

01:10:22 PRAYAS (?) Thanks.

01:10:22 SPEAKER 3 Thanks, Prayas. Thanks, Inder.

01:10:24 PRAYAS (?) Bye all.

01:10:25 CHETAN Thanks, everyone. Bye.