Surrogate Surfaces, Day 4

A broadcast by Surfatial, the collective of Satya Gummuluri, Malavika Rajnarayan and me, 12 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.

Prayas Abhinav · prayasabhinav.net/videos

00:04 PRAYAS Hi, welcome to the day four of Surrogate Surfaces. We start today's session with a trigger based on — what Inder you had — suggested and contributed yesterday, which is you know, which skills must an actor possess, you in—

00:36 —ting. And which skills help an actor grow?

01:23 Can you hear me, Inder?..

01:32 Yeah. So I already welcomed everyone to the day four of the Surrogate Surfaces and I narrated the first trigger. So which skills must an actor possess, and which skills help an actor grow? So, can— can anyone hear me?

02:22 Can you hear me, Nu Paradox?

02:25 NU PARADOX Yeah, I can, now. I can. Sorry, I got a call in between and I had to—

02:30 PRAYAS Yeah, sure. So I just — I don't know if Inder can hear me actually because I've — I've described the first trigger twice and there's been no response from him, so I'm wondering if we can— if you want to take it forward. The, you know, so which— the first trigger is, which skills must an actor possess, and so which skills help an actor grow?

02:58 NU PARADOX Okay. Now, we have to perhaps define what growth means for an actor and then we can answer the—

03:10 NU PARADOX (?) The second— the second part of the question.

03:11 PRAYAS —the second part of the question.

03:12 Yeah, but maybe we can start with the first part of the question, which— the trigger, which is, you know, which skills must an actor possess?.. Do you— do you think, yeah, we can start with the first part, or do you think we should clarify the whole trigger first?

03:34 NU PARADOX I think — well, both would essentially answer the same thing. It's— it's— it's the pieces of the bigger puzzle, actually.

03:43 PRAYAS Yeah. I mean so growth means basically — what is what helps the actor act better. Which is a way of saying what helps the actor act in a way which you know, involves the minimum—

04:11 NU PARADOX Traction.

04:12 PRAYAS — disturbance, yeah, or noise for him, and maybe also for the audience. So in the sense — yeah, I mean, I'm not really the one to frame the idea of growth here. I'm just putting things out there, but yesterday we had this idea, we had actually Inder bringing in this whole aspect of skill that is involved in acting. So, we are just going further from there.

04:45 NU PARADOX I see. But I think we have to step away from the conventional definition of an actor —

04:55 PRAYAS Okay.

04:56 NU PARADOX —vis-a-vis movies and theatre.

04:59 PRAYAS Yeah.

05:00 NU PARADOX (?) Right? They are not necessarily confined to that definition, the limited definition—

05:05 PRAYAS Yeah, I mean—

05:06 NU PARADOX —as we all know.

05:07 PRAYAS Yeah. I mean because yesterday that's what I was slightly uncomfortable with, when the discussion got into the professional actor acting in formally constructed scenes. Because yeah, like you're saying, that is not the only notion of acting, and actually I think it further distracts us from able— from being able to talk about acting in an expansive way, and forces us to, in a way, deal with acting as a— as a, you know, professional and social kind of role.

05:51 NU PARADOX (?) I think Inder brought forth some interesting perspectives and some clarity, in fact, on that, where— where he quoted a farmer and whether we are talking for the farmer, do we represent the larger whole and —

06:08 PRAYAS (?) Yeah, we had some—

06:10 NU PARADOX (?) —what constitutes acting and all.

06:13 PRAYAS Yeah, we were in quite a bind, I think, towards the end yesterday because of what Inder was suggesting of the difference between someone who has a choice and to, you know, to calibrate and select what their act should be, and somebody who doesn't have a choice, but is doing what needs to be done.

06:44 NU PARADOX Right, and that takes me back to the very first day and what Lawrence—

06:50 —that there are many ways to go about it: one is with a script, and then without a script, and then Satya chipped in by saying, "Yeah, one— one just acts and then the script automatically appears." So to speak, that meaning— meaning appears as we act, right? So the act itself is writing a script. so we don't have a predetermined script which unfolds or we are adhering to here. So—

07:21 PRAYAS Yeah.

07:22 NU PARADOX (?) —there are many ways of acting, per se.

07:27 PRAYAS Yeah, but I mean so all along, you know, all through these days, actually, the notion of script that I've been— that I have been holding on to is you know, the essential nature of the act. So in a way, like, you know, we— if we know each other for some time, then we know what our voice stands for, and we will know when either one of us is deviating from that voice, if it is possible, and when one is not. So in the sense, one forms a pattern of— pattern of the act, and that pattern of the act is the script for me.

08:19 INDER (?) Haan, Prayas? Prayas?

08:21 PRAYAS Haan ji, yeah.

08:22 INDER Do you listen to me?

08:23 PRAYAS Yeah, we can hear you.

08:25 INDER Okay. I just want to clarify because it's very interesting debate. yesterday I was just trying to make a distinction, little distinction between— let us say a term called — bahurupiya.

08:40 PRAYAS Haan.

08:41 INDER (?) You know, in society a bahurupiya is someone who is double-faced, who is a trickster — you know, trickster, huh?

08:47 PRAYAS Haan.

08:48 INDER But on stage, the bahurupiya is a quality, you know, you can play many roles, right?

08:53 PRAYAS Haan. Haan.

08:54 INDER So— so there is a little departure here. But in— on— in life in general—

09:00 —we see that people are actually using many skills which are similar to acting skills, to— to sustain themselves, right?

09:09 PRAYAS Yeah.

09:10 INDER Right? So on the stage what we are doing— because there's an analogy there, because on the stage what— what the actor is doing sometimes you know, learning the craft, the skills, from the life directly, or from a school—

09:26 PRAYAS Yeah.

09:26 INDER —to— to enact certain characters.

09:29 Huh? So, to enhance the— the idea of what the character out there must be, or a imaginative idea of a character.

09:38 PRAYAS Yeah.

09:38 INDER Now what happens is, in— I'm— I'm— I'm conscious about one term called trick. You know, in— in acting, there is a point when it tricks you. Let us say a beg— a beggar tricks us on the— outside the temple gate, and we— we give some money because he's not a handicapped person, but he tricks us with his skills, huh?

09:58 On the stage also, a—

10:00 INDER (?) Actor tricks us.

10:01 So we become sentimental and we like that, huh?

10:04 PRAYAS Yeah.

10:05 INDER (?) So what is the— the delicate point is that when we are tricked doubly. Let us say an actor comes with a particular preparation on the stage, huh? But suddenly forgets the role or the skill.

10:21 And that time, what kind of forces take over or tricks the actor also, is actually the— the— the force which we are actually trying to understand right now. And in life also, when someone is very perfect with particular skills, you know, to sustain himself or herself—

10:41 —some situations trick the person. You know, sometimes you make a calculation, but it doesn't work. So something new happens. Something which exceeds our calculations.

10:52 PRAYAS Right.

10:52 INDER (?) That is—

10:53 PRAYAS But you know, but off the stage, in— in life in general, I mean which is basically what I mean one— what you're talking about— I would think that the construction of the persona that we direct ourselves, right? So in the sense, when we construct who we are for someone, or who we are for everyone in general, right? So when we do that construction, isn't that similar to—

11:26 NU PARADOX Acting.

11:26 PRAYAS —the act of construction yeah, of an act?

11:30 NU PARADOX (?) Well, I'd like to compare two things here. Now, Inder said bahurupiya.

11:35 Now here, intent plays an important role. Now I could say a person, a married person, let's say, plays multiple roles. Not just a married person, anyone for that matter. One could be a musician, he— he could be a journalist, and he could play husband at home. So you're playing different roles. So you're not necessarily a bahurupiya. You're the same person with multiple faces, and you take on these roles as and when the situation requires. But that doesn't mean you're tricking anybody, or you're breaking your act as a musician or as a reporter to be a father.

12:14 You could still be a father and be a musician at the same time. But—

12:19 INDER No. May— may— may I add here what I meant by the— by tricking. Let us say, you know, it is basically either we are looking at a goodness model—

12:30 NU PARADOX Falsely leading someone into believing something you're not.

12:34 INDER No. Husband, you see, let us say term called husband or a wife.

12:37 NU PARADOX Okay.

12:38 INDER So we are basically trying to be faithful to the acting. But I'm saying that there's always a possibility of an extramarital affair. That's why the husband tricks the wife. But that is— I'm not saying that's a bad thing. That is—

12:51 NU PARADOX (?) Yeah, we're not getting judgmental, merely different roles that one person is playing.

12:56 INDER Additional roles. Number one, we are counting husband, musician worker farmer, something, can exist in the same person. But I'm saying beyond that also, the— there can be many faces behind that same person. And yet, the third dimension is that the calculations of the same person can go wrong somewhere. It is this going wrong that something else re— takes over. That happens on the stage also. This is what interests me actually, when we go wrong. The moment we go wrong beyond our calculations, something takes over. That is— that is what tricks us. That's what I'm— I'm understanding. We— we mark skills, we have— we know the particular skills, and we go on the field with skills that we know that we can play those shots. But something outwits us. What is this— what is that which outwits us? Why are the s—

13:51 NU PARADOX Well, you're not—

13:51 INDER Huh. Why are the skills inadequate?

13:53 NU PARADOX We can't always be prepared for what comes our way.

13:57 NU PARADOX (?) Yeah, we come with a skill, you know, wherever you go, you go with a skill.

14:00 But then you can't always be prepared for everything there is on offer, because there are some things which will challenge you. You will be limited regardless of your preparations.

14:10 INDER Of course, when a person goes— you see, when a person goes— goes to sell some product on the— in the market, he goes out with particular skills. You know, he has a competence. But something goes wrong. You know, I was watching the film Saudagar. You know, this— he goes out to sell his gur, right? But something tricks him. He falls in love with another woman, and she is unable to— she— he actually immerses in another kind of rasa.

14:38 NU PARADOX Right.

14:38 INDER So his rasa in the market doesn't work then.

14:40 NU PARADOX So—

14:41 INDER So he's unable to understand how to balance the two rasas.

14:44 NU PARADOX Right.

14:44 INDER The one with the wife—

14:46 NU PARADOX Correct.

14:46 INDER (?) —and one with the market, right?

14:47 NU PARADOX (?) So—

14:48 INDER (?) So that's—

14:48 NU PARADOX So I'd like to ask another question here.

14:51 Is — now, being genuine, does it necessarily mean that you are to play a certain kind of role all the time? Ha— playing multiple roles well, diminishes your intensity of being an actor, or does it take away from you as an actor?

15:10 SATYA You know, I want to add—

15:10 NU PARADOX (?) Can you not be [unclear]—

15:13 SATYA Sorry, I'd like to add to what you said there, Nu, about being genuine—

15:17 —because all the while I've been thinking about this, about acting. A musician or a husband, you know, different acts. But the most genuine musician is the one who's bringing out the

truth, or the most genuine actor is the one who's actually presenting the self. That's how I feel. Like you're telling the truth.

15:37 NU PARADOX But you're not deviating from the truth while playing a different role. Husband could be absolutely truthful to his wife and play an ideal husband while he's playing the husband, and be very truthful [unclear]—

15:51 SATYA But I'm not talking like ideal husband role. I'm saying— I'm saying an ide— it's not ideal, it is the self. For me, genuineness means the self. Like, I am myself on stage, I am myself with my loved ones. It's the same person, and I'm not necessarily putting on acts.

16:10 PRAYAS Yeah, but I mean I thought we were st— sticking to the idea that the— that the self is not a static surface, it's only the surrogate of the moment.

16:26 INDER (?) Yes, yeah.

16:28 PRAYAS (?) Right, Satya? So that's — so what you seem to be saying—

16:32 SATYA I— you know, I want to go back and forth. I want to go back and forth because for me the other one where— I do see that, but the other part where there is a self which is the one at home from which you depart from, to me that is also, you know, quite a valid proposition, personally.

16:49 PRAYAS Okay. Okay. Okay. So we— we have these both, and we have what Inder you know brought in today, which is the moment of being outwitted. Like, you know, so the actor is tricked by something in his environment, or some— by something that other actor— some other actor does, or the actor succeeds in outwitting someone else. But what were you— I mean, so I think we have all of these things on the discussion floor right now, and maybe the outwitting and the sk— does the, does the— mo— the, you know, the trick— does the trick have something to do with the skill which is required to tackle the trick? You know, so the tricks will play out, but they can be tackled. And—

17:56 INDER Yeah. the trick word is double— you see, it is a, it is a paradoxical term. You trick someone, and you are, you are, you are being tricked at the same time. You know, there's a— there's basically something you are— you are always confident of what you are saying. You know, let us say, let us say the art actually has something which exceeds something. You know, our limits of communication are given. But I think that something is always more than what we are able to communicate. That's why the self is very interesting term in the sense that we don't know what we are. We are always something less than the term self, or something more than the self term, right? So, for me, the actor goes there very competently, and operates particular character or a role with full competence and operates, and has a full communication with the audience. But I'm saying still, the communication is not the only part of that situation in a particular space and time. So, if that was so, then it would not, it would not cross the territories of that proscenium. It goes—

19:07 PRAYAS Yeah, so I mean I— you are saying that there is also what's needed is also an ability to be able to dodge or, you know, maybe like tackle or dodge the—

19:21 INDER No, you are— you are actually dodged by the situation. You know, for— for example, I am on the stage. The moment I enter into a structure— that's why I was interesting in the space and time, and also the architecture where we are. Because the moment we enter into a particular space, it defines us. If we enter into a room, the walls, the roof, the door defines our situation, our position. So we cannot exceed that, even if we undermine what we are. So if we are on the street, there is different kind of situation. So we cannot be the same person who is on the room and who is some— somebody on the street. So the space and time is very—

20:00 Very important thing feature here which actually makes and breaks a communication. But I'm saying in spite of entire the— the entirety of the communication, something else also sits on it. That's what call abstractions. Abstractions, what you— what you can say reflections or I say abstractions. But abstractions are always—

20:19 PRAYAS Yeah, so one— one of these tricks and one of these do- dodge— dodging movements is I think also so what Satya was bringing in, the idea— the— the— the dual nature of the— that the word self suggests that one is the surface of the moment, the surrogate of the moment, and one might be something which is more continuous. But so maybe that is a trick in itself. So every time the idea of the self is evoked—

20:58 INDER Yeah, good. We— we— we— we devour some- something, somebody devours us at the same time.

21:05 NU PARADOX I think, Prayas, rather than dodging, adaptation and improvisation is a better term, I think, to define the tricky situation where you're bam- bamboozled by a situation that you're not prepared for.

21:19 PRAYAS Right. Yeah, right. No, yeah, it's the — yeah, dodging is a— is too specific —

21:25 NU PARADOX It's evading.

21:26 PRAYAS Yeah.

21:27 NU PARADOX (?) Whereas improvisation is actually confronting.

21:30 PRAYAS True. Yeah, so I think that is a better working term with— No, but what I was getting at is maybe the— the word self is also one of those tricks which can be which can be tackled only by refusing to you know by— only by refusing to represent yourself, you know? So every time the—

22:04 Question is who— who are you? by refusing to answer accurately, or even attempting to answer accurately, you dodge this thing. Because if you don't dodge it, if you don't deal with it, then you get tricked— tricked into—

22:26 NU PARADOX Yeah.

22:26 PRAYAS (?) — defining yourself unnecessarily.

22:33 NU PARADOX We are a momentary expression of an infinite unity. So we are not this one thing —

22:43 PRAYAS Haan, exactly.

22:44 NU PARADOX —all the time.

22:45 Right.

22:46 INDER That's exactly. See this is what I'm coming. Because there are moments when— when we have— when you use silences, you know. Consciously we are using silences, you know, as a — as a mechanism to enhance the ability to communicate in theatre and also— and so in music also somewhere. But I think sometimes the silences are very interesting— interesting thi- instruments. Because sometimes we really don't know what to do. The silences take over on us because we don't know what to do. The— it is not about that the words are insufficient or— or s- we don't have appropriate term to— to describe the situation. But sometimes nothing works.

23:27 NU PARADOX Sometimes silence suffice.

23:29 INDER Ah, no, it doesn't— it's not— it's again a— again a tricky term. Suffice is not the right word. Silence is actually a—

23:36 NU PARADOX I said—

23:36 INDER (?) No, si- silence is actually silence.

23:38 NU PARADOX It's sufficient, meaning silence alone is sufficient. There's nothing—

23:42 INDER (?) No, it's not sufficient. Silence is stifling. But we don't have alternative to that. It's not — it's not sufficient.

23:47 NU PARADOX (?) Because that's the— that's the eternal truth. The rest is noise. We are making noise. Whereas—

23:53 INDER No. No.

23:54 NU PARADOX —the universe—

23:55 INDER No, dear. No, it's not.

23:56 NU PARADOX —essentially silent.

23:57 INDER It is becoming religion then. It is becoming a religion. You see, the silence is not— it— it's not basically the moksha or— or the— or the shunyata of it. I'm saying truly that it is— it is the desolation of thought, you know. We are— I— as I'm— I'm— I'm thinking about Artaud. You know, when Artaud was actually describing it, that we have a desolation of thought. We really don't know what to do at a point of time. It is not that— and at that time when the silence takes over, doesn't mean that we have a— we have a peace. Or doesn't mean that it's actually a kind of an instrument or a— or a— or a— or a term. Silence means that it's really deeply, profoundly outwitting the self.

24:38 PRAYAS Yeah.

24:38 INDER From— from the entire foundation of the self is shaken somewhere. So—

24:42 PRAYAS Yeah, so I mean silence is a— is a proof that the voice is not able to articulate.

24:50 NU PARADOX Because silence came way before language was invented, reason was invented. So—

24:56 PRAYAS No, but in the absence of a— in the absence of a listener, we don't really know if there wasn't any sound. So, you know —

25:04 Yeah, that— that—

25:07 INDER (?) Yeah, that's again—

25:08 No, it's— this is— it is actually what silence comes before the sound. No, it doesn't work like that. For me, you know, the entire archival material, which is— which is has two components. One is the legible component, another is the illegible component, right? We go to the archive and dig and just read some certain things, but there are at the same time there are some silence — silent zones. And we are dealing simultaneously with— with both zones. It's not about the— what is the more original, whether the sound is more original or the silence is more original, whether the— whether the not— what is noise and what is— what is the pure sound, music and all that. No. I'm not— I'm not here interested in a binaries Because nothing works. Sometimes nothing works. It is at this point when nothing works, that is where the language also grows. When— when actually everything—

25:57 PRAYAS Yeah, because language is only I think, a process of finding out what we are you know, still able to hear. So, in the sense that you know, we have a vocabulary set for communicating something, and over time this vocabulary becomes jaded. So if you use a certain word, it doesn't mean anything to anyone anymore. So you have to make up new words or search for a new way of using those words. And that is the process of using language, that you make sure that a communication is still possible becau— and, you know, you're still able to get through.

26:43 INDER Right, it— it— you— you are— you are— I think you're rightly saying it. I'm also thinking in a— in a— in a— in a psychological realm, there's a term called hysteria.

26:53 PRAYAS Haan.

26:54 INDER You know, when— when particular person reach at a point, a kind of an effervescence erupts, you know, eruption of an effervescence. You know, a— a— a— a kind of a bout of madness or, you know, we— which we call creativity. But we don't— we don't know at the time of the effervescence, we don't know how to control it.

27:13 That can happen anywhere. That happens— that's what sometimes protests happen, sometimes the political, you know, revolutions happen, sometimes something happens, some fight— it happened between two schools, two genres of two dis- disciplines in the theatre, you know, like jazz versus classical, some fight happens, and a new— new kind of form takes shape, you know. It's a kind of a lava. So the effervescence at a moment of the eruption is not controllable. It is— it is actually this— this possibility is always there. Now sometimes it is happening in smaller doses, sometimes in a larger doses, but the effervescence always are there even at the very micro level also. I am also—

27:51 PRAYAS (?) But what differentiates what differentiates the hysteria from the mania?

28:00 INDER Ma— ah no, mania is also part of the effervescence. I'm saying what is— what— what act — see, what basically our societies are more and more controlled, right?

28:09 And the control means that when we have really— when we understand how to— how to use the language or the words or the laws to— to control the other. That's where the police and the judiciary and the— that's why the— the— the Foucault comes here. So, but I'm saying that within these— these operations because the— the— the present is quite porous. Porosity of the present enables these effervescence to— to crisscross or to, you know, keep on puncturing the territories at— at a very rapid space. We may not notice it at a very visible level or a very audible level, but at a very passive level they keep on happening. That's why the art happens at a very passive level, in a hyperbolic way, rather than— rather than in a very direct way what happens basically in a language, you know, in a communication. So when you pass on the street and you— you make the— you ma- you ensure the policewala that— that I— I— I— I accept your rule of law. But you may be having a weed in your pocket, right?

29:07 PRAYAS Right.

29:07 INDER So which is— which becomes more important than, you know. That's why we are also— also layered. We— we come— we trick the other.

29:13 PRAYAS No but you sa— you were saying something which is, you know, that art happens in a, you know, very understated way. But I mean for me what is interesting for me is the word happening. In the sense—

29:31 INDER Good.

29:32 PRAYAS —that when do we know that art has happened? Because in the— in the logical model art is supposed to happen only when there is somebody for him— for whom it, you know is able to evoke something you know? But today—

29:55 INDER Yeah.

29:56 PRAYAS — let's say if we— if we let— if we

30:00 But so I think this is related to what we were discussing last time, the refractive surface. So refra- when refraction happens, then we can consider that yes, the surface is refractive. But if the- if refraction doesn't happen and something is claiming to be art, then how do we know that art has happened?

30:27 INDER No, it's not it's not necessary that we should be able to mark every happening. You know, happenings keep on keep on you know, encircling or, you know, just containing us all the time. Happenings are everywhere. Now we are constantly getting transmissions from different sources. You know, there's a very interesting term that sex is not innate but a product. Why I'm why I'm quoting this postmodern text here is because we are constantly receiving transmissions from different sources, whether with advertisement, whether television, whether our food, whether there is a glossy objects which we which we purchase on the market, and that keeps on stimulating our nerves accordingly. So the idea of what is natural is constantly dissolving into the constructs which we are. Right? So we are assemblages or constructs which operate in a on a relative basis the moment we are we are move- we are marking our movements outside, inside, wherever we are. The idea is not that the what is art, because we have never able to understand what or we can never even define what is art.

31:37 PRAYAS No, but that is not even I think...

31:40 INDER (?) That's not...

31:41 PRAYAS ...after something already... Yeah, after something already exists, I think it d- it's not so important to ask what it- what is it. But you know, because it already exists, so we already have art amongst us. So what is art is a redundant question. But maybe you know, what are the qualities of art? So in the sense...

32:09 INDER Ah yeah, of course. The qualities of art must be essentially, for me, is if they keep on keep on pacing the being with the multiples of the present, which is actually a porosity of the

idea of us. So the so the I it's basically strangely term- terms are going through here. But I think the multiples is need- When we say that we want to arrive at some truth, is actually a lacuna that we want to arrive at something one. That's why I'm afraid of the oneness of the truth. There must be multiples. Multiples of the being which are operating vis-a-vis our understanding of art or life. So the so the multiples must be..

32:56 PRAYAS (?) Yeah, so which brings us to...

32:57 INDER ...communicated.

32:59 NU PARADOX (?) And art ties it all together.

33:04 INDER Pardon?

33:05 NU PARADOX Art ties it together. Art ties the multiples together, parallel multiples.

33:08 INDER Art binds it together.

33:12 No, then I don't think we can really separate art from life. That would be a problematic thing. But at the same time when you say...

33:19 PRAYAS No, but how can we how can we look at art as something which is not an act? You know, so f- as far as I understand today, I think art is only a specific kind of enactment. I don't think it's it has any way of claiming some authentic experience anymore. It's you know, it's so why would you think—what takes away from the idea of art if you think about it as a kind of enactment? A specific kind of enactment.

34:02 INDER Do you know do you know, Prayas, what's what actually comes to my mind is here about the protests. Because normally when we say we enact a protest, it's a political protest. There they the vocabulary or the tools of protest are very limited. Let us say the hunger strike, or directly having some violence, burning vehicles, or having even the guns in the hands against the government, right?

34:24 So but the moment we start enhancing the vocabulary of the protest, we start going into the art. And but since the since the bigger- big river of the protest or the or the understanding of communication is larger and is contained by a couple of couple of tools in the in the in the realm of protest, so the moment I try, for example, when I try to add something some another layer to the idea of protest, it is it is not it's not appreciated. Rather it is seen as...

34:55 PRAYAS (?) No, but Inder something which has you know, conf- confused me for some time is...

35:03 INDER Yeah.

35:03 PRAYAS ...you know, the protest has the—why it's difficult for me to, you know, hold the protest and maybe the enactment of art together in one frame is this: that, you know, the protest has specific or blurred objectives, whatever, but there is some position which is clear enough which is making you do something, which might be, like you said you know, going on a strike or lifting a gun or do whatever.

35:35 And whereas I think the philosophical basis of art might sometimes actually leave you in a position where you don't think anything is worth doing.

35:51 INDER No, I agree with you. But I'm saying still I'm still saying...

35:53 PRAYAS (?) So how are they compatible? So how do you hold these two things compatible?

36:00 INDER That's why where we are struggling basically. This is this is the this is actually where the where the dichotomy emerges in a very clear-cut black and white way. Because I think the art is political. Because even if you if you start making abstractions on the road or even the home for a longer period of time, some kind of a ritual takes over. And that becomes political. But the forces on the ground don't engage with that kind of a process. That's wh- that's why the art is always isolated. But it is always a pr- it's always part of the larger protest area. You know, the mega protest is always within the artwork. It's not outside. You know, art is always political in that sense. So the even if it is abstraction, it's highly political.

36:53 PRAYAS You know, but politi- but you know, the politics of doing nothing... I mean, what I'm saying is if your politics and your philosophical position, your analysis of the moment, if that brings you to a point of really not finding anything worthwhile anymore...

37:16 INDER That is anarchist, na? You for example, if your position is anarchist, that also is political.

37:19 NU PARADOX Nihilism.

37:21 INDER No, I'm I won't go with the nihilism, let us say nihilism. I'm saying even the anarchist, you see. Anarchist position is also a political position.

37:28 NU PARADOX Totally.

37:28 INDER (?) And art is art is by and large anarchist. No?

37:35 PRAYAS Right.

37:35 NU PARADOX It is.

37:37 INDER So for example, as an artist if you approve group sex, it will be always political, even if you even if you don't operate it physically, even if you articulate through text, or a poem, or a painting, it will be political, no?

37:50 PRAYAS Right. So I think we can go to our second...

37:54 NU PARADOX Question.

37:55 PRAYAS ...trigger of the day, which is you know does the act reveal rather than hide...

38:02 NU PARADOX Hide the actor.

38:03 PRAYAS ...the actor? And if so, how? Right? So how does the act manage to reveal rather than hide the actor?

38:12 NU PARADOX I feel it basically makes available another facet of the actor, and it does not hide. Now again, we have to look at intent. Now if as Inder was mentioning earlier, if it's a bahrupiya, if it's not the actor's own persona that's coming out through whatever performance, through whatever agenda that the person may have, then it probably hides him. And there he's using the act as a mask to hide what is, right? Whereas if you're performing a certain duty and exposing another facet of yourself, it shows another facet of yourself, so it doesn't it doesn't hide anything of the actor. So it merely exposes him, if anything. So it does not hide, in my opinion it doesn't hide. But again, we have to take into account the intent of the action and what the person...

39:18 PRAYAS Yeah, I mean..

39:19 NU PARADOX ...intends to bring about in the end.

39:22 PRAYAS Yeah, I mean, so I understand the, you know, the disin- disinhibiting role that acting assumes. So which in the sense—so if you're disinhibited by being, let's say, by obscuring your identity through an act or whatever, through a construction, then you might be able to represent positions which you wouldn't be able to do with your own identity. So that's one thing. But

40:00 The paradoxical part in this is you're actually you know, part of a construction. So that's, if you're part of a construction, that's an act. and if you're be-, if you're, if the surrogate surface is in that sense, trying to, you know, hide or obscure what is behind it, then how does it reveal it more? I mean, if you think of it as a mask.

40:34 NU PARADOX I think acting is revealing. So even if you're trying to hide, it tells you how you're hiding it. So it reveals a per-, a person's, an actor's capability of hiding something even. So it's, even in the act of hiding, he's revealing something about himself.

40:53 PRAYAS Right.

40:57 NU PARADOX So I don't know how well it masks a particular actor. See, the act of acting itself is, it doesn't hide, but it reveals. It tells something about the person. Now again, I'm taken, I go back to that example...

41:11 PRAYAS No, but that means that.. No, but what you're saying what that means is that you can in some ways judge an actor through the acts that the actor puts on. And which is actually not true. I mean, so, you know, an actor who plays the act of a, of a very cruel person, for example, might actually be very kind.

41:48 So what does it reveal about the actor then?

41:53 NU PARADOX See, it's both yes and no, you know. It can hide if you want to, or it may reveal. It depends on the actor's intentions, really. And again, what's genuine, as Satya was saying earlier. Now Inder was mentioning, you might act very decent in front of a police, although you might have illegal substances with you. So you might put on an act. That way you're hiding something, at the same time you're revealing the fact that you can get away with a situation like that, and you're adept enough to bring about something to mask the fact that you have some illegal substances with you. So it does both. It reveals and masks depending on what end you're driving at, and your intentions.

42:54 So it's both, really. It's not one thing or the other. It's one and the other.

43:00 PRAYAS No, but if we were, we were talking day before yesterday about the inability, the impossibility of being able to psychoanalyse the actor. Right? So people you can psychoanalyse by considering that they have an inside, that they have a subconscious. But actors, how do you, how do you probe into them? Like what lies behind the act for you to be able to read into? Right? Is..

43:37 NU PARADOX Intent. As I said, intent. What are you driving at? What is the desired end that you're taking your boat towards? Where is it that you're driving this to? Questions would answer what the artist is up to, basically.

43:58 PRAYAS No, that's a, that's a very simple process because in the sense that you want to do something, that's all right. What makes you think you're going to be able to do it? So, or that you are being able to do it. So, you know, the input and the output in this case have no relation. You might have an intent to, you know, save the world, but you might end up ruining it.

44:34 Right.

44:35 INDER Hello?

44:36 PRAYAS Yeah. Hi Inder.

44:38 INDER Prayas.

44:39 PRAYAS Hi.

44:39 INDER There's a, the Brecht was using this, I'm thinking about this, you know, what reveals and what hides. Brecht was using the term called alienation effect.

44:48 PRAYAS Alienation.

44:49 INDER You know, when you, alienation effect is, you know, Brechtian terminology.

44:55 When an, when an actor purposefully or consciously comes out of the stream of the character, you know. When you're playing a role, and when the, when the actor deliberately comes out and rather shocks the audience that I was not this, while the act was going on, and quickly slips back into the character. A small moment of it. So the alienation effect...

45:20 NU PARADOX So fourth door, breaking the fourth door.

45:22 [unclear]

45:23 INDER Breaking the continuity, but in a very effective way. So the alienation effect is what I think, what I understand here is that this what hides and what reveals is actually a very interesting idea of what actually is a skill, you know, going in the first trigger. Because if an actor, let us say a very good actor can be a very bad person in the life, you know. He may be playing a very let us say the Pran was always a villain, but he must have been a very good person in his own life, a very good you know, helping also people or destitutes and other things, you know. So there can be what is on the stage and what is off the stage. So the, I don't know what it hides. But I am always saying, I'm always pushing this line, that the mask always adds. Mask doesn't take away things. On the stage.

46:21 PRAYAS Achha. So, okay, it adds.

46:23 INDER Mask always adds, doesn't take away the stage. But even if the mask is on, the alienation effects can also creep in, and even if the mask is on, the revealing part can also be there, and the hiding part also can be there, you know. But on, but why we are constantly going into the idea of art? Because art is that faculty which actually enables us to go into those areas where life generally doesn't go. Well, life in a, in a very tight situation, as it is on the ground, doesn't you know, go beyond the, beyond the acts which we are prepared for that. So if you, if you think you know, I posted an image at the Surrogate page on the Facebook today of a homeless person on the roadside, if you have seen it.

47:16 NU PARADOX (?) Yes. The actor is present.

47:18 INDER Yeah, the actor is present. So I know because it is very close to our home. There is a person, he's a homeless person. He occupies the abandoned shop. He keeps there a chair and a potli. He goes somewhere in the, during the day, and evening, in the evening comes back and occupies it back. But during the day, you can always feel his presence. You know, you can always feel that...

47:41 NU PARADOX Although he's not there.

47:42 INDER He's not there. He, but he's present there. You know, it is very much open, anybody can go in and out. But you can, but even I think the dog which is living closely will not dare to sit on the potli. Because the dog also knows that there is somebody, because normally the dogs can go on the car or anybody, because the dog also senses. Even the dog doesn't go into that space because the, it is now marked. So he is present in the absence even. So I'm saying that what actually the, that's why I was, I'm constantly going into the term called composite bodies. When we, when I, when I use the word term composite body, I think that the actor as a human body, as a outline as we understand in a, in a biological way, is not the only thing that operates on ground. It is human body and the, and the tree, human body and the, and the room, human body and the blanket, human body and the shoes, human body and the star, human body and the, you know, it is always, it's not that human body is the core. But I'm saying in the composite body, the term is basically enabling us to understand the human being more than what we understand by outlining, by isolating this strand called actor. So the actor must be very complex term at this at the, at the, even if we go deeper into the psyche of the term that. So the synonyms of the term actor are very fabulous terms, you know, if you go, like yesterday I posted one...

49:13 INDER (?) Yeah, yesterday...

49:14 PRAYAS (?) Dictionary meaning.

49:15 INDER Because this, because it is basically the language, you know, how the, how the synonyms of the term actor lead, takes us to very strange terms, you know, very strange and they cover most of the, most of our activities, you know, double face and this thing, and...

49:29 PRAYAS (?) No your term composite body in the sense, you know, it makes sense in the idea that the mask always adds...

49:40 INDER Adds, yeah.

49:41 PRAYAS ... because if you think of the body and the mask in terms of matter, the mask is adding.

49:48 INDER (?) Adding, always adding, because adding beyond our calculations, you know, because you don't know how you look the moment you put a mask on your face, you really don't know how it actually operates in the ma-

50:00 Because you are behind the mask. There is always, actually I go back to the Socratian thing, when Socrates was drinking hemlock at the last point when he was going to die. He is saying to his friend Crito that, "Crito, now I am drinking hemlock, and now I see the mask merging with the face." That means even Socrates also was constantly conscious of this thing that as long as he was alive, there was a, there was a mask...

50:29 NU PARADOX Putting on a mask, yeah.

50:31 INDER Not... No, not putting on, the mask is inevitable. The mask is inevitable, because the language itself is mask. Because the moment we...

50:38 PRAYAS Right. But the way we can work with language, for example, the least we can do is try and be precise with language, right? So we can...

50:51 INDER Yeah, even...

50:52 INDER (?) Language [unclear].

50:53 Yeah, even if you see, we try to be precise, you know. Every—whether you shave or you keep a beard, whether you make a haircut or you keep long hair, whatever you do is precise.

51:05 It's there.

51:05 It is precise. It is, you are not adding anything more than what is given. But whatever we do is part of this some sort of a communicative language, you know, it's a signology.

51:16 PRAYAS (?) Yeah, but do you think we can configure it or not?

51:19 NU PARADOX Totally, and it's manipulable also.

51:21 INDER We can, we can, of course we can, we can. We are free to do what we want to do. But the problems are just too many structures are working, operating upon us. Whatever we do, even if we become ascetic, we will be marked. You know, for example, if you go in Haridwar, you will be marked, yes, vo to sadhu ban gaya. You know, if you become, if you try to break some other kind of a territory, you will be quickly marked with certain some terminology.

51:44 PRAYAS So you know, like what you've been saying just now, that really paints a very complex picture for me.

51:51 INDER Huh.

51:52 PRAYAS In the sense that we always have two of us to deal with. So one is our face and one is the mask. So in that...

52:03 INDER But we don't... Yeah, that's true, that's true. But we don't know...

52:06 PRAYAS So there is always two of us, and that makes it complex in the sense it's not just us that we can deal with, we also have to deal with the projection, we also have to deal with the mask...

52:16 [unclear]

52:16 ...because that is equally a part of us.

52:19 INDER Yeah, that's what shringar is. Even in Indian rasa system, we have the shringar. What is shringar basically? Shringar is actually this an effort to make a very celebratory departure of what we are. You know, shringar. You know, you see it is very, it is celebration of the departure of us into something which we celebrate: colors, compositions, decoration and all that, right? So the shringar is not... Yeah.

52:48 NU PARADOX (?) The question being, shringar ke baad, are we departing from who we are? We just established earlier that masks only add and doesn't take away.

52:59 INDER Yeah, this is, this is a departure...

53:00 INDER (?) [unclear]

53:02 For example, my name is Inder Salim, you know. It was not given the name to me by my father. I made it, I gave it to myself to make a departure from what I was. So similarly, we also, we always keep on departing. The departure is, I think that's why I was... one of my posts earlier about the same conversation was that we, actor is a departure. The departure and departure and departure, you know. The actor first uses mask, then the stage, then the text, then the other actor comes, then the audience, you know, there are constant departures of actor. Then the architecture, then the effects, then tears, then something else...

53:43 PRAYAS So the act is always an accident. It can never be... So, I mean, what I'm saying is the, eventually, you know, even if you think of the actor as a composite system, there is a face and there is a mask and all that, but for the audience, for the witness—so we are actually slipping

into our third trigger—so for the witness, there is only one thing. There is a uni—unified act, in the sense, you know, whatever is being enacted, that is one experience for me. So unlike the actor system, which might be composite, for the witness it is one experience. Now, in this united, in this unified experience, how do you discern between different things, so in the sense that you were just talking about? So, and... So I have some further things about the witness, but I would just like to maybe end, stop here for now, which is: so if you think of the witness and the uni—and the unified experience of the witness, then what does it do to the, you know, to the maybe fragmented or the multiple experience of the actor?

55:08 NU PARADOX See, it's like shadow puppetry. Would you want to follow the narrative that's going on, or figure out how it's done—the lights and the puppets and, you know, decipher it down and then reason and break the whole illusion?

55:23 PRAYAS No, but see, as an actor who is concerned with the act, you don't really have an—have a choice. You have to figure what's—figure out what's happening, because otherwise your act is only going to work accidentally. So if you don't know actually what is operating to, for the witness to experience the act through the multiples of your face and your mask and all that, if you don't really know what's happening, then you are saying that you are relying on the act working as an accident only. So...

56:07 NU PARADOX There are multiple parallels. A, you might not know. B, you might know, you wouldn't care. C, you might not know and you would probe and figure out as to how it's unfolding. So you would know as you go along, right?

56:24 PRAYAS But do you, do you know? I mean, that's what I'm, I mean, that's what we are trying to get at, that if it's, you know, like you're working on your face, you're working on your mask, and then something is happening, and that unified something that happens, you don't have access to that, because... So, because this idea has actually destabilized the idea of the flat surface of the act. You know, so now it's not the flat surface, it's the, it's the, it's two surfaces, right? The mask and the surrogate and the, you know, and the self in that sense, the face and the mask, both are present. And we don't really know at this point, through these multiples, how does a singular act emerge, and how does it work?

57:29 PRAYAS (?) Sam, would you like to come in? You're, or you have audio problems or can you hear us?

57:40 Okay.

57:41 INDER Here, Prayas.. I think when we talk of mask and face binary, we are actually again going into some such problem zone.

57:51 PRAYAS Hm.

57:52 INDER So for me, the face has very little to do something with the skin of the body. You know, face must be like a term, but we really don't know what is face. You know, like there is one of these, the Gandhi is holding the mask, you know, but the Gandhi mask itself a mask on the person who is holding here, right? So we have a kind of a mirror reflecting mirror, you know, endlessly. So we really don't know how to touch the face. But to arrive at the idea of face, we have no choice but to keep on working with the masks. Right?

58:27 Right.

58:28 NU PARADOX (?) Why is the mask necessary?

58:31 INDER You... Mask is language. See, the moment we use the language—for example, we are, what Derrida is also saying, that we are nothing but translations or mediators. What does it mean? That we have no choice but to keep on shuffling between masks. You know, from one mask to another mask to another mask. And, you know, I know one, I read the Italian group who were playing Shakespeare for many years. When after 50 years they went to London and encountered the original text Shakespeare, they were, they saw the original of the Shakespeare very ordinary. They saw the Italian version which they were playing for 50 years is more accu-

rate and authentic than the English one. So you are sometimes used to particular kind of translation. We don't know, for example, we really don't know what is mainstream...

59:20 PRAYAS No, but, so Inder, what is—you were talking about the, you know, the problems, you know, the problematic space that you were going into by talking about the binaries of the face and the mask. But...

59:37 INDER Yeah.

59:38 PRAYAS ...how do we find our way out of that? Because to my mind, the moment we have these multiples—so are you saying that the multiples are not there, it's a unified...

59:49 INDER Multiples are there! That's why the complexity of masks is the multiples. You know...

59:56 PRAYAS The multiples are not the face and the mask, you're saying.

01:00:00 INDER No, multi— see, the mask and the face is not the— the question.

01:00:01 [unclear]

01:00:04 It is basically the face is the horizon. Face is not— face is not in your hands kind of thing. It is— it is— it is, the more you go towards face, it recedes. What you have in the closet, what you have in your drawing room, what you have your architecture, on the stage, and language, songs, is all masks. And we are trying to go towards the horizon. And the moment we go, we— it recedes. That is— that is basically what we are. That's why it is so— so enigmatic.

01:00:31 NU PARADOX I think we have to use our words carefully because masks could also mean mediums, right? It could be mediums—

01:00:38 INDER We are— that's what I'm saying. It's a language is a medium. When we are— when we are talking—

01:00:42 NU PARADOX Masks could also imply something that you put up so that you can hide the real you or something. You know, there is multiple connotations actually of a mask.

01:00:52 INDER I already— I already said that the— that the term mask is a very bad term in society. But every person is coming out with a particular mask when they go to work. Right?

01:01:03 NU PARADOX A role.

01:01:04 INDER (?) There is no other way. There is no—

01:01:05 NU PARADOX (?) It's a role, yeah.

01:01:06 INDER There is no other way. We are— we are only using the term— we should not be actually tricked by the term mask.

01:01:11 NU PARADOX Mask, yeah.

01:01:12 INDER That's why I'm— that's why I'm— I am interested in the synonyms of the terms.

01:01:16 NU PARADOX Right.

01:01:16 INDER You know, there is a one chapter— there is a one chapter by Jean-Paul Sartre. It was— it was— the name of the chapter was "I owe my expression to the sumptuousness of terms and phrases." Right?

01:01:26 PRAYAS So we can— we can call it the interface. we can call the mask actually as the interface —

01:01:33 NU PARADOX Interface is great, yeah.

01:01:34 PRAYAS (?) —because you have the face and then you have the interface, and it's — and you don't try to—

01:01:41 NU PARADOX Medium, interface.

01:01:42 PRAYAS Yeah, you don't try to name it at all.

01:01:48 INDER Yeah, of course, we may not name it, but I'm saying that when— the moment we— we work from one language to another language or one genre to another genre, there is some— some time zone actually tricks us. You know, when we— when we understand "I love you" or main kehta hoon jaise even shanti— shanti word is not translated into peace. So the time zone

actually tricks us. It is this in-between zone, in-between, which is actually the silent zone, where we are unable to do anything. That's why it's not a— it is not— it is basically— that's what— what I go back the Artaud, who is saying it is the desolation of the thought. We may— whatever we may do—

01:02:24 NU PARADOX It's the end of thought.

01:02:25 INDER In— we are inadequate. Inadequate in the sense that it is a deep kind of an anguish, you know, existential anguish, that we don't know how to— how to resolve this, you know. We are trying to shuffle, but it's not— it is not basically some sort of a frustration. It is not basically some sort of a cynicism even.

01:02:42 NU PARADOX It's a limitation.

01:02:43 INDER It is a very— it is a— it is a pro— no, it is a profound understanding of that what we are, and the— the larger idea of where we are.

01:02:53 PRAYAS What you are saying, Inder—

01:02:54 INDER (?) It is too complex.

01:02:56 PRAYAS Yeah, what you are saying is whatever we might be is—
01:03:04 —is— is some part of the picture, but not the whole picture.

01:03:08 INDER Part, yes. Exactly. It can— it can never be full. Never.

01:03:14 PRAYAS Yeah.

01:03:15 INDER Because— because the face is— the face is always the— face is the horizon. Let us say— let us you know, I'm also working on the term— face—

01:03:20 PRAYAS Yeah, I mean, I find this very interesting point to pause actually, because if the— the— the face being the horizon makes so much—

01:03:32 NU PARADOX It's a very liberating thought for me, really.

01:03:35 PRAYAS (?) Yeah, and it makes so much sense to me in the sense that —

01:03:37 NU PARADOX Correct.

01:03:38 PRAYAS —you know, the face or the idea of the self as being the sought-after and the— the un-attainable, but which through the interface is always being sought—

01:03:52 INDER Negotiated.

01:03:53 PRAYAS Yeah, negotiated. And in that sense, it configures the interface as well as the— the seeking for the face, you know? So it's— it adds— it dramatizes the whole process actually. yeah, it adds a lot of movement, a lot of movement, yeah.

01:04:11 INDER I like— I like the term "dramatizes" because— because if we— if we don't use the word "dramatizes," we— we may be using some— some very dysfunctional term. You know, I'm using — I'm interested in the word, in the dramatization of it, because that takes away the— the— the panic of us. Otherwise, it'll be very panicky. Panicky means that we are not able to understand who we are. But if we use the term "dramatization," that is basically then becomes more celebratory, participatory. Then we know we are inadequate, but it is drama. You know, the life is a drama. That's what Shakespeare actually ends up, that we know it is inadequate—

01:04:50 PRAYAS (?) Yeah — yeah, at this point, I'm actually able to understand the statement that life is a drama, I think, on— for the first time only now.

01:05:01 *[laughter]*

01:05:03 PRAYAS (?) In that sense that it's a drama because—

01:05:05 NU PARADOX Life's a stage.

01:05:06 PRAYAS Yeah, it's a— it's a— it's a drama because it's a movement in which you are seeking your face, and that seeking for the face configures the interface, and you know, the interface negotiates the seeking in a way that makes you— allows you to even go towards the horizon, like Inder, you said. So it actually makes it like a— yeah, it makes it you know, like a process in itself. It doesn't need anything more. Just I think just—

01:05:44 NU PARADOX That's our propeller.

01:05:45 PRAYAS Haan, just seeking your face is enough.

01:05:51 NU PARADOX Indeed.

01:05:55 INDER Thank you.

01:05:56 PRAYAS Yeah, thanks everyone for joining in. Sam, we didn't hear your voice today, but I guess you must be doing other stuff. But I hope you can all join in tomorrow again. We start at 9 p.m. Yeah. Thank you. Tomorrow is the last day of Surrogate Surfaces, so we'll be having the last session. Thanks a lot.

01:06:16 Thanks.

01:06:17 NU PARADOX Thanks Prayas. Thank you, Inder.

01:06:18 NU PARADOX (?) Good night.

01:06:19 PRAYAS Bye, Sam.

01:06:20 Thank you, thank you. Thanks.

01:06:21 PRAYAS (?) Thanks. Bye.