We Want To Know Why (Vidisha Fadescha, Alex Yudzon, Prayas Abhinav)

A broadcast by Surfatial, the collective of Satya Gummuluri, Malavika Rajnarayan and me, 18 July 2015. 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

00:02 PRAYAS Okay. So Alex, welcome to a live broadcast at Surfatial and Vidisha is a resident artist at Surfatial this month. So we are doing lots of extended conversations that Vidisha is kind of anchoring and she's inviting her friends and artists she's interested in and all that. So that's what is happening right now. That's what we are part of. So

00:30 ALEX (?) Thank you for the invitation.

00:32 PRAYAS Last echo. [?]

00:34 VIDISHA At Surfatial

00:39 This month.

00:42 Why is that an echo?

00:43 Doing lots of extended conversations that Vidisha is kind of anchoring.

00:48 Why is that true? [?]

00:49 Inviting her friends and artists she's interested in and all that.

00:54 ALEX Not sure if it's from me or from you.

00:55 ALEX (?) Back up.

00:56 VIDISHA Whose computer is doing this? I don't even know.

00:58 But it can't be.

01:00 VIDISHA (?) Okay.

01:02 ALEX (?) Das ist ein Kurs. [?]

01:03 VIDISHA With

01:04 No we've got

01:07 Is this better now?

01:11 ALEX I think so.

01:12 VIDISHA You know what happened? I had YouTube open on my computer.

01:16 ALEX Ah. All right. So you was you were watching the broadcast simultaneously with the transmission.

01:25 VIDISHA So today we have Alex with us, who's actually sitting at another residency. He's sitting at Wassaic right now, which is in upstate New York. And he's an artist who's based out of Brooklyn. Hi Alex.

01:41 ALEX Hi Vidisha.

01:43 VIDISHA Trans have disappeared. [?]
01:45 No, I'm back.
01:49 VIDISHA (?) I'm back.
01:50 ALEX (?) Okay, good one.
01:53 PRAYAS Yeah, I just I flashed a visual. I think we've I f yeah, the echo has stopped, so now we can
02:00 VIDISHA That's because I was playing it on YouTube.
02:03 PRAYAS Yeah, that's a great idea, Vidish. I think you should always perform echoes at hangouts and freak people out. Or something's going wrong.
02:14 ALEX I think only when the conversation starts to starts to kind of become a little boring. Like your superpower is that your eyes light up and Vidisha's superpower is that sh puts on
02:28 PRAYAS Yeah. Yeah.
02:31 ALEX Superpower is that I invent superpowers for people that are on Google Hangouts.
02:35 ALEX (?) Wonderful.
02:36 PRAYAS (?) Yeah.
02:37 So if I give you characters can you just invent superpowers for each of them? I mean can you just
02:45 ALEX Absolutely.
02:46 PRAYAS So I'll just send you random characters and then you just script their superpowers and that'd be fantastic.
02:53 ALEX They have to they have to join the Google Hangouts and then and then they'll be granted super superpowers. This is the way that the superpowers are transmitted.
03:01 PRAYAS But they're fictional characters.
03:04 ALEX Oh, they're fictional characters. All right. Well maybe you can get someone to impersonate them and then as those impersonations join the Google Hangouts and then it becomes performative.
03:17 PRAYAS Right. No, but some I've been trying to do these performances in which I invite actors to perform this character.
03:27 Oh.
03:28 And the actors are in that sense following a script. So they kind of know who this character is. But the problem is that becomes very incidental. I mean that becomes very sporadic.
03:43 ALEX (?) Mm.
03:45 PRAYAS So the this character has no life outside those enactments.
03:50 PRAYAS (?) Mm.
03:51 And so, you know, it's kind of like imposing inhibition on this character.
03:57 PRAYAS (?) Mm, so
03:58 To talk all the time and we just let him talk once in a while.
04:02 ALEX Right. I see what you mean. Yeah, you almost you almost have to create a an avatar, like a computer program to embody the character that can then live independently and not be bound by someone controlling it.
04:20 PRAYAS Yeah, or m maybe I need to hire actors, not by the day but by the month.
04:26 VIDISHA I think I mean I was hired to play that character for an for three hours. But it was difficult because it's like people I know for real and I can still have a conversation with them. And I only know a particular number of set of dialogues. So I was only s I was only able to say those dialogues and not say
04:52 Any dialogue of my own.
04:54 VIDISHA (?) Mm.
04:55 VIDISHA (?) So that's what happened with the with performing the character.

05:00 PRAYAS Vidisha, would you like to be Hoja Asli for a month?

05:04 VIDISHA Yeah, next year maybe.

05:08 PRAYAS (?) Yeah. So I have I have next year's dates with you.

05:12 VIDISHA (?) Okay.

05:13 VIDISHA (?) Next year, july twenty sixteen.

05:15 PRAYAS Oh perfect. So meanwhile I'll work with Ashmeria, Rai [?] and everyone else, you know.

05:21 VIDISHA Totally. Yeah, you just have to do with that.

05:24 PRAYAS (?) Yeah.

05:26 ALEX Yeah, I was actually I was listening to a story on the radio by this woman who decided to live she didn't it wasn't that she wanted to get a sex change or become transgender. She just wanted to live as a man for a year to see what that would be like. And so she went basically undercover, you know, she dressed up as a man and you know

05:54 ALEX (?) Yeah.

05:55 Did all the things that, you know, she joined a men's group and they would go b bowling and they would go hiking and hunting. And she had this amazing story, but at the end she talked about how essentially she's the stress of embodying a completely different persona of creating a character and then living as that character more or less permanently for extended period of time, how that actually started to completely destabilize her own native personality and her own conception of self. And her psychologist or psychiatrist or whatever finally told her, you know, you have to stop this. You're basically approaching a the point of having a nervous breakdown because it's just too psychologically stressful to continue living such an intense double life. Which I found totally fascinating because obviously we all we all engage in role play and in sort of dress up and you know we all invent sort of personas for ourselves. But you never think that if you take it on to such an extent that it would actually it could it could it could really destroy you on some level.

07:17 PRAYAS But doesn't it capture something that is a default case anyway? So aren't we like fragmented individuals with lots of characters within us and the you know the enactment of a singular persona being actually more stressful than breaking into the fragmented self that we are.

07:50 ALEX Mm. Yeah, that's a question that begs a discussion, doesn't it? I mean and also the degree to which those fragments how radically different are all those fragments? I mean, if they have a degree of difference which is fairly similar to one another, you know, then maybe it's not as stressful as if you if you create a fragment that's really different. I mean in her case it was a different gender.

08:28 ALEX (?) Where did you go, Vidisha?

08:31 Did you

08:32 PRAYAS To turn yourself off.

08:36 VIDISHA No, I'm here.

08:39 PRAYAS I mean yeah, because I mean I have my I would have my biases in that in that debate because I really think it's so it's so much in plain sight. The f the fragmented nature of ourself, right? The porosity of our being. that's so much in plain sight that anyone prepared to argue for the other side is actually engaging in self delusion.

09:10 PRAYAS (?) Mm-

09:11 PRAYAS (?) I mean I really don't think how anyone can argue for a singular persona.

09:16 ALEX Yeah, I agree.

09:20 PRAYAS Because yeah, I mean I actually model multiple characters and I enjoy and I kind of write in their voices.

09:29 And actually think that without if I if I were not to do that, I would just be over overly investing in this persona Prayas, which I'm not even that interested in.

09:46 ALEX (?) Mm.

09:48 If you had to guess or if you had to not guess but estimate how many different personas would you say you have?

09:58 PRAYAS I mean I think it's a process of discovery and opening up. so I'm sure these personas will multiply as I go along. But I think as of now I can I sense distinctly three distinctly different voices who actually look at the world in fundamentally different ways.

10:25 ALEX (?) Mm.

10:27 PRAYAS Sometimes even opposed to you know their perspectives are even up opposed to each other.

10:35 ALEX Has that has that created a conflict in y in your life in terms of trying to reconcile the perspectives of these different voices?

10:44 PRAYAS No, it's it becomes more of a struggle to you know, so whom are you allowing to lead you at different points, right? So because there are some parts of some voices which are very sure of themselves and in that sense, you know, very absolute. But sometimes you just need a little bit more ambiguity and you don't want that kind of absolutist, you know that you don't want that kind of confidence. so yeah, you kind of vacillate between these voices based on what you actually need.

11:25 At different times.

11:27 ALEX (?) Yeah, you know, it's funny, sometimes I'll find myself talking to myself almost in a in a conversational way, like where like if I'm making a decision in a work of art and I think to myself, okay, you know, I need to I think that area I think that area needs to be red. You know, the color red. That area needs to be the color red. And there'll be another voice that'll come in and that'll say, Yeah, I think you're right.

11:57 PRAYAS (?) Yeah.

11:59 ALEX (?) And I think like, what?

12:01 PRAYAS (?) Yeah.

12:03 PRAYAS (?) Okay.

12:05 So what do you how do you figure what is art? In the sense what isn't it a very strange thing?

12:18 ALEX (?) Yeah. I don't I don't know how to answer that. Vidisha, how do you how do you feel about that?

12:26 VIDISHA I don't know actually, I don't know the answer myself, but I was speaking with another friend of mine today for a really long time. And I think one of the

12:42 I mean, I was talking to a friend of mine for a really long time and then I think the question that we were having a discussion about was not about art but it was about curation. So I think even within there's a there's a certain question and I'm not answering the question about art right now. I don't think I'm gonna answer the question about art actually. because a lot of time like I have been told a lot of different things about curation where somebody said that it's only assemblage. That's all. That's what curation is. but then I do not I mean, but of course and then there are of course like this things that people identify as curation to be. But then what does this become? Like what is it that we are doing here right now at Surfatial become? I mean curation is not only about actually just like putting stuff together. Curation is also the idea of kind of presenting new spaces, bringing up new spaces and bring inviting people to those spaces and see what happens from there. I mean what happens within their practice, what happens what happens when you create these new opportunities. So that's another thing that a curator does. So here I'm not answering about art, but I'm just saying that art kind of functions with all these different other structures which kind of work around it because maybe I mean basic idea of creativity could be something but it doesn't mean that it becomes art because in some sense art what one is questioning I'm not sure I mean I'm not sure if one is questioning it like that but art being defined by these certain systems. Like just similar to how like the idea of management gets defined by certain systems, you know. I mean anybody could be a manager

but anybody doesn't participate in demand management. The same thing, like if one is looking at art in that sense, then

14:44 PRAYAS No, but how can art be more important or more significantly packaged than life?

14:52 VIDISHA Nothing can be. I mean

14:56 PRAYAS I don't I don't like the way art pretends to be more pristine than life itself.

15:05 VIDISHA No, I mean but that's but that's what I'm saying. I mean one doesn't have to maybe one is asking that question to art and putting that question to art because it borrows from life so closely versus a lot of other things. while which is really sad because I mean it's like but though economics is so much more closer to life actually. Because everything within economics is surveyed according to I mean there are human surveys that happen. So why is that question asked towards art? Like that can be asked towards everyt everything else as well. And yeah.

15:43 PRAYAS No, I'm all for critiquing everything and dismantling the whole universe. That's fine. I mean I'm all for it and I think I enjoy that maybe as much as you. But I'm just saying art because it is I mean

16:02 It is so people you know, people who you think also can think of some things and model some ideas so people who are basically some kind of intelligent these people make art and then it becomes that much more strange that okay, why is it worth the while of someone as smart as this guy to do something as weird as art?

16:33 VIDISHA But Prayas I want to ask you what do you mean by what when you are saying art in that statement, what do you mean by art?

16:43 VIDISHA (?) So I mean

16:44 VIDISHA (?) Is it are you saying that are really participating in the system or

16:49 ALEX Yeah, is it the art market or the art production system or art as a set of economic principles?

16:55 PRAYAS No, art as a as a context, so as a ontological package, you know, just the just the category, just the semantics of it, just the lexicon of art. You know? So why would you construe something as art? What c what is that what is that construction? What is that

17:18 You know, appropriation of something as art, what does that do in terms of according value to it?

17:25 ALEX I had I'd read a quote by Andrey Tarkovsky where he defined art as

17:34 Something that brings or communicates spiritual values to people. So it and that's the way he defined it as being distinct from, you know design or from illustration or for instance the way

17:55 PRAYAS I would agree, but more in the sense that is art as the romantic idea. The

18:03 ALEX Absolutely.

18:04 PRAYAS The universal, you know, the universal, the meta art. But

18:07 Yeah.

18:08 As it is participated in and you know constructed by people and institutions around us it's a very it's almost it's a joke that falls flat in its face against this whole meta universal very generous romantic idea. So you know art is if art is about finding the truth, let's say, because spirituality is about finding the truth. So in that sense if art is also about finding the truth, then how can you lie so bluntly?

18:43 PRAYAS (?) How can you lie?

18:44 PRAYAS (?) So bluntly, I mean how can you shamelessly lie if artists are finding the truth?

18:51 ALEX What is it? What did Picasso say? Art is the great lie that reveals the truth or something like that. You know, I don't know. I think it's a language. And I think it's what's complex about it is that as all languages, it's based on both sort of universal principles, but also on historical conventions which change constantly and unpredictably. and as a language it's used to communicate any number of things, and I think that's why people ultimately are obsessed with continuing that practice because it's a form of communication, and I think it's why philosophers are

so obsessed with visual artists, because they're sort of dealing with similar ideas, but visual artists oftentimes approach those ideas as a way of thinking that's communicates them in a completely different way.

19:53 VIDISHA But maybe I mean I think just picking up from what Prayas is asking, and I might be wrong, I just actually I mean what Alex is then saying is that then the artist is anybody who's producing out of whatever is existing, out of life. I'm just I mean that maybe that's not what he's I mean just kind of. but what Prayas is asking I think is not to do with the practice of it, but the idea of like becoming and presenting presentation of it.

20:26 PRAYAS Yeah, the f the frame of art. In the sense the frame and also the system through which you assign value, right? So like

20:38 ALEX Yeah, that doesn't exist in a vacuum though. How can you answer that question without taking into account the economics and the whole monetary system that's built around it, the whole promotional system that's built around it, right? I mean, aren't those things completely interconnected?

20:55 VIDISHA Yeah, but then does that mean that somebody who was doing the practice of spirituality apparently does who and who can't function within these economics is not work.

21:07 VIDISHA (?) Isn't that what?

21:08 PRAYAS (?) Practicing art.

21:10 ALEX No, it just means that, you know, there's you know, there's different ways of engaging in it, right? I mean like the land artists who were totally

21:18 PRAYAS But the only way that gets acknowledged in history is are the ways that fit the historian's perspective. So whoever it is that is constructing the frame of history, at some point it d it does get constructed. whatever fits that perspective

21:40 ALEX That's a problem with history, right? That's not a problem with necessarily with art, it's a problem with the way we the way the way

21:46 PRAYAS That's a problem with hist with art because art internalizes its history as its practice. You know, so if you are if you are in the present and if you are practicing art in the present in this moment, then I don't care about what your legacy, what your heritage, what your history is about. I'll do what I feel I need to do as an artist and that's it. And your job as a historian is try to understand what I do and make sense of it if you can. Otherwise I'll make sense of it myself and it's fine.

22:23 ALEX Yeah, but isn't this also the just the problem with the way we human beings organize meaning out of out of experiences which are have an infinite amount of bits of information and an infinite amount of stimuli. You know, it's that we tell ourselves stories that select one narrative that's composed of one set of ideas and that necessarily excludes many other things. and it's the way that we sort of figure out how to make sense of our lives. Which is the same process that sort of you know, history takes on or art takes on. You know, you select out of chaos, you select what makes sense as order, you build patterns. And that creates a narrative and it's a false picture of reality. but it's the picture that you end up choosing because it makes sense to you for whatever reason.

23:40 PRAYAS Yeah, I mean I'm only saying that the way the pattern this pattern exists and how it extends is limited by the shadow of history. And that is unnecessary. It's only it's only a discomfort with ambiguity because there's so much money riding on predicting the patterns. So it's like a match fixing, you know, it's really and I think that's the problem. so invariably it is a capital problem because the capital that we took in as patronage has come back to haunt us by scripting what we do and which patterns we follow because there's so much money riding on it that

24:30 It really doesn't make sense to for the for the entities who control capital to

24:38 Play that watch and wait and watch game.

24:42 ALEX (?) Yeah.

24:44 Yeah, they've been I think that it's funny, they've been doing all these studies, the biopsychologists have been doing a lot of studies on memory recently, which you know deal with the way memory is constructed. they've sort of come to realize two things. Number one is that there's no such thing as a kind of a hard drive in your brain which contains all the memories like a computer does, you know, where you kind of like save a file and then you put it away and then every time you remember it, you just open it up with your memory application that actually memories are composed of multiple bits of information that are stored in multiple parts of the brain. And whenever you remember something, the memory is literally recreated. So it's not that there's like one memory that exists. It's actually your brain reconstructs that event completely anew every single time. And every time it reconstructs that event, it changes it a little bit because it's starting out of these Lego blocks and it's rebuilding the thing. So the most perfect memory in the world exists in the mind of someone who's lost the ability to remember at all. Because for them, that exists without ever it having been changed, because every time you remember, you change it. is kind of fascinating in terms of just how we are as human beings. But then the other thing that's sort of interesting is that the more they study this, the more they realize that people tend to remember not what they literally experienced, but what makes the best and most interesting story. So they're completely biased because memory serves a social function. It's not just your own private form of making sense of the world. You're also sharing the memory and you realize recognize that your memories serve to make you either a more interesting person, a less interesting person, or more someone that comes across as more or less intelligent. There's all of these functions outside of yourself that memory is connected to. So the way we tend to construct memories is closely related to what we perceive as being a really good story to tell. So two people may have experienced the same event and remember it in vastly different ways just based on what they think is a great story after the event.

27:29 PRAYAS Right. No, I totally agree with you and I think you know the role of narrative and just in terms of you know what will be a better story is really it's significant it's a significant role. But then that's exactly what why I would question are the ease with which we buy into and follow the story of art instead of instead of constructing our own.

28:04 ALEX Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. I think that I mean to me that makes a lot of sense. And that's what cu curator curators do too, going back to Vidisha's point, right? It's like creating stories out of out of these elements.

28:25 PRAYAS Right, but you know like the honesty the honesty of the market.

28:33 You know, the market is honest in the sense that if you really have a bad product, then you won't be able to keep it selling you won't be able to keep it afloat for a very long time.

28:46 ALEX (?) Yeah.

28:48 PRAYAS So that yeah, I mean that I'm thankful to that honesty, right? I mean there's I mean so bad products disappear naturally. But that honesty doesn't apply to art.

29:01 ALEX Oh, I think it does. I think it does. I've worked at art galleries which had paintings secondary market works that they had bought when the market was sort of hot, you know, and these were works by you know, like second rate this it was one of the one of the first galleries I worked at in New York. So they sold a lot of Chagall and Picasso and stuff like that, but then they also sold these kind of like second rate impressionists and post-impressionists. And they had this one artist, I forget his name, and they had bought his work, I think they bought a bunch of paintings for about a million dollars each in the eighties when Japanese investors were flooding the market and they were buying everything they could because there was this huge economic boom in Japan, and so these guys were buying, you know, real estate in America and fine art from Sotheby's and Christie's. and so this gallery had bought a bunch of this guy's work because it was very popular with the Japanese investors at that time. and the market crashed. And this guy's work, by the way, I'm not a big fan of. I think it's like not even second rate, it's like third rate. So the market crashed. And those pieces, you can't sell them for like a hundred thousand dollars now. You know, and they're historical. I mean, that guy has a

name, he's in history books, you know, like if you look at you know art history books. and they can't get rid of them. also something recently there's this gallery that just closed down that was run by this woman named Ana Tzarev, and Ana Tzarev is this terrible painter who happened to be the mother of a I thought it was a Russian guy, but it turns out it was a Croatian multi-billionaire, right? And like the family was like heavily involved in oil and exporting, importing oil and crude refinement, all this stuff. So anyway, the it's like billionaires. And the mom, this sort of matriarch of the family liked to paint. And she made these like incredibly garish paintings, which looked like if Van Gogh made paintings, but he made all his paintings like f eight feet by twelve feet tall. And he painted them all straight out of a tube. So he never mixed his colors. It was just like he would just buy like cadmium red. And it was like, okay, cadmium red background with a lot of brushstrokes. Here you go. So they rented this space in the same building that Marian Goodman Gallery, which is one of the most prestigious and best and actually like really m best curated galleries in the world, I think. They rented a space in that building and they built this incredible edifice with floor to ceiling windows. It was two stories high. They had an elevator in the middle with this spiral staircase made out of you know like polished steel inside. They hired people from museums, like really well regarded people, to work as directors, to run the space. I mean it was it was a gorgeous environment. And then of course they hired the top advertising and PR firms in New York to basically promote this woman's work. They had ads in every single art publication and I think they lasted for four years. I think they were around for four years and they finally closed about six or seven months ago. And it was kind of nice because it sort of went to show you that you know you can hire the best people, you can have the best PR. But if you're selling

33:18 PRAYAS This is about what you're talking what the stories you're sharing are they of work that is universally or let's say even critically or in the community acknowledged as of not much value and the market seems to be you know, have a desire to rally with it. But I'm talking about A-list artists, the so called a t A-list artists whom you perceive as

33:49 Possessing not real value or at least constructed or fishy fishiness of the value, whatever. Or a shaky value. Then yeah the so the I think the self the self critical nature of the market doesn't exist to do garbage collection for what has already gone past the door. So once you have already entered then what do you do? That the garbage collector doesn't collect it just sits at the door and works very hard at being the gatekeeper. But once you're in you can do anything you want.

34:37 VIDISHA (?) I

34:39 ALEX Yeah, I you know, I think I think it's I think there's a lot I think you're right. There's a lot to which

34:48 VIDISHA I mean I don't I mean if one looks at like sure I mean the question is getting [?] all that money that he's getting for active Instagram screenshots, right? So he is getting the money but critically I mean I don't think people really appreciate what should he do. so I mean he is a list artist. He ha he gets that kind of money for bullshit. But it's still bullshit. So I don't know. I mean money is not so even if it comes to A-list, I don't think money is money is what tells you that oh you are appreciated. I or it shouldn't be s like what makes you consider something good or of value.

35:35 PRAYAS Yeah, so I mean the s the same way we have let's say hybrid evaluation spaces in which money and curation let's say are intermingled and they look at work. In that same way I would like it if there was there is also a very a very rigid, almost fundament fundamentalist way of looking content just on the basis of content. You know? So no external logic. I don't care if you are looked up to as a kingmaker and if you have a lot of influence and a lot of power, but if you're doing bullshit I'll call it.

36:18 VIDISHA Yeah, but I mean the thing is then that judgment of concept is very subjective and it's the same thing that I mean then how's it's it's

36:27 PRAYAS It's subjective, but I think it's only fair if you are judging me, then I should be allowed to judge you as well.

36:40 VIDISHA So yeah, go ahead. I mean, they are not stopping you. No but the collectors are not stopping you from I mean recently I think there was an article just recently out which was I mean it's a viral article which is just talking about how like the world's five most poorest collections and people like the collectors have spent like lots of money on those collections. And so they are just like bad collectors. So of course there's a space to judge it, but I mean what do you think is of value? Is the collectors I mean now that's the thing, like what do you think is of value? Because for him in that art market, if somebody got a resale value, then it's valuable for him. And now if you think that the space of viral is more powerful or whatever, more impactful in kind of producing value for something else, then that's of value in that space. I mean, I'm s asking for like how do you like think that what space is produced to look at something critically. I mean because that

37:42 PRAYAS But I find the whole democratic argument that you know you smoke your pipe and I'll spoke smoke mine, I find that very defeating because you know at one level we can be very we can very easily acknowledge how a certain part of the conversation flows only one way. And that direction of that flow is d is decided by you know how much how or how much you control attention, how do you control how much power you have in deciding relationships and a lot of other parameters that decides that conversation flows only one way. So we can easily acknowledge that. But then the other when conversation wants to flow the other way, then you want to filter it, then you want to

38:34 VIDISHA Prayas, you know what happened last year actually, there was a show which is completely sad, like that's absolutely fucked up that's what happened. There was a show at Hammer, which was basically a curated show about institutional critique. And that's totally stupid because how does a show which was critiquing the institution in the first place land up in a institution?

38:58 You know, and that's the question that you are asking about like

39:02 PRAYAS I mean exactly what you're saying. So you cannot you cannot read symbols only for the symbolical value. You also have to go outside the frame and see what is their you know, what is their landscape, what is their role in the landscape, right? So and also I think in the narrative of time, so when are you doing it, what are you doing, where are you doing it?

39:32 ALEX That's why I really like the land artists from

39:38 Yeah.

39:38 The sixties and the seventies because essentially they saw this problem and they saw that there's actually no way to work outside of that system unless you make things which literally can't be collected, you know. So if you dig a hole in the earth in the middle of the woods, you know, like there's no way for anyone to buy that. And so it exists outside of the monetary system that you know, problematizes the relationship between artist, collector, gallerist, public.

40:13 I think I think art as an asset for the people that collect it when it exists as an asset, obviously those people have an invested interest to retain the value of that asset.

40:31 PRAYAS (?) Yeah.

40:31 PRAYAS (?) Yeah.

40:32 ALEX So various strategies are employed to protect that asset, just in the same way you would want to protect your house, so you would make sure that there's no termites, you'd remodel the kitchen, whatever. So they employ various strategies, and sometimes those strategies seem normal and sometimes they're very problematic because the people that collect also tend to sit on the boards of museums and they have very close relationships with galleries and with institutions and with things like biennials. but the one thing that they can't

41:08 Protect the asset from is the change in generational taste and also mounting critical consensus so they can manipulate critical voices to an extent but when a critical consensus against a particular art movement or particular kind of way of working is built there really isn't much that

they can do you know or in the same way as when there's a generational change in taste, you know, like what happened with like neo expressionism, you know, like it was so hot in the eighties and then a new generation of collectors and buyers and gallerists came in and they really didn't have any interest in it. And the market for that work has really never come back. I mean it's sort of become almost a pariah art movement in the in the art world.

42:14 VIDISHA Prayas I actually also I mean this generational thing I think it's extremely important because one of the other things like if let's say if film I mean film as a medium is a medium to basically create more consumption. I mean it's a it's an advertisement. That's the whole thing. That's what a film is. And so the thing is that I mean everything around a film can only be successful in every if everything around that I mean if like the articles are concerned about like I think recently that there have been articles which have come out about online dating in India. And I mean those were things which came out like long time ago in other spaces. So there was a lot of like interest in that kind of practice and understanding sociology through that practice of like understanding online dating or whatever. or I mean So if I mean if people around if like so it's not only about artists actually moving towards creating a different kind of art and I mean just creating a different kind of art, but I think it's also important that everybody else around them, I mean people that I mean, journalists or whoever else who are producing new I mean new knowledge or whatever, they all are employed in understanding those things. Like Her, like Her is so late actually. Her as a movie is so late in time. I mean people who are already doing it, you know. It's not but it came so late. But so then what a lot of other people were there doing, they're like, Oh now I understand you which is totally stupid because it's like you are choosing to understand only what's been told to you and you're not like really putting a mind of your own to understand something which is of importance.

44:03 VIDISHA (?) Yeah.

44:04 VIDISHA (?) Hello?

44:06 PRAYAS No I'm here. I mean you just stopped talking so I was collecting all of that and

44:14 Yeah, figure that. No, but you're saying that this whole it's a environmental responsibility for all for people who are performing this role of journaling, of knowledge creation, or for or of this.

44:31 PRAYAS (?) Whatever. Yeah, whatever create.

44:33 PRAYAS (?) Yeah. But you're saying that it's the it's a ecosystem responsibility for them to behave in a certain way. But

44:40 VIDISHA The ecosystem responsibility. I'm just saying that if you get rejected, it's not it's not I mean, you firstly shouldn't participate in the ecos in a certain ecosystem which seems stale to you. That's actually a good idea. That's one step that oh I'm not gonna do this because now you've understood that I'm not

45:03 A lot of mistakes.

45:05 VIDISHA (?) No, but you know that creates other problems.

45:10 Is on

45:16 PRAYAS (?) Voice is gone. I'll convert this to a audio only hangout for a few

45:24 ALEX Okay.

45:25 Yeah, I'm losing I'm losing Vidisha.

45:27 PRAYAS Yeah. Vidisha we missed the last part of what you said.

45:31 VIDISHA (?) Know what is

45:33 No, I think I think what I said was let should I turn off my video?

45:38 PRAYAS (?) Yeah.

45:40 VIDISHA So I think the last thing that I said was

45:46 I don't know what I said. What did I say?

45:48 PRAYAS No, but I mean just following the previous thread, I'm just saying so but this di this expectation of this recommendation or this demand for ecosystem responsibility to be to be per-

formed, is isn't that isn't that very two things. It's isn't that idealistic and isn't that really expecting too much when nothing is n no one really owes you anything at all in this system because you are not the one who is contributing to the value inflation or the value extraction process. So why should you have any say in it?

46:34 VIDISHA You wanna say something, Alex? I can see you but I can't you can't see me. anyway. No I'm not actually

46:51 I don't think it's your responsibility, I don't think it's idealistic. I'm saying that in a situation if you choose to do what you want to do, then you do it. You know? And then

47:02 PRAYAS That's fine, but if you do it and y like you were saying, cho you can choose not to participate. But

47:10 VIDISHA I'm saying choose not to participate in the stale system. If there's that sorry.

47:18 PRAYAS Which is saying that you step out of

47:22 Something you let's say you place yourself on your self perceived margins of the bubble or wherever else you know some kind of stepping out and I mean that just I'm just saying that doesn't really I think that is a kind of martyrdom which doesn't really affect the situation in any way even by contributing to the way history is constructed it doesn't do anything it just allows you to

48:01 PRAYAS (?) Hand over whatever stake you had in the system and say that okay, you do your thing, I do mine.

48:13 VIDISHA No, see. So I mean there are different ways. It's depends on how much do you want to do it. Like you can also be a cultural and multiple functions, you know. You but that's what I'm saying, choose what you're trying to do. And that's so if you do want to like place what do you call it? If you do want to place like now it's let's say it's not about it's about something else. Now that person's work is interesting. But what you do as a cultural producer is different from this other person's work. So what do you do if you're interested? The thing is that this person is not willing to take not willing to like participate in the function. So now n I think a lot of like questions that were asked through like these forty five minutes. I think a lot of thing is just that looking at the idea of I mean just the artist as worker also. Like if I'm saying that art that worker's job is a particular job, but then the writer's job is another particular job. So now I'm a writer, this is the artist, the artist has interesting work, I re I'm really interested in this work. I have some kind of like faces [?] that I write at and I kind of produ I start to produce n I mean somebody has to take the responsibility of producing more culture around it, right? Like either the artist takes that responsibility or somebody else has to take that responsibility.

49:39 PRAYAS Who else would take the I mean I mean I'm really just getting lost in your use of the word responsibility actually.

49:46 VIDISHA I mean you ask responsibility, I didn't say responsibility.

49:50 PRAYAS No, you just used it.

49:51 VIDISHA (?) Responsibility. No, I mean I think there's responsibility. But I'm just you said that the artist needs to be responsible.

50:01 PRAYAS What is what is the basis of your responsible behaviour? Is it I mean, is it

50:08 VIDISHA Yeah.

50:09 PRAYAS Yeah. No, I mean, is it history, is it tradition, is it legacy, is it ethics? What is it? I mean, on what basis are you demanding responsible behaviour?

50:21 VIDISHA Sorry?

50:22 PRAYAS (?) I mean on what basis are you demanding a responsible behavior?

50:27 VIDISHA I think on basis of respect and I mean I think we are just bringing this conversation from somewhere else actually. But to answer that question, I think responsibility for me is the idea of mutual respect and ethics. I mean but ethics can I mean I think ethics and then of

course there's a relationship that I understand between ethics and humour. So but I think that's still ethics important even d depending on the location of humor. So for me ris I mean

51:01 Because you said ethics, I'm just saying it's mutual respect also. And responsibility also, I mean, why you are asking that the artist needs to be responsible? So because you are saying that the artist then needs to be responsible towards themselves or whatever the practice that they have.

51:19 PRAYAS No, I'm just saying that you know if just by being participants in this system I think we have a certain ability and right to weed out, weed out empty containers or weed out content packages are demanding more attention than it is due to them or demanding more value assignment than is due to them. And doing so would actually yeah, that's the only thing which I think is our responsibility because if we don't punch the inflated bubbles that govern our own world, then how are we going to set the

52:11 You know, the way we seem in the landscape, how we going to set that right. And isn't that what we are essentially trying to do? We want to manage the optics around

52:24 VIDISHA So how do you do it? I mean, how do you do it? You have to you have to interact with that thing, right? How do you do it? By i mean, there are different ways. Either you ignore it or you play with it.

52:36 ALEX You work with s in secret, right? You can work I mean so many of the strategies for how you do it are so fundamentally opposed to what artists naturally want. They want sort of to be seen, they want exposure, but in order to sort of work outside of that system, it's like you have to do it either in secret or you do it anonymously, or you know, you're like Henry Darger, you're like in your room making it without ever anyone ever seeing it until you die. Not everyone can be a land artist, right?

53:09 PRAYAS (?) Yeah.

53:12 No, I really yeah, I think you picked a very relevant I mean thread and I think in the affinity of artists in pursuing you know attention in just being wanting to be visible. I think that is one that is a very big compromise because when you say you want attention, you are saying that you're okay with diluting your intensity. And when you say you're okay with that, then that's a slippery slope you're already on.

53:47 ALEX Why? Why would that be a dilution of your intensity?

53:51 PRAYAS No, because I think that attention depletes material. So

53:59 ALEX (?) I think you're being romantic now.

54:01 PRAYAS No at no attention depletes material in a very in a very sim simplistic model. In the sense the more something is seen, the more generally all of us learn how to think about it. And the more we learn to think about something, the less friction there'll be when we encounter it again next time. I mean essentially cultural product

54:30 ALEX I could argue the art the opposite in the sense that if art is a language evolves and becomes more interesting and elaborate and expressive through public use rather than private use. And so then when you deploy art as a language to the public you're actually creating a more interesting language than you would be if you're just doing it in private.

54:57 PRAYAS No, I'm just saying that visibility is a very strategic it's a very strategic thing. So when, how and how long for do you want to be seen? You know that is that all that needs to be parameterized and configured because if you if you just if you just take your visibility to be an empty parameterless thing, then it is just going to exhaust whatever corrosive potential your you know your persona or your idea or whatever it is, your construction might have had.

55:41 VIDISHA (?) Yeah, who decides those parameters though? Yeah.

55:44 I don't understand why you say that. I mean

55:52 VIDISHA (?) No.

55:53 Producing multiple one is producing multiple personas. Why are you scared of losing one persona to the other?

55:59 PRAYAS No, I'm not scared of that at all. I mean I'm actually ready to discard and jump ship, you know, once a persona is exhausted. I mean but I'm saying how soon you want to exhaust it and when you want it to be done should be in part your own.

56:19 VIDISHA Lost.

56:21 PRAYAS Because attention depletes material. So in the sense the more you are seen, the more the more you're becoming part of the landscape. So if it's if there is a if there's any friction in movement if then the you know the same thing that makes you move actually corrodes you. So the road corrodes the wheel and the tire, whatever and the and but that corrosion also allows it to move.

56:54 ALEX (?) But that in that o imp implies or

57:00 I guess it yeah, it implies that the thing that's moving isn't changing while it's being observed.

57:09 ALEX (?) Yeah, it

57:12 PRAYAS (?) I mean I agree with you.

57:14 ALEX I agree with you if you're a static entity, you know, if you're just an ice cream cone and you're being licked, you know, and there's just a finite amount of ice cream in that cone and the visibility is like multiple tongues licking the cone. Eventually the cone there's not gonna be any more ice cream left. But you know, I don't I don't I think it's it and some artists are like that. Some things are like that. I think the key is you have to and maybe that's where the personas come in, you know, is if you're if you're replenishing yourself then v visibility doesn't necessarily have to be corrosive. But I think it depends it depends on the on the

57:51 PRAYAS I mean I think yeah what you are what you are asking about the you know what you are suggesting about the dynamic nature of the projections is actually something very similar to the personas. So that dynamism is a shift in who you are at that in that instance of exposure. And if that keeps shifting, then yes you are you are negotiating different ways to allow yourself to suffer exposure for a longer time.

58:32 ALEX Yeah, because in and some things can't be created outside of the arena of exposure, right? I mean

58:38 Yeah, so

58:38 Some works are completely dependent on that. I mean like going back to something very traditional like Sistine Chapel ceiling, right?

58:47 Yeah.

58:48 There's no way that would have ever been created as a private enterprise.

58:54 PRAYAS Yeah.

58:59 Yeah, it just needed to be on that stage, on that yeah, in that space, yeah.

59:05 VIDISHA But as you're saying that your visibility I one of the other things that you're saying is the more visible you are, the less in intense you start to get. While when you actually speak about attention, even if I mean look if I mean and how Surfatial talks about attention. Also it's like so people only have this certain amount of attention, right? And so are you saying that even if they go intensely into something, I do not think they actually register more than what they had already registered with that small amount of thing that like a single text could have also done.

59:38 ALEX (?) Wait, say that again, Vidisha. What's the last part?

59:42 VIDISHA No I was just saying that you know, let's say the way the attention towards or commitment towards looking at somebody's work or it being interested in something one is only reading up till the headline. You know, one is not reading what and even if one is reading more than the headline, I really don't think but what still stays with you is the headline. And maybe the pull quotes, you know. So but that does not mean that people have engaged with all that you have to give. So when I'm asking Prayas, it's like you're talking about visibility the more visible you become, the less intense you become.

01:00:23 PRAYAS Yeah.

01:00:26 PRAYAS (?) You think so?

01:00:27 VIDISHA (?) Yeah, I mean yeah.

01:00:29 I think intensity multiplies.

01:00:31 PRAYAS No, it's a very simple thing. So if you're holding a conversation with one person or with twenty-five people in the room, and if you're trying to keep each of them engaged, then you will have to gradually keep simplifying the I mean keep diluting the intensity of what are we talking about. So if you see political speeches where you know politicians are talking to five hundred thousand people or hundred you know, even more than that, then you'll see that essentially they are saying nothing at all because they have to say something so simple that it can resonate with such a wide group. And if it's if it's something you say if you say something very

01:01:24 VIDISHA I mean it's like a fortune cookie. I mean what you are saying that the idea of resonating with multiple people. But that even a fortune cookie does, right? Like it says, Oh, this is about me but it's not about you know, and it's about no one. And it's just but I don't but then there's no then the there is no interest in that kind of artist also. I mean then why is that artist intense actually?

01:01:51 PRAYAS You're saying the fortune artist.

01:01:54 VIDISHA No ha fortune cookie artist is excellent. But I'm just saying I mean that's just only because it's just the fortune cookie. I'm talking about the political speech. Like

01:02:04 PRAYAS But so I'm saying that the A list, let's say the A list of the A list artist is not very dissimilar from the from the politicians trying to speak to five hundred thousand people. It's not is similar, of course relatively much smaller, similar kind of dilution that is happening there.

01:02:32 VIDISHA But I think that probably has to do with a lot of art now this is like one minute, but it's a very big conversation. But I mean it has to do with the idea of the object hysteria within the art. Like how can the art exist without object, you know? And the same thing I mean, this is the same thing that happens with like the land artist as well, when James Turrell's volcano actually, which he's created, which is located in one place, cannot be moved. So James Turrell created a spaces that he participates in. So it's the hysteria around object that art doesn't exist without the object. So since w whenever object gets introduced within something, it already becomes social. It already becomes adaptable by like five thousand people.

01:03:21 ALEX (?) Mm-

01:03:23 ALEX (?) Na nice.

01:03:25 PRAYAS Yeah.

01:03:28 VIDISHA Yeah, no, so I don't I mean I don't know. What do you think? So I'm I think so yeah, I mean so it's like A list artist is meant to produce the object and object is already something which anybody can engage with. It's eleven.

01:03:44 PRAYAS Yeah. I mean I think what you yeah, I mean it is it might be one of those you know, the object might actually be one of those symptoms which are which is produced in that sense for that purpose. To

01:04:02 Oh, we lost you.

01:04:03 Writing off an ability of you know people that might they might have had to actually understand whatever you're doing because people don't really have a capacity to understand too much abstraction. That is the general sentiment.

01:04:26 PRAYAS (?) Yeah.

01:04:27 ALEX Yeah, and I think there's also I mean o objects become it's sort of A-list through a variety of different paths. I don't think it's I don't think all objects reach that state.

01:04:42 PRAYAS Yeah.

01:04:43 ALEX The same way. You know, like there's some works become their way through the art world version of you know crowdsourcing and focus grouping you know like by the time you

know Jeff Koons reaches to market, you know, it's been you know it's gone through so many different test groups, you know, in the art world version way. Which is which is very different than like a Marcel Broodthaers who died you know relatively young and is now revered and that the way that his works have gained critical and commercial attention is very is has taken a very different path.

01:05:31 PRAYAS But are you saying that you well that artists actually use the processes of reverse engineering right that otherwise industrial sector relies on, that design actually relies on in preempting your desire, right? Are you saying that is overtly used or you are drawing a parallel?

01:06:01 ALEX Yeah, no, I think I think that there's not necessarily anything wrong with listening to an audience. You know? Kubrick did it when he was making two thousand and one he showed his movie to a test audience and you know seems like

01:06:18 PRAYAS In cinema and in all of the media it's not very unconventional to do that. for a filmmaker to do small t screenings for smaller groups is expected before the final edit. But in art I have not really heard of this you know but this is

01:06:40 You know, right? So it's like you kinda submit your work.

01:06:45 PRAYAS (?) So you invite artist to your studio.

01:06:48 ALEX Yeah, studio visits and I mean you may do studio visits with people that aren't necessarily artists but people that you really trust and whose opinions you know you trust in. You know, and that's like a form of peer review.

01:07:05 VIDISHA But I think yeah, I mean that's kind of actually that as a practice I would say is really missing.

01:07:15 VIDISHA (?) Is really missing?

01:07:16 In not I mean i is missing in India the idea of the studio visit because I mean of course it happens when it's the classroom setting and it's the class groups or one is at school it's happening but when one is asking for studio visit right now people are interested in like oh this is the edition, this is like can I sell my work to you? This is my PowerPoint, this is my pe like so that is not really a studio visit. So I think perhaps that's something that is really missing in terms of practice.

01:07:48 PRAYAS Yeah, we don't have that kind of stage for peer exchange.

01:07:55 VIDISHA Yeah. That's something really missing as a practice. I mean I think even though people do try to set up these kind of things, there are politics within that as well. And I think it needs to become I think there needs to be more parties and I think parties are like a very important thing for idea of like creating solidarity and like if there is no trust there is no studio visit and there's no point having a studio visit, you know.

01:08:19 Yeah.

01:08:20 Oh, I mean those are all things which are kind of not I mean those are all parts of peer reviews or everything.

01:08:32 PRAYAS Yeah. So we have finished our hour. It's eleven PM. So Alex it's been great talking to you and it'll be great if you have time later on in the mu in the month. it'll be great if maybe Vidisha invites you again and we are here again.

01:08:59 ALEX Yeah, that would be great. That'd be that'd be wonderful. I think it was it's and it's a perfect time because I'm doing a residency here and so these topics are on my mind and I'm in the midst of sort of peer review and all this kind of stuff. and Vidisha is obviously you know so yeah, I'd love the conversation. I'd love to engage in another one.

01:09:21 PRAYAS Great. So Vidisha, any wrapping thoughts or we stop?

01:09:26 VIDISHA No, we are good. We're over time. Thank you.

01:09:29 PRAYAS Good night everyone. See you next.

01:09:32 ALEX Good night. Bye.