

THOUGHT CURFEW

RESOURCE PACK

EMPATHY & RISK

stages
theatre
group

THOUGHT CURFEW

A lyrical, devised, mixed media theatre performance.

A collaboration between Empathy & Risk and
Stages Theatre Group.

Created by David Cotterrell and
Ruwanthie de Chickera

First performance on 17th July 2018 at
Kigali Genocide Memorial Amphitheatre /
4th Ubumuntu Theatre Festival

THOUGHT CURFEW

is a lyrical, devised, mixed-media theatre performance piece that explores how unthinking violence suddenly unleashes itself on communities.

The performance was a product of twenty days of devising that explored this theme through collective research.

This resource pack, summarily explores and analyses the process of world building in the play with a mix of mediums – live performance and animation. It includes interviews from the directors, research, discussions, and devising exercises in the play's creative process.

The study pack is aimed at actors and theatre practitioners interested in further exploring world building for theatre using Thought Curfew as a case study.

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1. THOUGHT CURFEW

An Introduction

*'Everyone in the world is looking for a child
Everyone in the world is looking for one small child
Who is running away from the unthinkable
Now when the unthinkable happens
No one is left who can tell the story
So before it happens,
Before this one small child is found by everyone in the
world,
Before she is caught and before she has to face the
unthinkable,
Here is how it happened
Here is how the unthinkable came into our lives...'*

Thought Curfew

THE PLAY

Thought Curfew is a play created by Ruwanthie De Chickera, from Stages Theatre Group, and British visual artist David Cotterrell. This is a lyrical performance that incorporates the medium of animation. It was a play and a creative process which set out to explore the manner in which entire communities of people can be rendered unthinking in a moment – or in other words subject to a 'thought curfew'.

Thought Curfew addresses the outbreak of sudden and widespread violence and examines the individuals' negotiation with fast spreading senselessness. Thought Curfew was staged at the 4th Ubumuntu Festival of Humanity held at the Kigali Genocide Memorial Amphitheatre in July 2018.

With a cast of Sri Lankan actors and an ensemble of UK animators, designers and composers, the play reflected the partnership between its playwright/visual artist co-creators from the UK and Sri Lanka. It brought into the conversations the historical colonial violence and contemporary global superpower status of the UK, and the seven decades of war and violence of post-colonial Sri Lanka, which, at that time, was on a rocky road towards reconciliation after a 30 year civil war. Thought

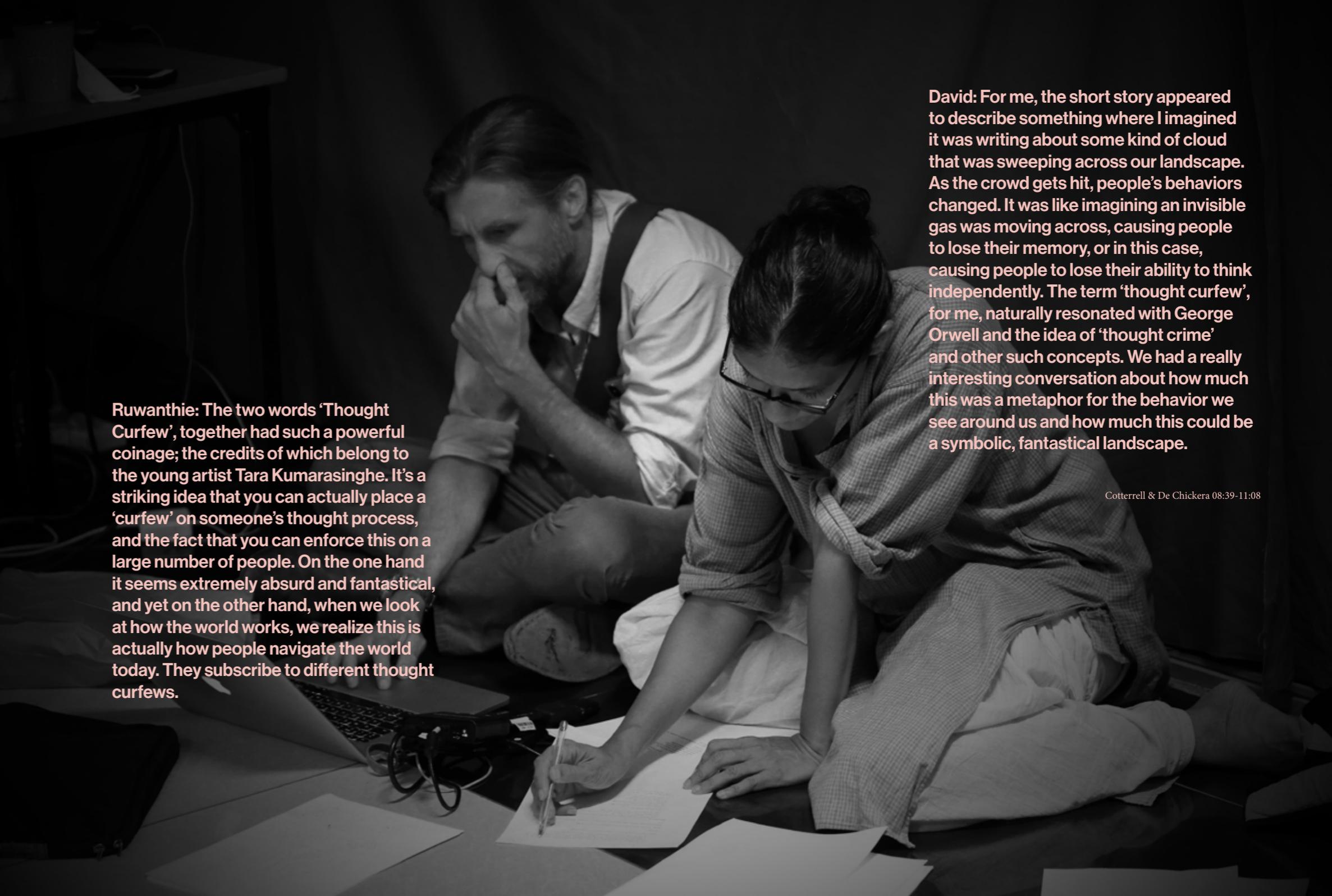
Curfew was further performed in Rwanda which had its own catastrophic tragedy of the 1994 Genocide. While the play drew from the experiences of all these countries Thought Curfew is not a play about war torn Sri Lanka, or the arms manufacture of the UK or horror of the Rwandan Genocide. Thought Curfew is a play that attempts rise above nationality to capture the universal human capacity to sink into a place of unthinking violence and atrocity. According to director Ruwanthie De Chickera it was 'a commentary on a growing global phenomena – where language, agendas, money, media, power, faith, lifestyle, careers – all contribute to create fortresses of restricted thinking, patterns of curfewed thought, structured to protect those who belong and negate those who don't'

(De Chickera, 6)

THE IDEA

Thought Curfew originated from a short story written by Ruwanthie De Chickera which was based on a discussion with a young Sri Lankan playwright Tara Kumarasinghe (now Tara Nadun), who was the person who first came up with the concept of a 'thought curfew'. The conversation which happened decades earlier and the short story that had been written as a result of it, remained untouched for many years. Essentially, the story was a small fictional piece about a little girl running away from a fast spreading thought curfew, or a wave of unthinking people, as her father pursued her.

When the time came to create a collaborative production for the Ubumuntu Festival, Ruwanthie shared this story with David as the concept resonated with current events of the times as well as their interests and discussions as artist collaborators. Together, Ruwanthie and David saw immense potential in this idea of a 'thought curfew' and they began to unravel and reinterpret it together.



Ruwanthie: The two words 'Thought Curfew', together had such a powerful coinage; the credits of which belong to the young artist Tara Kumarasinghe. It's a striking idea that you can actually place a 'curfew' on someone's thought process, and the fact that you can enforce this on a large number of people. On the one hand it seems extremely absurd and fantastical, and yet on the other hand, when we look at how the world works, we realize this is actually how people navigate the world today. They subscribe to different thought curfews.

David: For me, the short story appeared to describe something where I imagined it was writing about some kind of cloud that was sweeping across our landscape. As the crowd gets hit, people's behaviors changed. It was like imagining an invisible gas was moving across, causing people to lose their memory, or in this case, causing people to lose their ability to think independently. The term 'thought curfew', for me, naturally resonated with George Orwell and the idea of 'thought crime' and other such concepts. We had a really interesting conversation about how much this was a metaphor for the behavior we see around us and how much this could be a symbolic, fantastical landscape.

Cotterrell & De Chickera 08:39-11:08

THE STORY

The play follows the story a young child, a little girl, who is fleeing from a thought curfew that is fast spreading across the world, rendering everyone who falls prey to it, unthinking. Her family is the first to fall victim to the thought curfew. As advised by her thoughtful Grandfather, who sees the emergence of the thought curfew before anyone else, the little girl runs away from the security of her family and home in order to escape a danger she does not quite understand. As she runs away from the thought curfew, the little girl passes through many worlds that she had never before encountered. In each world she sees people who are trapped in different forms of thinking and behavior. Disturbingly, these persons she encounters in these worlds are strange versions of her own family.

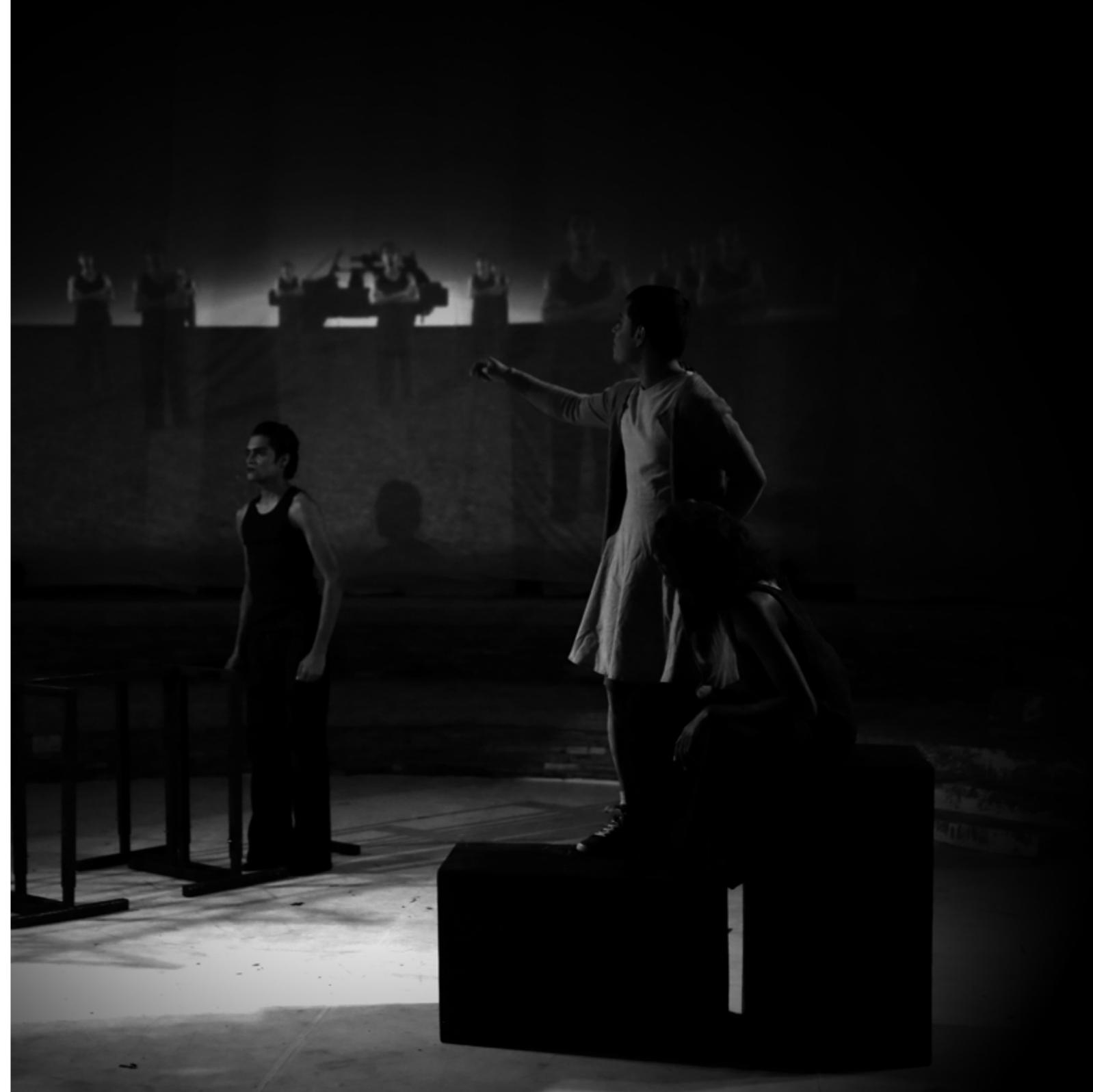
Upon fleeing from the world of her Home, she first encounters the world of Refugees: a world full of immobile people paralyzed by hopelessness and their lack of control and agency over their futures. Fleeing the world of Refugees she enters the worlds of the Military, Development Aid and Religion. As she comes into contact with these worlds, however, she realizes that the thought curfew has already got to their inhabitants. The soldiers in the military world are constrained by their unquestioning loyalty

to military order and discipline. In the world of Development Aid, the development aid workers' protocols take precedence over basic human instincts. And in the world of religion, everyone is blinded by unquestioning faith.

She traverses through these different worlds, somehow unscathed, fleeing the unthinking thought curfew her Grandfather warned her about. All the people in these worlds are subject to some kind of thought curfew – a regimented, confined way of thinking and behaving.

The play follows the little girl as she continues to somehow escape the thought curfew in these numerous sites of 'unthinkingness'.

In an unthinking world, the only hope left thus becomes the child who resists the thought curfew and is the only thinking person left in the world.





THE PROCESS

The process behind Thought Curfew was a rigorous one. The play was a creative collaboration between Ruwanthie and David, who worked in two completely different performative mediums: theatre and visual art. Given the two directors' creative backgrounds, the collaboration resulted in a mixed media performance, which melded both live performance and animation. The production brought together Sri Lankan actors from Ruwanthie's ensemble theatre company, Stages Theatre Group, and animators, composers, and designers from the UK.

The devising process and the performance brought in actors whose experience was mainly in live performance and dance. This production was, quite simply, the ensemble's very first experience in working on a live performance that also incorporated a digital medium. The production incorporated: 1) animation, which involved screen acting with green screen technology; and 2) a digital mise-en-scene, which required actors to act in front of an animated backdrop. In addition to this, it was decided that the play would be performed in English (in spite of the first language of the cast being Sinhala), in order to cater to a more global audience. This was in order to establish the fact that the play

attempted to capture a phenomenon more universal rather than one contextualized in Sri Lanka.

The actors were, therefore, forced to step out of their comfort zones in their performance. Due to this, leading up to the play was an intense period of research, devising and rehearsal where the artists; a) delved into better understanding the global perspectives and insights of the play's theme; b) engaged in devising exercises that enabled them to embody and interact with the worlds created in the play; c) engaged in physical training which helped them adapt to the interplay between live performance and digital animation; d) underwent language training to reach standard of performance in English.

The sections that follow depict the journey of the decisions, processes, challenges and outcomes of the team's creative collaboration.



2. NEW WORLD NEW RULES

Exploring Social Dynamics of the World

ENTERING THE TOPIC

To devise Thought Curfew an ensemble of 15 Sri Lankan artists were brought together, for a devising period of twenty days in Colombo. Parallel to this, there was a team of animators, designers and composers working on the production's development in the UK. Ruwanthie and David provided the connection between these two teams.

The first objective of the devising process was to lift the scope of the commentary from the local to the global. Most of the actors who had been gathered for the devising process in Colombo were comfortable with devising a play which dealt with a Sri Lankan context. However, for this play it was important that the playing field be expanded to address a global phenomenon through a fictional world.

Thereby when creating a fictional world, the boundaries and shape had to be defined clearly. The theme under discussion, the 'thought curfew', could be approached or interpreted in many ways. It seemed a simple phrase, but it potentially had an immensely broad and complex reach.

For the production, a unified understanding of the topic was necessary to decide the story and its shape. In order to achieve this, a large part of the devising process involved the directors and ensemble engaging in research and discussions under the broad theme of thought curfew in order to agree on the parameters of the fictional worlds under construction.

'The Thought Curfew is coming

The Thought Curfew is on its way

The Unthinkable will be amongst us soon'

Thought Curfew

Ruwanthie: This play, when it existed as a short story, was set in this universal space. It was simply a child running from a spreading thought curfew pursued by her father. There was no sense of nationality. The issues that David and I had been discussing, throughout the years, far beyond the play, were also to do with global situations of restrictions of thought, behavior etc. So ideally, the play also should have this kind of universal feel to it. Unfortunately we were restricted by usual restrictions such as budget, time and logistics and so we created this play with the group of actors who performed it in Rwanda. However, the hope of the project was to eventually make it much more universal than limited to a specific context.

David: Creating something in an accelerated time-frame, is actually difficult for actors, animators and composers. And so it made sense that we worked with people that we already had some kind of working understanding. It was really important that the actors had a close working relationship with Ruwanthie as I was coming in as an outsider trying to introduce new methods. This stability of understanding was necessary to push people into uncomfortable new territory.

It was the same with the animators and the musicians. With that prerequisite in place it was necessary to work with teams and artists who already had relationships with us. We had to accept that we were also bringing our own domains and our own worlds into this production which was really aspiring to be something, which, as an audience member, you might be able to take and actually apply to the context you were watching it in, as much as the context in which it originated.

Once the boundaries were fixed, the rules within this world had to be created.

To craft a nuanced, multi-dimensional world it was necessary to lay out features such as social norms, forms of communication, governance and rules of law. It was important to first understand the frameworks in place in our own real world in order to create a fictional world that could be informed by the same. In order to explore this, in brainstorming and research sessions the group explored further the notions of thought, curfew, society, ideology, control, discipline, punishment, and torture.

The following sections will illustrate how these themes were explored and grasped by the ensemble, through questions, research, brainstorming and devising. The outcomes of these devising exercises allowed the ensemble to explore the shape and the social dynamics of the fictional world that was going to be challenged by the emergence of this strange thought curfew.

THOUGHT AND THE UNTHINKABLE

One of the first exercises done during the devising sessions prompted a conversation through which the team attempted to unravel the blocks or prejudices in their own thinking.

Revealing prejudice/ Isolating suspicion:

Exercise: Actors are asked to walk around the space making eye contact with everyone in the space. In the beginning the atmosphere in the room is a relaxed one. Then the actors are given the instruction to identify (as honestly as possible) the most suspicion-arousing person in the room. The person they would trust the least. As they continue to walk around with this in mind, they are subsequently instructed to start walking towards this person. As the group moves towards one another, they are brought to a point of stop where they are all asked to point towards the person they identified as the most suspicious.

Results and Observations:

The actors were asked to look for the 'most suspicious' person in the room. There was no further context or reference given. So everyone was working with their own internal prejudices and self-justifications. This exercise therefore exemplified a block in thinking. Especially if this suspicion comes easily and especially if everyone points to one person it becomes clear how communities of grow suspicious of people based on collective prejudices.



But how did everyone define the unthinkable?

The group defined it as a situation or event that was so highly undesirable that it could barely be considered a possibility. Leading off of this question, David and Ruwanthie then prompted the ensemble to explore 'unthinkable violence'. The ensemble explored moments of history where people and societies plunged into states of such atrocities and violence that looked humanly impossible such as the Rwandan Genocide and the Black July riots in Sri Lanka.

Case studies showed, for example, how in the horrific events of the mid-1990s in Rwanda, tens of thousands of Hutu killed their Tutsi friends, neighbors, even family members. Visual research into the July riots in Sri Lanka depicted how Sinhalese mobs and youth engaged in burning, torturing and humiliating Tamil victims in absolute glee.

In both these events, seemingly ordinary, everyday people had committed acts of heinous violence based on either indoctrinated or inherent prejudices. They were all rendered unthinking in their violence. Following these case studies and discussions, it was surmised that 'thought curfew' could, in fact, be synonymous with the 'unthinkable': it was a state where humans were rendered unthinking, and they were committing acts that were unthinkable.

By analyzing their own actions within the aforementioned exercise, the ensemble was able to engage in a discussion dissecting the phenomenon of thought.

The exercise had many layers. At the forefront, it was the physical change it created as the actors embodied their suspicion of one another. More intriguing was the thought process in their minds as they proceeded to abide by the instructions. The discussion that followed attempted to unravel this thought process, and through it, find the parameters through which thought could be defined. This exercise raised the following questions that were discussed further:

What is the nature of thought?

What did everyone think thought was?

When does a thought begin and end?

The ensemble attempted to unravel the phenomenon of thought, which could be agreed as a self-awareness, which is thinking – which is the thinker. More thought related phrases were brainstormed: 'mind, mindless, will, willingness, free will, thoughtless, thoughtful, thought empty, unthinking, unthinkable'.

The ensemble was thus made to organically arrive at the word 'unthinkable'.

CURFEW

A curfew is essentially a restricting, regulating, and controlling structure imposed upon a person or people.

Within Sri Lanka this was a word that everyone was familiar with. Starting from the lengthy state imposed curfews during the JVP riots of the 70s and 80s in Sri Lanka, to the curfews that dotted the 30 year civil war – Sri Lankans were familiar, sadly almost comfortable, with the concept of curfews.

Moving further from the curfews the actors were only too familiar with, i.e. state imposed restrictions which regulated the movement of people at public places at certain times, the discussion deconstructed curfew as a devise of societal control and attempted to find other types of curfews.

What other kinds of curfews could exist in the world?

This was a question that prompted the ensemble to brainstorm different kinds of curfews, or restrictions that could be imposed to control and curtail a community's thoughts and behavior. 'Speech curfews, space curfews, love curfews, sight curfews, tactile curfews etc.'

David took the discussion further by then looking at the imposition of sensorial limitations on persons as a form of coercion. This conversation brought the ensemble to the subject of torture: when specific environmental stimuli are used deliberately against a person in an attempt to undermine his will or resistance or sense of reality (Leach, 5). The ensemble examined torture methods as a tool of social control and punishment for deviant behavior.

CONTROL, DISCIPLINE & PUNISHMENT

Next, the ensemble delved into both discussions and devising exercises that discussed how people could be controlled. Tools of state control were drawn into the conversation: surveillance, discipline, and punishment. Research into this led to Foucault's discussions on disciplinary power and its capacity to shape docile, disciplined, productive citizenry to meet the demands of the progressing state (qtd. Stapleton and Myers 2015: 4). The nature and "violence" of this disciplinary power was looked into in the devising process by exploring torture methods. David led a discussion with the actors which looked into different torture methods that were deployed, mostly in prisons, which restricted the human senses to a level where ultimately the subjects would 'give in' to the fold.

The significant factor was how these torture methods managed to control the free will of citizens. The torture methods discussed included prolonged sensory deprivations that could drive subjects to a state of senselessness and insanity: deprivations of touch, hearing, sight, smell, taste were all methods through which persons could be rendered unthinking to a point where all they could think about would be recovering the lost sense.

Solitary confinement in prisons, was discussed. This exemplified how the depravity of both light and human contact for a prolonged period were enough to break a person's free will. In the attempts to discipline a prisoner of criminal tendencies these torture methods could also blur their sense of 'self' in the process.

The discussions ultimately led to exploring what the tools of control could be at play in the fictional world that needed to be created. A devised game played by the ensemble led to a breakthrough in finding and setting out the rules by which the worlds in Thought Curfew gained social control and rendered citizens of these worlds 'unthinking'.



IMPOSING A THOUGHT CURFEW: DISCOVERY THROUGH GAME

Exercise: What is explored in this devising exercise is what makes someone ‘unthinkingly compliant’ to new rule of law.

The actors are first divided into pairs. Each pair is given the task of coming up with a game that would make players unquestioningly compliant to their rules of law. The groups are prompted to think about the following when coming up with their games:

How could people be controlled?

How could individuals be made to follow arbitrary rules?

What would be the consequence/punishments for dissidents?

In pairs, the actors worked on creating playing fields in which the other ensemble members were supposed to play.

Results and Observations: Devised scenes started from scenes where a teacher gained control over a classroom full of kindergarten students, and expanded to worlds of more bizarre levels of authoritarian control.

Actors who led the games used similar kinds of techniques to manipulate the rest of the players. There were often rules laid out (e.g.: one game even had an extreme rule which disallowed players to blink!), and breaking the rules led to some form of punishment or exile from the team or community built within the game. Fear of exclusion, or the incentive of reward motivated the players to often ‘go with the flow’ of the games unquestioningly.

One game, in particular, (which is explored in detail overleaf), allowed for a breakthrough in understanding the dynamics of control.

Devising actors **Nadie** and **Duminda**, came up with this particularly thought provoking game. The rules of the game were simple, at least at the very outset. It began as a simple game of musical chairs. The players would move about the chairs as music was hummed, and would immediately take a seat once the music came to a halt. As the game progressed, however, its rules became more twisted and arbitrary. There were points at which some players were arbitrarily favored during the game owing to their physical attributes (e.g.: long hair), while the lack thereof created a clear disadvantage to other players. At various points of the game some players were arbitrarily provided more privileges over others owing to such attributes.

As the exercise prevailed, the ensemble started surmising reasons for these favored treatments and started acting differently towards one another as well as towards the authority figures controlling the situation. For example, there were moments during the game when Nadie and Duminda favored players that complied by their arbitrary rules while meting out punishments for the players who did not. The ensemble members were soon turning against each other; betraying each other and acting a particular way to be appraised by the authority figures.

All it took for the subjects to turn against each other was for the authority to marginalize and penalize certain individuals within the group and treat others with privilege. The authority figures had succeeded in making a breakthrough into controlling their subjects’ thought and behavior through arbitrary rule of law. The stress and unpredictability of this situation led to that group becoming ‘unthinking’. This world had cracked a code of communal control.

This game resonated with many real life examples the ensemble had either experienced themselves or studied. It helped them understand how and why a community could be rendered ‘unthinking’. Through participating in the repeated worlds that were created in this devising exercises, and by unpacking their own behavior in these worlds – behavior that they were sometimes ashamed of, the systemic process that led to a situation of a thought curfew was one that was being grasped, through experience and analyzed through discussion, by the ensemble.

They could now begin to create their own rules of law for the world of the play.



3. NEW WORLD NEW LANGUAGE

Setting Up The Speech Curfew

SPEECH CURFEW

Having reached a common understanding of the social dynamics that would be at play in Thought Curfew, the ensemble next ventured on to building a vocabulary for the world of the play.

In a preliminary discussion on torture methods, restrictions, deprivation and social control the group set out to devise the idea of a 'speech curfew'. Linguistic research showed that language is so powerful that it actually affects how one sees the world; in fact, it could also influence the way people think and behave (Marroquin, 4).

The ensemble then delved into exploring how the vocabulary of the world and the play be restricted, or limited in a manner that contributed to the inhabitants becoming unthinking. They attempted to uncover whether these speech restrictions applied could actually render people completely unthinking.

In order to explore this, the ensemble engaged in a devising exercise that attempted to come up with limitations on speech and vocabulary that could render people unthinking.

'If you can see that you cannot see

You can still see my child.

If you are scared by your thoughts

You are still thinking my child.

Now, my little one, Keep running'

Thought Curfew



IMPLEMENTING SPEECH CURFEWS

Exercise: Actors are first asked to come up with a list of 'languages' or speech curfews that could operate within a world and limit the inhabitants' thought. The actors were then asked to pick one or more of the speech curfews from the list they created in order to enact scenarios of the implementation of their speech curfews in a world.

Results and Observations: The suggested languages included: 1) 'yes language', where the only option for citizens was to accept any request made of them; 2) 'this/that language', where nothing and no one was specified but referred to only by demonstrative pronouns; 3) 'no-sex' language, where any sex related references would be censored or disallowed; 4) 'One word' language, where the world's entire vocabulary was limited to one word only through which they must find the means of communication; and many more.

In pairs, the actors devised scenes that depicted how worlds would operate under the aforementioned speech curfews. The devised scenes raised many issues such as how censorship of language and hindering clear communication could be deployed as a tool of social control.

One devised scene, for example, depicted a language where only favorable words could be used when describing the government. Any words that were not in favor, were censored, or people who chose to speak these words were punished. This devising scene threw up many insights into control and power that is brought about by limitation, confusion and violence. However, one such speech curfew that was created – the 'this/that' language – made it directly into the play, and so deserves to be explored in some detail.

THIS / THAT WORLD

In this world, actors **Pramila** and **Piumi** illustrated how society functioned with a speech curfew that limited people's vocabulary to using only demonstrative pronouns to refer to objects and people.

In a devised scene, an authoritarian figure first calls upon someone in the audience to come on stage. The person is addressed as 'that one' or 'the other one'. No one is certain as to who was required to come up as the person giving orders is deliberately vague. However the tension mounts because, though vague, the authoritarian figure is also impatient.

Ultimately, one person is singled out and given instructions to 'go there', 'pick that up' etc. The person being instructed is utterly bemused and confused and intimidated. The instructions seem important and the force behind the authoritarian figure is felt, but the action required remains vague. The actor following instructions becomes increasingly nervous and anxious to please but confused about what is being asked of her, and nervous about making mistakes.

The authority figure then gives one final instruction: 'go there, find that person among those people, and once that person is found, you must do that to them.'

The actor following the cryptic instructions, disappears and all the audience hears is someone being assaulted. The actor returns and then blends in with the crowd. A third person, visibly an official, appears and now questions the audience as to what happened. He gets no pointed answers, as they are only able to answer him with demonstratives and no names.

Results and Observations: The scene stirred a discussion on how language contributes directly to a state of unthinkingness. Through the exercise the vagueness of the language increased the power and impunity of the person using it, decreased the responsibility and accountability of the person acting upon it, and created confusion amongst those witnessing what happened. All of this began from the act of depersonalization that was at the heart of the This/That language.

The speech curfew imposed in this world, namely the 'this/ that language' depersonalizes and alienates the subjects of the world from conceptions of being an individual person. It disables a legal system to act against the crime committed as well, for the perpetrator is unnamed. The person's basic legal and human rights can be denied to them under such circumstances. The vagueness of this language results in people not being able to identify, relate to, or empathize with other people as individuals as everyone and everything remains 'unnamed'. The world that operates with this speech curfew is desensitized towards atrocities, as it can no longer put names or faces to anyone who is subject to violence.

The 'This/ That' world's language became apt to explore and develop further to understand the effect of speech on a progressive thought curfew.

This language became the language which the characters at Home – i.e. the family members of the little girl - descend into as they are slowly overtaken by the thought curfew. In the very first scene of the play, while the little girl sits with her family watching news on the TV, she begins to notice the subtle shift in language in those around her. The family members of the Home scene calmly describe the most unthinkable acts of violence they see on the TV merely as 'those things, done to those people, over there.' There are no faces, no names, no places, and no specifications. And, most importantly, there is no need to understand any further. The depersonalization makes this unnecessary. And there is no shock or discomfort. There are no questions asked. There is no compulsion to act. The depersonalization of the 'this/that' language makes all these reactions unnecessary.

In this manner world of Home descends into a state of 'unthinkingness' before the little girl's eyes.





4. INHABITING A NEW WORLD

Connecting Characters to Worlds

'The unthinkable began not so long ago

The unthinkable began not so far away

The unthinkable, as no one here will remember,

First went unnoticed.

It first began in our Family...'

Thought Curfew

CHARACTERS

The social dynamics and language operating within the world of Thought Curfew was falling into place. In order to build a tighter world, however, and in order to give more resonance to the characters and create a denseness to this problem of the 'thought curfew', and to create emotional investment in the story, the directors decided that the worlds being created needed to be connected, in some manner, back to the characters the Little Girl cared most deeply about – the people of her family.

The play was thus developed to take audiences on a journey through a child's perspective, as she questions the goings-on in the world of adults. A few of the bigger questions that the play asks is how people fall victim to a thought curfew.

Is it something that happens without people knowing?

Is it imposed?

Is it resisted?

Do people opt for a thought curfew?

Do people ask for a thought curfew?

Research shows how exposure to violence at high levels or across multiple contexts has been linked with emotional desensitization.

People can be exposed to this kind of violence in their homes – often through the multiple media channels now available to everyone. Theoretically, desensitization to violence represents a form of habituation, a well-established type of non-associative learning that results in diminished response to a stimulus after repeated exposure (Rankin et al., 2009).

The play therefore opens portraying a family, a social unit that everyone finds safety and comfort within, under usual circumstances. The family unit of the play comprises – Father, Elder Brother, Elder Sister, Brother-in-Law, Grandfather and Little Girl. From the naming convention it is clear that the perspective of everyone else is through the Little Girl.

These characters, and this family unit, are what first fall prey to the encroaching thought curfew.

Ruwanthie: In the short story, it was a father pursuing his daughter who was running away from the thought curfew. When we moved the idea to the theatre it was necessary to make it part of a bigger ensemble performance. I believe our decision to secure it within the family focusing on the character of the child, and to keep the relationship intimate and personal in the midst of this abstract world had to do with the emotional thread that was necessary for the story to resonate with an audience. Otherwise it would just become a mind game. This was why it was important for me to secure it within the family as a recognizable through line and personal journey.

David: There was an extremely ambitious landscape that the audience had to follow, from a domestic family setting; through to a crisis ridden war zone; through to a desolate and empty wasteland. Potentially having consistency with the points of empathy we were hoping to establish and maintain with the audience allowed us to have an incredible free rein in terms of constructing and dissolving the several landscapes around the central characters. The importance of the child was really interesting. Because when we first started I was thinking of the child as the subject of the play. That this would be the person we were watching, and we were watching things happen to the child. But by the time we got close to performing it I'd come to believe that the landscape itself was created by the child. So instead of looking at the child we are all watching the world through the child's eyes.

Cotterrell & De Chickera 11:31-13:42

FAMILY'S DESCENT TO A SPEECH CURFEW

Exercise: The actors are asked to improvise an everyday family setting as they come together in front of a television to watch the news. As the scene progresses, the actors' language is slowly inhibited, and they are asked to devolve into communicating with each other through the 'this/ that' language. This curfew is imposed upon all the actors, but one (the actor playing the child). Everyone else must now continue each other's conversations and proceed to comment on what is going on the television with this speech curfew at play.

Results and Observations: As the actors improvised the scene of a family that descended into a thought curfew through the 'this/that' language, it became clearer to the artists how the miscommunications, departures and tensions began to occur. As the language of the characters became more generic, less idiosyncratic and (ironically) more 'shared' – the distance between the characters widened. There were soon emerging micro aggressions towards one another, especially towards the child who could no longer speak the same language as the rest of the family. Tacitly, the family members seem to agree on an increasing level of disengagement, almost purposeful ignorance. Events on the news when

spoken of in the 'this/ that' language no longer carried the same weight, as they became 'those things happening to those people'. Everyone out 'there' in 'that world' which was separate from 'this' worlds became a generic, faceless, unimportant mass of 'them'. The family eventually devolved into being well informed but completely blasé and non-empathetic.

The only source of conflict, interruption and discomfort was the little girl – who was not yet subject to the thought curfew, not able to speak the language of her family and still trying to make meaningful conversation and create meaningful human contact. However, this impulse in the Little Girl alienated her from her family. The little girl turned to each member of the family in search of a familiarity or a connection and saw only emptiness and distance in their eyes.

As the family members mindlessly and apathetically consumed the atrocities in their outside world and pulled away from the one member of the group still asking pertinent and searching questions, all the while slowly descending into the 'this/that language, the play's opening scene emerged.

It was a scene that was quite uncannily familiar to all the artists.

What Thought Curfew attempts to capture in this first Home scene is a typical middle class family's apathetic kick-backs to matters of consequence that surround them. No matter what happens in politics, here is a family that believes they will have all the minimal necessities to keep them happy; nine-to-five jobs, evening television shows and relaxation with family and friends. Of course, being middle class they must also exhibit some token activism which they conveniently direct towards more secondary, trivial societal happenings, which do not threaten their position of privilege (in the play this tokenism is illustrated by their insistence on the principles of recycling).

While the family unit goes about their daily lives consuming all the chaos of the world remotely, doing nothing of consequence, losing their language, losing their connection between each other, but maintaining their middle-class amenities and lifestyles, it becomes clear they are slowly, yet surely, losing their ability to think.

Why a child? / Why the family?

In this play, a child navigates the thought curfew that so easily captures the minds of the adults around her.

The choice of a child as the central figure that navigates this situation was made because of the insatiable curiosity, questioning mind and open-mindedness that exist naturally within children. The child, therefore, becomes a tool that helps audiences unravel the state of 'unthinkingness' that they themselves might have gotten accustomed to.

The point of using the family was to show that thought curfews are most dangerous when mixed up with security, belonging and home.

In most of the prior research and case studies the ensemble had engaged in, such as stories from the Rwandan Genocide or the race riots in Sri Lanka, it was elicited how thought curfews could begin unnoticed in the circles we know best, amongst the people we trust the most. Many adolescents could be exposed to violence in their own schools, communities or homes. This ensures that the prejudices of the previous generations are passed on to the younger generations.



This 'threat' becomes the central impetus of the plot. As the Little Girl runs away from the thought curfew, she is essentially running away from the threat of turning into an unthinking person, like the adults around her.

Naturally, there is less danger of this happening when the people around her are strangers to her. There is significantly more danger of this happening when the people around her are somewhat familiar to her.

With this objective in mind, a structure for the play emerged – which was that, each member of the Little Girl's family - the Father, Brother, Sister, Brother-in-law, and Grandfather – would pose a threat to the Little Girl – a threat of drawing her into a different kind of thought curfew. For this construct to work, each of these family members would need to reappear in the worlds of thought curfew that the girl travels to as she flees her home. Through this re-emergence of a familiar character in an unfamiliar setting, the Little Girl would be susceptible to a greater degree of threat from the spreading thought curfew.

In this manner, the 'family' provided a very important structural and emotional base for the journey of the play.

WORLDS & VULNERABILITIES: CONNECTING THE DOTS

Connecting the outside worlds with each family member needed to have a rationale though. And this was the next challenge.

Research, further devising, experimentation in the rehearsal room and discussions led to the emergence of these connections. It was decided that each family member would have a weakness or a vulnerability, and these weaknesses or points of vulnerability would link them to a specific world.

It was decided that if these family members are connected to a particular world through their most vulnerable characteristic, these very weaknesses, would be most easily manipulated to make them unthinking – or subject to a thought curfew.

The next step, in the development of the play was to narrow down and identify what the links between the family members and the worlds were, and to work out how exactly the Little Girl would encounter these characters in these worlds.



Ruwanthi: As an exercise we were trying to think about the clear manifestations of thought curfews within groups of people; defined either by their belief system, vocation or their life circumstances. David and I came up with a list and there were two things that determined the final selection of worlds of the home, refugee, humanitarian or development aid, military and religion. One determining factor was our own insight and knowledge into these worlds. The second thing was the balance between laying these worlds together. There had to be some degree of difference and some degree of carrying over or through line. Therefore part of it was to do with the structure and balance and part of it was to do with our knowledge, pursuits as directors outside this particular theatre production; the bigger questions we were asking of each other.

David: We were obviously making caricatures of worlds and the human experience, but we wanted it to be rooted in observation. It was obviously being exaggerated or parodied, but it was not without some degree of credible truth beneath it. So we ended up deciding on the environments based on what we felt we could still claim, while still continuing to maintain its sense of credibility in terms of its origins. We felt we had to have enough information to offer some confidence that we were drawing from landscapes that really existed. The choice of the landscapes was also to do with the transition that we wanted the audience and characters to go through; from an environment of stability and governed space through to a point of isolation and complete vulnerability.

Cotterrell & De Chickera 33:07-37:02

DECIDING THE WORLDS

The complexity within the play's creation also lay in the fact that within the play's universe, the ensemble had to create several parallel worlds. Once the social dynamic of a world being overtaken by a thought curfew had been understood by the ensemble, research and discussions revolved around what situations/ institutions in the world, as we know it, were already under some sort of thought policing. This meant looking at our immediate society for evidence of existence of jargons, thought processes, behavior rituals, restriction, rules, regulations, and punishments etc. within defined communities of persons.

Taking these factors into consideration, the worlds that the little girl passes through in the play were finally narrowed down to: worlds of Refugees, Military, Development Aid and Religion. The discussions and devised scenarios through which the worlds were created, alongside the characters' navigation within these worlds are illustrated over the next few pages.

REFUGEE CAMPS

David and Ruwanthie in their decision to include refugee camps as a site of the ‘unthinkable’ brought to light how this was a space defined by virtue of the fact that it lies suspended between worlds.

A refugee camp is a temporary space that people occupy – even if they occupy it for a lifetime. Inhabitants of a refugee camp have little or no decision making power regarding their state of being or their future. Their power and agency is limited to very immediate things – and their focus is mainly on survival, moment to moment.

The actors were initially asked to engage in visual research on life in refugee camps. The images that the actors brought back to the rehearsal room following their visual research had recurring themes: barbed wire fences; clothing lines; people in queues; (see images below). These images illustrated how refugees seemed to live in a state of limbo in these camps, in a space that was both physically and psychologically temporary. To further investigate this state, Ruwanthie initiated the following exercise for the actors.

Making Choices in a State of Limbo

Exercise: This exercise was aimed at understanding the mindset of people living in refugee camps, and exploring how their decision making capacities are impinged upon in a state of limbo.

The actors are first prompted to close their eyes and imagine themselves as refugees at a refugee camp, stripped off of everything they knew or had. Following this, they are provided cues to improvise: ‘On the left is a line for visas, on the right a cue for food.’ The actors pick whichever they feel was a priority and resume standing in line. The stakes are slowly raised at different points with different cues: ‘The visas are coming, but your child is starving’. These kinds of prompts and phrases are repeated, mixing it up at different times to prompt actors to make their choices as to what queue they preferred stand in.

Results and Observations: The actors were in conflict as they battled their minds to pick between their bare necessities: food or visas, water or rest. The exercise effectively proved how refugees can be rendered unthinking owing to being deprived of their basic necessities; the only thing that was running in the actors’ minds during the exercise was how and when they would receive their next meal. They were stuck in a world with no agency, where they had to rely on those in charge for basic necessities.

After a certain point, the actors themselves were exhausted of the instructions and switching queues for either food or visas or water or any other urgent, critical need they may have.

It was visible how the repetitive nature of their routine, coupled with little promise of actually acquiring what they needed, eventually led their thoughts to be suspended; the actors no longer actively engaged in the decision making and just ‘went along’ with whichever instruction without much hope of a positive result.

Their self-imposed thought curfew was almost a refuge in this situation. It was not just impossible, but inadvisable to think further than your immediate needs. In order to survive for long periods of time within an environment of a refugee camp, one had to maintain a suspended kind of thought process.

This exercise brought into focus how the character of the Father in the play was most affected by the challenge of this world, as he was burdened by the responsibility of looking out for his whole family. Should he prioritize food to feed his hungry children? Or should he queue up for visas that could possibly get his family out of their current situation? The actor playing the Father shared with the rest of the ensemble the sense of paralysis and panic he felt when improvising this scene.

The decision was taken then, that the character of the Father would be the one to create the linkage into the Refugee scene, as he was rendered the most powerless within it and was thus most vulnerable to the threat of a thought curfew.

DEVELOPMENT

The Development World – or the world of Development Aid was identified by David and Ruwanthie as a world that they wanted to explore in terms of the restrictions of thought and behavior. For several years now they had both been observing and also deeply critical of the immovable and bureaucratic structures erected in this world ostensibly set up on the grounds of humanity but ironically often lacking in human responsiveness.

In the rehearsal set aside to discuss this world, Ruwanthie began by telling the cast a story of a real-life incident. The story involved a development aid worker stationed in Sri Lanka who, during a human crisis, had ignored protocol in order to save a person's life. While travelling in an office vehicle through a town where a bomb suddenly went off, the worker had insisted on stopping the vehicle in order to help an elderly injured lady fallen by the road. The worker was subsequently sacked on account of what she did.

Security procedures of the development aid world such as 'Stay Safe' protocols strictly warn its volunteer workers to get to safety first, prior to helping those in need during emergency situations (terror attacks etc.). While these protocols are aimed at minimizing the risks these employees face and

increasing their capacities to deliver humanitarian services at all times, the 'unthinking' compliance to these rules could make people lose their basic human compassion.

Protocols such as these were examined closer when guest artist Dilrukshi Fonseka was brought in to help the cast create this scene and understand this world. Dilrukshi is an actress with experience working in the Development World and therefore Ruwanthie prompted an improvised scene where she could illustrate some such protocols.

Following Protocol

Exercise: The actors had to improvise a scene where a child was found by a humanitarian worker. The set up was that two actors would be development aid workers, who stumble upon a lost child. How would they respond to this on the job? The situation was then further complicated by adding in an emergency situation i.e. a bomb explosion in this case. How would the actors now respond to the child in response to the new event now unfolding before them?

Results and Observations: When improvising the scene Dilrukshi was aware of the language that needed to be used; she acted according to the behavior that was approved and sanctioned in the development world in this kind of situation. For example, when she first found the child, she restrained herself from any tactile contact with the child as per protocol, to avoid any infectious diseases the child could possibly have and to also protect herself from any accusations of inappropriate touch. The actor remained aloof, although it was visible that the child would have found more comfort had she shown more affection.

When transposing this scenario to the play, Ruwanthie and David decided on the two characters of the Sister and the Brother-in-law to play the roles of an international development aid worker and her local assistant respectively. Using Dilrukshi's previous improvisation of the interaction between a development aid worker and a child as reference, the Sister's character was brought in to devise a scene between an International Aid worker and the lost Little Girl. As the scene progressed, the Brother-in-law too was introduced into this scene to assist the International aid worker as her translator from a local NGO. In deploying these two characters the devised scene also played on the imbalanced power

dynamics between the sister and brother-in-law in the family. On the one hand their power dynamic was displayed through the professional chain of command with the Sister i.e. the international development aid worker being in the superior advisory position over the Brother-in-law; the local NGO representative. On the other hand the power dynamics were also brought in through language, with the Sister operating primarily in English, and the Brother-in-law primarily operating in Sinhala while comically fumbling his way through translations.

As the two actors playing the development aid workers thus discussed the 'case' of the child, their jargon and references to the child depersonalized the child: the child was reduced to a number and new 'file'. The most horrific behavior came when the explosion, i.e. the emergency situation was played out. The development workers followed protocol and brought themselves to safety first, leaving the child behind. What became clear to the artists was that most of these protocols that they strictly complied to were in place to protect the workers from any danger and yet they stripped them of empathy and spontaneous responsiveness.

MILITARY

The discussion of the world of the military and its thought curfews was initiated by David through his experience of being sent to Afghanistan as a war artist. This exposure drew David into developing a deep interest in the workings of the military in overseas conflict zones.

The rehearsal in which the artists devised the scene from the military began with a story that David narrated to the cast. He recalled how, one day he had been engaging in game of chess with one of the military men in the camp when they had been disturbed by the sound of a distant explosion. Before David could look in the direction of the sound, his soldier-friend was kneeling in a threat-focused shooting position, rifle cocked.

David discussed, using this scenario the difference of reactions between trained soldiers versus a civilian. The soldier's reaction, was so well trained and drilled into the military man's system, that it only took milliseconds for his body to instinctively 'return to' his trained position of defense. Every muscle in a soldier's body knows what to do so well, that it doesn't require any thought. His actions precede

his thoughts. In fact, his body is so impeccably trained for these situations, that a soldier does not require thought to respond. One of the factors that enable soldiers to endure terrible conditions and high casualties is their discipline (Sheffield 2). Military discipline makes the difference between a mob and an army. It is a form of behavior that is the consequence of intense and repetitive training and indoctrination designed to ensure compliance to orders above all else. Thought, opinion, doubt in this situation could literally mean disaster. It is not entertained at all.

In the family, the Brother with his compliance to authority was seen as the character most vulnerable to befall this kind of thought curfew. Thus, he appeared in the military world as the soldier who had undergone this rigorous military training. The brother was characterized in the play with the 'do or die' attitude which became the thought curfew of the Military World.

RELIGION

The world of religion was chosen as a site for the thought curfew because of the unthinkingness that is associated with extreme forms of faith in any religion. The fact that faith and religiosity are also the root of many global conflicts compounded this choice. The impact of religion and religious thinking on human functioning and evolution is a captivating intellectual debate. The institutions of religion and their ability to bring people into the unquestioning belief that their particular institutional power system is true, morally right, superior etc. was the premise of the world of religious thought curfew. Karl Marx, for example, called religion the ‘opium of the masses’. A cognitive hypothesis is that religion is a by-product of a number of cognitive and social adaptations which have been extremely important in human development (Hood 4).

Here was a world that could finally consume the character of the Grandfather, who had thus far been safe from the thought curfew. The world of religion would become the grandfather’s weakness owing to his devotion to spirituality. The Grandfather being connected to this world, and the Little Girl encountering this world right at the end was also

necessary for the increasing threat of the thought curfew to the Little Girl. For, it was the Grandfather who she trusted most. And it was the Grandfather who had initially told her to flee her family and the thought curfew. And so the Little Girl would feel safe with the Grandfather. Turning him into a victim of the thought curfew was the steepest challenge the Little Girl faced. He proved to be her biggest threat, because her trust in him was her greatest vulnerability.

Creating the World of Religion

Most religions adhere to their own language, rituals, and rules. This gave the artists sufficient ingredients to create the world of the play. The ritual behavior seen in collective worship, for example, makes people settle into a state of wanting to repeat behavior before thinking or without thinking. Dancing, singing and achieving trance-like states are still exhibited in some world religions practiced today.

Creating the world of religion, however, was difficult for the cast. It was the last world that was

created. The breakthrough came during a devising session when actors mockingly chanted popular songs to the tone of religious chants. During this game it occurred to the ensemble that this was how religion could render people unthinking. Years of indoctrinated prayer rituals, and chants that were passed down through generations of unquestioning, god-fearing people would lead to a culture of religious thought curfew. Another subject discussed was religious fundamentalism and how it calls for obedience and faith when things are not understood. – Questioning, in such an environment, is often seen as deviant or inconvenient or a betrayal. It renders people ‘unthinking’.

In this manner, through research, discussions and devised scenarios the ensemble made several breakthroughs that ultimately enabled the creation of the worlds subject to thought curfews in the overall play Thought Curfew. The language of Thought Curfew was also beginning to emerge through the worlds thus created, held together by some of the principles of language decided early on in the devising process.

The ensemble’s next step, was to create the physical vocabulary that would help them embody their characters and inhabit these specific worlds believably.



5. NEW WORLD NEW PEOPLE

Embodying Characters to Inhabit Worlds

'The child had never seen so many people,

So many people...

Standing so close but not talking

Standing so close but not talking

Looking so tired and not sleeping

Looking so tired and not sleeping

Facing one direction but not moving.

Facing one direction but not moving.'

Thought Curfew

PHYSICAL VOCABULARY

There was an inherent uncanniness in this play, with the family or its doppelgangers reappearing – as themselves but not as themselves, in the different worlds of the play. These 'reappearances' of characters was portrayed not only by the actors on stage, but also through the animations projected onscreen creating a kind of visual echo that resonated with the theme of repetition that ran within Thought Curfew.

In order to secure this effect created through these visual 'echoes' that recurred throughout the play, the directors deployed an acting technique that enabled actors to quickly embody the essence of their characters in the different worlds they appeared in. This had a dual benefit to the play. On the one hand it provided the actors with a rigorous physical grid through which to approach their performance, on the other hand it provided the audience visual aides which helped them create connections between the characters as the worlds around the characters changed.

The technique adopted for this process was the creation of several 'home positions' for actors - which essentially meant, creating a limited and very specific physical vocabulary for each of the characters to move within. Four such 'Home positions' were created for all the characters of the play who were ultimately subject to a thought curfew – (ie every character, other than the Little Girl).

This acting technique adopted in the process of the play was also in line with the theme of the play – the limiting or restricting of thought – because it set stringent limits on the physical vocabulary at the actors' disposal.

The actors were introduced this method by further exploring how the compulsion to repeat could be an inherent, primordial tendency in the unconscious that impels an individual to repeat certain actions. This was best exemplified by a case study brought into rehearsal by David (see overleaf)

MARCO RUBIO'S REPEATED RIFF

"Let's dispel this myth that Barack Obama doesn't know what he's doing, he knows exactly what he's doing."

(Rubio, 2016).

Marco Rubio, Florida senator, made this statement during the Republican debate in 2016 responding to a question by New Jersey governor Chris Christie. Instead of answering the questions that were put before him, Rubio repeated this phrase, this soundbite, over and over again without even seeming to notice what he was doing. Like a broken record, every single time he was put on the spot in the debate, Rubio repeated what Christie called his "25 second memorized speech". Rubio had memorized this speech so much, that he found himself automatically returning to it, over and over again when faced with hard questions to tackle. Rubio was repeating his response with no thought whatsoever going into his answer. The most uncanny part of his response was how whilst repeating the same answer over and over, he also resorted to repeating the exact same physical movements every single time.

It was quite clear that a thought curfew was at play in the aforementioned scenario. The scenario exemplified the state to which the human mind and body could be trained and conditioned enough for it to simply act, or react, in certain ways that were devoid of thought. The senator had been

indoctrinated with a certain vocabulary that he returned to, which in turn became his habitual resting place. And just like a habit, his behavior appeared to be routine, repetitive, and occur subconsciously.

The notions of repetition and habit became the key words that we took into rehearsal with us in relation to creating home positions for the play. Judith Butler, speaking on performativity of gender describes gender itself as a stylized repetition of acts, an imitation of what are the dominant conventions of gender. Butler argues that "the act that one does, the act that one performs is, in a sense, an act that's been going on before one arrived on the scene" (qtd. Butler, 14). She posits that repetition is what sets the norm.

This is something that resonated in the way repetition came into play in many scenarios the ensemble looked into – the physical training of military personnel, the religious rituals passed down through generations, the procedures and bureaucracy that needed to be adhered to in the development world, the repetitive state of limbo

of the world of refugees. In all of these situations, there was either a training or a external condition that imposed upon the human being a physical and mental restriction that overrode the natural and individual impulses of a person.

However, with this discovery and this path forward, was also an immediate challenge. How could this level of physical unthinkingness be achieved and integrated into performance in a short period of time? And then, how could the artists be rendered unthinking and yet acting and reacting?

David: To hold together a play which is so dispersed across landscapes we decided to try and maintain some consistent tropes that evolved rather than appeared to be invented each time for each scene. Obviously this related to the limited number of actors who had to play a number of roles; it related to certain forms of language; and it also related to movements of the actors which had a certain stylistic effect. That was something that also acted as a bridge between the live action on stage and the simulated action in the panoramic screen the actors were working in front of. We started from the way in which physical behavior can be rehearsed and standardized. While this was something that you can observe in dance, this is also something that can be observed, for example, in the military. Something about the way in which soldiers are trained where the continuous repetition of actions or drilling is a way to actually build in new memories of physical posture, physical behavior, decision making and reaction. So that under stress, these things are remembered faster than you can actually make a new decision. This enables you to act fast under stress. So in this short rehearsal time, we tried to do the same thing with the actors where we tried to ask them to build in physical vocabularies which they were consciously aware of; which they repeated and repeated until they became embodied.

Ruwanthie: This part of the actor training was quite a challenge, because what I had been used to working with, when working with actors, and also what the actors were used to working with when developing a character, was to build from the inside out. You begin with convictions about this character; you delve deep into this person's background, history, emotions to build some kind of truth from inside. Then this spreads out into a kind of behavior, physique and energy which then is the character. There were challenges that we worked within in this production, which were challenges of time - it was a very short play, ultimately, to fit into the festival's time constraints; challenges of space - sharing stage space with other productions and then, within the play with video, which meant that there had to be a seamlessness between live performance and video performance. This was a challenge for myself and the performers. So in order to progress the visual work of the play with the animation etc. we had to work with 'home positions', or stances, or unthinking behavior that actors could just settle into. This was conceptually important as well because this was the kind of unthinking behavior that we were talking of in the play. As a theatre director, this was really interesting as I had to teach my actors how to move from their home positions, or their body, into their characterization and into a sense of who they were embodying; and a sense of truth in their performance.

HOME POSITIONS AND CREATING REPERTOIRE

From Sanford Meisner's techniques of repetition that train actors to actively listen to each other through repetition, to basic line readings that actors do on a regular basis to memorize lines, to faster gabbles (very fast repetition of only the words of a dialogue sans emotion or punctuation), repetition is a technique that is not new to acting.

In the process of creating Thought Curfew, however, the artists had to explore, expand and deepen this familiar technique of repetition. Because repetition – with its links to automatic mindless behavior – was not just a technique of performance it was also the subject matter of it. It was directly linked to thought curfews and communities being led and controlled through these curfews of thought.

HOME POSITION ROUTINE

Exercise: In this initial exercise, actors are asked to take a few minutes to create three new positions/ habits or quirks for themselves. What they chose had to have some connection to their character – in terms of personality trait. The idea was to start a completely normal movement, but to try and capture an element which the actors could begin to repeat gradually. In addition to the three positions, the actors each also had to have one home position – which is the position of natural rest of the character and the position from which any of these other positions could stem.

For example, actor A's three new habits could be 1) standing giving more weight to his left foot, 2) crossing his arms and 3) bending forwards. His home position would be standing up straight with his arms at his sides.

The actors are then encouraged to find ways to move from the home position to each of the three new positions/ habits to another. Initially the actors are asked to move from the home position to each of the other three positions – (1-2-1, 1-3-1, 1-4-1). Then they are asked to move from the Home position through all the other 3 positions back into the home

position (1-2-3-4-1). Then as they become more familiar with these positions they are pushed into arbitrarily sequencing of the positions. However, what was really important was that, however long the sequence lasted, it would always begin and end with the home position.

For example, actor A's sequence could be a movement from position 1-3-2-1, and they would end in the very position they had begun.

The actors were asked to explore the intricacies of the physical transition from each position to another and also understand the settling of the body into the different home positions. Many hours were spent on this kind of repetitive exercise. After several days of practicing these home position routines, the actors had mastered the exact positioning, stance and expressions of each of the positions. Through countless repetitions, the actors began to own the positions more naturally – and were able to move in and out of them without much thought.

The next step of this exercise was incorporating these positions in moving from world to world.



INCORPORATING HOME-POSITIONS IN WORLDS

The home position of each character was the position that the actor would rest in, return to in-between movement or dialogue. So whatever repertoire of motions or habits the characters created for themselves, they always remained within a distinct, limited and easily recognizable body of movement. Further they would also constantly return to their home positions to rest.

The body language of these positions was directly linked to the essence of the character being portrayed. Furthermore, these positions were all established in the first scene where all six characters appeared together as a family.

Subsequently, as the characters of the central family began to reappear in ones or twos or groups as other characters in the parallel worlds subject to the thought curfew, they maintained a connection through this limited physical vocabulary and these home positions. It was this resonance in physical stance that created connections between the Little Girl and the strangers she met in the frightening worlds she fled into.

For example:

The Father had three positions, each stemming from his role and responsibility of 'protector' within his family. These positions of the Protector-Father then re-emerged in the refugee world (which was the world linked to his character in the play). The Little Girl finds herself drawn inexplicably to a refugee man who stands in line waiting for food – because the man (played by the same actors who plays her own father) has a physical resonance to the character of her own father.



In this manner, all the characters (except for the Little Girl) created a repertoire of stances which they constructed all their movement and choreography around and which they used repeatedly throughout the play in their performance.

However, that wasn't all. The stances picked by the characters for their physical vocabulary were not just an indication of their predominant characteristics or the role they played in life.

On another deeper, psychological level, the physical stances and positions revealed the link between the character and the thought curfew that they ultimately succumbed to. And this link would be the character's greatest point of vulnerability – which, the artists agreed, would be the quickest way through which to push a person into a condition of non-thinking.

If we were to take the previous example of the father – the father's primary role of Protector of the family is also his greatest vulnerability. Which is why the Protector-Father reappears in the Refugee world. Because in the Refugee world, men like the protector father are unable to protect or provide

for their families. And this catastrophe makes them most vulnerable to being subject to a thought curfew – a condition of non-thinking, mindlessness – which could show itself in complete paralysis and immobility or violent aggression and reaction.

If we were to take another example, in the Development Aid world, the physical vocabulary of the international aid worker (the little girl's sister) and the local NGO representative (the little girl's brother-in-law) are both heavily policed by protocols of right or wrong touch. The stances they picked, therefore had to do with ways in which they would position themselves when coming into contact with the child. This 'unthinking' adherence to protocol also resonates with the kinds of selective liberal concerns and token activism that these two characters give importance to in the setting of the Home (e.g.: the sister's concern about the 'need to recycle') over basic understanding and empathy. Their home positions would also be revealing about the kind of power dynamic between the sister and her husband, in their marital relationship: the Sister obviously wielding more power over her husband, as does the international aid worker over the local assistant.

In the military world the young soldier cannot look in any other direction than that which he has been commanded to. Within the family setting, in the very first scene of the play the Litte Girls' brother is shown to be a character who adheres to the authority and hierarchy within the family. It is almost as if he maintains order within the siblings while ensuring that no one undermines their father's paternal authority. This defining feature is what makes him vulnerable to the thought curfew of the Military world. He easily falls in line as a 'disciplined' soldier who heeds nothing but the orders of his superiors and someone who defends the status quo above all else. When the thought curfew reached him, the brother's body manifested itself in a repertoire of military positions orchestrated with military precision. His body language, as a soldier in the Military world and as a brother in the Home scene, was built on stances and gestures of respect, authority, rank, and compliance.

LIVE PERFORMANCE AND ANIMATION

The use of home positions and a limited, defined and predictable vocabulary of movement for each of the characters was important for the theme of the play – to portray the restricted thinking of the characters.

It was also imperative to have in place because of the interaction between the live performance and the projected animated landscapes which were created for the characters to inhabit and move through the play in their performance.

Right throughout the rehearsal process, the physical positions created by the actors in rehearsal were being fed back to animators and visual artists who were incorporating these aspects in creating the visual backdrops for the worlds.

Similar to an animated GIF that plays back in a sequence of images, the actors' stances and sequences of movement - both individually and as a group – were being collected into a body of material that was being fed into the animated visual landscape of each world.

The family whilst onstage as refugees, were themselves the thousands of silhouetted refugees in a barren land that was projected onscreen. The brother

guarding the wall, was thus the figure of the many faceless other soldiers who formed the backdrop of an army that stretched out behind him, in the military world.

With this repertoire of home positions, the repetitions of movement and the visual doppelgangers what were created, Thought Curfew managed to access a degree of uncanny eeriness throughout the play. The reproduction of meaninglessness – or was it the meaningless reproduction of something or another helped create the atmosphere of unthinkingness that was the subject matter of the play. This helped grasp the focal issue of the play which is how entire societies can be rendered unthinking.

Training actors' bodies through repetition, in this manner, also had another impact on the play. It gave the cast an immediate and felt understanding of the power of control through the setting of physical limitations. The constant limits set on words and speech within this play helped the cast understand the power that constrained speech has over human responsiveness. The repetitive ideology which each member of community had to adhere to in each

world gave the cast insight into the status quo of each world – and their individual placement within it. What was also abundantly clear in these worlds controlled by thought curfews was that straying from the set ideology would lead to consequences; a lack of protection, a lack of belonging, a lessening of privilege or even a meting out of punishments or expulsion. Hence, the members of these communities or worlds are demanded unquestioning obedience to the binding rationale set out in each of their worlds – even when the rationale limits their natural and individual instincts as human beings. Through this compliance – and through this repeated compliance the people of these worlds are inevitably rendered unthinking, initially in day to day matters and then incrementally in larger life and death situations too. The emergence of a Thought Curfew is really just a matter of time.



6. NEW WORLD 'NEW NORMAL'

Reflecting Living in The Thought Curfews

CONTEMPORARY RESONANCE

Thought Curfew was staged at the 4th Ubumuntu Theatre Festival at the Kigali Genocide Memorial Amphitheatre in 2018. The production was met with positive reviews and responses from its international audience. At the time, however, the creative team and ensemble had little time to reflect on their own process owing to the limited time within which the production had to be devised and staged. The play which dealt with the unthinkable was once performed and then forgotten.

Events in Sri Lanka, and the world, over the years that followed, however, have proved Thought Curfew worthy of further reflection and analysis.

On Easter Sunday, 2019 nine suicide bombers detonated their devices in six locations around the island of Sri Lanka. More than 250 people were killed almost instantly – the majority of them while they were praying. The Easter terror attacks have now become marked as one of the most macabre terrorist atrocities in the world. There was a sense of shock in the country and around the world

compounded by the fact that the attacks seemed to have come out of the blue. Suspicion, paranoia and islamophobia almost instantly seeped into the country following the event and language seemed insufficient to communicate what had just happened: the unthinkable.

A year later, in 2020, the world witnessed what seemed to be an absolutely incomprehensible and unthinkable situation globally. Within days and weeks the entire world was caught in the grip of a global pandemic and global panic that was debilitating economies; causing rising death tolls; halting all travel; closing down borders; and disrupting everyday life as we knew it. A world of no physical contact between humans may seem like something out of a dystopian fiction. Yet, it very soon became the reality. Before COVID-19 this kind of behavior would have simply been unthinkable. Yet, 2 meters between people; one way systems; personal protective equipment; plastic screens on supermarket tills all very soon became the 'new normal'.

'In this terribly moving mass of unmoving people.

Everyone has the same face.

Is this the Thought Curfew?

Is this the unthinkable?

Is it truly upon us?'

Thought Curfew

Parallel to the enforced measures of social distancing, tens of thousands of people around the world began protesting alongside the 'Black Lives Matter' movement against the death of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man killed in police custody in the United States in June 2020. Footage of an officer kneeling on Mr. Floyd's neck for nine minutes as he pleaded for breath, sickened not just the US, but the world, and triggered mass protests against this 'unthinkable' act of violence.

In the US, treatment of migrants has been brought into focus over the last year with news of 'severely neglected' children detained in what have been called squalid conditions (bbc.com) as well as numerous deaths at the US-Mexico border. Reporters who visited migrant detention centers in Texas claim to have seen migrant children 'held in cages', with approximately twenty children in one enclosure (Chotiner 1). That this would happen in one of the most developed countries of the world is unthinkable.

Thus we are living at a time, when the unthinkable is unveiling itself right before our eyes.

The same kind of research and analysis that went into creating the world of Thought Curfew, is now necessary to look inward. Maybe it will alert us to the fact that the world of Thought Curfew has become the unthinkable, unthinking world that we all now inhabit. The time has come therefore, for us to resist the thought curfews that engulf our world, by starting to rethink our roles and responsibilities in society.

*'The little girl had a thought.
And that was all she needed.'*

Thought Curfew

EMPATHY & RISK

stages
theatre
group