

*“Among the relics of the Anthropocene, therefore, will be the fallout of our atomic age, the crushed foundations of our cities, the spines of millions of intensively farmed ungulates, and the faint outlines of some of the billions of plastic bottles we produce each year - the strata that contain them precisely dateable with reference to the product-design archives of multinationals. Philip Larkin famously proposed that what will survive of us is love. Wrong. What will survive of us is plastic, swine bones and lead-207, the stable isotope at the end of the uranium-235 decay chain.”*

*- Robert Macfarlane, Underland*

*Hundreds + Thousands* is our sophomore project together. Collaborating artistically since 2014, our artistic practice has been concerned with alternative ways of seeing, communal and participative encounters, and relational politics in the theatre.

This creation began in 2018 but has encountered many turns and upheavals, resulting in different serendipitous discoveries (notwithstanding much frustration and disappointment), and iterations of a work that organically evolved over a slower-than-expected process. These included versions of this performance, photographs, a video, a website, and an online engagement process with a big group of participants in different cities.

Over the pandemic, we came across numerous people who have developed deeply personal relationships with plants. Plants became our meditative companions even as we ourselves lived like potted plants during lockdown. As we were forced to slow down, some of us began to pay attention to minute shifts in light and air qualities in our apartments, changes in our bodily and thought patterns, new buds sprouting and old leaves withering.

We also learnt of other artists as well as personnel working in other fields such as scientific and social projects that also involve plants and ecology. We began to appreciate that this common interest is rooted in our increasing anxieties over the climate catastrophe. Understanding plants better is one way in which we,

each in our own small ameliorative ways, cope with the overwhelming sense of disaster.

Gradually, far from needing to create a unique work of art, we also began to be interested in the knowledge of others, considering a network of co-authorship in which people think together, if only so that we feel less helpless ourselves.

In *Hundreds + Thousands*, we ask ourselves how we might be able to displace ourselves to catch a glimpse of the other. As this is a performance *for* people and plants, *with* people and plants, we wonder what kind of language is needed for us to listen, to see and to speak to/with plants.

For us, the title “Hundreds and Thousands” is a reminder of the overabundance of things that exist (in nature or man-made), the vastness of infinity, the great history of the earth and the universe in which humans are but a blip. What if we can ‘see’ together the times and spaces before the human epoch, or long after humans exist?

We want to approach ‘seeing’ as a perceptual process that is based on more than sight. To see is also to sense with the body. To gaze at something or someone is also to empathise with them. To listen is also to ‘see’ what is not immediately apparent: gaps, the in-between, what is absent or what is actually present even if it is invisible.

We might be able to choreograph a sense of empathy by reorganising the way we perceive time, bodies and materiality, when what is seen is also felt, when the one seeing is also being seen, when objects can gaze back at the subject, or when identities become fluid.

Listening to, breathing with, waiting for... performance happens at the moment when subjects present themselves to one another fully, when a movement out of (or into) stillness reveals the rich layers of relationship between things. In such a space, transformation becomes a possibility.