

abstract:

Keeping Theatre Alive and Live: A Provocation.

Reflecting on my Master of Design project, a staging of Sophocles' *Antigone* during the COVID-19 crisis in Aotearoa, New Zealand, this provocation invites participants to consider whether the live theatre experience is worth saving in the current climate, when digital forms are replacing the in-person experience?

Responding to the disruptions of performance caused by the pandemic, my research focused on designing and deploying a dramaturgical and scenographic methodology. The resulting method, Pandemic/Epidemic Embodied Performance ('PEEP'), enabled a group of actors to stage this theatre production as a live event. Performed within a large Perspex box, in a non conventional theatre space, adhering to health and safety protocols, *Antigone* highlighted the political and social concerns generated by the pandemic through its use of both scenographic and dramaturgical choices. The audiences of *Antigone* were invited to reflect on the thematic crisis of the play in the box, while reflecting on the COVID crisis, as they were reflected on the surface of the glass box. The week following the production, the presence of COVID 'cases in the community' caused large scale disruptions and cancellations of live theatre performances in New Zealand. If the unpredictable nature of the pandemic continues to cause uncertainty for practitioners and audiences of theatres globally, what might our responses be as dramaturgs and scenographers to ensure that theatre can survive as a live art form? After a brief explanation of my project, I invite the audience to respond with pictures, diagrams, questions, solutions, and arguments in consideration of this provocation.

bio:

Holly holds a Bachelor of Arts in Drama and History from The University of Auckland, and a Master of Design, First Class Honours, from Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand. Her Masters research focused on seeking creative solutions to maintain the liveness of theatre in the COVID-19 pandemic, by staging a production of Sophocles' ancient Greek tragedy, *Antigone*. In 2021, Holly was awarded the AUT Doctoral Scholarship to carry out her PhD research, building upon the work conducted during her Master of Design. This PhD research proposes to seek further potential solutions for future-proofing theatre during times of crisis. Holly has presented her research at international conferences. Two book chapters are set to be published discussing her Masters research and ancient Greek Theatre, and another co-authored with her mother Dr Jane Luton, discussing theatre and young people. Holly has worked in the Theatre and Performing Arts industry for several years in New Zealand, performing as an actor, and working as a director, production, and stage manager.