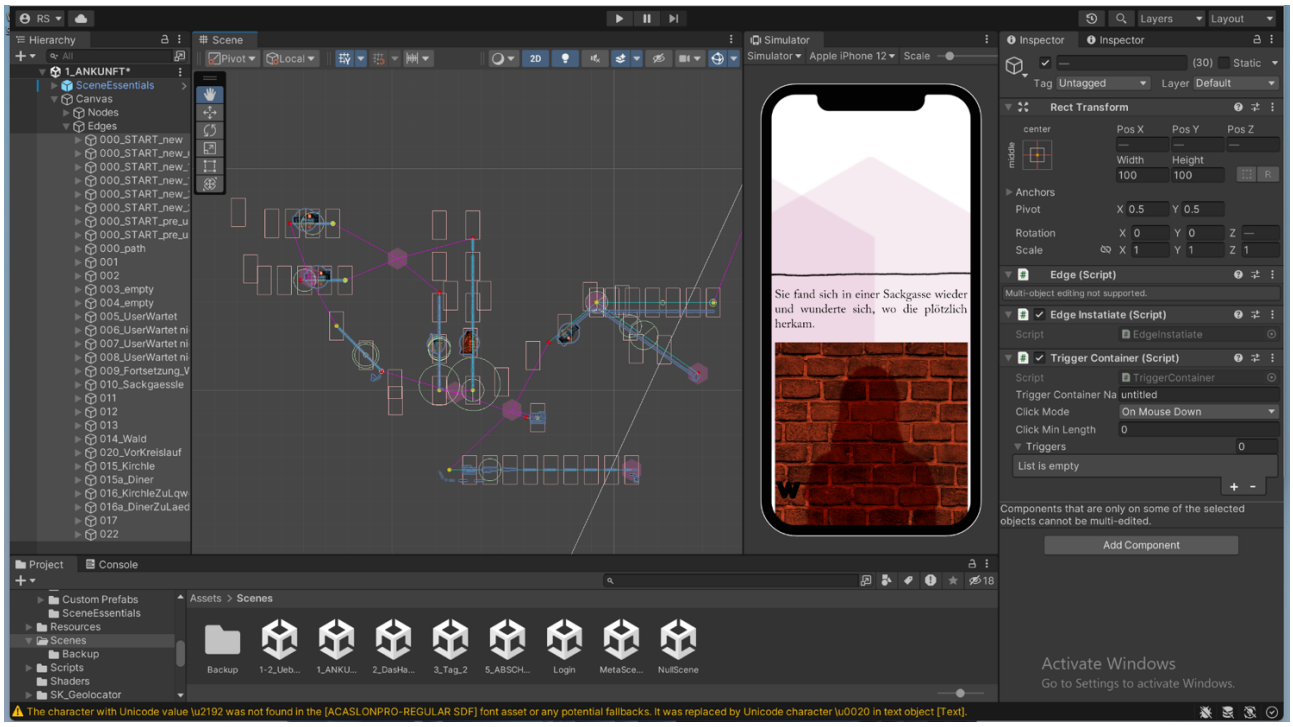
TRANSIT:
Tales of love, loss, forced migration and the tyranny of bureaucracy.

"For the third time, let me tell you, they'll let you stay here in peace for a certain piece of time only if you can prove that you intend to leave. Don't you understand?"
"No."

Anna Seghers, Transit (1943)



Inspired by fictional and non-fictional accounts of transit across Europe before and during WWII, TRANSIT explores how hostile bureaucratic systems shape and distort lives then, now and on into climate-stressed futures.

TRANSIT is an audio-visual cityscape interactive app-based performance work that plays out in your home, on the streets and in cafés and hotel bars. It is built on the 'story.glitch' platform.

This new hybrid performance brings together the digital (chatbots, online forms that mutate, audio-visual storytelling via a smartphone interface) with the analogue (letters, suitcases, spaces of limbo: cafés, hotel bars, waiting rooms) to ask:

- What is the relationship between the chimera of agency in gamification and the feeling of being caught in a bureaucratic web of increasingly sticky opacity?

- When does observation become surveillance?

- What mirrors are there between previous distortions of bureaucracy to perpetuate terror, and contemporary digital systems of surveillance and control?

- And what digital alternatives might we be able to offer?

The project is catalysed by fictional/non-fictional WWII accounts of the emotional impact of tyrannous bureaucracies, including by Anna Seghers, Joseph Roth, Lion Feuchtwanger, Vicki Baum, Iréne Nemirovsky, Christa Wolf, Martha Gellhorn and Irmgaud Keun. The experience explores how these stories resonate today, and on into the future, in an era where bureaucratic systems are driven by AI that is non-transparent even to its engineers, and in which climate uncertainty is being used to foster scarcity narratives, drive xenophobia, and justify border closures across the world.

We will be seeking to utilise the hybrid artistic and technological forms we are working with to challenge perceptions of migration that involve racialised othering. This contrasts with more traditional theatre formats that inevitably separate audience and representation and imply audiences to be viewing from a position of (supposed) safety.

The Online Event (in draft)

Supported by partners across Europe, you book a 'ticket' which enables you to download story.glitch app on your phone. The app allows you to read of lost loves, missed letters, and flight from Berlin to Vienna to Paris to Marseille, from the comfort of your own home. You get to know some of the characters a little, who will reappear throughout in different guises.

After a trailer that teases the themes, Part I is released in weekly segments – each following a different character who sometimes encounters another. The five intersecting characters are caught in limbo, circulating between waiting rooms, hotel foyers, immigration offices, in a (past) European city as they try to navigate hostile visa systems. You follow characters in loops that join and divide – moving away from single hero narratives. When you return to their stories, they might be visibly edited or redacted. An augmented reading/audio experience each c.7-14 mins long, that draws on live environmental data.

Part II: the present - launch of 'mirror' stories in the present (Cambridge Festival/Cambridge Junction), embedded in a live in-person performance event (with audience movements and encounters determined via the story.glitch app), inviting audiences to become part of the story – for and with each other. Part II brings the themes into the present, centring on a surreal adventure in an automated hotel – X is stuck in limbo with a lost passport, while fragments of the past (and future?) start to seep into the now. Part II will also bring the 'past' segments

together with the present and permit characters to interact/players to follow different characters which will also alter how the stories function in the present.

Both parts will also be shared online via our international partners.

Internally, the experience is structured like an invisible map that can be traversed in different directions, leading to different areas of the stories. These fragments do not necessarily happen in chronological order, nor does every element necessarily happen every time to every reader/viewer/player. Instead, it forms a surreal jigsaw, with story.glitch allowing us to shape the experience according to user engagement – not to gamify player agency, but to make visible the complex relationship between systems, power dynamics, and individual actions.

The Live Event (in draft)

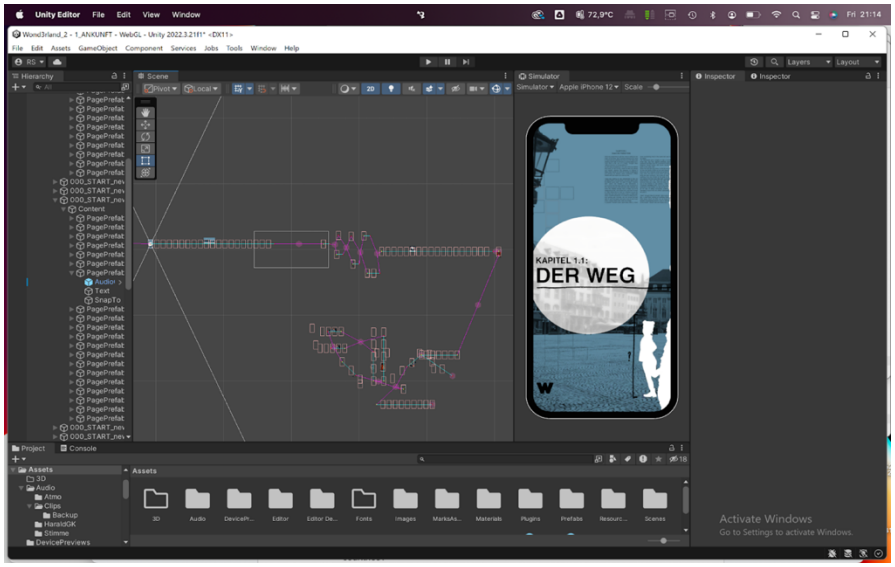
"From there I went to another café – what else was I to do?"
Anna Seghers, Transit (1943)

For the live events, once you have read certain stories in-app, you will receive a real letter in the post and inside this is a letter you mustn't open but must take somewhere to hand over to someone else, taking you out into the city. You pass people that may or may not have something to do with the story. How can you be sure?

You becoming increasingly implicated in the action yourself, as ghosts start to take flesh, and the story glitches between past, present and future. The stakes are high, although the action – filling out ever mutating forms, being asked to pass on messages to strangers, waiting in claustrophobic offices for yet another incomprehensible visa stamp – is banal.

Sooner or later the form of the app starts to feel less like an e-book, more like a cloud drive/storage. Eventually the tech may break down/you may have to delete the app, bringing you back to the here-and-now, and the potential sociability of conversation.

The Platform: story.glitch



The experience will be created using story.glitch, a new interactive storytelling engine, built on the Unity game engine – this will be only the second event to be created using the software, and the first to combine real world immersive experience with stories unfolding within the app.

Story.glitch provides a "plug & play" modular framework to create

interactive, data-driven experiences. Output can be to all sorts of media: text, audio, video, animation, images etc. or a combination. It enables stories to be told that can (algorithmically) adapt and change, depending on how a specific reader/viewer/listener/spectator is interacting with it.

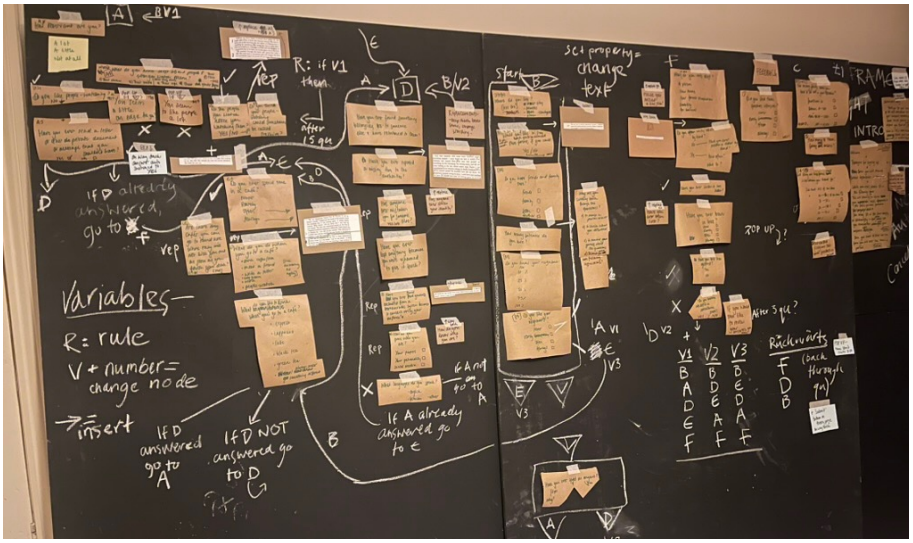
Story.glitch consists of two elements:

- User / Reader / Audience Interface
- Collaborative (Live) Editing Tool for art teams

For TRANSIT, we will create a hybrid narrative experience, starting as an interactive novel / reading experience / e-book, which will more and more venture out into the 'real world' (and vice versa) - inviting you to go out into the city, visit certain places (eg. a café, a hotel lobby) - all whilst changing the story / experience via how you react / interact with a variety of situations. You decide on how deeply you interact – but whatever you decide has implications for the story and your relationship to it.

We are currently using our ACE/impact R&D funding to code new features for the app including:

- Real-time smartphone sensor/data input: GPS, elevation, time, brightness, electromagnetic fields, compass, orientation, movement speed/direction, user interaction, weather data, news – and how these affect the story
- Develop the interactive backend of the story.glitch develop accessibility through bespoke capabilities that permit offline work and paper prototyping.
- Enable story.glitch automatically, on certain triggers, to send bespoke emails and texts to the player in real-time (and delayed).
- To enable the stories to 'tune' themselves to the time of day you are reading – so that in-app clocks show real time; and certain stories appear only at certain frames
- To create offline editors for text inputting / facilitating automated outputs for paper prototyping and to support access needs of the creative team (and other artists in future)



The Working Process/Practice-led Research

The production will be developed using the principles of Climate Dramaturgy: attention, connectivity, care and recognition of the context of climate crisis, and how it brings pressure to bear on all decision-making at every level of performance-making, from form, to content, to working methods and ethics. See: https://metisarts.co.uk/climate-dramaturgy.

The Climate Dramaturgy framework intersects with, and enables, our commitment to access – taking a differentiated approach to the variety of ways in which people are able to encounter artworks, embedding attention and care for those differences from the beginning. This will be reflected in our working process, which takes into account disability – and its affordances – in the methodology.

There will be a feedback loop between the development of the story and further development of the app. We started with paper prototyping, to map all the relations between elements. We will then test out elements in workshops, both on paper and digitally.

Café Conversations: audience development/'research-in-public'

We will be using the innovative 'research-in-public' format of 'café conversations' to research the project's themes, a format designed by Zoë Svendsen for interdisciplinary practice-led performance project research. Rather than the artist meeting researchers behind closed doors, we invite them to share their research with us 'in public', in an informal (non-university) space such as a café, and advertise the event to the public.

A 'café conversation' involves us showing a bit about our project, then interviewing two or more researchers with expertise we want to draw on for our project, often from different backgrounds/disciplines. We then open out the conversation to the audience, who can both ask questions *and* contribute expertise/knowledge of their own. As well as making creative research processes publicly accessible, these events often attract non-university specialists working in similar fields, whose expertise we would otherwise not have the chance to know about.

Café conversation events build a loyal following for the project, who contribute ideas, expertise and word-of-mouth recommendations for the project, enabling long-term audience engagement.

Partners

TRANSIT is committed to sharing process, as a project that originated through the Naked Theatre pan-European network of collaborators – artists seeking to strip back to the absolute essentials of making performance work (www.nakedtheatre.net).

This has enabled us to start building a network of partners across Europe, including: JAMU (Theatre Academy), Brno, Czech Republic; Culture for Future, Prague; Live Wave Festival, Prague; International Theatre Institute, Berlin; Cambridge Junction (primary partner); Wiesbaden Staatstheater, Germany (primary partner); Brighton Dome; Brighton Festival. Over the next 6 months we will be seeking to build further partners to enable genuine intercultural exchange.

Questions the project asks:

- What is the relationship between the chimera of agency in gamification and the feeling of being caught in a bureaucratic web of increasingly sticky opacity?
- How do we thematise the ethics of spectatorship – and the ethics of interaction/non-action/intervention/non-intervention?
- How does the invitation to make decisions affect audience attention and the experience of spectatorship?
- How do we make clear the complex cascade of effects that audiences' decisions (individually and collectively) have on the trajectory of the story?
- How do we reflect back on audiences' the implications of individualist decisions (or conversely, the power of collective and collaborative practice)?
- What is the role of artificial intelligence in creating the experience – both thematically, and technologically?
- How do we gradually thematise/make visible the algorithms that shape our audience/participants' experience of the event?
- How can we use immersion in tyrannous systems to explore the potentiality of alternative practices of interdependence and mutual care?
- Can immersive positioning in real world spaces offer a different kind of empathic relation from the invocation of pity that's encouraged by more traditional 'end-on' theatre forms? (with reference to Tania Singer and Olga M. Klimecki, 'Empathy and Compassion' Current Biology: special issue, Vol 24, no. 18, December 2019)
- How do we embed differentiated imagining around access and different modes of aesthetic engagement to account for different abilities, both in relation to working process/methods and in preparation for how the work meets workshop participants and audiences?
- How do we effectively document and model iterative artistic practice in relation to systems of funding/production?
- How do we articulate/account for methods of documentation (and their effects on artistic development)?
- What's the relationship between AI used to verify stories, & AI used to storify truth/history?
- When does observation become surveillance?

The Research and Development for the project has been funded by an Arts Council England R&D project grant; the IAA fund, SHAPE hub, and JE Wilson funds (University of Cambridge); and research/conferencing funding from CRASSH (Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities) and the DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst).

Further in kind support has been provided by: The Future Technology Lab, University of Sussex, Brighton Dome, Cambridge Junction, Collusion, Touring Artists, International Theatre Institute (Berlin), Staatstheater Wiesbaden, JAMU (Brno, Czech Republic), Culture for Future (Prague).

Co-creators:

Roman Senkl (he/him) based in Berlin and Vienna, is a theatre director/writer with a focus on digital and hybrid theater since 2008, both in ensemble theater (Burgtheater Wien, Schauspiel Köln, Volkstheater Wien, Schauspiel Dortmund, Deutsches Theater Berlin) and in independent theater (Ringlokschuppen Mülheim a.d. Ruhr, HAU, Konzertsaal UdK). His pioneering works include stage and multimedia productions, mixed reality performances (AR, VR - including the world's largest VR environment in Mozilla Hubs with Ars Electronica), holographic projections, as well as apps for interactive storytelling and artificial intelligence.

His work has been nominated for both "Digital Showcase"/Theatertreffen as well as FAUST Prize, his livestreaming projects generated more than half a million views, whilst his creative campaigns received more than 20 international creative awards (including the Golden Lion Cannes, London International Awards, CLIO Awards Las Vegas, ADC Awards International & Germany).

Roman has been co-founder of the "Academy for Theater and Digitality" in Dortmund, Head of the "Digital Arts Laboratory" at the Berliner Festspiele / Theatertreffen as well as Head of the "Department of Digital Arts" at Theater Dortmund; as well as various initiatives, such as the "Plattform Graz" (with Clemens Setz, Gerhild Steinbuch and others), the K.G.I., onlinetheater.live and "Digital Dramaturgy" - a network for exchange in the field of digital arts and theatre. With onlinetheater.live, he has been developing innovative livestreaming formats in the digital space since 2016, in 2020, he founded and organized "UnBoxing Stages Festival" for the Theatertreffen. Roman is a founding member of the Naked Theatre, a pan-European theatre network initiated by Belgian theatre director, Luk Perceval.

Beginning with the season 2024/25 Roman Senkl will be Artistic Director of Burgtheater Wien's "Kasino".

Zoë Svendsen (zoë/her) is a Brighton/Cambridge-based director/dramaturg/writer/researcher, who makes participatory theatre performances and installations exploring ecological crisis and capitalism, including Wild Dress (Hawkwood Centre for Future Thinking), the Amt für Zuwart und Gegenkunft @reEDOcate me! Floating University, Berlin; the cabaret improvisation show, Love Letters to a Liveable Future (Cambridge Junction); Ness, a sonic landscape work adapted from the prose poem by Robert Macfarlane

(Metal Culture/Estuary Festival); the video installation Factory of the Future (Oslo Architecture Triennale); the Artsadmin Green Commission, WE KNOW NOT WHAT WE MAY BE (Barbican), World Factory (New Wolsey Theatre/Young Vic/tour; shortlisted for Theatertreffen Stückemarkt, Berlin); 3rd Ring Out (Tipping Point commission; UK tour).

As dramaturg, Zoë collaborates with directors to adapt classic texts for the contemporary stage, including: Duchess of Malfi, Hamlet, Merchant of Venice (Sam Wanamaker Playhouse), Macbeth and The Tempest (Globe Theatre); A Midsummer Night's Dream, Measure for Measure and The Changeling (Young Vic); Miss Julie (Aarhus); Othello and Edward II (National Theatre); Arden of Faversham and Macbeth (RSC). Zoë regularly works with the composer and sarod player, Soumik Datta, to create theatre-concert hybrids exploring migration and memory, including Mone Rekho (Purcell Rooms, Edinburgh International Festival; international tour) and Borderland (Queen Elizabeth Hall, with the London Philharmonia Orchestra).

Zoë is Associate Artist at Cambridge Junction, and lectures on dramaturgy and performance at the University of Cambridge, undertaking practice-led research. Zoë co-designed and teaches the Politics and Culture MPhil course on colonialism, capitalism and the climate crisis. Zoë's performance research has been developed in several interdisciplinary artistic residencies, including at Hawkwood Centre for Future Thinking, Stroud, the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin, and the Cambridge Conservation Initiative, Cambridge. As Associate Artist at the Donmar Warehouse in 2022 Zoë developed the concept of 'climate dramaturgy', and is now sharing the ethos and methods of Climate Dramaturgy with playwrights, directors, dramaturgs and producers connected to the East region of the UK, as a recipient of an AHRC Knowledge Exchange fellowship. In September 2023, Zoë collaborated with the three National Theatres (Scotland, Wales, UK), to curate a day-long event for theatre directors, to explore the challenges and affordances artist-led climate care. Zoë's book, Theatre & Dramaturgy, was recently published by Bloomsbury. Zoë is a founding member of the Naked Theatre, a pan-European theatre network initiated by Belgian theatre director, Luk Perceval.

Carolyn Downing is a freelance sound designer, working both nationally and internationally. She enjoys working closely with directors, performers and other creative collaborators, from rehearsal room to performance space, to create cohesive and fully integrated designs with the desire to push the boundaries of sound as an artistic medium within theatre. Over the years, Carolyn has built strong and successful relationships with freelance directors and theatre companies alike, including the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal Court and Frantic Assembly. Carolyn also has a wealth of experience in the creation and leadership of sound design workshops and has worked with establishments such as Central School of Speech and Drama, Central St. Martin's College of Art and Design, Wimbledon College of Art and Mousetrap Theatre Projects. She also has experience working in other media genres, including film, animation and exhibitions (including fashion) and live events - and wishes to continue to flourish in these too.

Carolyn was awarded the Tony for Best Sound Design for Life of Pi in 2023, having been nominated for an Olivier Award for the same show in 2022. She also received an Olivier nomination for the Sound Design for Summer and Smoke at The Almeida and Duke of York's Theatre in the West End in 2019 and had previously won the Olivier for her Sound Design for

Chimerica at The Almeida (which transferred to the Harold Pinter Theatre in the Wesst End) in 2014.

Future Work Includes: Ness (a digital soundscape set at Orford Ness, which has been a miliary testing site and is now an internationally important nature reserve) and an RSC production of Roald Dahl's Big Friendly Giant.

https://www.carolyndowning.co.uk/

Pau Mantel is an illustrator and graphic designer specialising in comics, children's books, and games. Their work focuses on themes of queerness, chronic illness, activism, and a broad spectrum of scientific topics, especially from the field of biology. Making socially relevant topics accessible by presenting them in clear language and with strong visual strategy and illustrations is key to their work. In addition to graphic design and illustration, they also work in eduction on global topics.

Pau studied a Bsc and Msc in Biology with the intent of working in science communication. Therefore, they went on to study Visual Communication at Kunsthochschule Berlin Weißensee. Their recent work includes the website design project Queer Type Archive, documenting the visual and typographic history of queer protest posters in Germany, as well as collaborative exhibition and educational projects addressing colonial history and social justice a small rural museum, called kolonialokal. In 2026, Pau was awarded the Lion Feininger Scholarship for a residency at Art OMI in New York State.

Their portfolio can be viewed at pau-mantel.de.

Phil Hagen Jungschlaeger is a digital artist and creative technologist working at the intersection of media art, theater, and opera. He is a media informatics specialist from the Bauhaus University in Weimar. Phil explores the multimedia extension of reality through immersive installations, multisensory computer games, and audio-reactive performances. Shader-based video processing and spatialized sound are recurring focuses. Since 2020, he has been developing a 3D sound audio plugin with Not A Number GmbH at the ZiMMT in Leipzig. As part of the Tarmac Festival in 2021, he launched Polynoiseon, an interactive immersive space with performances. He contributed cinematographically to the sound ecology project "If We Vanish" in India in 2022. He now lives in Berlin and is working with the Berliner Symphoniker on an interactive storytelling app as part of the "Lügen über ALICE" project.

Alongside Roman Senkl, Phil was an original developer of story.glitch, the Unity-based platform on which Transit is built.

Orange is a creative technologist based in Southend-on-Sea, exploring themes such as repetition, cybersecurity, privacy, adaptation and repetition through their work and collaborations. Holding an MSci in Creative Computing from Goldsmiths University of London, they specialize in creating and supporting a diverse range of both online and offline artworks, including social bots, interactive installations, live streamed performances, and web extensions aimed at fostering social accountability.

In addition to their artistic endeavors, Orange actively engages in educational initiatives, conducting workshops and delivering talks on information security, privacy and surveillance. They have collaborated with institutions such as the Centre for Investigative Journalism, The Ferret, TacticalTech, and King's College London. Beyond the realm of art and education, Orange is deeply involved in efforts to combat the misuse of Pegasus Spyware against human rights activists in the UK, contributing to evidence collection for legal action.

https://kibernetikanto.fyi/

Sally Beck Wippman is a UK-based director, performer, and movement/physical theatre artist; she also works as a freelance producer, project manager, and access support worker for artists with disabilities, blending her artistic ethos with management and administration.

Sally has found her home in various cities around Europe, and the ideas of home, language, sociopolitical justice, and connection are themes at the forefront of her practice. She has a professional history directing study abroad/international education programmes, which informs her professional and creative practice. Originally from Chicago, Sally was a founding member of Migrants in Theatre, an organisation which advocates for equity for first-generation migrant theatre artists in the UK by highlighting the unique strengths and contributions such diverse voices add to the creation, performance, and concept of theatre.

Sally has been working on Transit for two years as a producer and access support.

www.sallyspeaks.com