

Behind the scene, in stage terms, is all that goes on behind what you see on stage as the audience. What you see on stage is more like the tip of the iceberg. You see only one-eighth of what it is. The rest of the seven parts of the iceberg remains unseen.

An article in *Harper's Magazine* from 1884 says, "But very few have the conception—even the faintest—the immensity of these secret regions compared with the stage upon which their eyes rest when the curtain is up."

What we see in Broadway productions, i.e. the entire animal world coming on stage in "Lion King" or helicopter landings in "Les Saigon", are mind-boggling theatrical elements and trappings. Last season, when my daughter and I were watching "Wicked" on Broadway, we were whisked away to a wonderland like Alice. The illusory world confused us—was it really a theatrical production or were we watching a movie on the big screen? One can only imagine the machinery at work which makes all this happen before our very eyes.

In this milieu of the glamorous and the fantabulous, the more advanced "Western" gurus gave the "magic" created on the stage a second thought. From these second thoughts came up theories which have been extrapolated into works such as "Towards a poor theatre", a collection of essays, interviews and instructions for actors developed chiefly by Jerzy Grotowski.

Grotowski (August 11, 1933–January 14, 1999) was an innovative Polish theatre director and theorist whose approaches to acting, training and theatrical production have significantly influenced theatre today. He objected to his theatre being labelled "experimental"



PHOTO: COURTESY

as he associated it with things such as stage tricks, buffoonery and trendy music. Central to his theory was the quest to find what separates theatre from the illusionary world of film and television.

One of his famous creations is "The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus". The central element of the performance space, designed by Jerzy Zurawski, was a wooden stage-cum-table that filled the entire auditorium; its T-shape was constructed from two parallel rows of platforms in one direction and a single row at the top. The audience members sat along the platforms on which Faustus

BEHIND THE SCENE AND TOWARDS A POOR THEATRE



PHOTO: COURTESY

audience is a bit of a far cry. Especially the physical proximity can be very threatening at times.

Acting in such proximity to the audience is experienced when we do a staging of "theatre in the round". The space of action is in the middle and the audience surrounds the actors. When an actor makes his delivery from the proscenium, he has the comfort of distance from the audience. The audience is in the dark and the actors are advised to look above the heads of the audience, often times at the wall at the end of the auditorium. Sometimes the director may want us to make eye contact with the audience, especially when we want to have them as witness to what has happened.

played out his life.

What Grotowski was trying to achieve was intense and potent. He was attempting to make one entity of the actor and spectator.

We, on the Dhaka stage, try to be as near to the character we are playing as we can. As Stanislavski said regarding method acting, we delve into the background of the character. We inspect where exactly she was before she entered the stage or where she is going as she leaves the stage. In this way, we come as near as possible to the character we play. We try other exercises to empathise with the character. But playing along with the

longer at a "distance" from the audience, which made doing dialogues about intimate matters somewhat uncomfortable. But thankfully they soon got used to it. I also had the good fortune of working with great actors such as Abul Hayat, Asaduzzaman Noor, and Nima Rahman—with less seasoned actors, the work might have been more daunting.

In recent times, a group that call itself The Open Space staged the play "12 Angry Men". The action takes place in the middle area of an experimental theatre hall at Shilpakala Academy, with the audience surrounding the actors. It has been praised as particularly well-acted and directed. It is probably one of the most well-staged plays of 2017 in Dhaka. However, whenever we plan a festival and the venue is not Shilpakala, the play is dropped.

So coming back to poor theatre (ours not Grotowski's), I would strongly recommend that productions be made adaptable. After all, this is not Broadway or The West End. We are poor as far as budgets allocated to theatre festivals or staging plays are concerned. It is of the essence that plays are tailored to fit the various staging opportunities that Dhaka has to offer.

Sara Zaker is a theatre activist, media personality and Group Managing Director, Asiatic 360.



CROSSROAD

SARA ZAKER


PERSPECTIVE |

THE REVOLUTIONARY CONCEPT OF WIDTH


SHAER REAZ

HONDA SUPER CUB - THE WIDTH REVOLUTION

INFOGRAPHIC: SHAER REAZ




IN PRODUCTION SINCE **1958** IN **20** COUNTRIES INCLUDING BANGLADESH (1966)



50CC ENGINE, **3 GEARS**, PRESSED STEEL FRAME


DESIGNED BY SOICHIRO HONDA FOR THE JAPANESE MARKET



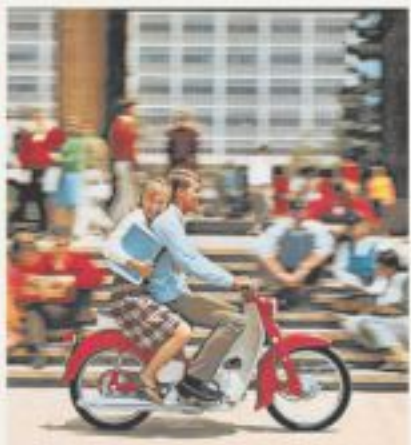
100 MILLION UNITS MADE/SOLD AND COUNTING (2017) (MOST PRODUCED MOTOR VEHICLE IN HISTORY)

MAXIMUM WIDTH OF ANY MODEL YEAR - 710MM (2009)

CREDITED WITH HAVING INVENTED CONCEPT OF LIFESTYLE MARKETING WITH ITS TAGLINE:



YOU MEET THE NICEST PEOPLE ON A HONDA



About two years ago, James May, mop-haired British TV personality and certified automotive encyclopedia-on-legs, was still presenting for Top Gear, the BBC's acclaimed show on cars. During more than a decade of employment at the BBC, he's presented several spin-off series', the most memorable of which is probably an in-depth look at various attempts to produce a "car of the people", in essence taking a look at the various approaches to making the automobile an accessible and readily usable tool for the masses. Through his witty and often quite eloquent posturing on the challenges of engineering a car for the masses, May stumbles upon a few concrete truths about mass mobility that is widely applicable—even in Bangladesh.

During an episode highlighting Japan's attempts at ensuring mass mobility, James May puts around tiny alleyways in Tokyo on a Honda Super Cub, a 50cc motorbike that offers a solution to the biggest problem facing traffic systems worldwide—width. With undeniable logic, he states the problem as it is—roads can be nearly infinitely long and urban environments can fit quite a good amount of cars if they're small in length, but that doesn't aid mobility as much as reducing the width of the vehicles plying the streets in mega-cities. He goes on to prove the point by winning a cross-city race between his puny motorbike and a *kei* car (an urban automobile concept nearly unique to Japan, with restrictions placed on engine size as well as overall dimensions so as to be eligible for exemption from tolls and congestion tax).

Motorbikes like the Honda Cub sold in the millions, especially in tightly packed Asian cities such as Hong Kong, Manila and Tokyo as well as in developing nations like Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia. Despite growing incomes and increasing standards of living, people in these places held on to the idea of two-wheeled transport because it was the most efficient mode of transport in sprawling, densely populated urban areas. Even if individuals could afford it, owning a car was just more of a hassle when owning a motorbike meant reaching your destination faster and using less fuel per kilometre to do it.

In Bangladesh, as is the case with neighbouring giant India, motorbikes are essential transport for lower-middle class families. While the motorbike has been serving the upwardly mobile social classes faithfully for decades, the common case of social climbers earning beyond a certain point has led to an explosion in the number of cars on the roads. While there hasn't been any research done locally on the topic to date, most people no doubt consider owning an automobile to be a sign of prestige in a growing economy, despite the common complaint of unbearable traffic and

constant tailbacks in Dhaka.

Between January and June 2016, 11,650 private passenger cars were registered with the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), while 21,062 were registered in the year 2015. Till June 2016, the grand total of all types of motorised vehicles on the road, including commercial and public transport, stand at 26,40,349 according to BRTA records. Of these, 15,25,283 are motorbikes.

The Bangladesh government has taken many steps to restrict further expansion in the number of vehicles plying the roads. Restrictive supplementary duty on vehicle import, high price of fuel and significant cost of vehicle registration have tried to discourage the purchase of vehicles, but the tide seemingly cannot be stopped. Even an expanding budget allocation to the transport sector has failed to register an impact in ensuring easy mobility and in easing traffic congestion.

What works, then? If only the people buying cars bought motorbikes instead. Or at least resorted to using motorbikes to travel in regularly gridlocked areas instead of sitting for hours in traffic and posting long rants on social media.


Ride sharing startups like Pathao have recently succeeded in making the motorbike a viable mode of transport for much of Dhaka city, by providing cheap and fast transport to students, working professionals and a source of income for motorbike users wanting to earn a little extra on the side. While some genuine concerns regarding passenger safety have been raised, it still stands to reason that someone heading to work during rush hour on a shared motorbike ride reduces the number of cars plying the roads. The competition from a local startup such as Pathao proved so formidable that even a global firm like Uber had to launch UberMoto, an additional Uber service that provides shared motorbike rides to users. If that isn't a step forward in the right direction, it is difficult to see what else is. With proper support from the government and an effective regulatory body that ensures user safety and etiquette compliance on the part of the service providers, motorbike ride sharing might be the answer to easing congestion inside Dhaka effectively.

It will take a concerted effort to let go of the air-conditioned, chauffeur-driven chariots of pride championed by people across socio-economic classes. Once people stop viewing the automobile as a sign of prestige and power and start seeing it as a source of daily misery and increasing costs, the nation can make the sensible switch to motorised transport that is a little less wide so everyone can have a little more space.

Shaer Reaz is in-charge, Shift, the automotive publication of The Daily Star.

ABOUT TOWN

EMK Center Presents
BLOWING IN THE WIND
Date: November 25, 2017
Time: 7:00 PM
Ticket: BDT 100
Free for EMK Center and The American Center members upon showing ID card

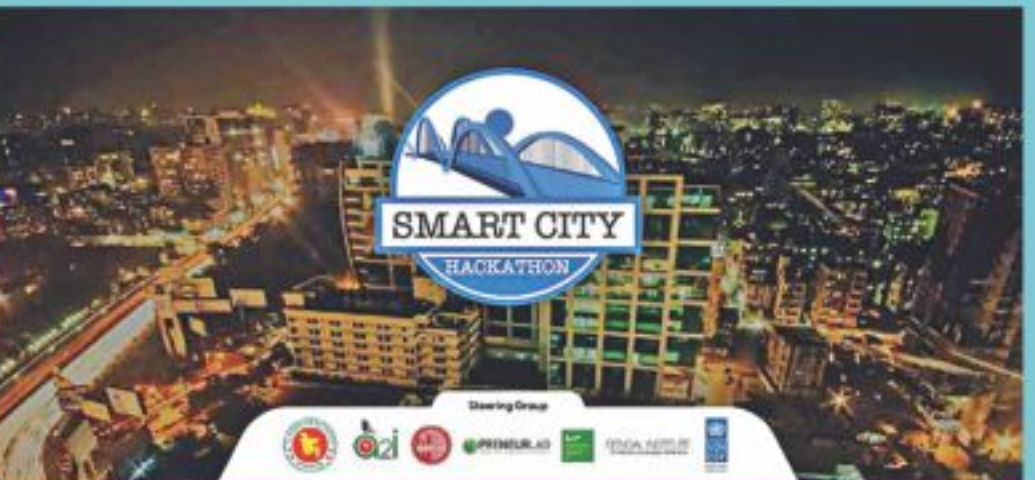


BLOWING IN THE WIND
A MUSICAL DEMONSTRATION
Organiser: EMK Center
November 25, 7-8.30 pm, EMK Center, Dhanmondi

Abinta Gallery of Fine Arts
42nd Solo Exhibition
Memories Beyond Time
SYED JAHANGIR
Time: Saturday, 11th November, 2017
06:30pm



MEMORIES BEYOND TIME
SYED JAHANGIR'S SOLO ART EXHIBITION
Organiser: Abinta Gallery of Fine Arts
November 11- December 01, 6.30 pm, Abinta Gallery of Fine Arts



SMART CITY HACKATHON 2017
Organiser: Preneur Lab - Social Good Company and United Nations Development Programme in Bangladesh
November 30- December 1, 9 am- 6 pm, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Novo Theatre, Bijoy Sarani