

THE ORPHHEUS PROJECT

Babel
Creative
Education

2022

babel

Collaboration | Connection | Community

www.babeltheatre.co.uk

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Introduction

The Orpheus Project is a game-changing free creative development programme for young men aged 18-30 in East London.

After the success of a 2020-2021 online pilot of the programme, which was held up by EECF and LBTH Council as a standout example of projects funded in lockdown, The Orpheus Project returned for the very first live iteration in Autumn 2022.

The Orpheus Project invites young men and male identifying people to take part in a series of uplifting, joyous, celebratory workshops led by Babel facilitators enquiring into the modern experience of being a man and the social factors and pressures that play into the every day experience of living.

These workshops generate **bravery**, **vulnerability** and **courage** and form real life bonds that live on outside the project, creating community and reducing loneliness.

The project has been generously supported since its inception from the Programming Team at **Rich Mix** and for the first live iteration worked across boroughs in East London in both Tower Hamlets and Hackney with grants awarded from **East End Community Foundation (EECF)**, **Foundation for Future London (FFL)**, **Arnold Clark Community Fund**.

The programme culminated in project participants and Babel's Artistic Director co-curating a very successful event: **Babel Night | Modern Myths on Manhood**, held at Rich Mix, featuring performances from participants as well as East London born, award winning artists, on the main stage space which was attended by over **100 people** from the **local community**.

The project demonstrated high levels of engagement and deep desire for further, ongoing opportunities like this, for young people in East London.

Our story so far

Timeline

2018

Artistic Director Joseph Lynch began exploring notions of grief and loss in male culture.

75% of registered suicides in the UK were men (4,903 deaths), which has been the case since the mid-1990s.

UK male suicide rate of 17.2 deaths per 100,000 represents a significant increase from the rate in 2017; for females, the UK rate was 5.4 deaths per 100,000, consistent with the rates over the past 10 years. (Office Of National Statistics)

2019

Joseph spent 6 weeks exploring The Myth of Orpheus with Acting Students at the Sichuan Academy of Art in Chengdu, China.

Joseph worked in Hong Kong on David Glass' Lost Child Project – moved by the powerful impact the program had on the young people, Joseph began exploring ideas of male behaviour, cultures and awareness as a community project.

A staggering 1 in 8 men say they have no friends to discuss serious topics with (such as work, money worries or mental health), according to a YouGov survey for Movember.

2020

Men's chances of having no friends almost treble between their early 20's and late middle age, with men who are married more likely to be affected.

Joseph created the framework for The Orpheus Project. A long term community cohesion project that would bring young men together to dispel feelings of isolation and lack of peer community whilst unpicking some of the sticking points of the modern male experience of living.

The effects of isolation and lack of peer community in young men was already a crippling factor in male depression and suicide across the UK before lockdown. The long term effects of lockdown are still unknown.

2021

"The pandemic is clearly having a major social and psychological impact on the whole population, increasing unemployment, separating families and various other changes in the way that we live that we know are generally major psychological risk factors for anxiety, depression and self-harm," (Source: Lancet Psychiatry, Volume 7., Holmes et al, 2020))

Multidisciplinary research priorities for the Covid-19 pandemic: A call for mental health Action
Mental health should be part of the public health response to Covid-19. (Source: World Health Organisation, March 2020)

The Orpheus Project Pilot ran as a series of online events in partnership with Rich Mix and Poplar Union.

2021

The project received widespread acclaim, demonstrated tangible impact on participants' lives and was featured by EECF and Tower Hamlets Council as a brilliant example of projects that were funded in lockdown.

A short video report was made and is featured here: The Orpheus Project | 2021

Babel secured further funding from EECF and Foundation for Future London, and partnership from Rich Mix to run an 8 week in person version, with taster sessions for recruitment and a culminating event.

Our aims and goals

1

Why

This program works directly within the themes of the Mayor's local strategies of tackling mental health issues within communities by utilising:

3.2 STEPS 1-5

1. Early intervention and prevention
2. Improving help for those in crisis
3. Identifying the needs of vulnerable people
4. Addressing training needs
5. Communication and awareness

3

What else

- Culminate in a performance to family, invited guests, future partners
- Workshop the model for a larger long-term project with participants
- Offer 3 subsidised trips to arts events at LBTH venues
- Create projects with participants which they can run in their communities, with mentoring and financial support

2

What

Deliver workshops once a week over 8 weeks in creativity and connection with 20 recruited young men aged 18-30 referred through local community groups, we have links with.

- Co-curate a night of entertainment and performance with project participants

4

Final goal

Create a community of men in East London that are unpicking the social factors in their lives?

Project Delivery

Babel Staff and Project Leads

The project was led by Babel's Artistic Director, Joseph Lynch as the Lead Facilitator for the project. Creative Producer, Arron Greechan was the producing and programme lead for the project. The full delivery team is;



Joseph Lynch

Artistic Director | Babel Theatre

Joseph is a multi-award winning theatre maker and Artistic Director of Babel. He has worked with Barbican, Complicite, David Glass Ensemble, HOMEcr, NYO, Tamasha and is an Associate Lecturer at UAL and regular teacher at many drama schools across the UK.



MATEUS DANIEL

Actor | Movement Director

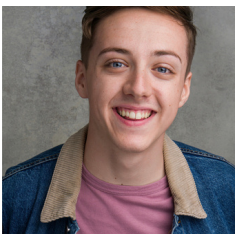
Mateus trained in Physical Theatre at East15 Acting School and has worked with Street Circus Collective, Talawa, Pappy Show, Definitely Fine Theatre, and he was nominated for Best Choreographer at the BBTA.



WILL TOWNSEND

Theatre Maker | Facilitator

Will is a physical theatre maker and Co-Artistic Director of Gym Jam Theatre. He is a trainee therapist and incorporates embodied wellbeing into his practice. Will won 2022 Offie and ONCOMM Award with GymJam for their film Anthropocene.



ARRON GREECHAN

Creative Producer | Babel Theatre

Arron trained at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh, graduating from the BA Acting course. He is an award-winning Creative Producer who has worked with organisations such as HighTide Theatre, National Theatre, Wonder Fools, Trajectory Theatre and Hopscotch Theatre.

Message from our participants

Feedback on Babel Night Performance:

"It was so refreshing to see a group of young men take to the stage together and share"

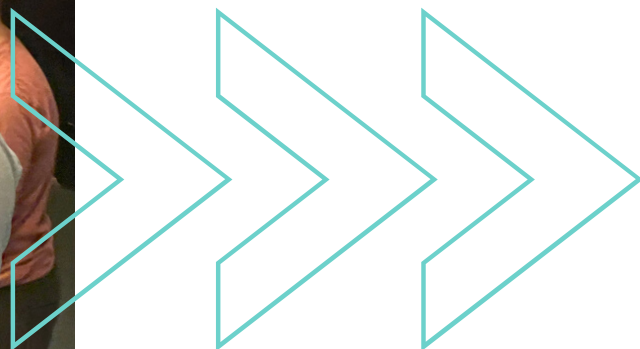
"It was so radical to see so many men talking about their feelings and experiences"

"I've never experienced an event where the participants lead and curate with such bravery"

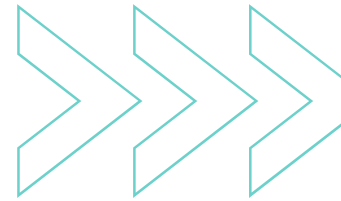
"A refreshing and joyous evening"

"We did a lot of different movements and talking exercises throughout the programme. One of the most memorable for me was in the first week. We had to say, 'I am a man because...'. It was very open and beautiful from the get-go. People weren't just putting on their armour and saying what you would expect them to say on the first day. We were being very vulnerable with each other about what it meant to be a man in today's society. We did an eye contact exercise beforehand where you are just being with the other person in silence. And we did another activity during the programme called 'I'm falling, I'm gliding' where we had to trust each other enough to lift one another up. Through those exercises, we got to know each other and built a strong bond. Everyone felt comfortable and safe"

Jack, Project Participant, 2022.



Key Facts & Figures



We are ambitious in being a leading centre for access, equity and inclusion

PARTICIPANTS

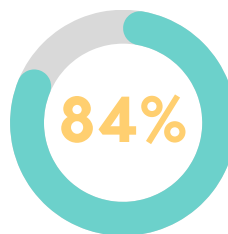
The project initially set out to recruit 12 participants to the cohort for delivery, but ultimately recruited 18 young people in line with an increase in demand and partnership referral from organisations such as Purple Moon Drama and Compass Collective.

Recruitment



18 participants were recruited to the Orpheus Project cohort.

New Engagement



15 (84%) participants were engaging with Babel for the first time

Referrals



4 (22%) participants were referred to the project from other organisations in LBTH

Identity



9 (50%) participants identified as either Global Majority, Eastern European or other non-white-british backgrounds.

Language



6 (33%) of participants speak English as a second language.

Age



Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 30 years old.

3 participants disclosed living in temporary accommodation

Planning

LEARNINGS FROM THE PILOT

Key pilot learnings included:

- Expanding the age bracket from 21-25, to 18 to 30 years.
- Longer project lead-in time for participant recruitment.
- Action accessibility criteria and strategy to engage a wider community.

PROJECT PLANNING

Project planning began in the Spring of 2022 led by Babel's core team. Due to ongoing and shifting deadlines across other projects, the planning phase was partially suspended in order to fulfil other commitments. This reduced our lead-in time across Q3.

Due to challenges experienced with confirmation of facilitating staff, venues and other such unforeseen challenges, our lead in and preparation was reduced to make way for delivery.

We identified that across the organisation, our approach to marketing can be improved as marketing led to a stall in other areas of progress. Marketing combined with partnership and venue confirmation dictated our activity schedule and can be avoided through a longer lead-in process. The Creative Producer will assume responsibility for these areas in future iterations.

SUMMARY OF LEARNINGS

In order to improve the preparation experience, we will;

Aim to outsource marketing and PR experience and remove this from direct staff

Engage in further research and development of our marketing and content strategy.

Look to scale funding to encourage 12 month preparation - delivery period

Engage partnership support for producing and administering the project

Provide a longer lead-in time for staff and facilitators, including additional paid administrative time.

Work with funders to communicate longer planning, delivery, reporting cycle required

Activity

Participant recruitment occurred throughout September and October 2022. Two taster sessions were held for participants to experience the project without commitment to engagement. Applications were accepted via attendance at a taster session, referral or direct simple online application.

2

Taster Workshops

6

Weeks of Creative Sessions

+3

Weeks of Personal Development Sessions

18

Participants

3

Facilitators

2

subsidised trips

1

Co-Curated Event

2

Award winning artists

100+

audience attended

Participants engaged in regular Sunday sessions, and additional 1-2-1 mentoring sessions with staff held across a six week period of delivery. The sessions featured an open-space discussion of central issues such as toxic masculinity, mental health, identity and wellbeing. Activity led to a physical exploration and devising process aimed at producing a performance for sharing at our end event. In addition, the facilitation team provided personal development sessions in goal setting and creative development sessions for participants to set and build an attainable pathway for their future. We recognise the importance that a sense of direction and feasible action planning has on improving mental health.

Sessions were delivered at Rich Mix, Tower Hamlets and Hackney Bridge, Hackney Wick.

The project culminated in an end event held at Rich Mix on Tuesday 6 December, 2022. [Babel Night: Modern Myths on Manhood](#) attended by **over 100 people**.

The event allowed young people to share new materials which explored issues which mattered to them and the group, including; the identity as an Albanian refugee in the UK, what it means to be a modern man, and what it means to be young and black.

The cohort performed their new work devised over the previous sessions, followed by a Q&A. East London born, award winning dancer Tyrone Issac Stuart was invited to perform a theatrical response to his debut Jazz, Hip-Hop, Spoken Word album S!CK, followed by a wrap party and set by celebrity DJ Donnie Sunshine.



"I just wish I had
brought my
boyfriend to this"

Audience member

Outcomes

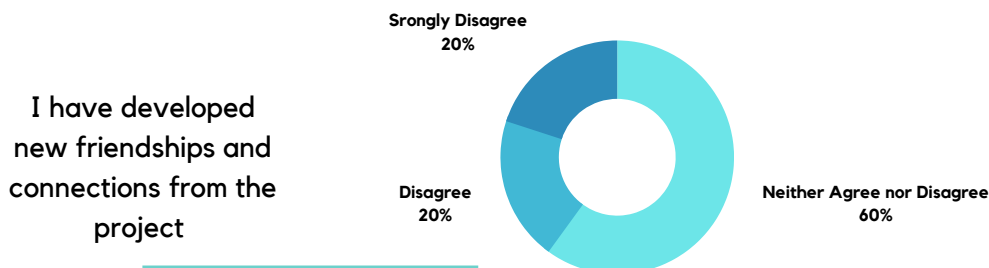
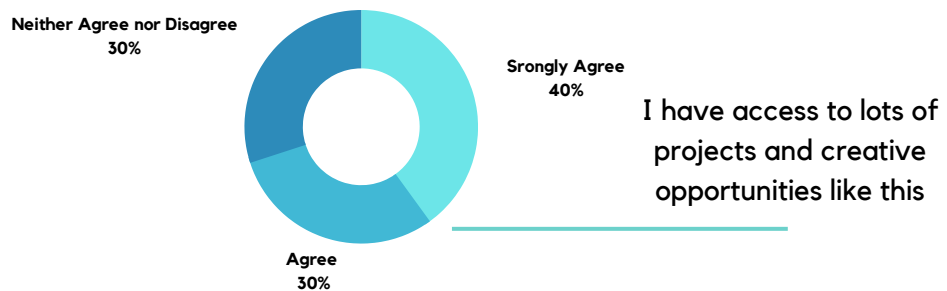
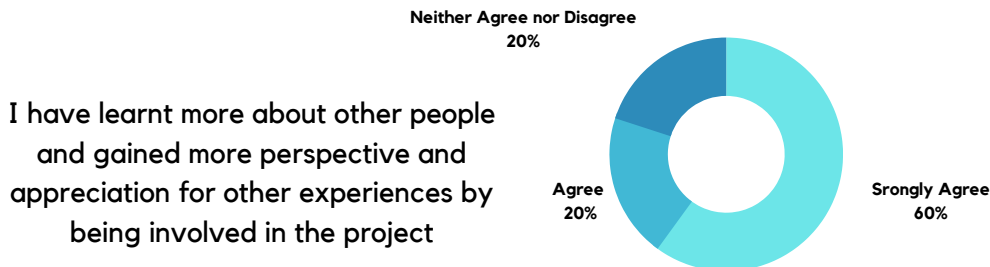
What participants said



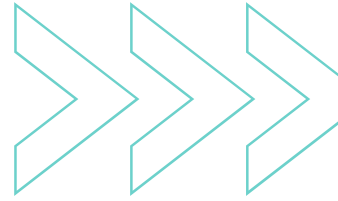
[View The Orpheus Project | 2023 film here.](#)

Participants were invited to 1-2-1 feedback and mentoring sessions with Artistic Director, Joseph Lynch throughout December 2022 and early January, 2023. A summary of participant reflections are as follows:

- All participants expressed a keen desire for the project to happen again and in continuing their relationship with the project in the future.
- A longer project activity time would allow participants to engage in a more conscious investigations of the key themes and areas of the project, including; toxic masculinity, mental health. Participants indicated that this would allow further relationships to build and the openness of the group to continue.
- Participants demonstrated an enjoyment of the performative element of the event, but would benefit from even further exploration of the work generated and an interest in incorporating more methods of expression.



Feedback Samples



What has been the biggest benefit for you personally in taking part in The Orpheus Project?

I connected with other men in a way I haven't for a long time and learned a lot from them. Equally, I am more astutely aware of my differences with other men and value the time spent together in helping me better realise where I sit in the world.

Being creatively fulfilled , meeting people from different backgrounds / journeys and using that to help influence our work

Meeting new people and working in a professional creative setting. the project made me realise how important the arts is to me.

What was the best parts of being involved in The Orpheus Project?

Finding out about myself and understanding people's barriers in society as men. Movement is a beautiful physical expression which I am willing to venture out more.

Meeting all the participants , being guided by the tutors and creatives in making work together and talking about / creating work in a topic (Masculinity) that is rarely explored in this much depth.

Doing physical theatre, while exploring our masculinity and what we truly wanted to say. I learnt that what we say when we are being challenged it can bring out the real truth and passion that you have inside of you.

If we did a project like this again, is there anything we should change?

I'd love to create more work , I loved it so much I wanted it to last longer

I would like to have more time to work with the ensemble.

I would just say, that in case it's possible, due to so many uncontrollable circumstances, we could have more rehearsal/exploring and performance time.

Key Findings

Feedback from participants in 1-2-1 feedback sessions, direct engagement in the project and feedback survey indicate the following:



There is a community requirement for The Orpheus Project as provisions which exist specifically for young men in East London are limited. The project makes a positive contribution to improving mental health and wellbeing, reducing isolation and establishing new networks and friendships.



The project would have an improved impact with a longer activity period. This is feedback which will be actioned in our learnings. Furthermore, we can be doing more to foster a further inclusive and equitable environment and will be developing new frameworks within our arts centre without walls approach to meet this.



Overarchingly, there was a very positive impact survey conducted highlighting the success of the project in dedicated resources to support young men address key social themes and challenges within their community.

"Overall, the program was really beneficial for me. It made me realise my creative potential and my love for the arts. I would recommend anyone to take part". - Participant, 2022.

Evaluation

Significant Successes

BABEL

- Despite Artistic Director and Creative Producer's significant experience in running, facilitating, organising and working on a broad range of local, national and international engagement projects outside of Babel, The Orpheus Project is Babel's first independent wider community engagement project. This is a significant step forward for Babel and the wider London community we serve.

RECRUITMENT

- 100% recruitment target achieved, additional 25% added due to increased demand.
- Recruitment was capped at 125% to maintain integrity of the group and ensure we were able to deliver to a high standard with the group.
- There was sufficient demand to add a further 50% participants. Showing demand for the project was very high.

RESPONSE

- The project was hailed as a success in the pilot and garnered significant attention and the first live iteration had marked the way for an ongoing need for the existence of the project.
- The co-curation of the Babel Night was a key success, offering participants the agency in their own representation was powerful for them and the audience.
- Participant feedback was outstanding, showing there was real value and impact on the lives of the participants and a great demand for more time.
- All participants demonstrated further engagement in the project was deeply desirable.

ACCESS

- Babel were able to allocate resources to participants for travel and food. This was vital for access to 40% participants were unable to attend without travel and food subsidy and a further 30% meant it eased the financial strain and mental pressure of allocating personal finances.
- This is vital in combatting the growing erasure of minority voices having access to creative experiences and working within the cultural sector.
- A recent study showed from [British Sociological Foundation](#) 8% of UK Artists come from working class backgrounds.

COMMUNITY

- Babel created a project whatsapp group with all participants in it. Which continues to run without input in

"I've never seen that many men on stage before talking about their experience of being men in that way... it was vulnerable, powerful and beautiful"

- Babel Night Audience Member

Evaluation

Challenges

COST OF LIVING CRISIS

The ongoing cost of living crisis has stretched resources available to support young people and projects such as The Orpheus Project.

- inflation creates risk towards delivery and feasibility of project budgets across sector leading to conservative spending and cuts across projects.
- This manifested in the project with increased operational costs, specifically within space hire.
- Due to our work existing within community spaces, an increase in space hire costs could not be accounted for within an initial project budget. This led to a reactive spending pattern and amended financial projections for the project due to the sporadic nature of rates increase, and the tightening purse strings of partner organisations who are unable to invest support in kind space.
- Participants investment of time and participation in the project was shaped by the ongoing crisis. Attendance and participation in arts programmes could be difficult for participants who required financial support to engage. We invested with participant bursaries to meet the needs of participants on a case by case basis.
- Attendance at the end event was a PWYC ticketing approach ranging from £5-£15, which is significantly below the average ticket price for cultural events in East London.
- We noticed an increase in the lower ticket price and delayed uptake in ticketing sales with over 30% of tickets being sold on the final two days of sale.

- This highlights a challenge in attracting audiences outside of traditional engagements within arts venues, signalling that cultural engagement continues to be below what it was pre-pandemic, and is only aggravated by the cost of living crisis.

PLANNING AND ENGAGEMENT TIMELINES

It has been widely acknowledged across sector that project delivery timelines have had to increase as a result of the Covid-19 recovery. It is important to note that pre-pandemic, timeline delivery for projects on a similar medium scale were unsustainable and could had a negative impact on staff workload and wellbeing.

Our timeline for the project was challenged due to a range of factors, including; other project priorities, venue coordination, moving timelines, personal circumstances, and Covid-19. The project would have benefitted from a longer planning period in order to transition smoothly into delivery upon the scheduled date. As an organisation, we recognise that work on this medium scale, with an ambition to meet a larger scale and increasing capacity requires a longer lead-in time. Therefore, project budgets and plans are required to reflect this moving forward.

Next Steps

Where will we go from here?

The project is successful in meeting participants, the wider community and social needs and demands, with a particular focus on providing opportunities which enhance provisions for connection, allowing young men to develop an open-space to explore their emotional and mental wellbeing



01 Develop Long Term Strategy

We will publish a longer-term strategy for the project across 2023-2026 which will outline the project timelines and medium to longer-term objectives for the project. We aim to scale funding and investment so The Orpheus Project can run as a year round programme tackling the challenges and addressing the needs of young men today.



02 Arts Centre Without Walls

We will publish our 2023-2026 business plan for the organisation, in line with our new arts centre without walls strategy, where community engagement is at the centre of our activity. Creating world-class, creative experiences for and with our local communities, centring courage and community as core tenets of our practice.



03 It Starts With Us

We will deliver a 2023 Orpheus Project in Summer and Autumn. We will publish an action plan for the project which features co-creation and accounts for 2022 experience and co-design. We will recruit 2022 participants to act as mentors and assistants on the project creating a pathway for project participants to keep re-engaging.

Executive Summaries

CREATIVE PRODUCER | ARRON GREECHAN

The Orpheus Project was a flagship of our 2022 activity plan, returning to deliver an in-person and live project within the community for the first time post-pandemic. The project speaks to urgent local and wider societal issues of exploring themes such as masculinity and male identity in modern society, mental health and wellbeing; and many more sub-themes which are vital.

Where else and who else are providing spaces for vulnerability, openness and creativity for young men around these issues and themes?

It has been a bold and testing pilot of this project in the current environment; with a pandemic still ongoing, despite relaxing restrictions, recovery for our organisation and sector, and an urgent need to tackle loneliness within young people in our local community in East London.

Overall, I am satisfied that the project has made a positive impact on the lives of young people who are engaged and we continue to see an urgent appetite from other young people to engage with the project and our work. The project in 2023 will be a vital juncture as we aim to expand our remit, aims and objectives and commit towards a multi-year iteration for the project.

We have identified, alongside our participants and partners, the challenges which lie ahead and will work proactively and collaboratively to tackle these challenges in order to continue to provide an acclaimed and vital provision for young people.



Executive Summaries

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | JOSEPH LYNCH

The Orpheus Project marks a significant step for Babel and the wider community we serve. The launch of this project in the wake of the pandemic has revealed to us the urgent need for more accessible creative activities for young people in East London. It demonstrates our commitment to being a space for people across all walks of society with a multitude of experiences to gather together and explore their commonalities rather than chastise each other for their differences.

Through delivering the project and seeing the participants navigate their own questions around masculinity, male identity and what informs their experience of living, we began to see the true power of this curated space that invites vulnerability and celebrates courage as each week the participants returned excited, fresh-faced commenting this is the highlight of their week. Their learning, bravery and empathy was inspiring to be a part of.

The wider project, though still in germination, will be a game-changing programme for young people as it continues to establish a culture of inclusion and access into creative experiences with Babel, onwards with our partners and friends, and equipping participants with the skills and confidence to engage in further creative opportunities, directly challenging the norm of who gets to engage in creative experiences in the UK today. Our commitment to access and inclusion positions this as a pioneering project and we see our facilitators and team as gate-openers rather than gatekeepers.

It has been a big, bold attempt at delivering a vital and much needed space to our community, and we are heartened by the warmth and support we have received. As Arts Funding in London continues to tighten and access to creative experiences dwindle, it is vital that projects like this think even bigger and aim for more radical inclusion.

In 2023 we will be delivering a further iteration to our East London community and we will centering the voices and experiences of our participants to help us co-create an ambitious, powerful and impactful programme.



We thank you for your ongoing support of our programme

Acknowledgements

This final project report was authored by Joseph Lynch and Arron Greechan on behalf of Babel Theatre.

Contributions to the final report were made by Orpheus Project 2022 participants, event attendees, Mateus Daniel, Will Townsend, Elena Juzulenaite.

Babel would like to thank the following individuals for their support; Jack Edwards, Francesca Gkotsi, Chris Hayes, Elena Juzulenaite,

Babel would like to extend a warm thanks to our supporting partners and funders without whom, none of this would have been possible:

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