

Focus Live Art

The challenges facing
policy and provision for
Live Art in England and
looking towards a
more sustainable future

Compiled by
Lois Keidan and Daniel Brine of the
Live Art Development Agency
November 2001

Focus Live Art Executive summary

Initiated by the Live Art Development Agency with support from the Live Art Officer at the Arts Council, *Focus Live Art* was an unprecedented series of meetings in Manchester, Birmingham and Brighton bringing together key artists, promoters and funders in each English region to consolidate the strengths and achievements of the Live Art sector, to address issues of policy and provision, and to consider solutions for a more sustainable future.

The aim of the *Focus Live Art* meetings was to focus on the identification of shared challenges and explore strategies to address them in relation to individual practices, regional needs and sector-wide developments. Collectively, the findings of the meetings are already acting as starting points for regional initiatives and, more importantly, can be seen to form the basis of a national overview.

Focus Live Art identified the challenges facing the sector under four groupings:

- **Advocacy and speaking out**
- **Artistic development – process and product**
- **Infrastructure and knowledge sharing**
- **Audiences**

Focus Live Art particularly identified a need to focus on the sustainability of both individual practices/practitioners and the sector at large and to rethink approaches for the support of those working within Live Art. If looked at from one direction Live Art is an unruly cross-artform anomaly that doesn't seem to sit easily within the system. But if looked at from another direction we can see that what Live Art 'is' and what Live Art 'can do' are synonymous with the funding priorities of innovation, risk, hybridity, audience development, social inclusion, participation, new cultural discourses and cultural diversity.

The *Focus Live Art* initiative and this report, which draws together its main concerns, essentially act as a review of the Live Art sector. This report offers many departure points for development. How to resource these developments is open for debate and negotiation, but one logical step is for there to be an injection of national provision from the Arts Council which would provide sufficient backing to take the sector forward in the most appropriate and effective ways.

This report does not end with a set of recommendations. Instead we are identifying a series of priorities for consideration and, hopefully, action.

Key priorities:

- **Signpost the system**
Signify to officers, artists and promoters how to negotiate the layers and agendas of the funding system and how to source appropriate avenues of support for project and strategic developments alike.

- **Resource artists as much as art**
Support artists in the research, development and ongoing process of their practices in equal measure to the generation and placement of new works.
- **Sustain provision and practitioners**
Invest in the ongoing needs and long term growth of Live Art artists, promoters and infrastructures.
- **Delegate responsibilities to those artists and promoters with the expertise and capacity to deliver**
Resource and enable artists and promoters working on the ground to do what they do best directly and effectively.
- **Enhance cross-artform fertilisation**
Recognise the relationships between and across, innovative contemporary practices and facilitate strategies for cross-disciplinary dialogues, collaborations and funding initiatives.
- **Further critical and popular representation**
Invest in the development of an ongoing critical framework for Live Art and support new strategies for increasing audience awareness and appreciation.
- **Facilitate specialised training, networking and mentoring**
Support artists, promoters and funders in initiating and accessing specialised training, in facilitating informed dialogues and exchanges and in maximising the impact of 'best practices'.
- **Demonstrate a genuine commitment to innovation, risk and hybridity**
The funding system needs to find a way to get to grips with what these words and concepts really mean or stop using them.

Focus Live Art

Introduction

Focus Live Art was a series of meetings held in September 2001 bringing together key artists, promoters and funders in each English region to address the challenges facing policy and provision for Live Art and to consider some solutions for a more sustainable future.

Focus Live Art set out to explore ways that artists and promoters working at the coal face could be more effectively resourced to do what they do, and how those working within the funding system can better get to grips with what Live Art has to offer. The meetings particularly aimed to examine the ways in which ‘what Live Art is’ and ‘what Live Art can do’ are virtually synonymous with funding priorities in terms of innovation, risk, hybridity, audience development, social inclusion, participation, new cultural discourses and cultural diversity.

The three meetings brought together regional grouping in Manchester (Northern Arts, Yorkshire Arts, and North West Arts); Birmingham (West Midlands Arts, East Midlands Arts, and East England Arts); and Brighton (South West Arts, Southern Arts, and South East Arts)¹.

The minutes of each of these meetings are attached as appendices to this report including lists of contributors.

Background

The *Focus Live Art* meetings came about through discussions within an informal grouping of national promoters about the uneven provision for Live Art. The group identified the need to raise awareness and appreciation within the funding system of the contribution Live Art can make at regional and national levels. The New Work Network echoed this desire and the Live Art Officer at the Arts Council provided a small grant to the Live Art Development Agency to help facilitate the meetings. Each of the Regional Arts Boards also contributed by covering delegates’ expenses and/or hosting the meetings. The agenda of *Focus Live Art* increased in its sense of urgency because of the likelihood of a restructuring of the funding landscape, however, the focus of the meetings was not on the restructure but on the constants which exist despite change.

¹ During the planning of *Focus Live Art*, London was considered to be a special case (as it often is) and therefore not included in the initiative. This was because of the concern that the issues facing the sector in London would dominate discussions. However, in hindsight, many of the issues raised through the discussions demonstrate that the situation in London is not an exception. In fact, the sector is interesting because, with the exceptions of London Arts and the Live Art Development Agency, provision in London is very poor and London venues and organisations do not dominate the national scene (as is the case with many other sectors of the arts).

Context

Live Art is now widely acknowledged as one of the most vital and influential of creative spaces: it is the research engine of our culture where borders are disrupted and rules are broken, where new possibilities are imagined and new discourses are formed.

Live Art can be ...

- Hayley Newman working in collaboration with computer scientists from Nottingham University and school children to develop a performance with innovative collaborative software;
- Moti Roti inviting us to have a cultural makeover;
- Bobby Baker undertaking a residency in an old persons home and developing an innovative interactive website;
- Ann Whitehurst reconceiving her wheel chair to make it a socially conscious vehicle for today's society;
- Fierce running a programme of arts 'tasters' in some of the hottest clubs in the UK;
- Harry Palmer working with allotment owners in the largest allotment in Birmingham;
- Duckie opening our eyes to our inner cities with tongue-in-cheek walking tours;
- Michael Mayhew inhabiting a disused home for the mentally unstable in rural Lancashire;
- Franko B's bloodletting in front of a capacity audience at Beaconsfield;
- the anger and wit of Roney Fraser Munroe's bizarre characterisations;
- Jeremy Deller's projects the recreation of the Battle of Orgreave and a collaboration with the Stockport-based William Fairey Brass Band to play a selection of Acid House anthems;
- Amorphic Robot Works creating a warehouse full of robots performing for family audiences at the NOW Festival;
- La Ribot selling performances to Distinguished Proprietors around the world;
- Arnolfini's Breathing Space offering emerging artists time and space to develop work;
- the New Work Network bringing like minded artists together around the UK;
- the opening of our eyes to the beauty, vulnerability, and intimacy of our bodies brought about by watching Kira O'Reilly body based actions;
- an understanding of the outlook of contemporary Black Britain communicated through a Susan Lewis performance;
- an exploration of the fragility of family relationships as explored by Kazuko Hohki;
- Blast Theory BAFTA nominated exploration of interactive software and the gaming culture;
- Desperate Optimist's remappings of the city;
- Jason E Bowman's exploration of urban regeneration;
- Aaron Williamson in a museum vitrine in the Victoria and Albert Museum;
- the ROOT Festival in Hull;
- Colchester Arts Centre's innovative tour of Live Art to small rural venues;
- Anna Best's residency in a bingo hall;
- the Chameleon training programme for Black and Asian artists;
- Becky Edmunds collaborating with scientists to explore our future human physicality;
- Doran George bricking himself up in a shopping centre at Elephant and Castle;
- Juliet Robson organising debates and performances on issues of disability for Vital;
- Andrew Caley Chetty exploring the relationships between the creative industries and the arts;
- Jo Joelson and Bruce Gilchrist analysing the eclipse by flying kites;
- Bock and Vincenzi working with blind performers to explore movement and the experience of journeys;
- Station House Opera's spectacular breeze block constructions in front of Salisbury Cathedral;
- Lone Twin line dancing while blindfolded for twenty four hours;
- Divine David performing a skating spectacular at Streatham Ice Rink;
- an intensive month of international residencies and presentation of ideas at SPAN2 ... and much more.

As we can see from this list, Live Art's obvious ability to move fluidly and eloquently across genres, spaces and places singles it out as an area of practice uniquely equipped to negotiate the complex tapestry of our lives and times. Live Art is well placed and able to respond to the hybridity and sophistication of diverse cultural experiences and expectations. Moreover it is an area of activity that has had, and continues to have, a profound impact on critical frameworks, cultural infrastructures, and the politics of artistic production and consumption. There can be a perception that the innovative and specialised nature of Live Art is at odds with funding priorities such as audience development, social exclusion, participation, legacy and urban renewal but a quick look at contemporary practices demonstrates that this is clearly not the case.

Over the last few decades Live Art has evolved into an area of practice that ranges from the theatrical at one extreme to time based installation work at the other. In between, it touches upon the edges of dance, video, new writing, installation, club culture, political activism and the emergent languages of the digital age. Grounded in ideas of space, time and action Live Art is a landscape, a geography, as much as it is a received discipline. Such extremities were reflected by the diversity of artists and promoters who contributed to the *Focus Live Art* meetings.

The unfixable, fluid, flexible, uncontainable and diverse nature of Live Art is unquestionably one of its greatest strengths and something that keeps the sector alive and 'on its toes'. But it has its downsides. The constantly shifting and evolving terrain of Live Art can offer a great freedom to artists and promoters alike, but can also pose huge challenges to those who lead in the development of coherent policy and provision.

The extremities of approaches also tell us that Live Art is an area of practice with complex and diverse needs – to put it simply, an artist or promoter working more theatrically has very different needs from those working with time based installations. One size does not fit all.

The extremities in practice within Live Art were reflected in the Regional Arts Board Officers who attended the *Focus Live Art* meetings and, in turn, the diversity of approaches that we see in national policy and provision for Live Art. In some regions Live Art falls under drama, in others under dance, in some it is considered visual art and in others combined arts. This in itself automatically reflects one of the challenges that Live Art faces in terms of a clear national policy and clear provision. Where does it fit? Where should it fit? Should it fit into one place or be a way of bringing many places together? Who should be responsible for it and what strategies need to be put in place to ensure a more even playing field and more effective ways of communicating across disciplines and across regional borders?

Specific objectives and structure of Focus Live Art meetings

To summarise, the objectives of the *Focus Live Art* meetings were to:

- provide an informed sense of the contributions Live Art makes to the cultural landscape in England;
- develop a national overview of the Live Art sector² by exploring what is happening and who is making it happen region by region;
- examine existing models of best practice for the development of a sector of the arts and to explore how this could inform the development of the Live Art sector;
- identify key challenges for the sector and begin to imagine ideal scenarios for the future.

Each meeting was structured in the following form:

- An introduction to recent developments in Live Art and its relevance to funding priorities (Live Art Development Agency)
- A presentation about a vision for a national network of artists (New Work Network)
- A presentation about the potential to develop national partnerships and initiatives (Arts Council of England)
- Discussions centring on two 'regional' case studies. The case studies were not provided as 'a solution' or the only models of development, rather they were presented as active projects to be considered in the context of examples from participants and thereby form some starting point for discussion.
- An afternoon of discussion exploring how we can work collectively towards building a more effectively resourced and empowered Live Art sector across the country.
- The identification of key issues and the 'top ten' challenges for the Live Art sector.
- Regional discussions (in three regional groups) focusing on which of the key issues are most relevant to each region and considering some possible ways

² For convenience the term 'Live Art sector' has been used to describe the body of practitioners, promoters, funders, and organisations which actively contribute to the development of Live Art. The notion of Live Art being an identifiable 'sector' goes against the nature of practice which by its very nature often crosses artform boundaries and challenges definitions. However, the use of 'sector' has been helpful in trying to identify a group of arts professionals with common goals and interests.

forward. Including the exploration of relevant models (including those from other artforms).

- A summation and pooling of ideas, and considering how to begin to paint a national picture.

Report and Findings

A sense of a shared desire to make the most of this vital sector dominated the meetings and the uniqueness of bringing artists, promoters, and funders together for open discussion was a liberating experience.

The *Focus Live Art* meetings demonstrated that the sector is articulate and astute in identifying its key challenges. However, they also demonstrated there are too few opportunities to put solutions in place to meet them.

This report has been structured around the challenges of: infrastructure, speaking out, knowledge sharing, audiences, and process and product. However, these should not be read as separate and clearly defined areas as there is significant cross-over between them. A bullet point summary of the challenges is attached as an appendix.

The identified challenges for Live Art

Sustainability

The Live Art sector can be characterised as having a ‘flash-fire’ infrastructure – one where sparks of activity illuminate the scene for a time and then dwindle only to be replaced by other sparks and fires elsewhere. This can create a degree of excitement and a sense of always working ‘on the edge’ and is for many artists, promoters, and audiences one of the reasons to be interested in Live Art. It is not, however, the ideal environment for the development of strategies or initiatives that have a long-term impact. The case studies presented by Black Arts Alliance and Hull Time Based Arts demonstrate that sustained provision has long-term impact through enabling the development and implementation of strategies for audience, artistic and venue development.

The ‘flash-fire’ infrastructure in Live Art is often a reflection of the interests and enthusiasm of an individual – either catalytic artist, promoter or funding officer. Anthony Roberts at Colchester Arts Centre is an excellent example of this. Having ‘discovered’ Live Art for himself at the National Review of Live Art he began to commission and programme Live Art at his venue. This interest resulted in an ongoing programme of work; the Charge Festival (in collaboration with First Site Gallery); and a small regional tour. This activity represented a step-change increase in provision for the region and has been acknowledged as contributing significantly to the national scene.

The Live Art sector is one that currently encourages fatigue. Many of the more senior artists and promoters feel they are fighting the same battles they have fought throughout their careers. The *Focus Live Art* meetings showed that the sector is articulate in identifying its key challenges. What is apparent is that there are too few opportunities to put the solutions in place to meet these challenges.

The *Focus Live Art* meetings looked at ways to beat the fatigue and to capitalise on new energies – to stimulate discussion about solutions which could be put in place even with limited resources; to imagine ways to lever new resources; and to look to the future positively. The need to stimulate new activity is important, however – in response to the voices we heard around the county – this report takes as its central theme the challenge of sustainability.

The activity in Colchester has been personality driven and there is no guarantee the Arts Centre will continue investing in Live Art if Anthony moves on. Sustainability is not about maintaining the status quo, rather it is about responsible responsiveness and long term planning. Sustainability is about cultivation. It is a key challenge for the sector to find ways to sow the seeds for this organic and catalytic growth of activity; build on it; and sustain it over a period of time (while at the same time continuing to sow new seeds).

The challenges of infrastructure

The ‘flash-fire’ effect applies equally to individuals, single venues and broader areas such as regions and cities. Some cities such as Nottingham have been able to sustain activity over time because of a range of activities in the city. On the other hand there are cities like Brighton, which has a rich mix of provision but has failed to develop a sustainable body of practice. Brighton has a large number of artists; strong higher education provision; and good potential venues and partners (including the South East Dance Agency, South East Touring Agency, The Brighton Festival, Lighthouse, and Fabrica) yet for lack of a champion has not been able to sustain a body of activity. To identify cities and towns with strong existing provision (in Live Art and related practices) and, more importantly, to nurture and build on that provision is a challenge which the sector needs to continually meet.

Sustaining infrastructure and provision within a region is also important for cities and regions where there is a perception of a ‘talent drain’. Strong infrastructure and provision encourages artists and other arts professionals to stay in a region. In particular it encourages university graduates to remain after graduation. Strategies to sustain provision can therefore contribute to ensuring that regions ‘retain’ their talented individuals.

In many regions the ability and desire of those working in Live Art to undertake site specific projects and use unusual or non-traditional venues, was cited as a strength. The questioning nature of Live Art encourages this search for appropriate presentation spaces but the use of alternative spaces/places also reflects an opportunistic and entrepreneurial approach of many Live Art practitioners and promoters.

The current funding system rewards the project-to-project approach by offering a range of project based funds as its main source of income for Live Art. This support however, perpetuates a one-off (flash-fire) approach and fails to offer opportunities for long term development. It also means that artists and promoters are locked into a cycle of project development, fundraising, and presentation which leads to fatigue as they move from one project to the next. This project-to-project approach in particular, presents challenges in terms of audience development, as it is very difficult to build a consistent audience base when continually working on a one-off basis. This approach challenges those involved in funding to acknowledge and work with the project based culture while at the same time finding ways to encourage and support sustainability.

The infrastructure of Live Art dedicated organisations and venues is not extensive and the main venues and organisation committed to Live Art can be counted on two hands. The importance of sustaining the activity and commitment of these venues is therefore paramount. An excellent example of the impact of the changing makeup of the Live Art infrastructure is the changing role of the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA). Until five years ago the ICA was the peak organisation for Live Art in England; it presented and commissioned innovative

work; ran significant professional development programmes; led critical engagement with practice; and was well regarded internationally. The change in policy at the ICA means that Live Art is no longer a priority and the ICA's withdrawal from the sector has left a substantial hole. The limited extent of the national infrastructure means that there are specific issues of sustainability of practice because it is not possible to assume that if a hole is created in the infrastructure other organisations will be able to fill it. The funding system, in particular, needs to be sensitive to the fragility of the Live Art infrastructure and ensure that as the landscape changes resources are not lost or 'relocated'.

The infrastructure should also not only be considered in terms of those 'dedicated' providers – that is organisations and individuals solely working with Live Art. Within the Live Art sector those 'casual' contributors are equally important and without them the sector would not be able to continue. Therefore organisations such as the South London Gallery, Site Gallery, Battersea Arts Centre, and Warwick Arts Centre while not solely dedicated to Live Art are nonetheless vital components of the infrastructure and their ongoing interest needs to be supported, developed and sustained.

The Live Art sector needs to continue to think creatively about the ways infrastructure can work and support practice. A dependence on building based provision is not necessarily the only means to support a sector and there is potential to think about other types of infrastructure. The sector knows all too well that the provision of a physical space does not necessarily translate into activity. A good example is the dedicated Live Art Space at Ferens Gallery which remains largely unused because there are not the staff or resources to enable it to be productive.

Many in the Live Art sector look enviously at the network of National Dance Agencies and consider this a valid model from which to consider the development of Live Art provision. The success of the Live Art Development Agency in London and Fierce in the West Midlands demonstrates that the agency model can work for Live Art. However, the nature of the sector is such that means of developing the infrastructure need to be found which shore it up but do not institutionalise it.

International activity is also a key component of the Live Art infrastructure. Live Art is increasingly attracting international attention and intrigue and the role of Live Art as a catalyst for trans-national dialogues and exchanges is now recognised as a vital one by the British Council. A specificity to location and a concern with immediate, intimate and charged dialogues with audiences complemented by a practical, linguistic and contextual flexibility, all contribute to Live Art's ability to move fluidly and eloquently amongst generations, identities and experiences and across artistic, cultural and geopolitical borders. Live Art comes with little baggage and is uniquely equipped "to travel".

Through the *Focus Live Art* meetings it was continually emphasised that one size does not fit all and that regional initiatives need to be developed which reflect the

activity of that region and build on its current strengths and provision. It is also vital that there is collaboration between regions and an understanding of how regional initiatives contribute to a national picture. There is little point in each region establishing a platform for emerging artists when a more viable option may be to buy into an existing initiative in another region. The Arts Council currently takes the lead in providing a national overview, however, it should be a long term ambition of the sector to have this role led by practice rather than by the funding system.

The challenges of speaking out

The practices of Live Art are diverse and representation of the sector therefore presents significant challenges – challenges of representation within the sector; about the sector to funders; about the sector to other sectors; and about the work to audiences. The Live Art sector needs to present a coherent picture of diversity – diversity of form, approaches (scale, site, context, process) and needs (of artists, promoters, and funders). One way to meet this challenge is to emphasise and focus on what Live Art **has to offer** rather than **what it is**.

The challenge of speaking out for Live Art is no more apparent than within the funding system. In the Regional Arts Boards, officers responsible for Live Art have as their primary focus dance, theatre, new media, visual arts, or combined arts. This eclectic mix reflects the diversity of practice but it also means that provision from region to region is vastly different. The diversity means, in particular, that it is very difficult for the funding system to find a common voice or even common interests with which to address Live Art. On the basest level it is difficult for these officers to meet because of their diverse portfolios.

The many locations of Live Art within the funding system mean that Live Art often falls between the gaps of existing provision. It is therefore difficult for the sector to be represented at a national level. There is a dedicated Live Art Officer within the Visual Arts Department at the Arts Council and recent funding patterns suggest that, post restructuring and the abolition of the Combined Arts Department, Live Art is still being embraced through ACE's Visual Arts strategies and initiatives including the National Touring Programme, Spaces and Places, Visual Arts Publishing and ACE Fellowships. However, without the post being mirrored in the regions it is difficult to find a coherent voice within the funding system and Live Art continues to miss out on opportunities offered by strategic initiatives.

The diversity of provision within the funding system means that it is hard for officers to coordinate and share information, it is however even more confusing for artists and promoters to negotiate the system. The funding system faces a significant challenge in the need to clarify its access points for artists to information about and provision for Live Art – to better and more consistently sign-post opportunities available to those working in Live Art.

Sustainability is also an internal issue for the funding system in relation to Live Art. No Regional Arts Board has a dedicated Live Art Officer and there is therefore not the continuity provided by the stability of a dedicated post. More often Live Art is housed with the officer who has shown the most interest in the area of practice (basically the one who put up her or his hand). This has its advantages because it ensures officers who are interested in engaging with the work, however, it also means that it is very difficult to sustain strategy and provision over time (and sometimes no officer puts up a hand). Linked to this and equally important for the sector is the consistency of funding opportunities. London Arts' sustained support for Live Art through Combined Arts London, as part of a holistic strategy, has been very important for the sector. The long life of the fund means that artists and other arts professionals know about and can plan towards a stable funding opportunity. If 'pools' of generic funding are to be developed within the funding system then maintaining signposting for Live Art becomes crucial and the role of the officer as the conduit of information even more important.

Crossover of practices is common – in fact it is a strength of Live Art – but due to the nature of the sector connections with other practices are fragmented. An excellent example of this is the relationship of the National Dance Agencies to the Live Art sector. Dance4 has well established relationships with a number of Live Art focused organisations and artists. This has significantly benefited Live Art and has also enriched the dance sector. Similarly the relationship between the Arnolfini and DA2 was fertile territory for the exploration of crossover between Live Art and new medias. There is a great opportunity for the Live Art sector to develop many more strategic relationships and partnerships such as these which will enable a cross-fertilisation of ideas and provide access to a broader range of resources and opportunities.

Because of the interdisciplinary approaches of Live Art and its exploration of 'difficult' content and form it is often an attractive area of practice to artists who do not see themselves as comfortably fitting within other artistic traditions. Live Art is a particularly potent arena for a new generation of culturally diverse artists and disabled artists who have effectively been marginalised within dominant cultural traditions in Britain. Live Art offers new languages to play with the cultural and social influences that inform us, to articulate new forms of identity and representation and to create new cultural landscapes. For artists addressing issues of identity and cultural difference, Live Art has proven to be an articulate platform to challenge the dominant post colonial narratives and traditional representations of 'the other'. Recent years, for example, have seen the emergence of a new generation of black artists, such as Ronald Fraser Munro (who uses live performance, new technologies and subversive humour to mock pillars of the western establishment) and Moti Roti (who draw upon a diversity of interdisciplinary practices to create new representations of the complexity of the British-Asian experience). The performance work of these and other artists contributes to broader social and political shifts around identity, assimilation and hybridity in Britain's multi-cultural society. Such processes have not only

contributed to the negotiation of cultural identities of Britain but have also been instrumental in questioning perceptions of essentialised cultural experiences.

While Live Art has an excellent record of inclusivity its infrastructure needs to further explore cross-fertilisation with culturally specific arts providers and where appropriate develop initiatives to ensure that Live Art remains an inclusive practice.

Engagement in critical dialogues within the sector (and relating to other sectors) is an ongoing challenge for Live Art. Live Art Magazine plays an important role within the sector as an information and listings resource but unlike other sectors there is no critical focus for the sector. There are a number of journals with a strong academic perspective such as Performance Research but none that are rooted in practice. In recent years the Arts Council has supported a number of Live Art publications (My Valentine by Monica Ross, Stalking Memory by Desperate Optimists, and Hearing Things by Aaron Williamson just to name a few) and these have made a significant contribution to the development of critical dialogues. However, as direct resources for Live Art have been increasingly limited at the Arts Council these opportunities are no longer as available. Although Visual Arts Publishing Fund at the Arts Council has indicated that Live Art will be a priority for the coming year, there is no long term strategy for critical writing and consequently critical dialogues may well be limited and unable to fulfil their potential to significantly develop critical frameworks.

After-show discussions are regularly held at a number of venues and the New Work Network's recent Live Late Review initiative has been a welcome one to the development of critical dialogues but these are neither regular enough nor the outcomes well enough disseminated to have a national impact.

In relation to the national press, Live Art has failed to capitalise on its role as an innovative and exciting practice. The sector needs to meet the challenge of developing Public Relation strategies for its voice to be heard in the national press and thereby reach a broader audience.

The challenges of knowledge sharing

To varying extents networks of artists, promoters and funders already exist within the Live Art sector. Of these the artist-led support initiative, the New Work Network is the best established and it receives a small amount of fixed term funding from the Arts Council. Promoters meet on an informal basis through the Live Art Promoters Group although this is not funded and works on an ad hoc basis. Funding officers no longer have the very useful tool of Joint Officer Group meetings and networking is only possible through informal contact between officers. Of most significance, there is not the opportunity for these different groups to come together to share ideas. One of the benefits of the *Focus Live Art* meetings has been the inclusiveness of the discussions, which many of the participants would like to continue in the future.

The existing networks operate on a national level and many of the regional discussions as part of *Focus Live Art* emphasised the need for stronger regional networks. In some cases there is a need for the gathering of a base level of information – basically a regional audit. Some officers, such as the officer from East England Arts, have decided to prioritise this. Others regions such as Northern Arts have already identified a committed group of practitioners and promoters but wish to develop better communication between the different activities.

The desire to network is many fold. For some it is the desire to meet peers while others have identified the need to share information and resources. For many there is a perception that a formal development of the connection to peers would be of significance for professional development. And, in fact, this is one of the primary concerns of the New Work Network. Most commonly, the desire to undertake mentoring programmes was a priority and perceived as an excellent way to tailor professional development programmes to the individual.

The ways in which providers of higher education fit within the sector was discussed at all of the meetings. There was concern that higher education did not sufficiently inform the sector or capitalise on what it has to offer and vice versa. A major challenge for the sector is to find better ways of drawing the higher education sector into ‘the fold’ and cultivating a greater crossover of critical frameworks, facilities and audiences.

To experience Live Art properly it needs to be seen. Viewing documentation is often inadequate and fails to communicate the nature of the work, especially those works which are site specific and/or time based. The need for promoters to see work is obvious but many artists also identified the need to see the work of peers. This is not only an issue on local and national levels but suggests a need for greater access to international work. Many of the participants at the *Focus Live Art* meetings voiced a desire for better resourcing to be able to travel to see work as a crucial aspect of professional development.

The challenges of audiences

Live Art has the potential (and indeed the track-record) of being attractive to new audiences. Ground breaking research in relation to club audiences was undertaken in the Live Art sector and many participatory projects are managed by Live Art practitioners. The unique understanding of the relationship between form, context and content means that Live Art is well equipped to meet audiences on a common cultural footing and relate to them on their terms.

Among practitioners and promoters, there is an increasing feeling that the funding system is seeking quantity of audience rather than quality audiences. Live Art may not always pack out a stadium but the quality of experience appreciated by a Live Art audience member is often much much more than being a ‘bum on a seat’. Because of Live Art’s engagement with context (physical and social) the work

often directly effects audiences and informs their understanding of society beyond the arts context.

Because Live Art is more about an approach or ethos than a form, it does not need to struggle to find relevance for a wide cross-section of the community. The fact that it is not overly burdened by artistic tradition means that it can shape itself to suit the context and audience. There is sometimes a perception that Live Art is inaccessible and exclusive. As an area of innovative practice, the form of the work is often challenging, however, this does not automatically translate to exclusivity.

There is sometimes a perception within the arts that social and political agendas such as urban renewal and social exclusion (for example) are forced upon practitioners and practice. Within Live Art social and political concerns are not manifestations of cosmetic progressiveness but are often inherent in artists' and promoters' practices. Excellent examples of this were evidenced during the 2000 NOW Festival when Hayley Newman worked with school children to develop a performance with innovative collaborative software; Moti Roti enabled young Asian women to articulate their experiences of living in contemporary Britain; and Amorphic Robot Workshop worked with socially excluded young people to make robots which played to packed family audiences.

Live Art audiences are highly committed arts attenders and willing to explore and engage with new ideas and new artistic practices. Monitoring at Arnolfini has shown that their core audience is dedicated to pursuing Live Art practices whether in the studio, galleries, or beyond the building. The experiences of Arnolfini and other promoters such as NOW also demonstrate that providing a unique and often participatory performance experience can attract and sustain new audiences to the arts.

The commitment of audiences to particular companies and artists is also a key characteristic of the Live Art sector. This means that ongoing audience development should not only be considered in relation to venues but also with the ways companies develop long-term relationships with audiences. A good example of this is the ways audiences seek out the work of Forced Entertainment. Although the company is currently forced to have a peripatetic relationship with London venues it never has a problem attracting an audience. This loyalty is demonstrated by comments such as "I wait for the next Forced Entertainment show like I wait for the next album from my favourite band."

Throughout the 1990s, the impact of artists working within the Live Art arena has extended throughout and beyond the art world. They have unquestionably contributed to the energy at the edges of in British culture in recent years and affected the politics of artistic production and consumption. They have brought concepts of interdisciplinarity and collaboration to the foreground, they have changed the reference points of contemporary culture and in their response to the hybridity and complexity of the forces at play in the modern world they have actively contributed to the shaping and defining of broader debates in Britain.

Live Art has genuinely acknowledged the shifts that have taken place between gallery, theatre and other cultural spaces and recognises the sophistication of audiences' experiences and expectations at the start of the millennium.

The challenges of process and product

Live Art is one of the primary test beds and breeding grounds for the arts. It almost goes without saying that when Live Art practices ultimately impact on the mainstream – as they always do – it is these kinds of developments that keep our arts alive. These are artists who are out there questioning, resisting, experimenting, testing and making work that should be recognised as the research engine of, not just our art, but our culture. Experimentation and innovation, which are central to Live Art, should be nurtured, celebrated and supported.

Provision for Live Art needs to not become fixated with product but to also acknowledge the validity of process. Time and space to develop ideas and practices are vital within Live Art, throughout the career of an artist. Arnolfini's Breathing Space programme has demonstrated the benefits of providing a nurturing environment for artists and the constructive outcomes which are possible when the focus is not solely product led. If Live Art is to reach its full potential then it is important to invest in the process of making work as well as celebrating and enjoying the creative product.

What was voiced loudly and clearly by artists attending the *Focus Live Art* meetings was that they sought support which enabled them first and foremost to be artists and did not impose agendas, over burden administratively, or discount the right to try but sometimes fail.

Artists also expressed a desire to have the best possible access to new cultural and artistic agendas. This ranges from access to new media and the artistic issues it raises to being able to find a voice for current issues such as civil liberties.

The sector also needs to find ways of presenting and better communicating the processes of working to audiences. Fixed notions of forms of presentation need to be challenged to meet the needs of Live Art practitioners. The Trans:actions initiative of Arnolfini, Bluecoat Arts Centre and Warwick Arts Centre was an excellent example of exploring the touring needs of Live Art work and resulted in the work being adapted for the audiences and location of each venue.

Sustaining activity is not only about the infrastructure and the people who are part of it. It is even more directly relevant in terms of artists' practice. One of the key challenges identified by artists was sustaining professional careers. They emphasised the need for support throughout their careers – essentially cradle to grave provision. This is not to suggest consistent provision throughout a career but different types of support at different times. Continuous professional development will be very different for each artist because of the many and varied

career paths that artists take. The key for provision which sustains careers is therefore flexible and responsive to a wide range of needs.

There is sometimes a perception that Live Art is solely the domain of young artists and provision is therefore limited to the needs of younger artists. Live Art is not solely for younger artists and it is important that provision reflects this. It is possible to identify many 'stages' of careers within Live Art that are in need of support. Addressing the link between education and first public presentations of work; commissioning opportunities and long term administrative support for mid-career artists; and documentation and archiving for the work of senior artists, are just a few cases which were cited through the *Focus Live Art* meetings. The challenge for the sector is to ensure that there is a plurality of possibilities and to listen to artists so that provision can be responsive to need.

Meeting the challenges

This scope of *Focus Live Art* was not to arrive at a series of action points which would redefine the future of Live Art on a national basis. Instead the meetings focused on identifying shared challenges and then discussing regional needs and developments. Recommendations and action points for the future will be developed on a region by region basis by those with an interest in the region. The *Focus Live Art* meetings and this paper are only a starting point. It is now up to regional groups to take the initiative forward.

Already regional groups have started to plan for the future. Northern Arts was host to the first regional specific meeting and that meeting agreed on some simple but important actions for the future. Similarly, there is an action plan for the East Midlands which has the potential to enhance the current activity in the region.

The regional action plans will not aim for homogeneity but will aim to build on the strength within each region. Some regions currently have little Live Art activity and will focus on sowing the seeds while others which have established venues and practitioners will put in place long terms strategies to enhance the existing provision and address the gaps of current provision.

In recent years the Arts Council has put in place a range of strategies designed to rebuild key aspects of the national arts infrastructure including The Orchestras Review, Spaces and Places (based on the Galleries Review), and the Theatre Review. Frustratingly Live Art is often on the edges of these types of reviews but is rarely a significant beneficiary. There is no reason why Live Art should not also benefit from a review of the sector.

The *Focus Live Art* initiative and this report, which draws together its main concerns, essentially act as a review of the Live Art sector. This paper offers many departure points for development. How to resource these developments is not so clear. However, the logical step is for there to be an injection of national provision from the Arts Council which would provide sufficient backing to take the sector forward.