

Making the future

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Much has happened since the last volume of Live Art UK case studies, *In Time*, was published in 2010. The world in which we live has irrevocably changed, conversations about participation in art and culture have shifted and Live Art as a sector has grown and matured. Whereas *In Time* arguably focused on definitions and advocacy for recognition of Live Art as a significant contemporary artform and growing sector, these 2018 case studies illustrate how Live Art – a vital, radical approach to artmaking – has come of age, influencing the languages of mainstream culture and creating marked social impact that reaches far beyond predetermined groups of artists, organisers and audiences.

Over the last nine years, Live Art has gone from strength to strength, both within the UK and internationally. Live Art's sophistication and flexibility has enabled the creation of powerful bodies of works that have sensitively responded to a myriad of scales, sizes and settings. The complex and nuanced ecologies of Live Art understand and value symbiosis between small, marginal activities in local communities, perhaps unseen by artworld cognoscenti, and the more established or institutional successes in producing a vibrant, blooming scene. That the majority of recipients for the 2018 Paul Hamlyn Breakthrough Fund award – including *Scottee*, the vacuum cleaner, and *Outburst* queer arts festival – have been working under the auspices of Live Art is an indication of Live Art's reach and influence in the UK cultural sphere. Similarly, this year will see Live Art making further furores into formal education with the inaugural cohort of the MA Live Art, the first masters programme of its kind, convened by the Drama Department at Queen Mary University, London in collaboration with the Live Art Development Agency (LADA).

The continued centrality of social change to Live Art's DNA today can be quickly gleaned by scanning the thematics covered in this collection of case studies. From money to migration to access and activism, Live Art is profoundly concerned with the conditions of living as well as the conditions of artmaking, admitting that the activity of artmaking is never value-free. Indeed, I would suggest that Live Art is not only a laboratory for new forms of artmaking, but a laboratory for testing new ways of being and living in the world. The urgency of these questions for Live Art practitioners is highlighted in Joon Lynn Goh's case study on Live Art and Solidarity (p.18), 'What kind of world are we committing our practices to? Whether you take inspiration from and across a No Borders movement, a global commons, Afrofuturism or non-capitalism, how are our artistic practices building possible futures?'

Drawing on the vast spectrum of human (and increasingly non-human) experiences, Live Art attempts to build artistic languages that are honest and reflective of the values and ethics of its makers. By actively putting forward voices/places/subjects that might otherwise not be considered appropriate for artmaking, Live Art has long been questioning the inherent elitism of 'art for art's sake' (as who can afford to do this, honestly?), however it has not been content with reproducing institutional critique. As is described in the case study on Live Art Spaces and Places (p.30) written by Abby Butcher and David Sheppard of the Marlborough Pub and Theatre in Brighton, Live Art practitioners have also seized opportunities to seed experimental, self-organised, DIY organisations, often in disused, unexpected spaces. Whilst on the one hand, access to such spaces may be the ambivalent consequent of recession, property bubbles and other economic fallout, it may also be that these unconventional non-white cube gallery, non-traditional theatre spaces allow new definitions of organising to flourish, enabling Live Art practitioners to re-imagine, curate and control (in concrete, practical ways) these initiatives so that purpose and values are thoroughly embedded and aligned, from root to tip.

At a time when metrics, quantification and the collection of data loom large as ways to know and understand the world, Live Art provokes us to practice artmaking and art-enabling beyond the norm, reminding us about the power of leftfield intelligence, humour and a nimble rolling-with-the-punches, coupled with a recognition that there is always an opportunity to shift inequities of the status quo. As Andy Field in his case study on Live Art and Money (p.80) asserts, Live Art is 'collaborative, non-hierarchical, responsive, disruptive, fleet-footed and imaginative'.

Live Art building(s)

Live Art challenges the methods and languages of artmaking, through its interdisciplinary use of material, subject matter and settings. Moreover, Live Art has attempted to change the institutional structures that enable presentation of work and understandings of audiences. As a sector with big ambition, (often) small budgets and a discontent with inequalities, Live Art initiatives are keen to create support structures for artmaking that reflect the values of the work itself. As a result, the UK's Live Art sector plays a key role in a fundamental shift to the ways that culture is being produced and presented around the world.

By reflecting on what it means for different types of bodies to be present, perform and experience, Live Art often fundamentally challenges and disrupts the relationships between art makers, art support structures and audiences, encouraging mutual responsibility and support. Karl Taylor's case study on Live Art and Access (p.59) refers to how Live Art practitioners have challenged the convention of viewing the bodies of BSL interpreters as invisible instruments, 'Artists working in Live Art are rarely content with ignoring another body onstage with them; they want – and need – to address how this new body shifts power and space'. In Live Art, the provision of access is not merely a barrier to be addressed, but instead becomes a creative parameter and challenge for artists to address.

Live Art forms of protest and resistance therefore manifest as a need to push beyond the making of image or action, towards the building of inclusive spaces and ways to co-critique and co-create relations between those who contribute to artwork in ways not often acknowledged by official discourse on art. For instance, *They Are Here's 40 Temps, 8 Days* (2017), a durational performance work during which five different temps a day are employed to do activities they would usually do in their spare time, writes new critiques of labour forms into the ecosystem of making art.

Live Art defiance

'What's the point in taking up space with a semi-nude non-binary body and a megaphone if you have to get permission first?'
Abby Butcher and David Sheppard,
Live Art Spaces and Places (p.30)

The values, achievements and hopes of Live Art remind me every day to be brave, demanding that I remember every woman and person of colour who has stood up for their rights, so that I – as a WOC (Woman of Colour) – can be part of the Live Art sector. We need bravery to make work that communicates the barriers of privilege, breaks them down and builds an accessible and inclusive ecology that tells of diverse experiences and models a more equitable society. Bravery is also needed to build infrastructures for Live Art practices, so that artists, organisers and participants are able to take time and space, to nurture contexts against the incessant waves of neo-liberal energies.

Discussing the relationships between direct action and durational performance in their case study on Live Art and Activism (p.22), Mel Evans and Hayley Newman tell us that 'in the cultural sphere we are subject to the health and safety checks and constraints of galleries. In activism we take care of health and safety planning ourselves'. Determination, inventiveness and defiance have been crucial to the success of Liberate Tate and



They Are Here, 40 Temps, 8 Days, Tate Modern, 2017. Photo by Indre Neiberkaite



Monica Ross, Act 19, LSE, 2010. Photo by Bernard Mills

other Live Art initiatives that challenge the perception of art organisations as primary custodians of society's rituals. Indeed, this defiance is noted again in Salome Wagaine's case study on Live Art and Representation (p.38), 'artists and arts leaders have grown tired of politely knocking on doors. Instead, they learnt to talk the talk of funders and politicians in order to unlock institutional and government support for the art they want to make'. Wagaine highlights shifts in language that have accompanied the various changes in policy, public acceptance and understanding of who art is made by and who it is for. Alongside these tides, Live Art has consistently championed artmaking that engages with the issues of representation, identity and difference, because as she says, 'without representation, we learn to forget ourselves'.

Live Art lives

The social practice that underpins much Live Art practice calls for the hearts, minds and bodies of artists, organisers and audiences to be refuelled, in order to continue growing and thriving. Namely, Live Art ecologies need care, sustenance and imagination.

1. Care –

This principle of care is outlined in Ilana Mitchell's case study on Live Art and Participation (p.52) which discusses the impact of Joshua Sofaer's *Opera Helps* and Monica Ross' *Anniversary – an Act of Memory* on everyone who comes into contact with them, 'if you are going to invite people to participate in works, every layer ...must be treated with respect and care'. In both of these works, allowing sufficient time for relationships to evolve seems to be decisive and necessary for empowered engagement between artists, organisers and participants. Going beyond refusal of traditional, passive models of being an audience member, towards shaping new conceptions of audience is inherent to Live Art approaches.

2. Sustenance –

This set of case studies evidences that Live Art is infiltrating all sorts of weird and wonderful spaces, yet the sector, its supporters, funders and institutions must also acknowledge and describe the financial, emotional and physical toll that such work takes to perform. Often this potential is thwarted by burnout and fatigue, in the face of an extremely challenging economic environment and political uncertainty prompted by the Brexit vote. As a framework for not only producing art but also reproducing ourselves, the notions of sustenance and nourishment are essential components to Live Art, helping those who make work in this sector to replenish the various forms of labour expended.

3. Imagination –

Mary Paterson states, 'Live Art is the invitation to think and keep on thinking. It is precisely this attention to thinking as a process, rather than ideas of any form, that makes it so radical and so engaging. After all, this is an activity not just open to everyone but contingent on everyone involved' (p.75). Through trust, dialogue and care for the development of an artist's idea, Live Art creates space and opportunity to imagine wildly, and turn such imaginings into a reality. The belief in the germ of a new work, which could be written in the last line of an email or whispered in between details about budgets, is threaded through Aaron Wright's case study on Live Art and Artist Development (p.45), where he talks about, 'sensitive and supportive commissioning which takes a 'slow burn' approach'.

Live Art futures

It is important to speak of the Live Art sector, as this act of identification grounds and aligns artists, organisers and audiences who participate in this work to a backdrop of resistance, marginalisation and struggles, and pushes them towards active listening, embodying justice and practicing joy. Live Art's commitment to risk-taking, experimentation and inclusion allows us to appreciate, understand and listen to one another in new and different ways. Sitting outside the confines of the relational, Live Art's complex messiness considers us as who we are, and also who we might become.

As corporations, institutions and organisations across the world are waking up to the importance of social purpose and values for their stakeholders, these case studies demonstrate the ways in which Live Art has already been trying to practice alignment between values and work, enacting future models for organising art and society. As Andy Field says, Live Art has 'learnt how to operate as a ghost in the machine'. In this way, maybe we have trained ourselves to work within the confines of an age of 'perpetual precarity' (which of course is a reality for many, except the 1%). At the same time, perhaps there is opportunity for the ghost to act as a radical figure who produces speculative and visionary approaches to the future, beyond the binaries of utopia and dystopia.

This of course begs the question: What kind of futures could we build through Live Art? And what would our organisations, ways of governing and economic models look like? As Lois Keidan of LADA wrote in *The Guardian* in 2015, Live Art is 'a research lab for mass culture', where you need to look if you want to know where the mainstream will be in 10 years' time. Considering its international impact on both artistic practice and arts organising, there is no doubt that the UK Live Art sector, in partnership with others inside and outside of arts, will deepen its influence, and produce art that transforms our lives. The question of Live Art's future achievements is of course also (but not only) an economic one, as Live Art has historically received less support than other artforms. These case studies are evidence to support the claim that to invest in Live Art is to invest in making the future.