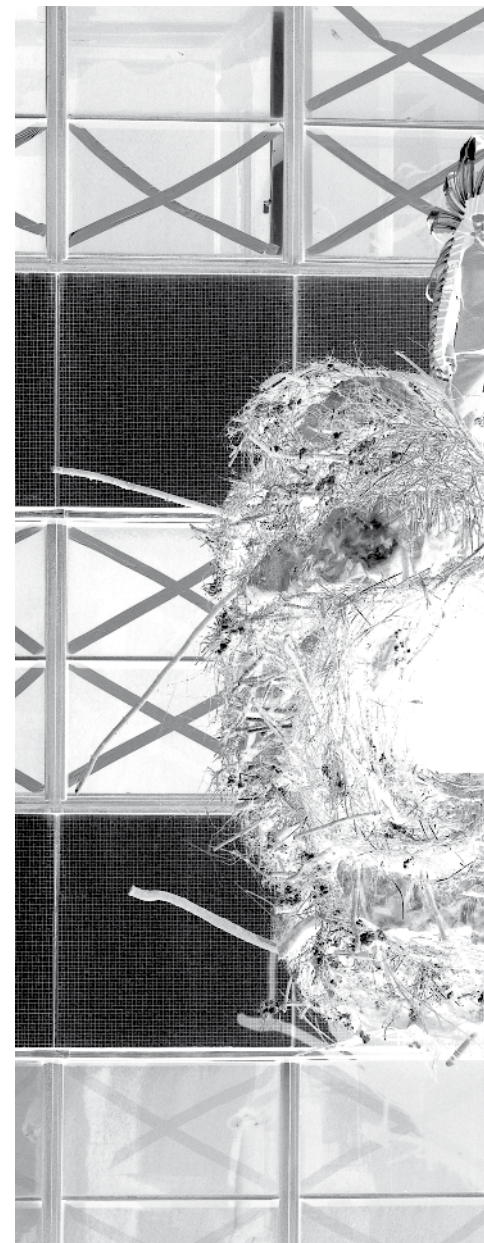


# In Time

A Collection of Live Art Case Studies

A Live Art UK project





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# Introduction

Live Art Development Agency

## By Lois Keidan and CJ Mitchell, Live Art Development Agency on behalf of Live Art UK

*In Time* is a collection of ten commissioned case studies, designed to represent some of the innovative and pioneering ways in which Live Art has both posed and responded to many of the exciting cultural challenges of our times.

The timing of this collection feels auspicious: the quality and quantity of Live Art practice currently undertaken by artists in the UK is unprecedented – and, in turn, this is reflected in increased audience engagement and supported by theatres, galleries, festivals and the higher education sector. Indeed, the title of the collection, *In Time*, not only refers to the fact that much Live Art practice is concerned with ideas of time and its experience, but also to both the timeliness of this publication and the long overdue nature of such an overview of Live Art in the UK.

Each case study was directed by members of Live Art UK using either their own work or the work of others as its focus. The case studies are complemented by contextualizing essays from cultural commentator Sonya Dyer and critic Lyn Gardner.

The members of Live Art UK believe that Live Art has, by desire or necessity, developed demonstrably different approaches to issues such as Critical Writing, Professional Development, Archiving and Audiences, and that these approaches are proving to be influential – or have the potential to be influential – across a range of cultural sectors. Each case study focuses on one key issue, and, in combination, these documents reflect a dynamic set of inter-related successes, challenges, and opportunities. The collection also reveals the distinctive “cradle to grave” provision addressed by the Live Art sector, from emerging artists’ needs through to questions of continuing professional development and the archiving of work by senior practitioners.

Conceived to reflect upon this burgeoning area of artistic practice and to ‘make the case’ for Live Art, the case studies also reveal that a deeper understanding and mapping of the Live Art sector is also crucially needed so that more artists, presenters, audiences, scholars and policy makers might better engage with and invest in this work. The diversity of opinions and the sometimes anecdotal mode of reporting featured in the case studies highlight key issues facing Live Art, however, they offer only a partial view of the sector: while some of the case studies are informed by a deep sector-wide understanding of, for example, artists’ professional development needs, others are more locally focused. We believe these findings are all nonetheless dynamic and illuminating, and reinforce the need for a formal and rigorous analysis of the sector. As Sonya Dyer concludes:

This is a great time to re-consider, and make the case for, what nature and level of support the sector needs now – in order to meet current economic challenges, and to enable practitioners to continue to push boundaries and change the landscape. We also need to work towards encouraging funders to create a space to invest in risk taking, and remind them of the importance of research and development in producing quality work.

Live Art UK hopes that this collection provides a strong foundation for these conversations to take place, resulting in a deeper understanding and awareness of the Live Art sector. There are crucial opportunities for new or increased investment highlighted throughout the case studies that would benefit innovative artistic practice, enhance public engagement, and strengthen the infrastructure and sustainability of the sector.

We also hope that this collection will be an inspirational resource for those engaging, or wishing to engage, with Live Art, providing useful examples of inventive, investigatory, and insightful artistic and organizational approaches – a body of evidence about a body of practice. A key strength of the sector is the extraordinary collaborative sharing that takes place therein, and we hope this collection represents a further example of this.

We can think of no better way of reflecting the value of the Live Art sector and foregrounding the following case studies than by reproducing a statement recently written by the critically acclaimed artist and writer Tim Etchells for the Live Art Development Agency on the significance of Live Art to his own work and artistic development:

Over the years as an artist making many different kinds of projects in different contexts in the UK and much further afield I've always found Live Art a kind of centre, rather than a periphery – a place where many practices and ideas meet, join, and connect in new ways. From within the Live Art sector have come many significant opportunities to expand my practice, opportunities to think about the work in new ways, and opportunities to connect with others that were challenging the forms they'd been educated in, or inherited. Live Art has been and continues to be a space where it is really possible to make something new, risk taking, innovative. It's an area where the support – in terms of funding, mentoring, and debate – has helped to develop my practice and that of many other artists, in important ways and at key moments. Though my work has been supported by different zones of the Arts Council (Drama, Dance, Visual Arts, Film and Video at least) as well as of course by commissions, awards and so on from many many other places, it has very often been initiatives from within the Live Art sector that have really allowed new doors to be opened in terms of my creative and intellectual practice. I'd say the influence of the sector has been and continues to be disproportionate to its economic footprint – Live Art is, in other words, a dynamic and motivating force which spreads sparks in many directions. Support for Live Art really matters – for itself, and for the profound influence the sector has on all the other forms.

Or put it another way – heading out of theatre and into the border zone at its edges – towards visual art, video, installation, writing, projects in public spaces, choreography, interactive projects and fiction, and all the time, at the same time, heading into the zone called Live Art, I found a space that made my work possible.

In Live Art and Performance I found direct and vital contact with audiences, I learned the value of intimacy, the strength of liveness. I learned about time, and something of how to make it unfold, slow or quicken. I learned the difference between writing and speaking. I learned something about the strange groups of people that theatre calls audience and which we might like to think of more as witnesses. I learned a creative disrespect for the borders between art forms and a real respect for what you can do at those borders, or in the space between them. I think more and more artists work there, in Live Art – between one thing and another – because somehow that’s where it’s possible to get close to the experience and the issues that really concern us in the start of the twenty first Century.

*Live Art UK is a consortium of venues, promoters and facilitators who collectively represent a range of practices and are concerned with all aspects of the development and promotion of the Live Art sector. Live Art UK aims to promote the understanding of Live Art practice, grow and develop audiences for Live Art, and inform regional and national policy and provision for Live Art.*

*Live Art UK members, 2003-2010: Arnolfini, Artsadmin, the Bluecoat, Chapter Arts Centre, Colchester Arts Centre, Fierce, greenroom, Live Art Development Agency and New Work Network. From 2010, Live Art UK will build on the strengths of its achievements and redefine its membership and role within the current context of Live Art in the UK.*  
[www.liveartuk.org](http://www.liveartuk.org)

In interesting times



By Lyn Gardner

**“Change is gonna come.” Sam Cooke (1964)**

We live in interesting times. It is a period when the old certainties and old structures are up for grabs and an era when confidence in our leaders is at an all time low. Sometimes it seems as if our confidence in ourselves is ebbing fast too. We face unprecedented challenges in terms of climate change, poverty and inequality and at the same time are living through a period when technological changes are creating huge cultural and social shifts that can feel bewildering. Those shifts leak into every aspect of everyday life: I press a doorbell with my finger; my children use their thumbs.

Those living through Renaissance Europe would have been largely unaware of the shifts in thinking that were taking place even though their lives were part of the fabric of change. For us the evidence is all around in tottering banks, the transformations in the music and media industries, in the ways information is shared and disseminated, in every click of the mouse, in the silence each morning where there was once a thud as my newspaper hit the mat or the clink of bottles as the milkman delivered. I seldom go to meetings now but am part of on-line communities. I can sit in a cinema 2,000 miles away and watch the live streaming of a play from the National Theatre or the Globe and idle in a Soho bar and watch Station House Opera create a show with collaborators in Brazil. Audiences from two continents wave at each other and smile. I am no longer just a spectator, I am part of the spectacle.

The world of which I am part is one that is very different from the world I was born into, but the changes that have taken place during my lifetime have been snail slow alongside those that have happened during the lives of my teenage children. The future gallops not just towards us, but past us with dizzying speed. As Unlimited's Jon Spooner suggests in his performance lecture, *The Ethics of Progress*, “the thing about the future is that, by the time it happens, it's already too late”. You cannot uninvent the already invented; you can only ensure that you keep abreast of what is happening and make the best possible and responsible use of those inventions.

We can't rely on the scientists to come up with solutions for our problems; the onus is on us to take action, to create our own individual and collective futures. To do that we need artists who can help us imagine that future using all the tools available to them, who can think beyond the world as we know it, imagine and reinvent the future.

Who better to do that than those working in the field of Live Art, who through their practice have already proved themselves capable of thinking outside the box and beyond the often imprisoning forms of traditional culture? As Albert Hunt wrote in *Hopes for Great Happenings*: “When you are trapped inside a room in which all the windows are distorting mirrors it's no good looking in the mirror and describing more of what you see. You have got to make some kind of imaginative leap to get yourself out of the closed room”. Many live artists do that every day as a matter of course. For them, making the leap is like breathing. As Helen Cole suggests in the case study

on Internationalism in *In Time*: “Audiences and artists want to be mobilised, to take responsibility, to feel their presence is important and that they are making change”.

Since the start of this century, we have seen such an unprecedented explosion of Live Art activity, indeed so much that it seems astonishing that it still feels necessary to make the case for Live Art to funders, programmers and critics, when Live Art has so blatantly been making a case for itself, with audiences and across all art forms including the visual arts and theatre. We have yet to see the National Theatre embrace Live Art in the way that Tate Modern did with *Live Culture*, but the impact of Live Art is evident everywhere in theatre, even in more mainstream practice and on conventional stages. Live Art’s interest in playing with space and time and the body has seeped into a theatre culture where the question is no longer “is that theatre?”, but rather a wondrous speculation of what is it that theatre can and might be. Sometimes I feel like a child with my nose pressed up against the sweet shop window.

Assimilation can of course be a dangerous thing, and the purpose of Live Art is not to be picked up magpie-like as a pretty bauble that can be incorporated into the dominant culture, a culture that has too often marginalised Live Art and failed to find the time and space to embrace its quirks and individualities or develop the vocabulary to make it part of mainstream critical discourse. But, as *In Time* proves, the moment is long past to complain about neglect and ill-treatment; instead those working in Live Art are making a case for Live Art through performance, dialogue, engagement with audience, critical writing, participation and ideas around production and distribution that put it way ahead of the game in facing up to the challenges and opportunities of the twenty first century.

The old models are broken and can no longer see us through, and yet many artforms still bury their head in the sand and past, in hock to the old ghosts that take up so much space clunking around in our cultural institutions, shored up by bricks and mortar. Meanwhile Live Art pops up like an impish poltergeist in many shapes and forms (and sometimes even disguises), constantly disrupting the traditional spectacle in places such as Arnolfini, and also in pioneering festivals such as *SPILL* or BAC’s *Burst*, seasons such as *Sacred* at Chelsea Theatre or in the fly-by-night, seat-of-the-pants initiatives such as Forest Fringe. The imaginative leap that takes Live Art out of the closed room, often takes it right to the edge or the very brink. Historically, culturally, socially, the edge is almost always the most interesting place to be, a place where the radical thrives.

Newer models, and the palpable sense of an art form grappling to find other ways of proceeding and ensuring not just its own future but all of our futures, emerge from the pages of *In Time* like fat white buds on a bare winter twig. Lois Keidan and Mary Paterson consider the challenge of critical writing and the way on-line platforms have not just become crucial but have encouraged those working in the field to create entirely new critical dialogues, generating responses that are often as creatively challenging as the work it reflects and offer new ways to engage with audiences.

It is this engagement with audiences — new and old — and the recognition of them as collaborators and conspirators that runs like a thread through *In Time*. Sharing,

connecting, networking and collaborating are the keys to an emerging cultural economy which has participation at its heart and marks a shift to what Charles Leadbeater has called a culture of “with” rather than “to” and “for”. We are all in this together, a point of view evidenced by the *In Time* case studies exploring the challenges of engagement, including Manick Govinda’s consideration of the role that Live Art can play in inspiring and motivating communities, young people and children, and Kevin Isaacs’s look at audience development with particular reference to Birmingham’s *Fierce Festival*. In *Nomadic Meetings*, the beneficial possibilities of networks are considered and the way these loose, changing, non-layered structures and on- and off-line communities can assist the making, presentation and response to work for both artists and audiences.

We are poised at a moment of crisis, when recession bites hard and future funding of the arts looks uncertain. But Live Art, so often so fleet, flexible and ingenious, has always been inventing its own future out of necessity. As these case studies demonstrate, the importance of professional development should not be underestimated and the erosion of funding that allows young artists to bloom and mid-career artists to sustain their practice is potentially hugely damaging. Funders balancing their budgets should do well to consider that it is a crucial part of their role to act as midwives, to help usher in the future and not merely to defend the past.

But despite the hand-to-mouth existence of so many working in the field, there are so many reasons to be cheerful when reading *In Time* because it shows that the Live Art community is already grappling with the issues of sustainability and ways of creating art that everyone else working in the cultural industries will have to confront too. Richard Kingdom and Hannah Crosson’s case study exploring artist-led activity and its impact on the Live Art landscape does not hide the difficulties but also celebrates the ‘anything-is-possible’ attitude of many live artists. Similarly, Kingdom’s *Economies* case study focussing on the work of the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home celebrates an alternative approach to economics that chimes with the times where the costly failure of free markets comes with a yearning for community, generosity, reciprocity, frugality and gift relationships.

As Helen Cole suggests in *Internationalism*: “In a world where war, border control, recession, economic development and climate change rewrite the cultural landscape in which we live and work, the time is ripe for a new type of coming together to emerge to bring institutions, funders, practitioners and audiences together with a sense of urgency, intimacy and action”. *In Time* is part of that coming together and the conversation — and the future — starts here.

*Lyn Gardner was a founder member of City Limits, the largest publishing co-operative in Europe. She writes about theatre and performance for The Guardian. Her second novel, Out of the Woods, has just been published by David Fickling Books.*

# Live Art Now

Situating the Present  
and Projecting the Future

By Sonya Dyer

## Introduction

When asked to write this framing document for *In Time*, I spent some time thinking about what I consider Live Art to be. In many respects, it was easier to think about what Live Art isn't. It isn't particularly traditional, or easy to quantify, for example. I also realised that when attending meetings within the bureaucracy of the visual art sector (as I often do) it's an almost invisible presence, which seemed weird, as some of the most arresting, urgent and moving art being made right now comes from artists working within the Live Art sector. I began to reflect on why this might be.

This diverse field of practice encompasses what used to commonly be referred to as 'performance art,' and traverses fine art practices, non-traditional theatre, Fluxus-style 'happenings,' participatory practices, micro-performance and much more. It is undoubtedly difficult to categorise and resistant to definition, but it is these elusive, transformative, fluid qualities that make Live Art so exciting.

As Lois Keidan, the Director of the Live Art Development Agency, states in the Critical Writing case study, "[Live Art] seems to neither fit nor belong within received cultural frameworks".

Indeed, upon reading the ten case studies presented in this collection, certain words and phrases stand out as key descriptive terms – interdisciplinary, participatory, innovative, collaborative, artist-led, and risk-taking.

The work being undertaken throughout the Live Art sector, and much of the work referenced within this collection, reflects not only the current vitality of this area of artistic practice, but also its 'public benefit' – the diversity of contexts within which the work now operates, the ways in which it is advancing the possibilities of participation and Public Engagement, and how its innovative approaches are opening up new models of education and empowerment.

Whilst *In Time* provides a strong sense of Live Art UK and other connected networks – and how members support each other and the practitioners they are actively engaged with – it is essential to remember that there are also many, many Live Art practitioners and promoters who work outside these networks. The Live Art sector's diversity of approaches, forms, networks and audiences can be considered one of its greatest strengths.

This series of case studies comprehensively demonstrates the innovative, creative and dynamic approaches the Live Art sector has to issues of self-organisation, networking, professional development, audience development, education amongst others, as well as suggesting dynamic ways forward for the development of new approaches to art writing.

In many ways, *In Time* gives us the opportunity to reflect on current practice and ways of thinking in an open way – to share learning with the wider arts and cultural sectors, and with the Live Art sector itself.

## Culture Clash – Funding Risk

Whilst Live Art's status as a practice that is difficult to classify has its advantages, there are also challenges that come directly from this. Most obviously, funders – whether public funders (such as Arts Council England) or trusts and foundations – often don't know where to place Live Art. For example, there is no longer dedicated Live Art specialism within the national office of Arts Council England. In terms of the funding landscape, Live Art is either covered (or ignored) by theatre, fine art or interdisciplinary arts. This is detrimental to the specialised needs of the Live Art sector, and to the arts in general. New art forms always have to fight for their place in the world (as photography had to, for example) and this is precisely where Live Art still seems to be at.

Many other art forms rely upon a network of practitioners – artists, curators, development organisations, member organisations – goodwill and some serious juggling, but with Live Art this is particularly so. Perhaps the sector's ability to work independently and survive with relatively limited support makes it easier for it to fly under funder's radars?

There is also a profound difference in organisational culture, as elucidated by Niki Russell in the Networks case study and worth quoting at length here:

Any attempt to measure the importance or impact of a network is fraught with difficulties. From within, productive activity is judged according to autonomously determined values, decided through the ongoing and repeated interactions of the network members. This renders such relations distinct from the formal hierarchies of measurement and means the value of a network is difficult to quantify because of its collective, intangible nature. I believe that this viewpoint is at odds with the nature of funding. I therefore appreciate the requirement for these two contrasting structures to meet somewhere in the middle for each to support the other, whilst I also wonder what a counterstrategy of value production might be?

It seems that the types of networks prevalent within the Live Art sector – which are essential for its development and survival – are difficult for funders to negotiate. The box-ticking culture of the current funding system is inherently inflexible, and unable to 'measure' the intangible. Russell is right to ask how the two might meet in the middle. In terms of the financial survival of the Live Art sector, it is the most urgent of questions.

Artists' Professional Development is another area where the risk-adverse nature of funding culture clashes with the needs of the risk-taking nature of Live Art practice:

Underwriting risk, early research and development, and nurturing a focus on process and experimentation are increasingly difficult areas to attract the key resources of time, space and money, yet they are the life-blood for both emerging and established artistic excellence and innovation. (Manick Govinda, Professional Development case study).



The increased prevalence of process-based practice is clearly something the funding structure has difficulties with. Activity without a pre-defined outcome, experiments that may not work, nurturing an artist/project at an early stage in an idea's development are all anathema to most funders at the present time. Any dialogues with funders would benefit from lobbying from this perspective to demystify and value risk-taking – what is art without risk?

## **Another Perspective on Risk-taking: the Artist-led Example**

Artist-led initiatives in Live Art are generally characterised by a less fearful attitude to risk, as one would expect.

The singular vision and corresponding ethos of artist-led initiatives create an environment in which an artist feels able to operate on first principles. In this environment, experimentation and freedoms exist which offer artists and audiences something that is often not found in established institutions where funding agendas and institutional policies can set constraints on activity.

(Richard Kingdom / Hannah Crosson, Artist-led case study).

Indeed, I would argue that the artist-led side of the sector is characterized by this openness and flexibility. In addition to this, effective and sympathetic networks, such as New Work Network, Live Art UK etc, can provide much needed support and advice to those running organizations.

It's worth remembering that artist-led projects can often just involve one or two people, as Kingdom/Crosson (quoting Gemma Paintin) in the Artist-led case study note: "We do a lot with very little." [This] "quick, energized [and] unrestricted approach is a liberating departure from the sometimes slow bureaucratic pace of institutions and the bullet-pointed agendas of funding bodies".

The problem of sustainability is a real concern, however. How long can practitioners be expected to run shoestring projects and maintain the rest of their lives – partners, families, rent – if they are not themselves economically privileged?

One problem that occurs for many organisations is the division of labour – in short, who within the organisation has the time/skills/application to negotiate funding streams, particularly when they seem unsympathetic to the nature of Live Art practice?

...the challenge for funding bodies is to devise a way to support artist-led activity that is sensitive to the vitality and integrity of its independence; if funding bodies had the power to harness the momentum of artist-led initiatives, enabling them to continue on the same unfettered energy that created them, our cultural experience would be increasingly enriched.

(Richard Kingdom / Hannah Crosson, Artist-led case study).

## Support Structures

The challenges to be met by the Live Art sector evolve from its peculiarities, as we have established. This is one of the reasons why networks play such an important role as the main support structures for individuals and organisations.

As this area of practice is inter- and multi-disciplinary and diverse, emergent, adaptable and responsive support networks have developed over time to meet the challenges faced by practitioners. Projects such as New Work Network's *Activator* scheme have been supported through a one-off Arts Council England award, but now find themselves faced with the challenge of sustaining the momentum of that foundational work without financial support: "There are difficulties and challenges involved in trying to get people [ie funders] to 'buy' into the idea of continued support; this can often be down to a short-term view that the support and development work has already been done." (Niki Russell, Networks case study).

But of course, the support and development work of a support structure is ongoing. And every year there are more graduates, more people reaching that 'mid-career' stage, and more people reaching that tricky stage between 'emerging' and 'mid-career' – the need for support is continuous.

This is most obviously apparent with the current paucity of Professional Development opportunities for practitioners. Professional Development has been an Arts Council priority for the best part of the last decade. However, recently it has been noticeable that the most lauded schemes tend to be for arts managers or other arts bureaucrats (for example, the Clore Leadership Fellows etc.) There is a sense that there is a 'crisis' in arts leadership that needs to be fixed through expensive management training programmes. The point is made by Manick Govinda in the Professional Development case study that this 'crisis' of leadership can be felt in the country as a whole. Whether it's an IT crisis in the NHS, politicians 'flipping' houses, Councils wasting taxpayers' money etc. – the crisis is everywhere: "A fleet of efficient and effective arts managers become aimless bureaucrats without the infrastructural support of giving unprescribed time, space and money to artists, which can lead to powerful new work".

Which is why it is so dismaying that vital projects such as Artsadmin's *Bursary* scheme (of which I was a beneficiary) and NWN's *Activators* scheme are struggling for support, when more and more money for 'the arts' is diverted towards quangos and management training.

## Audiences and Education

Live Art practices have also developed innovative ways of engaging with the general public, including and going beyond received notions of the 'audience', and developing new models of touring:

A growing network of energetic and ambitious artists, producers and curators are pouring out of UK universities and creating opportunities for their contemporaries to present new work in unusual contexts within cities, commuter towns, sleepy hamlets and bygone seaside resorts – sometimes with funding, often without – replacing the decaying UK touring circuit with something far more exciting and finding innovative and effective ways of engaging with the people that live there. (Richard Kingdom, Economy case study).

Another field where Live Art's influence is particularly felt is within arts education. The Education case study in this publication discusses Artsadmin's fantastic education projects at length. It is also of interest to note how many major institutions, such as Tate, are working with Live Art practitioners, or learning from models of educational engagement that Live Art practices have developed.

From the Education case study: "Developing a free enquiring spirit is hard when so much funding is driven by the values of training, skills development, the economy and other government agendas, but the value of live artists interacting with young people plays an important role in developing independent thinking".

I believe this statement connects directly to Live Art's attitude to risk and experimentation. "...Live Art lives and dies over a fixed period of time – a performance is an experience in history, as opposed to an object that stands outside it (or appears to)". (Mary Paterson, Critical Writing case study).

Live Art engenders a very particular and unique relationship with the notion of 'the audience,' which has led to considerable innovation in terms of audience development activity.

In Kevin Isaacs' case study on Audience, he argues that "the audience is, in fact, much more implicit and involved in the actual performance or depiction of the work [in Live Art] than in any other art form".

For many years it has been argued that Live Art has a somewhat 'niche' audience – particularly for venue-based work – although there is more than enough evidence today to suggest that Live Art can have many and various audiences from the intimate to the large scale. Fierce and other members of Live Art UK have been instrumental in this process, and Isaacs describes Fierce's audience development strategies in great detail, emphasizing the benefits of long-term engagement with potential audiences and canny cross-programming.

Almost inevitably, Live Art's particular qualities mean there are specific challenges in finding – and retaining – audiences but these are challenges that the sector has risen to and embraced. "There is no "one size fits all" strategy for audience development. Nowhere could this be more true than with Live Art, where the challenges are even greater and the work by its very nature does not slip nicely into well prepared demographically-led target audience boxes". Furthermore, "we [Live Art practitioners] often offer a much more personal and individual experience to our audience members than the norm. ...[it] has always been clear that audiences don't fall within the traditional demographic segments or attendance patterns that tend to govern most arts marketing strategies".

So, nurturing the audience, and considering what happens before and after the 'event' itself, is in this instance an integral part of developing a Live Art audience.

Anthony Roberts presents an example of this (from the ICA's Live Art heydays) in his Programming and Curating case study:

The ICA in the nineties built a magnificent audience and reputation for promoting Live Art by bringing in consistently good work and by maintaining good lists and working closely with the marketing department. Over months and years the audiences began to escalate and the reputation itself began to become as an effective marketing tool as any other.

## **Critical Writing and the Archive – Preserving the Past and Claiming the Present**

Live Art presents further challenges in terms of preserving records of 'performances' and of finding ways to textually relate to work being produced today.

Critical dialogues on Live Art although still very much new, have, as Mary Paterson suggests, developed rapidly over the past decade.

In response to the lack of recognition for Live Art by most magazines, journals, newspapers and websites, the members of Live Art UK felt that there needed to be a more creative solution and set up the *Writing from Live Art* project in 2005, which sought to find new ways of writing about and around Live Art. As Mary Paterson writes in the Critical Writing case study:

...if the dual problem of visibility and suitability did not exist, there would be no need to support writing about Live Art in the first place. ...[it] is because Live Art is 'difficult' to write about that critical writing is so important as document and as profile. This means that critical writing on Live Art is prompted by artists and by publishers to step away from tradition, and into the path of the work itself.

This presents Live Art writing as a form of Live Art (as demonstrated by the *We Need to Talk about Live Art* project for 2008's *National Review of Live Art* festival) suggesting fresh ways of thinking about what Art writing itself can be.

Indeed, if the institutional history of art is told through archives, records and other systems of remembering, what are the challenges for institutions with a background in supporting performative work?

Old formats, such as U-Matic, reel-to-reel, as well as paper records, invites, and photographic documentation require careful handling, which is time consuming and expensive work. Julian Warren's Archiving case study details how Arnolfini is using new technologies and Creative Commons to try to make their record of past activities available to as wide an audience as possible. He also highlights how fragile much of their archive is. It is interesting to consider how contemporary artists might engage with the idea of 'preservation' – whether this will encourage Live Art practitioners to record and document their work with the archive in mind: "...it is important to remain alert to the danger of the history of Live Art becoming a history of the best available documentation, and not actually of the most significant art work".

## Live Art and Social Agency

Recent discussions around Live Art practices have focused on the now notorious comments by the ICA's Director Ekow Eshun. Announcing the discontinuation of their Live and Media Art department, Eshun is reported to have claimed that Live Art practice "lacks depth and cultural urgency".<sup>1</sup>

The irony is, of course, that this particular institution has, certainly since the 1980's, nurtured the growth of Live Art as a particular form of practice, and supported the development of countless artists.

It is also arguable that the Live Art sector is at the forefront of exploring urgent political issues and that many Live Art practices operate as a form of social protest. There is an urgency to Live Art projects around issues such as climate change, geo-political conflicts, and social inclusion, to name but a few, that is – I would argue – seriously lacking in other visual art forms. On many of the key challenges of our times, Live Art is at the artistic forefront. As someone involved with both visual arts and Live Art – and who is also involved with curating and writing about the intersection between art / politics – it is clear to me that Live Art is where the action is in terms of 'cultural urgency.'

I'm thinking, for example, of Artsadmin's recent *Two Degrees* project exploring climate change and the environment; the Carrot Works Collective and Emma Leach and Natasha Vickers' *Position Unpaid* project which engage with issues around precarious labour practices; and the Live Art Development Agency's *Performing Rights* programmes on art and human rights.

1. [www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2008/oct/23/ica-live-arts-closure](http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2008/oct/23/ica-live-arts-closure)

## A Sense of Scale

Of course, not all Live Art happens on a no-budget, DIY, small scale and low profile basis. All members of Live Art UK, and many other artists and organisations, are Arts Council RFOs (Regularly Funded Organisation) with rich portfolios and international profiles.

*Marina Abramovic Presents...*, featuring a group of acclaimed international Live Art practitioners, was one of the critical and popular highlights of 2009's *Manchester International Festival*.

One of the other most talked about art projects of the year has been Anthony Gormley's *One & Other*, where members of the public occupy the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square. This project, in partnership with Sky Arts, features a live stream of the project, and nightly broadcasts on Sky Arts of the 'performances.' Whilst I have certain reservations about the project artistically, it is certainly the most high profile 'live' event in Britain for some time. It is also significant that it requires members of the public to make it happen – the 'audience' is the work – and is accessible through a variety of media. I can't help but hope that *One & Other*'s main legacy could be to make Live Art more accessible to a wider public.

We can also see an increasing profile for Live/multi-disciplinary/ephemeral works in museums and galleries throughout the country, from Tate Britain to Modern Art Oxford. Perhaps this is partly the result of a demand from public bodies for a more audience-centred approach? Or at least recognition that, as previously mentioned, Live Art is particularly adept at adopting strategies of engagement?

With this diversity in mind, perhaps it is the DIY, lo-fi and self-organised nature of much of Live Art practice (especially when artist-led) that – despite all the well resourced and high profile work – engenders the sector as a whole with a relatively low profile. As Richard Kingdom says in the Economy case study: "There is a real danger of Live Art being perceived as bargain-basement programme content rather than correctly valued and accordingly invested in".

## A Necessary Dynamism

Another development over the past decade or so has been the rise in the number of Performance or Performance Studies courses at University level, and the rise in the number of art school graduates working performatively.

A quick perusal of e-lists such as Arts News or Critical Network demonstrates how much new performative work is being produced in venues (from pubs to galleries) all over the country. Practitioners weave between roles (artist-curator, writer, 'performer,' invigilator, box office assistant...) as part of a larger 'gift' economy and – for the lucky few – in salaried or freelance posts within organisations.



I believe it is useful to consider the flexibility and dynamism displayed within the sector in the context of ongoing research and projects looking at issues of free/ precarious labour. At a time when there are greater opportunities in the arts for people who can afford to exist within the 'free economy' for as long as possible, Live Art – as a generally under-funded art form – is in particular danger. It is no coincidence that the Economy case study features a self-generated project that exists on very little money. The key question for the arts in general (and Live Art in this particular instance) is: how do you go about making a case for greater support and recognition of the tireless work already being done in this economy without losing your independence?

Equally, are artists (and curators, writers etc.) their own worst enemies? Much of the work that goes into supporting Live Art (and other visual/performative sectors) largely goes unnoticed. It is not unusual for artists to work for free. In many respects the contemporary UK artist is a model of economic neo-liberalism – cheap, flexible, mobile and (apart from Scotland) non-unionised. Are practitioners ready to ask for – or indeed demand – more? And what will be asked of us in return?

One hopes that *In Time* goes some way to illustrate the diversity and indeed 'cultural urgency' of Live Art: an environment that needs to be fed and watered, not left to its fate because it is perceived as being 'difficult' to manage and understand.

Ironically, Live Art in Britain is thriving, as these case studies make clear. Internationally, the UK is known for producing fantastic live artists. Events such as the *SPILL* festival also bring some of the best Live Art practices from all over the world. Indeed, one could argue that one of the most prevalent characteristics of Live Art is this sense of the borderless. Balanced against this, and as noted within the Internationalism case study:

Many ... festivals are successful at building complex relationships with international funding organisations and co-producing partners, offering critical platforms for international exchange. However, most of these festivals are insecurely funded on a project-by-project basis and their sustainability remains uncertain. At the same time, these festivals are almost the only place where international exchange takes place in a sector that is forced to work on miniscule budgets...

Live Arts' internationalist outlook is also potentially under threat from the government's fear-ridden response to terrorism, illegal immigration and the recession, which has made it prohibitive and costly for invited artists and academics from non-European Economic Area countries to be granted visas to take part in artistic and intellectual activities in the UK. These legislations will have an impact on the borderless ideals of Live Art, particularly curbing and curtailing international cultural exchange and collaboration with artists on low-income, from visa-national countries (for example, Pakistan, Iraq and Iran) and where their legitimacy as artists is called into question. The sector's commitment to internationalism must be embraced as a philosophical and moral principle in its core mission.

## Conclusion

This is a great time to re-consider, and make the case for, what nature and level of support the sector needs now – in order to meet current economic challenges, and to enable practitioners to continue to push boundaries and change the landscape. We also need to work towards encouraging funders to create a space to invest in risk-taking, and remind them of the importance of research and development in producing quality work.

To quote the Networks case study: “Live Art and interdisciplinary arts requires the involvement of people in dialogues, conversations and partnerships for the construction of art, critical feedback to develop it, enablers and facilitators that assist in showing the work, and the audiences that engage with it”.

Live Art should boldly proclaim its success stories, its strategies of non-competitive collaboration between organisations, its ability to adapt and transcend borders, its active engagement with the here-and-now – the blood and guts work of being a thinking human being in the modern world.

*Sonya Dyer is a London based artist, writer and cultural commentator and co-ordinator of Chelsea Programme at Chelsea College of Art & Design. Sonya’s practice incorporates writing, performative actions, public speaking and paper-based work, as well as curatorial projects and interventions into public discourses. She has written for publications including a-n, Art Review and Time Out London. Past projects include Current Thinking (Tate Modern) and Temporary Agency (Chelsea Space). She is a member of a-n’s NAN advisory panel and on the board of New Work Network.*

# Infrastructure

# Professional Development

Artsadmin, Live Art Development Agency,  
New Work Network

## Introduction

By Manick Govinda, Artsadmin

Time, space and money: three simple words that can make a difference to an artist's professional development and creative growth. Backed-up with advice and guidance, a shoulder to lean on, peer support and a critical context, the Live Art Advisory Network (LAAN; which comprises Artsadmin, Live Art Development Agency, and New Work Network) has supported many thousands of artists over the last ten years through our collective offerings of advice, information, bursaries, awards, workshops and many initiatives led by artists for artists.

The current climate is relatively constrained and challenging. Underwriting risk, early research and development, and nurturing a focus on process and experimentation are increasingly difficult areas to attract the key resources of time, space and money, yet they are the life-blood for both emerging and established artistic excellence and innovation. This is particularly the case in Live Art.

The two artist profiles presented here both make an urgent case for time, space and money for artists at all stages of their careers.

Robert Pacitti is one of the UK's foremost experimental theatre-makers, having made work since 1990. Pacitti was a founder member of New Work Network and a recipient of a Live Art Development Agency *One to One* bursary. In the early days of new media technology, Pacitti was also given in-kind off-line editing support by Artsadmin in 1999 to produce a 60 minute video work for Pacitti Company's *Evidence of Life after Death*. Pacitti makes an important point in his interview with Lois Keidan; his *One to One* bursary award came at a critical juncture of his development as a mid-career artist, but buying time cannot be a one-off privilege. An artist needs this kind of support at key moments throughout his/her artistic career. New Labour's Cultural Leadership Programme (CLP) initiative, which was launched by Gordon Brown in June 2006, was intended to target and strengthen the impact of the cultural and creative industries through investing in its leadership now and for the future. However, the focus has leaned towards the increasing managerial leadership of arts and culture, arguably a short-term reaction to the current crises in leadership across all spheres of life. Other New Labour initiatives such as Chris Smith's Clore Leadership Programme is not dissimilar. Pacitti points out: "The Clore Leadership is a good scheme for arts administrators, but where is the equivalent for artist leaders? Why isn't that level of attentiveness and pastoral care happening at the training and development level that actual practice would so obviously benefit from?"

This is critical. Ground-breaking and stunning new work can only be achieved through regular investment in artistic investigation and reflection. The support Pacitti was given by LAAN and Live Art UK members at the early and middle stages of his career led not only to the artist pushing his artistic practice further, but also to the consolidation of The Pacitti Company (which is now a regularly-funded organisation by Arts Council England), and the development of the *SPILL* festival (established and curated by

Pacitti) and Pacitti's confidence as a curator of contemporary performance. *SPILL* has become a significant festival, presenting the work of many Artsadmin *Bursary* recipients, associate artists and managed artists such as Harminder Singh Judge, Robin Deacon, Julia Bardsley, Mem Morrison, and Rajni Shah, alongside other hugely influential international artists. A fleet of efficient and effective arts managers become aimless bureaucrats without the infrastructural support of giving unprescribed time, space and money to artists, which can lead to powerful new work, as was evident in the range of challenging, beautiful and provocative work in *SPILL* 2009.

(It should be noted that the Cultural Leadership Programme has established an *Artist/Practitioner Leadership Development Programme*; however, this is a small scale programme at a nascent stage, and it is difficult to predict the impact this will have. In addition, this support is offered via placements at arts organizations, rather than direct support for independent artists.)

Rajni Shah has been working as an independent artist since 1999. Her responses to Philippa Barr's questions make a strong case for a comprehensive range of support structures to help an artist to develop and find a community of like-minded practitioners for reciprocal encouragement and criticality: "I feel like I have a sector; especially as we go through a financially challenging time, it is important for me to have a sense of belonging which is something I've never had before".

The two artist profiles presented here were commissioned by LAAN and are therefore London focused. But within Live Art UK's membership there are other important artists' professional development initiatives taking place throughout the UK such as greenroom's inter-connected artist development programme that includes residencies, an associate artists scheme and *Method Lab*, where a selection of North-West based artists are supported with a small commission, rehearsal space, mentoring, peer support and access to technical resources that leads to the development of a new piece which is showcased to the public. Arnolfini's *We Live Here* is a new artist development scheme inviting a selection of artists living and practicing in Bristol to create works at Arnolfini, whilst offering audiences the opportunity to participate throughout the process of creation in a series of meetings, discussions, works in progress and performances.

The value of venue-based professional development support for artists is critical, providing a safe and supported environment for artists to develop their practice, build long-term relationships with the venue in their region, as well as testing out their work to a public audience. They are also the launch pads for artists to take off into the national and international arena.



## Professional Development – Case Study One

### Robert Pacitti

#### Introduction

The *One to One Individual Artists' Bursary Scheme* was set up in 1999 by the Live Art Development Agency working in collaboration with Arts Council England (London office). The scheme ran from 1999 to 2006 with the aim of providing artistic and professional development opportunities for individual practitioners based in London working in Live Art.

*One to One* bursaries of around £8000 were awarded to eight artists each year to undertake self-determined artistic and professional development strategies that would stimulate new processes, support different ways of working and ultimately enhance their artistic practice.

In its seven years, the *One to One Scheme* offered bursaries to 56 artists and was instrumental in enhancing and furthering their practices in significant ways. Further information about the *One to One Scheme* and artists' statements on how the bursary impacted on their work is available here: [http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/prof\\_dev/one\\_to\\_one/index.html](http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/prof_dev/one_to_one/index.html)

Artsadmin's artists' *Bursary* scheme offered practical support, in-kind and cash bursaries of between £1,500 to £5,000 for artists to develop the early stages of an innovative idea further, to explore new ways of working, to experiment and undergo a journey without a notion of what the outcome would be; where ideas could change in the making, and, in turn, change the way that we experienced art. A lot of material was generated and bursary recipients would have open-studios or work-in-progress showings at Toynbee Studios, which led to the further development of new work.

Robert Pacitti was one of the first *One to One* and Artsadmin *Bursary* recipients and has been invited to talk with Lois Keidan of the Live Art Development Agency about these, and other professional development initiatives he has been involved with, for the Live Art UK case studies.

Robert Pacitti is Artistic Director of Pacitti Company and creator of the *SPILL Festival of Performance* – London's premier biennale of experimental theatre and Live Art. Having initially trained as a fine art painter, Robert began making Live Art performances and experimental theatre in 1988. With Pacitti Company, Robert has spent nearly two decades producing and touring an award-winning body of radical performance works worldwide. Across the year 1999/2000 Robert was awarded a Live Art Development Agency *One to One* bursary, and as part of this was mentored by German artist Raimund Hoghe. A highly experienced facilitator and teacher, Pacitti continues to lead workshops and residencies worldwide. He has sat on a range of selection panels, including Theatre Production Fund for Arts Council England, the Live Art Development Agency, Artsadmin, the Lux, and the London Filmmakers Co-op. For the past three years he has been a London selector for the *National Review of Live Art's Elevator* programme. Through the Pacitti Company, he is a member of IETM

(International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts). A co-founder of New Work Network, Pacitti also regularly contributes internationally to a broad span of publications, conferences and other performance related cultural activities. He and his partner currently live in London.

Lois Keidan: What has been the nature of the professional development support you have received?

Robert Pacitti: I'm going to reflect on two different types of support I've received. Firstly, in 1997 I received an in-kind *New Media Bursary* from Artsadmin that enabled me to work with Media 100 software, with an off-line editor in an editing suite. This was the first time I'd ever accessed that sort of resource. Whilst I had used film work within my live practice before, I had always had to buy in a commercial service to facilitate it. Remember, film editing packages like i-Movie or Final Cut Pro that we now take as givens, weren't available then. So the *New Media Bursary* allowed me hands-on access to a highly prized resource that Artsadmin owned onsite at their base in Toynbee Studios. It enabled me to combine video work in my live performance practice in a very different way to the work I had made previously, in that I was able to construct and control everything through trying stuff out, rather than briefing a commercial studio with instruction I'd had to guess at working.

The second was that in 1999 I received a Live Art Development Agency *One to One* bursary to undertake a self-determined programme of work lasting twelve months. At the time of applying for the bursary I had been making and presenting live work for ten years. My intention for the bursary was to conduct a set of research-based investigations into the act of drowning, utilising the physical act as social and political metaphor. My bursary also involved a mentoring relationship with established German practitioner Raimund Hoghe, brokered on my behalf by the Agency; the production of five public performance 'treatments' based on my research outcomes; time to return to painting (which ten years before had been my original training); the making of audio work; and keeping a bursary diary.

LK: What were your expectations and were they met?

RP: My expectations for both bursaries were of time and space to explore, and to hopefully thrive in all areas of my bursary activity. With my *One to One* programme these expectations were definitely met, but importantly I also unexpectedly experienced a very high level of direct engagement and willingness to support me from the Agency too. The amount of the bursary was significant and was partly responsible for Pacitti Company transitioning into a formal Company structure, with all appropriate governance models still remaining in place today. A common experience for artists based in Britain is being treated seriously overseas whilst finding that harder here in the UK, and the

bursary definitely reflected prestigiously on my career both at home and overseas. So the subsequent effects on the way in which I now continue to work remain ultimately significant, particularly in relation to my approaches to research, strategy and financial structuring.

LK: What were the challenges?

RP: Certainly getting the bursaries in the first place was fairly challenging. Throughout their existence, both programmes remained totally oversubscribed, because such opportunities were – indeed remain – unfortunately rare.

The *Artsadmin Bursary* was a double-edged sword. It was brilliant to receive it and I made good work in the editing suite. But because I'd never used the Media 100 system before, I had to pay a professional editor to physically do the work for me. I had to pay him at a high daily rate (albeit reduced from the level he charged for music video clients etc.) and so ultimately the bursary – which was entirely 'in kind' – cost me loads. So at the time this was really tricky.

The main challenge of my *One to One* bursary was it ending: I wasn't prepared for that. I had an emotionally difficult time coming to terms with the fact that I'd spent such a hugely productive year being utterly engrossed in making stuff that I'd forgotten to look up, or to prepare for anything to happen next. In retrospect, I would have benefited hugely from planning an exit strategy. Nonetheless, I would say that my bursary spurred on much of the next ten years activity for me – if only I'd had a way of knowing that would be the case when my bursary ended.

LK: Was it the right/best time in your practice, and how did you and the Agency ascertain and work with this?

RP: I was supported in the first year that the bursary programme ran and ten years into my practice: that was very timely for me indeed. But nothing quite like it had existed before, so from that perspective it was always going to be the right time. In fact I would say it remains an unprecedented opportunity. At that time I desperately needed something other than the project funding rotation I was on, which, although always a privilege to succeed in, was regularly unstable and offered no ongoing financial security or mechanism for development outside of direct project outcomes. The bursary allowed me to uncover a model of sustainable practice – a mechanism to develop free from the pressures of having to publicly deliver, and for that I remain completely grateful.

As to how a match between the programme and my needs at the time was ascertained: the method of application was based on paper submission and then short-listed interviews with a panel of peers and

fundors. So, need aside (as lots of artists 'need' this type of resource), potential impact and long-term benefit were assessed by a jury of peers.

The total buy-out for a year afforded by my bursary also definitely informed my latter application for Regular Funding, when invited to apply by ACE. My application at that time was fundamentally underpinned by my bursary experience and the success of garnering Regular Funding for the past 7 years has been pivotal to every aspect of my career since.

I did apply for a second bursary in the final year that the scheme ran and was unsuccessful on that occasion, which felt like a massive knock back as I really needed it then too. As we grow older the decision to apply for external opportunities carries more weight and I now very rarely engage in schemes or contexts that I do not directly create myself. So applying felt very serious to me, and before submitting I thought long and hard about what, why, how etc. In retrospect, I would rather have not been eligible for a second bursary than invest hopes on an application that ultimately failed. But it gave me perspective on how precious the scheme was – and, as a limited resource, I think it was right that as many different people as possible benefited from it.

LK: What were the distinguishing features of the professional development support you received and why were these significant to your practice? What have you done since that has been particularly influenced or informed by the professional development support you received, and in what ways did the professional development support you received make a real and lasting difference to your practice?

RP: The distinguishing features of the professional development support I received were care, time, diligence around details, a light touch from the Agency coupled with an open door at all times, and understanding. All of these have taught me a great deal about how to operate as an arts professional. If I had not had a *One to One* bursary I don't think I would have eventually made *SPILL* festival happen. The dots can be joined very clearly, from making research across my bursary year to when Raimund Hoghe then asked me to format into a solo show for presentation at STUK in Leuven. This was called *This Is Not A Love Song*, and in turn became a group work called *Finale*. Having toured extensively in theatre spaces, this then developed into a new site-specific touring model for national and international distribution that has now shown worldwide. But this second generation of *Finale* required a new dimension of activity to tour responsibly, and this focused on peer review and curation. And it is this model that ultimately developed into the *SPILL* festival, as an artist-led tactic of peer activity forging international reciprocity between makers. Now already one of the UK's primary performance platforms, the *SPILL* model can be traced directly back to that decision to award me a bursary for a self-determined programme of work – no strings attached.

LK: If you were seeking a bursary or some form of professional development support now, what would you be looking for?

RP: The thing that I lack most now is time: time to be an artist, time to sit and look out of the window and think, time to read, time to catch my existing work in ways that may somehow be useful in the future, time to make gains (or mistakes) in my studio. I have unwittingly become an arts professional rather than a professional artist. The success of my Company has meant an increased office workload, and the festival that I run pretty much takes all of my time and energy. I have become 'in service to' on such a significant level that time away from that now is almost inconceivable.

I would love a *One to One* bursary now more than ever: there is simply nothing like it anywhere in the world that I am aware of, and that would facilitate me focusing on my contribution through my own artistic practice, whilst simultaneously supporting me in keeping my foot on the accelerator as a producer and presenter of *SPILL*. There is no scheme I know that would allow me to have a mentoring relationship with, say, someone like Alex Poots at *Manchester International Festival* whilst also working on a new live or film project under the watchful eye of someone like David Lynch. But in my own work I am aiming that high on behalf of others, placing the work of young or mid-career British practitioners next to international giants from the field. The Clore Leadership is a good scheme for arts administrators, but where is the equivalent for artist leaders? Why isn't that level of attentiveness and pastoral care happening at the training and development level that actual practice would so obviously benefit from?

LK: For the Agency there were several essential characteristics of the *One to One* bursary scheme – all the programmes were self-determined by the artists (and not proscribed by the Agency or others), and the level of the award was big enough to buy time and space and things for participating artists. But having acknowledged the difference that a no-strings-attached professional development grant can buy, I think it's also important to acknowledge other forms of professional development that don't involve direct awards or grants to artists such as specialized information and advice (Artsadmin's Advisory Service being a great example), access to resources and critical contexts (such as the Agency's Study Room resource and Live Art UK's *Writing From Live Art* initiative which led to the creation of *Open Dialogues*) and a sense of community and belonging (New Work Network's work in these areas has been particularly instrumental). How important were/are these things to you as a practitioner and as someone who now supports and advises younger artists?

RP: This is very difficult to answer as I am very supportive of the strategies and resources you mention above. But in all honesty I don't



Rajni Shah *Glorious*  
Photo by Rajni Shah



Rajni Shah *Money Mouth*  
Photo by Rajni Shah





Pacitti Co *Finale 1*  
Credit: Memhet Ali

Pacitti Co *Finale 2*  
Credit: Memhet Ali

use many of them. I have spent time in the Study Room, which I think is a fantastic resource. I have also collaborated with some of the writers who came through Live Art UK's *Writing From Live Art* initiative on *SPILL*. In 2007, two writers from the scheme blogged about *SPILL* and in 2009 I invited them back into the programme itself with *SPILL: Overspill* – a project for seven critical writers who had open access to the festival and were able to explore different ways of critically engaging with the work in the festival, its artists and its audiences. But I suppose I have always felt the biggest resource we have is each other, and I've always felt able to reach out and make contact with a range of folk to ask advice from or run ideas by. I'm sure for lots of artists the things you list above are fundamental, but none of them have been for me. Trust, context and money have been the things I have pursued and remain in need of.

LK: I'm interested in hearing about how your role in setting up New Work Network in 1997 contributed to your own practice through your connections with other artists, and I'm also interested in your thoughts on current professional development needs (and resources) through your work in setting up and running the *SPILL Platform* for younger artists.

RP: Both examples are absolutely predicated on mutuality, reciprocity. Just as the teacher who concentrates can learn as much from the education process as their students, so too it seems to me in the art world. It is enormously enriching to aide growth in others. It seems to be the same old story – still artists crave platforms, spaces and contexts to show more than anything. Most artists worth their salt can be resourceful when what they have to work with is limited (in fact it's probably the case that only a tiny group worldwide can truly afford their real ambitions) but I truly believe what we need most is space: space that can be accessed easily and is trustworthy. Of course I mean space metaphorically as well as actually – space to make, space to present, enough space between us to forge bonds whilst also simultaneously being able to all breathe freely in the 'market' or 'sector' or wherever. Contributing to setting up the New Work Network and now running the *SPILL National Platform* is the same: it is a way of forming bonds, of shifting proximity between people – be they co-makers or cultural workers, or audiences – in order to assert change that benefits us all. Both examples are about creating change through peer review, and about using common sense to address something that needs to shift. When I was just starting out, Lois, you programmed me as part of the *Spring Exhibitionists* platform at the ICA, so I learnt from the get-go what a high status, well-run context could provide and it was brilliant, I never looked back. So being in service to others is actually a very easy thing to do in order to maximize what we have. There's no grand ethos really, I simply believe it's the right thing to do.

## Professional Development – Case Study Two

### Rajni Shah

#### Introduction

The following interview by Philippa Barr of New Work Network (NWN) with artist and producer Rajni Shah examines the positive impact that a variety of Live Art professional development support and initiatives have had on Rajni's artistic practice. Rajni has been able to access a number of professional development opportunities offered by the Live Art Advisory Network (LAAN) organisations, such as the *DIY* scheme: a collaboration between LAAN and a range of national partners that offers opportunities for artists working in Live Art to conceive and run unusual training and professional development projects for other artists. Other opportunities Rajni has taken part in range from participating in Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *Masterclass* (part of the *Live Culture* programme organized by Live Art Development Agency and Tate Modern) to performing in the *Vienna Performing Rights Festival* and sitting as a Trustee on NWN's Board.

This interview expands on the range of opportunities from which Rajni has been able to benefit throughout her career so far, and focuses with more depth on two key initiatives: Rajni's ongoing participation in the NWN's *Activator* scheme for artist-producers, and as a recipient of the Live Art Development Agency's *One to One* bursary. The NWN *Connecting the Activators* scheme, which Rajni was involved in, was a one-year professional programme for ten artist 'Activators' that addressed leadership development for artist-producers working in multi-disciplinary arts practices. It was based on an innovative action-learning network, bringing together independent artists/producers from across the UK. The programme provided dynamic and effective approaches to peer learning and knowledge transfer, including a series of action-learning events, peer mentoring, individual pathway development and on-line forums.

Rajni Shah is a freelance performance artist, writer and producer currently based in London and the South East of the UK. She has performed extensively over the past ten years in the UK, USA and Europe. Her work ranges from large-scale performance installations made through an in-depth collaborative process, to small solo interventions in public spaces. The quality of Rajni's work is evidenced by her growing profile through commissions, invitations from national and European promoters, and critical reviews. Most recently she was invited to be a part of *SPILL* festival; the British Council's *S.P.A.C.E.* showcase in Spain; to become an Associate Artist with Artsadmin; and has had critical reviews and profiles including *Dance Theatre Journal*, *The Guardian* and *Time Out*, as well as a number of other published images and writings. In addition, Rajni has worked as a producer-curator for the Live Art Development Agency, Alternate ROOTS, the Farnham Maltings (Senior Management Fellowship), Arts Council England South East, the Engaged Art Network, and Rules and Regs. She is a member of the NWN Activators, a group of independent UK artist-producers, and is an active member of Alternate ROOTS (USA).

Philippa Barr: What was nature of the professional development support you received?

Rajni Shah: Since moving to the UK seven years ago, I have received a great deal of professional development support, which has been completely invaluable to my career as an artist-producer within and outside the Live Art sector. Before going into any depth about particular schemes and support, it is worth emphasising the role of inter-connectedness between these three key support agencies, and the ways in which this has benefited me: rather than working competitively, as I have witnessed in other sectors, the staff at NWN, Artsadmin and the Live Art Development Agency make a conscious effort to function as a sector, which means that I have always felt that I've received excellent signposting as well as advice. This sharing of knowledge also means that every professional development encounter feels very rich as each individual is able to draw on the variety of opportunities and support across the sector rather than focusing on what is offered by that one organisation. I would say that this way of thinking extends to a national network of Live Art programmers and producers, who are usually very willing to share advice and expertise in order to create and sustain what has become a very rich Live Art sector within the UK.

It is hard for me to pick out specific examples of support I have received since they have been numerous and interconnected, and continue to be significant within my practice. However, for the purposes of this interview, I'd like to focus on two schemes that have been pivotal in my career so far, and one in which I am newly involved. Firstly, I'd like to focus on the *One to One* bursary I received from the Live Art Development Agency in 2006 and which in many ways provided the basis for my current touring and creative strategies through the provision of significant time, money and vital introductions. Secondly, I'd like to focus on the unique *Activators* scheme run by NWN, which as far as I know was the first scheme to seriously address providing support for artist-producers within this sector, and which continues independently to this day. I'd like to also acknowledge the benefits of recently becoming an Artsadmin Associate Artist, which has been fantastic in terms of raising my profile and, again, providing me with vital contacts for making and touring work.

PB: What were your expectations and were these met?

RS: Both the *One to One* bursary and *Activators* schemes were very well managed in terms of expectations. In both cases, I was able to have in-depth conversations about what was expected of me and what I could gain, and crucially these took place before, after and during the development periods.

I applied for the *One to One* bursary in its last year. It was by then a very competitive scheme and I knew that I would be lucky to benefit from such a significant amount of support. However, the most crucial moment in the process occurred for me before I had even written my application, as the Live Art Development Agency encouraged any potential applicant to attend a one-to-one advisory meeting in order to ensure that applicants fully understood the nature of the scheme. I was sure that it was the right time for me to apply for the scheme, but unsure as to what exactly I would propose. And it was during this one-to-one meeting with Daniel Brine that I became clear on not only the content of my proposal, but on the direction I wanted my career to take. It was because of this meeting that writing the application itself became an act of professional development, and one in which I took risks, clarified my own needs, and was able to contextualize my own practice for the first time. It is increasingly rare that schemes are run with such care and attention. But I believe that this pre-meeting set me up to write an application that would be successful in its benefit to me even if I had not received the bursary. Having received it, the Agency provided me with a combination of dedicated attention and support, and total freedom. This discreet but dedicated support was exactly what I needed, and to this day I am happy to say that I am always able to rely on their advice when making key decisions.

Sophie Cameron (then Coordinator of NWN) set up the Activator Network in consultation with the artist-producers who would be part of the scheme, and was completely shaped by documents that we provided in response to questions about our needs. These documents provided the basis for NWN's Cultural Leadership funding bid, which initially supported the year-long activity. So again, the expectations of this scheme were well-managed because it was completely shaped by the needs of its participants. This is a key strength of NWN, which was set up as a member-led organization, and I feel that this process of early consultation led the Activators to feel complete ownership of the programme, to the extent that we are seeking funding to continue the network independently of NWN. Although there was a challenging transitional period at the beginning of the programme (when Philippa Barr replaced Sophie as Director of NWN), ongoing consultation remained a key part of the process, and the programme continued to remain completely responsive to the needs of the participants. This meant that the programme was completely innovative, both in its focus on artist-producers, and in its fluid, creative structure.

PB: Was it the right/best time in your practice and how did you and each of the organisations ascertain this and work with this?

RS: This takes me back to my earlier comment about communication within the sector. I feel that I have always been pointed towards the most appropriate form of support for that phase in my career, and that

each organization is fully aware of what it can offer in collaboration with the others. It is this clarity that makes it easy for artists to find the right support for their practice at that moment in time. It also makes it easy for me to suggest the most appropriate avenue to artists whom I am mentoring or advising.

For example, when I first met Live Art Development Agency in 2003, I was still an emerging practitioner and they did not at that time have a lot to offer me. I therefore found more support in the member-led organisation, NWN, and in the open advice surgeries offered by Artsadmin. However, since I had made this initial contact, the Agency started to invite me to appropriate events, and it is through this process that I attended a hugely influential masterclass with Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and eventually applied for the *One to One* bursary.

PB: What were the distinguishing features of the professional development support you received and why were these significant to your practice?

RS: As I have mentioned, the *One to One* bursary included an excellent advice session before writing the application, and delicate but dedicated attention during the bursary. Lois and Daniel were also very clear that whilst they would provide any level of support, I should ask for this support as and when I needed it. This combination of freedom with the occasional check-in was very useful. I know that some schemes are even more 'hands-off' and I feel that this works less well, as the occasional nudge is essential for all of us! I would say that the key feature of this scheme was the fact that I was in control of my own programme of activity. This was combined with the practical support of the Agency in giving me key contact details and facilitating meetings so that I could make this programme of activity happen. Having a decent amount of funding also meant that I was able to meet new curators and presenters and develop a relationship with them outside of the usual funding constraints – so the money to pay myself and my expenses created an invaluable and completely unique space for conversation. This has led to real, long-term relationships, which I do not believe could have been so meaningful without the bursary.

The NWN *Activators* scheme was completely shaped by the needs of its participants. It combined a structured approach to professional development through group activity and meetings with high profile artists, curators and producers, nationally and internationally, with an individual strand of support where each of us had funding to determine our own needs as well as to undertake peer to peer mentoring sessions. After consulting with NWN and the group, I decided to use my funding to set up an informal Advisory Panel; in many ways, it was not the financial boost that I needed to make this happen, but the confidence and space to declare that this was what I needed and to

make it happen. I also found the peer to peer mentoring sessions to be a completely enlightened way of working: I was able to forge new relationships and have professional conversations whilst being a witness to someone else's way of navigating the artist-producer role in another part of the country. I was so inspired by this learning process and its value that I have continued to fund this practice myself, as have other members of the network. Last but not least, in creating and giving profile to this network, NWN began to develop a national voice for artist-producers within the new work sector. As we continue to work together, we are developing and refining this voice to articulate new ways of working and navigating the relationships between independent artist-producers and institutions, which feels incredibly important.

Most recently I have become an Artsadmin Associate Artist. This is an excellent scheme as it lends weight and recognition to artists without needing to be too heavily resourced. Although the amount of actual support Artsadmin can offer is limited, being named as an Associate is prestigious and allows a new level of access to the organisation as well as extra promotion to Artsadmin's extensive list of international promoters and artists. I have also found that Artsadmin have been very supportive of other activities I have initiated, and are keen to engage with my complete range of work as an artist, writer and curator.

PB: In what ways did the professional development support you received make a real and lasting difference to your practice?

RS: Every bit of support I have received within this sector has made a real and lasting difference to my practice. The *One to One* bursary has allowed me to build significant relationships with promoters. In particular, the Nuffield Theatre in Lancaster, one of the first venues I contacted on Live Art Development Agency's recommendation, have now hosted numerous residencies and performances of mine, and are currently co-commissioning a new piece of work, making a significant financial investment, hosting workshops and residencies, and working in a genuine collaboration with me as a producer and artist. The NWN Activator Network continues to provide a forum for discussion and support but also encourages me to be visionary and challenge accepted models of production in the new work sector.

Going back to my comment about the joined-up thinking of the sector, I feel that these organisations together give me a strong sense of community, and make me feel like I 'have a sector' – something I have never felt before, and very much struggled with in the dance and theatre sectors. There is something about the size of these organisations that means they can support artists without hierarchical structures getting in the way, and that they can always be responsive to the real needs of artists.

PB: What have you done since that has been particularly influenced or informed by the professional development support you received?

RS: Thanks to schemes such as the *One to One* bursary scheme, *DIY* (for which I have had two successful applications), and *Performing Rights Vienna*, I have developed the confidence to take hold of my own professional trajectory and shape it according to my beliefs. I am working within a new model of touring which favours real relationships, exchange and dialogue over the quick, inauthentic old-style touring model; I have established a Sustainability policy so that the ethics of my professional practice are in line with my personal beliefs; and I am confident in creating innovative risk-taking work in the knowledge that I have the support of those who truly understand Live Art and will give me genuine feedback and criticism. In addition, through the support of the Activator Network and my role as Project Director for the Live Art Development Agency's *Restock, Rethink, Reflect* programme, I am now in a position where, with the support of these three organisations, I can curate and produce international exchanges.

PB: If you wanted a bursary or some form of professional development support now, what would you be looking for?

RS: Although the *One to One* bursary model is a big financial investment it is invaluable in giving artists the opportunity to take a leap forward and explore new territories. If it were possible to get this kind of support again, I would definitely apply, as I found even the application process incredibly helpful. I think this is primarily because it offers long-term support and is visionary in its model of investment in artists. I feel privileged to have benefited from this scheme but devastated that support could not continue as I know how much difference it made for me and how much it gave me the space to develop a more outward-looking, politically engaged and effective practice. Similarly, the Activator Network invested in a year's activity, and was successful for some of the same reasons – that it was able to provide a decent amount of support for a small group, knowing that the benefits would spread through their engagement with their own artistic communities. It is such a shame that long-term investment nurturing genuine creativity is so often, by financial necessity, de-prioritised in this country as I think if we allowed more space for programmes like these we would really feel the benefits.

I also think that schemes such as *DIY* that prioritise creativity and allow artists, to run projects for other artists provide an excellent model. I only wish there were more opportunities like this, as the competition means that perhaps only the more unusual and outlandish projects get supported, and only in limited parts of the country.



## Conclusion

### By Manick Govinda

The two artist profiles presented here demonstrate how the Live Art sector works as a unified body that nurtures artists, and has a comprehensive approach that responds to the needs of the individual and also allows them to take leaps into the unknown. This is a strength of the sector, based on mutual support and respect and a desire to share resources, expertise, and collaborate. But the reality of a loss of resources bites hard:

- *Artsadmin's Bursary Scheme*, which was launched in 1998, has been in suspension since 2007 following cessation of project-specific funding.
- Live Art Development Agency's *One to One Bursary Awards* are no more after 7 years (1999–2006), following cessation of project-specific funding.
- Funding for artistic research and development is increasingly difficult to secure from Arts Council England's *Grants for the Arts* scheme with its emphasis on public outcome.
- *New Work Network's Activator Programme* was a one-off twelve-month funded programme from the Cultural Leadership initiative in 2007/08 and is now without funds.

Both the public and private funding sectors need to invest in the good practice developed by members of Live Art UK. Our extensive experience and feedback from practitioners show that long-term support for our organisations is needed to allow us to re-invest in risk, innovation, artistic research and development.

Our commitment to offering bursaries and peer-support programmes to artists at all stages of their career must be supported with confidence and conviction by funders, who need to argue for *long-term* benefits of artistic development rather than short-term outcomes.

We hope that the two contrasting artist profiles presented here will act as exemplar models of supporting artistic progression, reflection, risk-taking, experimentation, research and development. Artsadmin, Live Art Development Agency, New Work Network and all the members of Live Art UK are committed to advocating and lobbying for these critical moments in the artists' career.

# Artist-led Activities

The Good, The Bad and the...  
Exploring Artist-led Activity and its  
Impact on the Live Art Landscape

The Bluecoat and New Work Network

Compiled by Richard Kingdom, the Bluecoat  
and Hannah Crosson, New Work Network

### If you want something done...

Artist-led activity as a 'do it yourself' culture has an international history. The 1960's and 70's saw the birth of many, now established, artist-run centres and organisations in Canada such as Canadian Artists' Representation/Le Front des Artistes Canadiens (CARFAC) and prominent North American art spaces run by artists for the support of an artistic community, such as ps.1 and ps.122 in New York and Alternate ROOTS in Southern USA. In Europe there has been a rise of artist-run spaces and galleries since the 1990's with the notion of 'artist as entrepreneur' and in October 2008, Internationale Gesellschaft der Bildenden Künste (IGBK) in Berlin ran a trade show for artist-run spaces across Europe (ranging from small scale independent artist project spaces, to galleries with an ambition to become commercial arts centres). Meanwhile in the UK, *SPILL* – an international festival of Live Art and contemporary performance – was instigated, managed, developed and fundraised for by an artist's company, Pacitti Company, in response to a perceived lack of high profile spaces in London where leading British performance makers could show their work alongside their international counterparts. What unites this variety of international projects and initiatives is often a call to action in the face of adversity and the faith that, through grouping together, artists can find new and innovative ways to create their own opportunities.

The singular vision and corresponding ethos of artist-led initiatives create an environment in which an artist feels able to operate on first principles. In this environment, experimentation and freedoms exist that offer artists and audiences something that is often not found in established institutions where funding agendas and institutional policies can set constraints on activity. It is often for this reason that artist-led spaces spring up; as Andre Stitt observes in the following text, artist-led activities enable artists "experimental methods of creating art that could not be explored by other means or in other more conventional contexts".

During a presentation at the *Into The New* festival in Glasgow, February 2009, Anne Seagrave referenced the impact that artist-run and alternative spaces across Europe have had on her practice. She posited that these spaces allowed her to develop her practice through the performance opportunities they created, the connections they enabled her to make with other artists, and the inspiration she took from a community of like-minded people. The link between the work that is nurtured through artist-led activity and the work that is staged and exhibited in larger, more established institutions throughout the wider cultural sector is irrefutable.

In contrast to larger arts institutions, artist-led initiatives are most often fleet-of-foot with small teams, sometimes as few as one person, delivering an organisation's worth of activity on minimal resources. "We do a lot with very little," as Gemma Paintin describes below. This "quick, energised [and] unrestricted" approach is a liberating departure from the sometimes slow bureaucratic pace of institutions and the bullet-

pointed agendas of funding bodies. It is a 'nothing is impossible' attitude that artists and audiences alike want to be part of. The flip side of this is that often it is presumed artist-led activity is activity necessarily run on little or no money, due to the ingenuity of artists to create the impossible with limited resources. At the same time, there is also a growing relationship between artist-led groups and arts institutions who recognise the vibrancy and cultural urgency of artist-led culture and want to both support this and gain from it by inviting it into their space.

The case studies below speak of the personal investment of money, time, and principally the energy required to set up and maintain various initiatives. It isn't surprising that this relentless expenditure of energy is exhausting and can often threaten the stability and sustainability of artist-led activity. It is a curious dilemma that the more successful an artist-led project, space or initiative becomes, the more energy is needed to keep it going, and the less time its leading artists find for their own practice. Consequently, many initiatives come to an abrupt end just as they seem to be establishing themselves. It is precisely because of this success that the key protagonists, to use the term favoured by athletes, 'hit the wall'.

How support organisations, funders and arts institutions can better support artist-led initiatives needs to be considered in virtue of a complex set of relationships that the following texts by Andre Stitt, Ilana Mitchell and Gemma Paintin touch upon. Each artist was invited to consider their own artist-led initiatives under the headings of *The Good, The Bad, and The...* as a space to explore some of these issues, and to offer up some other suggestions and key considerations in developing artist-led approaches. By reading these statements side by side, some themes discussed above and overlaps of experience become apparent.

## 1. Andre Stitt: Trace Gallery, Cardiff

[www.andrestitt.com](http://www.andrestitt.com) [www.tracegallery.org](http://www.tracegallery.org)

Trace is a combined performance art and installation space (the converted ground floor of a terraced house) that Andre Stitt initiated in 2000 as a curatorial enquiry into the material remains of performances which are normally cleared-up or discarded. Performance artworks are always temporary and often influenced by the environment in which they occur. Trace explores the relationships between a performance and what it leaves behind – in terms of documentation, installation or trace elements.

### The Good

I had previously followed a trajectory that included years of squatting in London, creating alternative events and establishing transient or elusive venues as centres for artistic activity. When I moved to Cardiff in 1999, I bought a run-down house and converted the ground floor into my studio. I thought it looked so good I imagined an occasional gallery. A 'safe house' for like-minded artists to push the envelope. This developed into a place for friends to visit and make work and, by extension, for showing my students' work that they would previously not had access to. This became Trace.

Trace has allowed me to explore and investigate both artistic and curatorial concerns relative to experimental methods of creating art that could not be explored by other means or in other more conventional contexts. Because Trace is actually part of the house in which we live, it has become a very social space. Experimental art in some sense becomes domestic. The house has become a hub of social and domestic interactions. The real development of space and organisation has given myself and a group of local artists the opportunity to become a community and to share this with artists from all over the world who visit and stay with us. This has resulted in mutual support with common goals and the intention to help other artists realise work that could not be possible in other contexts.

The real benefit of artist-led practice is the derived knowledge of how to challenge one's practice and to create a situation that facilitates what artists need to realise their work. Basically, I set up Trace and put my own money into operating it for a couple of years and, as it developed, friends, artists, students helped me organise events. I've maintained curatorial control and, because of my own position within performance internationally, I have been able to create strong relationships with other artists and artists' groups around the world. This has enabled me to create diverse programmes of work on the basis of friendship and understanding, and the knowledge that we all work on a shoestring budget.

### The Bad

In my experience most artist-led initiatives grow, develop and fold quite organically. Knowing when to change and evolve is a good thing. After eight years functioning as a gallery with a regular programme, we all felt exhausted and a little worn out. Although we all loved the work and sharing our lives with the visiting artists and all the wonderful audiences, it could be quite draining.

The running joke was, “Welcome to the Trace Hotel”. I suppose for me there were times I wanted to quit because of sheer exhaustion; operating Trace as a gallery was a full-time job, and yet I also had an actual full-time job! It could get very stressful not having space to oneself in your own house; although this is something I laugh a lot about because sometimes, when I look back at all that was achieved, I can’t quite believe how I managed at all.

## And the... domestics of art

At present, in 2009, with the development of collective performance work by Trace as a group, I see this activity fulfilling my own practice as a performance artist. I am more interested in working collaboratively and as part of a group than as a solo ego-feeding art star – been there, done that!

If anything, being helped by the kindness and support of other artists in making Trace such a success, I have come to understand the importance of working collaboratively, communally and collectively. In a very profound sense, what has developed out of Trace for myself is the importance of performance art as a socially engaged practice that can creatively promote mutual understanding and support in order to achieve a common aim. The essentials are energy, open-mindedness, love and respect... and a lot of patience!

## 2. Ilana Mitchell: Artist-producer

[www.ilanamitchell.co.uk](http://www.ilanamitchell.co.uk) [www.starandshadow.org.uk](http://www.starandshadow.org.uk)

[www.platformnortheast.org](http://www.platformnortheast.org)

Ilana Mitchell makes artistic and other creative endeavours happen: her own, other peoples’ and anything in between. At the time of writing she is developing *Wunderbar*, a new participatory Live Art festival for the North East; researching a project about reincarnation supported by an Artsadmin bursary; working as part of the national Activator Network; and is one of the collective of volunteers that run the Star and Shadow Cinema in Newcastle.

## The Good

The first thought that comes to mind about the good in artist-led approaches is that they provide an independent way of working, not held up by the processes of other people or systems. And I’m an independent-minded girl...

My first project was *Starboard Home* – a series of events in my shared flat after I graduated that gave opportunities for recent graduates to make and show new work. In a first attempt at fundraising, we were awarded £900. This stretched over three events, covered the costs of printing flyers and, in the recent past before the social technology revolution, proved important for putting the project out there. This start proved there was a space and support for independent practice alongside the larger cultural and art activities (it was the year BALTIC opened) and that if you told people about it they’d come. I didn’t make a decision not to work in institutions; it was just a case of making things happen in a quick, energised, and unrestricted way.

That same year, I made a performance work as part of the first *Platform North East* event, a platform for emerging artists working with Live Art practices run by a loose association of independent producers. At the feedback meetings following the event, this informal group was expanded and when someone asked who wanted to organise the next event, I put my hand up. The informal nature of the group allowed that initial enthusiasm and commitment (along with a fair amount of free time) to evolve into a job – I ran *Platform North East*, along with other hand-raising artists, for four years.

Independence as well as collaborative working have been the key interests for me in developing the Star and Shadow Cinema. The cinema runs on the ideals of creating rather than consuming culture and being free of organisational hierarchies and structures. We like to call it a Donutocracy – a circular structure with no centre (and with just a few sugar strands). Managing the Star and Shadow is a constant challenge, but an interesting one, navigating individual and group concerns. I love the challenge of finding ways to exist alongside regular institutions and contexts, whilst at the same time maintaining the core ethos. For me, being involved in Star and Shadow is similar to my involvement in making work – having ideas, discussing them, finding ways to realise them.

## The Bad

The difficulties I've found are around trust and sustainability. With all the trust, care and commitment that goes into running projects independently, and often with a group of people who are or become friends, it can be difficult when things go wrong. At the same time, coming up with solutions to such issues isn't easy and to do so without compromising the project can be a challenge.

With Star and Shadow, we've had to adapt over time to manage the risks of breaches of trust, which have happened on occasion. Two collective-run projects in Newcastle have suffered major setbacks when open systems have been abused and individuals have been able to take money and resources from those projects. Star and Shadow has had minor trust breaches and does take this matter seriously, although it's proved tricky to balance implementing systems that need to be managed in ways that don't create hierarchies or more work than individual volunteers want to take on. Compromise has become part of the reality of the project.

Being able to support a common cause as a collective can be hard to balance with individual energy, interest and availability. As a building, Star and Shadow's long-term standing is precarious. The lease agreement, which runs out in 2010 is not renewable and we are at the mercy of the decisions of the owners. The work we have put into transforming the space has no relevance in this commercial situation – and we can't change that system however much we'd like to. The challenge of continuing, with either finding a new space or fighting for this one, is one I do find exciting on one level, but there are questions over whether collectively we have the energy to rebuild.

With *Platform North East*, the sustainability issue has been capacity, finding clear ways to bring new people in to take over when individuals move on. And capacity



John Boehme *Fore Mein* 2001  
 at Trace Install-action Artspace  
 Trace Archive



Entrance to cinema from  
 the bar at Star and Shadow  
 Photo by Jason Thompson





Residence, Bristol  
Photo by James Stenhouse

is also an issue when it comes to support and resources. I've never really had a manager figure or a structure to learn from and sometimes collaborators aren't there, or also don't have the relevant knowledge or experience themselves. Within Star and Shadow, there is a huge amount of knowledge and experience collectively but, when one person moves on, plugging the gap they leave takes hard work; as everyone takes on tasks to suit themselves it's unnatural to give someone a role. Over the last few years I've gathered a number of informal mentors. My independent way of working does mean I've had to learn not so much where to turn but how – the where is in these informal networks of mentors and support. I think that on balance that's a good thing rather than a bad, as I both feel well supported and able to return the favour.

### **And the... need for structure**

It is commitment, energy, openness to discussion and experimentation that make artist-led projects happen. It's important to find ways to support each other and the project to harness those key elements. It sounds dull, and probably contradictory to my independence mantra, but the more projects I've worked on, the more aware I am of the need for some form of structure to hold the vision and to enable things to happen. Structures don't need to be onerous, they can be as simple as a safe-word, or as complex as the Star and Shadow meeting structure. As Star and Shadow has developed, the need for different structures is a constant evolution – our wiki is testament to that.

As part of a collective that has shared aims and visions, building a framework that allows that vision to be realised is key. It shouldn't make a project bureaucratic or be imposed, and it should be creative. Projects evolve, and end, constantly – that's the beauty of this way of working. It's just more satisfying if those changes are made positively, rather than because no one knew how to stop them.

### **3. Gemma Paintin (of performance company Action Hero): Residence, Bristol**

[www.actionhero.org.uk](http://www.actionhero.org.uk) [www.residence.org.uk](http://www.residence.org.uk)

Residence is a group of companies and individuals making theatre, performance and Live Art (Action Hero, Edward Rapley, Folake Shoga, Jo Bannon, Kate Yedigaroff, Muddled State, Search Party, Sita Calvert- Ennals, The Special Guests, Tom Marshman, Tom Wainwright, Tinned Fingers and The Wonder Club), who came together following a Theatre Bristol open space session to offer each other support and collective strength. Their first aim was to find a space to work from, which they achieved in April 2007 when they moved into the Old Horfield Police Station as tenants of ArtspaceLifespace. Residence ran two office spaces from the police station, put on discussion events, used communal rehearsal space and hosted work-in-progress nights. In June 2008, they completed a move to Bridewell Island, an exciting new project in the centre of Bristol run by ArtspaceLifespace.

## The Good

As Residence gets better known, then the work of all the artists involved becomes known by association. This leads to more work because we appear less of an 'unknown' to programmers who may not have put our work on before. Other benefits are a sense of community and all the positives that go along with this – support, inspiration, peer-to-peer mentoring. The main thing is the strength that comes in numbers and the support of the other members. We all share a belief in the power of a community to foster the development of Bristol's performance scene. Residence's collective ethos means that there is an increasingly supportive atmosphere and a more open forum; this means it's easier to take more risks and make better work. We don't necessarily all make similar work, but we do have a similar commitment to contributing to a community of artists in Bristol that is dynamic, diverse and exciting.

Managing Residence is simultaneously at the centre of my practice in terms of supporting it, and battling for space alongside it. There is no one whose responsibility it is to run and develop Residence, so we are all trying (and sometimes failing) to find time. In another sense, Residence feeds all of our practices. It's like fertilizer. We keep going because we have a belief that Residence is massively important and that it has contributed to all of our work in such a vital way.

## The Bad

Moving to our first place was a huge, huge step. I feel like I can (and will) be part of Residence forever, but this is not necessarily universal across the group. The less you are involved in the project, the harder it is to feel in control of it, and, as a non-hierarchical organisation, it is very self-selecting and different members relate to it in different ways, and at different times.

The lows are always related to the inadequacy of our space and the complexities of dealing with another artist-led group in a tenant-landlord relationship. We want to be completely autonomous in terms of space but at the moment cannot be. The space is unbearable in winter and is damp – this means it is not used and morale gets very low, people feel like they want to leave the group etc.

Other low points are related to how the group runs; no one is in charge and this means things can take a long time to happen. As an artist-led initiative it comes second to all of our artistic practices. Residence is no one's top priority, it is second on the list for all of us (there are currently twenty members).

## And the... key to keeping going

Ambition – it seems impossible at first but you have to ignore your instincts telling you that this kind of thing is impossible for people with very little experience and even less money. Keep asking questions and people will want to get involved and help you.

Patience – with lots of people involved it can be frustrating. We have never managed to get the whole of Residence in the same place at the same time.

Passion – the project takes a lot of work so everyone needs to care about it and be able to contribute, even if that is in small ways.

Warm clothes – nowhere seems to have adequate heating so you have to be properly dressed! This sounds like a small point but it's actually the source of most of our problems; it is almost impossible to work in a room that is below ten degrees.

We don't have any funding. This was initially a conscious decision as it allowed us to move quickly and autonomously right from the start. We operate in the following way financially: each member pays a small monthly amount to Residence, and this money pays the rent on our space. Sometimes we have money left over that pays for upkeep, e.g. cleaning materials, tea, etc. We all contribute our time for free and share everything in the space that members bring from home or get from freecycle etc. We have groups that run, for example, an academic reading group, a monthly sharing called *Tiny Ideas*, and we support each other more informally by sharing information and knowledge and seeing/responding to each others' work.

We are completely independent and we are not aligned to a venue or funding body. We may or may not continue in this way in the future; some members would like to pursue public funding so we can do more to actively contribute to the wider Bristol (and national) arts 'scene', whilst others feel we have more freedom and stability if we remain self-funded. The amount of work involved in getting funding is also an issue for us: who would take on this role?

Sustainability is an issue, but we want to see it as a positive challenge. We have no funding and want to be as self-supporting as we can so we can be as autonomous as we can. We do a lot with very little, and this way of working responds very well to problems of sustainability!

## Conclusion

Artist-led initiatives create a breeding ground for ideas – not simply artistic ones but also ideas of curating, organising, reaching audiences, and this naturally feeds neighbouring arts institutions and a wider culture. In Stitt's case, his students at Cardiff School of Art gain access to work that would not otherwise have been available to them, and Paintin's Residence provides a working space for many of Arnolfini's associate artists. That institutions are able to represent the work of these initiatives is fantastic but the preservation of the initiatives' independence is also essential to their continued vitality. The difference between an artist working for salaried arts administrators on the one hand, and for fellow artists on the other, is obvious – in terms of the exchange that takes place; money, good will, and the passion to get things done regardless – but it is a distinction that ought to carry greater credence with funding institutions that seek to support an entire arts ecosystem.

Institutionalising artist-led initiatives is potentially counterproductive and the laborious process associated with large funding applications is not only the antithesis to the unique energy and drive that characterises many artist-led initiatives, it is frequently enough to persuade even the most resilient artist-entrepreneurs to throw in the towel. Nevertheless, when energy itself is often the key resource of any artist-led activity, it is clear that this cannot be indefinitely produced without a nourishing influx of people-power or financial support to buy time/secure leases/cover basic amenities.

To support this culture there needs to be greater investment and the challenge for funding bodies is to devise a way to support artist-led activity that is sensitive to the vitality and integrity of its independence. It should be recognised by funders that, through supporting the ingenuity of artist-led approaches, exciting risk-taking work can happen for less resources than are funnelled into larger institutions. If funding bodies had the power to harness the momentum of artist-led initiatives, enabling them to continue on the same unfettered energy that created them, our cultural experience would be increasingly enriched.

## Links to a selection of UK artist-run initiatives

Act Art, London  
[www.actart.co.uk](http://www.actart.co.uk)

Area 10, London  
[www.area10.info](http://www.area10.info)

Bermondsey Artists' Group at the Café Gallery, London  
[www.cafegalleryprojects.org](http://www.cafegalleryprojects.org)

Black Market International, Belfast  
[www.vads.ac.uk/collections/maclennan/index.html](http://www.vads.ac.uk/collections/maclennan/index.html)

Cube Bristol  
[www.cubecinema.com](http://www.cubecinema.com)

Elevator Gallery, London  
[www.myspace.com/elevatorgallery](http://www.myspace.com/elevatorgallery)

Forest Café and Forest Fringe, Edinburgh  
[www.forestfringe.co.uk](http://www.forestfringe.co.uk)

Hatch, Nottingham  
[www.hatchnottingham.co.uk](http://www.hatchnottingham.co.uk)

Live Art Falmouth, South West  
[www.liveartfalmouth.com/site](http://www.liveartfalmouth.com/site)

New Work Yorkshire, Yorkshire  
[www.newworknetwork.org.uk/userinfo.php?uid=1201](http://www.newworknetwork.org.uk/userinfo.php?uid=1201)

OMSK, London  
[www.myspace.com/omsk](http://www.myspace.com/omsk)

Open Dialogues, National  
[www.opendialogues.com](http://www.opendialogues.com)

Other/Other/Other, Norwich  
<http://otherotherother.wordpress.com>

Pilot, West Midlands  
[www.pilotnights.co.uk](http://www.pilotnights.co.uk)

Rules and Regs, South East and National  
[www.rulesandregs.org](http://www.rulesandregs.org)

Shunt Vaults, London  
[www.shunt.co.uk](http://www.shunt.co.uk)

Simon Whitehead/Corsespace, Aberdeenshire  
[www.corsespace.co.uk/corsespace.html](http://www.corsespace.co.uk/corsespace.html)

SPILL, London  
[www.spillfestival.com](http://www.spillfestival.com)

Static Gallery, Liverpool  
[www.static-ops.org](http://www.static-ops.org)

Stench, Leicester  
<http://stench.org.uk>

Stoke Newington International Airport, London  
[www.stkinternational.co.uk](http://www.stkinternational.co.uk)

Supper Club at Basement, Brighton  
[www.thebasement.uk.com](http://www.thebasement.uk.com)

Switch Performance, London  
[www.switchperformance.co.uk](http://www.switchperformance.co.uk)

The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home, Liverpool  
[www.twoaddthree.org/residencies](http://www.twoaddthree.org/residencies)

Time Exchange, North West  
[www.newworknetwork.org.uk/userinfo.php?uid=2307](http://www.newworknetwork.org.uk/userinfo.php?uid=2307)

You Me Bum Bum Train, London  
<http://bumbumtrain.co.uk/>

# Networks

Nomadic Meetings:  
the Possibilities of Networks

New Work Network



## By Niki Russell, and Hannah Crosson, New Work Network

It's this stickyness, provisional but binding, fragile but firm, a contradictory and paradoxical state that through constant binding and breaking, snapping and resticking builds a shared structure of memory and experience that presents in us, together, a "unity of marks and traces".

Charlie Fox, artist, producer and member of the Activator Network in response to *Connecting the Activators*

The last ten years has seen an extensive shift in the importance and way in which we network. Networks are increasingly recognised as essential systems and channels of communication that can quickly react to breaking news stories (think of the speed at which the death of Michael Jackson was communicated around the globe), networks allow for news to be reported and broadcast independently of dominant TV companies (via groups such as Indymedia for example), and networks allow people to organize complex responses to social situations (such as the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination and Climate Camp activities during G20 protests, involving numerous people and activities orchestrated to take place at set times within the City of London). The rapid growth and use of on-line social media applications is recognised as a powerful social phenomenon and both sought and recognised for its marketing potential by industry, whilst at the same time social media are continually developing in user-led ways, which develop ahead of industry determined trends. With a younger generation growing up with Facebook and Twitter amongst a raft of others that allow instant messaging and global communications twenty four hours a day, on-line networks are altering the ways in which we connect and communicate with each other.

The power of information, and how information can be shared, is changing the ways in which industries are operating; with the impact of Myspace on the music industry, and on-line blogs bringing previously unknown writers to fame, networks which develop new connections between people are significant in the development of contemporary culture. Politically, there is a greater awareness that through distributing information and making connections with others, new things are possible. But alongside the explosion of on-line networking, there is also a desire for people to retain connections in the real world, find face-to-face contact and make networks physically manifest to allow for action to happen in real space and time. Possibly the most powerful outcomes of networks are the marrying between (on-line) information and (live) physical action.

Within Live Art and interdisciplinary arts practices, materials and methods of working have taken an interesting turn away from the established materials of paint and clay, and from recognised structures such as the ballet school or theatre circuit, towards the body as a material, the participation of the audience as the work, and peer learning and informal, often shifting, support structures. Live Art and interdisciplinary arts require the involvement of people in dialogues, conversations and partnerships for the construction of art, critical feedback to develop it, enablers and facilitators that

assist in showing the work, and the audiences that engage with it. In this environment, collaboration and connections between people is the currency and of key importance, and can be accessed and harnessed through the identification of networks which form loose and often changing structures that bring people together.

There is a magnificent variety of networks that operate in numerous ways within the cultural area of Live Art and interdisciplinary arts. Networks exist as small and self-generated meetings of people, such as TAFKA, an artists peer group, to larger organizations that can be membership-led, such as Dance UK (1000 members) and New Work Network (950 members). Networks are set up for many different reasons, and can start out as immediate responses to current situations and then grow into stronger support structures; for example, Other/Other/Other as a group met to create a space for performance in Norwich, and Junto formed as a collection of emerging artists to offer one another peer support and is currently running a mentoring programme for recent graduates. There are networks which offer support for artists in the provision of professional development programmes and advice, like Performing Arts Network Development Agency (PANDA) and Film London Artists' Moving Image Network. There has been a recent increase of networks which serve to communicate information to artists and others in the sector, such as Critical Network, Art Rabbit, Run Riot, and Artshole. Networks such as Disability Cultural Projects and Black Arts Alliance (now defunded) have been set up directly to respond to, address and raise a voice for political issues. Networks range from local (e.g. Southwark Arts Forum), to regional (e.g. New Work Yorkshire), to national (e.g. Axis) and international groups (e.g. IETM and wooloo.org).

There are numerous networks that emerge, evolve and disband, but in response to our current cultural and economic climate there is an even greater urgency for information and skills exchange to happen, and strong and clear networks to exist and function well. As illustrated in the following interview with Niki Russell, it is through a variety of networks composed of connections, peer support and shared dialogues that Live Art and interdisciplinary arts, and the cultural environment, functions and thrives. As Niki says: "Individuals have the potential for multiple connections to a variety of networks, and need to be supported to step in and out of overlapping spheres of influence". Networks allow new things to happen via the 'stickiness' of meeting points and the 'binding' that happens when people communicate and work together across time and space.

In 2007, New Work Network (NWN) brought together ten Activators (artist-producers) from across the UK for *Connecting the Activators*, a one year professional development programme funded through the Cultural Leadership Office. The participants' final reporting highlighted that the programme was beneficial to their development and that they most valued the opportunity to form a network amongst themselves to share support and information. As a development of the scheme, eight of the members continue to operate as the Activators Network, of which Niki Russell is a member:

Hannah Crosson: From your perspective, what is the importance of networks and how do they exist and grow?

Niki Russell: To visualise networks, we can see them as social structures made up of nodes that are connected by forms of interdependency. Within the context of the work I produce, I am an individual node within a loose and complex network made up of all the agents responsible for artistic production. I am actively involved with numerous smaller, overlapping networks that continually emerge, grow and collapse back into a larger network. The boundaries of each network are continually negotiated by the specific members, and in doing so effectively shape the structures that surround them.

With a collaboration such as Reactor, whom I have worked with for several years, there exists a network made up not only of core members but also an array of individuals and organisations that have played an essential part in realising the work that Reactor has produced. In contrast, my involvement with NAN (Networking Artists Networks) ebbs and flows: having received and then assessed the NAN bursaries at different times, I have also attended NAN events and, in collaboration with other artists from Reactor and Stand Assembly, organised the NAN-NANA event, which brought together an assortment of groups who had previously received NAN bursaries.

My involvement in these, and other, networks is integral to my process of making work, whether directly through collaboration, or indirectly through support. From my perspective, networks are not optional, but rather inherent to artistic production.

HC: In your experience, how do networks play a significant part in the Live Art and interdisciplinary arts sectors?

NR: I consider networks to be important across the board, however within any particular sector the specific type of network needs to be fit for the environment it emerges from. As the Live Art sector is relatively new and is made up of multiple disciplines, the environment lacks a fixed and clearly defined infrastructure when compared with other art forms. Therefore, emergent support structures become increasingly important in response to developing and supporting artistic practices. At its best, the self-organised possibilities of a network can produce flexible, adaptive adhocracies that are suited to respond to what can be a complex operational environment.

The spaces that are formed within a network can be challenging and inspiring in equal measure, and therefore ultimately have the potential to play a critical role in determining how I consider the activity I am engaged with, and the decisions I take about its future direction. I consider this kind of reflection on the how and why, rather than simply



*The Utopia of Hugging*  
Gao Brothers 2006  
NAN-NANA networking event



Connecting the Activators Programme,  
group activity, 2008

*what* is produced to be essential. As an example of this approach, in 2006 I agreed to join the Zero Point group to explore how collaboration could be negotiated when both the group and the project started at 'zero'. As such, the group reflects upon its own development and relations, including how and why change occurs. The group could be seen to have no affect, in that it does not directly produce anything, however the thinking that occurs within the group has an indirect affect on all other collaborations I am involved with.

HC: You are involved in The Activators Network, a network originally funded by the Cultural Leadership Programme for artist producers/curators, supported by NWN. Could you explain what developed for you and others in the group via this network that might not have happened otherwise?

NR: Prior to coming together as The Activators Network, we each co-existed within a series of larger networks (NWN, the Live Art sector, etc.) but by and large did not directly interact. The network originally comprised ten individuals: Di Clay, Charlie Fox, Richard Kingdom, Elaine Kordys, Seth Kriebel, Ilana Mitchell, Rajni Shah, Sarah Spanton, Cecilia Wee and myself. We came together on the basis that as well as delivering our own artistic practice we also functioned as independent enablers who used different cultural strategies to make projects happen in collaboration with other arts practitioners, venues and audiences. Individually we could be seen to already have particular qualities and strengths that in turn determined a particular role, or position, within the Live Art sector. However, it may also have been the case that by not tapping into existing knowledge we were not truly exploiting the potential of sharing information.

This network allowed us to take real, often shared, experiences and challenges that we face and provide a critical space for their discussion. Through the formative year, we were able to develop a strong bond and identity as a network, in particular through the group sessions and peer-to-peer support. As a result, the group has begun to develop an approach to highlighting and responding to the challenges it raises, and is currently developing a cycle of seven public events for 2010 and 2011. These events will investigate a set of issues that confront artist-producers, addressing the problems of long-term sustainable relationships within an international context, how we can influence, challenge and work within larger organisations, as well as exploring issues of production/consumption by discussing sustainable structures for developing artistic risk and new audiences. The network recognises the need for independent artist-producers to have access to effective channels to represent their views, therefore the network aims, through this series of events, to develop a stronger public voice. This form of self-generating network is key to ensuring the work of independent

artist-producers is furthered, allowing individuals to understand their activity in a collective context rather than ploughing on alone.

In asking what has developed through this network that might not have been possible otherwise, it is important to consider that networks can have qualities not directly traceable to the individuals within it, but rather to how those individuals interact, in effect: the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Having the time and space to discuss ideas and offer support to one another has resulted in new collaborative relationships and a kind of licence to be more ambitious with regards to individual projects. As one example of this, when offered the job of Creative Producer for a new high-profile Live Art festival, Ilana Mitchell identified the support of peers through the Activator Network as contributing to a confidence to work at this level on a project of international significance; a sense of collectively realising the strength within the group that has had comparable impact on the projects that each Activator is involved with. Additionally, added value comes through investment in individuals, whose practices are geographically dispersed and who act as nodes for wider networks. This creates an inter-regional model where new connections are made, existing connections developed, and knowledge shared amongst the regions through wider dissemination.

HC: In relation to the networks you are involved with, but also thinking beyond that, could you talk a little about the issue of sustainability in relation to keeping networks going? How can they be encouraged to grow and develop?

NR: Networks form for varied reasons; they may be a temporary structure, formed to achieve a particular goal or resolve a given problem, and then dissolve upon completion, alternatively, they may evolve to define new goals or encompass different problems.

In 2003, I joined the East Midlands Capital Network as a Director of Nottingham Studios, an organisation seeking to develop artist-owned studios. This network was initially formed to share learning amongst organisations developing capital projects in the region. As a small group, the network successfully led participants through a series of challenging questions and exercises, and in turn supported the protagonists of the most significant group of arts capital developments in the East Midlands region. As many of these capital build projects were nearing completion, the group decided to expand, with the emphasis now being on ongoing management and artistic ambition, rather than on building development. Although the network was seen to be a successful model, it was self-determined that the model should shift to incorporate, and benefit, a larger group.

A network, as an organic structure often lacking clearly defined roles, creates a situation where all members have the authority to make decisions and take actions that affect the future of the network. Whilst I would view this lack of fixed hierarchy to be a positive characteristic of a network, this can be viewed negatively from an external perspective and can also lead to difficulties in sustaining a network if other conditions are not conducive to creating and sustaining momentum.

The Activator Network initially received funding to support the management of itself for the first year. This meant that those involved needed to only commit to attending the meetings and not to fundraising and administrating the network. As each individual was already committed to a variety of groups, networks and activities, the initial support was essential to get this new network off the ground. After this first year, the group has had to look at ways to continue to support the network financially in order to sustain it. There are difficulties and challenges involved in trying to get people to 'buy' into the idea of continued support. This can often be down to a short-term view that the support and development work has already been done, when actually it is imperative that the Activator Network is further supported to achieve its full potential as a group with a strong political voice, contributing to regional, national and international debates relevant to the sectors within which we operate.

In situations where a network encompasses multiple disciplines, instead of adding like to like, there is an interaction between entities of an unlike kind. I would like to propose that networks are flexible and permeable, that individuals have the potential for multiple connections to a variety of networks and need to be supported to step in and out of overlapping spheres of influence.

HC: There are a wide variety of networks that are self-generated and independently sustained, along with networks that receive funding to carry out their aims. Networks are by nature inter-relational and their connections often operate on an individual level – how can we 'measure the importance' and impact of networks to satisfy the needs of grant givers and also to self-assess the value of networks in achieving their ambitions?

NR: Any attempt to measure the importance or impact of a network is fraught with difficulties. From within, productive activity is judged according to autonomously determined values, decided through the ongoing and repeated interactions of the network members. This renders such relations distinct from the formal hierarchies of measurement and means that the value of a network is difficult to quantify because of its collective, intangible nature. I believe that this viewpoint is at odds with the nature of funding. I therefore appreciate the



requirement for these two contrasting structures to meet somewhere in the middle for each to support the other, whilst I also wonder what a counterstrategy of value production might be.

Support for a network must be based, at least to a degree, on trust and mutual support. A network should create a learning culture in which questioning is encouraged and in which we are allowed to make mistakes. The expectations and values for the network, and in turn how these are measured, need to be continually generated and renegotiated by the network, which should in this sense include any entity that supports it (whether financially or otherwise). In the case of the Activator Network, we intend to generate and negotiate ongoing support on the basis that, as well as extending individual development, the network is now in a position to look outwards to a greater degree. This broadens the scope of the network and its findings and acts as a kind of think-tank, which can share this learning with a wider network of peers as well as other organisations, networks and the wider public. Despite this example, a public element should not be seen as an essential facet of a network in order to achieve funding.

A strong example of a network can simply provide the space that allows those involved to achieve an impact outside of the network itself, as such, if we avoid seeing individuals as discrete entities, the value may well become easier to measure.

New Work Network is a national membership organisation that supports the development of new performance, Live Art and interdisciplinary arts practices. It provides professional development opportunities and activities that focus on networking, exchange and collaboration. NWN plays a unique role in supporting the growth of the new work sector through its artist-led ethos and nurturing of arts practitioners through information exchange, critical debate activity, networking events and an interactive networking website.

The Activator Network is a network of eight artist-producers from the original ten who came together as part of the Connecting the Activators professional development programme instigated by NWN, which ran from April 2007 to April 2008. The programme focused on action-based learning events, peer-to-peer mentoring and a bursary for personal development. Since the end of the programme the Activator Network has developed a proposal for an innovative two-year national programme of activity: a series of eight action-learning events running alongside a programme of public debate, an ongoing professional development programme for the core members of the network, and wide dissemination of the knowledge gained through the programme.

Niki Russell is an artist/producer based in the UK. Since graduating from Nottingham Trent University he has been involved in numerous projects nationally and internationally. Alongside solo activity, he has developed a collaborative practice with the group Reactor who have most recently delivered Big Lizard's Big Idea in Austria. Since 2001, he has been responsible for instigating numerous artist-led projects including: You Are Here Festival (2003-2004); the Sideshow festival (2006); the Nottingham Studios development for a new studio complex and a plethora of other collaborative projects.

[www.newworknetwork.org.uk](http://www.newworknetwork.org.uk)

[www.nikirussell.com](http://www.nikirussell.com)

[www.reactorweb.com](http://www.reactorweb.com)

## A non-exhaustive list of related networks:

### Alternate ROOTS

Alternate ROOTS is based in the USA and supports the creation and presentation of art, which is rooted in particular communities of place or tradition.

<http://alternateroots.org>

### Art of Engagement

This network exists as an ongoing open space for international dialogue on the Art of Engagement. It is experimental, co-created and free.

<http://islandsinstitute.ning.com>

### Black Arts Alliance

Formed in 1985, BAA is the UK's largest network of Black artists.

<http://www.blackartists.org.uk>

### Black Market International

Founded in 1985, the group has presented its unique, durational performances throughout the world in a range of venues and locations.

[www.performance-art-research.de/black\\_market\\_international.html](http://www.performance-art-research.de/black_market_international.html)

### Balloon

A peer group lab initiated and facilitated by Artsadmin and Oval House focusing on dramaturgy and critical discussion in the early stages of making new work. TAFKA and the Department of International Business are two self-organising groups emerging from the past two years of the Balloon project.

[www.artsadmin.co.uk/opportunities/bursary.php?id=10](http://www.artsadmin.co.uk/opportunities/bursary.php?id=10)

### Critical Network

A not-for-profit organisation run voluntarily by a collective of practicing artists based around the UK keen to promote critical and contextual art, events and discussion.

[www.criticalnetwork.co.uk/home.php](http://www.criticalnetwork.co.uk/home.php)

### Devoted and Disgruntled

An opportunity for the theatre and performing community to gather in Open Space and work on what could be improved; the things that we are passionate about and the things we wish were different.

<http://devotedanddisgruntled.ning.com>

### Disability Cultural Projects

Aims to further the cultural equality of Deaf and Disabled people / Deaf, Disability arts practice in the UK and internationally, and to evolve new approaches to the way these are delivered.

[www.disabilityarts.info](http://www.disabilityarts.info)

### Film London Artists' Moving Image Network

Supports London-based artists working in moving image in all its forms.

<http://flamin.filmlondon.org.uk>

#### Guardians of Doubt

Established to investigate different approaches to dance, unencumbered by form, not bound by disciplines or criteria, GoD believes in the freedom of thought and movement.

[www.guardiansofdoubt.org](http://www.guardiansofdoubt.org)

#### Henry VIII's Wives

[www.h8w.net](http://www.h8w.net)

#### (h)our 8 and 9

[www.helencuinn.com/page15.htm](http://www.helencuinn.com/page15.htm)

#### IETM

A membership organisation that exists to stimulate the quality, development and contexts of contemporary performing arts in a global environment.

[www.ietm.org](http://www.ietm.org)

#### Junto

Was formed in 2008 to provide a platform for discussion, support and critique for recent graduates working in performance, visual, sound and Live Art.

[www.newworknetwork.org.uk/userinfo.php?uid=2366](http://www.newworknetwork.org.uk/userinfo.php?uid=2366)

#### LANWest

Came about in 2003 as an informal gathering of regional promoters and producers with an interest in Live Art and contemporary performance.

[www.lanwest.org](http://www.lanwest.org)

#### Live Art UK

Brings together key promoters and facilitators to support and develop the Live Art infrastructure for the benefit of artists and audiences.

[www.liveartuk.org](http://www.liveartuk.org)

#### NAN

NAN's mission is to promote the aspirations of artists and the development of practice through peer dialogue and exchange.

[www.a-n.co.uk/nan](http://www.a-n.co.uk/nan)

#### New Work Yorkshire

Enables professional development, empowers practice in the margins, works in partnership, stimulates debate and influences strategy, makes connections between disciplines.

[www.newworknetwork.org.uk/userinfo.php?uid=1201](http://www.newworknetwork.org.uk/userinfo.php?uid=1201)

#### NODE.London

London's media art network.

[www.nodel.org](http://www.nodel.org)

#### Other/Other/Other

Aims to stimulate and support the location-responsive/durational art scene in Norwich.

[www.newworknetwork.org.uk/userinfo.php?uid=2191](http://www.newworknetwork.org.uk/userinfo.php?uid=2191)

#### Performance Initiative

An organisation that researches and designs strategies that promote innovation in the theatre industry.

[www.performanceinitiative.org](http://www.performanceinitiative.org)

**Performing Arts Network Development Agency**

Supports and nurtures emerging performing arts companies and individuals within the North West.

[www.panda-arts.org.uk](http://www.panda-arts.org.uk)

**Rhizome**

Supports the creation, presentation, and preservation of contemporary art that uses new technologies in significant ways.

[www.rhizome.org](http://www.rhizome.org)

**Sound and Music**

Is the UK's landmark organisation for new music and sound.

[www.sonicartsnetwork.org](http://www.sonicartsnetwork.org)

**Stellar Network**

A membership based organisation connecting the UK's film, theatre and television professionals.

[www.stellarnetwork.com](http://www.stellarnetwork.com)

**TAFKA**

A group of artists and performance practitioners, who come from very different artistic backgrounds and with a wide variety of interests.

[www.theartistsformerlyknownas.com](http://www.theartistsformerlyknownas.com)

**Total Theatre Network**

Supports and advocates for a variety of theatre practices.

[www.totaltheatre.org.uk](http://www.totaltheatre.org.uk)

**Wooloo.org**

Provides opportunities for artists.

<http://www.wooloo.org>

# Economies of Live Art

The Bluecoat

## Foreword

By Richard Kingdom, the Bluecoat

The Live Art economy has grown with the urgency and inventiveness of entrepreneurial necessity that might be expected of a relatively young industry. A complex web of forward-thinking organisations (presenters, producers, festivals, funders, local and national government), drawn towards those artists that embody the gravitational energy of the new, continue to respond to and support Live Art. Meanwhile, live artists, driven by the dual needs of making work and earning a living, find creative approaches to funding criteria, inventive responses to commissioning opportunities, and often create their own contexts to support the development and presentation of their work. So it is then that, while the economic issues facing the Live Art sector might parallel those in other artistic and cultural sectors, Live Art also comes with its own range of distinctive economies by virtue of its need to grow without waiting for the rest of the cultural economy to catch up.

It would be instructive to read all ten of these case studies with a focus on the economic challenges and opportunities within the Live Art sector and the following is an inevitably reductive summation of what is a multifaceted composite of approaches that can be addressed from multiple perspectives.

For many of its early exponents, the intrinsic transience of performance art, and the direct involvement of the artist, represented a resistance to the commodification of the art object. Rather than a commercial transaction with a dealer, the artist was engaging in a direct, non-financial exchange with an audience. This sense of a gift economy is still fundamental to many artists for whom the imbuelement of value is innate to the act of performance. Meanwhile, the uneasiness that many live artists have with the commercial exploitation of mainstream performance continually manifests itself in the work's opposition to the identifiable aesthetics of commercialism. By contrast, a buoyant market has developed around the photographic documentation of performance and many artists and curators are exploring the potential for a similar trade to develop around the detritus and traces of Live Art. Indeed, the sums fetched for the belongings of pop idols would suggest that there is potential here (at the time of writing, a glove tossed by Michael Jackson into a crowd at the end of a concert sold for £30,000 at auction). It is interesting to consider the lines of scale, jurisdiction, value and reference that are drawn by necessity between different economies – between Michael Jackson and Tehching Hsieh for instance – and, with this in mind, I will define the Live Art realm discussed in this foreword as that of the subsidised UK sector. This is a ball park rather than a pin point but will hopefully provide some context to the economy described herein. While digesting this range of material, it is also worth remembering how experimental and emerging artistic practice can often be at the forefront of cultural and civic regeneration.

A large number of the arts centres, theatres, galleries and institutions that present Live Art do so within diverse multi-artform programmes. Set against more familiar genres and 'quicker wins' from a marketing perspective, Live Art needs the buy-in of

an institution's directorship to ensure that it is given the weighting within an overall programme that will see it, to borrow the Arts Council's maxim, "thrive not just survive". The extent of this buy-in is inevitably influenced by the perceived value of 'Live Art' and ultimately informs how the work is presented, supported and received.

'Live Art' gains value when the British Council's *Edinburgh Showcase* or the *Decibel Performing Arts Showcase* decides they need a dedicated Live Art category, or when Pacitti Company stages an internationally significant festival of Live Art called *SPILL* and *Guardian* articles report the public's insatiable appetite for new kinds of live experiences. Conversely, its value falls when the Arts Council closes its national Live Art office or when the ICA announces that it is shutting its Live and Media Arts Department on the basis that the form "lacks cultural urgency". To the unfamiliar, the value of Live Art yo-yos according to the latest performance/ article/ email/ conversation/ box office report/ attendance figures/ budget breakdown/ audience questionnaire/ funding agenda, and while Live Art lacks proper national representation and is left vying for attention beside the canonical megaliths of theatre and visual art, it's little wonder that its champions tirelessly form networks and lobbying groups, encourage writing about Live Art, and forge allegiances with institutions, academics, promoters and artists in order to continually make the case for Live Art, seeking to shore it up against the shifting sands of reactionary opinion, fixing its value and stabilising the Live Art economy.

And the process appears to be working. Where previous Live Art programming might simply have been down to the evangelical passions of a visionary member of staff or persistent artist/curator, institutions throughout the UK are embracing Live Art as a core part of their work. Larger venues are opening their stages to live artists and major international arts festivals are featuring it prominently in their programmes. Emerging practitioners are receiving project funding to develop new work, established companies are gaining RFO (Regularly Funded Organisation) status, and Live Art's legitimacy is constantly restated in university courses, books, articles and blogs. A growing network of energetic and ambitious artists, producers and curators are pouring out of UK universities and creating opportunities for their contemporaries to present new work in unusual contexts within cities, commuter towns, sleepy hamlets and bygone seaside resorts – sometimes with funding, often without – replacing the decaying UK touring circuit with something far more exciting, and finding innovative and effective ways of engaging with the people that live there.

It would appear that the Live Art economy is flourishing and certainly, if exchange is our primary yard-stick, it is. However, this rapidly expanding cottage industry determines the work that is created as much as it responds to and facilitates apparent trends. To the emerging live artist with sufficient nous to subscribe to Artsjobs or the Artsadmin e-digest, the myriad of small fees and commissions available through the numerous shoe-string artist-led initiatives and platform events at established venues almost looks like a living. But this is often a living earned through natty, formulaic, disposable ideas and a system in which emerging artists 'with means' are in a better position to succeed than those less privileged. It's also a system with an overbearing amount of administration for painfully little remuneration, shifting the tenacious artists' priorities away from making work and towards the endless completion of application



forms fitted around unfulfilling part-time jobs (contentiously, this might be described as a squandering of the artist's untapped creativity and its potential benefit to a wider UK economy). Meanwhile, the increasing prevalence of this format deflates the perceived cost of producing and presenting Live Art. As I hope I have made clear, it is certainly not the case that if something is cheap it is therefore of less value, and indeed there is much to be said for the near recession-proof autonomy of Live Art compared to a more decadent form such as opera. However, there is a real danger of Live Art being perceived as bargain-basement programme content rather than correctly valued and accordingly invested in.

Performance platforms do create vital opportunities for emerging artists to develop their work and for programmers, producers and curators to seek out the latest work of integrity, originality and quality. However, if Live Art is to remain synonymous with new, cutting-edge, boundary-pushing performance, and if its value is to genuinely cement itself within our cultural landscape, the investment in the best work needs to be there. The existing surplus of supply relative to investment isn't unique to Live Art as any L.A. waiter will testify, but unlike the bedroom musician who can buy the means of polished digital production for the same price as the punks bought their guitars, Live Art is perhaps particularly unforgiving in how closely the work reflects its investment, particularly the investment of time.

Not that it's enough to say that more money equals better art. While arts funding has reportedly enjoyed a recent boom period, the vibrancy of the emerging scene that rose up on Thatcher's Unemployment Benefit, and specifically the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, may be an interesting reference point for those seeking to develop the infrastructure of support for the next generation of new artists. Indeed, that is why initiatives like Residence (see Artist-led case study) and the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home (in the case study below) are so compelling since they directly address this problem of how to maintain an ongoing practice.

I'm not advocating a system of forced impoverishment that condemns artists to the dole queue but rather suggesting there is a case to be made for a kind of support that affords artists without 'means' the same opportunities as those with, by facilitating a sustained practice and enabling the artist to respond to the untrammelled spring of dynamic, (predominantly) artist-led performance opportunities. By contrast, the current model is one of funded bursts of activity followed by stretches of unrelated rent-earning, and of booking a tour before stepping foot inside the rehearsal room.

The following paper by the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home, can, in part, be read as an artist-activists' response to the economy surrounding the UK Live Art sector. The Institute is well positioned to consider this topic, founded as it was while Gary Anderson and Lena Simic were coming to terms with the regular income of their new academic positions and the corresponding responsibility of advising students on the career opportunities for performance graduates. At the same time, they were driven to activate a critical dialogue with Liverpool's impending year as European Capital of Culture, questioning the positioning of local artists and indigenous audiences within the regeneration agenda and examining the city's attempt to manufacture a familiar pattern of gentrification – albeit an accelerated



*The concept of culture  
is deeply reactionary*  
The Institute for the Art and  
Practice of Dissent at Home,  
after Félix Guattari



version – that prices artists out of the areas that they’ve brought to life. The Institute explores the gaps between an infrastructure that boasts buzz words like ‘sustain’ and ‘thrive’, the financial realities of the artists that this infrastructure purports to serve, and the finances that different notions of culture are capable of commanding.

The decision of the Institute to publish this transparent break-down of their accounts is both radical and necessary. Radical because talking about money in such frank terms is still something of a taboo. Necessary because understanding the economy in which artists are operating contextualises the work they make and helps us consider what might need changing in order to enrich the creativity of the sector.

As well as an inspiring example of the possibilities for alternative economies – which is arguably representative of the out-of-the-box thinking of the Live Art sector as a whole – the Institute’s radicalised transparency is a challenge to examine the kind of economy that we’re creating and the impact this has on the artists that operate within it.

-----Original Message-----

From: The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home  
[mailto:theinstitute@twoaddthree.org]  
Sent: 14 July 2009 11:21  
To: Richard Kingdom  
Subject: RE: LiveArt UK publication

Hi Richard,

Thanks for that.

It might be fitting for you to add that we are getting £300 for the publication which will be split evenly between the Institute and Caroline Wilson.

You are right about the panel [assembled to discuss ‘Marina Abramovich presents...’ at the Whitworth, Manchester and seemingly dumbfounded by a question of the radicalism of institutionalised performance], it’s difficult for them to answer. How can one be radical in such an institution? But there we go... being radical in Live Art UK publication probably amounts to the same thing.

Here’s the invoice.

Best

Lena and Gary

## Look Out! Here Comes Uselessness: The Institute On Financial Transparency

### By The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home and Caroline Wilson

The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home is a home-run initiative, run out of the spare room of a family council house in Everton, Liverpool, UK. The Institute is run by a family of two adults and three kids, collectively, twoaddthree (Gary Anderson, Lena Simic, Neal 8, Gabriel 6 and Sid 22 months). The Institute is a self-sufficient and sustainable initiative drawing 10% of all income from its members (Gary and Lena work as university lecturers, children receive child tax credits and child benefit). The Institute is concerned with dissent, homemade aesthetics and financial transparency, as well as critiquing the capitalism of culture as was embodied in *Liverpool08, European Capital of Culture*. The Institute is interested in social transformation and has refigured a part of the family living space into a meeting place for artists, activists and cultural dissenters. This activity is undertaken in order to develop and extend dialogues about a 'culture' not necessarily driven by market forces. More information about the Institute and its activities is available through [www.twoaddthree.org](http://www.twoaddthree.org)

The Institute is also an experiment in home economics, borrowing from the historical tradition of the tithe, whereby one tenth of income is gifted to the church as a tax. We chose to support critical arts practices instead of the church. In September 2007, both adults in the Institute family got permanent 0.5 contracts in academia (one included a statutory maternity pay rather than a salary until May 2008). Having experienced life on artists' fees and scholarships for the previous few years, we felt that entering the labour market and receiving a reasonable salary at the end of each month was deeply unsettling. This feeling compelled us to do something with the extra money. The Institute tithe was born and collected, each and every month.

During 2008 the Institute embarked on a domestic project of recording, as meticulously as possible, the family's income and expenditure in an Excel spreadsheet. The purpose of this was to enable the Institute to publish an Income and Expenditure statement, for the year ending 31st December 2008. The Excel spreadsheet comprised three sheets: one for income, one for expenditure, and one for the resulting surplus/(deficit). These spreadsheets have been reviewed and compiled by Caroline Wilson (our artist accountant). We discovered that bookkeeping was a laborious, time-consuming and subsequently, if current capitalistic logic is to be taken seriously, an economically inefficient method of archiving. However, the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home is committed to the idea and practice of capitalistic-uselessness and feels compelled to go against the grain of capitalistic productivity. This bookkeeping and production of a year-end Income and Expenditure Statement was very much a necessary activity. By publishing these documents and leaving them open to public scrutiny, the Institute hopes to contribute to what it feels is a largely absent, but necessary debate around financial transparency in contemporary arts practice.

## Review of the Institute's Income and Expenditure Statement, for the Year Ending 31st December 2008

### Summary

The work performed on the Institute's monthly income and expenditure, and the resulting surplus/(deficit), can be summarised as follows:

A detailed breakdown, by transaction, of the year's income was obtained in Excel. Using the sum function in Excel, a total income for the year of £4,424 was agreed.

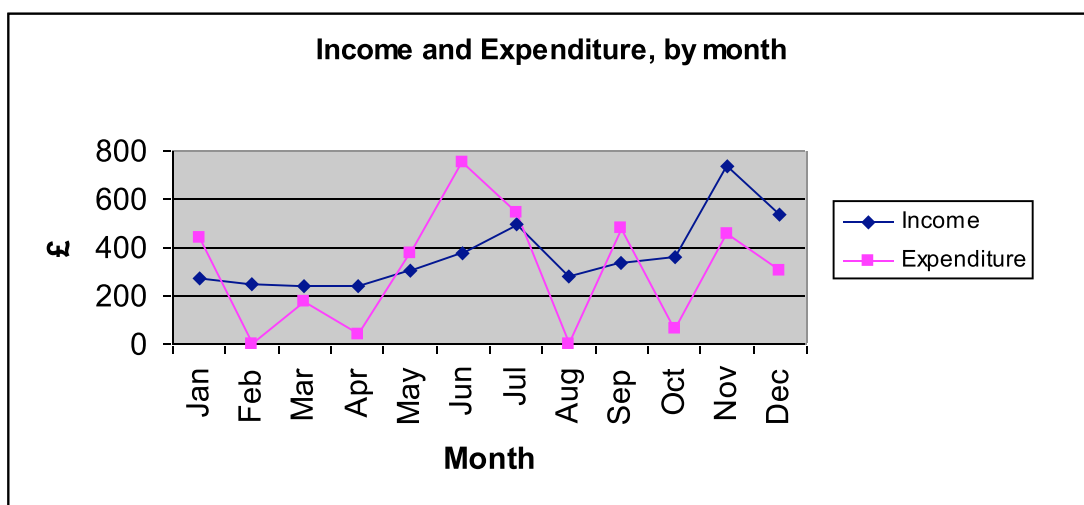
A detailed breakdown, by transaction, of the year's expenditure was obtained in Excel. Using the sum function in Excel, a total expenditure for the year of £3,631 was agreed.

This gives a surplus of £793, to be carried over into 2009, (i.e. £4,424 – £3,631). This differed, by £148, from the surplus initially calculated by the Institute. This was due to a transaction that was recorded in June (a grant of £200 was returned to the Institute by twoaddthree), when a £74 debit was recorded as a £74 credit.

On a month-by-month basis the Institute's Income and Expenditure, and the resulting surplus/(deficit), can be summarised as follows:

Month	Income	Expenditure	Surplus/(Deficit)	Comments
Jan	274	437	(163)	-
Feb	251	0	251	-
Mar	239	174	65	-
Apr	242	42	200	-
May	304	375	(71)	-
Jun	374	750	(376)	-
Jul	497	542	(44)	-
Aug	276	0	276	-
Sep	335	479	(144)	-
Oct	356	65	291	-
Nov	737	460	278	-
Dec	537	307	230	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,424</b>	<b>3,631</b>	<b>793</b>	£148 difference from surplus calculated by the Institute, of £941, is due to a £74 DR being recorded as a £74 CR in June, when a grant of £200 was returned to the Institute.

The income and expenditure, on a month-by-month basis, can be represented as a graph, as follows:



### Income Analysis

A detailed breakdown of the Institute's sources of income, for the year ending 31st December 2008, has been prepared as follows:

	Income (£)	10% of Income * (£)	Comments
Liverpool Hope Uni Salary – Gary	14,963	1,450	This income consists of 12 payments received
Liverpool Hope Uni Salary – Lena	11,082	1,059	This income consists of 8 payments and 1 additional payment received.
Work and Child Tax Credit	10,781	1,054	This income consists of 54 payments received.
Grant returned to the Institute	0	200	Repayment of emergency grant given to twoaddthree by the Institute (see specific line item within expenditure), therefore 100% allocated to the Institute.
Child Benefit	1,959	187	This income consists of 23 payments received.

Statutory Maternity Pay – Lena	1,834	183	This income consists of 4 payments received.
5% restored to 10% again	0	128	* Note, that in June, a total income of £2,563 was earned, of which only 5% was transferred to the Institute, ie. £128. However, in July the remaining £128 was also transferred over, to restore the % given from 5% to 10%.
DIY payment	500	50	This income consists of 2 payments received.
n.paradoxa journal fee	250	25	-
Hazard fee	207	21	-
Martin LeSanto-Smith donation	0	20	Donation to the Institute, therefore 100% allocated to the Institute.
Open Eye Gallery Fee	150	15	-
University of Sheffield fee	112	11	-
Mute Magazine fee	80	8	-
Plymouth guest session	79	8	-
MAP Live – Lena’s Artist Fee	50	5	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>42,047</b>	<b>4,424</b>	Agreed casting

For a detailed breakdown in Excel, on a transaction basis, of this income, please e-mail [theinstitute@twoaddthree.org](mailto:theinstitute@twoaddthree.org).



## Expenditure Analysis

A detailed breakdown of the Institute's expenditure, for the year ending 31st December 2008, has been prepared as follows:

Description	Amount (£)	Comments
Residencies	1,474	Ruth Beale, Pete Hindle, Nicola Kirkham, Michael Pinchbeck and Julian Hughes, James Leadbitter, Simon Bowes, Tom Robinson, Branka Cvjeticanin, Anna Francis, Ania Bas and PLATFORM.
Other – all individually under £50	329	Manchester (green room), Artist Newsletter subscription, banner for Miss Julie, Magical Mysterious Regeneration Conference, computer bag, Hazard day expenses, Branka petty cash, screwdrivers, Engels books, The Culture of Capital book, Report on Activities Springhill Institute, Blinds material, FANTASTIC project, Engels paint brush, Bluecoat - H.Simpson, Biennial guide, Cathy's present, Oxfam diary and wall calendar, letters to Branka.
Train tickets	326	Janice Harding (DIY), Jane Trowell (DIY), Jane Trowell (other), and for DIY picnic in London.
Website Expense	310	-
Emergency grant to twoaddthree	200	This grant was subsequently returned to the Institute in June, and can be seen as a specific line item within the Income analysis.
Institute Warming	173	-

Pack-It-Up 08	123	John Bennett, Stuart Tait, Simon Bowes, Ross Dalziel, Annette Etkins, Iona, Angus, Imogen Stidworthy, Severin, Anna Ketskemety and Jack
Expenses for Anna Francis weekend	115	-
Food	114	2 lunches and fry-up with Cathy, fry-up with Michael and Julian, food for generic stew, Bite2Eat lunches with James, AGM (Coffee and Pizza)
Alcohol	110	Wine and beer.
Viva Dissent Cake	75	-
buggy for Branka's residency	72	-
Taxis	60	Cathy, Byran, Branka & kids and Pete Hindle.
Ruth Beale Round Table expenses	50	-
Indian Maharaja with James	50	-
Front of House	50	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,631</b>	<b>Agreed casting.</b>

For a detailed breakdown in Excel, on a transaction basis, of this expenditure, please e-mail [theinstitute@twoaddthree.org](mailto:theinstitute@twoaddthree.org).

The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home are Gary Anderson, Lena Simic, Neal 8, Gabriel 6 and Sid 2. A home-run artist-activist initiative, run out of the spare room of a council house in Everton, Liverpool.

Caroline Wilson is a writer, performer and Chartered Accountant. Having graduated from Leeds University with a degree in English and Theatre Studies, she then trained with a Big 4 accountancy firm, qualifying in November 2008.

Richard Kingdom is the performance programmer at the Bluecoat, Liverpool. Prior to this he ran a shoe-string artist-led initiative called Fresh and was the artistic director of Demonstrate theatre company. During this period he lived with his parents rent-free.

# Public Engagement

# Programming and Curating

Confusion, Anxiety, The Ramones  
and The Hanson Twins (Paul & Ian)

## By Anthony Roberts, Colchester Arts Centre

The Hansom Twins sound like a band don't they? Particularly when set next to The Ramones. Let me tell you. They're not. Not remotely a band but rather two slightly chubby, absolutely identical twins that were in the same year as me in Watford Grammar School in 1976. When speaking of identical twins, medically, we mean two persons created from the same egg who characteristically look very similar, however in truth they don't always look literally identical. The Hansom Twins however did. They were the identicest of identical twins ever known to mankind. Every pore and nuance in their face, figure, gait, stature, countenance down to the minutest wisp had been produced in duplicate. They were the exact mirror image of each other, without the reversal of mirror imaging.

Pleasant lads the pair of them, the job of distinguishing them was greatly assisted when one (Paul) left school after O levels leaving the other to enter into sixth form life alone. Quite why one left while the other advanced I cannot say.

Events in my own life had taken an exciting turn for the better.

My own sibling, my elder by a couple of years, had introduced me to The Ramones. This had created a seismic shift in my understanding of everything in the world ever. It was quite clear that nothing could ever be the same again. (A small byproduct of this change in outlook is that it pushed my ability to distinguish between the Hansom Twins even further down my list of priorities than the already lowly status it occupied before). Music had changed my life. It seemed to me, in a blinding flash of revelation, that music could be ours, mine even, and the necessity to spend years perfecting long guitar solos disappeared in the 1.38 secs it took *I Don't Care* to rattle through the stereo speakers in my bedroom. John Cooper Clarke and Seething Wells replaced John Donne and Thomas Hardy. I cut my hair, I got rid of my flares. It was heady stuff.

Armed with this new found confidence and with The Ramones album *Road To Russia* tucked under my arm, I entered the sixth form common room with a mission to introduce vitality where now there languished safety and conformity. And so it was that even before the end of the first track, I was confronted by an incandescent Ian Hansom, his slightly chubby adolescent jowls quivering with apoplectic rage.

"What the fuck's this?" he could hardly get the words out. The Ramones.

"You can't possibly like this? What is it? What is it?" It's The Ramones.

Normally such aggression would leave me frozen with fear but strangely not this time. I stood my ground. At this moment, Ian appeared to have built up such a head of steam, so moved was he by this challenge to his musical sensibilities, that he was rendered incapable of speech. The music had induced an acute state of confusion and anxiety. He didn't speak but stared intently at me and after a few more seconds began to list forward and slightly to the left. The Ramones rattled through several more numbers and slowly but surely a numb and dumbfounded Hansom retreated, filled to the brim with confusion and anxiety.

Over the next week, the transformation across the tastes and ideas within the sixth form was astonishingly swift. The Ramones took centre stage and a supporting cast burst into life: The Clash, The Pistols, The Bears, The Cortinas, The Yachts. Friends looked to me for the next album. Merely by presenting the work of other people I had become considered by my fellow pupils to be in the vanguard of contemporary culture – a role to which I readily warmed – and which I have mirrored in my professional life as programmer and curator of Live Art. A succinct way of describing it might be: “basking in the reflected glory of other people’s talent”.

When at work at Colchester Arts Centre, at the end of a particularly challenging and interesting piece of Live Art, it’s not uncommon for a person in the audience who knows me to come and congratulate me. I modestly accept their platitudes with a carefully rehearsed, understated nod of the head and quiet acknowledgement. Oh come on, it’s not that bad. It’s not like I’ve bought a duck house or anything, is it? But the fact is that my role has been very modest in comparison to the artist. It’s simply another version of playing The Ramones to people who haven’t heard them before.

I have introduced the subject with a true but hopefully amusing story from my schooldays. And of course there is a huge and important skill with which the programmers and curators of Live Art operate. But it’s worthwhile remembering, before we congratulate ourselves too much on this skill, that it is the artist who creates the work – it’s a serious point and it shouldn’t be missed.

There is continuous (and healthy) debate over the terminology associated with the practice we call “Live Art” that extends into the role of programming and curating. People will, sometimes passionately, assert themselves to be programmers, curators, promoters, producers, creative producers, artistic directors etc. etc... to my knowledge no one has yet described themselves as a Live Art Tsar (although I feel it’s only a matter of time).

It is difficult to think of an era when there has been a greater number of contexts and outlets for Live Art within the UK. Whilst my case study focuses primarily on Live Art within the mixed programme of a multi-purpose arts centre, there are all kinds of curatorial approaches, all with distinctive qualities, from programmes in festivals, museums, galleries, and theatres, to artist-led initiatives taking place in disused shops and deserted industrial spaces.

So we operate in a world of shifting definitions where Live Art is described as a contemporary performance practice, time-based work, a happening, an intervention, and can be presented by anyone of the promoter terms above, in any one of the contexts. A creative producer can present a time-based, site-specific performance piece at the same time as a dodgy promoter can book an act for a turn. Same gig, different words.

So for simplicity's sake let's have a try and say what we mean by the programming and curating of Live Art. In simple terms, what the task within these words comprises of is two basic elements:

1. Selecting of an artist
2. Selecting of the context in which they are presented.

Put like this it sounds straightforward, but within this simple task lies a myriad of possibilities. Get it right and you have a beautiful partnership between place, artist, audience and time. Get it wrong and it's a car crash, an embarrassment for everyone.

But is the programming and curation of Live Art any different from any other art form? Can't the same be said of programming a jazz club or a theatre specialising in children's theatre, say? To some extent, most certainly. At the heart of doing these things successfully lies a person or a team who genuinely understand and empathise with the landscape in which they operate. Passion, hope, nerve, belief, knowledge, charm, humanity... These are as much ingredients as any tricks in the arts marketing manual, and yes, these are all universal and work in any art form. The added dimension that separates the task of programming and curating of Live Art is that we will often work with artists who challenge the very notions of performance, will push boundaries, challenge conventions and ideas of the norm in the most thrilling and gripping ways. It's just not as straightforward as choosing which feature films to screen in the cinema. How do you sell tickets for a gig that lasts eighteen years? Where's the art in someone ramming cheese sandwiches up the jacksy? Or a "one to one" performance where no one speaks and nothing happens? What about a leg coming out of a book case? Dragging a telegraph pole down the road or cuddling a dead pig?

In the programming and curating of Live Art the challenge is to respond to the new landscape that fresh thinking and fresh ideas create. These new works and new ideas don't always appear in headlines or sexy media soundbites – they can often come wrapped in conventional clothing. Admittedly The Ramones was like a punch in the face, but new ideas can also come up behind you and quietly tap you on the shoulder. They can be shy and cosy as well as crazy and baffling. We need to be tuned into the nuances of different languages – which are sometimes most interesting when they are only slightly different. The tweaking of the tone control on the stereo (don't think they have the old tone control on the iPod, do they?) or altering the balance between the speakers can be as radical as throwing the system out of the window. As programmers and curators, we need to listen for the voices and respond.

The Sex Pistols kicked down the door and spat at you. But as the noise of that explosion drifted away, the door remained open and led me to the gently surreal world of Ivor Cutler – a man whose self proclaimed description was indeed: "Never Knowingly Understood".

## A View from the Heart of Essex (or A Dodgy Promoter Speaks His Mind)

The annually presented *National Review of Live Art* in Glasgow probably brings together more artists and more performances condensed into a five day concentration of back-to-back presentation than any other annual event. It is usually sold out well in advance, there are long queues to see new work, the bars are two or three deep, artists, promoters, students fill the café with animated conversation and mischievous intrigue. It is a huge success story. It has frequently introduced me to inspirational new artists. It's a joy to be there.

But how will this work play back at the farm in Essex? Where there ain't no festival and no peer group artists, promoters, producers and the like to swarm into Colchester Arts Centre when doors open, when it's a Tuesday night and the theatre next door is offering Theatre de Complicité?

Well, it's a challenge.

How do we make audiences come to see an unknown artist showing an unknown piece of work without the context of a festival?

I never thought I would invoke the help of Donald Rumsfeld in this matter.

To first quote Wikipedia on the "unknown unknown":

The term **unknown unknown** refers to circumstances or outcomes that were not conceived of by an observer at a given point in time. The meaning of the term becomes clearer when it is contrasted with the **known unknown**, which refers to circumstances or outcomes that are known to be possible, but it is unknown whether or not they will be realised. The term is used in project planning and decision analysis to explain that any model of the future can only be informed by information that is currently available to the observer and, as such, faces substantial limitations and unknown risk.

And so to that Rumsfeld quote: "There are known knowns. There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we do not know we don't know".

This seems to be a take on Thoreau: "To know that we know what we know, and that we do not know what we do not know, that is true knowledge".

Let's analyse and compare the night Theatre de Complicité performed at the Mercury Theatre next door with our unknown artist at the Colchester Arts Centre by exposing its elements to the known/unknown test.



Theatre de Complicité	Known
Presents: Macbeth	Known
By William Shakespeare	Known
At Mercury Theatre	Known

And now let's introduce our invented Live Art artist piece by piece:

Franko C	Unknown
Presents: Macbeth	Known
By William Shakespeare	Known
At The Mercury Theatre	Known

Event gets more difficult to sell tickets for:

Franko C	Unknown
Presents: Miracle Man	Unknown
By William Shakespeare	Known
The Mercury Theatre	Known

Event gets more difficult to sell tickets for:

Franko C	Unknown
Presents: Miracle Man	Unknown
By Franko C & Kim Hackarie	Unknown
The Mercury Theatre	Known

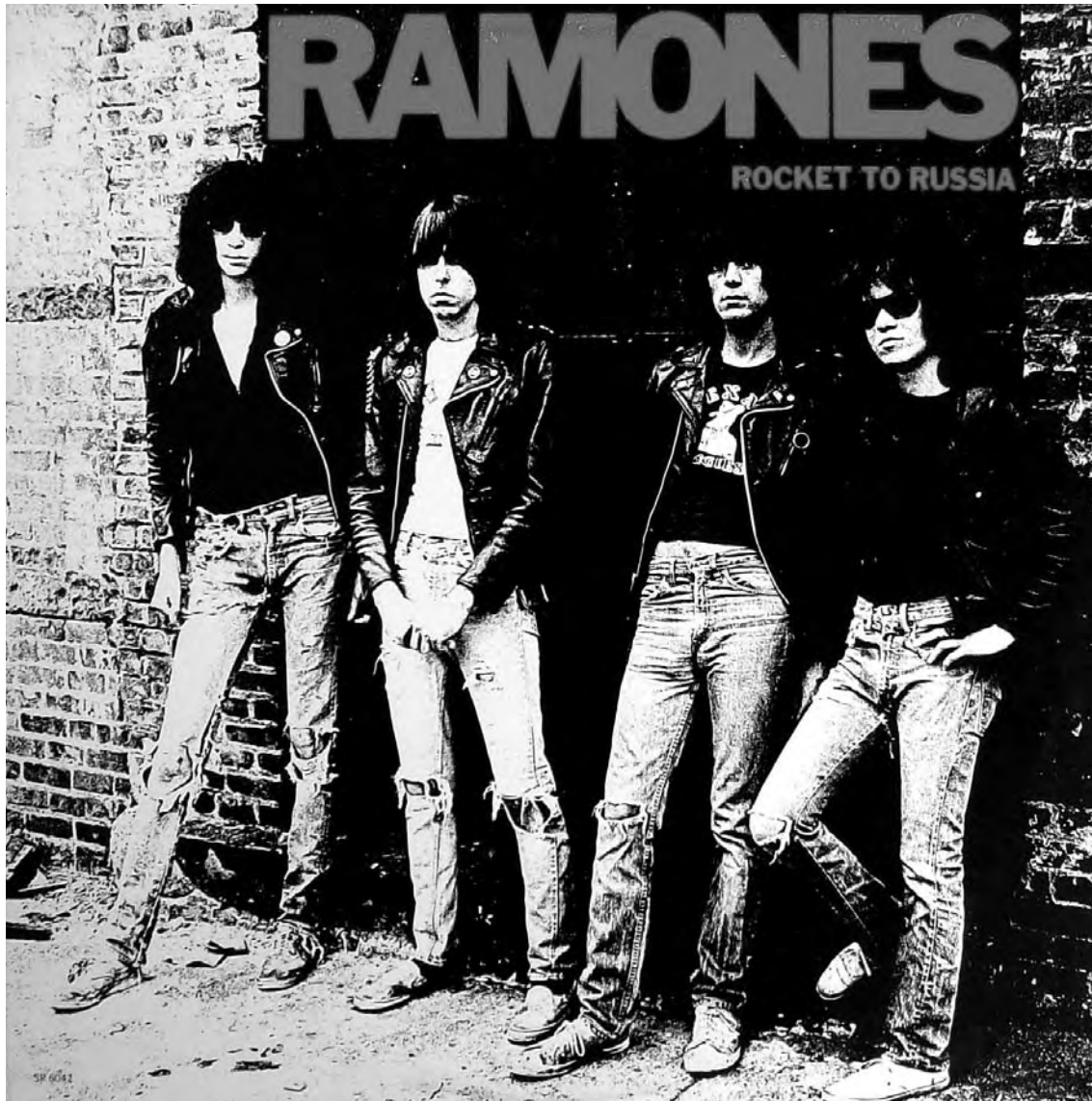
Trickier still:

Franko C	Unknown
Presents: Miracle Man	Unknown
By Franko C & Kim Hackerie	Unknown
Colne Ferris Leisure Centre	Unknown

Who in their right mind would find this attractive? Well, me obviously, but that's just because I'm neither normal nor relevant so that doesn't really count.

But we actually do have a known here, the Colne Ferris Leisure Centre will be the Colchester Arts Centre and herein lies the opportunity to build an audience and create a dialogue with a community that engages with Live Art.

There is one absolute essential in this challenge, one unmovable, unnegotiable must-have that cannot be compromised or neglected in any way. At the centre must be a programmer or curator who has a knowledge and understanding of the art form he or she is dealing with. It doesn't need to be the world's leading professor or an authority of international recognition (plenty of successful events are created and curated by peer group artists fresh out of art school) but someone somewhere needs to have an idea about what they are dealing with.



*Rocket to Russia* album sleeve  
The Ramones  
Photo: Anthony Roberts



Anthony Roberts 1  
Photo: Anthony Roberts



Anthony Roberts 2  
Photo: Anthony Roberts

Once you have a person with a working knowledge in the middle you have the opportunity to build a successful programme. Because if you apply basic sound arts marketing techniques to a strong programme of work – and do it consistently – you have the ingredients to make a success. Encouraging audiences to take risks isn't a monopoly for Live Art promoters. There are plenty of experimental music clubs, pubs and venues and the like. If you can get the audience to trust the venue then this can be the one KNOWN element with which to attract your audience.

There are real and tangible examples of this. The ICA in the nineties built a magnificent audience and reputation for promoting Live Art by bringing in consistently good work and by maintaining good lists and working closely with the marketing department. Over months and years, the audiences began to escalate and the reputation itself began to become as an effective marketing tool as any other. If it was on at the ICA you knew it was worth checking out. And naturally, while Colchester Arts Centre has a different set of challenges being outside of the capital, the same principle applies: good work, well publicised, over a prolonged period will build an audience. From these foundations other initiatives can be introduced: *The Ripple Effect* at the ICA, an opportunity for emerging artists to experiment, allowed both audiences and artists introductions without the pressure of a high profile showcase. *The Veggie Chilli* platforms at Colchester Arts Centre operate under the same principle: *The Veg Chilli* takes centre stage so the pressure is off for the artists.

## Cheese Sarnies up the Arse and New Model Army

One of our ideas to attract new audiences and introduce them to the joys of Live Art was to create a couple of nights which mixed up Live Art with some bands and musicians making interesting work locally. The bill included a new commission by Hugh O'Donnel, an improvised vocal onslaught by Fabienne Audeoud, extraordinary sonic glass work by Justice Yeldham and an appearance by local Colchester bass player Mel from New Model Army.

The audience were a genuine mix of Live Art savvy people (we were running *Franko B Winterschool* week and had twelve artists from there), plus a generous turn out from the local music scene, making a good crowd many of whom had never seen any Live Art. On the first night, during Hugh O'Donnel's liver frying, people were literally jumping out of their chairs and had to be duly restrained. On the second night, Hugh stuffed a load of cheese sarnies up his arse to a backing track of him singing *I Just Don't Know What To Do With Myself*. Both Hugh's pieces were beautiful and dark. He's a tremendous artist with great integrity and humanity. I have invited him to respond to some of the issues raised by this piece of writing and share his thoughts on the experience at Colchester Arts Centre.

Anthony Roberts: Artists are often invited to present work in vastly different contexts – black box, outside, galleries, theatres, libraries, foyers, you name it. From your experience as an artist, what are the key considerations when responding to these invitations?

Hugh O'Donnel: To be perfectly honest you need to be a bit of a Scout: 'always be prepared'. In the event that you have not seen the space, I tend to leave at least 50% of my original idea open for change. You never know what a space may offer to the work, i.e. a nice tiled floor and it's probably not a good idea to use a hammer.

Once, in Iowa U.S.A. at the Waterloo Centre for the Arts (the event was *Vertigo ALO*, curated by Jeff Byrd), I was in a lecture theatre space and had football boots on; not good for the wooden floor.

Alternatively, the vastly different spaces to present work in can sometimes enrich your work and also pose as aesthetically beneficial for the 'live work' and the production of documentation.

AR: Audiences too can vary wildly from one context to the next. At what level or at what stage (if at all) do you consider who the work is being presented to?

HO'D: When I make work in the park, street, bus stop etc., I tend to enjoy the aspect of the incidental audience. You are totally unaware of the possible actions of the audience. It's more enjoyable and concentrated as you are in the position of controlling when you start and when you stop and it's nice to have an uninformed audience. You also can negotiate the documentation, you can hide the documenter and feel totally engaged with the work and your audience. A camera can usually distract the audience or the passers by.

Once I made work in Dublin at the *Out of Site* festival 07, organised by curator/artist Michelle Browne. I was making work in inner city Dublin in a hand-ball alley where children play. I had to very quickly curb my original intentions, as when I lifted my head off the sheep's heart I was caressing, my audience seemed to be at least 80% 5-12 year olds with their parents. I then realised that this performance would have to be of a more sensitive nature. In saying that, if the audience were more mature I may have reconsidered this aspect of sensitivity.

AR: Is it an over simplification to say there are two types of audiences (but not exclusively two) – those that are 'Live Art savvy' like at the National Review of Live Art and those that approach it with no fine art training or background?

HO'D: A lot of events I have been involved in, especially *International Multi Media Arts Festival Serbia* organised by Nenad Bogdonovic Mas Gallery, are events where usually the audience are the artists themselves. It seems like a meeting for performance and artists, and the audience is mainly made up of the artists and some of the locals that come to support the event.

I personally feel to have a non-informed audience can be the most successful in terms of feedback on your work. The incidental audience

is sometimes the best for me. In relation to when I made my work *Full Bleed* at Colchester Arts Centre, the audience was music informed and I think my work and that of some of the other artists was quite challenging for them. I think only one woman walked out during my 'cheese sandwich performance', which of course is perfectly acceptable.

I think there will always be at least three types of audience: 1. Informed audience in terms of their own practices and knowledge of being an artist; 2. The uninformed, the person off the street; and 3. Children.

AR: As an artist, what is your perception of issues related to the programming and curating of Live Art?

HO'D: I feel that a lot of the time curators of performance are familiar with the person/artists' work and/or have seen them do their work before. So I reckon 'trust' is in place or has to be in place before being invited to the festival/event/exhibition. There is a lot of 'ego' associated with the artist and I would imagine that it is a difficult time for a curator if he/she invites a difficult artist.

I feel that it is an interesting challenge for a curator to 'mix up' the genres for exhibitions as this not only challenges the artist/curator but indeed the audience and their assumptions.

A curator, in my opinion, will always be at risk when curating performance. Very clear and simple dialogue and trust needs to be in place on both parts, i.e. curator and artist.

There is, for me, a thin line between, as I term my work, 'Fine Art Performance' and 'theatre', and I think this 'line' can be healthily blurred or if need be 'tipp-exed out'.

Live Art curatorial programming I think can sometimes merge more conventional methods of performance with unconventional methods of performance and music and physical performative work.

AR: Can you describe how you felt about the performance at Colchester Arts Centre with particular reference to the mix in the audience?

HO'D: I felt that when I came to make work in Colchester I was treated like a king, I had an amazing experience with all the staff and fellow artists. I felt a bit anxious when I realised that the audience were, say, more informed about theatre/alternative music etc., as I thought "mmm... Can they cope with the idea of someone placing cheese sandwiches up their arse?" I think, in hindsight, yes they could, bar one woman, which is fine. I am not 100% sure that they understood the meaning I was trying to convey, but that's not important, as if it was meant to be literal it would have been a play or something and it's not, it's fine art! At the liver frying performance, one audience member

made an attempt to come closer to me, maybe even try to intervene; I'm not sure why, perhaps because I had a rope around my neck quite tight. One audience member told me that he thought the liver frying performance was about domestic violence, which it wasn't, and perhaps his uninformed knowledge of performance, or at least this type of performance, sparked this notion.

The mixed audience is arranged and programmed to turn up, pay in and be entertained in some way. I don't make work to entertain, so perhaps for me this was an awkward feeling, but a challenge. I suppose the mix of the audience is like the incidental audience you get on the street/ parks/shopping centres etc.

## Those Pesky Hansom Twins

*Blackmail Man* by Ian Dury and The Blockheads opens with him shouting: "Arseholes, Bastards, Fucking Cunts and Pricks". And Hansom is back in my face, adolescent jowl wobbling, listing, the lot. This time it's me that's filled with confusion and anxiety: what the fuck's going on? Surely Hansom had been won over some weeks ago. Only yesterday he had enthusiastically endorsed my choice of Manic Esso and The Lurkers for lunchtime listening. I'm full to the brim with confusion and anxiety.

It's blinking Paul Hansom, isn't it? Bastard rejoined the school and didn't tell me. But in a way I'm grateful. Confusion and anxiety are underrated as responses to work. I'd been reverse-attacked by my own petard.

Let the hobgoblin of confusion and anxiety spread like a virus across Britain.

# Audiences

Fierce



## By Kevin Isaacs, Fierce

This case study seeks to explore the very particular challenges incumbent in developing audiences for Live Art. There are distinct issues to deal with that go beyond those associated with simply promoting new work to new audiences, or even new work to existing audiences. Live Art, by its very nature, often doesn't inhabit a traditional theatre auditorium or gallery. One is more often than not offering an experience that is unusual and strange, in a space that is not normally considered a performance space. Live Art may not happen at traditional theatre performance or gallery times; the performance may be longer, or it may change from day to day; it may be durational in a way that is unfamiliar to many audiences used to going to see a piece that lasts an hour or two in their local arts centre and sitting quietly until it's over. What is almost certain, though, is that with Live Art the audience is usually crucial to the piece. Particularly with regard to the *Fierce Festival* programmes outlined in this case study, I argue that the audience is, in fact, much more implicit and involved in the actual performance or depiction of the work than in any other art form. Something out of the ordinary is often asked of them. And this is hard. People don't always like to be asked to do things, or to make some sort of commitment to a performance that involves more than just watching. This case study considers what it is that makes audience development for Live Art unique, and hopes to find some answers amongst strategies that have worked in a number of scenarios.

### The Challenges of Engagement...

Fierce has produced the *Fierce Festival*, together with many one-off Live Arts events and touring projects, for over ten years. Central to Fierce's growth model is the ethos that audiences are at the heart of all that it produces and presents. Of course, audience development is a well rehearsed mantra to most arts organisations, whatever art form they may work in, and whether they be a producing company or a venue. Most will claim that, of course, they do have an audience development strategy. However, whilst there is a constant quest to get existing audiences to see more work, attract first timers to see a particular artist, or to visit an arts centre or gallery for the first time, there is no "one size fits all" strategy for audience development. Nowhere could this be more true than with Live Art, where the challenges are even greater and the work by its very nature does not slip nicely into well prepared demographically-led target audience boxes. Nor does Live Art generally tend to command large pots of marketing spend. Yet the marketing job for Live Art is often far more complex – and dare I say interesting – than for one of the more mainstream art forms.

As Mark Ball, creator of the *Fierce Festival* and now Director of LIFT, suggests, Live Art can deliver one important benefit with far greater effect than most other art forms – that of explaining the world to an individual, or in this case an audience member, in a way that is both powerful and personal. Of course, music or a piece of writing can have a similar effect, but I would suggest that Live Art may give those moments a profundity that is unmatched by many other performative experiences. It comes

down to the fact that, as Live Art practitioners, whether we are artists or whether we are producers, marketers, venue managers or administrators, we often offer a much more personal and individual experience to our audience members than the norm. As Tim Etchells, Director of Forced Entertainment, said in his book on contemporary performance *Certain Fragments*, there is “that belief that the audience member can be a witness to events with a responsibility for them that makes it important for us to ensure the best possible cultural experience”.

In practice, what does this mean to us as producers and venue managers? Well, at Fierce we believe that it means that when we look to engage our audience with new work where there might be some anxiety that it is ‘difficult’, we must not only make that event a ‘witness experience’, but also communicate the *experience*, as opposed to simply communicating what the piece of work is about or what happens in it, to the audience in the best way we can, and reinforce this at every opportunity.

This means that a consideration of the audience may form a critical part of the way a live artist develops his or her work, so that an unequivocal, but nonetheless unique and organic relationship between the artist and audience is created.

## The Artist/Audience Relationship – a Symbiotic Delight?

When the artist Joshua Sofaer, renowned for creating large-scale multi-media work that often involves some form of consultation or dialogue with the public as part of the development process, is creating new work, he says that “the audience is the most motivating factor”. He sees them as intrinsic to the work, and not simply as a ‘client group’. Their reaction to a new piece of work, and their deeper involvement in it, is crucial and a relationship with the audience is often developed over several months or longer. Here lies a central issue with ‘audience development’.

“If you know you’re going to be delivering something like *Name in Lights* or *Tours of People’s Houses* on a certain date, then to the venue, producer, marketing team and so on that’s the critical date for the relationship with the audience to come to its climax. However, most of the time there’s a massive amount of work going on upfront. I often need to recruit participants from members of the public, or gather their input and comment to actually make the project real months in advance. With *Name in Lights* [a gigantic Hollywood-style sign made up of hundreds of lightbulbs spelling out the name of a person nominated by the public] we began the audience consultation well over six months before the date of the ‘performance’.”

Similarly, with *Scavengers*, one of Joshua Sofaer’s most popular projects, participants need to be recruited well ahead of the day of the performance. One tends to think of Live Art as being something that happens on a given day, or over a weekend, say, and then is gone, with little happening before or after. Not true. The entire publicity machine (the website, PR, advertising and the whole marketing plan) has to kick in not with the final ‘performance’ in mind, but often much earlier, so building a much more sustained, and much deeper relationship with the audience over the long-term.

This long lead in time is something that funders and curators often fail to grasp, resulting in too few resources being put behind the entire process. “Funders and venue managers want to see the big event taking place... Perfectly understandable – the performance is the realisation of the entire creative process, but please don’t forget what’s gone before, and what should come afterwards”, says Sofaer. In audience development terms, having such a lengthy relationship with the public in the development phase is hugely beneficial. Not only are people made aware of the project earlier, and for a sustained period, but with many Live Art projects such as these, a real sense of public ownership and participation is possible. Live Art is meant to nurture a reaction with the audience, but we are kidding ourselves if we think that we can ignore the before and the after. Of course, after the performance has happened, we’re usually asked to evaluate and document it, and there’ll be a chunk of money in the budget to do this. However, there’s rarely any money to continue the relationship with the audience after the event has taken place. Many venues are getting better at tracking audiences for Live Art and there’s progress in understanding how important a sustained relationship is with such audiences, but there remains much to do. Audiences are at the heart of Live Art. In almost all cases, we are taking our audience on a far more involved journey than would normally be the case for a traditional ‘show’, so we therefore owe it to them to continue that journey and think about the next stage of the relationship. This can make the role of marketing and audience development both fascinating and ultimately hugely rewarding.

## The Media – Make it Friend not Foe

PR, and what the media want from a project, is sometimes viewed in cynical terms by Live Art practitioners, or at the very least something that they want to control or influence to retain the absolute integrity of the ‘art’. However, as Sofaer asserts, “Press in commercial terms is worth masses. We need to be selling ourselves in PR terms, and I would always advocate putting as much effort in as possible to this area; making sure that the PR agency or consultant is involved in the project from the very beginning, and is an intrinsic part of the team”.

It’s true that we mustn’t forget that most of the time we are getting public money to fund Live Art, and sometimes if we’re lucky, commercial or private sector sponsorship too. The private and commercial sectors are going to become increasingly important as other funding sources diminish in future, so it makes absolute sense to make the right noises about the work we make. When Fierce produced *Name in Lights* with Joshua Sofaer, the company engaged the services of PR guru Mark Borkowski, better known for dealing with high profile celebrities and popular culture than Live Art. “It’s horses for courses”, explains Joshua Sofaer.

“*Name in Lights* was about celebrity – what it means to be propelled towards some level of fame where your name would be displayed for all to see – so it made absolute sense to talk to someone who knows that market inside out, knows the language and has the contacts to make sure the profile is raised amongst the right audiences. It’s about getting the right people for the job,” says Sofaer, “and that job, the messages that go with it and the way you talk about them, might be different for every project you do”.

The use of media/on-line platforms and social networking sites offer increasingly fertile opportunities for public relations, and the development of audience awareness and participation. Fierce has regularly operated in these areas with great success, recognising that much traditional media can't easily accommodate Live Art and that many younger audiences aren't particularly interested in what more mainstream commentators have to say.

## The Importance of Site

Context is vital to Live Art. How and where it is presented is one of the most important decisions the creative team has to make in order to give a piece of work relevance to an audience.

For Fierce this meant that siting Benjamin Verdonck's bird's nest for the performance of *The Great Swallow* on the side of Birmingham's Rotunda Building was crucial to its success. The building itself is arguably the most recognised in the city; it is sited at the junction of New Street and the new Bullring Shopping Centre, so is passed by probably the greatest number of people walking through Birmingham City Centre on any given day. As such, it was very much in the public's space, not the artist's or the curator's, but in a space in which the public felt that they had a stake, and of which they enjoyed a sense of ownership.

Similarly, the end result of Joshua Sofaer's *Name in Lights* was not only in a very public space (the roof of Birmingham's Central Library) but where the public themselves actually had a hand in creating the artwork, using the new worlds of social networking and a designated website to allow men, women and children from every walk of life, culture and political persuasion to decide for themselves whose name would be chosen to receive the accolade, and therefore what the final piece of artwork would look like.

These two examples followed several years of extensive dialogue with Fierce's audiences through focus groups, interviews, audience panels, vox pops and so on, about the festival programme and their perceptions of what it meant to them. It became clear to us that the distinctiveness of the work, and of the festival as a whole, was its strongest asset. But this distinctiveness did not just rest with the performance or installation itself. Its location, where it was physically placed, had as much of a bearing on its success, and certainly in most cases on the strength of its impact, as the raw performance itself. It goes back to that witness experience again: audiences want experiences, which can be strongly rooted in an unusual and distinctive site. Nowadays, at least half of all work produced by Fierce is site specific, and these sites have ranged from strip clubs to swimming pools, from greasy spoon cafes to shopping centres, and from nightclubs to factories.

Even when we work with venue partners, the work as often as not is sited in an unusual or interstitial space in or around the building – maybe in a dressing room, or in a square outside the theatre, or even on the walls and roof of the building. We're

currently planning a production of Mem Morrison's *Ringside*, a piece about Turkish-Cypriot weddings, in collaboration with Birmingham Rep. By far, the most crucial and time consuming part of the planning has been finding precisely the right location to re-create this piece to give the audience exactly the experience that they need, marrying the all-important element of surprise with a sage assertion that 'yep, this is just right for this one...'

As Anthony Roberts, Director of Colchester Arts Centre, concedes: "site is essential. Making sure that the layout in the building is right, in the same way you might for comedy for example. You have to make it so that people don't actually notice the context, but at the same time it absolutely works for the piece of work – it's almost subliminal".

### So How Do You Recognise a Typical Live Art Attender?

You don't. It is a given that audiences for Live Art in the UK are very niche. So much so that even Audience Development Agencies themselves don't quite know where to pitch artists working in this eclectic field, let alone how, or to whom, they should be marketed. From the days when Fierce used to joke that its audience could pretty much fit inside a couple of black cabs, to today, twelve years on, when audiences for the *Fierce Festival* have grown to levels where over 100,000 now engage with its performances, it has always been clear that audiences don't fall within the traditional demographic segments or attendance patterns that tend to govern most arts marketing strategies.

However, there are opportunities to target work towards certain segments who do show a higher propensity, perhaps, to want to experiment with 'the experience'. Here, however, other elements often come into play. With younger audiences, there are other drivers towards attendance or non-attendance than the artists or the work alone.

Price, for example. We are mindful of the fact that often our greatest competition when trying to get young people to our events is not other theatre performances, but cinemas, pubs and bars, so we choose not only to price ourselves appropriately to those, but also to programme a large proportion of the events as free. There are also other factors, including the opportunity to mix and mingle with mates; the ability to socialise with other audience members is important to younger audiences. So too is timing – maybe they need the opportunity to do more than one thing in an evening, or to experience them at times other than the traditional matinee/evening option. Things like proximity to public transport are often overlooked, but hugely important to many audience members.

And now, of course, there is the digital media phenomenon. Living large portions of one's life through social networking portals, and having both a trust and huge interest in new technologies, has had a significant impact in how we both market our work to new audiences and in how we engage with them on a deeper level. Joshua Sofaer's *Name in Lights* is one aforementioned example of how Fierce created a sustained and personal relationship with its audience over the development, the promotion and

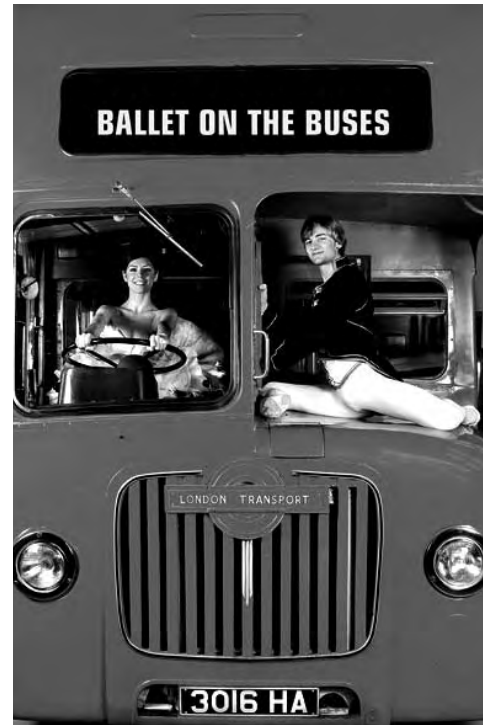
**PIERCE**



Joshua Sofaer  
*Name In Lights*  
Photo: Chris Keenan



Benjamin Verdonck  
*The Great Swallow*  
Photo: Sven Van Baarle



Birmingham Royal  
*Ballet Ballet on the Buses*  
Photo: Dave Reams

the presentation of the work. In 2008, for our eleventh festival, we got the audience involved on an even deeper level by asking them to effectively curate a portion of the festival by selecting those artists and companies that they wanted to see programmed into the festival as part of *My Fierce Festival*. Using a website [www.myfiercefestival.co.uk](http://www.myfiercefestival.co.uk), members of the public could look at all aspects of a piece of work from budget through to technical requirements, and select the sort of space in which it should be presented. The result – almost 25,000 people taking part in the on-line curation, and more significantly, most of the events selling out well ahead of the show date with a large proportion of festival visitors being new to Fierce.

## Partnership Working – *Ballet On The Buses*

Creating strong partnerships is crucial to the successful delivery of Live Art projects. But it's more than that. It's about bravery from all quarters, trust, and a shared belief that something great can come out of the vast unknown. This belief is crucial for audiences, who want to take risks, but need that trust in order to be able to do so.

In 2007, *Fierce Festival*, in partnership with Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB), commissioned a series of new works by BRB resident dancers using as inspiration a de-commissioned, classic red Routemaster bus. The dancers explored the physical possibilities and limitations of creating dance inside and outside of this familiar vehicle, which in effect acted as a large sculptural work for the dancers to respond to. With both intimate *pas-de-deux* created for audiences sitting in the bus, and larger works created by the dancers spilling out of the bus, *Ballet on the Buses* was both visually spectacular and highly engaging. It was important that this new piece of work was targeted at non-traditional dance attenders, and as such the bus was driven to community venues such as schools, colleges and public squares across Birmingham to act as a portable experimental stage from which dance could be displayed in an innovative and challenging way to excite the imaginations of a broad cross-section of people for whom ballet, and perhaps dance in any form, was off their radar.

*Ballet on the Buses* represented the development of an important new partnership between Fierce and BRB, enabling both organisations to extend their reach and attract broader audiences across the city, and for Birmingham Royal Ballet to develop new experimental dance work whilst providing choreographic development opportunities for the company. There would be little point in either party creating a piece of work that was just a kiddie step forward. It needed to be surprising, but it needed to be reassuring, and it had to be top-notch quality, but it also had to raise a smile and make the audience feel charmed. Above all, the whole experience had to be different, and had to work for audiences.

## Audience Development through Education – Arnolfini Bristol and Summerhill School

We tend to think of audience development as solely about getting more bums on seats, or more regular visits to our gallery or events, but it can also be highly relevant to consider it in terms of long-term relationship development with new sectors, possibly bringing together artists and audiences who, at first glance, might not be an



obvious match, with the hope that it might change the perceptions of what Live Art can bring to that sector.

This was the case with Arnolfini in 2004 when they decided to develop projects in conjunction with Creative Partnerships in Bristol. This initiative was not, in raw terms, about bringing people into the building to see work (although in fact it did achieve that), it was much more about exploring how far one could extrude the boundaries of participatory work and what this might mean in terms of future understanding of the artistic process. Clearly, once again, in audience development terms, it was all about that crucial ongoing relationship, stretching it in as many ways as possible, and making it as rich as it could potentially be. The overarching ambition of Michael Prior, Arnolfini's Education Programmer, was to work with artists who were completely new to working within conventional aspects of creative learning and who could essentially take interdisciplinary practice to an audience for whom the entire experience would be a steep learning curve.

Michael chose to work with the artists Noble and Silver, known mainly for the more adult nature and content of their work, but whose practice focuses around mixing live and recorded performance. The development of the work happened over time, first getting buy-in from the teachers at Summerhill School, so they began with Kim and Stuart (Noble and Silver), taking over a school assembly, using humour and a strong interest in film and moving image to communicate with the schoolchildren in a very different way to what they were used to.

The next stage was to work with two Year 5 groups over a protracted period to develop the idea of a new TV Station – Summerhill TV – exploring, in the process, everything that TV meant to these children, from programming to production to funding and broadcasting.

This led to two performances, the first in school, and then a second in Arnolfini itself. This is where the work really developed onto a different level, and is another example of taking the new audience on a journey both in terms of the work and of the venue, encouraging them, perhaps, to step into a performance space for the first time, and certainly to see how the development of the work changes as it needs to be developed for a bigger, more sophisticated audience, and to work in a new space. Whilst it was fine to do a school performance in a school, both the artists and the participants felt that they needed to step up a gear to present a performance to members of the paying public in a highly respected arts centre.

The results, like anything of this nature, were both the hoped for and the completely unanticipated. The school found that it introduced new ways of engaging pupils, although it has to be said that the greatest impact is on individuals rather than re-shaping an entire school's culture. Perhaps that is no bad thing for Live Art, where the work that we produce has such a singular and personal impact on an audience member. It is this relationship, and building upon this experience, after all, that we seek to develop.

The most important thing learnt by the Arnolfini team was that an initiative like this has to be part of a long-term strategy, which has implications for budgeting, sustained programming, fundraising and marketing, as well as within the education team. Work often takes years to develop, and the strategy needs to be adapted, molded and developed over several projects. But for Michael, it showed how work created through participation could offer a valuable audience development route for Arnolfini over the next decade.

## Creating a Successful Venue Programme

It is a brave venue programmer or curator who stands up these days and takes risks which might jeopardize the all important ‘bums on seats’. However, even going back to the mid 90s, venues such as London’s ICA and Manchester’s greenroom, through a combination of radical programming, an emphasis on quality and relevance, strong relationship building and a deepening understanding of their audience as individuals, demonstrated that Live Art can, and does, sell out. Yet there is still a perception that Live Art is frightening to venues, who believe that there are few big draws in the sector and that it’s a risk many are unwilling to take. So how has sustained success been achieved at venues across the country such as Bristol’s Arnolfini, Battersea Arts Centre, Warwick Arts Centre, Chelsea Theatre and Colchester Arts Centre, who now witness full houses for their Live Art programmes with increasing regularity? Clearly the entire venue team – not just programming, but marketing, producing, technical, finance, front of house and crucially, the person at the top – the Director or Chief Executive – are central to achieving success.

For a venue like Colchester Arts Centre, this means a combination of always aligning innovative programming strategies with creative approaches to audience development, and recognising that Live Art audiences are hard to define and categorise in the accepted demographic ways. Essentially, the whole venue needs to work with this assumption, and not fight against it. At Colchester, Director Anthony Roberts believes that it’s about faith, belief and passion, the excellence of the work and above all, a sustained programme that allows people to trust the venue with its programming policy and take those risks:

“Our job is to have as complete an understanding as possible about what it is about a piece of work that is going to excite, intrigue or entice the curiosity of an audience, so it starts with me as far as Colchester is concerned. It’s my job to inspire every member of my team with the excitement of a piece of work. It’s unfamiliar, so of course, it’s harder to sell, but to a venue, that’s what can make it interesting. I call it ‘informed enthusiasm’ but it’s where you go ‘off campaign plan’ and start to think laterally about what will make this work sell.”

Unlike other parts of Colchester’s artistic programme, audience development for Live Art is not just about marketing per se. It often starts with the choice of venue or space in which to show the work, which may be outside the venue itself, allowing the audience to chance upon it in a public space, much as Fierce does with its programming policy. It’s also about context, and not entirely removed from a shopping

experience, says Anthony:

“Some time ago we ran a Franko B workshop week with twelve emerging artists, and whilst Franko has an audience that knows his work and will travel to see it, it’s vital that you get beyond that to new audiences. We planned to do two nights of live work from Franko and the more untried artists in the middle of the week, so we decided to mix it in with a rock-and-roll band. Through doing this, we got much higher audiences for the Live Art programme than we could have done had we programmed and marketed it alone. It was about getting people in to see one thing, and allowing them once you’d got them to experience another that they wouldn’t have chosen themselves”.

Thinking outside the box, and trying new things to tap into the audience mindset, is what it’s all about, and for a marketing team, that’s actually far more fun than just sending direct mail after direct mail to repeat what you’ve said in the brochure to an audience you’ve segmented based on quite spurious ‘if you liked this...’ links.

Another case study at Colchester that illustrates the need to think about every aspect of the performance was Richard DeDomenici.

“Richard was programmed to perform in a public space in town”, recalls Anthony, “but we knew we needed to create a critical mass of interesting things going on around it to make people stop and take notice, so we commissioned five emerging artists to make work in the street, so that in a sense, you were in fact creating some sort of mini festival. The crucial factor in all of this, though, is in maintaining standards. Richard DeDomenici’s work is brilliant, highly provocative and inspiring, so it’s vital that the artists you programme show equal promise and can add to the experience, rather than, as is so easy, detract from it and devalue it. Fingers crossed, the audience will want to see more”.

Finally, breaking down barriers as far as possible is crucial. Continuing to make the journey easier for the audience, and making the risk more palatable, Colchester Arts Centre also piloted a unique membership scheme, which was based on similar schemes run by cinemas:

“Basically, for £8.99 a month you can come to see as many things at the arts centre as you like. We get people to sign up for a year at least, and this then gives us at least a fighting chance that they’ll experience more pieces of Live Art than they would choose independently, and take a few risks that they would not have done otherwise. You also have a great tool for tracking what they’ve seen throughout the year, and taking it one level down, those people are your best word of mouth ambassadors – something hugely important for Live Art work”.

## Conclusions

So what have we learned from all of this? Well, maybe there are a few things worth remembering, whilst maybe not actually hard and fast rules, that do give us pointers to developing audiences for Live Art. And I truly believe that we shouldn't restrict this thinking solely to Live Art. There are many initiatives that have been successfully used in the marketing of Live Art programmes that could very usefully be translated into building new audiences and enhancing the experience of existing attenders of other art forms. Why end there? Within this model, there are examples of good practice that can have benefits right across the arts, and arguably, other sectors as well:

- Remember that what the audience member wants, every time, is an experience. So make sure that the crucial personal relationship with the individual is at the heart of how we talk to them, making that experience much more multi-layered and deeper than if you were selling a single performance of a play or a dance piece. Most importantly, understand yourself what the experience might feel like.
- Think of the before and after. We're talking long-term relationships with our audiences here, not one-off's.
- Court the media, see them as friends, and with marketing budgets tight, getting the right PR person to present a piece of work or a season to the media could be the best few quid you ever spent, and reap thousands in return. More importantly, think beyond traditional media and consider on-line marketing and promotional opportunities, including blogs, social networking sites, and listings. It is widely felt that these examples have significantly contributed to the recent increase in audience awareness of Live Art.
- Treat every project as a new adventure – it will be a new and unique audience experience, for sure, so make it a new and unique campaign plan that thinks 'outside the box'.
- Contextualising the work in the right way for the audience is vital, so think where, when and how. It all enhances the experience, but getting it wrong can also detract from it big time.
- Choosing the right producing and presenting partners, and understanding one another's goals and ambitions for a project, is vital.
- Think of other routes in – maybe through education, or some way of adding value to a performance by clever programming to tap into that element of surprise.
- Excellence in programming quality, and building a sustained programme so that audiences have more opportunities to experience Live Art, makes the journey easier for them. What's the point of great 'word of mouth' if there's nothing coming up to benefit from it?

Finally, it's our job as curators, marketers, producers and venue managers to inspire our audiences, and we wouldn't be working in the field of Live Art if it wasn't fun, would we? Thinking a bit left-field, being brave and a bit risky, is what makes the job fun, and seeing the audience getting a great experience that they'll remember for many a year has to be the perfect payback.

# Internationalism

Chapter Arts Centre and Arnolfini

## By James Tyson, Chapter Arts Centre, and Helen Cole, Arnolfini

Internationalism is a commitment shared by both Arnolfini and Chapter Arts Centre. Integral to each centre's mission is the drive to enable public audiences to appreciate arts practice from across the world. At the same time, this practice develops, informs and inspires each centre's local arts communities in their continued growth and maturity as vibrant and engaged sites of art practice.

The following project summaries provide an opportunity to reflect on examples of internationalism from within the UK Live Art sector, drawing out how the concerns and practice of Live Art provide a defining model of international arts practice where audiences, curators, artists and theorists connect to a wide and complex global network.

### *Live Culture* (2003)

In 2003, Lois Keidan and Daniel Brine of the Live Art Development Agency collaborated with Adrian Heathfield, writer, artist and theorist, to curate *Live Culture*, a weekend of events, lectures, installations and associated publications at Tate Modern, London.

*Live Culture* offered audiences a programme of charged encounters and points of critical reflection with some of the world's most influential artists and theorists drawn from the visual and performance art fields, as well as those with closer affinities to histories of experimental and conceptual theatre, dance, video and film art. The event featured work by Marina Abramovic, Ron Athey, Franko B, Carol Becker, Ansuman Biswas, Blast Theory, Oron Catts, Ricardo Dominguez, Forced Entertainment, Tim Etchells, Jean Fisher, RoseLee Goldberg, Matthew Goulsh, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Adrian Heathfield, Leslie Hill, Lin Hixson, Kazuko Hohki, Amelia Jones, John Jordan, Keith Khan, Yu Yeon Kim, Oleg Kulik, La Pocha Nostra, Rona Lee, Andre Lepecki, Alastair MacLennan, Hayley Newman, Peggy Phelan, Pope & Guthrie, William Pope.L, Andrew Quick, Alan Read, La Ribot, Henry M Sayre and Aaron Williamson.

On-line interview between Helen Cole, Lois Keidan and Adrian Heathfield.

Helen Cole: Why do you think it was necessary for *Live Culture* to happen at this place and at that time?

Lois Keidan/Adrian Heathfield: The intention for *Live Culture* was to raise the profile of Live Art within a visual arts context and Tate Modern was the highest profile museum/gallery in the world. There was at this time a sense of an increased engagement with Live Art across art forms and from major institutional, grass roots, academic and community quarters. This combination of factors plus a recent restructuring at Arts Council England prompted the drive to position Live Art in the wider cultural landscape in visible ways. *Live Culture* was made possible by high level

approval within the institution combined with a small but active group of supportive younger resident curators working in association with the experienced external curatorial team.

HC: What conditions were in place to make it possible?

LK/AH: An Arts Council commission to do 'an event that raised the profile of Live Art in the visual arts'. A desire by Tate to look at their role, the kinds of practices they engaged with and their relationship with audiences. The very existence of, and Arts Council support for, a development organisation for Live Art with the mandate and the capacity to work collaboratively and strategically. A diversity of other sources of potential funding sources, including a variety of funding streams within Arts Council, as well as Trusts & Foundations. A body of museum standard work, and a context in which discourse on performance and liveness had reached a critical mass, enabling discursive urgency, correspondence across disciplinary divides and institutional recognition.

HC: What have been *Live Culture's* achievements, impact and repercussions?

LK/AH: Some suggest that Tate Modern now has a dedicated performance programme because of *Live Culture*. If Tate Modern can present such work without compromise, censorship or apology than anyone can. The publication projects, *Live: Art and Performance* and *The Performance Pack*, were produced and continue to be sold and distributed globally. Live Art practices have continued to be taken more seriously by audiences, institutions and critics. The event itself was an important moment of empowerment for artists and everyone working in the sector. It went on to position the UK as a leader in this field, the envy of the world. Other major institutions have since followed suit with major performance exhibitions although many of these are still positioned under the notion of the historic or radical re-enactment rather than through a commitment to commissioning new performance works.

HC: What future challenges do you think we face in order for *Live Culture* or a similar event of its standing to ever happen again?

LK/AH: A certain kind of similar event happened recently within the *Manchester International Festival – Marina Abramovic Presents...* at Whitworth Gallery. This took vision and major investment by a leading festival matched by equal vision and willingness to take risks by Whitworth Gallery. Unfortunately, in the current climate, it is unlikely that the Arts Council would see the need for, or commit to supporting a project of this kind now. Raising substantial additional funds would also be a challenge. Art world economies need to shift away from their



object-centred and identity driven modes, to engage with ideas above products, and relations above names.

*Live Culture* was a reflexive, international event to be immensely proud of. By locating it within one of the world's leading cultural institutions, *Live Culture* increased the profile and popular currency of a wealth and breadth of global Live Art practices. *Live Culture* was a marking of a moment of maturity when Live Art practice took its rightful place within the wider field of contemporary cultural research. In fact, *Live Culture* can be seen to be asserting significant influence still, as its associated publications continue to advance an international public's critical understanding of Live Art practices and the kinds of curatorial, critical and social contexts they occupy. As for whether we will make an event of this nature ever happen again, shared models of curatorial, theoretical and artistic practice are evolving as we write and although the funding climate may not be seen to be conducive at this moment in time, the need for assertive, collaborative, critical interventions increases. In a world where war, border control, recession, economic development and climate change rewrite the cultural landscape in which we live and work, the time is ripe for a new type of coming together to emerge to bring institutions, funders, practitioners and audiences together with a sense of urgency, intimacy and action.

### ***Goat Island Summer School (1996 – 2008)***

The *Goat Island Summer School* is directed by the members of Goat Island performance group, founded in Chicago in 1987. The summer school provides an opportunity for artists to work and study together for a period of approximately two weeks. Participants include artists drawn from the visual arts, Live Art, music, dance, and theatre. Disciplines of performance, installation, writing, movement, music, research, publication and documentation are examined dictated by the interests of the participants as well as those of the instructors. Sessions combine theory and practice with an emphasis on the development and encouragement of new ideas.

Each *Summer School* takes on a life of its own, driven by the specific people involved. Visiting creative scholars destabilise distinctions between academic paper and personal response, between discourse and dialogue, between reason and art, delivering lecture/performative presentations, in response to participants' work, and occasionally functioning as artists in residence. Guests have included Stephen J. Bottoms, Adrian Heathfield, Carol Becker, Peggy Phelan, Charles Garoian, Simon Jones, AL Kennedy, Francis McKee, Carlyne Rye, Lucy Cash, Joe Steiff, and Alan Read.

Since 1996, Goat Island has led three *Summer Schools* in Glasgow (Scotland), three in Bristol (England) and nine in Chicago (USA). Other workshops have taken place in Dartington, Lancaster, Brighton, Alsager, Zagreb, Hamburg, New York City and other locations.

On-line interview between Helen Cole, and Goat Island members Matthew Goulish and Lin Hixson.

Helen Cole: It appears to me that your *International Summer Schools* have developed a method of working that has accumulated over the years to create a global community of theorists and practitioners who have stayed connected over time. I am interested in the way that this growing group of artists have continued to evolve and influence each other despite obvious geographical distance and cultural difference. I am also interested that this way of working presents a different economic model as evidenced by your work between the academy and the institution. You particularly intrigue me by the way that you often describe Bristol as a type of “home away from home”. Why is this? What makes ‘home’ for an international touring company such as yourselves? Why have you found a home within the Live Art communities of the UK? How does this influence the work that you make and the way that you make it?

Matthew Goulish/Lin Hixson: From the beginning with the *Bristol Summer School*, and the *Glasgow Summer School* before that, the host institutions made a three-year commitment to the project. This was immensely important as a vote of confidence, for us the teachers as well as for the participants. Second, in both cities, as well as here in Chicago, there was (and is) a certain degree of collaboration between institutions. For example, in Bristol we had Arnolfini (including the bookstore), the University, and Dance Services. All three worked together, and the workshop participants benefited from each organization in turn. Then there was the ongoing parallel of our performance work outside the teaching, which had been established in the cities where the schools were offered. Because of this we could be thought of as artists who were teaching. Finally, there is the work that we do within the school to build the community of participant artists where we allow, and even require, them to commit to one another’s work, facilitate ways of conversing about time-based, challenging work, and include invited scholars to enter into the dialogue. We ask all of them, artists and scholars, to generate new work during the course: performance work, responsive writing, and statements about their own processes and intentions. In this environment, people find they are capable of more than they thought possible. All of these factors I think contribute to the conditions of “home away from home,” of a temporary community in the process of becoming, a kind of ideal, a creative space and time that is recognized and valued as such as it is happening.

Goat Island’s *Summer Schools* fall outside conventional models of funding, production and distribution. For a venue partner there is no immediate or obvious means of public presentation or distribution. For an academic partner, there is little or no connection with the student body or teaching faculty and there is no obvious means of external critical intervention or publication. The work produced may never

be seen outside the small group of co-collaborators that first witness it. Yet, as an international touring company who spend months on tour away from home, Goat Island return again and again to locations where audiences and artistic communities greet them as one of their own. Goat Island's approach has proved a gentle, radical intervention into the international field of teaching and arts production, permeating a generation of practice. It eschews the conventional hierarchies of institutions to create an atmosphere of enquiry, risk, exchange and openness across borders, disciplines, institutions and arts infrastructures. This ethos remains in the hearts and practices of their collaborators long after they have got on the plane back to Chicago.

## **Arnolfini, Bristol (1961 – present) & Performance Space, Sydney (1983 – present)**

**By Helen Cole, Arnolfini**

Increasingly in this technologised age, we are embracing experiential interactions that pull us towards the live. Personally, almost as much as actually seeing 'the show', it's as important to share it with others, to reflect, discuss and disseminate after the event. And of course the community with whom I do this is so much larger than the people that I meet in the bar on the night of the show. As I watch a work unfold before me, I am always half thinking about the eventual dialogue I will have with those who cannot be there.

I first walked through Performance Space's front door in 2000. At that time it was still in its original location, on Cleveland Street in Redfern, Sydney. A space of peeling paintwork and evocative corners full of dusty boxes containing reminders of the artists that had shown work there over the preceding twenty years. You would probably not have found two venues that on the surface looked more different than Arnolfini and Performance Space at that time. Our now nine year collaboration evidently has nothing to do with buildings at all.

Venues like Arnolfini and Performance Space are extremely rare, as are the curators who work in them. Because of their commitment to the live, both venues offer transformable, evocative environments that do not feel sealed off, austere or excluding. Both venues are at the centre of wider national and international networks, offering support for contemporary discourse and practice, acting as homes for artists who are committed to experimentation and interdisciplinarity across cultural communities. We have together sought out new influences and acted as meeting points for audiences and artists who are open-minded, willing to take risks and find new edges, even if they don't know it yet!

Audiences and artists want to be mobilised, to take responsibility, to feel their presence is important and that they are part of making change. Interactions between peoples, through borders, are a fundamental human instinct, a way of understanding the world.



Anushiye Yarnell  
*The Animal Love Project* (2007–9), Chapter  
Photo: courtesy the artist.



Monica Tichachek and Manuel Vason  
Commissioned by Inbetween Time/Arnolfini  
for Encounters, pub by Arnolfini.  
Photo: Manuel Vason



Oleg Kulik at *Live Culture*  
Live Art Development Agency  
Photo: Manuel Vason

Interview between Helen Cole and Fiona Winning, Director of Performance Space from 1999 to 2008:

Fiona Winning: The collaboration between Arnolfini in Bristol and Performance Space in Sydney began as a conversation between two curators/producers. We shared notes about Live Art in the UK, contemporary performance in Australia, particularities of practice in our cities and the conditions and infrastructure necessary to support it. We introduced each other to artists we admire, to peers within our own and partner organisations. Then we expanded the dialogue – we each programmed inspired works by artists from both countries in our programmes, introducing UK and Australian artists to each other and our local audiences to contemporary ideas from the other side of the world.

A conversation between two people grew into a multiplicity of conversations between many – too many to track. Relationships between Australian and British practitioners organically grew into casual artist-to-artist exchanges, more formal collaborations, touring and co-commissioning. Skills and strategies were shared, contexts were compared, works were created. We had a plan, all too often shaped by our financial capacity to act, but whatever resources we could muster, we did. And our modest collaborations and interventions over the years have resulted in a myriad of artist-to-artist dialogues that contribute to cultural internationalism.

In the last decade there have been too many critical moments – most notably 9/11 and the GFC [Global Financial Crisis], where borders have been tightened or economies have been prioritised away from the arts, the first casualty being international exchange. Small-scale cultural exchange is a conversation – it needs at least two parties to participate, to commit to build awareness of experiences beyond our immediate world. Not news. Not facts and figures. Processes and artworks of great intellect, body and heart that startle us into new acts of thinking and doing – however small. It doesn't actually need that much money, because it doesn't always need to take place in the grand festivals and spectacular events. Artist to artist, organisation to organisation, community to community – is where profound exchange occurs. It's not a lot of investment – some will, some time and yes... some money.

HC: Open platforms, feedback sessions, artists' talks and discussion events, symposia, artist-led events, works-in-progress, showcases, festivals, residencies and commissions, parties, picnics, ball games and treasure hunts. The discussions between Fiona and myself have become embedded in the minds of our different communities. A sense of there being another place, on the other side of the world where people meet and ideas happen, in a critical context for performance. We have all become co-conspirators, fellow explorers finding ways to make the feeling of being here resonate across distance to effect a moment on the other side of the world.

## Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff (1971 – present)

### By James Tyson, Chapter Arts Centre

Since 2001, Chapter has presented *Experimentica*, an annual festival of “live and time-based art”. Taking place each autumn, it was established as a response to the need to provide a platform for emergent work, works-in-progress and new works whether drawing or engaging with the languages of dance, Live Art, performance art, experimental film, video, installation or sound art. Critically, these were works that caught the breath of new ideas, and that could lead to the formulation of new means of engagement from both artists making their professional debut to those twenty or thirty years into their art practice.

*Experimentica* could be seen as part of an ecology of Live Art festivals and events across the UK. Perhaps most established is the *National Review of Live Art* (1981 – present) in Glasgow that is now produced as part of *New Territories* festival every year, the annual *Burst* festival at Battersea Arts Centre (1974/80 – present), Bristol’s *Inbetween Time* (2002 – present), *Expo* (1991– 2004) in Nottingham, *SPILL* festival (2007 – present) in London and other artist platforms and festivals, as well as the annual graduate showcases and degree shows that take place at the various art colleges and universities across the country.

It is a gift to present shows off-the-shelf. It takes intelligence, daring and a gift for words to come up with slogans, copy and occupying the attention of media to make the case that Live Art, or new theatre, or radical performance or however it is defined, needs attention for all its ephemerality and as yet unknown-ness. So often Live Art is an integrally local form, which speaks as much about its local audience as it does of any particular skill, intelligence or uniqueness of its performers. Very often it is the influence of that audience that determines how “successful” or “radical” or “innovative” or “vital” any show or performance might be.

So *Experimentica* is just one example of a local place finding a way to deal with a local issue, which also is as much about making a map for a place that Cardiff would like to be... international, local, regional, Wales, UK... those things. But maybe we can say a place that people will remember. For artists who discover that actually here is a place where they can do the very thing that too often escapes venues, biennials, festivals or even their own time: a space, an audience that has come to listen and see and think about what they are saying; a place where if you want, someone will talk to you about what you have seen; a place where you can try; where it doesn’t even matter if you don’t speak English too well; but where most of all we can find a way to listen and communicate through different languages.

Inviting an artist to work at Chapter happens when finances are available and I see a work that I feel would be resonant for Chapter’s audience and so somehow need to find some way to bring that company or artist to present their work. What follows can be a relationship that may last several years, as the person making the work becomes integral to a process that can last beyond a particular project. And so then the next work. And how to find a way to do the next work after that.

This can explain a range of Chapter projects in recent years by artists whether from Wales, Europe or across the world, where the centre's commitment to a continual internationalism rather dissolves the line between international and local artist. Maybe in Wales, itself often described as a site of a certain cultural identity, this can be useful, enabling focus on the practice of making the work itself, rather than how that work gets legitimized or described.

A year-round venue with continuous access to space and its audience can be flexible to how projects can change and evolve. Different models, whether festivals, guest curators, one-off projects, can all provide access to works that challenge and rethink the very act of seeing any performance. Yet when I think about Live Art and internationalism the less I think about the next "hit" show, or the "must see" new talent, or the next "foremost" artist from whichever place, but rather those artists that spend time, day-by-day, and in some way invest in a place, and how that changes what that space becomes and the possibilities that are open to it.

### Artsadmin (1979 – present)

Artsadmin is one of the UK's leading arts organizations for supporting and promoting the work of contemporary artists working across theatre, visual arts, dance, Live Art and performance, through management, artistic development, bursary and training programmes as well as presentations from its recently renovated base, Toynbee Studios in East London. Through artists such as DV8 Physical Theatre, Station House Opera, curious, Graeme Miller, Wendy Houston, Ackroyd and Harvey, Bobby Baker, with whom it has worked steadily, in some cases since the organisation began in 1979, Artsadmin has witnessed, participated in and influenced the changing international networks for contemporary arts (not least the IETM since its formation in the early 1980s), both across Europe and globally, and the effect this has had on touring, cultural exchanges and a wider cultural development through those artists it has been able to keep working with during these past thirty years. The biennial *British Council Edinburgh Showcase* (1997 – present) is one initiative that the artists Artsadmin represents and manages have consistently been involved in.

On-line interview between Judith Knight, Co-Director of Artsadmin and Helen Cole:

Helen Cole: I would like to ask you to reflect on the current conditions for international touring. My perspective is that over the last five years there has been growing interest from international producers and programmers in Live Art practice. Is this correct from your perspective? As a presenter working within the *British Council Edinburgh Showcase*, how has this worked for you? Is it true that the British Council has opened up opportunities for wider international distribution? What are the positive stories that you have been part of making happen? How does a sense of an international market effect the work of the artists with whom you work?



Judith Knight: Yes, there's definitely a growing interest in Live Art internationally, and I think there's a recognition that UK artists have been leading this area of work. Obviously the Live Art Development Agency has done a lot to get this interest going, and also festivals such as the *National Review of Live Art*, *Fierce*, *Inbetween Time* and most recently *SPILL* have been increasingly attracting international promoters. There have been several international festivals/showcases which have been specifically programming UK work, examples such as *HAU* in Berlin, *In Motion* in Barcelona, the British Council's *SPACE UK* showcase in Gijon, Spain last March and a forthcoming *British Live Art Festival* in Mainz, Germany.

The *Edinburgh Festival Showcase* is including more live artists and site-specific projects in its programming than it used to do – it used to be mainly theatre, but it has increasingly included live artists and I think this has obviously made a difference. It is useful, as the showcase does bring in programmers from countries other than western Europe, or countries where we might not have many existing contacts. It sometimes leads to direct bookings in possibly unexpected places (Gary Steven's *APE* went to Tunisia for example, a connection we probably wouldn't have made without the *British Council Showcase*).

Obviously we've been working internationally for years – since we began – and it's hard to detect a general trend – it comes and goes, different work being popular in different countries at different times. But as you said, the interest in Live Art really is in the last five years or so. The positives are obvious – the cultural connections and collaborations, the co-production possibilities, artists working together on one project. Station House Opera's *Play on Earth* ([www.stationhouseopera.com/project/6048](http://www.stationhouseopera.com/project/6048)) was a good example: three teams of people – Newcastle, Singapore, Sao Paulo – working on one live/internet performance.

Also, the British Council's initiatives in China and Brazil have been helpful – curious for example had a residency in China and the research they did there led to the *Red Lantern House* film, part of their *Lost and Found* project, ([www.placelessness.com/project/1003/lost-found](http://www.placelessness.com/project/1003/lost-found)) and this sort of cultural collaboration/research is really incredibly valuable for artists wishing to work in this way – i.e. not just 'touring' an existing piece of work all over the world, but genuinely working in partnership with other artists and institutions.

And the international market is really important – for all those reasons above: real collaborations across cultures, strengthening networks, working with international artists, and not least, financial benefits.

The two-way process is also important I think. Now we have a building, we are sometimes able to invite international artists here (recently Grand Magasin) so we are not just sending UK artists abroad, but offering opportunities here too. *SPILL* (directed by Robert Pacitti) is also interesting for that reason – Pacitti Company’s international touring on the one hand, Robert curating international work in London on the other.

All very positive. As long as the UK visa restrictions don’t drastically affect international artists coming to the UK. And then there’s climate change and how we should be planning our touring ... But that’s another story!

## A response to the *British Council Edinburgh Showcase*

By James Tyson, Chapter Arts Centre

James Tyson: In many ways, to experience Live Art at the *British Council Edinburgh Showcase* somewhat contrasts with the very specificity and cultural sensitivity of what over many years has developed as Live Art in the UK and what also makes it so potent as a sector in bridging cultural exchange, audience development and promoting cultural excellence. The figure of £1m that the *British Council Edinburgh Showcase* is estimated as bringing into the UK theatre industry, and the many tours and projects that might result from bringing a highly influential group of programmers and presenters to what Sally Cowling, Head of Performing Arts at the British Council, describes as “the fantastic madness of Edinburgh”, and the trail of critics that follow in its pursuit, is perhaps the sting that probably makes it so difficult for many artists or companies to say “no” to participating in the wider jamboree of the *Edinburgh Fringe Festival* that is nevertheless a now significant platform for UK Live Art and experimental performance.

For many years the Live Art scene, and before that an experimental theatre scene that developed across the UK particularly in the 1970s, battled a conservatism of British theatre that seemed to represent some idea, perhaps because of Shakespeare or the recognition of certain twentieth century writers, as being the best in the world. The *LIFT Festival* (London International Festival of Theatre, 1981 – present) is just one event that was directly challenging this, opening British theatre to diverse and rigorous forms as were being developed internationally, to excite dialogue with other practitioners and contexts that could provoke and inspire.

It would seem what Kath Mainland, Chief Executive of the *Edinburgh Fringe Festival* applauds as “the bravery of the programming choices” made by the British Council’s *Edinburgh Showcase* (described by the British Council as being “deliberately chosen to represent the more unusual and cutting edge British work”) refers precisely to the Live Art and context-specific works that have become some of the notable success stories of the *Edinburgh Showcase*, as well as testifying to the quality and excitement generated by those artists making Live Art.

How the British Council or Visiting Arts, and those agencies that support them and events such as the *Edinburgh Showcase*, should plan towards this future is an

ongoing question. Certainly the value of Live Art can be recognized in its process and how this informs and evolves through the experience of the work itself by an audience. Enabling dialogue with promoters and artists is important in helping build international networks, much like it functions with an audience in any local or international context and the possibilities then for thinking about making new work, and the form such work can best take. Importantly, Live Art has developed a history that attempts with great care to make frameworks for sustainable international exchange and development. How this is progressed and acknowledged can be significant for future opportunity and sustainable investment.

## A Parochial and Protectionist Outlook

This collection of case studies presents a fundamental and ironic anomaly. Balanced against the positive summary in the Introduction – “the quality and quantity of Live Art practice currently being undertaken by artists in the UK is unprecedented” – we have to acknowledge that the infrastructure of the sector remains fragile.

As noted throughout this collection, funders often don’t know where to place Live Art. One area where this is keenly felt surrounds the commissioning and touring of international artists.

The sector has developed some key international festivals: *SPILL*, *Experimentica*, *Inbetween Time*, *Wunderbar*, *Sacred*, *Fierce*, *National Review of Live Art*, and *Liverpool Live* demonstrate the regional diversity and cross-country impact of Live Art and reveal that it is not entirely London-centric or particularly metropolitan. In addition, many of these festivals are successful at building complex relationships with international funding organisations and co-producing partners, offering critical platforms for international exchange. However, most of these festivals are insecurely funded on a project-by-project basis and their sustainability remains uncertain. At the same time, these festivals are almost the only place where international exchange takes place in a sector that is forced to work on miniscule budgets.

Live Arts’ internationalist outlook is also potentially under threat from the government’s fear-ridden response to terrorism, illegal immigration and the recession, which has made it prohibitive and costly for invited artists and academics from non-European Economic Area countries to be granted visas to take part in artistic and intellectual activities in the UK. These legislations will have an impact on the borderless ideals of Live Art, particularly curbing and curtailing international cultural exchange and collaboration with artists on low-income, from visa-national countries (for example, Pakistan, Iraq and Iran) and where their legitimacy as artists is called into question. The sector’s commitment to internationalism must be embraced as a philosophical and moral principle in its core mission. The sector also needs to put pressure on Arts Council England, DCMS and the Home Office to seriously reconsider the impact that these particular immigration regulations are having on international relationships.

## Conclusion

This case study has provided some overview on how certain active figures and organisations that make up the UK Live Art scene have integrated internationalism within their ongoing work. From the high visibility and widely disseminated legacies of *Live Culture* at Tate Modern to the subtle permeating influence of the *Goat Island Summer School* at venues and organizations across Europe, internationalism in Live Art is perhaps most critically about the realisation of ideas that can engage with and beyond national borders; an open circle that can be inclusive to new works and artists from diverse countries across the world. That this enables a route to a wider financial economy is demonstrated by the growth of the *British Council Edinburgh Showcase* and the success of Live Art within it, and obviously how making links across diverse economies can act to sustain and enrich a continuing artistic practice.

The UK government's new border agency regulations are already having significant impact upon artist mobility and international exchange across all sectors of the arts, but it is difficult to think of a Live Art scene in the UK without the influence and presence of those many artists from across the world who have presented their work at festivals, residencies, venues and projects across the country. This inclusiveness, and how it leads to links to other festivals and organizations, as demonstrated by the Arnolfini's ongoing collaboration with Performance Space in Australia, is part of a Live Art culture that is not fixed in size or scale, but yet is about a pragmatic and sometimes itinerant engagement with places, people and ideas. The Live Art sector certainly faces challenges of distribution and touring in the face of insecure funding platforms, but, at its best, Live Art demonstrates a complex and subtle internationalism that responds to and moves between the potentials of a global map.



# Education

Artsadmin

## Introduction

### By Manick Govinda, Artsadmin

This case study focuses on an educational model of engagement, which encapsulates the energising and influential role that Live Art and performance can play in inspiring and motivating communities, young people and children in formal and informal settings.

Education is a word that is moving further and further away from state discourse. There is no longer a Department of Education in British government. The name changes of the Department have been too frequent and numerous to catalogue but it is currently called the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and higher education is now under the auspices of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS). It could be said that the new DBIS is a political response to the recession, and the DCSF is a political response to make children and young people happy and healthy, keep them safe and sound, help them stay on track and oh yes, give them a top class education.

I would like to define education within a framework of what the British sociologist and writer Raymond Williams called a “structure of feeling”. In part, education engages young people through learning and active experience by engaging with key social, political and economic moods and feelings.

The arts become a tool of engagement with these structures of feeling. Thus, some participatory dance projects become a means to promote healthier living, some theatre in education is used to promote environmentalism, and higher education becomes a route to improve ones chances of getting a better job.

There is much debate surrounding the value of either art for arts sake versus art as a means of social engineering. Live Art, in my opinion, straddles both camps: it creates a space for social engagement, where ownership is devolved to the audience or participants, and can also posit alternative methods of education, promoting free thinking, free enquiry, an unrestrained imagination and the development of the self and its relation to culture and society. It can engage with the notion of what it is to be human. Developing a free enquiring spirit is hard when so much funding is driven by the values of training, skills development, the economy and other government agendas, but the value of live artists interacting with young people plays an important role in developing independent thinking.

The former Arts Council of Great Britain commissioned artist Richard Layzell to write a publication called *Live Art in Schools* in 1993, which highlighted how Live Art was being employed as a novel means of engaging schoolchildren in cross-curricular projects. Since that time, Live Art has played an important educational role in the UK, a role that mirrors the relative strengths and weaknesses of the Live Art sector over time. Unlike dance, theatre, painting, sculpture, photography and so forth, the term Live Art is not used so much just as a description of an artistic practice, but also as a description of an approach – a cultural strategy to engage institutions, audiences, and participants with different ways of creating and experiencing art. Education and

public programme departments of many galleries and museums see Live Art, as *a strategy for cross-art and participatory practice*. Leanne Turvey, Curator of Tate Modern's schools and teacher's programme, incorporates Live Art, sound, drawing, performance and curation in much of the education and participatory projects she develops with young people, as does Sally Tallant, Head of Programmes at Serpentine Gallery, and many others. In addition, Live Art practitioners such as Harold Offeh, Charlie Dark, Howard Matthew and David Blandy lead many education projects. While it is easy to cite remarkable examples of Live Art-based educational programmes, there has not been a comprehensive study of Live Art in social or educational contexts undertaken since 1993, so it is difficult to identify the quantity and quality of the practice in the many art institutions with an education remit.

Live Art UK members have developed many projects that engage young people; for example, Arnolfini's Education and Access project with Kim Noble and Stuart Silver in 2006 and 2007, the Bluecoat's initiative to encourage and support engagement by local creative industry professionals with the education sector and Fierce's year-round education work in formal and informal settings. However, many projects are reliant on chasing short-term funds from various grant-giving trusts and training organizations, and it's challenging to give a broad assessment of education and community initiatives within the respective programmes of Live Art UK: not all of them are Live Art specific, as some of these are venues driven by a range of art forms – music, cinema, exhibitions, etc. That said, the integrity of getting young people to engage with cross-disciplinary Live Art – performance, new media and visual – is demonstrated by Noble & Silver's projects at Arnolfini.

On one Arnolfini project, *Summerhill TV*, Kim Noble and Stuart Silver worked with two classes at Summerhill Junior School in Bristol, involving sixty children, ages 6-8. Noble and Silver are cutting-edge, risky artists, who work around various genres and disciplines such as comedy, theatre or television. The nature of their work is site-specific, tackling and deconstructing whatever traditions that space has. A lot of the work on *Summerhill TV* was conducted from a small room in the school, which had been set up to look like an artist's TV studio. The style of the project was very performative. The project began in January 2006 and was performed in March. It included pre-recorded films, a live quiz, the news, interviews and a fake celebrity Big Brother. There was also a screen behind the children with lots of interaction and lots of added extra parts. Every child had a part in this performance. The artists worked hard with the children to develop a new version of the work, which was then presented to a packed audience at Arnolfini as part of the venue's Live Art programme.

Creative Partnerships East London invested in critical research and development funds from 2004 to 2006 by commissioning Artsadmin to create an agenda for discussion, debate, reflection and action research in Live Art and young people, which led to Artsadmin employing an Education Coordinator in 2007, which in turn led to establishing the Artsadmin Youth Board partly as a means to bring younger people into Artsadmin's practice. The focus of this case study is on Artsadmin's long-term development work with young people, particularly the development of the Artsadmin Youth Board, because of its:



- integration with Artsadmin's commitment to continuous professional development for artists and creative professionals.
- long-term relationship with a growing corps of young people who enter the doors of Artsadmin through discursive and creative projects initiated by the Education Coordinator.
- on-going focus on experiment, criticality and development rather than on any specific arts project.
- being held up as a model of best practice in developing continuous professional development by Creative Partnerships.

## **Artsadmin's Education and Participation Work** **By Sam Trotman, Education Coordinator, Artsadmin**

Artsadmin believes that Live Art and performance can be used to develop experimental and experiential processes of involvement. Collective and individual agency is at the forefront of the creative process, and these principles are at the core of all Artsadmin education and participation projects.

The Education department at Artsadmin is a new department that has already become a thriving hub of artistic talent and ideas. Artsadmin artists have created participatory projects in the past but it was not until May 2007 that a department was created specifically for the development of young people wishing to engage in Live Art. The start of this department coincided with the opening of the redesigned Toynbee Studios. Since May 2007 we have set up and successfully:

- Carried out 12 public participation projects
- Run 50 educational events
- Worked with 20 artists
- Formed successful links with 10 further education institutions in the London Boroughs of Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham.

The aims and objectives of the Artsadmin Education department are to offer its participants long-term engagement within Live Art and performance, engagement that goes beyond the one-off participatory project. We aim to:

- Adopt the same style of support and artistic nurturing that Artsadmin provides to its artists and associates. We aim to offer this to young people from various backgrounds and disciplines to further their artistic practice.
- Develop a London-wide network of young, emerging artistic practitioners.
- Create educational projects in collaboration with our users; e.g. teachers, young people and artists.
- Provide a long-term engagement with our projects.
- Provide time, space and guidance to individuals in order to support artistic networks to grow and to respond to the needs of these groups.

A programme that encompasses all of these aims and objectives is the Artsadmin Youth Board. We believe that a successful, flourishing Youth Board can have a great impact on an arts organisation.



Artsadmin Youth Board  
Photo: Calvin Condry

Joshua Sofaer  
*Getting to Know You*  
at Mulberry School for Girls, 19 May 2008  
Photo: Emmy Minton



Artsadmin Summer School  
created and directed by Mem Morrison  
July–August 2009  
Photo: Marine Thevenet

The Youth Board is a really important part of keeping in touch with young peoples' expectations of Artsadmin. They are a barometer of current thinking and interests and their active steering of future activity alongside Sam Trotman, the Education Coordinator, ensures that the projects that we make are the ones that young people want to engage with.

Gill Lloyd OBE, Director, Artsadmin

## The Youth Board

The Youth Board is a group of eight people aged 16–25, from a diverse range of backgrounds, who have taken part in past educational projects at Artsadmin and have wanted to continue working with the organisation to create new opportunities for other young people, and in doing so enrich or develop their own artistic practices.

Although the idea of the Youth Board is not innovative in itself (most organisations have a group of young people they work with on a regular basis, whether it be a young theatre group or a shadow board) our Youth Board is innovative in its integration with Artsadmin. It is distinctive in that the Board creates opportunities for other young people with artistic and producing freedom within Artsadmin's public programme. The Youth Board not only advises on all the participatory projects run by our artists for young people but also initiates, produces and delivers their own participatory programme supported and mentored by the Artsadmin Education Coordinator, Sam Trotman.

The Youth Board's deep rooted-ness within the organisation provides its participants with a safe and nurturing space to experiment with new ideas and processes. The Youth Board has decided to focus on two areas of interest:

- An open dialogue event, called *Talking With Your Mouth Full (TWYMF)*. This is a space for the Youth Board to host, produce and deliver workshops and events to encourage engagement in Live Art from other young people outside of their existing networks.
- Personal and professional development of the Board members themselves as facilitators, artists, programmers and producers.

These two areas go hand in hand and influence and enrich each other. It also allows for the Board members to work with other young people; they are currently creating the Youth Board Advisory Network (YBAN), made of up to 30–50 young people who get involved in Youth Board initiatives, meet, get involved in various projects led by young people and offer each other feedback and dialogue.

## The Public Face of the Youth Board

### *Talking With Your Mouth Full (TWYMF)*

*TWYMF*'s bi-annual open space debates and discussions act as a tool for the reflection and development of the Board. The event is set up to review the education work at Artsadmin. The first *TWYMF* event took place in December 2008 and attracted fifty young people, some of whom had never engaged with an arts organisation, as well as other more seasoned project attendees. The group initiated and answered questions such as "How do I engage in critical dialogue once I have left an institution," and "How can I continue making work?" The Youth Board acts as advisors and facilitators to both answer questions and signpost individuals to other forums.

The Youth Board devise, market, deliver and evaluate the whole event. They plan to continue to use this format to evaluate the educational offerings within Live Art and performance, as well as push their own work forward.

Artsadmin believes it is key to the Youth Board's development that they make work that interacts with the public. The Board flourishes because it is given space to breath outside of its educational confines.

*TWYMF* was the thing I am most proud of last year. I can't believe we managed to do so much and have such an impact on people. I feel like it provides a space where young people from loads of different places can really be heard and that we will respond to their feedback. Plus I get to meet loads of cool new people and find out what they have been up to.

Rui Rodrigues, Youth Board member since 2007

This event also provides the Board with continuous first hand research that shapes the future projects the group set up. A good example of this is the Youth Board *Scrifs*. At the *TWYMF* open space debate, participants said that making and developing new work was particularly difficult when there isn't an audience or space to get feedback from apart from showing it to friends. This was a key factor that had stopped a number of them from making work. The participants, many of whom come from a theatre background (whether that be drama higher education, youth theatre or community theatre) did not have their work critiqued even within an arts institution and were unaware of the value a critique could bring to their work.

From the feedback gathered at the *TWYMF* event, the Youth Board spent four months developing innovative ways to solve some of the problems that were raised. The Board collaboratively devised the *Scrit*, part scratch performance, part critique. The *Scrit* is a multidisciplinary critique that is held at Toynbee Studios bi-monthly for young people and emerging artists wishing to get an outside eye on their work and to open up a critical space for the development of their work. The *Scrifs* are hosted by Youth Board members, who are occasionally joined by invited artists. They are unique in their offer of giving young people from a variety of disciplines a chance to receive and offer constructive criticism to help support new work at a vital and early stage of their artistic careers. One of the strengths of the *Scrit* group is that they are not a peer group, they are a changing group of people available to anyone, at any stage of their practice, on a drop-in basis to help nurture the seeds of their creative ideas.

The great thing about the *Scrit* is that I get to comment on and see the development of projects that aren't just fine art. I can use the skills I have learnt for viewing fine art and apply these to dance, devised theatre or multimedia work. It is also great to get feedback from people about my own work who are outside of my university or friendship group. It is a great privilege to be able to see others work at an exciting developmental stage.  
Giles Bunch, Youth Board member since 2008

The variety of disciplines and experience within the Youth Board means that people who attend the *Scrits* can receive a detailed and intimate exchange of opinions on their work. The fact that the *Scrits* operate on a sign-up and drop-in system means that, unlike a peer group where you have a relationship with the other members, the *Scrit* allows for more constructive and honest feedback on the work being presented.  
Carly Halse, Youth Board member since 2007

## The Private Face of the Youth Board: Personal Development

Another important aspect of the Youth Board is that they are supported in their personal development as artists, producers and directors. The group receive regular support and advice sessions, tailor made to their individual needs, with the Education Coordinator and the Advisory Service, as well as advice and support from the rest of the Youth Board. This not only pushes the Board's own work but enables Artsadmin to be aware of the group's aspirations and goals, and to match these with other artistic opportunities available beyond Artsadmin.

The Youth Board can deliver high quality, participatory projects because Artsadmin supports them as both artists and arts professionals in their own right. This personalised approach is key to their engagement and it is this area that we are looking to open up further, by creating a more formalised youth network with other organisations.

Artsadmin is my London home, I know I can turn up in the middle of an existential crisis, be offered a cup of tea and for someone to sort me out and push me forward with belief in my ideas. I know that we all (the Youth Board) feel comfortable in Toynbee Studios and that the Artsadmin staff are genuinely interested in what we are doing. Everyone is totally helpful and open to new ideas. All the staff get behind our ideas whether it's the big bosses, studio managers, cafe staff, box office people or building team, they all pull together to make our ideas reality.  
Carly Halse

The Youth Board has a simple structure on which they can build. They meet quarterly to review the work they and other educational artists have done throughout the three months, which gives the group a chance to reflect upon achievements and pitfalls of their work and for it to grow in new directions. The group also meets annually with the Artsadmin Board of Trustees to feedback on their work and present the results of their AGM. Beyond these five sessions the group are able to create their own timetable

and liaise with Artsadmin staff to book space and resources when they are needed. Besides working in collaboration with the Education Coordinator, they also work with the building team, the studios and administrative manager, and the marketing and development team. This combination of experts provides the group with skills that are transferable to many roles within arts organisations as well as their artistic practices. The group manage their own time and can decide whether they wish to engage in other education projects that Artsadmin runs; for example Youth Board members are also Artsblog bloggers or involved in socio-political art projects such as *C.R.A.S.H.*

## How Do We Know This is Working?

The Artsadmin Youth Board has been held in a position of best practice by many larger arts organisations. They have had consultations with the Whitechapel Gallery who sought advice from the group in setting up their Young Creatives programme; they have consulted with the Barbican education team who are looking to develop their own ongoing youth programme; and the group has been used as a model in the development of the Create Young Peoples Advisory Group and thus influenced the development of the *Create Young Programmers* project being set up in 2009.

Many of our Youth Board members have joined us at the very early stages of their careers. Members have come from a range of backgrounds, including BTEC diploma courses, the doors of Brixton nightclubs, and Central School of Speech and Drama. They have gone on to not only create a radical, flourishing participation programme at Artsadmin but have also developed as artists and arts professionals in their own right. To name but a few of the Board members' individual achievements so far, they have:

- Performed at Zoo Art Fair
- Gone on to study Fine Art at Middlesex University
- Performed with cutting edge theatre makers You Me Bum Bum Train
- Assistant directed *Why I Don't Hate White People* by Lemn Sissay
- Coordinated the education programme for *The People Show 120*
- Showed work as part of the *Venice Biennale*
- Created Live Art community projects with East Ham youth groups

The Artsadmin Youth Board gives me a chance to make collective projects and to take full responsibility for the work that we make. I have the chance to work with new people with other skills and collectively come up with and carry out ideas that are totally supported by the staff at Artsadmin. Through the Board I have been able to develop as both an artist and an arts professional simultaneously. I have learnt vital skills such as how to facilitate workshops, write lesson plans and make sure everyone within a group can be heard and contribute towards the task in hand. When I turn 25 and have to leave the Youth Board I will continue to work as an advocate for the work we create and hope to bring this model to other arts organisations.

Phoebe Davies, Youth Board member since 2008





# Legacies

# Critical Writing

Live Art Development Agency

## Introduction

### By Lois Keidan, Live Art Development Agency

Given that Live Art is an innovative, itinerant and interdisciplinary area of practice that often seems to neither fit nor belong within received cultural frameworks, it has often had a challenging relationship with critical writing. For many years Live Art has, on the one hand, figured as the subject of scholarly study and discourse, and on the other, as an object of derision by art form-bound mainstream critics. Of course there have always been exceptional exceptions to these extremes, but it is only in the last decade or so that Live Art has found a broader recognition and that, more importantly, different kinds of critical dialogues about Live Art practices have come into their own.

Mary Paterson writes in the following case study: “it is perhaps because there is no long history of critical writing ... that live artists and writers can think outside the normal constraints of a critical text”. It is this kind of thinking, alongside the advent of on-line platforms for cultural debate, the revolutions in the possibilities of publishing and distribution, the development of new curatorial frameworks, the emergence of Performance Studies and investigations into the relationship between practice and discourse, that have shifted the critical discourses about and around Live Art dramatically and demonstrably.

The proliferation of the field of Performance Studies and its investigations into the cultural values and possibilities of performance, coupled with the Higher Education sector’s more general recognition of practice-based research, have generated a new wave of practitioners who have a more fluid approach to the old distinctions between artists, writers and scholars – with many, such as Dominic Johnson, wearing all three hats at the same time. Even those who define themselves as artists, such as Tim Etchells, engage with critical discourses through commissioned writing for books, lectures, catalogues and journals or through their own blogs. Projects such as the Live Art Development Agency’s *Live Culture at Tate Modern* or *Performing Rights* events are exploring new curatorial strategies to frame the relationships and convergences between practice and discourse. On-line platforms such as Lyn Gardner’s *Guardian* blog, *Open Dialogues* and the Institute of Ideas’ *Culture Wars Forum* are influencing cultural debates and engaging audiences in ways that much print based journalism can only aspire to. And finally, on-line stores and the capacity to produce publications and dvds on-demand are freeing up all kinds of curators and artists from the old, often exclusive and expensive, models of publishing and distribution.

Live Art UK’s *The Live Art Almanac* (2008) illustrates many of these developments. The *Almanac* was a collection of ‘found writing’ compiled following an open call for recommendations. Composed of articles, interviews, blogs, emails, letters, and obituaries from 2006 to 2008, the *Almanac* reflected a broad range of writing by artists, journalists, scholars, curators and thinkers about and around Live Art, and was printed and distributed on an on-demand basis. With over 500 copies produced to date, it has proved to be a best seller on *Unbound*, the Live Art Development Agency’s on-line shop for Live Art books, dvds and limited editions.

In the process of finding new ways to critically engage with Live Art and new platforms to disseminate such thinking and writing, the critical dialogues surrounding Live Art have provoked exciting questions about the nature and role of cultural commentary and critical discourse themselves.

As part of *Live Art UK: Into Action*, Live Art UK initiated *Writing From Live Art* (2006 – 2008). *Writing From Live Art* was conceived to provide an opportunity for new writers, or writers who were new to Live Art, to engage with Live Art and move towards seeing their writing published. *Writing From Live Art* was specifically focused upon supporting writers to become commentators on Live Art, and encouraged writing that is critical but accessible, and engaged new audiences and readers. The eight writers who took part in the scheme achieved publication in a diverse range of print and on-line platforms such as *Yishu Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, *Dance Theatre Journal*, *Real Time Arts Magazine*, *Performa 07 Blog*, *A-N's Interface* and *Culture Wars*; instigated an on-line blog (*Writing From Live Art* blogspot); and undertook writers' residencies within events such as Finland's *ANTI Festival*. More interestingly, during the course of *Writing From Live Art*, and as one of its key legacies, several of the writers initiated new formal and conceptual approaches to a critical engagement with art, events, and audiences through projects such as *Open Dialogues* and *We Need to Talk About Live Art* for the *National Review of Live Art* 2008.

For the Live Art UK case studies, the Live Art Development Agency commissioned a case study on critical writing from Mary Paterson, who participated in *Writing From Live Art*. Mary was particularly invited to consider the ways that writing about and around Live Art can contribute to broader cultural discourses, encourage new ways of thinking about art, and engage with audiences.

## Case Study: Critical Writing and Live Art in the UK

### By Mary Paterson

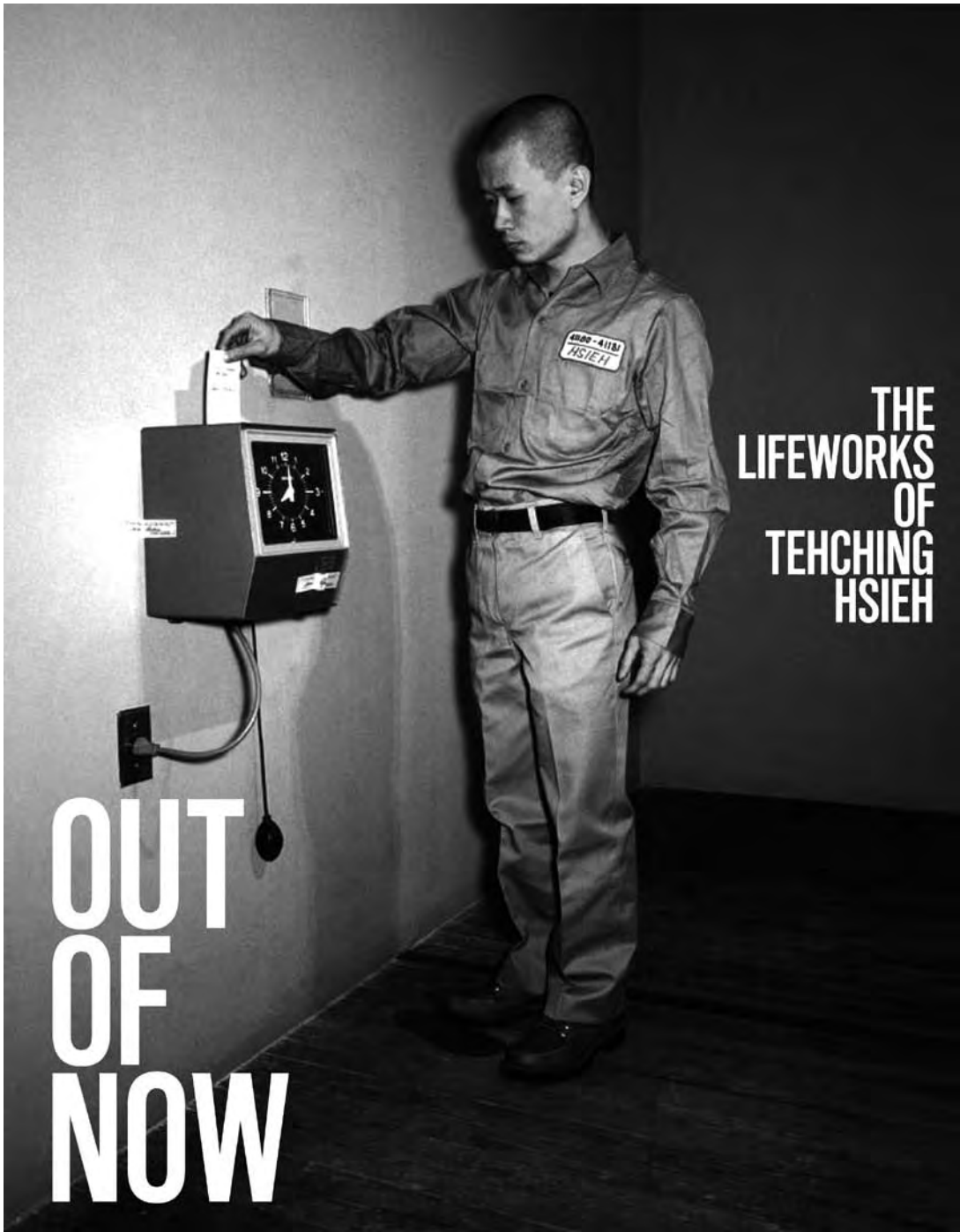
*Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh* (2009) is a monograph of the Taiwanese artist, written by the writer and curator Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh. Like a conventional monograph, it features photographs of the artist's work, descriptions of his practice, and biographical detail. It contains an essay by Adrian Heathfield, an interview with the artist, and responses to Hsieh's work from other writers, artists and historians. Like a conventional monograph, *Out of Now* is a sustained and detailed analysis of the work of a single practitioner, which situates his work inside familiar histories of art and performance. It has a vital role in providing information and disseminating knowledge; it is, says Heathfield, "somewhat of a restorative act"<sup>1</sup>, seeking to place Hsieh inside established thought.

Unlike a conventional monograph, however, the first sentence in *Out of Now* declares it is a work of fiction. "This is a story", says Heathfield, on the first page.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the project of *Out of Now* – that is, the project of writing critically about the performance artist Tehching Hsieh – confronts some significant problems when faced with the artist's work itself. Firstly, there is the duration of Hsieh's performances; his lifeworks consist of year long pieces that emerge through time instead of persisting despite it (like, for instance, a sculpture). Secondly, there is Hsieh's relationship with the institutions in which *Out of Now* wants to mark his place; from 1983 to 1999 Hsieh carried out a thirteen year performance of voluntary exclusion from the artworld, an action which partly accounts for his outsider status. And thirdly, it's not immediately clear which strand of art he should be included in, or excluded from, in the first place. Are his durational performances, documented in photographs and film, a form of visual art? Are their physical constraints a type of bodily sculpture? Is this performance? Or is it conceptual art?

In short, as a piece of critical writing *Out of Now* has to use words that are fixed on a page to represent an artist who works with the material of time. Through a literary form tied to the institution of art, *Out of Now* has to describe an artist who chose to absent himself from the institution. What emerges is a book that does not obscure these problems, but brings them to light. For example, apart from Heathfield, the contributors do not submit essays but letters to Hsieh; like Hsieh's work itself, these letters are a mark of difference in time – difference between the person who writes them and the person she is writing to. In order to represent Hsieh's thirteen year absence from the artworld, the book shows a series of blank pages – one for each excluded year. Here, where words declare their own contingency in time, or stop altogether, is where writing sees its own limits. This is what Heathfield meant when he said that the book is a story. Not the story. Not an accumulation of facts. Nevertheless, it is not fiction either. Instead, it is an attempt, through critical writing, to meet the work of Tehching Hsieh.

1. *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh*, Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh (Live Art Development Agency, London and MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2009), p. 12

2. *Ibid.*, p. 11



**OUT  
OF  
NOW**

**THE  
LIFEWORKS  
OF  
TEHCHING  
HsIEH**

*Out of Now*  
Tehching Hsieh

# WE NEED TO TALK

about Live Art

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Julia Bardsley, Hannah Wasileski, Clod Ensemble,  
Marcia Farquhar, Claire, Augusto Corrieri

EDITS THE LIVING CRAP  
OUT OF SCHUBERT

A LOADED  
BLANK  
CANVAS

EAVESDROPPING ON A  
CONVERSATION

THEATRE (CAPITAL T)

ANONYMOUS  
& BEIGE

THE IBIS IN  
GLASGOW

I WASN'T REALLY  
FEELING IT

Friday, 8 Feb 2008

Writers for *We Need to Talk about Live Art* are: Tim Atack, Rachel Lois Clapham, Mary Paterson and Theron Schmidt.

We're here to spark debate and stimulate conversation. Each writer's opinions are personal, unfiltered, unspun and not necessarily shared by the group.

Disagree? Leave your comments at the front desk, contact us at [www.writingfromliveart.co.uk](http://www.writingfromliveart.co.uk), or come talk to us at the NRLA.

*We Need to Talk about Live Art* is an independent project and is not affiliated with the National Review of Live Art.



*Out of Now* is a useful starting point to look at critical writing in relationship to Live Art, because the problems it faces are not unique. Typically, Live Art lives and dies over a fixed period of time – a performance is an experience in history, as opposed to an object that stands outside it (or appears to). Historically, Live Art has had a troubled relationship with mainstream culture – in 1993, Peggy Phelan described it as the “runt of the litter” of artistic practices, although that perception is rapidly changing.<sup>3</sup> And perhaps most importantly, Live Art is often situated between artistic practices and discourses. Taking inspiration from painting, sculpture, theatre and other types of performance, Live Art is neither constrained by the institutions of a single genre nor buffeted by cultural tradition. As a result, the search for writerly solutions in *Out of Now* (if not the solutions themselves) is not unique either. The generic freedom of Live Art, in other words, rubs off on the texts that are written about it.

That is not to say that critical writing about Live Art is always experimental. In many cases, conventional forms of writing are an effective way of communicating the work. C. Carr’s evocative reviews for the New York paper *The Village Voice*, for example, both describe performances of Live Art to people who weren’t there, and put them in context. As such, they are important historical documents and advocates for Live Art. Carr’s articles about Karen Finley in the 1980s and 1990s not only analysed Finley’s work, but also gave her a profile at a time when she was being silenced elsewhere;<sup>4</sup> now, Carr’s texts serve as record of that cultural moment, and form part of that cultural moment itself. In the UK today, there is still a strong desire for accessible, critical writing on contemporary Live Art. In 2006, Live Art UK set up a project called *Writing From Live Art*, which was designed to encourage new writers and new writing on Live Art, for audiences outside the academy. The project was a success, and over two years it fostered relationships between artists, writers and publishers and led directly to the publishing of texts on Live Art in the arts press.

But *Writing From Live Art* also shone a light on the ways that traditional forms of critical writing fail to meet the challenges of writing about performance. The traditional newspaper review, for instance, is short, contains a judgement and is designed to inform people about what to go and see. That is why a review of the latest blockbuster at the Tate Gallery or the Globe Theatre is ideally shaped to describe the show, rate its merits and help readers decide how to spend their weekend. Indeed, in the eighteenth-century journals, where the genre of critical writing emerged, these kinds of art event were the ones for which the review was specifically formed. But if Live Art is often (but not exclusively) either too long or too short to be seen like an exhibition or a play, then a review cannot point audiences to tomorrow’s performance. And if Live

3. Unmarked: The Politics of Performance, Peggy Phelan (*Routledge, London, 1993*), p. 148. Gavin Butt made this observation at the Arts Writing Symposium, *Whitechapel Art Gallery, Friday 19th June 2009*.

4. Karen Finley was one of four American artists whose proposed funding from the National Endowment of the Arts was vetoed, in 1990, on the grounds of obscenity. Finley was essentially silenced by the decision, which not only damaged her income but also her reputation. See C. Carr ‘Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts: the Taboo art of Karen Finley’ in Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan, eds., *Acting Out: Feminist Performances (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1993)*, pp. 141 - 151



Art often (but not exclusively) operates between artistic discourses, then it may be difficult to describe within the tight constraints of a review format. Moreover, if a work of Live Art is difficult to define, how can it be judged in terms both the critic and the reader understand? While reviews of Live Art certainly increase the artwork's profile in the present and in the future, the traditional review format is not always a good fit. In fact, the success of *Writing From Live Art* itself is testament to this fact – if the dual problem of visibility and suitability did not exist, there would be no need to support writing about Live Art in the first place.

*Writing From Live Art* writers found one solution to this situation by side-stepping the rigours of mainstream publishing altogether. In 2008, they produced *We Need to Talk About Live Art*, in response to the annual showcase, the *National Review of Live Art* held in Glasgow. *We Need to Talk About Live Art* was a low-fi, daily self-published pamphlet featuring reviews of the previous day's shows. Like Heathfield's declaration that "this is a story", the crude presentation of this writing was designed to show that it was not the last word. The front pages declared the writing was "unfiltered" and "unspun". And by responding to the work in a short period of time – there were less than twenty four hours between the work of art and the published review – the writers hoped to create an equivalent for the liveness of the performance itself. In this way, *We Need to Talk ...* aimed to meet the audience and the artists on their own terms. Like the work in the festival, *We Need to Talk ...* tried to produce texts that were contingent, experimental and open to interpretation; like the audience, *We Need to Talk ...* tried to produce writing that was questioning, provocative and willing to be challenged. Artist interviews and audience comments were published alongside the reviews. The net effect of all these conditions – the crude presentation, the fast turnaround, the self-conscious contingency, the inclusion of many voices – was an attempt to stitch critical writing into the fabric of Live Art itself. This was not writing after art but writing *towards* art; critical writing that approaches its subject as a creative challenge.

If *Out of Now* suggests that a formal and conceptual freedom in writing about Live Art derives from sympathy with the artwork, then projects like *We Need to Talk About Live Art* suggest that this freedom is – in part – borne of necessity. It is the necessity to find an appropriate form of publication. On one hand, critical writers want to match the affect of the Live Art that is their subject. On the other, they need to think creatively in order to avoid the pitfalls of the formats of mainstream critical writing, which have been moulded in response to different types of work. And yet, it is because Live Art is 'difficult' to write about that critical writing is so important as document and as profile. This means that critical writing on Live Art is prompted by artists and by publishers to step away from tradition, and into the path of the work itself.

In some cases, the influence of the artist is overt. In 2007, for instance, two writers from *Writing From Live Art* blogged about the *SPILL Festival of Performance* in London. In 2009, the festival's artistic director, Robert Pacitti, invited the writers back into the heart of the programme with an extended budget and remit. *SPILL: Overspill* was a project for seven critical writers, who were given free tickets to festival performances and access to artists and production staff, in return for publishing texts on a blog over the course of the festival. These writers were not just writing about

the artists in *SPILL*, but were in their employ. As such, they broke the cardinal rule of critical writing – objective distance between writer and subject. This objectivity is how the writer gets to stand in for her reader: it makes the writer credible and the judgement assured. But breaking this relationship also freed the *Overspill* writers from reporting on the work in the festival, and gave them the opportunity to explore other, more appropriate ways of meeting it – including interviews and performative texts. This differentiation was clear when the *Overspill* blog was linked to from other sources, such as the *Guardian*; the theatre critic Lyn Gardner wrote of one piece, “it’s not a review, but it’s an alert, thoughtful response to the shows”.<sup>5</sup>

You could in fact argue that such an overt relationship between artist and writer in *SPILL:Overspill* did not break the rules of conventional art criticism, but simply demonstrated the fact that they are broken as a matter of routine. Artists and critics often know each other – sharing, as they do, professional interests, colleagues and resources – and a critic cannot, in any case, be truly objective. Objectivity in criticism, then, as in all types of text, is a fallacy. By acknowledging the artist-writer relationship, *SPILL:Overspill* proved that rich(er) writing can emerge when the onus of (false) objectivity is taken away. And similar relationships have sprung up elsewhere. *Open Dialogues*, a writing project that emerged directly from *Writing From Live Art*, has worked in this way with art festivals across the UK and in Europe. While it is dangerous to generalise about a sector that is, by definition, so diverse, it is perhaps because there is no long history of critical writing and Live Art – that is, critical writing as a genre was designed for other purposes – that live artists and writers can think outside the normal constraints of a critical text. It is also tempting to see a connection between the elective liminality of Live Art and an inherent openness to new or other forms of critical practice. Live Art does not settle in the traditions of theatre, dance, or the visual arts – so why would it settle in traditional critical writing?

But whatever the artist’s relationship, the most important element in any piece of critical writing is the reader of the text. If the traditional critic improves the reader, acting as a sort of expert everyman, then how does the writing in *Out of Now*, for instance, work? I would argue that the reader of *Out of Now* is also educated and informed by the writing. But instead of unfolding through a process of explanation, this happens through a kind of resonance of experience. The reader is not expected to absorb a presentation delivered in print, but to sift through the words on the pages, reading this self-declared story as a tale amongst others, including her own. *Out of Now* suggests a reader that fits somewhere between that conjured by the traditional, mediating critic, and that imagined by a writer of fiction. It’s a model of a reader that weaves the reader’s own responses and opinions into the writing itself. It’s a model, in other words, where artist, critic, and reader meet.

Writing that embraces formal experimentation, creativity and a shift in the role of the reader is, however, by no means unique to contemporary Live Art. In fact, this is a relational struggle that has been happening since at least the beginning of the twentieth century. Moreover, any shift away from traditional publishing points and

5. [www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2009/apr/17/lyn-gardner-theatre-tips](http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2009/apr/17/lyn-gardner-theatre-tips), accessed 21st June 2009

formats also has a weighty disadvantage – it must survive without the mechanisms for income and distribution that accompany more established forms. And yet the conditions of Live Art certainly encourage critical writing that is thoughtful and self-aware. Writers engaging with the Live Art sector experiment in order to match the temporality and discursive slipperiness of Live Art – spurred on by the double incentive of the ineffectiveness of traditional criticism, and the need to document and profile the work. The artistic imperative is the carrot, and the standing conventions of critical writing are the stick. As such, critical writing finds rich nourishment in the Live Art sector, which in turn benefits from writing's ability to spread its news. At its best, this relationship is more than the sum of its parts. When critical writing and Live Art meet, they can tell another story.

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# Archiving

Arnolfini

## By Julian Warren, Arnolfini

### Scope

Central to this case study is Arnolfini in Bristol, where I was appointed as Arnolfini's first Archivist at the beginning of 2007. The paper broadly describes and reflects upon some of the experiences of beginning to establish an archive for Arnolfini, and the particular challenges of creating an archive for materials that relate to Arnolfini's 'live' programmes. It is written from my perspective as Arnolfini's Archivist, responsible for the 'perpetual' care of the documents of Live Art within Arnolfini's collection. Nevertheless, many of the issues expressed here will be common to other similar presenting organisations who, like Arnolfini, have also generated collections of Live Art documentation from their programmes. I hope that the information included may prove useful to a range of audiences, including funders, producers, programmers and artists in considering questions relating to the 'archiving' of Live Art.

### Background

Arnolfini was established in 1961 in Bristol, in the South West of England, to "seek out challenging, often controversial and sometimes relatively unknown artists and performers, and to provide a vital showcase for their work". Since its beginnings in the 1960s, Arnolfini has actively encouraged and supported the practice of live work, and from the early 1970s Arnolfini has consistently programmed this kind of art, which has encompassed experimental music, theatre, dance and performance (work by artists whose practice might be described using the umbrella term of 'Live Art'), remnants from many of which have remained within the organisation.

During a major refurbishment project of Arnolfini's building between 2003 and 2005, over four hundred large boxes of old materials were packed away, and it is from these that Arnolfini's archive has begun to be shaped. What has survived until now has done so without any fixed policy on what should be kept, save for legislative requirements. Like, I suspect, many similar contemporary arts organisations that produce temporary exhibition and live programmes, Arnolfini's impetus remains focused on the present and near future, without concerning itself very much with what came before. Nevertheless, Arnolfini has continued to hold on to many of its documents from past projects, recognising instinctively, perhaps, that they may have a future value. As Arnolfini now approaches its fiftieth anniversary, it has begun to explore what this might be. Unlike a traditional museum housing a permanent collection of objects, the ephemeral and transient nature of Arnolfini's programmes leaves no permanent visible trace. These boxes of materials are all that remains; evidence that significant things did indeed take place, and which may now be usefully organised into an archive. Similarly, archival materials from presenters as well as an older generation of live artists are starting to find their way into National collections, such as Tate, Locus+, and the Theatre Collection at the University of Bristol, as some of those who have spent their lives making, teaching, presenting, and nurturing the practice of Live Art, deposit their collections. This, it seems to me, is important. These documents are evidence of the art form, from which the future histories of Live Art will be written and passed between generations. Live Art tends to create little in the way of traditional art objects, and this relative invisibility could result, perhaps, in its art historical profile

becoming lessened. But, in a sense, the leftover records of events are the objects of Live Art, and in order that the rich, varied and exciting culture of Live Art remains accessible to art history, it is vital that we ensure that these documents are properly cared for. Why should the documents of Live Art be accorded any less care than the more traditional objects of the museum or art gallery?

Live Art has, of course, historically had an uneasy relationship to its documentation, outwardly appearing resistant to anything that might result in its commodification. As Dr. Paul Clarke points out, many theorists have positioned performance as “antithetical to saving”, to the recording, document and archive: to quote [Peggy] Phelan, its “only life is in the present”. But many live artists continue to take great care in creating versions of their work for the camera. A seductive set of still images, for example, has the immediate value of attracting attention from funders, programmers and audiences in the first place, and is a convenient way in which something of the artist’s work might be readily be distributed and represented beyond the live event itself. A printed image fixed on paper also, of course, has a physical longevity and reliability that the ephemeral live event does not; a reasonable quality piece of printed paper well looked after should be good for at least three hundred years or so. Books published on the history of performance frequently seem to me to be as much a history of these photographs, many of which now have iconic status, as they are of the live events themselves. Often officially sanctioned by the artist or organisation, these photographs remain the privileged documents of Live Art. But what is the impression left by them? What is their relationship or proximity to the live event of which they are a part; what do they convey? Have they become like the objects in the museum? And what of the many other kinds of documents that circulate around the events of Live Art?

### Arnolfini’s Archival Documents

In terms of Live Art, Arnolfini has a potentially fantastic archival resource. Unlike the archive of an individual artist, its enduring programme of over forty years of Live Art events offers a history of Live Art practice and its diversity in the UK. As a collection, the documentation complements that from other presenting organisations such as the *National Review of Live Art* or Locus+, or the *What’s Welsh For Performance?* archive, collected by Heike Roms at Aberystwyth University. Although Arnolfini’s archive does not contain collections by individual artists, many performers with whom Arnolfini has had a sustained relationship, such as Goat Island Performance Group (Chicago), are well represented. Nevertheless, with the exceptions of Baltic and Whitechapel, Arnolfini is unusual amongst its peer organisations in having appointed an ‘in-house’ archivist.

A near complete set of Arnolfini publicity material has survived, including flyers, posters, ‘What’s-On’ brochures, invitations, and sometimes programme notes, from which basic facts of Arnolfini’s ‘live’ programme may be gathered: names of artists and titles of performances, together with their dates, times and locations (and sometimes duration), often accompanied by short descriptions of the work, and perhaps a photograph. As documents created primarily to advertise or ‘sell’ an event to a public audience prior to it taking place, they remain to a large extent bound by

this particular and partial context. Although they have a material advantage in that paper is far more robust than, say, magnetic video tape or electronic data stored digitally, they offer, at best, only a partial clue as to what the performance might actually have been like. They do not account for what actually happened, or for what it might have been like to be there.

As well as these records created for public consumption, many production papers from the mid-1980s onwards – such as proposals and draft performance synopsis, lighting plans, cue sheets, set designs, prop lists and other technical specifications – together with correspondence between Arnolfini staff and artists (including copies of contracts) also still exist, and these may prove critical to future understandings of a particular event. Indeed, these documents, mainly prepared in advance of the event, reveal much more about the context, detail and negotiation of the staging of the live event, and yet, compared to the publicity materials as a series of records, they are often frustratingly incomplete. In the context of Live Art, which neither produces ‘finished’ art object or script, the future value of these documents needs not to be underestimated.

Furthermore, since the 1980s, when video technology began to become widely available and affordable, Arnolfini has been recording much of its live programme using video cameras. There are over one hundred U-matic tapes, some 600 VHS tapes, together with several hundred mini DV tapes from the past five years or so, in the archive, alongside many sound recordings on cassette and reel-to-reel tape. The footage shot is of variable quality, depending on the nature of the performance itself (props, set, lighting, sound etc.) and the recording equipment used, but they do, of course, provide a lot of information about a performance. Sometimes there are recordings of the same performance made on different nights, as well as the promotional version of the performance shot to camera by the company or artist sent to the programmer. In some cases, there are tapes of ‘work-in-progress’ showings together with recordings of the later ‘finished’ pieces, indicating how a work developed.

## Conservation and Preservation

However, many of the videos themselves are now suffering with age. The magnetic tapes, on to which events are recorded, have a shelf-life of thirty years at best. A conservator’s report in 2007 on Arnolfini’s audio-visual materials estimated the effect of their deterioration as being an informational loss of up to 70%. Given their perilous state, he recommended not to play them unless to conserve the information by migrating it to new media. Domestic equipment is unsuitable for this process: a DVD burnt straight from a video may demonstrate a loss of up to four-fifths of the original information, the equivalent of a poor photocopy of a paper document.

The vulnerability of old video tape should not be underestimated. As a trial example, Arnolfini attempted to migrate one U-matic tape from its archive to an uncompressed digital format: a recording made of Alistair MacLennan’s durational performance that took place as part of his 1988 retrospective at Arnolfini. Related photographs and correspondence in the archive indicate the effort and care that went into the original production of the tape, now a little over twenty years old, and the copy in the



Stuart Brisley performance, Arnolfini, 1978.  
Contact sheet of photographs by Jem Southam.





Arnolfini's archive,  
the Bristol Record Office.

archive seems to be (as far as I have been able to ascertain) the only one in existence. However, the image failed to show, and, even following baking, using controlled ovens in Bristol University's Chemistry Department, in an attempt to coalesce the chemical layers of tape which become separated over time, the picture remains invisible. It is likely that the recording is now lost.

The conservation process for analogue video tape employed by the recently completed AHRC funded *National Review of Live Art Digitisation Project* at the University of Bristol Theatre Collection, involved first creating an uncompressed digital version, in order to capture all the information from the original tapes. (Most common audio-visual software, such as MPEG or JPEG for example, use compression techniques in order to save on memory space, which results in the loss of some information). From this master copy (also stored on magnetic tape), further identical digital copies could then be created so that attempts might be made to restore colour or sound quality, for example, without further risk of loss. Compressed copies can then also be produced, as appropriate, for, say, DVD or web-streaming. However, this technical process is further complicated by copyright law, which requires permission from the artist and the film maker before copies of the original tape can be made, even for conservation purposes.

Although most of the artists who have shown at Arnolfini gave permission for their work to be documented, none were asked at the time for permission to make copies for future preservation purposes. On returning now to the artist and videographer for permission to copy the material simply in order that the information on the video is not lost, it is, of course, sensible also to ask for their permission to be able to make future copies for the purposes of preservation. In addition, because digital versions can easily be made widely accessible for viewing via the internet, it would seem preferable that permission should also be sought to enable this. Archival institutions have traditionally got round this challenging and often very time consuming situation by asking the creators of material deposited with them to sign over their rights to them. In the case of Live Art, where the documentation may be the only record of an art work, it seems to give the institution sole control of the copying of, and access to, an artist's work. Relinquishing his or her rights to the documentation of their work seems to me very unsatisfactory. However, the 'Creative Commons' set of licenses (see <http://creativecommons.org>) offer a potential solution to this predicament. Working within the context of internet culture, Creative Commons allow the creators of a work to select from a set of pre-determined set of licenses to enable the digital data on which their work is stored to be shared, distributed and used – commercially or non-commercially – in accordance with the terms of the license they have chosen. The effect of this is that, although the documentation may remain in the care of Arnolfini's archive (and from where it may later be published and distributed as appropriate), all rights to the work are able to stay with the artist. Indeed, Arnolfini is currently trying to raise funds in order to begin this preservation process through the migration of tape from analogue to digital files, incorporating Creative Commons licensing as part of this process. It is only with licenses in place (Creative Commons or otherwise) that the documentation of work can be made legally available through the internet; and the internet has the potential to expose Live Art documentation from the UK to international audiences

However, once this process is complete and the records conserved through the creation and licensing of new digital files, these then need to be subject to an ongoing programme of rigorous care. The current preservation ideal is to store master copies in different locations, and using magnetic and optical base technologies (tape and hard-drive disc) in order to minimize the impact of any technical failure. But even though the storage media (the tapes and discs) may have a life of another thirty years, the software and drives needed to render the files may only be available for another ten years. Ideally, therefore, formats used to store digital files should be limited in number, and be 'open source' – in other words, the software code is publicly available, and widely used. (Proprietary formats are not recommended for archival purposes. A handy list of preferable current formats can be found at <http://www.fcla.edu/digitalArchive/pdfs/recFormats.pdf>.) These formats should be subject to review (every five to ten years), and further migrations of files to new formats made as necessary. In addition, the digital files should also be regularly error-checked for possible corruption, and new master copies created as required.

Unlike with paper records, where preserving the object preserves the record, digital records are dependent on the interplay between the digital object and technology, and we need to be aware of how vulnerable the records of Live Art practice held digitally are, even in the short to medium term.

Conserving analogue audio-visual records through digital migration is a complex, time consuming and costly process, and the archive profession as a whole is struggling to come to terms with how to care for all digital records in the long term. The *National Review of Live Art's* project to conserve over 1,200 hours of video tape (similar in size to Arnolfini's collection) took three members of staff two years to complete at a cost of almost £300,000. However, *NRLA* documentation is now freely available to view at the University of Bristol Theatre Collection, some clips from which have already been made available on-line. If Arnolfini is to take seriously the challenge of conserving its collection for future generations, its tapes must remain inaccessible, given their perilous condition, until they have been digitised. In order that the material can be accessed the conservation process now needs to be begun as soon as possible.

## Alternative Approaches

Given the inadequacies of video documentation of live events, which as well as being materially at risk often seem to fail to convey a sense of being there and from which it can sometimes be difficult to detect the essence of the work, projects that seek to develop more satisfactory and sustainable ways of describing and documenting ephemeral art work are taking place. One such investigation, together with a case study, has taken place at the University of Bristol exploring the potential of creating something like a score in order to capture the integrity of a work, from which, for example, future versions could be realisable and recognisable. Adapted from Richard Rinehart's Media Art Notation System (MANS) developed in Berkeley, California, by audio-visual conservator Stephen Gray, the Performance Art Documentation Structure (PADS) is:

a data tool intended to unite disparate parts of a performance artwork (such as videos, props/objects, stills, interviews, transcripts, notes and

plans). PADS does not attempt to replace a performance work, the PADS record or 'score' simply describes the connections between fragments of a work in order to assist researchers of performance art. Importantly, PADS also identifies who made connections between a work's constituent parts (for instance, was it the artist, the curator, the archivist or the audience member?).

Together with the artist Clare Thornton and Paul Clarke, research fellow on *Performing the Archive: The Future of the Past*, a GWR funded project based at the University of Bristol's Department of Drama, and partnered by Arnolfini and the University of Exeter, Stephen worked with the artist Richard Layzell to generate a case study based on *I Never Done Enough Weird Stuff*, first performed at the *National Review of Live Art* in 1996. More information about the project can be found at <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/nrla/case-study/>.

It is hoped that PADS will become a useful tool for documenting both past performance works and new works as they are developed. As a commissioning and presenting organisation, Arnolfini is keen to trial PADS from the beginning of the research and development of a new piece of Live Art work through to its presentation.

## Access

The value of the creation of the documentation of Live Art, and the subsequent work of conservation and preservation, is sustained in part by the demand for access to the documentation in the long term. In the past year, the web-pages of the Live Art Archives held at Bristol University Theatre Collection alone have received over 11,500 hits, and the number of specific enquiries received by the Keeper of the Live Art Archives at the Theatre Collection continues to rise. The Study Room collection at the Live Art Development Agency, which houses over 3,500 catalogued books, DVDs, videos, limited editions, journals and articles about and around Live Art, receives over 700 visits from artists, academics, and researchers each year. As younger generations of artists and researchers emerge, interest in Live Art documentation continues to grow. Even without a publicly available catalogue, Arnolfini has received over sixty research enquiries about its archival holdings in the last year. Perhaps reflecting the inter-generational shift as work becomes viewed historically, rather than as contemporary, most enquiries are focused on ephemeral art work shown by Arnolfini in the late 1960s and early 1970s, including Live Art, where the documentation has become the primary, often sole surviving, remains of the art work.

## Funding

Funding permitting, Arnolfini will have produced a catalogue of a large part of its materials by 2011, and where material has been digitised and permission granted by artists, access copies of material will be made available on the web using A Database, an open source software tool that employs a cataloguing metadata structure designed specifically to manage the documentation of Live Art.

However, the creation of an archive capable of sustaining the documentation of Live Art in the long term is both technically involved and time consuming, and necessitates additional funding requirements. Organisations like Arnolfini do not generally have direct access either to the kinds of funds available to Museum Collections, such as through MLA or Renaissance funding, or to bodies such as the AHRC, who fund University Special Collections. With limited funding opportunities available, there is a very real danger that much of this important documentary material could fall through the net of funding priorities for presenting organisations. (Having identified the Heritage Lottery Fund as its best option, Arnolfini is currently in the process of developing a bid in order to carry out the vital conservation work needed for its audio-visual materials).

## Conclusion

Archival material is able to open up the wider contexts of Live Art to a large audience. Artists, students, academics and audiences alike are able to make reference and explore this material, and discover and re-discover past works. An audience member excited by the performance they have just seen is able to access the documentation surrounding other related work that they may never have the opportunity of actually seeing live. The documentation kept in the archives also leaves open the possibility of future re-creations of, or responses to, Live Art work.

But the pre-dominance of audio-visual rather than paper based documentation, captured using a wide variety of extremely vulnerable analogue and digital media, presents the archivist with a complex and challenging situation that is further complicated by the Intellectual Property issues associated with the publishing and distribution of these materials on-line. It is this combination that places the documentation of Live Art at the forefront of archival practice, both in terms of long-term preservation and access. Indeed, the knowledge and methodologies being gained by the Live Art sector in coming to terms with this situation have much to offer the wider art constituencies concerned with the collection and care of the myriad of increasingly diffuse, fragmentary and ephemeral kinds of contemporary art.

Live Art continues to raise significant and interesting issues and problems as regards its documentation, and these are impacting on archival practice, both theoretically and practically. Being event-based art work, rather than object-based, the future histories of Live Art will depend upon the archive for their primary resource materials, and not the traditional museum collection. The keepers of the Live Art archives are crucial in supporting future publishing, critical writing and research around the practice of Live Art. Archives have a fundamental role to play in keeping this work alive, disseminating and extending an artist's practice beyond the timeframe of the live event. Indeed it is important to remain alert to the danger of the history of Live Art becoming a history of the best available documentation, and not actually of the most significant art work. Presenting organisations, such as Arnolfini, have a vital role to play in ensuring a high standard and even quality of the documentation of its programmes, together with a strategy for maintaining their preservation and access in the long term.

# In Time: A Collection of Live Art Case Studies

## A Live Art UK project

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Live Art UK members, 2003-2010: Arnolfini, Artsadmin, the Bluecoat, Chapter Arts Centre, Colchester Arts Centre, Fierce, greenroom, Live Art Development Agency and New Work Network.

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