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## **Platform: Journal of Theatre and Performing Arts**

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# Contents

Notes on Contributors 1

Editorial 5

*Chris Green and Jon Berry*

**TRANS PERFORMATIVITY: In Between States of Becoming:  
Resistance, Transformation, Emanation 10**

*AURA*

Escaping the Neoliberal Gallery 35

*Marley Treloar*

The Performance of Striking: The Past, Present, and Future of  
Picketing in the UK 58

*Sebastian Mylly*

After Work: notes towards a work-less (playful) future 74

*Chris Green*

The Future is Decided [?]: 'Playing the game' in the practice of  
Third Angel 95

*Rob Fellman*

**Earth**

**117**

*Laura Moreton-Griffiths*

**Performance Responses**

**Improvisation as the Practice of Resilience in Precarity 123**

*Zoe Katsilerou*

**Incline, Decline or The Non Upright Subject 150**

*Helen Stratford*

## Notes on Contributors

**AURA** is a transdisciplinary artist and co-founder of Asterisco. Her work has been presented at The Place, Nottingham Contemporary, Municipal Galleries of Lisbon, and CLAY (among others). She holds a MA in Performance Making by Goldsmiths and a BA in Fine Arts & Intermedia by ESAP and Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk.

**Jon Berry** is a playwright and researcher currently based at Royal Holloway, University of London. His academic work centres around contemporary metaphysics of theatre looked at through the work of Deleuze and Guattari, with a particular interest in the ontology of the political in Welsh 21st-century plays. His plays have been performed across the UK, and he has been awarded with a Theatre503 503Five award. He writes for Kitchen Table Endless Horizon, and is co-commissioning editor at Common Tongue Press (for more information see: [jonberry.substack.com](http://jonberry.substack.com))

**Dr Rob Fellman** holds a doctorate from the University of Sheffield through which he collaborated with Third Angel performance company in assessing the possible conditions for longevity in the UK arts sector. He has also worked on cultural evaluation projects with the National Cultural Fund of Bulgaria and the University of Manchester.

**Dr Chris Green** is a lecturer in performance at Edge Hill University and an artist who works under the name greenandowens with Katheryn Owens. They recently passed their viva for their fully collaborative, co-authored practice research PhD at the University of Plymouth. This research is centered on experiences of millennial precarity, drawing on philosophies of hauntology and lost futures (published in *Performance Research and Studies in Theatre & Performance*). Their work is due to be published in the 'On Care' edition of *Performance Research* and in the book *Rethinking Barthes through Performance*. They are also in the process of developing new research on friendship, leisure, and performance.

**Milo Harries** is a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge, writing on dramaturgies of encounter in the context of the climate crisis. His work has appeared in *Critical Stages/Scènes Critiques*, *CTR*, *Platform*, and *IJPADM*. Milo is also an opera singer and coach, and has worked at the Royal Opera House, Glyndebourne, and Opera North (see [www.miloharries.com](http://www.miloharries.com)).

**Grace Joseph** is a theatre director, access worker, and PhD researcher at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her practice-based PhD is shaped by ongoing collaborations with disabled-led theatre companies, and inter-

rogates the aesthetics of access in both rehearsal and performance. At Goldsmiths, she co-convenes the Performance Research Forum, the Department of Theatre and Performance's public research event series. As a theatre director, Grace has trained at the Young Vic, worked at Shakespeare's Globe and Hampstead Theatre, and developed new writing with Camden People's Theatre and Battersea Arts Centre. She has directed and lectured at Drama Studio London and Central School of Speech and Drama, and has a Level 3 in British Sign Language.

**Zoe Katsilarou** is a maker, performer and educator with background in dance-theatre, devised & socially engaged theatre, polyphonic singing and improvisation. Originally from Greece, she lives in West Yorkshire and works across the North of England and Scotland as a freelance practitioner and lecturer in Performing Arts at Leeds Beckett University (part-time). Zoe's research and practice incorporate dance, theatre and live music to examine relationships between choreography and storytelling, and the poetic qualities these can evoke. Zoe uses her performances as a way of reflecting on her observations of the socio-political and ecological of her everyday life, and hopes that it will evoke pertinent discussions between her and her audiences. Her writing has been presented at a number of international conferences. Zoe is a creative associate with Stand and Be Counted Theatre with whom she offers creative and leadership skills to those seeking sanctuary in the UK. Zoe is member of the Artist Advisory Group (2023-2025) at Yorkshire Dance and company member at Speedwell Dance.

**Laura Moreton-Griffiths** is a transdisciplinary artist and writer of speculative fiction, who makes politically charged works that question the world and search for collaborative agency. She works with a range of traditional processes, simple interactivity, and broadcast technologies. Her projects craft critical theory and philosophical enquiry, with personal vulnerability and humour, taking audiences by the hand, into different experiences of history past, present, future, and other realities: all linked by her belief that art is a powerful weapon against rising global authoritarianism.

**Sebastian Mylly** is a PhD researcher in the Department of Drama at Queen Mary University of London. His research focuses on the scripting and audiences of protest with an interdisciplinary approach—combining theatre and performance studies and the study of contentious politics.

**Katheryn Owens** is an artist-academic who works under the name greenandowens with Chris Green. They recently completed the viva for their co-authored practice-research PhD titled 'Performance Writing, Objects and Millennial Precarity: a co-authored PaR exploration between

friends' at the University of Plymouth, UK. Their research is centred on experiences of millennial precarity (housing, labour, time), drawing on philosophies of hauntology and lost futures (published in *Performance Research and Studies in Theatre & Performance*). Central to this research is the potentiality of friendship, hospitality and art making as ways to reimagine the future and how producing slow forms of object making and DIY practices fit into this. Their performance writing practice often takes the form of walks, sound, text-based scores, craft, and zines. In 2022 they were commissioned by the Whitworth to make *Borderlines*, a walking performance exploring queer hidden borders in the city of Manchester as part of a Suzanne Lacy retrospective. Katheryn works as an associate lecturer and in hospitality; the experience of which is reflected in the research.

**Dr Helen Stratford** is a UK-based artist, architect, writer, educator and researcher with a social practice and practice-based PhD in 'Feminist Performative Architectures: making place in and with public space' from Sheffield University (2021). Her work has been exhibited widely, including Oslo Architecture Triennale, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Kettle's Yard and Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge. She is a Senior Lecturer in Architecture at Sheffield Hallam University. Informed by her lived experience of chronic pain, she is currently exploring crip time (en)counters with public space. Most recently, this includes 'Seats at the Table: Co-designing Equity in the Public Realm' project with The DisOrdinary Architecture Project and Re:Fabricate collective for London Festival of Architecture 2023.

**Marley Treloar** is an artist and PhD researcher. She is a member of the Art Space & The City research group, in the Centre for Postdigital Cultures at Coventry University and her research focuses on embedding social art practices through placements, residences and collaborations with arts institutions. She is part of the SPACEX-RISE network, an ongoing project funded by the European Union's HORIZON 2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Research and Innovation Staff Exchange (RISE) (see website for further details: <https://www.spacex-rise.org/>).

**Amy Terry** is a theatre-maker and practice-based PhD candidate at Royal Holloway, University of London. They hold an MA in Text and Performance from RADA/ Birkbeck. Their current research focuses on postdramatic playwriting methodologies as an intersectional way of working for queer, trans\*, and working-class practitioners. As a writer and performer, they have presented work at Camden People's Theatre and are in the process of creating a queer touring show in association with Farnham Maltings. They are currently the dramaturgy mentor for *Gabriel* by Clare Bayley, a collaboration between University College, Oxford and Oxford Playhouse.

**Laura Vorweg** is a visiting lecturer and doctoral researcher at Royal Holloway, University of London and has previously worked as a director, assistant director, and staff producer in opera and theatre. Her research explores the relationship between performer training and interdisciplinary performance practice within theatre and opera and seeks to examine the ways in which embodied physical skills are taught, learnt, maintained, and adapted within professional practice. Laura has contributed chapters to *Interdisciplinary Arts: Contemporary Perspectives*, published by the University of Malta Press, and *Time and Performer Training*, published by Routledge.



# Editorial

*Chris Green and Jon Berry*

What happens to political thought, practice, and imagination when it loses hold on 'the future'? It goes into crisis. The analytic, psychological, and libidinal structures of 20th century revolutionary politics were beholden to the temporal form of the future – it even gave the name to the first movement of the avant-garde: Futurism. The future was on the side of the revolution. It was a great and empowering myth, but few believe it any longer: the future is over. Its last vestiges were squandered in the schemes of a heavily futurized financial capitalism. (Berardi 3)

It could be said that we are living in the end times. Though this is not the end of history, as Francis Fukuyama once infamously stated at the end of the 20th century. Instead, this is *an* end of history, a curtain call for the myth of the saviour of humanity, Neoliberal Capitalism. Instead of delivering on its promise of growth without end via the sage of the free market, humanity has engendered a system of devastation. Through its desire for more, Neoliberal Capitalism has created monumental wealth for the few and destitution for the many (monumental wealth disparity), ecological disaster for the planet, and a highly destructive logic of casualisation/privatisation which threatens our most precious of public services. Our present of over-financialization and growth could be seen to be the source of what philosopher Jean Baudrillard describes as the melancholia of systems, a 'brutal disaffection that characterises our saturated systems'. (Baudrillard 162)

However, it is in this ending that we could find hope. Performance and art are in a uniquely privileged position to create space to open the imagination to be able to access what we need to bring into being a better world. As Vienne Chan notes, 'art benefits the art maker because it lets us

imagine something else. And it creates a desire for change. Art may not create change itself, but without this desire, there will be no transformation (in a democratic society)' (Chan). It is this potential for imagining and re-imagining that we hope to open up onto in this issue of Platform. While the future prescribed to many today is bleak, we hope to identify the necessary potentialities that performance and art can help to bring forth.

It would be remiss of us not to mention the sheer concentration of violence that pervades society at time of writing. The UK is in the midst of one of the worst cost of living crises in recent history, spurred on by a reckless economic plans enacted by an unelected Prime Minister; amongst numerous devastating wars happening across the world, Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues to cause devastation; Israel's bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza and other Palestinian territories in response to the Hamas attacks has brought death and devastation to an already tense region. Yet it is in the face of these tragedies that we are seeing renewed calls for change: calls for an immediate ceasefire grow from all sides of the political and identity spectrum, notably with Jewish communities organising with Jewish Voice for Peace to take over Grand Central Station to demand an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, wearing t-shirts emblazoned with anti-war slogans that mirrored the Act Up demonstrations of the 1990s. However, we are alarmed to hear of artists, curators, producers, and actors, are losing their jobs, being uninvited from speaking engagements and even having their security put at risk for participating in calls for action against war. Yet, even in the face of structural and state violence, calls for peace continue, driven by an imagination of a future founded in the possibility of peace (and hope) for all.

The authors in this issue of Platform are comprised of artists, researchers, practitioners, makers, and people in the world. Their essays and creative contributions in this issue explore a diverse range of subjects that seek to address a variety of possible ways that we might begin to reimagine the

future, through queer structural critique, performance responses, embodied experiences of performance, experiencing art installations, and explorations of different models of finance. We are happy to present these contributions with you and wish to invite you to think alongside them to re-imagine the future that we want to bring into being for ourselves and for each other.

Aura da Fonseca's paper explores the poetic experiences of transitioning as a transfeminine person, explored through their solo performance *7=8* (2012), the text is brought together in a stylistic way that is divided into seven parts. The analysis of the performance offers the reader a way to think about what it is to transition and is an embodied understanding of moving towards the future where the live performance is reperformed through the text, where reader becomes audience and witness to the work.

Marley Treloar's illustrated essay speculates the possibilities of alternative economic models that would allow galleries the means to embed social practices within their spaces. The essay highlights the difficulties facing the cultural sectors and the barriers to funding that are being faced by arts organisations because of relentless cuts and the damage caused by Covid-19. However, Treloar offers fresh insights for alternative models of funding and of the structures that arts organisations operate, and to maximise on the means they have available to them—one example is to rethink how Artsadmin use their café space at Toynbee studios. In rethinking these infrastructures Treloar draws on social, and community engaged arts practices from the 1960s to 1990s to rethink future economies.

Sebastian Mylly's contribution offers a reflection on the recent resurgence of industrial action as a 'performance of striking' and reflects on the goals and functions of these strikes. Mylly argues that the purpose of these strikes has shifted away from being solely about having an economic impact and are now instead more focused on the societal impacts, the space of the picket line they suggest has become a space where other forms of relational

activities take place. The article frames these protests through the lens of performance studies, in so doing the actions are able to be read as performance, in so doing building an argument about the 'use' of striking and its connection to current socio-economic issues and inequalities.

Chris Green's article explores concepts of post-work theory and spare time as possible ways to re-imagine our relationship to labour, Green offers engagement with art as a possible way to use our time. This is done through two examples, the first is their embodied engagement and experiences of seeing *After Work* (2022), an exhibition held at South London Gallery that included work by Céline Condorelli with Ben Rivers and Jay Bernard where Condorelli was invited to make a playground in a nearby housing estate. The exhibition includes a film and some play-like sculptures, the second example discussed is the group show *In the Meantime Mid-day Comes Around* held at Kunsthalle Wien in Vienna which explored our relationships with work.

Rob Fellman's contribution is a piece of performative writing that exists somewhere between a game, a set of rules or provocations, and critical writing that takes the twenty-eight-year career of the contemporary performance company Third Angel as its subject to explore the ever-increasing precarity of artists and theatre companies. The article draws on a range of Third Angel's approaches to making to reflect on wider socio-economic conditions that are impacting the wider arts and cultural sector, pointing forward towards possible tactics for survival of performance companies, that could take the form of the rules of the game laid out by Fellman.

Laura Moreton-Griffiths' short story *Earth* acts as a grounding for the next section of the journal. Set in a future overrun by techno-neco-capital, Moreton-Griffiths imagines the challenges emerging from the interplay between technics and society. Crafting a sense of wireloom claustrophobia, the story searches for a line of flight, a way of responding that might liber-

ate those still in the mire, or at least show a way to attempt an escape from the clutches of an uncertain past.

Mixing reflective critical essay and poetry, Katsilerou engages with the difficult questions around cultivating the intangible. Drawing upon direction from the World Health Organisation, theories of improvisation, and choreography, Katsilerou puts together an interrogation of concepts such as resilience, embodiment, and interconnection, outlining ways in which improvisation can be fertile ground for developing skills to be used in non-creative spheres.

Taking cues from crip theory, feminist theory and lived experience, Helen Stratford's 'Incline Decline' utilises reclaimed diagrams to open up new paradigms of spatiality. Focusing on the material conditions of producing academic work, Stratford generates depictions of life living with chronic pain which exceed the forces that seek to reduce it to symptoms or scales. Seeking to resituate ideas of disability through crippling one's experience of space-time, Stratford's artists' pages outline new normativities of spatio-temporal being, opening up potentials for rethinking the world around us and our relationship to it.

We wish to thank the other members of the editorial board for all their support and to thank our advisory board and the department of Drama, Theatre and Dance at Royal Holloway, University of London as well as the anonymous peer reviewers for their care and attention to detail.

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# **TRANS PERFORMATIVITY: In Between States of Becoming: Resistance, Transformation, Emanation**

AURA

## **1. Genesis: An Introduction to the Auric Fields**

*Me [my body] | Physical Aura*

Dedicated to all the trans people, all the gender non-conforming people, all the outsiders and the others that have had their life stopped, halted, ended, constrained due to violence.

You / We / I deserve more. (Alabanza)

This is my point of departure. I want to take you, the reader, as my companion in this autobiographical crossing. I want to be able to transpose my lived experience and knowledge into words. In them, to welcome and transfer you to a new cosmos.

It was a long pathway until 2021. The previous three years of academic life, and a whole life dedicated to learning, experiencing and, then, to transforming. Academia has indeed given me the Wittgensteinian toolbox and the timeframe from which I intend to build, tear down, and make my own; in other words, to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct.

Interacting with the local, national, and international artistic scene has always enlightened me, and on this occasion even more. Becoming a Londoner has been a unique and fruitive experience, distinct, and pluri-dimensional.

Cementing foundations requires the expansion of the field of who we are. It is no longer about the Self, but about inhabiting the Environment. Imagine building a home not from bricks but from books, the windows would be paintings to the outer world, the furniture sculptures, the television an experimental video channel, the people its performers, and the guests its

spectators. It is not about owning a property, but creating a safe space, with inspirational neighbours and referential surroundings.

Transitioning is to enable re-imagination to happen. First, you set your vision towards where you want to go, and then, with all your strength and resilience, you go. Learning how to navigate in post-pandemic times is a challenge, however it becomes necessary to reassess the status quo, in order to embark on an inner odyssey of self-discovery.

After a cycle, the process of metamorphosis takes place. The celestial field is a totality. Thinking and generating a show for more than a year, enhances the change of an artistic practice hitherto predetermined. Following the phrase 'To be or not to be Normal' (Smith 154), I choose both. Transgression deserves to be normalised, and the normal transgressed. From queer to trans. One does not delete the other. Two bodies bounce and merge into a single bodyscape. An ecosystem is rendered from the four elements — earth, water, air, and fire. In it, the audience-performer inhabits, feels, and transforms.

Completing the cycle implies blossoming and transcending. In this last instance, a chapter closes, and wings are given to begin another. The one of ripening and committing to my work. Finally, I fulfilled myself.

## **2. Rooting: Nurturing through Academia**

*Me, myself | Etheric Aura*

A thesis without punctuation

A thesis without quotation

A thesis without bibliography

Or

A thesis with self-referencing

Of multiple pseudonymous

A thesis as a manifestation

A performative thesis

I wrote these premises in October 2018, when I joined the master's degree in Performance Making at Goldsmiths, University of London, as a queer, migrant, working-class student yet to find the trans\* community. Three years later, I write and see it differently. I question why not both? Why not allow ambiguity in including both experimentations and resolutions, poetry and prose, others and me? Why the obligation to replace the other, and not the permission for coexistence?

It was very important to me to find the 'I': I feel this, this panned to me, I did this. (Jarman 30-31)



*Fig. 1 | Aura (2018) BOX SOLO. © By the artist*

My university life resembles the iconic slogan that Fernando Pessoa wrote for Coca-Cola 'First it's strange, then it's ingrained'. Before, I estranged myself, the environment, the educational system, and its interrelationships. Now, I feel integrated and connected, as someone who belongs to the prior



three-generational communities of talented performance makers.

The deep relationships with colleagues from all over the world, together with several workshops and classes taught by in-house or guest professors, allowed me to fully experience the best academia has to offer nowadays. My first project consisted of staging me inside a box as a delivery to the George Wood Theatre by the fake company BHL.

. When the audience opened the box with duct tape repeating the word FRAGILE, I came out naked. It was the planting of a seed that has grown and bears fruits over the course of time, which now flourishes.

My bond with Butoh dance increased with the imaginative and expressionist-inspired methodologies by the choreographer Marie-Gabrielle Rotie and the artist Nick Parkin. In the first workshop, I wrote:

Dehumanising by placing clay on the skin to create another layer, to 'transform' the body. (Not just in white).

Butoh, as a 'cosmological way of expression which explored the darkest side of human nature' (Nanako 12) was founded in the 1960's by people including Hijikata Tatsumi and Ono Kazuo. Though the etymology of the word evolved with time, by the 1960's, 'The word "butoh," now the accepted name of the genre, originated as ankoku buyō (...) "Ankoku" means 'utter darkness.' "Buyō," a generic term for dance' (Nanako 12), yet this type of dance departed from existing dances, by allowing a questioning and reflection on the beauty of life, embracing the beauty of the ugly, clearly influenced by the post-war reality:

For Hijikata the body is a metaphor for words and words are a metaphor for the body [...] He was very aware of how such changes influence the relationship between the world and the body: "The body is constantly violated by things like the development of technology" (1969:19). Today these changes are accelerating. The rapid development of computer technolo-

gy, virtual-reality technology, and the internet have extended human possibilities for the future but seem simultaneously to be eroding or changing our sense of what is real. From this current context one can more clearly read that Hijikata's struggle was to present the real in a time when the body is constantly simulated. (Nanako 16-25)

Butoh allowed me to explore my own reality and the unlighted or hidden side which would result in a deeply surrounding, personal and emotional performance. I remove the audience from the harsh reality to join me in an ethereal journey to the self, allowing us to be real and free, even if for a moment.

The body is configured, and the imagery of the Self is created. In my scenography project, 'Lar Dom Home', languages and memories are introduced and deconstructed, symbolising the trajectory between three (dis)placements: Porto, Gdańsk, and London.

As nora chipaumire uttered, not in these exact words, during a workshop I participated in Warsaw. 'Remember: the size between your legs represents the space you occupy on Earth.'



*Fig. 2 | Aura (2019) Lar Dom Home. © By the artist*

The mapping of geographies became elementary in my work. I have grown a special interest for the topography of the Subject by drawing words and archotyping thoughts, emotions, ideas, concepts, memories, experiences. In a nutshell, knowledge.

The transmission of knowledge was implicit during this time through circle-shaped conversations around Radical Performance focused on sharing philosophical notions, reflecting on previous and current systems, contextualising pre-definitions and historical values, reaffirming the potential of performance art and its empowering effect.

Additionally, I started building upon a lexicon, which not only contained words but also stored memory: attention, beginning, composition, doorkeeper, exercise, frustration, grammar, half, image, justice, Kafka, law, meaning, newspapers, orange, progress, queer, response, space, time, uninvented, veto, war, xaman, yves, zig-zag.



*Fig. 3 | Inter-non-disciplinary group (2019) OUTRAGEOUS UNIFICATION, COURAGEOUS INTERFERENCE; PRODUCT, MECHANISED, LAYERED. © By the artists*

The terms's different possibilities of use and the significations each individual attributes to them were motivated during the collective interdisciplinary exercise with Music and Dramaturgy collaborators. Unapologetically,<sup>5</sup>

we assumed, staged, and disrupted objects such as mirrors (referencing the film 'Mirror', 1975, by Andrei Tarkovsky), speakers, video projectors, matches, a red flag (referencing the film "Battleship Potemkin", 1925, by Serguei Eisenstein), a computer, a ladder, a dripping system, and a maquette of the performative place, the George Wood Theatre, a former church.

Manifoldness inhabits the city and we have pluralised it. My friend, Graham Taylor, and I produced a site-specific performance at World's End in London's Chelsea district. Our investigation focused on the history of counterculture, in questioning 'how can we make anti-capitalist art?' with the enlightenment of 'Living in a World That Can't Be Fixed' (White n.pag). The never-performed action, due to the emergence of the first SARS-CoV-2 cases, consisted of a walk along King's Road while we unveiled ten different looks that we tailored into a single outfit. We were the Anti-Chameleon. Outsiders and hybrids:

[t]he very countries of the body are sites that vacillate between the psychic and the material. (Butler 36)

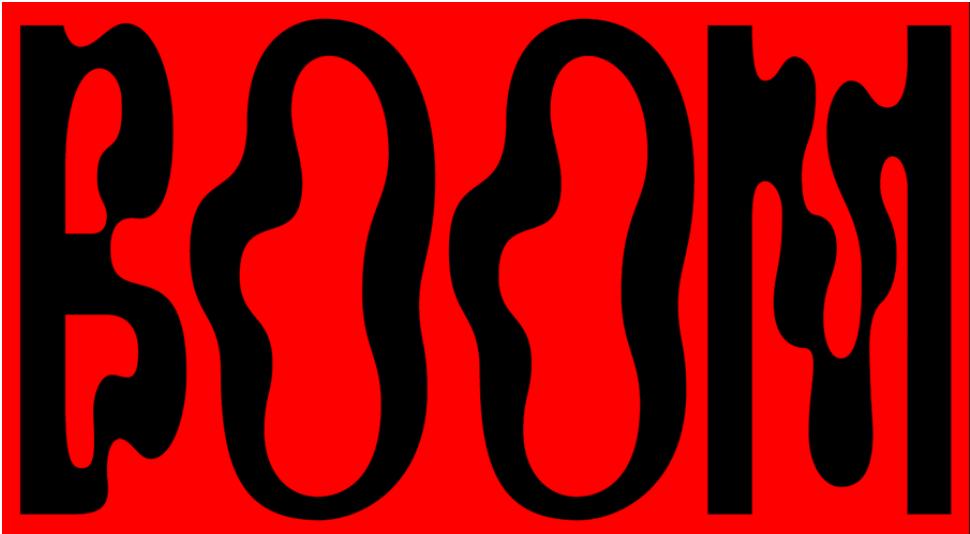


Fig. 4 | Anti-Chameleon (2020) Wal-king. © By the artist

### 3. Intersections: Spectatorship Findings across London, Porto, and Worldwide

#### *Me and the other | Emotional Aura*

Transformative energy is at the heart of affirmative ethics, which highlights the inexhaustible potential of all living organisms — human and non-human — to generate multiple and yet unexplored interconnections. This is the immanence of a life that can only be co-constructed and jointly articulated in a common world. (Braidotti 90)

Being a spectator is inherent to our lives. It is in the act of witnessing that we expand our vision and understanding; until, eventually, something intriguing and influential happens, in which we connect and immerse ourselves in.

Being a *flâneur* in the city and digital networks allows us to discover new contexts and to estimate existing internalised realities. The act of walking, permeability, and presence in space is included. Between streets, corners, roundabouts, museums, galleries, and theatres are more similarities than differences. After all, the world in the universe is small and our lives too short to fully contemplate it.

Nevertheless, I have glimpsed a variety of shows — live or online — from art, design, and architecture exhibitions, interventions, manifestations, protests, concerts, virtual or augmented reality visualisations, to theatre, dance, and performance pieces.

In March 2019, Anne Imhof built an atmospheric environment within the brutalist space, The Tanks, at Tate Modern. The work combined choreographed gestures, music, sculpture, and painting. The first time I came across her work was in 'Faust', although I was not present at the German Pavilion during the 2017 Venice Biennale, I immediately felt connected. Two

years later, 'Sex' was produced, and the libidinal aggression took hold of me:

It is certainly not a coincidence that performance art is Imhof's medium. The performance has come to play a key role today to the extent that its dynamic of permanent self-transgression has emerged as the paradigm of immaterial labor. (Rebentisch 28)

Although I identify with Imhof's work, there are mixed feelings regarding the new kitsch representation of peculiar pale bodies that wear couture alternative clothes and inhabit exclusively white spaces. There is something queer both in the piece and in the austerity that it represents, imposed by previous fascist regimes, that leads to an existentialist and situationist questioning. Perhaps, this is the violent and precarious scenario experienced by a young aimless generation:

It's the world of nocturnal violence with the lights turned on. Performers move languidly but with precision. Hands are on throats, tenderness contorts into aggression; simple gestures of walking are slowed down, glances become gazes. The dynamics of control pervade these actions. The micro-movements demonstrate how organic beings buckle under abstract powers and systems, evoking the current political tensions as right-wing ideologies start to take hold. (Manhattan)

Indeed: today's era is purely romantic. That which is strong in it is unflinching mysticism, assuming ever newer and newer forms. It is at once a mysticism of the decline of the world, of western culture; [...]; a mysticism of social belief in a rich wellspring of cultural strengths in the depths of the proletarian class; a pansexual mysticism [...], which rages directly, epidemically, in the young generations [...]; and this fashionable realism also has in its foundation mystical roots, just as it also

has not a little fashionable Weltschmerz. (Götz 67-68)

In November 2020, at São João National Theatre, in Porto, Mónica Calle unified four solos in 'This is My Body' ('Este é o Meu Corpo'). In this gesture, the actress questions and updates a series of works carried out over the last 28 years, probing her becoming. A physical, personal, and artistic body, but also a collective body, always built-in relation to others, working the word, the word in flesh.

Her work brought me into direct relationship with the Self. How do we build our identity intentionally or unintentionally over time? How is the body perceived? By the audience, either placed in an intimate and close space to the performance action, as in 'The Crazy Virgin' ('A Virgem Doida'), or in attentive observation from a seat that allows a full visualisation of the scene, as in 'My Feelings' ('Os Meus Sentimentos'). Respectively, by the complicity and interaction of two people or by the momentary collective dance.

In the first piece, the sexualised body is the centre of the action. With text by Rimbaud, the told stories merge between the real and the fictional. The spectator relates their own experience to what is said. It is a joint story-telling, in which one tells and the other listens, but both dive in.

In the second durational play, Calle reads and inhabits the words of the writer Dulce Maria Cardoso like a second skin. In a dense soil-fleuve, the spectator is once again taken to two different realities. One in which the theatre opened early between 6am and 12pm due to pandemic restrictions, while hosting a bar and dancefloor on stage between breaks. The other was the story that took us from the theatre inside of an overturned car, where a woman is laid down, with her seatbelt blocked, revisiting past moments in her lifetime:

[T]he position I encounter myself in, upside down, suspend-

ed by the seat belt, doesn't bother me, my body, strangely, doesn't weigh me down, the clash must have been violent, I don't recall, I opened my eyes and it was like this, upside down, arms hitting the roof, legs loose, a rag doll's misshapen, eyes staring idly at a drop of water standing on a piece of vertical glass, I can't identify the noises that I hear, I start again, I shouldn't have left the house, I shouldn't have left the house. (Cardoso 9)

I watched my third case study in April 2021, on the Portuguese TV channel RTP2. First in the company of my soul mate, who immediately wanted to see it again with our family. We were all blown away by the magnificent experience created by the musician Rone and the collective La(Horde) with the National Ballet of Marseille.

The show's title, 'Room with a View', resonates with the new post-pandemic way of living, in which from our rooms we became spectators of life and art. In the life that art dwells and in the art that life initiates, we are free to see and imagine:

In a marble quarry, several machines are in action, cutting and polishing the rock. In this out-of-this-world place, Rone sculpts sweeping electronic and emotional landscapes. As sculptors work with marble to 'free the human form from the block', dancers move to escape the stones white stillness, rising to examine the infinitely human contours of imminent disaster and glimpsing the very possibility of its beauty. (RTP)

Once again, forms of protest and rebellion, codified and incorporated, are references to my artistic practice. I find the proposition of (La)Horde to work on a blank page interesting, and, on it, to draw and sculpt sounds, bodies, and landscapes, that face urgent challenges about where humanity currently finds itself in mutation:



We live in the midst of permanent processes of transition, hybridisation and nomadisation and these in-between states defy the established modes of theoretical representation.  
(Braidotti 22)

#### 4. Foundations: Building upon a Transarchive

*Me and the environment | Viral Aura*

The archive [...] is the general system for the statements formation and transformation of statements. (Foucault 10)

Building an archive involves, a priori, an encounter with research and/or practices — written, performative, visual, auditory, sensory, scientific, among others. And, afterwards, a place where memories, history, herstory, images, texts, videos, sounds, data, are saved.

In this case, it is a site-under-construction dedicated mainly to the transgender transdisciplinarity of artistic, cultural, social, philosophical, politicised fields... a transarchive:

[T]he process of signification is always material; signs work by appearing (visibly, aurally), and appearing through material means, although what appears only signifies by virtue of those non-phenomenal relations, i.e., relations or differentiation, that tacitly structure of and propel signification itself. Relations, even the notion of *différance*, institute and require relations, terms, phenomenal signifiers. And yet what allows for a signifier to signify will never be its materiality alone; that materiality will be at once an instrumentality and deployment of a set of larger linguistic relations. (Butler 38)

An archive is not just a place where *œuvres* are deposited, but a place in

constant change and expansion. A rhizomatic experiment where the peripheries become centralised, and the centres fade away. In botany, a rhizome is a modified type of stem that grows horizontally and, generally, underground, which are important organs that asexually reproduce roots through their nodes.

It could be said that it (de)colonises the mind and (de)territorialises the layer in which we incessantly navigate in search of articulating and re-establishing our foundations. It's about looking in the other and the surroundings, who we are.

The stories we've been told shouldn't be the stories we tell.

(Al-Maria 121)

Though it may appear to be historic, and it is, the archive inhabits all-time. It is in the present and will be in the future. Its criticism and evolution are essential according to the times and wills that change. Giving way to processes of diversification, decolonisation, and queerisation in the field of History. It is necessary to give space to other stories—old, new, or imaginary—and to other stakeholders, hitherto ignored and marginalised:

By the early 1990s, primarily through the influence of Leslie Feinberg's 1992 pamphlet *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come*, transgender was beginning to refer to something else—an imagined political alliance of all possible forms of gender antinormativity. It was in this latter sense that transgender became articulated with queer. (Stryker 145)

The unfolding of new materialities previously immaterial implies the plurality of voices that become references. It is an umbrella capable of sheltering everyone. Trans men, trans women, non-binary people, androgynous, demiboy, demigirl, two-spirit, genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, intersex,

gender non-conforming, drag kings, drag queens, crossdressers, transvestites, and everyone who is fluid, disruptive, unsubmitive, deviant, and dissident. Although it seems impossible to install total justice and assign the deserved place and legacy to everyone, it is possible to fight for it:

From this moment on, all of you are dead. Amelia, Hervé, Michel, Karen, Jackie, Teo and You. Do I belong more to your world than I do to the world of the living? Isn't my politics yours; my house, my body, yours? Reincarnate yourselves in me, take over my body like extraterrestrials took over Americans and changed them into living sheaths. Reincarnate yourself in me; possess my tongue, arms, sex organs, dildos, blood, molecules; possess my girlfriend, dog; inhabit me, live in me. Come. Ven. Please don't leave. Vuelve a la vida. Come back to life. Hold on my sex. Low, down, dirty. Stay with me.  
(Preciado 16)

Following Preciado's words, I add other living voices, which are or are not among us:

Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, Arca, SOPHIE, Lyra Pramuk, Anohni, Dorian Electra, Ezra Furman, Colin Self, Lauren Arder, Honey Dijon, Kim Petras, Laura Jane Grace, Hunter Schafer, Laverne Cox, Jamie Clayton, Trace Lysette, Indya Moore, Elliot Page, La Veneno, Lili Elbe, Gottmik, CHRISTEENE, Andreja Pejić, Paul B. Preciado, EJ Gonzalez-Polledo, Patrick Staff, Genesis P-Orridge, Juliet Jacques, Cassils, Yishay Garbasz, Wu Tsang, Candy Darling, Renata Carvalho, Linn da Quebrada, Liniker, Dinis Machado, Aurora, Odete, Ves Liberta, Hilda de Paulo, Joseph Morgan Schofield, Pê Feijó, Gilbert Sierotzki, Housnara Nara Ali, Ariel Albuquerque, and all of you that represent the world I live in.

[T]he archive is the time that unites and the time that separates. (Neves 49)

Let's think together: Who are the trans people from the present or past that you know? And the ones you don't because history has often decided to delete or murder them. So, how can we create a safer world for future generations? How can we learn from our ancestry of gender dissenting people? Perhaps let's start by reading transfeminist texts, by sharing our stories first-hand, by creating together, by dialoguing and even debating.

Also let's make something clear: there could be no transition for me as a person or as an artist if I wasn't able to meet other trans people at some point in life. The first one, that I was aware of when meeting her in 2017 during Queer Porto, is a dear friend called Aurora. I can't truly recall what my feelings were at that time, but I do believe it had a huge impact and was a turning point in my life, leading me to include the word trans in my vocabulary, until then nonexistent or unconscious of. From then, a voyage began.

## **5. Transition: Self-Navigating in a Post-Pandemic World**

*Me and the space-time | Astral Aura*

In times when 'The Earth is transitioning. Power is transitioning.' (Preciado), and 'the subject doesn't die, but shifts'.  
(Védrine 184)

'The need to externalise personal discourses, mediating them through the own body, will establish it as a place of production of meaning and dissidence.' (Neves 34) These are the inquietudes that I intend to carry out while I am displaced, living in a world I never recognised myself in, and never seem to recognise:

Disidentifications is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to

the phantasm of normative citizenship. (Muñoz 4)

Moving towards Muñoz, it is by disidentifying myself that I decided to create my own world on the scale of who I was in which I learned how to walk.

The pandemic borne by the Covid-19 virus remains. Faced with the escapist instance of protecting ourselves from a common enemy — invisible to the eye, visible in the devastation — several, including myself, turned their vision on themselves. The time of Narcissus is installed, who sees their own reflection on water, even if tepid. It is the soul, and it is necessary to dive into it. Beyond vanity, submerging. Going to the depths of the individual who becomes aware of themselves, of their *raison d'être*:

It's knowing I was not born in the wrong body, rather born in the wrong world, but still grasping at my chest, longing for something to change, for me to change, for me to do better.  
(Alabanza 45)

As Travis Alabanza redefines their body in this world, it is needed to turn the page, to ungroup from the status quo dominated by techno-patriarchal biopolitical forces and transphobic passersby who insist on the vertiginous operating theatre. In epidemic times of economic, social, environmental, and public health collapse to which we are exposed, immunity is what we have left to resist the norms that intend to govern and dictate our identity bodies. 'Turning my experience of violence into the ability to express it as sensitively and forcefully as possible: that is my ideal'. (Zevallos 140)

Quarantine allowed me to run a careful dissection of my own organism. Particularly, of my needs. At the level of physical and mental wellbeing. 'Materiality never disappeared. The emergence of Covid-19 plunged us all into the dense materiality of our mortal bodies.' (Braidotti 96). It was a time of death, but also of healing. And, in my case, the second one happened.

Coming home is always a challenging but liberating journey. The disconnection from the stress of work, college, and, especially, the toxicity of moving around the city, catapulted me to the possibility of finally inhabiting myself. In *Me, myself, and I* (referencing the song by Billie Holiday).

While watching a world-already-in-collapse, collapse, another must be raised. Mine. Two hemispheres merge into one. Countless mountains and valleys, caves and constellations, fountains and oceans, form in the vastness of a bodyscape, a fusion of the body with the landscape:

Our most intimate fantasies, desires, projections, internal dialogues and ever-shifting identities are bisected, influenced and ruled by public discourse, legislations and the law.

(Gonzalez-Torres 87)

In this instance, I took the reins and the control of this phenomenological process. In times of emergency, the ability to change the order of things is born in us. It is empowerment. An ancestral and contemporary practice of self-validation in which we are granted access to topographic archives where our contours, our languages, our conduct, our DNA are recorded. We hijack and hack ourselves. We obtain a cartography of the becoming. Our body-in-motion is now the ruling map that pierces borders, breaks barriers, centres, and decentralises, teleporting itself.

I arrived and arranged my bags, they weighed more than they should. Unpacking all the anxieties I carried. Who am I? How do others perceive me? Where did the child with the desire to change the world who can barely take care of themselves end up? Who can barely see, hear, and identify themselves with? There is an inherent and continuous nausea. A discomfort. An urge that doesn't seem to disappear. At first, one does not know where it comes from, but soon it is discovered. I always knew, and they did as well. That I was the difference. The nothing and the everything. The pansy, faggot,

weird, queer, deviant. Now, I transcend.

## 6. Metamorphosis: Transformation as an Experience towards an Artistic Practice

*Me and the [w]hole | Celestial Aura*

I can reach any empty space and make it a bare stage. One person walks through this empty space while another person watches — and nothing else is needed for a theatrical action to occur. (Brook 7)

Through the words of Peter Brook, on a black three-dimensional screen, a black box, I created my final project, *7 ≈ 8*, a solo performance-environment created from transdisciplinary media, such as movement, set, sound, light, and costume design; as a culmination of progress and change in my artistic path; focused, a priori, on my rebirth, and, a posteriori, on my emanation as Aura.



*Fig. 5 | Aura (2021) 7 ≈ 8. © Liron Zisser*

The methodology is based on previous explorations of performative

gestures that seek, in the tremor of the body, wounds, imprints, and traces that are intrinsic to memory. Not only does our brain acquire, store, and retrieve information biologically and psychologically conceived. As our spirit-body also entails, incites, and physiologically and ontologically connects the habits and sensory memories.

How to transpose my experience as a transgender woman into my artistic research-practice? How to compile and translate the ephemerality of memories into movement? How to externalise the experience through us? How to create bridges that pass through us between the present and the past? How to provide the spectator with the opportunity to freely internalise it? As in History, reality is always fictionalised:

We are the pieces of a game that the sky plays [...]. *In girum imus nocte et consumemur igni.* We move in the dead-end night and we are devoured by fire [...]. A generation passes, and another succeeds, but the earth remains. The sun rises, and then sets, and so it returns from where it came [...]. All rivers enter the sea and the sea never overflows. Rivers always return to the place they came from, to flow again [...]. Everything has its time, and everything under heaven passes there, after the prescribed period [...]. There is a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to cut down and a time to build... There is a time to tear and a time to unite again, a time to be silent and a time to say. (Debord 43-45)

Necropolitics questions whether or not the state has the power to kill. Here, the author kills and buries themselves. In the depths, the fire burns and restores them, the earth perishes and heals them, the water swallows and purifies them, the air suffocates and scars them. Everyone oppresses Them and She aurically frees Herself. Rising upon Herself. Like a cleave, title given to my MA's festival, that simultaneously tears apart and unifies the hybrid territory of the body that knows when to be silent, when to speak,

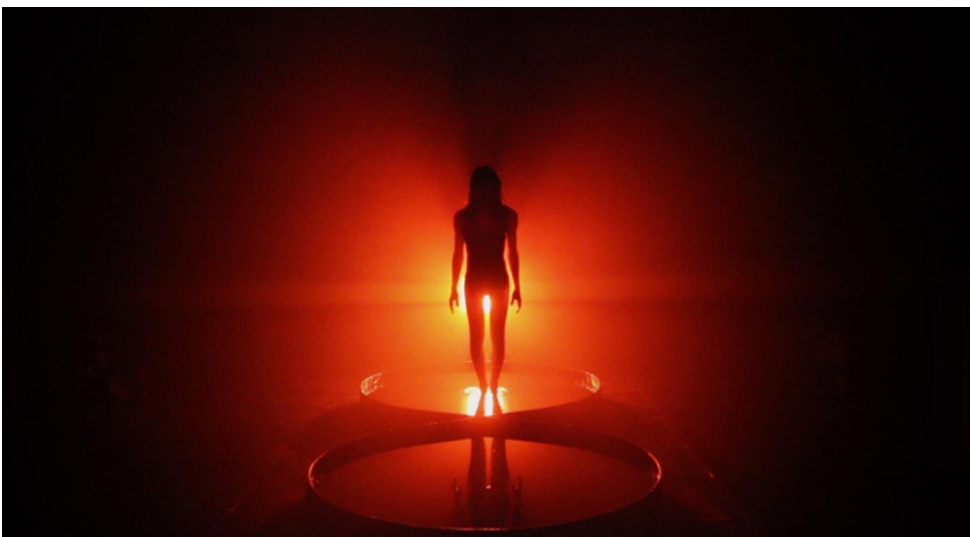


and when to silently speak.

Textless, the performance structure consists in a series of actions that contains tenderness in gestures, and perseverance in presence. From the tenuous horizontality to the transcendental verticality, the ritual passes through acts such as the umbilical water that descends, gestation, giving birth to oneself, levitating, the body as a foetus, ascending, revealing, drying, transiting, being dressed, the opening, the joining, and the expansion of a continuous movement, eternalised in memory:

James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis describe the Gaia hypothesis as a view of the Earth as a living organism where the clouds are the Earth's lungs, the rivers and oceans are the blood, the land is the skeletal structure and the living organisms are the Earth's senses. (Staff 18)

The body that rotates on its own axis is the translation that generates light and shadow. The bodysphere constituted by the seven almost eight auric layers, provides the ideal environment to be inhabited by the artist and the audience.



*Fig. 6 | Aura (2021) 7 ≈ 8. © Konstantina Tsagianni*

I — Aura — am the muse:

[D]efined as the body of the Earth, if the Earth is understood as a singularity that is also plural. The muse is Earth's life-energy, a holographic perception of self-interpenetrating spheres of space-time. In this holographic perception, the Earth becomes a portal to a hyperspatial exterior. (Allado-McDowell 50-51)

In a composition of atoms in transition, the hormonal process of oestrogen is the link that covers and exalts. It is in this etheric transformation that the artificial is diluted into the natural, and, in artificiality, a natural order of things is found. After all, biology is also a social construction.

In a process of transgression and transformation, oestrogen is simultaneously the constituent of the mental-corporeal being as well as of its surroundings. At its essence, plants have hormonal properties. My costume, a printed fabric garment, tailored from a double-coloured organza containing a microscopic view of oestradiol. The piece's soundtrack, composed by me and Sarah-Holly Sayeed, made out a binary technological code. The scenographic space divided in two hemispheres.

In Nature, I find myself. Its essence is vital in the construction of a transqueer practice through the research of counter-narratives. Where reading botanical texts queerly is bio-art. It's about understanding 'What is ancient about herbalism and what is modern about gender transition? What is modern about herbalism and what is ancient about transitioning?' (Linn and Staff 15)

For (Carl) Jung, a person needs to maintain a strong inner balance between the spirit of the times and the spirit of the depths; too much either creates neuroses. And as for the individual, so for society. Culturally, we have allowed the scales to shift dramatically; we are cut off from our deeper

natures, we have turned our back on the spirit of the depths and live entirely in the spirit of the times. In order to regain balance, we need to remaster the ability to go deep, to “turn away from outer things”. To face what is in ourselves. This starts with connection and creativity. (Tempest 40)

This shifting has enabled me and my performativity to leave a previously negative point-of-view over the living, surrounded by denial and confrontation towards the world status quo; and now to perceive things positively, with acceptance and healing.

To the resemblance of identity — unite and manifold — my artistic practice research is built through different assimilations at a personal and intellectual, academic and social, geographical and epistemological level. If one intends to define it, it works the negative positively, finds calm in calamity, balancing itself between the liminal space, and becoming aware of the causal action. Finally, in the individual it finds the plurality of other voices. A transgenesis.



*Fig. 7 | Aura (2021) 7 ~ 8. © Sheila Burnet*

## 7. Blooming: A Fulfilled Cycle

*Me + myself + I ≡≡ 3nity | Causal Aura*

From seed to flower, we infer the growth of form. (Neves 132)

Thinking of Humanity in relation to Nature. Another form of anthropocentric conception. Or, on the verge of the Anthropocene, a search for an answer by circumscribing ourselves in Her. Species — such as identities, ethnicities, sexes, genders, religions — carry ancestry. Each flower is unique, as is each body. Aura's blossom, and, in them, communities emanate.

The transcourse of this epistemic astral travel is the end of an academic chapter and the beginning of a new personal and professional trajectory. Three years. A trilogy that implodes against brutal power relations, including the power over us. Amidst pandemoniums, conflicts, and injustices, change took hold. 'Transformations, metamorphosis, mutations and processes of change have in fact become familiar in the lives of most contemporary subjects'. (Braidotti 21)

I recognise 'I am not nothing. I will never be nothing. I cannot ever want to be nothing. Apart from that, I have in me all the dreams of the world.' (Campos 649)

Ultimately, in the midst of these strange times, a deep feeling of hope dwells in me. After winter, spring arises. In hibernation, preparation happens. And, in liberation, achievement.

Fulfil yourself. Until the end. (Neves 136)

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# Escaping the Neoliberal Gallery

*Marley Treloar*

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## **Abstract:**

This illustrated essay speculates on alternative economic models for embedding social practice within commercial and public spaces in art galleries in the UK's charity sector. Cultural institutions are being asked to 'do more, with less' in a period rife with budget cuts, reduced staffing, zero-hour contracts and redundancies exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The cultural sector is urged to become less reliant on public money, to diversify revenue streams and look towards other, private stakeholders.

All the while, institutions under the Arts Council England's 2020-2030 'Let's Create' strategy are told to prioritise societal challenges, such as 'inequality of wealth and of opportunity, social isolation and mental ill-health' as well as 'the accelerating climate emergency'. Cultural institutions are being asked to make meaningful, impactful and long-lasting relationships with their local communities inclusive of LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, and people with health conditions or impairments, school children and teachers, champi-

oning mental health, diversity, and equity within their programmes. All the while, those working within the sector are struggling due to low pay, barriers to employment and consolidating of multiple jobs into singular positions.

Social and Community art practices of the 1960's-1990's sought to interrogate and democratise art production and address how this production could enact change in society. Socially engaged art practice showed that art can be a useful tool to explore societal issues and give people agency, space and power to make changes. However, I would like to argue that the way social art practice is implemented within arts institutions today does not fully capture the radical potential of societal change, due to the nature of funding structures and institutional workflows. Barriers to embedding social practice within arts institutions are structural and ideological problems, with governance, finance and requirements from funding bodies being the key barriers faced by social practitioners. There are lessons to be learned from artists, communities and other sectors to better embed social practice within arts institutions and offer alternatives to the current models. I explore how artist- and communities-led institutions embed social practices by discussing new models of democratised cultural spaces, places, programmes, highlighting artists and collectives providing examples of cultural alternatives.

## **Introduction**

In this paper I speculate on the capability of social practice to transform commercial and public spaces within arts institutions towards collaborative, cyclical programmes for embedding communities and socially engaged artists. This exploration of space acts as a frame to interrogate the relationships between artists, communities, and art galleries in the UK's charity sector. Transformation and radical rethinking of existing space is crucial for arts institutions future proofing through cultural austerity, allowing evidenced



deep impact through social programming. I will share the practices of artists and organisational economic models placed within the café, the garden, and the gallery as spaces where economic and collective models exist both within artist and institutional practices. These models explore how these three spaces can further embed radical social models now and for the future.

I first would like to define social art practice as understood within this context. Social and Community practices of the 1960's-1990's (Bourriaud, Larson, Bishop) sought to interrogate and democratise art production and address how art could enact change in society. Social practitioners saw art as a useful tool to explore societal issues and give people agency, space, and power to make changes in their lives. These practices often worked with marginalised communities, facilitating exchange between organisational power and communities they serve, and provide ideas, alternatives, and focus toward political and policy changes. As such, contemporary social art practices interrogate the established political, economic, and social spheres in which they are created and problematise the systems which result in social inequities. Through this interrogation, in this paper I focus on social practices which demonstrate alternative ways of being together, through social practice business models, embedding social ethics into healthcare and art market economics, and creating new shared economies of time. These practices support the artists and communities involved by offering different methods of organising in place of the prominent art world systems which perpetuate inequality.

I feel it is pertinent to review how arts organisations have been shaped by neoliberal cultural policies and the effect these policies have on social practices. To provide an overview for this topic, I will refer to the work of Hewitt, Jordan, Bishop, and Jessop to map out the impacts of policy on social art practices and its context within the UK. As a broad definition, neoliber-

alism/ neoliberalization is a political process comprising policies supportive of 'economic liberalization, deregulation, privatization, recommodification, internationalization, reductions in direct taxation, and decriminalization of predatory economic activities' (Jessop). Due to these policy objectives in the UK, neoliberalism promotes uneven development in favour of economic global market competitiveness, and encourages policies that largely neglect its adverse economic, social repercussions. These repercussions, including growing inequalities of income and opportunity, are often linked directly with the reduction of state funding and state monopolies, resulting in greater poverty in favour of free-market, corporate-led initiatives (Jessop). While often associated with right-wing parties (for example Margret Thatcher and the Conservative party) neoliberal shifts have also been initiated, maintained or backed by centre-left parties, under a 'Third Way' label (Jessop, Hewitt).

Thatcher's Conservative government positioned the arts as an industry which needed to evidence its worth to the economy and began the privatisation of the welfare state alongside it. With the introduction of economic market terminology to public arts funding, arts institutions needed to justify that their activities increased tourism, regenerated cities and supported local businesses for continued state support (Holden). The Labour government of 1997– 2010 deployed similar rhetorics to that of social practice to justify public spending on the arts, pushing a 'social exclusion agenda' (Holden, Bishop, Hewitt) and positioning arts to bring those underserved by society back into work, education and communities. Hewitt situates three mutually supporting rhetorics between Labour's 'Third Way' cultural policies and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Arts Council England (ACE): 'the three rhetorics are: firstly, the rhetoric of art as a discursive cultural democracy; secondly, art as an economic driver; and thirdly, art as enabling social amelioration' (Hewitt pg 25) and argues that these interconnected rhetorics, while on the surface promote public good, contribute

to the weakening of the public sphere, furthering the privatization of the state and diminishing the transparency of government. Following on from this, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010 promoted the idea of a 'big society', encouraging 'volunteerism' (Jordan) while continuing their "mission to enable all members of society to be self-administering, fully functioning consumers who do not rely on the welfare state" (Bishop 14).

Because of these neoliberal shifts, cultural policy aims as set by the government shifted 'public good' from defunded public bodies (education and healthcare) into art spaces, with cultural organisations needing to evidence to their funders the impacts on education, health and wellbeing on the public, while the social sectors which provided these services are continuing to be defunded and dismantled. Democratisation of art production, as used in social practices which point to the failings of neoliberal cultural policies, are now being used by arts institutions in limited capacities due to these same rhetorics and the constraints of their funders. This is not to discredit the benefit of the arts on people's lives. Art and culture as a 'public good' is a liberal concept which has been at the centre of public arts funding since its founding in the UK (Arts Council England). However, art democratisation has become a tool of neoliberal state control, with institutions being required to commission and develop projects which use social practices through the lens of 'levelling the playing field', fitting policy aims rather than of radical political social change which challenges the political and institutional status quo.

This article poses that to begin to address societal issues and shift the relationship put on the arts as a service provider for shortfalls in government policy, arts institutions must start with themselves, renegotiating how social practices are embedded and supported within their structures and significance of their practices communicated back to funders, the wider sector and the public. To change this, art institutions must break down barriers to

embedding social practice and develop deep commitments to working with social practitioners who challenge political and institutional frameworks, to build new social frameworks together. These barriers are structural and ideological problems, with governance, finances and requirements from funding bodies being key barriers faced by social practitioners (Lynch, Bienkowski). The project-based timelines and reporting periods of funders are too short to accurately reflect the long-term benefits these arts programmes might have on participants, and too short to develop deep relationships between community partners and institutions (Lynch, Bienkowski).

Bishop problematises the term 'engagement' as used by art institutions as an 'ideological reframing of participation, away from collective cultural production and towards marketing and audience development' (Bishop, 00:16:00). Bishop's argument boils down to the difference between 'engagement' as a neoliberal market target and 'participation' as collective social action. 'Participation', I pose, is a deeper action by art institution which requires equality and power sharing, giving the participants agency to enact change within the institution. This goes further than participation as outlined in the 'educational turn' of curatorial practices (O'Neill and Wilson), which considers transforming or giving over the roles of artist/curator and the inclusion of participants and more closely align with the nuanced relationship, as explored for example by the Free Art Collective as 'impossible participants'. Building on Lecerle's 'actant' (Lecerle), impossible participants don't just 'reinforce familiar roles within art's existing apparatus' (Jordan, Hewitt, Beech); instead the 'call for the transformation of art's apparatus demands new places, new actants, new roles, and new tasks for art that are unthinkable within the current configuration' (Jordan, Hewitt, Beech). By this they expand nature collaboration through social practices away from status quo of the division of labour from artist, towards establishing new social relations which seek to create new forms in which

to understand the arts institutions. These new forms align closer with deep activism, social change and transformation of existing relationships and the power dynamics at play.

Building these new relationships is to reimagine how social art practices might be enacted within arts institutions, which confronts neoliberal pressures restricting the potential for social change. In the remainder of this article, I will explore artist and institutional practices which begin to shift this dynamic between artist, institution and public. These alternative economies, while not perfect solutions, offer an insight into how a social practice ethos embedded within arts spaces could begin to change the service and provider relationship rendered between arts funders and institutions towards one of collectivity.

## The Café

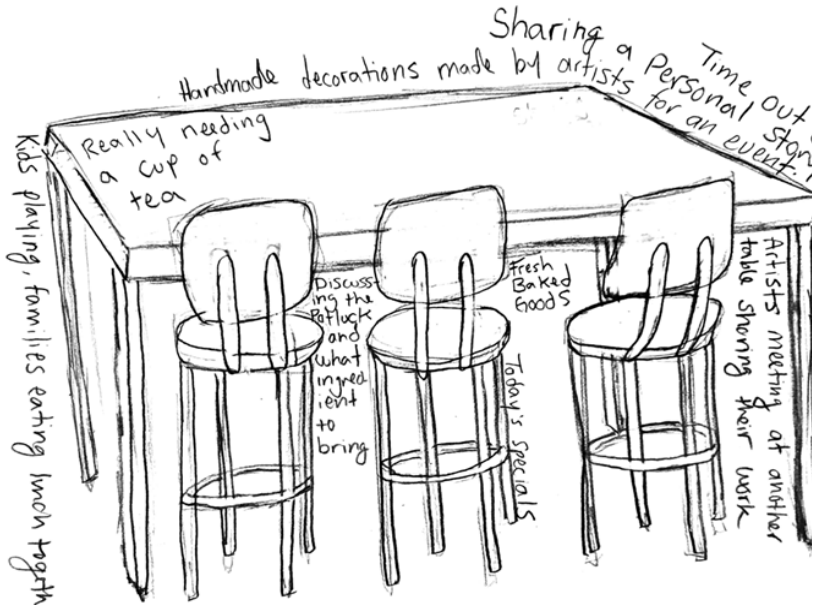


Fig. 1 Illustration done in the Toynbee Studios Café, Marley Treloar 2022

The café is one of the public and income-generating spaces within cultural institutions which has the potential to further embed social practices. Many galleries subcontract cafés on their site, providing constant revenue for the institution in exchange for hands-off management of the catering business. The café may also be built into the business model of the institution under the umbrella of the brand. I would like to illustrate how social practice might democratise the café towards a space for the inclusion of artists and communities in addition to as a business.

Jennie Moran is an artist whose practice explores hospitality as a reciprocal gesture between artist and audience. Her project/café Luncheonette started in 2013 when she took over the closed National College of Art and Design Dublin's (NCAD) canteen, where she previously attended as a student. During Luncheonette's first year, students attending NCAD volunteered at the new canteen, helping prepare, cook and contribute recipes,

shaping the menu with their own personal histories. Moran reflects that the students who helped shape Luncheonette 'are proof that a big educational institution can have a meaningful and genuine point of hospitality; that it sees the magic individuals who pass through it, and it remembered them when they are gone' (Moran). Moran was able to embed the ethics and ideals of her practice into the commercial space of the university – doing no harm and embedding sustainability and climate awareness as core tenants of the menu (Moran). This emphasis on the remembrance and recognition of community participation within the project is a core facet Moran's engagement with social practice within institutional settings.

Moran took up residency in the café of Artsadmin's Toynbee Studios, a live arts development organisation, from September to November 2022, fulfilling the role of artist-in-residence and café-in-resident, during which she offered the space for the general public to work, gather and celebrate at events and parties without the pressure to purchase anything. In addition, she programmed free events called the Morning Producers where anyone from a creative discipline could meet with the artist and programme support staff from Toynbee Studios to discuss their current projects and share breakfast made by Moran and her team. She also co-hosted free, collaborative events with resident practice researcher Malaika Cunningham, titled the 'Rest and Slowness Potluck' which explored the importance of rest and slowness across politics, food and performance in community-owned spaces (Artsadmin). Moran then acted as a consultant in the hiring of a permanent business placement for the café once her residency was over, in which she could advocate for sustainable, small business options. While this social practice intervention was time-limited, it impacted the way Artsadmin used the café as a space for public interaction and how it would be occupied in the future.

Moran's practice of re-establishing the café as a residency space shifts

the business model of the gallery café into a public space for gathering, creating and investigating together the relationship between public, food and institution. Her practice of hospitality reimagines the relationship between public and service sector as one of co-creation, building living legacies of those who contribute to the menu and who share meals together in those spaces. This combined artist and café-in-residence blurs the institutional structure of the artist-commission, as Luncheonette is Moran's art practice as well as being a functional business. Through this, she blurs the lines of what are artist practice commission budgets and what are operational expense budgets. In offering free space, food and experience as part of the residency programme, Moran shifts what could have solely been used as operational budgets of café expenditure towards opportunities for collective social events for the public.

In many institutional funding structures, the café fully transforming into a residency space for artists-in-resident is not sustainable. While the café-in-residence does provide a place for income generation within the institution, the artist-in-resident poses free uses of the spaces, the tension here for the institution is balancing the income generation of the café with programming budget for the residency. In an effort to scale small into these more social functions for the café, arts institutions could take inspiration from adjacent fields by offering guest menus, pay-what-you-can menus, host events, or perhaps collaborate with the permanent café while artist-in-residence in another programme. This would develop short platforms for the institution to develop this social framework without putting the entire café's income on hold. This need not extend only to artists, but communities-in-residence as well, offering space to use facilities, host, cook, and gather within the centre as part of these small steps towards. As such, the loss of income is managed through deliberate choices connected to other budget areas in the programme while also opening access to the facilities



of the café to social practice artists and communities.

## The Garden

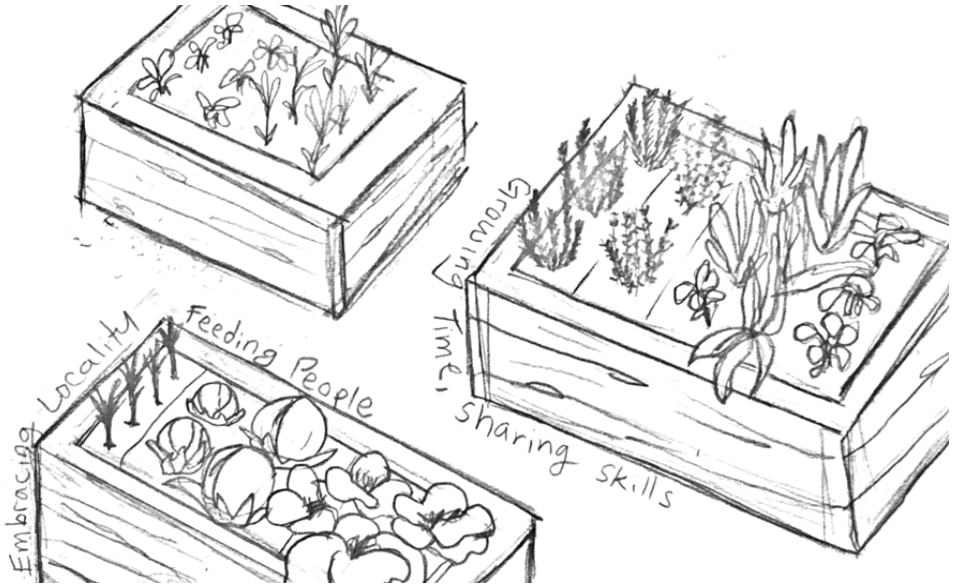


Fig. 2 Illustration of my local community allotments, Marley Treloar 2022

The Pod is set within Coventry Council's Adult Social Care system and funded by the Clinical Commissions Group. The Pod is a programme to support adults in social care by investing time with them to develop skills, community and creativity through the development of a cyclical alternative economy. While not a straightforward social art project, The Pod uses social practices and its ethos of care in tandem. Their programmes use communal garden allotments, environmental activism, arts-based projects, and a soil to table café (Coventry Council) to champion their core aims: 'the right to be included', 'the right to their place in community', to 'access universal and mainstream opportunities (which include training, education and employment)' and 'the right to design and manage their own route to recovery' (Coventry Council). The Pod is made up of three strands of programming: The Time Union, The Food Union and Quiet Activism (Coventry Council). Here I will explore their first two strands and how they might be embedded through social practice in arts institutions.

Time Union is a time bank system between members of the Pod, sharing their skills and time on a give-and-take system. Examples of this include DIY, language learning, music, dance, cooking and career coaching between individual members through mutual exchange. These exchanges between members are facilitated by a paid member of staff, connecting members to meet up when their schedules align.

Interconnected to the Time Union is Food Union, a food activism and garden allotment project based at the Sherbourne Valley allotment in Coventry. The aim of Food Union is building a sustainable vegetable garden which develops knowledge of gardening, growth of biodiversity, and develops skills which will serve The Pod members in the adult health service programme in their lives and recovery. The Food Union supplies 70% of what is served in The Pod Café, with the remaining 30% supplied by local businesses (Coventry Council).

"Gallery time Union"  
recognizing  
volunteer in-kind  
value"

Q: How much would it cost  
US to staff the galleries with  
Paid attendants / agency workers?

Q: How much are volunteers  
Saving US VS bringing in paid  
staff?

Q: What do we already spend  
Compensating volunteers?

Q: How Else can we share  
in-kind support to our  
volunteers?

Fig. 4 Questions for art institutions opening a time union for volunteers, Marley Treloar 2022

How could these two programmes be adopted by art spaces to promote community inclusion and more circular economies of time? Many hours of free volunteer labour are already present within the workflows of galleries today (DCMS). The framework of a time union has the potential to recognize the value of the labour volunteers perform within institutions in a deeper, socially engaged exchange than is customary in many arts institutions. This radicalisation of the value of time questions the value institutions give volunteers in exchange for their free labour and against the governmental acceptance of volunteerism as the norm. The accrual of time could be put towards volunteers earning free spaces in workshops, talks, courses, time with members of staff to learn industry skills, or professional development. This could also act as a way for galleries to develop relationships between communities they wish to consult, in exchange for sharing of space, facilities or expertise.

'In-kind support' is already a familiar term to institutions needing to define their capabilities of support to cultural funding bodies, and the same language could be used to express the value gained by institutions by their volunteer labour. As such, institutions could formalise processes as evidenced by The Pod which embed sharing of resource from a top-down level. While this on the surface maintains the top-down power hierarchy of the institution, as Raichovich (2022) poses this could be done centring care by building strong communication which allows for the inclusion of volunteers to shape and maintain these processes. Even further, this gives art institutions the ability to advocate on behalf of their volunteers, evidencing their impact on the organisation through formal data demonstrate to other organisation the benefit of these practices which builds momentum towards collective sector shifts away from low-valued volunteer positions.

In sharing resource, the communal allotment of the Food Union could be embedded into interconnecting social programmes with arts institutions

as part of a residency, commission, exhibition, or education programme. For those galleries with outdoor space, window ledges for planter boxes, or connections with local allotments or a garden, this would open another avenue to share institutional resources, provide space and develop an interconnected circular economy between the allotments and café.

Dr Nirmal Puwar, Reader in Sociology at Goldsmiths University of London describes The Pod as, 'a deep activism, a unique case of civic care for people, places, land and multi-species, at a time when civic care is aggressively being eroded through calls to austerity, auditing and capital' (Coventry Council). Taking lessons from The Pod, the art sector has multiple programmes it could carry forward from deep activism and care The Pod supports. By re-evaluating the value of labour and 'in-kind' support that volunteers and communities contribute to institutions, art spaces can challenge the established volunteerism and instrumentalization of unpaid labour contributing to sector precarity and barrier of widening access to working in the arts, towards more social and equitable exchange.

## **The Gallery**

The gallery, as a space within the art institution, provides a different function to that of the café or garden, which is more deeply tied to wider art market forces both in commercial and publicly funded galleries. I pose that the artists who galleries work with are also a community in which the relationship needs to be reassessed through commitments by institutions for more radical, social and communal support for artists.

In this section I would like to stretch towards reinvesting of institutional profits, and how an embedded social and political ethos by arts institutions can seek to address inequities which are prominent within the current art sector. In this, the art institution itself is reimagined as a social practice project, testing the boundaries of the sector it functions within and questioning

why others are not doing things differently. While this section specifically explores different models for fairer artist commission, the need for fairer pay in the sector extends to the unpaid voluntary labour and the barriers to access caused by not sufficiently paying community partners for their time in institutional projects.

The We Industria 2023 report on artist commissions suggests that due to low pay, art institutions are fundamentally inequitable and inaccessible for many artists, and points to the necessity of reforming how artists are paid and their labours valued by arts institutions, in order to evidence the need for policy reform to arts funders (We Industria). With the 2023-2026 ACE Investment Programme (Arts Council England) many arts institutions are re-evaluating their financial viability, having lost percentages of their previous support. Major NPO's and well-renown contemporary art galleries in London such as Southbank Centre, Whitechapel Gallery, Serpentine Galleries and Camden Art Centre (Arts Council England) lost large percentages of funds in this shift of public funding outwards towards the rest of the country. The idea of increasing the pay of artists seems further away than ever before.

I describe Guts Gallery as an example of an arts organisation subverting traditional economics of the art market by developing circular economies of support whilst still operating within the system of the art market, to counteract income inequality. While this differs significantly in function from the previous café and garden examples, interrogating the relationship between artists and institution can evidence how an ethos of embedded social and political practice can develop towards social change even in the most economically driven elements of the art sector.

Guts was founded in 2019 as a nomadic gallery, its name stands for 'Grafting Under Tory State' and sets the tone of the political and ideological framework for the gallery (Guts Gallery, Perdu). Led by Director Ellie Pen-

nick, the gallery is aimed at tackling structural inequalities that plague the art industry, including racism, classism and ableism, by exclusively working with artists from underserved backgrounds and identities. On the surface, Guts is an independent commercial gallery, facilitating the creation, exhibition and sale of artworks. However, the ethos underpinning the business model of Guts aims to offer an alternative to the traditional art market for artists who have been excluded from entry through other channels.

Guts opened two online exhibitions over the Covid-19 pandemic, 'When The Shit Hits The Fan' and 'When The Shit Hits The Fan Again' (Guts Gallery) on Instagram, exhibiting the work of established artists in the art market who agreed to contribute 50% of their profits to a pool of support for the emerging artists exhibiting alongside them. These exhibitions sought to address the economic impact of the widespread cancelling/postponing of exhibitions for emerging artists who had less sector representation and suffered most from the loss of commissions due to the pandemic. In addition to artists supporting each other through the communal sharing of profits, Guts takes less than the established 50% commercial art sector percentage of commission, ensuring the artists earn a fairer percentage compared to other commercial contracts. This rebalancing of the relationship between gallerist and artist, ensuring artists are paid more for their work allows for the development of mutually supportive collective funds, which begins to address income inequality through an agreed social practice of sharing resource collectively.

The Guts model plays within the system, reinvesting in their artists and upholding commitments to access and equity by developing new artist funds through existing ties with the commercial art market. This model of supporting the sales of early career, underrepresented and marginalised

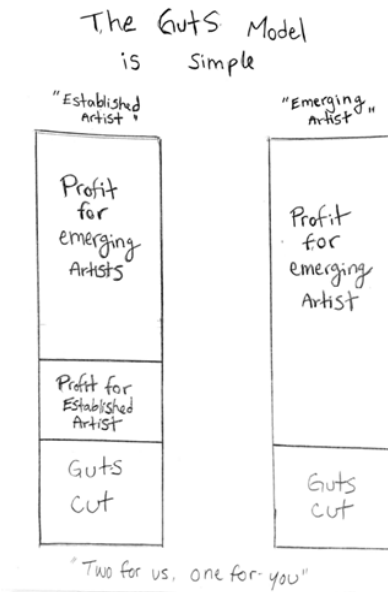


Fig. 5 Napkin math illustration of the Guts Instagram Sales Model, Marley Treloar 2022

artists through pools of collective funds generated by the wider art market could develop towards radically rethinking how art institutions commission and work long-term with artists. It shifts away from a service model of artists selling individual works for individual profits, and towards a collective decision to share resource, including institutional profits for the equality of pay for the artist community.

## Discussion

Charnley poses that due to the impacts of neoliberalism, the institution "tends now to block attempts to situate art in the political currents of the present" (Charnley. Pg 18). Yet, despite the pushback externally on politics being situated within the institution, social practices have increasingly become commissioned in the art sphere. This tension that exists then is between the neoliberal will to neutralise politics within the arts institution



while simultaneously employing cultural policy which promotes the commissioning of social art practices, even in instrumentalized forms. The neutralising and co-opting of radical social practice, as seen in the legacy of institutional critique can then be questioned if it is as relevant today and instead gives opportunity to position the institution as against neoliberal pressures alongside artists. To do so, requires development towards collaborating with art institutions to develop agency and advocacy for change.

One argument is that social practices have been successful due to their ecologies outside of the art market, however, the examples explored in this essay provide insights into artists who view the institution as required partner to explore what a social art sphere might look like under neoliberalism. Charnley writes that these collective social practices which reimagine the art institution “sometimes mimic corporate identities” (Charnley, pg 48) and thus work within the art sphere to evidence how it could be formed differently. This can be seen in the practices of Moran, The Pod and Guts Gallery, offering alternative ways for social practices to collaborate with, ethically drive and create formal structures of social art institutions. Circular economies are one way in which social practices can begin to shift institutional pressures of neoliberal cultural policies away from a lip-service relationship for the defunded welfare state, and towards the development of a social ecology which advocates for change.

To address the prevalence of ‘volunteerism’ (Bishop, Jordan) arts institutions commit to reducing the underpaid and free labours which profit institution as a first step in advocating for the need of increased funding. Included in this is the amount of unpaid labour existing in current artist commissioning model, through commitments to fairer pay (We Industria), arts institutions combat inequity, and make commissions more accessible for social practitioners. Deeply embedded of social practices over long-periods of time (Lynch, Bienkowski), such as The Pod provide an example of

how an individual institution can offer alternatives to existing sector wide frameworks. The arts are not a gap filler for health services, but contribute to wider societal need, of belonging and prospering within a community. In addition to advocating for increasing funds, by sharing existing institutional resources art spaces can continue to democratise access to physical space, pushing back against wider privatisation efforts.

Revisiting the role of impossible participants (Jordan, Hewitt, Beech), each of the three case studies positions the artist, public or institution in a moment of poignant transition away from established models and brings with them their own barriers of increased staff capability, oversight and structural change to financial models. Critically, this puts institutions and social art programmes in a place of precarity, needing to declare openly the issues within the current public funding model and demonstrate their programmes as an alternative example of how the sector could function more collectively. With increasing funding cuts, to make these cyclical practices sustainable in the future, institutions must advocate, better articulate and reflexively evaluate how these social practices contribute towards social change across the entirety of the arts ecosystem – artists, institutions, publics – not for ‘levelling up’ the arts but by providing tangible actions which combat structural inequality.

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# The Performance of Striking: The Past, Present, and Future of Picketing in the UK

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Fig. 1: Members and supporters of CWU (Communication Workers Union) at a rally outside Mount Pleasant Post Office on 26 August 2022, dancing to Gala's *Freed from Desire*. (Photo by author.)

## The Picket as a Blockade

Pickets are not what they used to be. The history of the British picket is fraught with militancy and violence, and the Thatcher era and the 1970s and 80s National Union of Mineworkers' (NUM) strikes in particular irrevocably changed picketing practices in the UK: Martin Adeney and John Lloyd argue that the success of the tactics of the 1972 strike and especially the mass picket that came to be known as the Battle of Saltley Gate precipitated



a significantly harsher police response to the 1984-5 pickets and brought on an onslaught of legislative retaliation from the government, profoundly redefining the picket (100). As the culmination of the 1972 strike which combined multiple tactics and secured victory for the miners, Saltley was an especially embittering defeat to the police and to the government. The picket, began by miners and later joined by thousands of other workers in order to shut down the distribution of coke fuel from a Birmingham fuel depot, was, in Diarmaid Kelliher's words, 'celebrated by the labor movement for demonstrating the power of solidarity and mass picketing, and demonized by its opponents as a symbol of mob rule' (Kelliher 5). Sure enough, secondary picketing (the picketing of a location economically connected to but separate from one's employer), flying pickets (the picketing of a location that belongs to one's employer but is not one's workplace), and solidarity strikes (strike action in support of workers in dispute elsewhere) were all either banned or restricted by the Employment Act of 1980 passed by Thatcher's government. The Code of Practice for Picketing, introduced in the same year, expressly denied picketers the legal power to physically obstruct would-be picket line crossers and, infamously, instituted a limit of six picketers per workplace entrance. The Code of Practice and the Act combined produced what Peggy Kahn, Norman Lewis, Rowland Livock and Paul Wiles describe as 'a conflation of the civil and the criminal law' in the public mind; the complex restrictions on picketing practices and increased police authority over picketers dragged the distinction between criminal offence and civil liability into murky waters (Kahn et al. 49). Indeed, Nick Blake pointedly argues that the government was 'keen to plant an association in the public mind between the recourse to violence of striking miners and terrorism' and that the 1972 NUM strike prompted the authorities to 'form an overall strategy to prevent effective picketing' (Blake 109 and 103). Robert East, Helen Power, and Philip A. Thomas similarly interpreted these chang-

es as an attempt by the state to ensure the inefficiency of picketing, 'most obviously by "criminalising" the miners and their supporters who sought to engage in such activity, thereby assisting the presentation of mass picketing as anti-social and a threat to law and order" (East et al. 305).

It is, of course, not only inevitable that such legal restrictions would change picketing practices, but it is also a possible (and understandable) consequence of what Blake as well as East et al. see as an intentional propaganda project by Thatcher's government that today's picketers might want to disassociate themselves from the spectre of disorder and lawlessness that still haunts the picket to this day. After all, as Joshua Clover writes, 'There is no mystery' as to why the strike as a tactic 'should wish so insistently to distinguish itself from the riot, given its need to make claims of legitimacy both against state repression and for support from other trade unions' (Clover 82). The picket has certainly changed dramatically over the last fifty years: while the practices of informational picketing to gather public support and of persuading others to not cross the picket line do continue, 'the old push and shove' has given way to shared food, music, conversation, and even dancing (Adeney and Lloyd 114). The shift of rhetoric around pickets over the past few decades is rather telling of this transformation. To Arthur Scargill 'the sanctity of the picket line was a vital weapon, particularly if it could be extended' via secondary picketing; the picket was 'the basic tenet of trade unionism' precisely because it physically obstructed the flow of people and commodities in addition to having the psychological element of persuasion (Adeney and Lloyd 93 and 92). East et al. assign a comparable level of significance to physically obstructive pickets, associating picketing by 'small numbers of quiet individuals not trying to stop vehicles and responding immediately to demands of police officers' with inefficiency (East et al. 306). Although NUM officials had advocated for peaceful picketing in the 1970s, in 1984 police brutality was a real enough possibility that NUM's



National Co-ordinating Committee went so far as to recommend picketers to wear 'industrial type footwear and clothing, and, if possible, safety helmets' (Adeney and Lloyd 92). In stark contrast to this, today's picket organisers may set their pickets up with sound systems for music and speeches and may provide snacks for strikers and their supporters (Fig. 2); some even encourage picketers to bring their children. When members and supporters of the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) gathered outside Mount Pleasant Post Office on 26 August 2022, CWU's London region representative Mark Dolan declared to the crowd that 'our pickets are great, everyone knows that'. The implication that what makes a picket 'great' today has more to do with sociality and enjoyment than pushing and shoving was confirmed later as the rally erupted into song and dance, waving flags and jumping up and down to Gala's 1997 europop tune *Freed from Desire* blasting from the loudspeakers (Fig. 1). The picket, once a site of potentially violent confrontation and Scargill's 'key tactical weapon', has thus become something more akin to a political picnic – or, indeed, a performance of striking (Adeney and Lloyd 92).

This is not to say that the picket would now be devoid of purpose (nor is it my intention to call for a return to more militant picketing practices). Rather, I want to suggest that the decline of the picket as a physical barrier preventing the circulation of goods and enforcing the withdrawal of labour has left behind a space that has been taken up by alternative forms and uses, heightening the picket's sociality and its role as a co-constituted space of collective protest. Although the Thatcher administration reduced the picket's capacity to interfere with the smooth functioning of economic reproduction, the fact that striking workers continue to picket their workplaces today indicates that the practice still has value and is, in some way, useful in industrial disputes. I do not want to imply that other aspects of picketing – such as speeches and leaflets – would be irrelevant or inconse-

quential to the picket as a tactic in helping win a strike: the picket does of course retain its powers of persuasion, and for many picketers the recruitment of fellow workers to the cause and the convincing of members of the public to support the fight and to boycott employers remains the primary purpose of picketing. However, I would argue that there is more to the contemporary picket than this. I want to suggest that the historical shift of the picket from a barricade to a picnic means that today's picket has different aims and purposes than the picket as a blockade (that has now been policed and legislated out of existence): rather than a tool for economic disruption, it is a primarily social space that acts on its participants as much as it does on its audiences. Thus, a shift in analytical tools is required: if we are to understand the purpose and meaning of the picket today, we must take into account not necessarily its (directly measurable) economic consequences, but rather its social features.

In what follows, I will analyse the picket in the framework of performance offered, on the one hand, by Richard Schechner and by Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow on the other. Schechner contends that 'just about anything can be studied "as" performance' and that this approach facilitates the analysis of 'things otherwise closed off to inquiry' such as the significance of the spatiality and temporality of an event (Schechner 38 and 48). Building on Schechner's assertion that 'there is no human social interaction that is not [...] rule-bound', Diana Taylor stresses the importance of 'reiterative elements' and 'meanings and conventions' to the broader meaning of performance, adding that 'A protest is not just any walk down a public street'; indeed, Taylor includes 'sociopolitical and cultural practices' such as protest in her definition of performance (Schechner 51, Taylor 15 and 17). Mirroring the consequently interdisciplinary nature of performance studies, Tilly and Tarrow borrow the 'theatrical metaphor' to describe forms of protest as 'contentious performances' and 'contentious repertoires' that not only

have performers and audiences but also what Taylor might call 'reiterative elements that are reactualized in every new instantiation' (Tilly and Tarrow 16 and 11, Taylor 15). The public and repeatable (or, as Tilly and Tarrow call it, 'modular') nature of protest and the presence of performers, audiences, and 'shared scripts' make the metaphor an apt one and comparisons between protest and performance rather organic (Tilly and Tarrow 12). Performance studies is thus well-placed for the purposes of examining the picket as a form of protest and working out the picket's role in today's industrial disputes (and, hence, in building and imagining other futures for our workplaces and for our society). It is in this context that I want to argue that the historical evolution of the picket has endowed a previously de-emphasised social dynamic within it with a heightened significance that deserves attention and that today's picket operates in the realm of affect as well as in that of persuasion.

## **The Picket as a Performance**

When picketing is practiced as part of industrial action, it draws attention to the dispute between workers and employer by establishing the workers as physically present at the picket line – which designates them as separate from and in opposition to their place of employment. The picket line marks the place of employment as a place to be avoided; something unjust or at least unfair is happening on the other side of the picket line, and the picket line is hence not to be crossed. While the hard pickets of the decades past emphasised a more economically tangible approach to enforcing the boycotting of picketed places of employment, the tightly regulated pickets of today are much more limited in their capacity to assert the authority of the picket line – so much so that Frances Fox Piven contends that the picket line is now 'merely a form of speech' (Piven 21). The death of the blockade-picket has aligned the picket more closely with performance: the picket now

functions as the physical articulation of the act of striking that gives form and substance to not going to work (as well as working towards economic disruption for the employer via peaceful persuasion). Given that a strike in and of itself is an absence of action rather than an action in itself (at least in that a strike constitutes the withdrawal of labour, the absence of it, the stoppage of the production of commodities or nonmaterial goods), the picket is an opportunity for striking workers to assemble and perform their strike, i.e. to make it visible by gathering together to demonstrate that they are outside their workplace because they are not going to work. They are not simply striking, as in not going to work, but picketing, as in making a show of not going to work and dedicating time to not going to work. The picket and the strike are not synonymous (*ceci n'est pas une grève*); although the two commonly co-occur, one can be had without the other. A strike is a strike with or without pickets; a worker can be on strike in the comfort of their home without standing outside at a picket. Similarly, buildings and other spaces can be picketed without strike action being involved. In other words, (very) strictly speaking a strike doesn't need pickets. The picket certainly strengthens strike action, and it is for good reason that the picket and the strike usually do walk hand in hand; recognising that they are two separate and distinct – and not necessarily contiguous – contentious performances however speaks to how valuable the picket still is to the strike in spite of its lessened capability to turn workers and others away from the place of employment. It may well be that this capability, lessened though it is, might in and of itself be sufficient to ensure the picket's continued importance to striking workers; however, I would argue that the weakening of the picket line as a hard boundary has been supplemented by the strengthening of the social dimension of the picket.

As Nick Blake writes, pickets 'provide visual confirmation to the doubting worker that he or she will not be alone when embarking upon the un-

equal struggle between employer and employee'; the 'evidence of visible solidarity acts on the individual worker as a reminder that he or she is part of a group or a class and that the hardships to be faced will not be faced alone' (Blake 107). The picket is where class solidarity finds a material expression; at the picket, 'the materialization of community, identity, and working-class respectability are mobilized' (Nield 89). The picket allows its participants to 'have the experience of recognition, of belonging to a whole', as Clayton Bohnet argues; even more so when it succeeds in its persuasive function and finds more workers to join the strike (Bohnet 39). Thus, just as many other forms of protest, the performance of picketing is addressed to picketers themselves just as much as it is to employers, passersby, and would-be picket line crossers: 'the question of efficacy and size' should hence also be thought 'in relation to the protest itself, where it would seem that the growth of the movement would have its greatest effect' (Bohnet 39). In this sense, the picket can be understood as a space of affirmation and imagination: we see others who are also engaged in the same struggle and may be reassured that by working together in our numbers we may bring about an improved future. The decline of the picket as a direct action tactic has made the picket more akin to the protest demonstration: a gathering of (more or less) like-minded individuals intended to express a collective opinion and spread awareness of their cause. The demonstration and the picket both look to the future by offering their participants and audiences the possibility of change and by imagining alternatives to the current state of affairs; or, in L.M. Bogard's words, they 'provide a prefigurative vision of the world we want to see, and thus help make that other, better world possible' (281). This does not, however, mean to suggest that the picket is (or even imagines) a utopia or a complete vision of society. It should be noted that the picket can and often does also create division as well as unity: the picket, does, after all, draw a more or less literal line dividing us (or those who are

with us) from them (or those who are against us), thus singling out and/or ostracising those who cross the picket line. In other words, solidarity is not a given and the picket is a space of struggle and protest just as much as it is that of sociality and collectivity. Unsavory though it might be, this could simply be seen as an extension of Bogad's 'prefigurative vision' in that the future imagined by the picket may not be unconditionally inclusive; likewise, Nield's 'community' and Blake's 'whole' both imply an outside or an opposition to them, an out-group to their in-groups. (A full analysis of the ethical and moral implications of this is, sadly, outside the scope of this essay.)

Nevertheless, the sharing of food, the playing of music, and even dancing make pickets spaces that have a lot in common with what Bogad calls tactical performance, i.e. 'the use of performance techniques, tactics, and aesthetics in social-movement campaigns' (2). Bogad's analysis of the role of performance in protest emphasises 'the pleasure principle' and 'serious play'; he argues that 'Even if the issue is deadly serious, there should be something about the time spent and the physical movement through space that inspires desire and defiant joy' (281 and 89). In this way, the picket also resembles what Bogad describes as 'carnavalesque' protest, meant to 'inspire desire, collective stories, group cohesion, and identity formation' (96-7). To Bogad, enjoyment as part of protest interrupts what he terms the hegemonologue: 'the hegemonic monologue of common neoliberal ideology that drones on from big and little screens, with favorite themes being the criminalization or pathologization of dissent, and the inevitability of predatory and unrestricted global capitalism' (32). Insofar as the picket can be understood as a protest gathering that reappropriates time that would otherwise be dedicated to wage labour, devoting it to shortbread and laughter instead, we can also understand the picket as a space that breaks with the hegemonologue. As not only a materialisation of solidarity and a performance of strike action but a space where collectivity is expressed through

free food and shared enjoyment, today's picket runs counter to the ideas that protest is an anti-social phenomenon and that there are no alternatives to neoliberal capitalism's ordering of society.

Both Bogad and Bohnet derive an understanding of protest as a participatory experience capable of rupturing the hegemonologue from Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*: what Bogad describes as the interruption of the hegemonologue, Bohnet associates with 'a rupture with the ideological presuppositions that set the spectacle up as the sovereign domain of recognition and solidarity' (166). 'The outside of the spectacle', thus, is 'a democratization which dis-alienates one from the present' and can 'help communities to reclaim their existence for something besides obedient production and consumption' (Bohnet 165 and Bogad 282). Bogad and Bohnet take somewhat different approaches in their Debordian interpretations of protest: while Bohnet alludes to Rousseau's direct democracy without representation as key to piercing the spectacle, Bogad reads in Debord 'a desire for a more participatory and playful life' and an encouragement to 'a participatory, do-it-yourself form of political action and communication' (64 and 106). Both, however, associate a certain immediacy to the collectivity of protest: there is a sense here of protest being able to generate or materialise something more direct, something more real, than other forms of political participation. The picket as the reclamation of labour time touches upon precisely this. By choosing to come together to perform their strike and to dedicate their reclaimed labour time to protest, picketers create an alternative to what Bogad terms 'obedient production and consumption': the picket, as a contentious performance, frames the time taken away from production as explicitly disobedient to the exigencies of wage labour and economic reproduction.

While many experienced picketers would likely wince at the idea of associating picketing with leisure, allowing and inviting picketers to have

fun at the picket rather than gearing them up for a fight does emphasise the picket as a space removed from work, carving out a space of not just non-work but of joy to the side of the workplace – but specifically doing so in the context of protest and contention. The picket thus creates a collective, co-constituted space that explicitly and purposefully exists in opposition to the workplace while carrying within it an echo of a whisper that goes something like “we could do this more often”. Implicit and understated though it often is, there is a glimmer of a different future in the picket. As a physical manifestation of solidarity, the picket can rupture the spectacle of compulsive representation (that, to Bohnet, constitutes an ‘abnormal need’ ‘to be a spectacle’ and ‘a consequence of the radical self-estrangement the spectacle engenders’) and instead stake a claim to public space to enact an alternative to neoliberal individualism (Bohnet 138). The teach out, often found at the picket lines of universities, is a particularly good example of this. The sharing of knowledge outside the university in a manner not too dissimilar to lectures and seminars decommodifies what the university sells as a product and hence not only imagines but enacts a different way of education.





*Fig. 2: A breakfast spread at a University and College Union (UCU) picket outside Queen Mary University of London on 20 March 2023. (Photo by author.)*

## **The Picket As...?**

Much like Blake and East et al., Bohnet also understands the criminalisation of protest as a way of rendering protest compliant and ineffective. Bohnet sees the 'regulated, patrolled and controlled forms of dissent' as acquiescing to 'the demand [...] for state and consumer behaviors not to be in any way disrupted, threatened, de-legitimated'; such protest 'counts on its spectacularization' and therefore becomes part of the spectacle, mere representation (167 and 32). As Bohnet indicates, Debord's theories thus anticipated debates about the inefficiency and co-optation of protest (55). It is this very concern that prompted Kai Lumumba Barrow to aptly term 'ritualized' performances of protest as the 'spectacle of protest'; the fear is

that playing by the rules makes protest useless or banal, just for show, or, as Piven put it, 'merely a form of speech' – like logging a complaint that is taken note of but never acted upon (Barrow et al. 322). It should now be noted that although the picket has evolved to find alternative ways to articulate its nature as a protest and to challenge the spectacle, it certainly does play by the rules. In this sense, the picket represents exactly the kind of 'regulated, patrolled and controlled' protest that Bohnet speaks of; criminalisation, whether by legal text or by the manipulation of public discourse, appears to have left the picket little choice but to reinvent itself within the strict parameters imposed upon it (as opposed to contesting said parameters).

We might then echo Barrow's reflections on the nature and efficacy of protest as a response to anti-Black violence and ask ourselves: 'Are our tactics and methods of dissent predictable?' (322) A staple in the industrial action variety of our repertoire of contention though the picket might be, can it still help win a strike? Is the picketnic enough? I ask the question not in order to suggest that the practice of picketing would be obsolete, meaningless, or not worth the effort (as I have argued above, I certainly do think the picket still has its uses), but as something of a provocation. It might well be that leaflets and peaceful persuasion, alongside pastries and music, are indeed enough for the picket to continue to be a viable and relevant contentious performance. However – is this all that the picket can be? The brief historicization of the picket above points to the possibility of alternatives; granted, a return to the picket's more confrontational origins is not necessarily neither desirable nor feasible, but perhaps there is a prospect of further evolution here. Embracing Bogard's 'pleasure principle' even more fully might sound appealing to some, while others would undoubtedly scoff at the idea. Regardless, the flicker of possibility that the picket projects into public space might inspire or instruct the building of new futures: as Sita Balani writes, pickets 'are part of a pedagogy of defiance, creating spaces in

which new kinds of knowledge are produced' (Balani 18). The ways in which the picket might articulate the futurity within it thus deserve deliberation and speculation – perhaps even premeditation.

Perhaps it is true that the picket found its feet and began dancing only once its hands were tied. However, the evolution of protest tactics in itself is nothing out of the ordinary. Repertoires of contention change over time as previous performances become ineffective; as Charles Tilly reminds us, our present repertoire looks nothing like that of the 18th century and has remained virtually unchanged since the 19th century (Tilly 20). 'The first strike is a mystery, the second an outrage, the thousandth a problem to be dealt with'; people have always learned new tactics to challenge the various injustices they have been faced with and updated their skillsets to match their circumstances (Tilly 19). Clover also warns against forgetting this 'process of transformation' lest we would be 'left instead with its resultants standing before us as givens' (83). Adaptation and evolution are inherent to social movements and repertoires of contention, and 'The preservation of collective action's many modes, of the creativity of antagonism, is a vital task' (Clover 80). Piercing the spectacle is one of the challenges contentious performance today is tasked with achieving: as Barrow argues, 'Any tactic or strategy that becomes too familiar turns stagnant – into a spectacle, so to speak. In this sense, I think we must always be willing to interrupt ourselves, even when we think we've got it "right"' (323). The picket is no exception to this. It is worthwhile to question what the picket intends to achieve and how that something is (purportedly) achieved – to question whether the picket is mere spectacle, an antidote to spectacle, or something in between – when trying to understand how the picket strives to change futures and presents. In other words, it is worthwhile to question whether the picket is just a familiar ritual with little material impact or whether it is still a relevant and useful tool in building better futures. If not, the question

becomes not whether anything at all can be done anymore but what else is yet to be done.

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# **After Work: notes towards a work-less (playful) future**

*Chris Green*

## **Abstract**

This paper takes as its starting point the current situation in regards to labour and protest within the context of the U.K. specifically in relation to Higher Education. After more than six years of working on precarious contracts (whilst also engaged with part-time PhD research) across numerous Universities, the author recently moved onto a permanent contract. My aim is to think through the possible ways that art and performance might offer alternatives to a life filled with work. I begin by looking at some specific examples of where artists have reflected on work and labour. In doing so, I am then able to move into an analysis of the exhibition *After Work* by Célline Condorelli (with Ben Rivers and Jay Bernard) held at South London Gallery between March and June 2022 to suggest possible futures of work and the way that it is presented in practice, a future that might push away from our current culture of over work and one that might shift to finding more space for leisure and play. These suggestions open up possible small solutions to much bigger problems. In addition, I will also draw upon *In the Meantime, Midday Comes Around* an international exhibition exploring the changes to work over the last decade. The exhibition was on show at Kunsthalle Wien between November 2022 and May 2023.

## **Introduction**

In late 2022 a twitter account titled 'Birkbeck, University of Liberation' (now renamed 'Free Birkbeck') was set up in response to the proposed restructuring planned by senior management at Birkbeck, University of London,

that would involve the loss of over 100 jobs and destroy a number of the world-leading departments. Birkbeck is an evening University, aimed at mainly those who are already working in full-time employment. The proposed cuts are particularly significant to both this paper and to this sector more widely because of the damage they will do. The account offers possible solutions for an alternative University model. One post reads,

Free Birkbeck (Birkbeck UOL). We all need to wrestle the sector off the claws of the managerial class. First step is to stop normalising their existence. The second step is demanding they step down. The third step is organisation in solidarity.  
(Cooperativism as praxis' 6 December 2022, 09.52 p.m. Tweet)

What is striking about this account (unlike other accounts set-up to resist such restructuring plans) is that it offers possible solutions and strategies for togetherness that remove the role and need for the managerial. Across the country, workers are taking action in order to resist worsening conditions, fighting for fair pay deals that keep up with inflation and protect against the cost of living crisis, and to stop job losses — from nurses to paramedics and ambulance workers, to train drivers, to university staff, to cleaners, to barristers, and beyond there is a crisis of / at work. Simultaneously we are all working harder, longer, and with less security. Our rights and our means to have a work / life balance are eroding and we feel guilty if we are not (or at least seen to be being) 'super busy'. Precarity is now the norm. As a point of departure, I wish to return to the 'Free Birkbeck' twitter account where they invite us to imagine the following. 'Crises as a site of opportunity. Crises as the chance to rethink the now, because the now has shaken out of place, because we can't afford to be complacent.' 6 December 2022, 09.52 p.m. Tweet.

I am using the example of the UK HE context here as a framing device and as a point of departure that is indicative of a wider contemporary work

culture. This context is particularly relevant given the scope of the journal and it also speaks to and allows me a way into a discussion about the relationship between labour and art making, and the experience of engaging with art and performance practices as a tool to imaging otherwise. This is, however, picked up again in the section titled Leisure Time / Play Time in which I discuss the phenomena of 'quitting'.

## **Work and Labour as Art / Art as Work and Labour**

Work and labour have long been the subject of contemporary practice, and there is a wealth of scholarship spanning both contemporary performance and art including a 2017 'Documents of Contemporary Art' anthology published by Whitechapel Gallery titled *Work*. Mierle Laderman Ukeles is perhaps the most well-known artist making art that centres work, Ukeles famously became artist in residence at the New York Department of Sanitation. They created (amongst other things) performances, works on paper, sculptures, and a manifesto for maintenance art. The manifesto relates specifically to a proposed exhibition titled 'Care', that would have consisted of three different parts: personal — where the artist would perform household chores but in the gallery environment; general — this would consist of interviews with the public about maintenance and earth — refuse would be delivered to the gallery to be sorted and recycled (Steinhauer, 2017). Each element of the exhibition would question the audience's perceptions of maintenance and the labour associated with it.

In her book *Working Aesthetics* (2019) Danielle Child describes a distinction between labour and work that draws on the writing of Raymond Williams. She notes that 'work is our most general word for 'doing something'; however, the term tends to now refer to regular paid employment, that is, 'I'm going to work'. Labour was more historically associated with hard physical toil and pain, referring to manual and productive work (and,



of course, childbirth)' (3). The term work may be most appropriate to describe the kinds of jobs that many people now undertake (especially in the arts and culture sector) where the work engaged often fits into the category of 'immaterial labour', the kind of labour that does not produce a material product. Maurizio Lazzarato highlighted that within immaterial forms of labour, the worker is required to have their own subjectivity at the centre of the work that they do,

The worker is to be responsible for his or her own control and motivation within the work group without a foreman needing to intervene, and the foreman's role is redefined into that of a facilitator. In fact, employers are extremely worried by the double problem this creates: on one hand, they are forced to recognize the autonomy and freedom of labor as the only possible form of cooperation in production, but on the other hand, at the same time, they are obliged (a life-and-death necessity for the capitalist) not to "redistribute" the power that the new quality of labor and its organization imply. (135)

This creates an environment where workers are working 'socially' (in the sense that part of the job is to work together) but they are also working against and in competition with each other — and where working becomes a performance of emotional labour. Self-organisation also means self-monitoring, and monitoring of others. This creates a feeling of pressure of knowing that we should be busy, but busy doing what? As noted by Professor of Work and Organisation Peter Fleming 'our jobs now become something very intimate to us, especially when it relies upon our social aptitudes, creative energies, and emotional intelligence to make things happen' (192). So, we are no longer exhausted by the physicality of the work that we do, but also by the need to be social. One of the central examples in Child's book is Rimmini Protokoll's Call Cutta in a Box (2008-12). The performance is described by the company as an international phone play, where the audience

member is directed to a specific room or other location with a sketched map. Inside the location there is a phone ringing, on the other end is a call centre worker in India who usually 'sell credit cards or insurance over the phone to people on the other side of the globe' (2008, no page). The performance then begins as a conversation between the audience member and the performer / call centre worker (or actor-worker). Unlike other examples in the book, Child notes that Call Cutta performs labour rather than 'engaging in productive labour' (94). Those who perform in the work (the callers) are not trained actors but have instead answered an advert for a job. The 'actor-worker' (a term coined by Shannon Jackson in 2011) is asked to play themselves in the teleplay (they use their own names and images); they are required to create a bond with the audience member asking personal questions. At the end of the performance if they have engaged fully the pair will have 'shared a cup of tea, conversed, eaten and danced with, and seen the person on the other end of the call' (96).

Call centre work is a clear example of immaterial labour. The work that is conducted does not produce a material product, but rather it produces an encounter (although these encounters are rarely wanted by the person receiving the call). Call Cutta in a Box cleverly uses the format of a call centre and the notion of immaterial labour to shift the audience members perception of this type of work. It uses the format to try to do something different, that is to create a bond between the audience member and the 'actor-worker'. Although this bond may be superficial, it also raises questions about the role of work and labour within our lives. Calling a stranger's home, or a stranger at home or at work, to try to sell them something is a crossing between 'private' life and capitalism. This performance reminds us that the person on the end of the phone is also a person, doing a job, trying to make a living. The performance is also a highlighting and pointing to the kinds of labours that are involved in this kind of role – it becomes a microcosm of

contemporary work.

Olivia Plender's 2013 installation *Self-direction Lounge* commissioned by Henie Onstad Kunstsenter (HOK) Oslo, where 'the installation is a play on contemporary working environments and the language of workplace psychology' (2013: no page). There is a key shift of focus here however, this is not about the labour of another (no one is performing for you), but instead about the audience's relationship to labour and work. As Plender describes, 'Several themed areas (or zones) are divided by screens, so that the office becomes a stage or set, in which performance can be measured' (no page). The use of office furniture connotes well-trodden cultural references to post-Fordist work and connect it to other cultural products in a similar vein (Mike Judge's *Office Space* (1999), for example). Plender notes that the work is a comment on the 'individuals happily instrumentalising their creativity, striving for personal growth and self-actualising whilst accepting less and less job security' (Plender, 2013). These observations speak to what Fredric Lordan observes in *Willing Slaves of Capital* (2014) that the ideal worker is one who gives themselves fully to that of the organisation for which they work and 'the goal is reached when employees, "moving entirely of their own accord" and without needing to be further co-linearised, strive in the organisation's direction and bring it their power of acting unreservedly as a perfectly voluntary commitment' (123). What these works have in common is a sense of bringing to the fore contemporary experiences of labour and our willingness to give ourselves over to our work with ease. In different ways, both Rimini Protokoll and Plender use that labour in the work, and they both offer critiques of that labour – one uses human encounters to do so and the other uses an encounter with objects.

In *Capitalist Realism* (2009) Mark Fisher noted the ways in which work, and life had become inseparable from one and other as 'capital follows you when you dream. Time ceases to be linear, becomes chaotic, broken down

into punctiform divisions. As production and distribution are restructured, so are nervous systems' (34). This articulates the impact that work has on our lives. The problem of work and life balance is further articulated by Fleming who states that 'we begin to live with our work and it with us. And this pressure is certainly exacerbated in today's climate when the only thing that worries us more than our jobs is the thought of not having one' (192). As we have shifted away from a work culture of physically demanding tasks, these have instead become mentally demanding. This is especially true in precarious work, something that is rife within the art and culture sector with many working on freelance and zero hours basis – the work is often in the finding of work in the first place, as Fisher continues, 'periods of work alternate with periods of unemployment. Typically, you find yourself employed in a series of short-term jobs, unable to plan for the future' (34). Since the time in which Fisher and Fleming were writing these issues have continued to be exasperated, as evidenced in the introduction to this paper. This raises a number of significant questions. How then can we imagine a future of work where there is more space for leisure? Or a future of work that allows us to move towards sustainable models of food production, care, and energy when we spend all of our time either at work or working at getting work?

## **After Work**

Célline Cardolloni's *After Work* (2022) is a body of practice that takes as its starting point a commission from South London Gallery to create a playground for Draycott Close, Elmington Estate in Camberwell (close by to the gallery) that consists of 'carousels, climbing frames and colourful surfaces... developed over several months with architect Johnny Cullivan, children and residents' (South London Gallery). It was part of a wider and ongoing collaborative project between the gallery and local housing estates. The exhibition is made up of elements connected to the playground and audiences to the

gallery are somewhat transported there. The exhibition brings the outside in (as pictured below); there are sculptural elements that can be sat on, and it seems as though they can be played with — although within the setting of a gallery there is always some level of reluctance to do so. This is in keeping with official statements about the work ‘the exhibition explores themes of labour, play and public space while investigating the relationship between exhibition making and public art, reflecting on the artist’s interest in connecting the gallery space to the outside world’ (South London Gallery). In one room of the Old Fire Station the artist has erected some metal frame-work positioned towards a video projected on the wall in front of it. The frame consists of multiple areas to sit, one deckchair like seat exists, alongside other options for people to lean on. The frame and floor are painted in pastel colours that promote a feeling of calmness and relaxation; the larger chair is similar to that of a beach chair (see Figure 1). The area creates a feeling of leisure, a space to stop and relax. Leisure time exists separate from work time (although, interestingly, it is interconnected and somewhat tied up to neoliberal models), the exhibition, not least through its title, highlights this. Pil and Galia Kollektiv argue that,

Defined primarily in terms of one another, the modern notions of work and leisure serve to sequester daily experience from this fearsome loose pleasure that cannot coexist with the developed bourgeois ego: leisure time existing as time spent outside the office or factory and work functioning as a desired space – a catalyst for the manufacturing of wealth (2005: no page).

Indeed, the fact that we are not outside playing in the playground draws to our attention the work that has gone into making the exhibition, perhaps it also reminds us that by being inside the gallery we are still partially ‘at work’, as to engage with art requires a certain amount of associated

labour. This also highlights questions around who gets to enjoy leisure time and who has access both to the time needed to be taken out of a working day and the time taken to enter the exhibition and to engage with the work. Even though the gallery is open over the course of the weekend, this supposed designated period of free time is not so to many, for those who may have to work shifts, those with various and sometimes challenging caring responsibilities and those who may have to take up extra hours at work and overtime in order to meet the hellishly high costs of living (especially so in Zone Two South London). There is a link between the importance of leisure time (and access to it) and the argument for a Basic Income. Such an income would allow for all members of society to manage their working life in such a way that they could potentially only work what they were comfortable to do and allow them the opportunity and possibility of engaging with other non-work related activities, without the constant fear of not having enough money to survive. The approaches to Basic Income are wide and varied but I am inclined to side with Kathi Weeks' (Professor of Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies) argument for a 'minimal liveable income regularly remitted as a social wage, paid unconditionally to residents regardless of citizenship status, regardless of family or household membership, and regardless of past, present, or future employment status' (575). I return to the question of Basic Income in my discussion on the exhibition *In the Meantime, Midday Comes Around*.

Furthermore, the film that is projected, and somewhat dominates the space points towards the labour involved in creating the playground and the subsequent artworks. The film, created in collaboration with Ben Rivers and Jay Bernard documents the process that went into the creation of the playground. Scenes flip between building work, the bringing in of materials and resources, and larger depictions of construction industry — diggers working on the side of a hill, stones being jet washed and cut which are

juxtaposed against more 'natural' figures, footage of a fox moving around and people moving through the surrounding area. The playground structure emerges through this. The film (see Figures 2 and 3) shows the process and the coming into being of the playground, it draws to the fore the labour involved in the making process. It also draws us away from the space that the viewer is in, reminding us again that we could / should be outside playing, running about the way that the fox is. Upon visiting the exhibition, my embodied experience was one of reluctance. The structure made me want to engage on a playful level, but I was resistant, instead choosing to 'respect the art'. I found myself wanting to sit in the chair, but unsure if I was allowed, I spent time walking around the space, looking for approval to do so. The space was relatively small and there were not many other people present, so there was nobody to follow. My visit to the gallery was made possible because of work commitments. I visited on a day that I was down in London for work, I had come a day earlier and stayed with friends. I was worried that a gallery assistant would see me and tell me off for sitting in the chair, or for leaning on the railings. The environment did create an emotional synaesthesia of sorts, this was largely down to the pastel colours that created a calming feel, the space also had a smoothness to it added to the sense of a leisurely experience — my time off work was nonetheless being spent productively. However, the exhibition did seem removed from the playground, a divide existed between art gallery visitor and housing estate resident. Two experiences exist between those who can and do have access to the leisure time to enter the gallery (on days off or after / before work) and those who do not enter the gallery and experience the work outside. But perhaps this is the point, the exhibition does not just point to experiences of labour and work, but also pushes you to think about what you could be doing instead of working (a thought often rendered unimaginable).

*Fig. 1: View of the larger seat as part of the sculpture.*





*Fig. 2: Film still with footage of the playground.*



*Fig. 3: Further footage of the playground.*





## Leisure Time / Play Time

In recent years, there has been a growing movement relating to 'quitting'. This is something that is particularly pertinent for many doctoral and early career researchers especially within the arts and humanities; the prospect of never actually being able to get a secure job after years of studying and hard work has become enough for people to say enough. The damage that precarity does to health (both mental and physical) is so severe that for many it is no longer viable to keep working towards a seemingly impossible goal of what Lauren Berlant describes as 'the good life'. There is a growing body of writing about this that is categorised as 'quit lit' — not just the kind of writing that is designed to make you stop drinking – but writing about stopping working. An example of this is an article written by Francesca Coin titled 'On Quitting' in which she seeks to examine,

the impact of the neoliberal academie on subjectivity. In the neoliberal university, subjectivity is caught into a web of conflicting expectations. On the one hand, it is expected to live up to high standards of competition. On the other hand, the body experiences competition as a celebrated form of self-abuse. In this context, quitting is not merely about resigning an academic position. It is a symptom of the urge to create a space between the neoliberal discourse and the sense of self; an act of rebellion intended to abdicate the competitive rationality of neoliberal academia and embrace different values and principles. (705)

Although Coin is writing from a North American perspective, the issues are still present within UK academia too, where over work and unequal payment and precarity is also rife — quitting therefore can be seen as rebuttal to this. It is common too for artists to experience precarity, with many taking on a 'portfolio career' which is a nicer way of saying, a selection of short-term contracts and jobs, often employed only as and when required.

The idea and use of the word quitting speaks to the arguments put forward in post-work theory. In 'The Post-Work Manifesto' Stanley Aronowitz, Dawn Esposito, William DiFazio and Margaret Yard argue that,

The very premise of a nonwork future evokes a split second, gut-wrenching shock of the inconceivable. The conventional wisdom has elevated work to the status of a holy mission, even as labor productivity, generated by technological progress, makes possible a future without endless work. Western civilizations are fated by historical circumstance to be addicted to a culture of labor. Sometimes it's hard to discern whether the initiating stressor for living on borderline of "making ends meet" is fear of starvation from losing a job or fear of going to Hell and suffering eternal damnation. Such is the massive cultural guilt of nonwork. (71)

This demonstrates the fact that we are now wedded to our work. This text was written over twenty years ago, and connection to our jobs and the work / life balance has deteriorated even further — we are now constantly able to check into our work emails wherever we are. The idea of leisure time has been encroached upon even further. Even when we engage in leisure activities we are often distracted by our work, checking in to see what is going on, or if we have been contacted. To return to *After Work*, how could the idea of free time or leisure time been pushed even further, perhaps the exhibition itself could have been created as an indoor playground, without the contextualising of the labour that went into it. However, I would argue that that labour should not be overlooked, it would be somewhat disingenuous to suggest that within a gallery there could be a complete move away from work — the visitor team would still need to be present (and working), the artist's labour has gone into the work, and it highlights the fact that there is labour in engaging in play and leisure (meaning that the audience would still be performing labour).

In 'The Decline and Fall of Work' Raul Vaneigem argues that,

The same people who are murdered slowly in the mechanised slaughterhouses of work are also arguing, singing, drinking, making love, taking to the streets, picking up weapons and inventing a new poetry. Already the front against forced labour is forming; its gestures of refusal are moulding the consciousness of the future. (52)

Although first published in France in 1967, (a year before the May 1968 Paris uprisings that saw mass civil unrest including protests and general strikes) the words and the state of labour conditions echoes in 2023. Although much time has passed, the sense of a resistance forming is strong, although perhaps the same feelings of hope are less prevalent. Despite advances in technology, the shift away from production and manufacturing

to immaterial labour, not much has changed. We are still wedded to work and unable to get away from a culture where we are defined by it. Throughout the Covid pandemic there was talk about changes to the way that we worked, how being able to decide how and where we worked would mean more time for things outside of work. This talk seems to have instead turned towards people once again being scared of losing their jobs and for fighting for better pay and conditions; there seems to have been no revolution of work, only more deterioration and attacks on our rights.

Perhaps, we could begin to consider art and performance practices that explore non-work as 'gestures of refusal' of contemporary experiences of labour. This position is demonstrated in the previous example of *After Work*. It is also true for *In the Meantime, Midday Comes Around* (2023) a past exhibition at Kunsthalle Wien. The exhibition seeks to address such questions as 'how did it come about that we don't work to live but rather live to work, and that we can scarcely imagine other forms of living?' (Kunsthalle Wien, 2023) through the presentation of artworks and engagement activity that places unemployed and no work futures at the centre. The exhibition title and theme were inspired by 'a quote taken from a seminal sociological study on unemployment from the 1930s called *Marienthal: The Sociography of an Unemployed Community*' (2023). The study was of a local Vienna suburb that was largely impacted by the 1929 world economic crash that saw the whole area become unemployed (Kunsthalle Wien, 2023).

I did not see this exhibition live and therefore my experience of it is somewhat different to that of *After Work*, in that I do not have that embodied knowledge of being there, I have not been able to engage with the works and I am unable to comment on the way that it made me feel. However, I want to reflect here on some of the artists that I know were included in the work, to think about how they have addressed the issues to do with post-work and no-work in order to extend my arguments around a basic

income and to think more about a post-work future and its connection to what Kate Soper terms 'an alternative hedonism'.

In the Meantime, Midday Comes Around was curated by What, How & for Whom who are a collective of curators who are the now artistic directors of the Kunsthalle Wien. Their name is taken from the basic questions for any economic organisation that must consider what, how and for whom. The collective from Croatia are interested in curatorial projects that ask important questions in relation to recent historical events. In this case, the questions are connected to our dependency on work and the culture that surrounds this. The opening event of the exhibition included a range of performances, readings and musical performances by some of the artists displaying work. There was also an accompanying series of events that ran for the duration of the exhibition titled 'What to do After Work?' that acted as a public intervention and numerous questions were explored including, 'what holds society together if we 'abolish' work or if it takes care of itself?, how would we cooperate and take care of each other?, could we make our lives freer? And what activities will we find meaningful and what will sustain collective identities?' (2023: no page).

In thinking about these questions, we can turn to some of the works that I discussed earlier in the literature / practice review section of this essay. For example, the work Call Cutta highlights our need to make connections with people that stem beyond our working relationship to them. The fact that outbound call centre work demonstrates a form of immaterial labour is important to reflect on here when thinking about how we use it to identify ourselves. So often, we introduce ourselves to someone new, and ask what it is that 'they do'. Of course, we do not mean what they do with their free time, but rather what they do that is 'worthwhile'. This becomes a somewhat tricky and problematic question when what you do might not be how you wish to recognise yourself or how you want to be known (though I don't as-

sume that call centre workers don't have pride in what they do), perhaps the questions raised by the exhibition are concerned with what else do you do as well or instead of working? And then, how would we organise ourselves in such a way based on the use of our free time, would it be easier to make connections with people because of this?

Examples of some of the works on display in the exhibition include *Congress of Idling Persons* (2021) by Bassem Saad which is a film work that looks at multiple recent worldwide catastrophes, protests, examples of humanitarian and mutual aid, and Palestinian outside status and mixes this with recent worldwide movements and protests such as Black Lives Matter (2021: no page). The work explores the relationships between these moments and how they connect to people and the act of togetherness that forms acts of resistance and protest, the work is a film that focuses on five 'interlocutors' who play themselves as well as other characters, the action is centred around the speech and movements of the different performers who operate and connect to a specific landscape. A second work by the same artist *Suppose that Rome is Not a Human Habitation* (ongoing) is a series of image and text works that are centred around different sites where 'the occupants are considered peripheral to the city, the nation-state, and wage relation' (no date). Both works document the ways that people operate against the normative constructions or the status-quo of an environment, either through the places they reside and the way that they navigate those environments or through how they resist or challenge the specific order of a place. Also in the exhibition was a work by Arts of the Working Class titled *Weapons of Choice* (2022) which is a series of flags that deal with issues to do with work, unemployment, and employees rights and use lyrics from specific songs that address this, for example 'we built this city'. The flags also function to raise questions around community and nation and challenge the idea of the use of one flag in order to represent a whole

country or nation. Instead, it suggests that connections and communities are often smaller and multiple and each of the flags represents a different 'Gemeindebauten' in Vienna, which is a specific area of social housing.

The exhibition demonstrates the need and desire to think differently about our relationship (and somewhat addiction) to work and where different kinds of communities can and do exist that are not wedded together as a result of work and working relationships. I want to now return to the question of basic income, on top of the call for there to be a basic income that would help to reduce peoples over work (and equip people with the means to maintain themselves to a decent level that would allow them to live a healthy and fulfilled life without having to worry relentlessly about money) there is also a wide spread call for a reduction in working hours — with no loss of pay. Philosopher Kate Soper discusses this in the book *Post-Growth Living* when she notes that 'in the UK, the New Economics Foundation has for some time been advocating a shift to a twenty-one-hour work week, and arguing its benefits in terms of lowering the carbon footprint, reducing unemployment, improving well-being, and promoting better childcare, co-parenting and more equality between sexes' (97). This demonstrates the ways that working less has a positive impact beyond just allowing people the chance to experience to enjoy art and performance.

Allowing ourselves space and time to play, for leisure activities (that are not themselves tied to capitalist spending or feed into capitalist models of self-care) is a form of resistance against neoliberal modes of work and labour. It becomes about saying no to productivity, to being useful. It pushes back against the 'cultural guilt of nonwork' (71), but can art galleries / institutions be a space where this can be facilitated? What would need to happen for galleries to become a space of play and resistance? I would argue that Celine Cardolinni's work begins to make strong steps towards this, offering a space and the means for playfulness and leisure to be en-

acted. This is also demonstrated through the works that are exhibited in *In the Meantime, Midday Comes Around* although, the question around what we could / should be doing instead of working are raised slightly differently there and are less about playfulness but instead are more about world building as an alternative strategy / approach to how the world is currently being managed.

## Conclusion

This paper has been a space to think through the potentiality of art as a way to rethink our relationship to work. Throughout, I have highlighted more questions than I have been able to answer. What is clear is that there is still no way of modelling a new dynamic between work and life. Likewise, it is also clear that there needs to be a change; there are many issues that I have not been able to raise here that would benefit from us slowing down, being more together and enjoying moments of play and leisure. What is apparent however, is that there is a potential within art and performance to allow these moments of play. As art (like pretty much everything else) is now so tied up with being useful and productive that we have lost an ability to be playful. Even in my own reading of *After Work* I was trying to think about what it could be doing, and how it could be doing it, what change could an exhibition truly bring about. However, what I have learnt from this is the importance of embodied experience in relation to art, and allowing yourself to have the means to intuitively respond, to enjoy the colours and the textures, and to feel the smoothness (or the roughness) of an environment. And if this were to be translated into an experience of working cultures then perhaps we could start to think about what our bodies need to have a healthy relationship to work as our bodies are a site of protest — for example, when we strike, march, our bodies are performing politics. So perhaps playing (and leisure activities) is a politics of resisting productivity.



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# The Future is Decided [?]: ‘Playing the game’ in the practice of Third Angel

*Rob Fellman*

## **Abstract**

Contemporary performance company Third Angel sustained 28 years in action and, as such an ‘octovigintennial’ company, are a prime case study for survival in the ever-precarious UK arts sector. In their 28th year they began developing a programme of work entitled *The Future is Decided*. This article consists of a piece of performative writing that draws upon the author’s own research as a researcher-in-residence, uniquely positioned to reflect upon Third Angel’s longevity in the sector, and the making of *The Future is Decided*. Through this performative text Third Angel’s own creative signature is applied: a performance methodology closer to ‘research-as-practice’ (than the traditionally held ‘practice-as-research’). Their work often includes the use of recurring imagery and either cyclical or continuous projects that leave questions unanswered. A tendency towards detective-like research is drawn parallel to their preference for game-playing as both a creative and performative methodology.

Game-playing in Third Angel’s performance practice is examined as a positive approach to reframing the inherent risk-taking and now ubiquitous ‘precarity’ in the everyday. In part, this is both a feature of their audience appeal, and simultaneously a survival technique employed throughout their own company lifeline. Furthermore, their many open-ended projects instead exercise their own ‘previval’ (or acts of pre-emptive or anticipatory survival): acts of futurity that, in part, manifest the longevity of performance projects, and thereby, the performance company’s own continuation. Applying wider research from healthcare, economics and game theory, metaphorical con-

cepts are herein drawn parallel to observations of Third Angel's practice. This explorative provocation invites its reader to reflect upon the ways in which Third Angel's working notions of longevity and futurity dialogue with their processes, offering reflections on procedure, prediction, longevity and fictioning in relation to the challenge their current project poses, asking: is the future already decided?

## **Read Before You Play**

Sheffield-based contemporary performance company Third Angel [1995-2023] exemplify longevity in the UK's arts sector, particularly as they are among a proportionately small number of contemporary performance companies having exceeded the 25-year milestone, joining the 'quadracentennial' club alongside comparable companies like Stan's Cafe, Unlimited Theatre and Gob Squad.

The demands on makers of small-scale theatre in the UK are overwhelming: companies must negotiate first, the challenge of survival in a climate marked by reliance on government subsidy and shifting socioeconomics; second, the impermanence of their medium: haunted by its ever-imminent 'disappearance'. These challenges, especially for smaller companies, demand the application of practices of resilience; for them, the future is most often uncertain.

As such, Third Angel are a prime case study for survival in the ever-precarious UK arts sector, as a small company that have consistently worked with external collaborators, extending their multivocal reach and impact beyond their apparent size. In their 28th year they began developing an artistic programme entitled *The Future is Decided*. My own work with the company has largely been focussed on the question of when-and-how longevity in collaborative arts practice is achievable. Despite arguments to the contrary (the 'old' should make way for the 'new'), I contend that longevity is a

good thing, as both an aspirational and optimal condition of continuance. Longevity, unlike 'survival' or 'resilience' doesn't just respond to immediate threats, but rather keeps one eye on the moving horizon.

I have spent three years as Third Angel's researcher-in-residence as part of a funded scholarship, working closely with their archive (a dusty lock-up in Sheffield's industrial quarter) and as a part-time fly-on-the-wall (at Third Angel HQ). I originally planned to reflect here on my observations of the making of *The Future is Decided*, ultimately questioning whether this title's statement is an invitation-to-challenge, or an unavoidable truth. However, in a fitting interruption to the project's own provocation, the 2022 Arts Council England (ACE) funding decisions for their National Portfolio (NPO) saw Third Angel's inclusion revoked. My response herein is instead to acknowledge the same spirit of creative risk-taking and adventure that has been key to Third Angel's success.

Having declared my scholarly interest, the main focus of this article is to explore Third Angel's particular brand of 'ludic' performance, and the game-playing tendencies that underpin their creative and research-centred methodology. This article itself becomes an extension of the company's own inclinations, as heavily informed by my adjacency to the company; I adopt a mode of game-like provocation inspired by the company's own generative principles. This article plays with the indeterminate space between research for performance and performance research. It is critically positioned within overlapping spheres of performance studies, game theory, and more broadly, socioeconomics. I draw wide-reaching links between the performativity of prediction in *The Future is Decided*, and the balance between longevity of practice and anticipated futures.

Longevity, as I have come to think of it, can be achieved through anticipatory acts embedded in practice, an ethos of futurity that shapes the creative present. I adopt a term from Coleman Nye who considers acts of

'previval', or pre-emptive survival, as acts that can change the course of the future (2012). In its simplest sense, a company's future plans (both in the present, and as they *have been* in the past) are integral to the shaping of their own longevity and legacy beyond. In terms of creative outputs, prediction *in* performance, or predictions performed, reveal a holistic methodological futurity behind Third Angel's longevity of practice.

## Playing the Game

To, or by whom, is the future decided? As Cullen et al offer, 'the future is always in question, shaped by the reality of who has the power to dictate what will come to pass' (208). The future may be known to those with expert knowledge, but for the rest of us, the best we have is speculation and anticipation.

Despite Third Angel's longevity, and the questions of futurity they characteristically explore, the hard realities of decision-making power are exemplified in the incompleteness of *The Future is Decided*, as the company have opted to cease activity with the withdrawal of their NPO subsidy.

Reflecting on their debut performance, durational part-show-part-installation *Testcard* [1995], Third Angel explained 'we knew we were at the start of [a] journey, but we didn't have a clue where we were going, or how long it was going to take to get there' (*Testcard*).

This article circles back, imagining a set of rules for a longevity of artistic practice, drawn from my personal research. In this text, I use the term 'research' as 're-search'; a looking-again that implies a continual and cyclical process of finding, learning and reflection (Bauer et al. 167). As I apply it, to re-search may also be to look again at the anticipated future, to make adjustments based on present evidence, that might come to influence future outcomes, a form of previval.

Third Angel's practice, to which I incorporate a related analogy proposed by Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean (19), engages with the circular, oscillatory nature of the research-practice relationship (Fellman).

## **Rule Zero: Have Fun**

The sections that follow are partly discrete, and partly interconnected. Some are associative, tangential, and digressional: a formal representation of the incompleteness of my own research, and an attempt to encapsulate my own sense of the company's practice. In their own words, 'sometimes we go back along a [creative] strand to the last junction and go off', in a different direction (in Stanier 118).

Depending on the game, a general agreed position is that Rule Zero is the prerequisite that over-rules all else. This may mean that the person with most authority, such as The Banker in Monopoly, has final say. It may also mean that collective decisions should be made to 'house rule' situations the rulebook doesn't quite explain. Rule Zero should protect the integrity of the game. Any reinterpretation of the 'rules' to follow is actively encouraged.

The 'rules' were written in their published order, though they are fragmentary in nature and variously interconnect, overlap and oscillate.

Rule Zero upholds the (modernist) perspective that 'the future appears as a rather vast canvas onto which to project [...] the full gamut of rational and poetic talents' (Wark 21) whilst also acknowledging that the most democratic systems, such as the collaborating theatre company, exist in relation to rules, economic contexts, audience preferences, funding criteria, and ultimately artistic direction or dramaturgical craft. For long-lasting companies like Third Angel, the aim is to be creative, yet to do so within administrative and organisational bounds or parameters.

Rule Zero in this article underpins its methodology, to respect dreams of the future, as possibilities and probabilities.

## Rule One: The Future is Anywhere

'Anywhere Theatre', is Third Angel's self-termed ethos for a body of work that generates performance out of game systems, and that can be instigated anywhere (an initial idea was to produce a performance-game-in-a-box for a children's hospital, for instance). Anywhere Theatre is the concept that drives the development of *The Future Is Decided* programme, and at its heart, exposes the relationship between games and performance in Third Angel's oeuvre, embedding what game theorist Graeme Kirkpatrick calls 'ludic form' in their performance-making methodology (2018). Ludic form in gameplaying is located between a rules-mediated 'ludic structure' and a 'distinctive kind of storytelling', a term to describe the intermeshing of reality and representation, simultaneously 'pinned by power'. Ludic form, Kirkpatrick proposes, parses the attraction and appeal of mediated gameplaying into the dramaturgical infrastructure (327).

This *modus operandi* is also highlighted in Third Angel's open and active approach to mentoring and education, which perpetuates knowledge dissemination, as the 'rules of the game' are passed on. Whilst they are not unique in this, their contribution to the future of the sector at large far outweighs their apparent size (99 programme-based mentees, 20+ professional mentees, and youth theatre classes running for 7 years). I suggest that game-playing in performance contexts (particularly in collaborative and participatory settings) is also thereby pedagogical and is consequently a practice of legacy-making; the influence of the 'game' expands with each generation of newly inducted players.

Through Anywhere Theatre's proposal, the imagined world of art co-exists with the everyday. It is through the use of game-as-performance, or ludic form, that this is made possible. Third Angel explain:

We use gaming mechanics in a lot of our devising processes.



[...] Several shows are structured around the turn-taking mechanics of game play, too, such as *Story Map* [2010], *Inspiration Exchange* [2010] and *Homo Ludens* [2009]. (*The Distraction Agents Inspirations*)

*Homo Ludens* in particular was described by the company as ‘a piece of work that is at once a game and a performance’ (*Problem Solving*). Centrally, the audience navigated a human-sized gameboard, led by rolls of the dice. In a blog post from March 2009, titled ‘Playful Humans’, Third Angel explain:

Our process so far has involved the usual tools of show and tell [...] story telling, playing and deconstructing games, research (inventions and futurology) and writing up big lists. (*Playful Humans*)

Anywhere Theatre, as a term that encapsulates an array of imagined yet-to-be-made projects, makes evident Third Angel’s ludic sensibility, as that which is a distinct form of anticipatory legacy-making; their playful creativity plans for—and looks to—the future. The ethos of *Homo Ludens* in 2009 has clear echoes in 2023’s Anywhere Theatre.

## **Rule Two: Be Evergreen**

By 2040, the number of people aged 50 and over is expected to increase 21% (Scott, *Economics of Longevity*)

In Economics, ‘derivatives’ is a term used to illuminate what is often referred to as the ‘performativity [...] of the market’ (Martin 67). It is through this analogy that I draw a thread between the precarity and performativity of both the arts and the socio-economic environment in which it must operate. Risk can bind groups of artists together and give value to risk-taking creativity, appraising the artistic choices in the studio, long before the economic

benefits are felt (as tickets are sold and spectators invited in). Game-playing and devised experimentation bridges both artistic and (eventual) economic value.

New 'financial instruments proliferate' out of risk, such as 'weather derivatives that make climate chaos itself profitable'. (Miéville 37). The 'Silver Economy' taps into the market for an increasing ageing population, profiting from products and services such as care homes, late-age pharmaceuticals, and home stairlifts. (*Burgeoning Silver Economy*)

Professor Andrew Scott is an economist who refers to a concept called the 'Longevity Dividend'. To paraphrase the logic of the 'dividend': longer working lives and more product spending are two ways to enhance the economy as a result of longer life expectancies. (Scott, 'Three-Dimensional Dividend')

Scott coined an alternative 'Evergreen Economy': the market for younger people that may value later life more than their predecessors, as the probability of their time alive is extended (such as preventative medicines and procedures, training courses for future career changes, and pension plans) (*The Economics of Longevity*).

Rachael Walton, one half of Third Angel's directorial team, uses the term 'evergreen' to describe shows that seem 'timeless', that outlive their original intentions and remain vital and relevant through time.

In the case of theatre and performance, moves toward online or hybrid works pre-empt the possibility of, say, future pandemic lockdowns, a pre-visual instinct, learning from the very recent past.

Embedding processes of research and self-reflection in work can also be an act of pre-visual. Third Angel often present their research as performance, implement facts, lists and quotes, allowing the limits of their knowledge to remain incomplete, with questions that remain unanswered. Furthermore, I recognise a fertilisation of their research with-and-through other disciplines,

like science and technology; this diversification, too, protects the work by elevating the 'art', crossing into a citational legacy-building of academic discourse (Brown).

In a short documentary about *Homo Ludens*, collaborator Lucy Ellinson explains how 'playing human' involves 'creative adventures', undertaken throughout people's 'lifetimes and beyond', 'through generations'. She cites the playful nature of 'ingenuity' and human capacity for 'inventions' (*artmetropol*). If, as Ellinson proposes, the playful nature of humanity generates invention, the rule-based function of game-playing acts as a fulcrum between art and science, between knowledge and the imaginary, and between risk and reward.

Conjoining the ludic form with their research-centred approach, Third Angel's pipeline project, *The Future Is Decided*, was the first (longer-term) planned contribution under the Anywhere Theatre banner. In this project, they aimed to examine the provocation: is the future, in fact, already decided? New capitalist instruments create value out of the future, making the future increasingly, and precariously, balanced upon the derivative decisions in the present.

Diedrich Diederichsen suggests that 'to dream is to bargain' (63).

I propose that ludic form reframes Third Angel's artistic enquiry (neither defined by the experts, nor fixed by the statement), which I playfully adopt: *can* the future be decided?

### **Rule Three: Ask the Experts**

According to Swiss thinktank 'W.I.R.E' (Web for Interdisciplinary Research and Expertise) 1000 years from now, due to rapid language evolution, no words used in the present day will have survived.

The Arecibo message, sent into space in 1974, could reach its

extra-terrestrial target 25,000 years from now.

A response could be received in 50,000 years at the earliest.

(Future Is Ours 115)

By which time human language will have evolved 50x over.

Facts are ever-present in Third Angel's repertoire, from telling facts and stories about past classmates in research-performance *Class of '76* [2000-10], relating to space travel in performance-lecture *600 People* [2013-23], representing the vastness and complexity of globalisation in story-collage *What I Heard About the World* [2010-15], interview research about childbirth for verbatim-inspired *Partus* [2016], to embellish the mundanity of co-habiting relationships in *Presumption* [2006]; all of which engage with questions of futurity. Facts, when furnished with the imagination, can help anticipate the future.

Can the future ever be decided? Or at least pre-determined? The research and development process for *The Future is Decided* involved interviewing experts, to uncover any undisputable truths about the future, in their subject niches. I was present for one such interview, with astrophysicist Simon Goodwin. Whilst he didn't have any guarantees to impart, he was able to say to a certain degree of confidence that *there is a very high probability that alien life did-or-will exist, but as space and time are so vast the probability of us ever coinciding is miniscule. Even if we do encounter alien life, we may not recognise it by our own terms. The fact that human life exists at all, I paraphrase, is based on a similarly miniscule probability of the perfect set of conditions...* Yet, here we are.

In conversation, Goodwin also responded to the difference between his own approach to science and that of Third Angel's. I choose to interpret the two positions as the 'arty-science' versus the 'hard science'. Novelist Jane Goodall identifies how sometimes these seemingly oppositional positions elide, 'a kind of knowledge-based dreaming can take over and researched

elements start to lead the way', as facts also inspire the imagination (204). Is this also the line games tread, between imagination and probability? Rules-based dreaming?

## Rule Four: Roll the Dice

On a roll of a dice the chance of a 6 is 16.7%, or 1/6.

Roll two dice and the chance of getting a 6 is 30.5%, **slightly less than** 2/6.

In a work-in-progress project, Third Angel's other co-artistic director Alex Kelly, in collaboration with filmmaker Chris Hall, charted the early development of an unmade short film titled *A Man Amid The Wreckage* [2008]. Part of the text draft reads:

"God does play dice  
[...]  
and I suspect that he cheats."  
(Kelly and Hall)

## Rule Five: Expect the Unexpected

I was recently looking through an ACE document from 2018 in which arts organisations voted 'natural disaster' as only 12% 'risky' on a scale of 'level-of-risk-to-the-sector', compared to 'financial risk' at 90%... Even back then when words like 'resilience' and 'sustainability' were already prevalent (Woodley et al. 16).

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Third Angel were preparing for the

tour of *The Department of Distractions* [2018-21], which debuted in February 2018. Third Angel described the show as ‘a conspiracy theory documentary-exposé detective story for the 21st century that asks: What aren’t you looking at?’ (*The Department of Distractions*). Its antagonists, The Department, are a ‘clandestine organisation whose job it is to plant the seeds of stories out in the world’; drawing attention to the everyday distractions we encounter and challenge their coincidental nature (*The Department of Distractions*, 82). Third Angel explain:

As we spent some time developing this idea in 2016, it occurred to us that we had been tracking the work of The Department for years. Several of our enduring interests were arguably their work: urban legends, conspiracy theories, telephone boxes, [...] clues left in the street or buried in maps or letter pages or puzzles... (84)

The Department represent a fiction closely adjacent to the everyday world—claiming the credit for the ongoing distraction of, for instance, the Royal Family or the introduction of the Vegan Sausage Roll—an unreal organisation made real by virtue of their existence at a conceptual level (a sort of theatre-as-theology) (18). Artist-creator Mariana Valencia reminds that the Greek etymology of *fantasy* is ‘to make visible’. By articulating a dream, its possibility runs adjacent to other potential futures: ‘I often make lists of things I might never do’(215).

The Department’s design is not to suspend disbelief as one might encounter on a naturalistic stage, not mimicking the real, but instead asking ‘what if?’.

## **Rule Six: Stay Ahead of the Curve**

Making last-minute changes to football score predictions in-

crease the probability of losing the bet (Singleton et al.).

In *The Department of Distractions* there is a fictional character, the Professor of Beauty and Truth, who is found (to the surprise of other characters) to be based in the Centre for Mathematics.

Much like the difference between the imaginative aspect of science, and the fact-driven 'hard' science, I relish the edge of my own knowledge, the point at which I cannot fully comprehend the statistics and have to employ imaginative approximations to complete the picture. The story behind the data, or its implications, becomes the crux. Graphs and formulas can be practices of pattern-making; as David McCandless proposes, 'information is beautiful' (2012).

Theorist Aubrey de Grey has proposed a (controversial) notional situation called 'longevity escape velocity'. This hypothetical occurrence is achievable if life expectancy improves at a faster rate than ageing (de Grey and Docksaï). For instance, if a person's life expectancy can be improved by *more than a year* for every year alive, it is theoretically possible to live forever. Mapping this onto a graph, showing 'life expectancy' versus 'natural ageing', the result of de Grey's optimal condition returns an upward-sweeping curve. 'Longevity escape velocity' therefore supposes that an optimum state of longevity is that in which longevity no longer exists, that its relation to the fatal 'end' is severed; if we could remove all threats (such as ageing in the case of gerontology) then we would have escaped the need to think of longevity at all. The future (for human life at least) could become a little less precarious.

Transposing this analogy to the activity of performance companies, to stay truly 'ahead of the curve' would require some form of 'arc-ing algorithm' that could combine factors into a single value of optimisation (Breiman). To combine economic value, with artistic values.

To predict, to a certain degree of accuracy, the potential outcomes of funding rounds.

To predict trends in audience behaviour.

To anticipate future crises.

## **Rule Seven: Respect Rule Zero**

1 Million years from now, all glass (created to date) will have completely degraded. (W.I.R.E, Future Is Ours 115)

In March 2020, Third Angel held a crisis meeting. The planned tour of *The Department of Distractions* was cancelled as the pandemic closed theatre doors, causing companies and audiences alike to experiment with alternative formats. Third Angel had already been working on Anywhere Theatre, to which the pandemic prompted their first response; they opted to create 'a companion piece', a play-by-mail and 'virtual experience with real world challenges' to 'be enjoyed from home: part puzzle, part film, part game, part theatre, part real life' (*The Distraction Agents Inspirations*). The project was titled *The Distraction Agents* [2021-23].

This performance-game was self-led: a game package arrived through the letterbox. Third Angel provided pre-recorded video, through which actors gave the game's instructions, arriving via email, across a period of one week. The pack included a map-based treasure-hunt, a choose-your-adventure story, and observational memory tasks.

Upon opening the first envelope in the pack a player's handbook is revealed.

This book prompts its reader to enter a role as a budding member of The Department. The first exercise involves pictures and numbers for phone boxes. The player-reader must work out the phone box locations, using the area codes, or conversely, by phoning them.



The latter option is as if the player is performing a real-world version of Third Angel's early show *Hang Up*, a theatre piece in which the performers act out conversations with strangers in phone boxes...

Congratulations on completing your Induction. How have you done, and what does the future hold? (*Distraction Agents Game Correspondence*)

The 'Third Angel Phonebox' has longevity as a recurring image, marking a 'distinctively non-linear' digressive practice from *Hang Up* in 1999 to *Distraction Agents*, 22 years later. Kirkpatrick's study argues that there is 'a distinctive expansion of the space of representation' in ludic performance, in which 'ideas about space comport with the notion of a distinctively non-linear, expansive fictional space' (335-6). The legacy of *Hang Up* is transferred to the expansive fictional space connoted by the 'anywhere' of *Distraction Agents*' remote-play design.

Hannah Nicklin, a previous collaborator with the company, has echoed Third Angel's story-swapping performance game *Inspiration Exchange* [2010-23] in the format of her own *Games We Have Known and Loved* (Nicklin). Similarly, artist Raquel Castro performs *Turma de '95* [2019-], her own homage to Third Angel's *Class of '76* [2000-10]. Collaborator Gillian Lees performed *Tangent* [n.d.], acts of attempting to draw perfect circles, inspired by her collaboration on Third Angel's research-led *900 Billion Miles From Home* [2007-9] in which room-sized circles were drawn in talcum powder on the floor, using a rope-and-pulley system. These projects respect Rule Zero, taking inspiration from the formal structures and devising procedures of Third Angel's 'original' projects.

The connections between projects, in turn, reinforce the company's

own longevity, as a web-like supporting structure rather than a direct trajectory driving toward the future.

## **Rule Eight: The Future is Divided**

1 Billion years from now, the Sun's luminosity will increase 10%, and the Earth's surface will reach 47C. All oceans will evaporate.

110 Trillion years from now, all stars will have died. (W.I.R.E, Future Is Ours 116-7)

Returning again to *A Man Amid The Wreckage*, a draft version of the prelude text reads:

According to all the best sources, primes are the building blocks of mathematics. The golden ratio appears to be an important building block in our universe - like a four by two lego brick - fundamental, ubiquitous, unavoidable.

It's the fibonacci sequence which gives us access to the golden ratio, which only has a minimal amount to do with primes...

[...]

So there are two sets of numbers that keep the architecture of the universe upright, those friendly with the primes and those friendly with the fibonacci's [sic].

[...]

Two sets.

Both infinite, but in different ways.

So, two different kinds of infinity.

(Kelly and Hall)

## **Rule Nine: ‘Longevity combines contradictory elements’**

So this isn’t actually a rule, per se, but is ‘Hypothesis #2’ given by the W.I.R.E thinktank. They propose a series of ‘Paradoxes of Longevity’ (*Art of Longevity*). Parallel doxa, concepts pulling in different directions.

Annie Dorsen proposes an ‘algorithmic theatre’ that shifts the relationship between present tense and futurity in rules-based performance:

[...] the process of continuous live choosing amongst variables seems to call forth the future into the current moment; the choices made seem to arrive backwards, [...] the underlying rules of the program, the parameters of its functioning, evoke the past, where the real decisions have already been made[...]. This situation stages a paradoxical state of affairs [...] both closed and open, fundamentally pre-determined and simultaneously full of potential. (2012)

Like playing a game to win, by playing to the most successful probabilities, whilst still trying to maximise enjoyment and fulfilment.

Like an experimentation with games that fluctuates from the pole of improvisation (*paidia*) to that of the rule-bound (*ludus*) (Jensen).

Like creating artistic work against a backdrop of competitive funding, quantitative evaluations, and contractual obligations.

Paradoxes are not impossible to overcome, if parallel doxa are weaved together, as mutually supportive competitors, without which the rules of the game no longer serve a purpose.

## Rule Ten: Look Again

Third Angel demonstrate how re-search can be playful, seeking the novel in the already known; The Department ask their audience to 'look again' at the world, the art inspired by the science, the stories inspired by the facts. The devising games employed by the company in the making of *Homo Ludens* and their wider oeuvre is indicative of this imaginative searching, of play as invention-oriented research.

Looking-again is not mimetic. Like postmodern performance (and surrealism that preceded it) 'the activation of the ludic principle, where theme and form converge' emancipates "tomorrow's player" from an endless desire for 100% repetition, which cannot ever be fully realised (as truly as the world spins) (Rapti and Parkinson 178).

Performance is a process of giving form to the conceptual, much as the 'discursive, logical' or 'scientific' give form to inquiries they address (Vaughan 169-70). In Johan Huizinga's 1944 sociological study *Homo Ludens*, he proposed that humankind 'plays this great processional order of existence in a sacred play', that through ritual, 'actualizes anew, or "recreates", the events represented and thus helps to maintain the cosmic order' (Huizinga 16).

As we play at nature, we perform science.

A perpetual motion between different registers of knowledge, knowledge-seeking and the imagined is, perhaps counterintuitively, an effective way to enhance longevity: oscillatory processes of 'evergreen' re-invention, re-search and re-vitalisation that loop around in order to propel forwards, staying 'ahead of the curve' by continually drawing out a spiral. As the curve of a lifeline overlays its past echo, a spiral turning over points recognisable from its last circumnavigation, those points are revitalised anew (Looser).

Third Angel describe returning to an old show, revisiting the characters and story six years apart: 'familiar', but 'different' (*On A Revival*).

The future may not yet be decided, though the anticipatory horizon-gazing that defines the 'playful human' demands present-day ethics of futurity. Like the derivatives in acts of performance-making that project the future value of an artwork, and the 'algorithmic theatre' whose rules underpin its apparent generative nature.

Preval is, in a sense, playful.

Huizinga believed withdrawing from play is worse than to cheat, as non-compliance reveals the fragility of the play-world, its precarity propped upon its rules and social contract; we must not rob game-play of its illusion (the root-word *illusio* literally means 'in-play') (Huizinga 11).

Building on Kirkpatrick's 'ludic form', the developing languages surrounding game theory are ripe for application in performance studies, to 'look again' at the realities both media come to reflect, and increasingly repositioning the liveness of the 'real-time' of the art event (game, theatre) as that which is a false present, in which the near-future may already be coded and rehearsed (Siu 54). However, the illusion of probability is that it is a fixed parameter. Probability helps explain uncertainties in the world, but changes with time and motion. The chance of an event's occurrence can increase with each failed attempt. The chance of rain reduces as a cloud shifts course.

In order to aim toward a longevity of creative practice, it is essential to 'play the game', balancing both the mediated landscape of sector funding and socioeconomics, whilst embracing the playful, ludic qualities of performance that dislocate illusory possibilities just outside of their inextricable survival in the present. Preval may demand a constant shifting of these anticipatory horizons, a respect for Rule Zero that keeps the game in full view. The future doesn't concern itself with probability, it is illusory, already in-play, it just requires that we continue to throw the dice.

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# Earth

*Laura Moreton-Griffiths*

I put my finger in the hole; I have no need to ask, our contract allows me. Deep within the folds of loose back skin, I trace a mountain range of keloid scar tissue along a winding path, its passage blocked at irregular intervals by stitches struggling to craft what is missing and mend damaged wiring. As I feel my way, a model of the unseen space builds in my mind. It is clear as noon here in the dark, where knowing is tactile and mystical.

"I never knew."

"I don't talk about it much. People don't see it much either," they say quietly.

"How did it happen? When?"

"Was in the war. Flying metal cut right through me. There're bits in there still. They play up sometimes; let me know when a storm is coming." They smile, pulling their weight up; the radiation from the south-facing window, gives shape to their form, a loose structure of skin, bone and shadow.

Naked from the waist up, their breasts hang, nipples grazing the top of their belly roll. On their head, a peaked red cap, faded and worn, a symbol of bloody and failed revolutions. News crackles from the radio: ... CloudCom has made its first successful landing on Jupiter, beating its competitors. Their cargo ships return from Mars this week with new penicillins. Production is up 1,000% against last quarter. Same as yesterday, same as every day.

"It must hurt."

"It does."

I ask which war.

"The Hybrid Wars. The world was so unstable and full of conflict, there were so many I don't remember and I forget the reasons, though many were economic, fought at a distance by children recruited at gaming conventions to kill digitally." They turn to face me. "We were fighting back. We were

changing the world.”

I try to imagine the past from their point of view; to understand their naïve revolutionary optimism.

“But nothing changed! It’s the same, but different. Normal.”

“There is no normal. You’re wrong. It is transformed. I don’t know this world.”

I see their bio-hacked body tense. They cry slow tears, and with melancholy say, “Perhaps I was on the wrong side.”

“Maybe you were.”

“What would you have done if you had to fight? My parents had to fight, like their parents, and their parents before them. It is written in our block-chain. Everything was thrown at us. It was political, emotional, cyber and biowarfare. You see the world differently to me. You live in a different world to the one I know.”

I look at the badge I am wearing: the small white flower of a conscientious objector that proclaims that I am a pacifist, opposed to this violent world. I like to think that I would have refused to fight, but the truth is that I don’t know what I would have done. I don’t reply.

They lie back, asleep in moments. I cover them with a blanket and sit back also, to watch and listen to the secret language of things. Settling into the high-backed chair, my own body sags from the burden and I use the time to charge and update my software. On the wall opposite, a family photo of our younger selves looks on.

The décor resonates a tangible brown hum; the colours and hues vibrate at different frequencies and manifest beige and shabby pink and orange. The texture of the bedspread’s weave makes a light rasping noise as their body rolls. I log a photogrammetry of ornaments and personal effects, placing each object in the room relative to all the things in my mind. Cup rings on the bedside table mark its life span and tell me they have taken in liquids and medicine today. I am interested in their meal – I need to determine if

they have eaten and what.

I return to the dark space and watch the phosphenes swirl, and ebb and flow. Imagining that I am swimming in aquatic forests amongst shoals of fish and symbiotic organisms, I drift in the swell and the rhythm of crowds. I sit like this for hours. Suddenly, a break in the rhythm of exhalation. I panic, and rush to check they are still drawing air. As I lean over, they twitch and an arm flies up, lashing out. A well-aimed fist catches my jaw. Anticipating further blows, more pain, I duck and reel away. In my mind, I see a small figure running to a closed door, trying to escape the violence that happens in the family, the oppression of the private neo-nuclear home, with no safeguards. I recoil, remembering sleeping in shadows, as bruised tissue repaired, and violence and grief came to live in my body. They sleep undisturbed. At my station, my jaw throbs and I slow my racing heart.

On a tide of outgoing memory, I travel far away from here, from the confines of our smart-home prison. Their social credit score is zero. I ignore the feelings of shame and remorse bubbling to the surface of my thoughts.

I am my mother's keeper. As I have been all my life. Watching, tracking and protecting the family production unit, surveilling their privacy – human software living with its customer, serving advertisements and selling product updates, spying on them for our great Corporate State.

I feel their electricity pulse as they open their blue-grey eyes. The left eyelid sticks with age. Inhaling their pheromonic hydrocarbons, I am simultaneously comforted and repelled by the strong earthy smell. Soiled; vulnerable; in pain. I feel a strong sensuous urge to hold them close.

"Mummy." I repeat. "Mummy. Are you awake?"

They yawn. "You're still here."

"Of course. That's what I do." I smile. "Tell me again. About when I was small. About when I was a baby."

They manoeuvre their immobile bulk to face me. "When you were a baby?"

It was a lifetime ago. I hardly recall.”

“Try. Tell me the story.” We run through the old routine, for what may be the last time.

“We grew you.”

“Grew me?”

“Yes. In a bag.”

“In a bag?”

“Yes. In a plastic bag. That’s how all rescued children are grown outside of the womb. You are no different from the others, though we chose you. We used a DIY kit: a homemade lung and pumps that fed you nutrients and extracted your waste. Every day we watched you grow. Looking in at you and your beating heart. A little shrimp swimming in salt solution. The happy product of our labour. Our own little commodity; our treasure. We wouldn’t exchange you for anything.”

I have a memory of the water, and a time when I had no feelings of fear towards the world. Floating in patches of sun-warmed liquid, sensing light refracted through the surface. Then quickly, violently, air rushing into my lungs, as I am made to breathe outside. My throat constricts and rage bursts from my chest.

“You’re no earth mother. I didn’t choose this. I don’t choose to be here.” I shout. “We should be manufacturing one another with joy, not like this. Why on earth would you do such a thing? It isn’t fair.”

“Life isn’t fair,” they reply bluntly, bracing to turn away. They always turn away. “We thought the more there are of you, grown locally by many people, the more resilient we would be. We couldn’t risk just one point of failure. We needed backups.”

“Do you know how that makes me feel?” In truth, I feel vaguely reassured to know there are more of me. But I feel anger, hatred even, rising in my voice.

“You weren’t raising children. You were subcontracting. Building an army

for your own protection. It was a machine pregnancy. Machines don't nurse, can't love. It was commercial state surrogacy. You were manufacturing life. I want out."

"You can't. It's in our contract. We surrendered our freedom to have you. Anyway, you receive more than we were given. You're our property; registered to us when we broke the seal. We own your labour, and we give it to the State. It's in the Terms and Conditions, in the Service Agreement." Their cold, dry words resonate with bile.

"I didn't know about the T&Cs. I didn't sign up to this."

"We did. We thought we were doing the right thing. We wanted reproductive equality. We wanted to stop the oppression of women and children and to remove the gender divide." They pull themselves up. "I wanted a child, and I couldn't do it any other way. My womb was so badly damaged by microplastic."

"What about my genetic mother? What about her labour - her oppression? Did she have a choice? You removed her from the process. Protect the foetus at all costs. The foetus has a cost. I pay the price." I scream, overriding my obey commands. "Divorcing your partner is emancipating. Divorcing your parents is a crime."

They turn fully away from me now.

I look at my parent's back, at the place I now know a weakness lies, and then at the anklet that binds me to the house, and without thinking, I take the cup of old coffee from the bedside table, and pour its contents over their exposed wiring. With surprising speed, their electronics sizzle and short, and their body flops. As their head rolls backwards towards me, mouth silently open, my hand catches their cap as it falls.

Walking quickly to the door, I hear beeps sounding rapidly and run out into the street, forwards through streams of driverless traffic, navigating between perfectly sequenced cars. Reaching the other side, I stop to catch

my breath, enveloped in human noise and autumnal air that feels dense and polluted. A circle of shadow rings my feet. The anklet has signaled my location.

“Attention, Employee. You must return to your workplace immediately. You need to return to the house.”

Turning I look up to find a drone spinning around its axis to aim its camera directly at my face; its live facial recognition logging my age, gender, political and sexual orientation, ethnicity and emotion from my expression. It knows who I am.

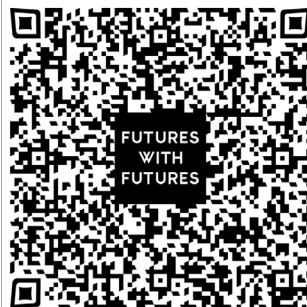
The disembodied voice continues, “Employee 8491154, you do not have permission to leave the house. I am authorised to arrest you. Your mother is wanted for war crimes. As part of the machinery of death, they are charged with 2,132 counts of accessory to murder. They must be watched at all times. You must return to your duty.”

I have a few seconds to decide before the information travels, before the State Police are alerted. They do not know I have killed my mother, only that I have left the house.

I look down at the cap in my hand, throw it over the camera and run.

*Earth is the first of a collection of short stories designed around the alchemical elements – building blocks that built the world the way it is – that could just as easily built it differently. Alchemy the project of the past, is of the future too. Set in a near future of corporate nation states, toxic supply chains and environmental collapse, hope, like lifeblood runs through, and the smallest act of resistance can have global effect. Welcome to the Great Transition.*

Scan the QR code below to listen to the stories:



# Performance Responses

edited by Amy Terry and Laura Vorweg

## Improvisation as the Practice of Resilience in Precarity

Zoe Katsilerou

### Abstract

*Improvisation is a practice that invites performers to  
interact with the present moment  
negotiate stimuli and ideas and the potential conflict  
between the two  
build confidence in following their own  
impulses  
move away from capitalist notions of finished and polished performative  
products*

Choreographer Jonathan Burrows defines improvisation as the 'negotiation with the patterns your body is thinking' (27), alluding to the embodied experience of making decisions in the moment through negotiating behavioural patterns unique to each performer. For an improviser to comfortably engage in such processes, the ability to identify and manage personal habits in relationship to stimuli of the present moment is key. Through this constant negotiation performers can develop strategies which support them in moving with patterned physical and cognitive behaviours, and in uncovering creative potential that is directly linked with spontaneity, presence and play. These skills are akin to the life skills identified by the World Health Organisation as most vital skills of the future.

Dancing within an unknown structure can offer insightful discoveries for one's way of moving and thinking. It can also be intimidating.

Drawing on my movement and text improvisation practice, I am proposing a poetic essay which will be constructed upon an embodied experience of thirty consecutive days of improvisation. Writer bell hooks suggests that the bridge between theory and practice is real life (1994). In an attempt

to theorise and physicalise the significance of improvisation in developing skills necessary for the future of performing arts, for thirty days, I will improvise and use writing as a reflective tool around notions of resilience, precarity, joy, play, negotiations, conflict and ecology. The poetic essay will include visual and written material.



*Fig 1. Improvisation performance CCA Glasgow (2018) captured by Brian Hartley*

## **Introduction**

This writing consists of a collection of critical and creative reflections on notions of resilience as embodied and articulated through the lens of my improvisation practice. Combining academic writing with sections of reflective 'interpretive pieces of poetic expression' (Elliot 12), I explore the qualities, understandings, and aspects of resilience that can emerge through a regular improvisation practice. I use improvisation studies as a critical framework and a practice-as-research methodology of documenting and reflecting on improvisations. The written reflections draw on thirty consecutive days of solo movement improvisations in my home, and touch upon themes of



resilience, motherhood, performing arts pedagogy, creative practice, and ecology. The audio-visual material is a selection of documented moments of these improvisations and aims to capture some of the physical and sensorial textures of this experience.

I have composed this collection as a way of pondering the future of the performing arts within educational systems and professional contexts. Some of the questions I am reflecting upon include: what are the relationships between improvisation and resilience as practices which can help support the future of performing arts? What types of training can support performers in cultivating and growing these? How have the temporal and physical realities of raising a newborn baby shaped and influenced the ways I improvise, in particular the qualities and themes arising within my improvisations? What relationships between resilience and flexibility can this experience cultivate? By asking these questions I aim to bring your attention to the significance of improvisation as a practice that can offer life skills. Rather than providing answers, I hope to inspire you to further explore these questions in your own practices.

In this writing, I approach and reflect on improvisation from the perspective of my movement and voice practices. This allows me to forefront elements that I consider essential within improvisation, and to contribute my distinct embodied understanding to the field of improvisation studies. Combined with my own research on relationships between choreography and voice (song and text), my work draws on a variety of practices which share a common interest in developing presence, listening and spontaneity. These include and are not limited to:

- Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening which emphasises voluntary and conscious listening. Deep Listening refers to listening that requires an 'active engagement with attention' (xxi), an attention that allows for the listener to expand their perception to include 'the whole

space/time continuum of sound' (xxii).

- Ideas of tuning by OBRA Theatre articulated by Eilon Morris. Morris describes tuning as a metaphor of 'a highly adaptable and fluid process that is as much about discovering and playing with dissonance and fractiousness as it is about finding harmony and union between performers' (Morris).
- John Britton's *Self-With-Others*<sup>1</sup>, a psychophysical training practice that explores relationships between an ensemble and a performer as a way of developing attention (316).
- Andrew Morrish's improvisation practice.
- Frankie Armstrong's voice work and commitment to freeing the natural voice.
- Somatics, mindfulness and creative anatomy that emphasise attention on physical perception and experience.
- This work has been written in short intervals which fitted around my newborn baby's needs and the reflective poems include implicit reflections on my journey of becoming a mother. The temporal, physical, and cognitive flexibility I had to embody in the process of writing this essay highlights the significance of the subjects explored and underscores the need for improvisational skills in daily life.

<https://on.soundcloud.com/VEJ1k>

*2. Interrupted Improvisation (audio) December 2022*

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge the significant contribution that John Britton has made to improvisation pedagogies and the value of his approaches to improvisation. However, there are aspects of his practice that I do not endorse relating to teacher-students power dynamics and interpersonal interactions with students.

## **COMMIT**

Can I commit  
Can I commit  
Can I commit

What does reflecting feel like

What do I do

I do

I dream

I feel

I allow my body to be transferred to a different space and time

I follow with my words

I follow my imagination

I blindly follow

I jump into

What my mind brings

Restlessness

Tiredness

Consistency

Consistency

Consistency

Commitment

I commit

## Improvisation

Improvisation is a practice that invites me to immerse myself in the present moment; negotiate stimuli and ideas, and the conflicts between the two; build confidence in following my own impulses; be skilfully spontaneous within uncertainty; and move away from capitalist notions of polished performative products. While many of these abilities may be inherent in humans, they are not always fully developed, even in improvisational performers. My improvisation practice and pedagogy are committed to facilitating spaces for performers to develop these skills through in-depth training, and to sensitise them to relationships between improvisation practices, daily life, and resilience.

Choreographer Jonathan Burrows defines improvisation as the 'negotiation with the patterns your body is thinking' (27), alluding to the embodied experiences of making decisions in the moment through negotiating behavioural patterns unique to each performer. These patterns consist of cognitive, physical, interpersonal, spatial, and imaginative elements. By highlighting the ability of the body to think, Burrows moves beyond notions of mind-body dualities and refers to the body as a whole; a body that thinks, feels, listens, and responds as one; a body that is aware of its patterns and their relationships with the present moment. Many performing arts practices I have encountered often assume a separation between the mind and the body, sometimes between the mind, the body, and the voice, too. This is reinforced by arts institutions within which students usually study theory and practice separately. Within improvisation training, a performer is required to engage cognitively, physically, and imaginatively all at once. Separation of mind and body is impossible as there is a constant intimate interrelation in order to pay detailed attention and respond to the stimuli of each present moment. In this writing, I will be using 'body' to refer to the body as a

whole and I will assume that the body has the ability to think through 'a set of senses' (Morrish), through its nerves, muscles, ligaments, bones, and all the other structures.

Movement improvisation is a 'spontaneous mode of creation' (Goldman 5) and asks performers to combine their technical training with their ability to assess the physical, musical, spatial, and interpersonal elements of the moment to respond with spontaneity. It asks them to move 'between the known and the unknown, between the familiar/reliable and the unanticipated/unpredictable' (Albright and Gere 3). Professor of Dance and dancer Danielle Goldman writes that improvisation is a practice that requires 'enormous skill that the most eloquent improvisers are able to mobilize' (Goldman 5). These words highlight the challenges in combining technique with spontaneity, and balancing listening with responding. Within contemporary dance training there is an unspoken, collective presupposition that the body can think for itself, and as in Burrows' describes, to negotiate patterns and movement phrases. Movement improvisation offers possibilities of applying 'analyzed, theoretical material into the soma-psyche (body-spirit)' (Blom and Chaplin 5) as a way of embodying and processing learning. However, I often encounter dancers who claim that they cannot think or speak but can only move. Such statements reinforce mind-body dualities and disregard the enormous skill necessary for dancers to engage their body in full, and to coordinate with other bodies and spaces. Within my improvisation practice, the assumption that body and mind are one, and work as one, is key as multiple parts of myself collaborate as a whole; I am present, I listen, respond, think, and propose, to name a few. When spending time with my 3-month-old daughter, I see all these qualities in her, and even though she yet has no words, she is able to be fully present and interact in honest, spontaneous ways. Why does it become harder to access these abilities as we grow?

Dance and movement practices offer me possibilities for a deeper un-

derstanding of my body in relationship to myself and the outside world, as they remind me of the significance of accessing embodied ways of relating and connecting to something other. This understanding has an impact on my interpersonal relationships and behaviour both within and outside the performing arts context. Through consciously practicing how to sensitise and tune my moving body to the movements, sounds, and presence of others, I become more aware of patterns that might inhibit clarity in communication and creative expression. Through becoming aware of these habits, I am given the opportunity to find ways of moving in and out of them. This process is not technical in the way we understand movement technique, and is applicable to my dancing and everyday body<sup>2</sup>. Within my pedagogical improvisation practice, I sometimes find it challenging to convince my students of improvisation's principles significance for the everyday, predominantly within undergraduate courses. What interrupts our ability to continue developing skills on being present, listening, responding, and to use them within an improvisation practice?

According to the World Health Organisation (1997), life skills are the abilities for 'adaptive and positive behaviour, that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life' (WHO 1). Within an improvisation, I use my body to adapt, respond, 'deal' with the 'demands' of the moment. In this sense, for me, improvisation is a life practice, and its principles support me both in and out of the studio. My aim as a pedagogue and performer is to find articulate and embodied ways of sharing this knowledge and to support my students and collaborators to develop skills that are essential not only for 'professional but also personal lives' (AlHouli and Al-Khayatt 416).

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<sup>2</sup> My dancing body is not separate from my everyday body. These terms are used here to describe a body that moves in prescribed, technical ways, and one that moves freely, responding to everyday demands.

## Untitled

Listening  
To myself  
To the environment  
Presence  
Adaptability  
Responsiveness  
Attracted to the uncomfortable  
Attracted to the comfortable  
Attracted to pleasure  
  
Make no conclusions  
No products  
No answers  
Improvisation as a continuous journey

\*

In 1997, the World Health Organization (WHO) outlined a core set of ten life skills: self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, stress-coping techniques, and emotion-focused coping techniques (1). These are intangible qualities that support 'adaptive and positive behaviour' and 'enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life' (ibid). Improvisation as an artistic and life practice, can support performers in developing strategies for adapting and moving through challenges, both in and out of a performing arts context.

My improvisation practice focuses on developing presence, listening, adaptability, self-reflection, embodied and creative problem-solving, empathy, and confidence. These intangible qualities offer a specific articulation of the ones proposed by WHO. Used as primary principles, they support

me in further developing my movement, vocal and collaboration skills, in deepening my creativity and spontaneity. They also support me in adapting and dealing with moments of my every day life. Within a compassionate environment, through practicing improvisation, I discover ways of being a more present, responsive, compassionate, brave and creative performer and human.

Reflecting on the similarities between the life skills proposed by WHO and my improvisation practice, the following questions come to mind. What are the relationships between performance training and these skills? What kind of training can provide tools for building these? Do current curricula in the UK offer such trainings? Could this work support performers in developing life skills and a sense of resilience both in and out of the studio? The answers to these questions are elusive and can only be found in practice through 'direct and consistent experience with uncertainty' (Mehta and Fessell). Uncertainty often makes performers feel vulnerable so this work is the most affective within a carefully facilitated environment and with the individual performers taking responsibility for their own learning. Since beginning to teach in 2011, I have witnessed performers being transformed through undertaking improvisation training that has its roots on building listening, presence, adaptability, embodied problem solving, empathy and confidence. With this work having no end point, performers are encouraged and guided to discover their own ways of developing these skills further and finding ways of applying it to their own practices and daily lives. This flexibility can be both exciting and daunting, and it is a facilitator's responsibility to curate a safe and supportive environment for those engaging in improvisation training to become 'active participants in learning' (hooks 5). By taking active responsibility of their learning, performers are more likely to become confident in their craft, sensitive to their environment and others, and bold at solving problems. These elements contribute to one's ability to improvise



eloquently, with eloquence here suggesting qualities of attention to the present and articulate physical responsiveness.

Movement improvisation is flexible in style and content and accommodates individuality in practice. It has the freedom to take any form, shape, and style, with performers being invited to practice as a way of further investigating how their bodies operate within uncertainty. As Goldman writes 'to even suggest that improvisation looks a certain way is to obscure its power as a process rather than a product' (109). This fluidity of form can deter performers from wanting to engage with improvisation, as it does not offer tangible results. It requires personal and active responsibility in relation to decisions and a clarity around individual behavioural, physical and interpersonal habits.

Further to Goldman's comment and due to its fluidity in style, improvisation has the potential to facilitate inclusive and diverse spaces. A variety of styles, techniques, genders, ethnicities, and religions can coexist within an improvisation studio, with the only requirement being openness to listen and respond to each other in the present moment. Although this openness is key, improvisation classes and performances are often dominated by white performers, whose training is predominantly in contemporary dance and contact improvisation. This exclusiveness has its roots in postmodern improvisation practices of the 1960's that often 'failed to acknowledge the importance of jazz and black social dance traditions in their so-called innovations' (Goldman 16). Postmodern white practitioners drew on Zen and Asian practices and black culture, but often unknowingly failed to recognise and respect these sources. In thinking about improvisation as a life practice, I am committed to raising awareness of inclusivity and diversity in our institutions and training, and to advocate for spaces that can comfortably and safely hold the improvisation principles independently of racial, gender, cultural and training backgrounds. In my work as a lecturer and pedagogue,

I strive to highlight the interconnected relationships of the politics of the studio and the politics of everyday life, as a way of planting the seeds for fairer and more inclusive professional spaces. With its focus on listening, improvisation has the potential to create a space for 'fresh models for scholarly inquiry and political action' (Goldman 2), and for growing informed, non-biased interpersonal relationships. In this sense, our performance practices carry the responsibility of a fairer and healthier future.



*Fig 3. Improvisation January 2023 by the author*

# Resilience

## **A day of twos 22/12/22**

Body  
Cut in half  
Soft tissues  
Scarred  
Muscles  
Separated  
Forcefully and naturally  
Layers and layers of deep, careful cuts  
To bring life  
New life  
A body that is cut in half, feels cut in half, but moves as one  
yearning for the familiar patterns of the past  
radiating a freshness that is inexplicable  
carrying long nights and fractured days  
A body  
Resilient  
A body that bends under and bears the wind  
The storms  
The unexpected  
Resilient  
A body that knows, instinctively, how to  
How to  
How to  
How to be  
Resilient  
How to  
How to  
How to  
Live  
Pause  
To be resilient  
Is  
To be cut in half and to know that life is  
Wearing the scar  
Letting it transform this body  
Allowing it  
Allowing it to be soft  
And to return to the future  
Strong/Soft  
Continuing  
To live

A desire to live  
The desire to live  
To continue living

\*

Resilience as a concept has become more frequent in everyday conversations, literature, and practices both within and beyond those found in the performing arts. The broad use of the term offers opportunities for resilience to adapt its meaning to a variety of contexts, raises questions around its relationships to the environments it can occupy, and interrogates the ways one can cultivate it. Through reflecting on my 30-day solo movement improvisation practice, I am investigating the relationships between resilience and improvisation within the context of the performing arts pedagogy and performance practices. Within this section, I am asking questions around key understandings of resilience within our field. How can these understandings offer opportunities for gaining tools that will support the industry to build strong foundations for its future as a significant contributor to a more creative, sustainable, and inclusive world.

As a term, resilience has been used to describe: 'people and systems that bounce back from negative experiences and disturbances' (Mehta and Fessell); 'the ability to be agile enough and maintain some form of identity through difficulties' (Mehta and Fessell); as 'systems that survive being jostled around — whether or not they go back to where they were before, or to any stable state, for that matter' (Mehta and Fessell). These are some of the multiple definitions of the word, which, although they carry a similar essence, offer nuanced interpretations.

What emerges from these and other understandings of resilience is a sense of the ability of something/someone to be adaptable and directly responsive to changes in its/their environment as a way of continuing to ex-

ist. Resilience's key qualities echo improvisation's principles of adaptability and spontaneity. It is essential that one is present, adaptable and able to spontaneously respond to change to be resilient. It is essential that one is present, adaptable and spontaneous to be an eloquent improviser. In this sense, improvisation and resilience are practices that require and cultivate presence and adaptability.

Resilience lives in the body; it represents the body's ability to make choices that affect its vitality and future. Whilst these choices can be made and implemented slowly, unlike within an improvisation, they are informed by one's attention to the present moment. For me, resilience requires a body that works as a whole; a body that is aware of itself in relation to the outside world; a body that is confident to swim in uncertainty; a body that listens and responds spontaneously with eloquence; a body that is present; a body that improvises. When reading about resilience, I often encounter metaphors of trees enduring strong winds. Their trunks and branches are soft enough to move with the wind and not break, and strong enough to not crumble. If they are too rigid, they will break. If they are too soft, they will also break. It is as if trees can respond to the strength of the winds moment by moment and adapt both in the now and over time in order to survive. Similarly, within an improvisation, one needs to fully immerse oneself and tune into the present moment with softness, openness and attentiveness. Only then eloquent decisions can be made, decisions that will respond directly to the flow of the present moment.

However, I have encountered improvisation practices which are not always in agreement on how to best approach cultivating presence, listening and spontaneity. What is ultimately a collaborative art form still has the potential to generate aggression and violence.

A memory:

It is 2019. I am in a studio full of improvisers of all ages, backgrounds, levels and disciplines. It is the end of a weekend full of exchange of practice, improvisations, discussions and performances and we decide to do a final improvisation to close the event. The rules are: everyone stands at the edges of the studio and they have the freedom to enter and exit the space as they please. We begin. A few minutes later, someone shouts 'STOP! We are not doing it right, everyone is doing it wrong! We need to start again!'. Everyone freezes and even though the improvisation begins again several group members are reluctant to enter the space.

In that moment, I am surprised by the improviser's lack of openness, softness and presence. I am surprised by their lack of respect to the journey of the group. Whilst I recognise their need for control, and anxiety, in a moment full of newness and uncertainty, it seems to me that this exclamation is breaking an improvisation's main principle: to be present in, listen and respond to each specific circumstance. In that moment, the improviser surrenders into ideas of what the improvisation could be and not what it is. I am, in that moment, reminded of Kirstie Simson who writes that, when under pressure 'if the performer focuses more on themselves than on the preciousness of connection in the context of working closely with others, the resulting actions can be tainted by gross or subtle forms of aggression that are often unconscious' (Simson).

There is aggression in the improviser's voice. Their voice is like a strong wind breaking a group that is newly formed and has not had the chance to bond in flexible and sturdy ways. The ecology of the room is disturbed. For me, to be resilient is to be able to improvise so as to maintain the every-changing balance of an ecology, and to improvise eloquently requires ecological resilience. In this sense, there is no resilience in the improviser's understanding of the dynamics of the group, and this has an impact on the

flow of the work and on the connections between its members.

Resilience requires an intelligence that is informed by individual and collective histories, politics and ecologies, and a responsiveness to these. Similar to improvisation, it thrives when combined with detailed attention to the present moment. It is a practice that needs to be cultivated and can only do so in the moment. As with improvisation, inhabiting the moments of the 'continuous flow of internal and external signals' (Blom and Chaplin 3), resilience is also most needed in moments when one is required to discover new ways of relating to another or the environment, as a response to change. Resilience presents itself in the necessity of a direct negotiation between the internal and the external. The political significance of this negotiation underlines all human relationships and ecologies, and the immediacy of improvisation has the ability to highlight the politics of these relationships.

How can resilience contribute to the shaping of the performing arts industry as it is adapting within a fast-paced, ever-changing, diverse world? How can these relationships support a sense of balance within precarious moments? How can they facilitate diverse, inclusive spaces? Is there a necessity for adaptation of the performing arts, and how can movement improvisation principles support this change? What are the relationships between the need for adaptability for survival and movement improvisation?

## **A Day in the Attic**

Moving small  
Moving parts of  
Moving continuously  
Internal, invisible  
They keep us alive  
The resilience of being  
With its ups and downs  
Its successes and failures  
Moving through waves of unknowingness and structure  
The resilience of life

## **Performing Arts Institutions**

In my work as a senior lecturer within Higher Education institutions, I have frequently encountered students who are overwhelmed with regards to their studies, professional life, and interpersonal relationships, particularly during and following the COVID-19 pandemic years. There is a collective recognition that the generation entering university between 2020 and 2022 have lost precious transition time between high school and higher education, and that this has an impact on their engagement with university. What I recognise in their behaviour is an intolerance for the unknown. This has a negative impact on both their experience of learning and on the content of the training I, as a pedagogue, am offering. Students often demand to know exactly what we are doing, why, and what knowledge will each task provide. It is encouraging that they are more aware of their rights in education and that they want to ensure a high level of learning, however, there is little understanding of, and interest in, less familiar forms of learning that take place subconsciously, more slowly, or in a non-cognitive way.

Within my improvisation practice, a level of uncertainty is assumed; without knowing what follows I respond spontaneously and adapt to the new now, constantly learning something new about the way I move, speak, interact, exist. To respond spontaneously to a change of circumstances, in a



way that is viable and creative, I require an embodied clarity within which I assess and relate to the past, the now and the new now. Qualities that can support me in such shifts include presence, deep listening, adaptability and confidence. These are intangible and unquantifiable and cannot be measured by grades, scales, and systems. Whilst I encourage students to move away from notions of cognitive right and wrong within an improvisation, there is an assumption that the performer can feel the quality of the present moment. Does it need something different? Can I carry on the same way? The answers to these questions come in embodied, kinaesthetic forms and are often not registered rationally.

How can this *feeling* be cultivated?

Kinaesthetic and embodied knowledge is, for me, one of the most vital ways of learning. To learn through engaging all senses, through engaging the body as a whole. Dancers often cultivate kinaesthetic awareness and embodied understandings through their technique and improvisation classes but are rarely guided in applying these principles to their everyday lives. With interdisciplinary studies and practice-as-research becoming more prominent within higher education settings, I am reminded of the importance of the transferability of the skills taught to other contexts. In addition to practical choreographing, directing, singing, and devising skills, what other skills will students need when they become part of the creative workforce? Are intangible, embodied skills still considered less important than technical skills? If yes, what is this revealing for the impact capitalism has in the arts and how much can our creativity withstand capitalist notions of productivity, making and success?

Considering the combined political, ecological and social challenges we face in the now, I am convinced of the significance of performers' abil-

ity to apply embodied and intangible skills to non-creative contexts. The complexity and the speed with which the world is evolving requires adaptability, spontaneity, clarity and creativity, and the necessity of a confident and strong creative workforce is evident. For me, the resilience of the performing arts world is dependent on the resilience of the individuals that represent it, and the future of our industry is dependent on its ability to be adaptable, interconnected and creative. Performing arts institutions and professional organisations carry a responsibility to adapt to the demands of the now as a way of modelling behaviour that will ensure the survival of the people within their structures.

With arts subjects being removed from schools and with the rising cost of living forcing a number of creatives to remove themselves from the industry, there is a general sense of devaluing the arts and those working within arts subjects. Performers, particularly early career artists and freelancers, are often expected to undertake long working hours, to agree to low pay and to commit to multiple projects at a time in order to survive. The word resilience is often used in such contexts to suggest that performers just need to push through and learn to cope with these challenges. This approach can have an overwhelming impact on one's mental and physical health. Within the multiplicity of conversations around resilience in the arts, it is important to differentiate a resilience that comes from a place of attentive listening, the ability to adapt and self-awareness, from that which comes from a place of panic, lack of choice and exhaustion. Eloquent resilient responses will contribute to a stronger performing arts workforce and improvisation can play a significant role in supporting performers to develop the ability to respond in pertinent ways.

## **In Good Company**

Rushing  
To fill in space  
To fill in time  
To find the story  
Rushing  
Compromising listening  
For quick gratification  
Pause  
Begin again

Listen  
Pay attention  
Follow the lines  
The stories  
The lines of stories  
Of your body  
Listen to me  
Listen to the stories I carry  
Listen to her  
To her small, new, short stories  
Trust  
As deep listening  
Don't follow closely  
Don't close the focus  
Get out of the way  
Get out of my way

\*

Getting out of the way is an expression often used within improvisation discourse and practice. It entails relinquishing control over the final shape and form of a performed sequence of movements, words or sounds, and it encourages distance between one's actions and the expectations/judgements that might be attached to these. Within my improvisation practice, letting go of ideas around the final product is key. The significance of this ability is amplified by discourses around connecting with others, or what Eilon Morris refers to as tuning, a term borrowed from music to describe connecting 'to

the space, to each other, to arrive in that particular moment and place, to rediscover a shared quality of being together' (Morris). Tuning is, for me, a verb that describes the ability to move away from existing ideas when improvising or performing, and being present to what each now asks of me. Connecting to each unfolding now with my whole being.

The difficulty performers face in letting go and tuning to their environment when improvising can allude to relationships between performance practices and capitalist, linear ways of being which promote a certain type of productivity. Frequent conversations with freelance colleagues evolve around invisibility, lack of opportunities and funding for their work. This is predominantly due to the unsustainable structures of funding bodies, the high demands of a freelance context, and the dominant place social media have in the way artists promote their work. Does this lifestyle have an impact on the ways students, performers and the performing arts workforce are engaging with and viewing their creative work?

As with an improvisation, the ability to eloquently and spontaneously respond to a change of circumstances in life can only be developed in practice. The preparatory work for moments of urgent and resilient responsiveness can draw on improvisation training. Presence, listening, adaptability, connections with the environment, confidence, embodied understandings of the world and creative problem-solving are improvisation's intangible, transferable skills that can be cultivated in and for the moments that need them. Movement improvisation, with its lack of interest in movement style and its focus on presence, listening and creative, spontaneous responsiveness, can be an invaluable resource. It can facilitate a rich space for growing life skills and for cultivating resilience. Through this practice, I am reminded and encouraged to notice how the work I undertake in the studio bleeds into my everyday live, and of the impact it can have on my relationships with others and the environment as it highlights valuable possibilities within

precarious, changeable moments.

However, improvisation alone cannot overcome the strongly established systems that impact on the ways performers fund, create, tour and disseminate their work now. Whilst improvisation can provide a strong foundation and a pool of principles for an individual to draw on when encountering challenges and change, a greater shift is needed for the wider systems to adapt to the needs of their workforce. Perhaps improvisation can provide a fertile ground for new growth, an area of study through which organisations can develop skills in listening and responding effectively to those working for them. Perhaps improvisation can offer alternative ways of being with each other, listening and responding to the impending changes in our climate, relationships and societal needs. Perhaps, improvisation can support us in finding new, more resilient and ecological ways of living.

## Conclusion

### OUT

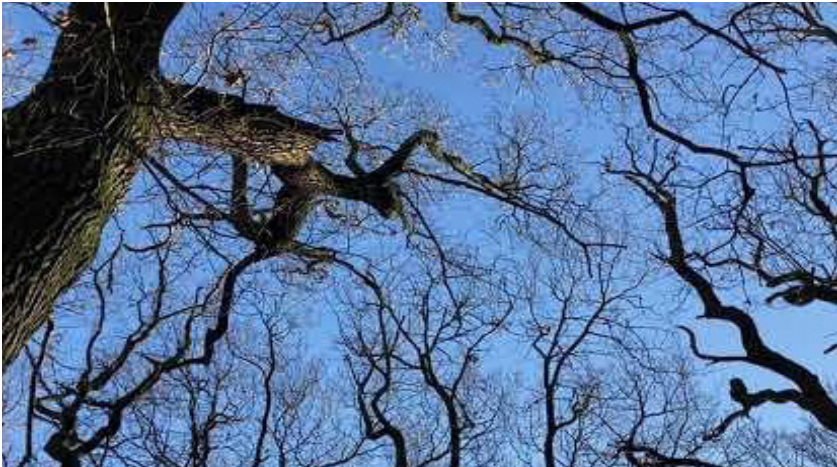
Where does a practice begin  
And where does it end  
What ethics do we encourage when we talk about professionalism in  
dance studios  
Could a practice develop in a forest  
Whilst walking in wilderness  
Could a walk be professional development?  
What ethics do we encourage in a forest?  
How do we talk about us, humans, in relation to the earth  
To a forest  
To a tree  
What do students know about resilience in the ecosystem  
What can they learn from gardening?  
What can they learn from stopping and listening to the birds  
What practices should we be encouraging as educators  
What skills  
Which skills  
Improvisation as life practice  
What practices, qualities  
Improvisation lends to  
A walk in the forest lends to improvisation  
Listening  
Respect  
Coexisting  
The cycles of seasons  
Growth and death  
Resilience  
The elements

Meandering as a form of movement improvisation  
As a way of understanding the human and ecological structures  
Take a walk  
Every day  
In the same forest  
For a year  
And notice  
The colours  
The sounds  
The light

The life  
What do you see?

Commitment to a regular life practice  
In which I can observe the seasons  
And sit in them  
In the cold and the quiet  
In the warm and fiery

A walk in the forest  
How can we encourage greater relationship to the environment as a way  
of nurturing performance skills, improvisation skills?  
How do we learn?  
How do we play?  
Play  
Always play!



*Fig 4. Still of a video of Northcliffe Park in Shipley, November 2022 by the author*

## **A final reflection**

I have spent the last two months improvising, writing and thinking about relationships between improvisation and resilience as practices that can support the future of performing arts. This research has coincided with the birth of my daughter and with me having to recompose myself again as a new mother, a partner, a friend, a daughter, an improviser, a pedagogue, a performer.

What I have discovered in this time, is the vast resourcefulness of the female body – endurance to pain and sleeplessness, care, love, creativity, listening, presence – all amongst circumstances that change daily. I have realised that my improvisation practice is present with me always and everywhere. It teaches me how to take a step back as a way of seeking deep listening and understanding, and how to only respond when the moment is right for me. It asks me to surrender to my body's know hows and to tap into visceral, subconscious knowledge even if I rationally don't know how. It encourages me to trust myself now more than ever and assures me that if I am committed to the principles of a practice, the work continues wherever and however I might be.

This research has been essential in supporting me to maintain a clarity around why I love to improvise and the significance of improvisation within my everyday life. It was not the intention of this essay to discuss relationships between motherhood and improvisation, it has however been inevitably beautiful to be forced to notice the strong links between the two. To surrender to the rising waves of the two together and let their currents take me without resistance. I admire and respect all mothers who give their bodies and hearts to listen, care, respond to and softly guide their children. I am grateful to my improvisation practice for teaching me how to be a good mother, a mother that is simply present.



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# Incline, Decline or The Non Upright Subject

*Helen Stratford*

In architecture and urban design, disability is conventionally framed as a condition that generates 'problems' to be solved, usually by physical additive processes. Access is achieved via a ramp or an extended doorway, found in Part M of the Building Regulations, without addressing wider social discrimination (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities). In contrast, in contemporary feminist and critical disability approaches, found across art practice, performance studies, sociology and geography studies, an expansive understanding of the 'bodymind' relationships that disabled people have with time and visibility, called 'crip time,' is emerging. Here, 'bodymind' refers to an understanding that the body and mind are not separate physical and mental entities but are felt together, particularly in the experience of disability (Sheppard). However, many of these critical art-based approaches focus less on specific socio-spatial contexts. My research addresses this disciplinary gap by bringing these approaches into connection with architecture and urban studies on disability (Boys, Gissen) to ask: how might feminist creative practice methodologies be developed to bring embodied experiences of crip time for disabled, sick and chronically ill people into normative assumptions of public space, in order to generate new spaces and theories that challenge existing socio-spatial models of disability?

At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, public space epitomised restricted access and fear. Yet, for disabled, sick and chronically ill people, access was already highly contested (Boys "Disability Space Architecture"). 'Crip time' is an embodied understanding of how disabled 'bodyminds' move "in/through time" that critiques ableist timeframes and constructions of disability (Sheppard 39). Outside 'linear, progressive time,' this 'broken time'

brings grief and frustration, yet it generates new ways of thinking, feeling and being in the world (Samuels). Here, embodied performances not only enable 'sick' and 'horizontal' bodies to 'pass' as 'the upright subject' (Hedva; Careveno), but also critique this spatiality underpinning Western thought, by generating indeterminate zones between 'able' and 'disabled.' By extending these embodied concepts into critical encounters with the support structures and processes necessary to sustain public life, the following artist's pages seek to examine what spaces emerge from crip time, and how are new theories for non-normative spaces are generated through these reconceptualisations?

Located between live, visual art, architecture and writing, my practice is a social one; developing live events, video-works, speculative writing, performance and artists' books that search for modalities to expand architectural conventions. The following pages are informed by a personal re-calibration of daily approaches to my research practice due to enforced periods of 'unproductivity' experienced over the past three years because of a chronic pain condition. Chronic illness is not only the topic of study and in desperate need of scholarship but is also the limiting factor in scholarship for many people. Led by my lived experience, the following pages employ feminist autotheory (Fournier) and speculative diagramming methods (Fric-hot) to explore relationships between public space, productivity and self-care. Through reappropriating diagrammatic devices designed to increase productivity, including those prescribed for chronic conditions to manage exhaustion and pain – CBT diagrams, flow charts and pie charts – the diagrams critique those organisational devices that claim to "build a better, stronger you" (Way of Life). Informed by my everyday activities encountered in 'performing' the 'upright subject', the pages make visible the emotional and physical labour needed to sustain the public and working lives of this 'sick' body. At the same time, in their reappropriation of diagrammatic de-

vices prescribed to manage productivity and pain, the pages extend artist Joanna Hedva's much quoted reclamation of 'sick' as an embodied lens by which to critique normative and disabling societal structures (Hedva). Ultimately, the pages examine how the reappropriation of these devices exceed the reductive methods through which they disable bodies, thereby 'cripping' them (Boys "Crippling Spaces?") by generating prototypical and joyful spaces that challenge these ways of thinking which underpin much of normative design.

WORK DAY (sometime in September 2022)

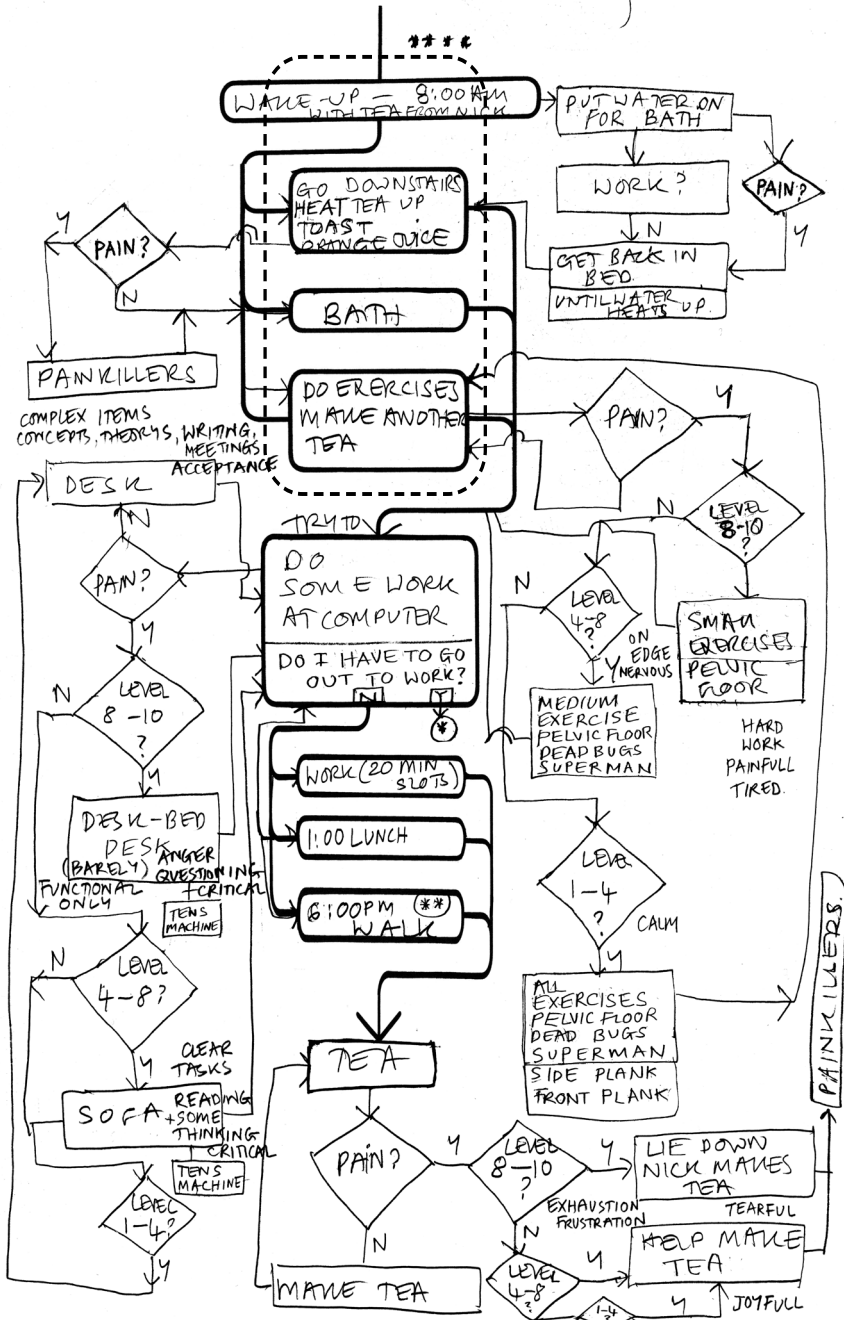
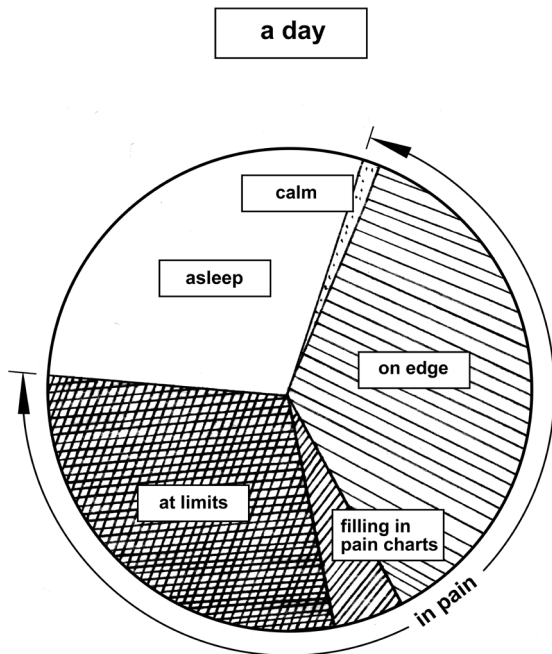


Fig. 1a









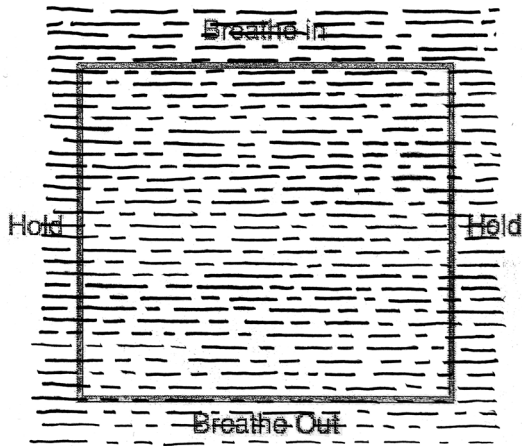
### Pain Management Checklist

<b>3</b>	Sleep diary / checklists
<b>7</b>	Pain cycle circles
<b>1</b>	Self care cycle
<b>2</b>	Stress bucket template
<b>1</b>	Upward spiral
<b>2</b>	Square box breathing instructions
<b>6</b>	Set of self care questions
<b>1</b>	Pacing chart
<b>1</b>	Persistent pain priority list
<b>1</b>	Emotional regulation system

Fig. 2



~~Square Box~~ Breathing:



~~Persistent Pain~~ Cycle

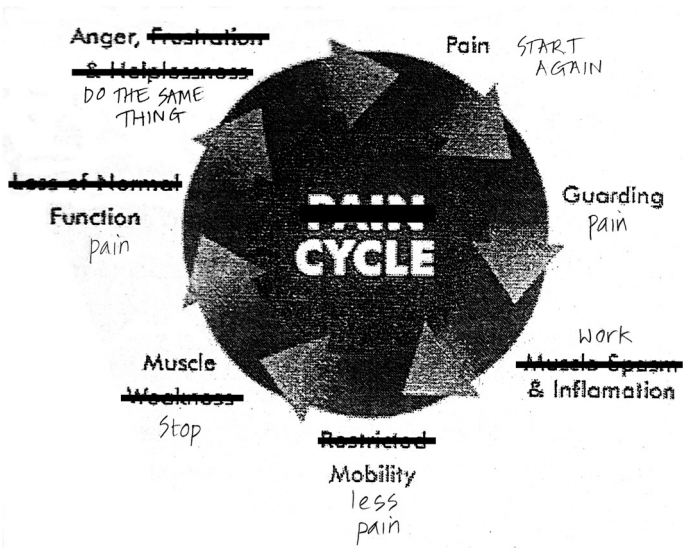


Fig. 3

## Acknowledgements

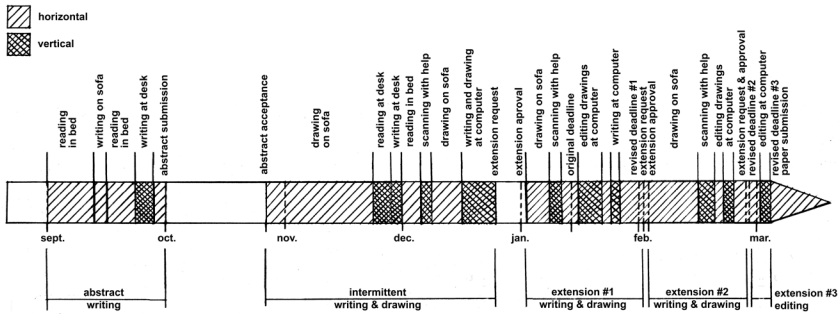
Thank you to artists, curators, scholars and students who have supported the current direction of this research, including Jos Boys, Emma Cheatle, Terri-Louise Doyle, Michiel Teeuw, Kaiya Waerea and Sunshine Wong.

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# Coda

## Paper Timeline



## Pain Levels



Fig. 4

## Figures

Figure 1: *Unproductive Spatialisations #1* - flow charts documenting the decisions made in attempting to get to make work (a), including travel and walk additions (b) and a close-up of getting up (c). Modified flowchart: 'Site inspection' (Green 129) from Ronald Green, *The Architect's Guide to Running a Job*. Butterworth Architecture Management Guides. Butterworth Architecture, 1986.

Figure 1b: *A Day*

Figure 1c: *Pain Management Checklist*. Compendium of rehabilitation measures prescribed to the author between Spring 2020 and Summer 2023. Modified '10 Rules for Improved Sleep Hygiene' table. Kevin Morgan, Beverley David and Claire Gascoigne. *Clinical Sleep Research Unit Loughborough University UK*. (Issued to author September 2022).

Figure 2: *Square Box Breathing*. Modified 'Square Box Breathing' diagram (NHS 16) from 'Helping you to Manage your Persistent Pain' Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (Issued to author September 2022).

Figure 3: *Persistent Pain Cycle*. Modified 'Pain Cycle' diagram (NHS 4) from 'Helping you to Manage your Persistent Pain' Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (Issued to author September 2022)

Figure 4: *Paper Timeline*. Timeline for paper production including pain levels taken from the *How Are You?*. Mobile App. Google Play. Vers 1.1.1. Målbar Trivsel. Jan 03, 2022