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Live Art: Radicalism and Complicity in a Scene of Constraint

When you enter a space of Live Art, you might be confronted with a literal scene of constraint. You might see the action of artist Martin O'Brien wrapped tightly in cling film and suspended from a small chain attached to a locked metal head cage. You might consider the unfinished concrete room where O'Brien is held, and recall that you are in an ex-glue factory, one of the many post-industrial spaces in Glasgow that have been reclaimed as a temporary venue for live events. Pulling back, you might acknowledge the broader context and its history: this is the club night of the inaugural Take Me Somewhere Festival in 2017, established to build on the legacy of The Arches arts venue, which until its sudden closure in 2015 was a venue for regular Live Art programming – and a home for the National Review of Live Art (NRLA) until its final edition in 2010. If this scene is constrained by its material conditions, it nonetheless incorporates them into the fabric of performance: O'Brien is physically shaking with cold because the space is freezing, and the act of exposure suggests how his agency has been claimed and surrendered in the same gesture. In the UK, a decades-long political programme of austerity has shaped this scene, resulting in seismic shifts in the field of cultural production: forced closures of venues, shrinking arts and cultural programmes, reduced frequency of arts festivals, and failure to increase pay with inflation. Artists, producers and other cultural workers in Live Art have responded by pulling together diminishing resources to sustain what has always been an ephemeral and sometimes deliberately precarious set of practices. Understanding the scene allows us to interrogate how Live Art practices reflect the field's radicalism, collaborative methods, disruptive nature and responsiveness and, at the same time, are the product of a resourcefulness born of absolute necessity in the context of artistic and political conservatism. Seen from this position, the decision to move from an annual to a biennial festival (for example) registers as both a strategic measure – enabling artists and communities of practice to develop their work organically over more extended periods – and a tactical response to a lack of funds that would allow for more regular events. In this context, Live Art organisations and practitioners navigate the uncertain territory between resisting and colluding with mainstream, majoritarian practices, weighing choices that might enable radical,

urgent work but demand participation in the structures and processes they would otherwise reject.

At the time of writing, the 'live' part of Live Art suggests the need for a particular kind of fierce attentiveness to the conditions of the present: it means paying attention to how what is happening is really happening *right now* and, at the same time, engaging closely with what it means to live and be alive together at this moment. From our position as editors based in the UK, we find ourselves amid a worsening culture war targeting migrant, trans and global majority existence, and in which Live Art practices seem especially vulnerable to hypocritical villainisation: being simultaneously denigrated as self-indulgent, irrelevant and a waste of limited public funds, and attacked as a locus of radical activism and political expression.[1] In tabloid media and conservative political discourse, Live Art may now be considered 'woke' – not simply alert to racial and social injustice as in the term's original AAVE meaning but part of a broader nebulous threat to the moral and cultural pillars of western civilisation, whether in relation to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, 'gender ideology', the demands of climate, disability and decolonial movements, or in efforts to advocate for refugees and asylum seekers. At the same time, we are witness to multiple regional, transnational and global crises distinguished by the now routine displacement of populations to war, climate change and the ongoing violence of colonial projects – with many cultural institutions unable or unwilling to be seen to 'take sides' in fear of threats to their funding or status as charities. Additionally, an imagined 'free speech' crisis on university campuses stands in sharp contrast to ongoing, actual threats to the UK's arm's length principles of arts funding, and the sector's capacity to act as a space of radical critique. In January 2024, Arts Council England (ACE) updated its 'Relationship Framework' policies to warn that 'overtly political or activist' statements beyond a company's core purpose might create 'reputational risk' and potentially breach funding agreements.[2] This reasoning led Arnolfini, Bristol, to cancel Palestinian film festival events at the end of 2023 despite having previously hosted events with explicitly liberationist, feminist and decolonial themes and ambitions. A backlash from the sector has since led ACE to revise its position and clarify that it will not 'remove or refuse funding to an organisation or an individual purely because they make work that is political'.[3] In Scotland, a direct intervention from Culture Secretary Angus Robertson led to funding being withdrawn from a major queer film project over concerns for its explicit nature and planned use of non-simulated sex – leading to delays to funding decisions as Creative Scotland carried out new 'risk checks' on all projects under consideration.[4]

Already always ambitious, Live Art seeks to speak to, amplify and reshape our knowledge of these events, their consequences and their histories, inviting us to re-imagine the possibility of intervention, reflection and critique. These ambitions extend from but develop Live Art's historical status as an (imperfect) home and refuge for those who have felt 'othered' by the expectations of mainstream, hegemonic culture. In our call for papers for this Special Issue, first imagined via long Zoom calls in the anxious depths of a COVID-19 lockdown when all live performance was suspended, we wanted to invite perspectives on how

1. See, for example, the media narratives surrounding Poppy Jackson's *SITE* (2015) at SPILL Festival: Lyn Gardner, 'Naked Artist Poppy Jackson Straddles the Personal and Political', *Guardian*, November 2, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2015/nov/02/naked-artist-on-the-roof-spill-festival-of-performance (accessed April 18, 2024).

2. Mary Stone, 'ACE warns NPOs of "political statement" dangers', *Arts Professional*, February 15, 2024, https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/ace-warns-npos-political-statement-dangers (accessed April 18, 2024).

3. Arts Council England, *2023–26 Investment Programme Relationship Framework February 2024*, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/21267/download?attachment (accessed April 18, 2024).

4. Brian Ferguson, 'Creative Scotland delays funding decisions for "risk" checks in wake of sex film row', *The Scotsman*, March 22, 2024,

https://www.scotsman.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/creative-scotland-delays-funding-decisions-for-risk-checks-in-wake-of-sex-film-row-4564502 (accessed April 18, 2024).

Live Art has responded to and been shaped by rapidly changing social, economic and political conditions since 2010. We were interested in exploring how Live Art practitioners and organisations had seen their work transformed by shrinking opportunities, depleted resources and a reactionary political environment or, in a testament to the sector's tenacity and inventiveness, discovered new modes of creative resistance and rebellion. In making sense of these dynamics, we hoped to address the contingency of Live Art's existence as a sometimes wilfully marginal field of practice with a resistant relationship to conventional forms of institutional power and stability through complicity (being involved in systems whose values we oppose) and radicalism (taking action in the service of political reform or revolution). This framing was shaped by a sense of the sector's development over the past decade in response to both external material conditions and an increasingly consequential reflexive critique of Live Art's political economy amid the emergence of vital organisations like Migrants in Culture, a proliferation of queer-focused Live Art events and the Live Art Development Agency's (LADA) hosting of the first meetings to plan London Trans+ Pride, a more significant presence of access riders and access provisions, the prioritisation of care practices and an expectation of structural transformation to enact anti-racist policies.

Informed by our presence at once regular Live Art events that would later turn out to be last nights, we were also concerned with tracing the implications of widespread changes to the social, economic and material structures that had previously sustained Live Art practices – developments which had included the closure of major venues such as Manchester's greenroom (in 2011) and Glasgow's The Arches (2015), the conclusion of the NRLA following its 30th edition in 2010 alongside the emergence of Forest Fringe, Live Art Bistro (LAB)/Centre for Live Art Yorkshire (CLAY), Marlborough Productions, Buzzcut and other artist-led organisations as crucial sites for the presentation and promotion of Live Art.[5] For the first time in its history, LADA had appointed new leadership – co-Directors Barak adé Soleil and Chinasa Vivian Ezugha – following the decision by its co-founder and director, Lois Keidan, to step down as part of accelerated plans for organisational change amid renewed calls for anti-racist action. In that context, we wanted to interrogate Live Art's complex relationship to systems and organisational practices whose values might be at odds with the desire to make space for the 'bodies and identities that might otherwise be excluded from traditional contexts' – and which might serve to reproduce the forms of exclusion and structural violence seen and felt across the contested culture sector at large. The desire to create space for a renewed critical engagement with Live Art's political economy, then, was joined to a fierce desire to contribute to imagining its possible futures.

In joining us to critically analyse, expand, survey, scrutinise and reframe these concerns, the contributors to this issue make use of their involvement with and close attachment to Live Art, displacing a convention of critical detachment to draw upon their live experiences

5. Centre for Live Art Yorkshire (CLAY) was formed in 2019 as the legacy of Live Art Bistro (LAB), which had been established as a venue and producing organisation in Leeds in 2012. CLAY announced its closure in 2024 as this issue was being completed, citing 'changing funding structures, decreasing support in the current climate, particularly for smaller organisations'. See CLAY, 'Closure Statement', May 10, 2024, https://www.clayleeds.co.uk/latest/closure-statement (accessed April 18, 2024). Marlborough Productions had run

The Marlborough Pub and Theatre since 2008, but in 2020 left its venue to become an independent organisation.

as artists, audiences, producers, consultants and teachers. If Live Art has a reputation for blurring the assumed distinctions between life and art and between artists and audiences, then that sensibility is captured in the self-reflexive modes that permeate the writing found here. As editors, we had hoped to invite perspectives on Live Art globally. The contributions to this issue are successful in highlighting how Live Art often works against borders as another boundary to be challenged, such as when Diana Damian Martin argues that Europe is best 'understood as a set of entangled processes (p. 384)' where constant flows and mobilities are being negotiated, or in Stephen Greer's demonstration of how localised fields of Live Art production are inseparable from histories of migration and legacies of imperial colonialism. Additionally, contributions often remind us of how artistic inspiration and expression travel and transmit internationally and interculturally – such as when Nando Messias writes of being a student in Brazil enamoured with the sublime genderqueer beauty of Japanese butoh dancer Kazuo Ohno's *Admiring la Argentina* (1977), itself about a Spanish dancer; and Bryony White traces how North American choreographer Trajal Harrell was similarly inspired by Ôno, re-imagining their work in *The Return of La Argentina* (2016). However, the overall scope of the issue still speaks to and from the UK-centricity of Live Art studies. The absence of scholarship from those currently based outside the UK despite our attempts to secure such contributions has prompted us as editors to consider what it means to be two UK-based white British editors, of a UK-based journal, written in English, with a wider international and interdisciplinary readership. Nonetheless, we offer that the essays, dialogues and speculative writing gathered here might invite the reader to think about the lives and possible afterlives of Live Art in extending beyond a reflexive critique of existing structures, values, and practices through writing which is richly, playfully and sometimes fiercely speculative – insisting not on Live Art's future so much as what a continued attachment to Live Art might allow.

Live Art Studies

It has been over a decade since the publication of *Contemporary Theatre Review*'s (CTR) previous special issue on Live Art in the UK in 2012.[6] In that issue's editorial, Dominic Johnson acknowledges Live Art's status as a contested category, 'not least because of the historical, disciplinary and institutional ambiguities that the term often tends to conceal'.[7] Here, Johnson's history of the term Live Art traces its emergence from the pages of *Performance Magazine* and through the work of early generations of Live Art practitioners whose varied practices suggest a shift from engagement with painting, sculpture, print and photograph to work characterised by a fluency in 'the formal languages of "mediation" – theatre, dance, video and film'.[8] Citing Nick Kaye's earlier influential positioning of Live Art as an 'attitude' more than a genre of theatre or drama, Johnson notes the troublesome relationship of Live

6. 'Live Art in the UK', ed. Dominic Johnson, special issue, *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22, no. 1 (2012). An edited collection based on this issue was later published as Dominic Johnson, ed., *Critical Live Art: Contemporary Histories of Performance in the UK* (London: Routledge, 2013).

7. Dominic Johnson, 'Introduction: The What, When and

Where of Live Art', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22, no. 1 (2012): 4–16 (4).

8. Ibid., 7.

9. Nick Kaye, 'Live art: Definition and documentation', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 2, no. 2 (1994): 1–7; Johnson, 'Introduction', 7

10. Johnson, 'Introduction', 10.

Art to theatre studies but also observes the 'trend for the absenting of British examples from those discussed in histories of Performance Art', and with international scholarship primarily dominated by discussions of British drama.[9] Johnson's editorial, though, may be more quietly significant in its resistance of an easy narration of Live Art 'as operating "between" – as opposed to against, outside or regardless of – institutionalised practices' and thus bearing 'inherent marginality or minority appeal'.[10] As we will describe further below, this issue takes up and extends that questioning through attentiveness to what it might mean for Live Art to inhabit the systems and practices that it might seek to displace, not simply working *against* hegemonic values or systems but operating as a field of reflexive, generative, political and sometimes critically complicit activity – whether understood in the terms of 'unproduction' explored through Eleanor Roberts' exploration of crip performance, the forms of 'unprofessionalism' suggested in Simon James Holton and Phoebe Patey-Ferguson's discussion of approaches to Live Art administration, or the counter-hegemonic forms of archiving 'from below' explored by Messias. As Damian Martin argues, the mess of affective relations which gather in/as Live Art might be best understood as 'Live Art vibes', which is 'not a case of feeling with or for, but the liveness of a dissonant, collective and differential praxis of identification and counter-identification'. If Live Art, as 'defined by [Lois] Keidan and [Catherine] Ugwu's work, allowed for artistic practice to take on a political stance and to operate in the world as an activist force', then the work gathered here suggests how such a project might unfold across the overlapping registers of aesthetic, social, organisational and historical analysis in a manner that exceeds the terms of an oppositional critique.[11]

11. Maria Chatzichristodoulou, 'Live Art in the UK: Shaping a Field', in *Live Art in the UK: Contemporary Performances of Precarity*, ed. Maria Chatzichristodoulou (London: Methuen, 2020), 1–18 (5).

The broader context for this issue is the significant expansion of creative and critical writing addressing the 'what, when and where of Live Art' (to borrow the title of Johnson's editorial), reflecting and contributing to Live Art's broader engagement with queer, feminist, disability and anti-racist theories and activisms, and their histories. In 2012, two key publications directly engaged with how Live Art navigates its uneasy, disparate and multiple histories: from a UK perspective, *Histories and Practices of Live Art* edited by Deirdre Heddon and Jennie Klein and, more focused on North America, *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* edited by Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield.[12] Monographs including Johnson's own *Unlimited Action: The Performance of Extremity in the 1970s* (and Johnson's associated collection of edited interviews *The Art of Living: An Oral History of Performance Art*), RoseLee Goldberg's *Performance Now: Live Art for the twenty-first Century*, Catherine Wood's *Performance in Contemporary Art*, Ke Shi's *Embodiment and Disembodiment in Live Art*, Rachel Zerihan's *The Cultural Politics of One-To-One Performance: Strange Duets*, and Greer's *Queer exceptions: solo performance in neoliberal times* have further interrogated the social, political and artistic ecologies of Live Art, locating its forms and practitioners within a broader, international community of experimental theatre and

12. Deirdre Heddon and Jennie Klein, eds., *Histories and Practices of Live Art* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012); Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield, eds., *Perform, repeat, record: Live art in history* (Bristol: Intellect, 2012).

performance.[13] Alice O'Grady's edited collection *Risk, Participation and Performance Practice; Critical Vulnerabilities in a Precarious World* and Nicola Shaughnessy's *Applying Performance: Live Art, Socially Engaged Theatre and Affective Practice* make explicit connections between participatory and community-engaged arts practice and the experiments of Live Art.[14] Maria Chatzichristodoulou's edited collection *Live Art in the UK: Contemporary Performances of Precarity* and Andy Field and Maddy Costa's *Performance in an Age of Precarity: 40 Reflections* have focused attention on the social, material and artistic impacts of prolonged austerity in the UK while also signalling the ongoing economic and cultural effects of Brexit.[15] Johanna Linsley's *Artists in the Archive: Creative and Curatorial Engagements with the Documents of Art and Performance* and the recent *LIVE ART DATA* project – the latter born of a collaborative project between the University of Glasgow, University of Hildesheim, and the University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück – have offered interdisciplinary perspectives on the pragmatics and creative possibilities of engagement with Live Art's archival trace.[16] Through publications combining oral history interviews and archival research, the ongoing Live Art in Scotland project has sought to challenge England-centric accounts of the field while exploring the forms of curation, support and development that might foster experimental practices in the future.[17] At the same time, Jay Pather and Catherine Boulle's edited collection *Acts of Transgression: Contemporary Live Art in South Africa* and Catherine Cole's *Performance and the Afterlives of Injustice: Dance and Live Art in Contemporary South Africa and Beyond* and contributions to interdisciplinary studies such as Hongwei Bao, Diyi Mergenthaler, and Jamie J. Zhao's *Contemporary Queer Chinese Art* have challenged Live Art's close identification with UK-based practice while platforming the work of international artists.[18]

The Intellect Live series has also promoted the wider profile of Live Art's leading practitioners, developed as a partnership between LADA and publisher Intellect in 2013 to platform the work of 'influential artists working at the edges of performance' through volumes on the work of Joshua Sofaer, Anne Bean, Kira O'Reilly, Adrian Howells, Lois Weaver, Ron Athey and Raimund Hoghe.[19] Drawing together critical essays, personal recollections, creative interventions and documentation of different kinds, these lavishly designed and illustrated works have frequently served as the first substantive publication dedicated to each artist's work while reconceptualising what an 'artist's book' might look like. Often developed in close collaboration between artists and writers, these books evidence the close relationship between the Live Art sector and the UK's higher education research institutions – with contributions to *It's All Allowed: The Performances of Adrian Howells* tracing the intimate weave of artistic, scholarly and personal relationships which informed the development of Howells' one-to-one performance practice.[20] These works have appeared alongside an ongoing series of artist books published by LADA that bring together writing and documentation through stories, reflections and artistic responses to the

13. Dominic Johnson, *Unlimited Action: The Performance of Extremity in the 1970s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018) and *The Art of Living: An Oral history of Performance* Art (London: Palgrave, 2015); RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Now: Live Art for the twenty-first Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2018); Catherine Wood, *Performance in Contemporary Art: A History and Celebration* (London: Tate Publishing, 2018); Ke Shi, *Embodiment and Disembodiment in Live Art: From Grotowski to Hologram* (London: Routledge, 2019); Rachel Zerihan, *The Cultural Politics of One-To-One Performance: Strange Duets* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2022); Stephen Greer, *Queer exceptions: solo performance in neoliberal times* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

14. Alice O'Grady, ed., *Risk, Participation, and Performance Practice: Critical Vulnerabilities in a Precarious World* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017); Nicola Shaughnessy, *Applying Performance: Live Art, Socially Engaged Theatre and Affective Practice* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012).

15. Maria Chatzichristodoulou, ed., *Live Art in the UK: Contemporary Performances of Precarity* (London: Methuen, 2020); Maddy Costa and Andy Field, *Performance in an Age of Precarity: 40 Reflections* (London: Methuen, 2021).

work of artists including Noëmi Lakmaier, Martin O'Brien, Tanja Ostojić, Tara Fatehi Irani, Project O (Jamila Johnson-Small and Alexandrina Hemsley), Sheila Ghelani and Sue Palmer, Daniel Oliver, and Jamal Gerald, with Gerald's book *Dee Jumbie Dance* archiving playful responses to a work which was never presented to a live audience but exists as a series of reflections on queerness, BDSM, ancestry and healing.[21]

Beyond LADA's imprint, Sandra Johnston, Cherie Driver and Paula Blair's *Actional Poetics – ASH SHE HE: The Performance Actuations of Alastair MacLennan, 1971–2020* has offered the first extended mapping of Scottish, Northern-Ireland-based artist Alastair MacLennan's 50-year career, *The Last Known Pose* presents a series of written and visual responses to the work of queer interdisciplinary British artist, Qasim Riza Shaheen, *Gómez-Peña Unplugged: Texts on Live Art, Social Practice and Imaginary Activism* further documents Guillermo Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra's urgent intercultural and transdisciplinary work, and Laurel V. McLaughlin and Carrie Robins' edited collection *Tania El Khoury's Live Art: Collaborative Knowledge Production* draws together perspectives from historians, archivists, curators, performance scholars, and other artists to explore Tania El Khoury's immersive social art practice.[22] These and other artist-led works sit into a broader ecology of creative and critical writing (including micro-publications, blogs and zines) that has sought to offer, extend and challenge the curatorial frames that might shape Live Art's production and reception.[23] These publications highlight the critical role that LADA has in publishing on, supporting and promoting Live Art, and, at the same time, the weakness of the broader field of scholarship and publishing by and engaging with the work of Black and Global Majority scholars and artists, and the relative absence – until very recently – of focused discussions of race, racism or anti-racism in Live Art. In this, we are especially mindful of the lack of discussion of race from CTR's previous special issue on Live Art and the omission or under-representation of the work of Black and Global Majority artists in several recent edited collections concerning Live Art and interdisciplinary practice.

In a UK context, the Live Art Sector Research (LASR) report has made a significant contribution to understanding the field's broader shape, contribution and challenges. Commissioned by LADA in partnership with Live Art UK and undertaken by a collective of independent researchers and artists co-lead by Cecilia Wee and Elyssa Livergant, the report drew on focus groups, roundtables, organisational questionnaires and a survey of individuals to map the ecology of Live Art and its support structures. Research for the report began the Autumn of 2019 but was paused in the following spring to enable the work to respond to the events of the COVID-19 pandemic and renewed calls for racial justice by the BLM movement. As the report's authors note, while queer culture has been particularly prominent in the UK Live Art sector and 'Live Art practice and disability arts have informed and exerted significant influence on one another',

16. Johanna Linsley, *Artists in the Archive: Creative and Curatorial Engagements with the Documents of Art and Performance* (London: Routledge, 2018); Andreas Wolfsteiner, Ekaterina Trachsel, Michael Bachmann, and Anselm Heinrich, eds., *Live Art Data: New Strategies in Theatre Archiving* (Hildesheim: Universitätsverlag Hildesheim, 2021).
17. Live Art in Scotland, https://liveartscotland.org, (accessed April 18, 2024).
18. Jay Pather and Catherine Boulle, eds., *Acts of transgression: Contemporary live art in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019); Catherine Cole, *Performance and the Afterlives of Injustice* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2020); Hongwei Bao, Diyi Mergenthaler and Jamie J. Zhao, eds., *Contemporary Queer Chinese Art* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023).
19. Intellect Books, 'Intellect Live', https://www.intellectbooks.com/intellect-live (accessed April 18, 2024).
20. Deidre Heddon and Dominic Johnson, eds., *It's All Allowed: The Performances of Adrian Howells* (London: Intellect Live, 2016).
21. Mary Paterson, *Imagination and Potential: Cherophobia by Noëmi Lakmaier* (London: LADA, 2017); Martin O'Brien and David MacDiarmid, eds, *Survival of the Sickest: the art of Martin O'Brien* (London: LADA, 2018); Tanja Ostojić, *Lexicon of*

historically, 'the UK Live Art sector has not supported ethnically diverse leadership'.[24] The report's research period also straddled the formal withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union at the end of January 2020, following the referendum result of June 2016. As such, the report reflects how an established network of UK activity has developed since the late 1980s and, at the same time, offers a snapshot of a moment in which the sector was pursuing (or being forced to address) changes to 'business as usual' after decades of individual and institutional complacency in the face of the arts and culture sectoral approaches to diversity which have failed to produce systemic change and, in some circumstances, worked to protect and reinforce exclusionary judgments – a dynamic to which we return below.[25]

Live Art's Infrastructures

While these works surveyed above focus on the texture and materiality of live performance, they also suggest an increasingly close engagement with the terms on which the field of Live Art has sought to sustain itself. This is to indicate that a critical exploration of the term Live Art in relation to the prospects of an institutional critique (with Live Art practices understood in terms of their challenges to traditional discipline-specific models of curation, commissioning and critique) has been joined by something resembling an infrastructural historiography. An awareness of Live Art as a sector rather than a formal tradition, sustained by a specific network of 'venues, development agencies, festivals, and related programming circuits', has been informed by increasing awareness of the complex challenges posed by the intersection of radical practices and the conservative (and sometimes regressive) structures intended to scaffold and sustain the field.[26] That awareness, though, has been constrained by a perception of Live Art as a marginal, fringe, and thus anti-institutional field of practice, more properly defined by its grass-roots rather than more conventionally organised existence.[27] In their contribution to the Live Art in the UK special issue noted above, Heike Roms and Rebecca Edwards suggest that a greater appreciation of performance art's 'institutionalizing capacity' might run counter to performance theory's preoccupation with the ephemerality of the live event.[28] At the same time, considerations of Live Art's organisational practices have been limited by a discourse in which the contributions of programmers, curators and producers have sometimes been framed as unwarranted bureaucratic interference, at odds with and distinct from creative activity. For example, when Keidan warned in a guest editorial for *Live Art Magazine* in 1997 of the 'looming crisis in the infrastructures that have nurtured and supported Live Art practices' amid structural changes at the ICA (London), CCA (Glasgow), greenroom (Manchester) and Arnolfini (Bristol), Roland Miller's response in the following issue stridently rejected the idea that artists might 'suffer from the temporary closure of some venues and the career moves of some

Tanja Ostojić (London: Live Art Development Agency and Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Rijeka, 2018); Tara Fatehi Irani, *Mishandled Archive* (London: LADA, 2018); Jamila Johnson-Small and Alexandrina Hemsley, *A Contemporary Struggle* (London: LADA, 2013); Sheila Ghelani and Sue Palmer, *Common Salt* (London: LADA, 2021); Daniel Oliver, *Awkwoods: Daniel Oliver's Dyspraxic Adventures in Participatory Performance* (London: LADA, 2019); Jamal Gerald, *Dee Jumbie Dance: A Resurrection* (London: LADA, 2023).

22. Sandra Johnston, Chérie Driver, and Paula Blair, eds., *Actional Poetics – ASH SHE HE: The Performance Actuations of Alastair MacLennan, 1971–2020* (London: Intellect Books, 2022); Mary Ann Hushlak and Monica Pearl, eds., *The Last Known Pose: Essays and Reflections on the Works of Qasim Riza Shaheen* (Manchester: CFCCA/Cornerhouse Publications, 2018); Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Emma Tramposch, Elaine A. Peña, Balitrónica Gómez and William Stark, eds., *Gómez-Peña Unplugged: Texts on Live Art, Social Practice and Imaginary Activism (2008–2020)* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020); Carrie Robbins, ed., *Tania El Khoury's Live Art: Collaborative Knowledge Production* (Amherts, MA: Amherst College Press, 2024).

administrators', while calling attention to events 'run by artists without the benefit of visible arts administrators' (a framing which might inadvertently acknowledge the necessity but relatively invisibility of such work).[29]

Critical engagement with how organisations, institutions, funders and artists might function as part of an expanded if unevenly distributed ecology of experiment, support and risk has proven essential to understanding Live Art's current state and possible futures. Each article in this issue discusses artists and practices traversing different scales of organisations, recognising that the ecology of Live Art in the twenty-first century relies upon multiple contexts and collaborations for its survival. In Live Art, community, artist-led, and DIY platforms hold a cultural and social capital which major institutions cannot compete with – but often seek to capitalise on. Neil Bartlett has suggested that as a young artist, the revelation 'that you could just do it' was 'the great lesson of punk', and Live Art's DIY ethos remains inherently intertwined with a punk attitude that places significant value on independent countercultural status, rejection of authority and a refusal to assimilate into commercialism.[30] While large institutions may have greater recourse to financial support, they often lack the consistent, curatorial infrastructures that might support radical work in development – with an appetite for risk further inhibited by a media and political environment that frequently targets experimental culture as a waste of public funds. In this context, nightclubs and cabaret events remain vital, more permissive sites for artists and producers to test and experiment with ideas. As Messias discusses in their exploration of the archive in this issue, the metaphorical subcultural 'underground' and the windowless nightclub is 'the space where queer and trans existence is lived out whereas the overground is commonly designated as the locus of dominant, hegemonic society' (p. 252). These underground spaces serve as an essential site for Live Art, transgression, togetherness and fun on their terms, but are also the laboratory where work is incubated and tested before being formed for larger stages – such as with Lucy McCormick's work *Triple Threat* (2016) which was tested as a series of short-form cabaret pieces over several years at club nights such as Duckie before being put together as a one-hour, award-winning stage show which was performed and toured extensively. Still, some of the most radical work in Live Art remains 'underground' in the club, in fleeting moments on the street (such as with the Disabled Avant-Garde's (DAG) interventions), or stumbled on in the digital sphere (as Damian Martin's discovery of Latifundiar).

In particular, festivals remain a nimble infrastructure particularly suited to Live Art: as Keidan wrote in the National Arts and Media Strategy: Discussion Document on Live Art in 1991, 'Live Art can range from a ten-hour spectacular involving twenty or more people to a five-minute solo action, and the "package" nature of festivals affords a freedom to present such work without worry about satisfying audience demands or, dare one say it, value for money'.[31]As bigger art and music festivals rose in popularity during the 2010s, Live Art found space, stages and platforms at Supernormal (2010–), Secret Garden Party (2004–17),

23. See LADA's series of Live Art Almanacs gathering 'found writings about and around Live Art' beginning with Daniel Brine, ed., *The Live Art Almanac* (London: Live Art Development Agency, 2008).

24. Cecilia Wee, Elyssa Livergant et al., *Live Art Sector Research* (London: Live Art Development Agency and Live Art UK, 2021), 103.

25. See Sonya Dyer, *Boxed In: How cultural diversity policies constrict black artists* (Newcastle upon Tyne: a-n The Artists Information Company, 2007); Jerri Daboo, 'The Arts Britain Still Ignores?', *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 38, no. 1 (2018): 3–8; Naseem Khan, *The Arts Britain Ignores: The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain* (London: Community Relations Commission, 1976).

26. Johnson, 'Introduction', 7.

27. For discussions of Live Art's DIY and grassroots ecology, see Robert Daniels, ed., *D.I.Y (Do It Yourself)* (Chichester: Bootworks Theatre, 2014) and Forest Fringe, *Forest Fringe: The First Ten Years* (London: Oberon Books, 2016).

28. Heike Roms and Rebecca Edwards, 'Towards a Prehistory of Live Art in the UK', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22, no.1 (2012): 17–31 (28).

29. Lois Keidan, 'Guest editorial: Will the last person out turn off the lights?', *liveartmagazine* 19 (1997): 5-6 (5). Roland Miller, 'Comment: Subverting the subsidy industry', *liveartmagazine* 20 (1998): 5-7 (5).

Wilderness (2011–) and in new areas at Glastonbury such as Shangri-La (2009–). At Latitude Festival (2006–), there was a dedicated tent, the 'Live Art House' (2014–16), which was co-programmed by LADA and other Live Art UK organisations, with a further stage run by Forest Fringe (2009–2017). The artist-led Forest Fringe festival (2007–2016) was itself a small but significant disruption of the Edinburgh Festivals' dominant artistic and curatorial logics, creating space to not only present but develop work, and enabling the inclusion of durational, site-specific and experiential works typically judged incompatible with the Fringe's box-office economy. This work was extended through collaboration with venues and other grassroots groups, notably the Scotland-based festival Buzzcut in programming an 'Out of the Woods Weekender' in 2015. Expanding from its original festival focus to pursue the creation of year-round support and development opportunities, Buzzcut retains its distinct character while mediating its dependence on short-term project funding by working in conjunction in Glasgow with Take Me Somewhere Festival and Tramway as larger organisations with (comparatively) stable funding agreements. These various infrastructures are co-dependent and actively collaborative, though they remain subject to unpredictable budget reductions (impacting the Live Art presence at Latitude) or shifting priorities and exhaustion (such as with Forest Fringe in Edinburgh).

As the sequel to *In Time*, Live Art UK's first collection of case studies published in 2010, *It's Time: How Live Art Is Taking On The World From The Front Line To The Bottom Line* (2019) reflects on a decade of cuts to UK public funding at national and local levels to address the 'radical roots' of Live Art as a collective project spanning the work of 'a community of arts workers (artists, producers, writers and facilitators) and organisations (from small collectives to major institutions' and makes a case for urgent structure change, 'starting with the immediate environment of the art world but looking outwards to society' in resistance of patriarchy, white supremacy, ableism, corporate interest and austerity.[32] As an advocacy document, the report centres the contribution of Live Art UK's members as a network whose 'joined-up' activities might enable sustained and holistic forms of support – with Aaron Wright's reflection on his work in artist development at LADA and Fierce Festival suggesting how artists appearing at prestigious venues nationally and internationally such as Martin O'Brien, Selina Thompson and the Famous Lauren Barri Holstein were given initial support by development initiatives including LADA's DIY scheme, the Artsadmin Bursary and SPILL's National Platform alongside artist-led platforms such as Buzzcut Steakhouse Live and Tempting Failure.[33] These networks evidence how Live Art's DIY sensibility has long been part of its self-definition, describing an approach to culture that does not wait for nor seek institutional approval to exist. This positioning becomes problematic when it serves to justify a lack of resources or support for artistic development and creative risk-taking: put bluntly, why would funders or organisations pay for what they can get for 'free' from grass-roots initiatives? LASR, noted above, observes how the work of key

30. Niel Bartlett, interview by Lois Keidan, 'Frightening the Horses: An Interview with Neil Bartlett', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22, no.1 (2012): 152–160 (159).

31. Lois Keidan, *National Arts and Media Strategy: Discussion Document on Live Art* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1991), 18.

32. Live Art Development Agency and Wunderbar, 'Introduction: It's Time', in *It's Time: How Live Art Is Taking On The World From The Front Line To The Bottom Line*, (Live Art UK: London, 2019), 2-3 (2).

33. For discussion of LADA's long-running DIY programme, see Deirdre Heddon, 'Professional development for live artists: doing it yourself', *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* 11, no. 2 (2020): 145–161.

institutions and organisational networks exists in close, complex and sometimes overlapping relationships to grass-roots and artist-led initiatives, where most of the work operates on a shoestring budget, with little or no funding, and through the unpaid or volunteer labour of its participants.[34]

As such, we are conscious of how the Live Art sector's capacity for improvisation and re-invention may be readily compatible with neoliberal demands for self-sufficient workers who are always ready to adapt to change, accepting precarious and uncertain working conditions as part of a creative 'lifestyle'.[35] Yet, insisting on the primacy of an economic analysis risks missing the alternative value systems that might drive and sustain Live Art practices. As Hannah Nicklin suggests in her recollection of DIY projects which resulted in a monetary loss but 'a net gain in all the other ways we value; laughter, thought, images, experiences and ideas', to work in a wilfully un-economic manner may be to insist upon 'a form of collective, radical loss. Or in other terms, generosity'.[36] Published on the occasion of LADA's 20th anniversary in 2019, Theron Schmidt's *Agency: A Partial History of Live Art* approaches similar concerns not through the attempt to define 'the practices that have gathered in relation to Live Art in oppositional terms – what they might be seeking to critique, reject or disrupt' but instead by considering 'the kinds of relations they might be seen to model or advocate'.[37] Schmidt's commentary disputes any easy distinction between Live Art's practices and the support structures from which it develops to propose agency as 'an emergent property, as a shape of encounter, as a relational quality rather than something that belongs to someone (or something): agency is a doing rather than a having'.[38] Jen Harvie's contribution to *Agency*, 'Institutional Celebration', further reminds us to be vigilant to the potential for institutions to work in self-reflexive, generous and socially beneficial ways and in resistance to neoliberalism's deregulatory impulses.[39] This turn to consider and affirm the generative potential of Live Art's infrastructures marks a break from the positions such as those voiced by Miller above while retaining a critical awareness of how support structures may become ossified and so constrain rather than enable action.

Common to these histories and critiques, then, is the understanding that it is insufficient to approach Live Art in terms of different ways of occupying the institution without acknowledging how Live Art, capitalised, has acquired its own institutional, if not institutionalised, structures and practices. In addressing this reality, LADA's Managing the Radical programme – the fifth in its Restock, Rethink, Reflect series – has explicitly sought to address 'what relations of power, with what infrastructures' might continue to maintain forms of privilege in Live Art even as 'its critical and collaborative aesthetics over the past 25 years have radically questioned precisely the privileges normatively attached to markers of race, sexuality, class, neurodiversity, gender, and ability'.[40] While ground-breaking programmes and publications such as *Access All Areas* have evidenced the inventive, radical and disruptive ways Live Art has represented and problematised disability issues, normative and sometimes exclusionary assumptions about access and accessibility persist

34. Wee et al., *Live Art Sector Research*, 37.

35. Ibid., 7.

36. Hannah Nicklin, 'DIY punk performance' in *D.I.Y (Do. It. Yourself.)*, ed. Robert Daniels (Chichester: University of Chichester, 2014), 88-93 (92-3).

37. Theron Schmidt, 'Introduction', in *Agency: A Partial History of Live Art*, ed. Theron Schmidt, (Intellect: London, 2019), 10-14 (11).

38. Schmidt, 'Introduction', 11.

39. Jen Harvie, 'Institutional Celebration', in *Agency: A Partial History of Live Art*, 177-84 (179-80).

40. Amitabh Rai, *(Self) Organisation, DIY Logistics, and Radical Management in Live Art*, (London: Live Art Development Agency, 2020), 3–4.

across the sector.[41] Produced as part of the diversity scheme 'Diverse Actions' – a three-year Live Art UK initiative, supported through ACE's Ambition for Excellence fund – Salome Wagaine's critical anthology *Vanishing Points* (2020) addresses the incomplete, inadequate work of 'diversity' as a project – most clearly when viewed as an additive approach which does not demand or result in structural change, or when it obliges those newly welcomed within existing structures to carry the labour of transformation. As Zarina Muhammad argues in her contribution to the volume, the conception of diversity in UK cultural discourse remains one in which the inclusion or involvement of a more diverse range of people is assumed to be inherently progressive, serving to advance projects of equality, diversity and inclusion even as these 'busted frameworks' which originally produced a monoculture remain largely intact, demanding assimilation and continuing to harm.[42] As Season Butler argues directly, 'the inclusion of Black people in order to *diversify* racist spaces for the sake of improving the reputation of said spaces is an act of racist violence and racist exploitation'.[43] In his contribution to this issue, Rai is also critical of tokenistic representation being favoured over structural change in Live Art, stating that in organisations,

> the shift of attention toward institutional forms of racial and class privilege that did occur focused largely on a narrow understanding of 'representation'—how to get numerically more working class, Black and brown bodies on boards and in leadership pipelines and positions. This foreclosed a conversation about the infrastructures of routines that continued to bolster white supremacist gatekeeping.

Rai's observations draw our attention to the often informal or unspoken practices that sustain Live Art's exclusionary dynamics. While the LASR suggests that 'individuals participating in the UK Live Art sector are diverse in relation to ethnicity, race and disability, and the sector does better than the creative and cultural industry as a whole', it also observes that 'artists and practitioners from ethnically diverse backgrounds' still face 'systematic inequality' and that Live Art has 'less currency for ethnically diverse artists and practitioners', due to 'the power to define, present and promote Live Art being shaped by white-majority organisations, the continued whiteness of academia and institutional racism in the performing arts'.[44] Though the Live Art sector may be 'more diverse' than the rest of the UK creative industries, it does not mean that it is doing well; indeed, it is Live Art's history of support for radical practice that may have contributed to a misleading and even self-congratulatory image of its progressive values, or how those values might have impacted its day-to-day practices and structures.

Caring for Live Art

Situating Live Art's practices and values in the wider theatre and performance sector is to address the complex and sometimes uncomfortable relationships between a field of experimental, radical and

41. *Access All Areas* was a two-day public programme organised by LADA 'reflecting the ways in which the practices of artists who work with Live Art have engaged with, represented, and problematised issues of disability in innovative and radical ways'. See: Lois Keidan and CJ Mitchell (eds), *Access All Areas: Live Art and Disability* (London: Live Art Development Agency, 2012).

42. Zarina Muhammad, 'The Problem with Representation', in *Vanishing Points*, ed. Salome Wagaine (London: Live Art Development Agency and Diverse Actions, 2020), 7-10 (8).

43. Season Butler, 'Heavy Lifting' in *Vanishing Points*, 17-22 (20).

44. Wee et al., *Live Art Sector Research*, 103, 100.

disruptive practice and the more professionally conventional, if not normative, structures of organisation and management on which such activities might depend for their continued existence, whether arts councils demand them as a condition of public funding or not. As noted above, LADA's Managing the Radical project has sought to address this problem space directly by asking what forms of 'management and methodologies of production might be more appropriate and effective for radical new forms of artistic practice'.[45] Begun in the year of LADA's 20th anniversary in 2019 but reframed by the upheavals of 2020 – both COVID-19 and amid renewed calls for racial justice and equity in the cultural sector – the project's development would inform Keidan's decision to step aside as director, making space for new diverse leadership. The appointment of Barak adé Soleil and Chinasa Vivian Ezugha as co-directors in the autumn of 2021 saw the creation of a new series of events titled Intersect intended to 'share insights into embodied practices that reflect intersectional ways of being' and oriented towards exploration and promotion of care as an organisational practice in recognition of LADA's unique role in the sector, as well as the needs of the communities it engages with alongside those of a new leadership navigating the world as 'Black diasporic, disability identified and neurodiverse, newly parenting, queer, woman and non-binary identified'.[46] Presented across 2022–3, the Intersect series would also articulate the desire to explore the potentiality of in-person, online and hybrid formats in fostering exchanges within Live Art and the broader cultural sector through events co-designed with artists Madinah Farhannah Thompson, Isaiah Lopaz, Jelili Atiku, Jamila Johnson-Small and Daniella Valz Gen.

A period of significant instability and upheaval saw adé Soleil and then Ezugha take separate decisions to leave LADA in 2023, and concern for the future stability of the organisation led to the temporary suspension of LADA's inclusion in the ACE National Portfolio.[47] In this moment, expressions of care and concern for LADA as an institution sat in complex, uneven relationship to LADA's desire to promote care through its programming and organisational practices, including Ezugha's commissioning of Rubiane Maia's *200 Questions about Care* (2022–3) through her own salary, to the experiences of LADA's workers during the pandemic, and to the sometimes uncaring responses to and demands made of LADA's leadership and board by the sector at large. This series of events, primarily conducted via social media channels and an online petition to 'save LADA from closure', revealed the scale of support for the organisation and its symbolic role at the helm of the UK sector while evidencing how different approaches to articulating that care – whether for workers, legacy, reputation, or the possibility of radicalism itself – emerge less from a cohesive community than from a contested space, alive with varying and sometimes antagonistic priorities and perspectives. Appointed interim artistic director in June 2023, interdisciplinary artist Ria Righteous's work – alongside that of a new board led by Robin Deacon as chair – has continued the project of exploring and attempting

45. Live Art Development Agency, 'Managing the Radical', 2020, https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/resources/managing-the-radical-2020/ (accessed April 18, 2024).

46. Barak adé Soleil and Chinasa Vivian Ezugha, 'Towards Shaping A Culture of Care', *Live Art Development Agency*, 2022, https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/2022/04/19/some-reflections-from-lada-co-directors/, (accessed April 18, 2024).

47. Neil Puffett, 'Arts charity bids to rejoin National Portfolio', *Arts Professional*, September 12, 2023, https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/arts-charity-bids-rejoin-national-portfolio/ (accessed April 18, 2024).

to define what care for an organisation and sector might look like. Founder of 'ecologies of care', Righteous's practice draws on the work of Audre Lorde in affirming the necessity of care as an act of 'political warfare' and in insisting that

> If we do not care for ourselves then we have nothing to build on, or towards, and we are at a crucial time of needing to rebuild. Rebuild ourselves, our lives, our creativity, our communities, relationships and families. We know we are stronger together, but we cannot be strong or together without foundations of care.[48]

As Righteous suggests, this work involves personal reflection on where our needs are not met and how we may be unable to meet them. It also necessitates reflection on the uneven distribution of resources, agency and expectations across the sector.[49] After a recruitment period in spring 2024, Mary Osborn was announced as the new Director of LADA. Osborn had previously been Senior Creative Development Producer at Battersea Arts Centre. Prior to this, she had worked at ArtsAdmin and been a core member of the Steakhouse Live team.

A concern with care runs through several of the works included in this issue. In their edited conversation, Toni Lewis and Demi Nandhra reflect on how the expectation of care from institutions, organisations and funders is frequently met with disappointment – if not forms of structural violence – motivating or perhaps demanding that artists discover and sustain ways to care for their audiences and each other. Holton and Patey-Ferguson posit queer friendship as a potential source of care in artist-led spaces in the absence of institutional support while recognising the limited ability of grass-roots initiatives to fulfil that role. In reflecting on 'dramatic failures of care and dramatic provision of care' experienced during Buzzcut's 2016 festival programme, Harry Josephine Giles argues that for artists and organisations, 'learning how to care for your audience is actually far more aesthetically interesting and politically disruptive than working out how to shock them'. For Giles,

> [I]n a political situation in which care is both exceptionally necessary and exceptionally underprovided, acts of care begin to look politically radical. To care is to act against the grain of social and economic orthodoxy: to advocate care is, in the present moment, to advocate a kind of political rupture. But by its nature, care must be a rupture which involves taking account of, centring, and, most importantly, taking responsibility for those for whom you are caring.[50]

While Oliver highlights the valuable role access riders can play as a tool which directly advocates and outlines care and support requirements for disabled and neurodiverse artists, he also draws attention to how they may fail to fully capture the complexities of what a person needs and how they might be cared for in a live situation – warning us against seeing them as the beginning and end of what it means to engage meaningfully with support for expansive, experimental and

48. Ria Righteous, 'Foundations of Care: The Basics', Patreon, April 5, 2023, https://www.patreon.com/posts/foundations-of-81069697 (accessed April 18, 2024).

49. Live Art's ongoing critical and creative engagements with care have included 'The Art of Care-full Practice' symposium at the University of Glasgow and resulting special issue of the *Scottish Journal of Performance*, and, more recently, Marija Griniuk, 'Curating as Care in Performance and Live Art: A case study of Lithuanian and Sámi art', *Revista de História da Arte* 16 (2023): 142–168.

50. Harry Josephine Giles, 'Shock and Care', 2016, https://harryjosephine.com/2016/04/24/shock-and-care/ (accessed April 18, 2024).

'neurotransgressive' practices. Exploring parallel concerns, Roberts highlights how the work of the Disabled Avant Garde (DAG) pushed back against reductive notions of care in Disability Arts in how they might manifest in pitying or infantilising ways rather than in the service of liberation, agency and empowerment. Expanding on Messias' investigation of the archive, care might look like preservation, and it might, at other times, be about destroying the whole thing 'by setting it all on fire' (p. 253). While we have seen a significant increase in discussions concerned with access and care, across all these discussions is a stark shared conclusion – care which embraces agency and enables radicalism is not possible without significant structural change and cannot be integrated easily into current systems which continue to prioritise efficiency and productivity.

It is imperative to note that tiredness, exhaustion, overwhelm, overwork and burnout are present in this issue, and we have often been unable to care for ourselves, each other or the work to the full extent that we desire to in the process of editing this issue. Like Nandhra, we might find ourselves saying to a friend, 'I'm too tired. And I don't mean like tired as in just tired, but career-wise tired, engaging-wise tired' (p. 319). As White's contribution reflects via Andre Lepecki's *Exhausting Dance*, we too find ourselves facing a demand for continuous motility and productivity. Living with grief, sickness, trauma and the ongoing effects of COVID-19, we are asking a lot of ourselves. At various points as editors and in dialogue with our contributors and the editors of the journal, we have had to share what feels like a vulnerable space to say, 'We're too tired/overwhelmed/exhausted'. We are proud of this work and excited to share it. However, we are also aware that the conditions of research in academia rarely provide the kind of time and space that might enable us to dream, engage and reflect on what is urgent and necessary. As Live Art researchers, we are part of the ecology of what sustains and holds spaces – and we feel sharply the restrictive and exhausting constraints of ebbing institutional support for radical imaginative practices amid a worsening culture war that targets queer, trans and non-binary lives with increasingly violent rhetoric. Beyond this, the very survival of arts and humanities subjects in higher education in the UK and the wider international field is threatened by cuts to funding, as well as a wilfully reductive political rhetoric that frames education only in terms of economic benefit. We recognise these realities not with pessimism but for the ways in which they might foster greater forms of solidarity, compassion and care to emerge for those whose practices we research, the ways we approach this work, and for each other.

Overview

Running through this issue is an extended critical engagement with the question of how Live Art sustains itself and to what ends. What practices and forms of knowledge production does Live Art enable, and what legacies does such practice rely upon or seek to intervene? What does it

mean to practice care in/as Live Art, and what modes of organisation, curation and development might best serve such a politics in deeply precarious times? At the same time, our contributors call attention to how Live Art's forms, ethics, and communities of practice are engaged in imagining, pre-figuring and materialising alternative prospects, processes and values through a weave of relational encounters: bodies and archives, bodies and borders, borders and institutions, bodies and other bodies. In reflecting on 15 years of performing with the persona of the 'Sissy', Nando Messias addresses the substance and value of their personal and artistic trans archive. While archiving trans and non-binary lives remains imperative, Messias suggests how such work necessitates a queering of archival logics – not simply working to preserve the material traces of trans existence but allowing forms of speculative, embodied and affective transmission. In addressing questions about how to deal with their archive in a larger context of trans historiography, before turning to a series of sensuous encounters with the archives of Lou Reed and Quentin Crisp, Messias considers how live encounters in the archive can allow us to cherish what is found in the counter-hegemonic underground.

Further valuing underground subversive practice, Eleanor Roberts turns to (DAG) – the Live Art collaboration of Aaron Williamson and the late Katherine Araniello – to locate the figure of 'crip imposter' at the heart of ideologically driven narratives of scarcity that frame austerity as a necessary response to 'scroungers' who rip off public funds. Reading against the demand for disabled artists to provide inspirational narratives in which the less fortunate overcome adversity, Roberts suggests how DAG's disruptive, sarcastic and deliberately chaotic actions manifested a form of strategic crip insurgency – both in opposition to polite, ableist normativity fostered by institutions and institutional classifications and in refusal of narratives of heroic triumph and rescue. For Roberts, this work brings to light the collective rather than primarily autobiographical dimensions of disability art – and the significance of alliance in difference. Daniel Oliver's contribution further extends this issue's engagement with crip theory by proposing the term 'neurotransgression' to privilege insecurity, ambiguity and complexity in making, understanding and writing about Live Art. Moving between an 'Easy Read', an Access Rider and an essay, Oliver's texts imagine – and manifest – how the methods, ethos and aesthetics of neurodivergence and transgressive art practices might align to transform the rules of the field, clearing a space of greater and even radical agency and empowerment for those who reject established systems of value and knowledge production.

Where Oliver argues you do not have to be neurodivergent to be a neurotransgressive Live Artist, but it helps, Holton and Patey-Ferguson investigate how you do not have to be friends to work in Live Art, but it helps. Tracing the social and relational qualities of Live Art – as a sector, as a community of artists and as a field of research – this contribution deploys an intimate insider methodology to explore how queer friendship has shaped the anti-professional, anti-

institutional and DIY practice of two UK festivals: Steakhouse Live and Buzzcut. Alert to how close social networks might produce exclusionary forms of 'cronyism' and 'cliquishness', Holton and Patey Ferguson nonetheless suggest how friendship might enable individuals to navigate inevitable tensions and conflict, offering a vital resource 'in common' in the context of vanishing structural support and neoliberal capitalism's demand for autonomous individuality. In their invited dialogue, artists Toni Lewis and Demi Nandhra use their own friendship and history of artistic collaboration to reflect on the conditions of Live Art in Birmingham and across the Midlands where – as in many other UK regions – cuts to local authority funding have sharply impacted the provision for arts and culture, placing further pressure on the role of longstanding organisations like the Midlands Art Centre (MAC) and Fierce Festival to sustain the sector. In considering the relations and gaps between DIY, artist-led and institutional structures. Here, the work of Contemporary Other, a support and development organisation co-founded by Lewis and Nandhra to work at the intersections of art, race, and care, calls attention to the possibilities and challenges in creating and sustaining space for Live Art in the Midlands – and in guarding against the high risks of burn-out and exclusion experienced by marginalised artists.

In considering the work of Jade Montserrat and Trajal Harrell, Bryony White addresses the historical legacies of racialised spectacle – and the demand for Black bodies to materialise themselves for white audiences – to consider the prospect of dance as care strategy and a practice of resistance against a demand that leads to burn-out. White's work invites us to reconsider the relationship between exhaustion, durational performance and labour – or, more sharply, to recognise better how slowness and withdrawal may trouble how racialised bodies are called upon to perform spectacular labour of 'liveness' for institutions that provide increasingly precarious labour settings. In turn, Amit S. Rai's essay reflects on the place of Live Art in a broader movement towards decolonising art and culture and the emergence in the UK of different ethics of accessible care as mainstream and oppositional organisational practice in the creative and cultural industries. In arguing that Live Art practice and organisation in the UK is undergoing 'a volatile process of decolonising its forms and practices of attention', Rai traces the emergence of approaches attempting to 'negotiate the state's top-down injunction for art organisations to develop diverse, extractive, impactful, entrepreneurial, and financialisable "community engagement"'. Here, Rai calls attention to the paradoxical relationships between queer and anti-racist modes of art and organisation and the emergence of organisational processes that tend towards the mitigation of impactful programming, which, in turn, service the continued operation of anti-blackness and white gatekeeping. In this space, the fault lines between care ethics and the demands of racial capitalism suggest the potential – and necessity – of forms of 'careful attention' that might pre-figure and affirm the anti-racist ethics of the commons.

Greer's survey discusses Live Art projects in Scotland that have responded to the country's role in the British imperial project and the transatlantic slave trade in particular. If Scotland's reckoning with that legacy has been frustrated by the belief that – compared to its English neighbour – it has no problem with racism, then works by artists such as Ashanti Harris, Alberta Whittle, and Thulani Rachia describe how such wilful amnesia might be redressed. In ascribing a decolonial turn to such work, Greer suggests how such a practice might not simply address the legacies of colonialism operating in plain sight but propose and begin to manifest alternative systems of history-making, knowledge and being in the world. Finally, the understanding that coloniality constitutes a present rather than a historical set of circumstances also frames Diana Damian Martin's consideration of migrant cultures in and from Eastern Europe, calling for an expansion of Live Art's strategic function in addressing multiple practices 'with differing and uneasy relationships to categorisation, institutionality and legibility'. Damian Martin's work is significant, then, in turning away from both the art historical circulation of the term and its deployment within the context of the UK's arts funding systems to propose an affective, relational and speculative mode of analysis. Here, the notion of Live Art 'vibes' works to unsettle dominant conceptions of political agency in the scene of neo-coloniality described by the cultural and political borders of East and West Europe, within and beyond those described by membership of the European Union.

Live Art is Dead, Long Live Live Art

One of the original titles we considered for this issue was 'Live Art is Dead, Long Live Live Art', born of wondering – seriously and because we were drawn to cause trouble – what it would mean to declare a post-Live Art moment. Whose interests might such a gesture serve? What might emerge in the spaces abandoned by Live Art or from which Live Art chooses to depart? In the spirit of DAG's slogan 'Disability Art is Dead, Long Live Disability Art', this declaration can express discontentment, disappointment and frustration with how things currently are, as well as a hopeful provocation of possibility for whatever might come next. However, in a passing conversation, an artist friend said to us 'I hope you're not going to say Live Art is dead!' – a concern that might be revealing of the imagined if not actual authority extended to academic exercises of this kind in shaping the field. If Live Art is 'over', the likely cause of death is not academic analysis but a funding environment resulting from a decade of cultural policy led by successive administrations disinterested in culture and often actively hostile to the communities of queers, disabled, working class and Black and global majority folk who create and sustain Live Art, and for who Live Art offers a space of expanded possibility.

But Live Art persists, both in ways which might sustain hope and pleasure, and in a manner that demands a renewed critique of its

material and cultural politics. Understood as a sector or a context rather than a defined field of artistic practices, four decades of practice have seen Live Art settled under a reliable and even predictable set of terms and histories. It shares kinship (and institutional spaces, logics and critiques) with performance art but is sometimes more closely related to theatre, except when it is something more like music, film, a video game or an installation that is mainly but not quite entirely paintings, photographs or sculpture. It can feel like going to a birthday party or a funeral, or sometimes a long walk in nature or floating in a lake, and occasionally like an apocalyptic rave. It is characterised by open-ended, exploratory and experiential practices except for all the times it tours as a show with a script and cast who have learnt their lines in work that does not change much, if at all, from night to night. It is known for its progressive, if not always radical, politics in offering space for queer, disabled, working class, Black and Global Majority artists and communities, apart from when it reproduces all the forms of hierarchy and structural violence that characterise the cultural sector at large. Live Art breaks from conventional expectations for where culture might be encountered by privileging the possibilities of art made in streets, schools, fields and community centres except when it much prefers to live in galleries and theatres; it does DIY, grass-roots artistic development and rejects conventional modes of professional organisational practice, except when it very badly needs an HR department. It questions what counts as cultural value except on application forms when it tells funding councils, cultural embassies and international foundations precisely what they want to hear about the capacity of the arts to address urgent social issues.

Fiercely and necessarily critical, the problem with such rhetoric is that it risks a discourse in which Live Art is always already constituted in the failure to make good on its claims to radicalism, as if to imagine there is a place of pure intention beyond the contingencies of the present from which to act. Alternatively, it prepares the ground for a cynical reading in which complicity is the price of limited freedom and wherein neoliberalism is so close to hegemonic that the practice of imagining or practicing alternatives is always compromised in advance. In attempting to explore new horizons for Live Art – and Live Art criticism – this issue and its contributions arrive at what seems to be a constitutionally precarious moment. But is not this already, always where Live Art positions itself? Stephen's office in Glasgow (where we eventually met in person to discuss this issue) holds a poster for an event organised by political arts organisation Arika titled 'OTHER WORLDS ALREADY EXIST' – a name inspired by the work of author, critic and sex-radical memoirist Samuel R. Delany. Part of what this issue offers, then, is what Delany proposes of science fiction as a 'significant distortion of the present' which looks at what we see around us and asks 'how can the world be different?'[51]

51. Samuel Delaney, *Starboard Wine* (Pleasantville, NY: Dragon Press, 1984), 177.

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