



**HISTORIES & PRACTICES OF**  
**LIVE ART**

**EDITED BY**  
**DEIRDRE HEDDON**  
**& JENNIE KLEIN**



## HISTORIES AND PRACTICES OF LIVE ART

What is live art? How have different practices of live art influenced one another over the years?

Introducing both the history and the major themes in live art, leading academics and practitioners engage with a number of key practices used in performance art. As they explore each different practice through a series of critical frameworks such as time, the body, politics, and place, the authors ask how these processes can be contextualized and understood. Recognizing that there is no single 'history' of live art, nor indeed a singular approach to the field, this book embraces the diverse nature of the practices, critiques, opinions and debates that have shaped live art.

# **Histories and Practices of Live Art**

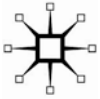
*Edited by*

Deirdre Heddon

and

Jennie Klein

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# Notes on the Contributors

**Judit Bodor** is an independent curator and researcher currently based in York, England. Previously she has worked at art organizations such as Artpool, Budapest and East Street Arts, Leeds and higher education institutions such as Dartington College of Arts and York St John University. She has developed and delivered projects in archival, educational, gallery, artist-led and social contexts and curated colloquia, symposia, exhibitions, online projects, performances and residencies internationally. Judit is interested in alternative models of art education, collaboration and collectives, ephemeral and marginal art practices and how these practices enter (or not) into the mainstream histories of art. Judit has also edited a book about Roddy Hunter's work, *Civil Twilight and Other Social Works* (Trace, Ontario: Samizdat Press, 2007).

**Deirdre Heddon** is Professor of Contemporary Performance at the University of Glasgow. She is the co-editor, with Jennie Klein and Nikki Milican, of *The National Review of Live Art, 1979–2010: a personal history* (New Moves International, 2010). She is the author of *Autobiography and Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) and co-author, with Jane Milling, of *Devising Performance: A Critical History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). She has published widely on autobiography, contemporary performance practices and, most recently, the art of walking. She is the co-editor, with Sally Mackey, of a themed edition on 'Environmentalism' (2012) for *RiDE: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*.

**Stephen Hodge** is a Senior Lecturer in Drama at the University of Exeter. He is a core member of the artist–researcher collective Wrights & Sites ([www.mis-guide.com](http://www.mis-guide.com)), which employs disrupted walking strategies as tools for playful debate, collaboration, intervention and spatial meaning-making. Key works to date include *The Quay Thing* (Exeter, 1998), *A Manifesto for a New Walking Culture* (Zürich, 2005), *A Mis-Guide to Anywhere* (launched at ICA, London, 2006), *Stadtverführungen in Wien* (Vienna, 2007), *mis-guided* (Fribourg, 2008) and *Everything you need to build a town is here* (multi-sited CAFE-funded public art work in Weston-super-Mare, 2010). He is the Associate Curator (Live Art) at Exeter Phoenix, and his avatar, Drifter Rhode, curates 2ND LIVE ([2ndlive.org](http://2ndlive.org)), which aims to

explore space, event and the anachronistic practice of walking within virtual environments.

**Roddy Hunter** is an artist, curator, educator and writer based since 2007 in York, England, where he is currently Head of Programme, Fine Arts at York St John University. Roddy's performance and installation works have appeared at many international festivals and venues (including in Guangzhou, Warsaw, Cardiff, Singapore, Rotterdam, Tel Aviv, Sheffield, Santiago de Compostela, Québec, Vilnius and Budapest). Curatorial work includes *Span<sup>2</sup>* (with André Stitt, London), *Rootless '97: The Nomad Domain* (with Hull Time-Based Arts), and current doctoral research at CRUMB, University of Sunderland. Critical writings include monograph essays on Alastair MacLennan, John Newling and André Stitt.

**Dominic Johnson** is an artist and writer based in Drama at Queen Mary, University of London. He has published many articles on performance and visual culture and is the editor of two artist monographs on the work of Franko B and Manuel Vason. He is also the editor of a themed edition of *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22.1: Live Art in the UK (2012). He is the author of *Glorious Catastrophe* (Manchester University Press, 2012), a monograph on the work of Jack Smith. Dominic's performances have been presented at galleries, museums, festivals, clubs and other venues, including the SPILL Festival, Chelsea Theatre and Gay Shame (London), National Review of Live Art (Glasgow), Fierce (Birmingham), and also as part of Gay Icons at the National Portrait Gallery (London). He has performed internationally, in Austria, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, France, Italy, Slovenia and the US.

**Jennie Klein** is the Chair of Art History and the Associate Professor of the School of Art at Ohio University. She is a contributing editor for *Art Papers* and *Genders*. She has curated or co-curated several important exhibitions, including *The 21st Century Odyssey Part II: The Performances of Barbara T. Smith* (with Rebecca McGrew) and *Maternal Metaphors* (with Myrel Chernick). Klein is the editor of *Letters From Linda M. Montano* (Routledge, 2005), and the co-editor of *The M Word: Real Mothers in Contemporary Art* (Myrel Chernick, Demeter Press, 2011). She was a contributing scholar and catalogue essayist for the exhibition *Doin' It In Public: Feminism and Art of the Woman's Building*, which was part of the Getty funded initiative *Pacific Standard Time: Art in LA 1945–1980*. She is presently working on a book about the work of Marilyn Arsem.



**Claire MacDonald's** interests lie at the intersection of fiction, performance and the visual arts. A co-founder of UK performance companies Impact and Insomniac, she was a theatre-maker and performer before turning to writing, editing and teaching. A founding editor of the Journal *Performance Research*, she is also a contributing editor to *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* and writes widely on artists and writers whose interests cross disciplines, as well as on artists' books and publishing, and on the pedagogy of art and performance. Her creative practice addresses questions of what language can do within the conditions and parameters of literary and performance form. Claire recently returned to performance herself in *Traces of Her*, a two-woman show with choreographer Charlotte Vincent. She divides her time between the UK, Greece and the USA, and her current interests lie in the cultural history of art and performance in the UK, as well as in Greek and American art and writing.

**Cathy Turner** is a Senior Lecturer in Drama at the University of Exeter. She is a founding and core member of the company Wrights & Sites (see Hodge, above). In addition to her co-authorship of Wrights & Sites *Mis-Guides* and other publications, Cathy is also the co-author, with Synne Behrndt, of *Dramaturgy and Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Cathy and Synne are joint editors of a special issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review* on 'new dramaturgies' (2010). Cathy's interest in dramaturgy has extended to exploring the relationships between dramaturgy and architecture (the subject of a forthcoming monograph), and between walking and performance.

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# Introduction

## Writing *Histories and Practices of Live Art*

Deirdre Heddon

### **Impossible tasks**

Writing a history of live art is something of an impossible task. A repeated claim for live art, ironically settled into a defining feature, is that it resists definition. As the pre-eminent 'live art' organization in the UK, the Live Art Development Agency (LADA), writes,

Disrupting borders, breaking rules, defying traditions, resisting definitions, asking awkward questions and activating audiences, Live Art breaks the rules about who is making art, how they are making it and who they are making it for. (Live Art Development Agency 2010)<sup>1</sup>

If this is so, then proposing to contain the unruly, divergent and extensive practice(s) of live art within the pages of a book, and further, to organize those practices into something resembling a history, is paradoxical. So it is that, borrowing from the insights of French feminist critic Hélène Cixous, in mapping this history of live art practices we begin by paying attention to our bodies:

This is what my body teaches me: first of all, be wary of names; they're nothing but social tools, rigid concepts, little cages of meaning assigned, as you know, to keep us from getting mixed up with each other, without which the Society of Cacapitalist Siphoning would collapse. (1991: 49)

'Getting mixed up with each other' seems like a fitting motto for live art and for a history which attempts to tell some of its practices. In this history of live art, then, we embrace the term 'live art' as an expanded and expanding

category, without defined beginning or settled form. We include examples of Fluxus, happenings, performance art, 'Action Art', land art, digital work, devised performance, site-specific practice and even experimental film and video.

'Mapping a field', though an overused metaphor, is nevertheless a useful one in this context if it is taken to mean an embodied and located surveying of the land, one that acknowledges perspective, its own historicity, and the incompleteness – the unavoidable selectivity – of the exercise. Our mapping has been organized into themes that seem to have particular or recurrent relevance to the history and practice of live art: institutions, time, action, site, risk, collaboration and politics. That each of the themes explored could easily have filled a monograph (or more) is indisputable. The impossibility of the task relates, then, not just to definitions, but also to scale. How to tell all this, in one book? We cannot, of course. We can tell only a few moments. For this reason, we take as the starting point – a way into this field – a focus on the UK; at the outset, we attempt to tell the histories and practices of live art in the UK (and indeed, more specifically, the histories and practices of live art in Great Britain). But art, the people who make it, and the ideas they generate, travel and cross geographical borders. Whilst the UK might literally be an island (or, to be precise, two: Scotland, Wales, England; and Northern Ireland), contributors to this collection make tangible the flows of people, concepts, aspirations, agendas, manifestos, desires and practices; waves of influence travelling to and fro, from east to west, north to south, and vice versa. This history of live art is one of connections, then, a Do it Yourself (DiY) live art trade route; and though the focus here is on the UK, the histories and practices, and the discussions and debates they raise, have wider resonance. If our anthology is a map, it is one that, in the spirit of geographer Doreen Massey (2005), seeks to leave the stories open and unfinished, trailing loose ends – loose ends which we hope provide opportunities for others to make different connections.

## **Collaborative productions**

The task of writing a history of live art practice – even one that seeks to focus the activity by framing it geographically – is impossible on many counts, then, and resembles the performance game encouraged by Goat Island, where the seeming impossibility of an instruction precisely carries you towards the as yet unimagined. As those who have practised the impossible task recognize, its success depends on a leap of faith supported

by the magic of collaboration. Embracing the productive – generative – impossibility of writing a history of live art in the UK (or even Great Britain), this anthology represents a very deliberate collaboration that makes the rejection of a singular history its only certainty. Where a solo-authored book might have produced a more seamless and linear account, this collective effort solicits instead multiple stories plotting divergent and different perspectives. These differences, I hope, render this anthology textured, or, to borrow from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Renu Bora, ‘textured’, signalling ‘how, substantively, historically, materially, it came into being’ (Kosofsky Sedgwick 2003: 14–15). Rather than erasing the locations and investments of its production, this anthology wears them, reminders that this is history in the making.

The history – or genesis – of this collection is to be found in another moment of production: my editing, with Jennie Klein and Nikki Milican, of the National Review of Live Art’s 30th Anniversary Catalogue (Heddon et al. 2010), produced to also mark the final *National Review of Live Art* (NRLA). In approaching the task of cataloguing such a long and rich festival, Klein and I recognized that while that catalogue might tell one history of the NRLA, it could not locate this within the wider history of live art in the UK. Live art, a marginal activity in the 1970s, is by the twenty-first century a recognized term that references a diverse range of well-supported processes and practices of performance making. The NRLA has been joined by other festivals around the country, including *In Between Time* at Bristol, *Fierce* at Birmingham, *Sensitive Skin* at Nottingham and *FIX* in Belfast; and where there were very few places to show this work in the 1970s, now venues programming live art are to be found in most cities, including Bristol’s Arnolfini, London’s ICA Battersea Arts Centre, Glasgow’s Tramway, Cardiff’s Chapter Arts Centre, and Exeter’s Phoenix, to name just some. These are joined by organizations dedicated to supporting the development of live artists, such as Artsadmin, the New Work Network and LADA. In addition to the support provided by festivals, venues and organizations, the practices of live art have been brought firmly into educational institutions, with courses offered in, variously, ‘live art’, ‘performance art’, ‘body art’ and ‘contemporary performance’. In short, there is a plethora of live art activity in the UK, supported by a network of organizations.

Over the past few decades, there has also been consistent critical engagement with live art practices, including Adrian Henri’s *Environments and Happenings* (1974), Anthony Howell and Fiona Templeton’s *Elements of Performance Art* (1977), Jeff Nuttall’s *Performance Art Memoirs* (1979), Robert Ayers and David Butler’s edited text, *Live Art* (1991), Richard Layzell’s *Live*

*Art in Schools* (1993), Catherine Ugwu's *Let's Get it On: The Politics of Black Performance* (1995), Nikki Childs and Jeni Walwin's anthology, *A Split Second of Paradise* (1998), Adrian Heathfield's edited collection, *Live: Art and Performance* (2004) and Leslie Hill and Helen Paris' collection, *Performance and Place* (2006). There are also increasing numbers of publications that focus on particular spaces, groups or artists, such as Gary Watson and Roddy Hunter's *Alastair MacLennan: Knot Naught* (2003); Guy Brett's *Exploding Galaxies: The Art of David Medalla* (1995); Julie Bacon, Heike Roms and Jimmie Durham's *Trace: Installation Art Space, Cardiff 00-05* (2006); or Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett's edited collection, *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life* (2007), to name just a few.

The increased visibility of writing about live art has been aided in no small part by the efforts of LADA and its publishing collaborations with other artists, writers, venues and publishers. Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh's *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh* (2009), published with MIT Press, is indicative of the possibilities, as is *The Live Art Almanac* (2008–), a venture with Live Art UK which invites submissions from people across the UK (and the Republic of Ireland).<sup>2</sup> LADA also commissions and publishes its own materials, such as artist Joshua Sofaer's inventive *The Performance Pack* (2005) and *The Many Headed Monster* (2009).<sup>3</sup>

Whilst acknowledging the extent to which live art has become part of performance and art landscape and discourse of the UK, as we grappled with the NRLA's 30th Anniversary Catalogue, Klein and I were nevertheless acutely aware that what remained unavailable was a broader history, collected in one place. Heike Roms' attempt to locate and narrate the history of live art in Wales, in her project *What's Welsh for Performance* (2008), is quite exceptional in this respect. Roselee Goldberg's book, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (1988), though largely a history of performance in the US, remains the most common touchstone for historicizing live art in the UK. While the chapters in our own collection certainly testify to the early influence of US-based practitioners, other influences, historical and contemporary, often intersecting, are significant. These include social, political and economic circumstances (local and national – European and beyond), individuals with particular visions and commitments, and informal and formal networks (local, national and international).

Valuable though existing materials are, the endurance and development of live art in the UK, not to mention its contemporary vibrancy, proposes that a publication which maps it both thematically and historically, from the 1950s to the first decade of the twentieth century, is long overdue.

Another aspect of the impossibility of this task resides in the fact that much of the earlier live work is undocumented (resisting documentation is one of live art's foundational stories). Personal reminiscences, as intangible as the work itself, become substitutes – witnessing, recounting, overhearing... So many artists and writers identify important moments, often of 'origin', when things changed – ways of doing, of seeing, of thinking. Often, this is predicated on an unforeseen encounter with another artist or event – useful reminders of the part that chance plays in making history. For Richard Layzell, 1969 proved a memorable year. In his first year of study at The Slade School of Fine Art, Layzell intercepted a postgraduate painting course, run by Marc Chaimowicz. The course moved from painting to performance. In the same year, Derek Jarman and Robert Medley 'run a project for first year students in the university theatre, later called the Bloomsbury Theatre' (Layzell 1998: 6). As Layzell reflects, the theatre project presented an incredible opportunity. They were told to 'Do what you like with this space and we'll have a performance at the end of the week with lights and all.' 'This project,' Layzell claims, 'contributed to my complete change of direction.'<sup>4</sup>

André Stitt's live art story of origin is set in 1974, in Smithfield Market, Belfast. Stitt recalls bunking off school with his mates, and encountering a film crew filming 'this big guy in a big fur coat wearing a funny old fashioned hat'. The big guy is talking in a German accent and 'he looks really weird'. He is also 'signing his name on bananas with a big felt marker'. Stitt feels like

something very important is taking place so I follow him down York Street to the big office building which is the art school. There's a big crowd outside and as he makes his way toward the entrance they part like the old Red Sea waves. I follow the crowd into the building and Mr. Fur Coat proceeds to deliver this really mesmerising talk in a wild and expressive German accent. He is chalking all over blackboards, he is getting really intense, the big crowd inside are hanging on his every word and action. I don't know what the hell he is on about, but I am captivated by it; there is a presence, there is an excitement, and an intensity to what is happening that I have only ever felt listening to music. Something in my head clicks; I hear it clicking, it's like an electric switch being flicked. I am thinking, "*This is it, this is what I want to do*". (Stitt 2010: 110)

Stitt only found out a few years later, once he had started attending Belfast College of Art, that his encounter was with Joseph Beuys.

My own story of engagement with live art began in 1989, with an enforced visit in my second year of university to the NRLA. Until this point, I had been questioning why on earth I – a wee lassie from the west coast of Scotland who had barely been to the theatre in her life – had opted to take a degree in Theatre Studies. Dutifully attending any number of theatre shows in Glasgow, I nevertheless felt myself increasingly struggling to ‘suspend my disbelief’. Then I went to the NRLA where I saw *Herbarium*, by Polish student company, Scena Plastyczna. Even now I recall, clearly, the entrancing sound, the strobe lighting and strange figures flying through space, coming so close as to almost touch me. The hairs on my neck rose. My eyes widened. I was utterly and absolutely exhilarated, bewitched and hooked. Since 1989 I have: returned to the NRLA ten times; written an undergraduate dissertation on performance art; completed a PhD on feminist live art; served as a board member for New Moves International (producers of the NRLA); co-edited the NRLA’s 30th Anniversary Catalogue; and proposed, co-edited and contributed a chapter to this collection. Suspicious of origin stories I nevertheless sometimes feel that the NRLA literally changed the direction of my life.

Though most of the contributors to *Histories and Practices of Live Art* write about live art from outside their own time and experience, each nevertheless has her or his own personal history of engagement with, and indeed understanding of live art (in the UK and beyond) and these visibly impress on their historicizing – on what they tell and how they tell it. Jennie Klein, a scholar of art history at the University of Ohio, has a long involvement in live art that began in the early 1990s in Sushi Performance space in San Diego. She has edited the writing of the ‘art saint’, Linda Montano, and co-curated an exhibition of the performance work of Barbara T. Smith. More recently, Klein has found herself repeatedly travelling to Europe, witnessing and writing about live art festivals and events including the NRLA in Glasgow, the *ANTI Festival* in Finland and the *City of Women Festival* in Ljubljana. Klein’s location outside the UK affords her a particular viewpoint when surveying the institutional history of the practice within the UK, while her knowledge of the US ‘scene’ provides a useful counterpoint, throwing into relief some aspects that those more embedded within the geographical landscape might overlook. Trained as an art historian, the critical trajectories and knowledges that Klein engages in telling her version of how live art ‘grew up’ in the UK are mostly drawn from that discipline which situates live art’s origins in the artistic avant-garde.

Beth Hoffmann, author of the second chapter, which focuses on ‘Time’, is also a scholar in the US, working at George Mason University; but her



recently completed doctoral thesis from the University of California focused on British contemporary theatre practices from the 1960s onwards. Hoffmann's scholarly practice embodies the internationalization of live art referenced in so many of the contributions. She reads the multiple 'times' of live art (its durational, present and ephemeral times) through theatre and performance studies lenses – interdisciplinary and expansive at the outset, yet focused on the unique pre-occupation with time that characterizes live art in the UK.

Roddy Hunter and Judit Bodor both, in different ways, engage with the practices they map out in 'Art, Meeting and Encounter', a chapter which explores the 'action' of live art. Hunter, formerly a student of Theatre Studies at the University of Glasgow, subsequently a lecturer in Visual Performance and Director of Art at Dartington College of Arts, is now Head of Fine Arts at York St John University. His personal trajectory has seen him travel from the language of theatre to the language of visual art and it is the latter that forms the background for much of this chapter. Hunter is also a performance and installation artist engaged in action-based work and has performed in many countries throughout the world, but perhaps most notably in Eastern Europe. It is surely not coincidental that the discussion of the 'art of action' focuses on the active network of artists connecting East and West in the 1960s and 1970s, underscored by a political imperative arising from the Cold War context.

Hunter and Bodor are also engaged in curatorial activities and curatorship is one theme picked up for discussion. Bodor, an independent curator, has previously taught arts management and curatorship at Dartington. More recently, she has been engaged in documenting the live work of Roddy Hunter, André Stitt and other members of the Trace Collective. This concern with documenting and exhibiting ephemeral moments, and with the role such documents subsequently play in the construction of histories (including this one), becomes central to their argument.

The fourth contribution, exploring 'Site', is also co-authored, and again the authors occupy dual roles as academics and practitioners. Stephen Hodge and Cathy Turner are both graduates of and lecturers in Drama at the University of Exeter. They are also co-founders and members of Wrights & Sites, one of the best known and internationally recognized companies working with ideas of site. Wrights & Sites was founded in 1997 and Hodge's and Turner's nuanced, expansive critical engagement with site's relationship to performance – what a site is, where it is, how performance engages it and how site engages performance – is underpinned by their own long, careful and shifting connection with site. Hodge's more

recent artistic interest in the site of Second Life, and the opportunities afforded by digital arts practice – a newer rendering of ‘live art’ – can also be traced in some of the discussions staged here.

Dominic Johnson, the author of ‘Risk and Intimacy’, is a lecturer in Drama at Queen Mary, University of London, having completed a PhD at the Courtauld Institute of Art. An attention to the visual and visceral language of performance is tangible in Johnson’s writing, though so too is a careful cultural and social contextualization, the act of live art taking place within historical and legislated relations. There is, too, an attuned awareness of the ‘presentness’ of live art and the sometimes tense identifications that circulate between performers and spectators, a recognition of what is asked of and by each. Sensitivity to the complex politics attached to queer bodies is marked in Johnson’s analyses, and indeed his own practice. Johnson has collaborated with Ron Athey (*Incorruptible Flesh (Perpetual Wound)*) and has performed his solo work at festivals throughout the UK as well as in Zagreb, Ljubljana and Los Angeles.

The history and process of collaboration in live art is the appropriate focus of Claire MacDonald’s contribution. MacDonald is a key figure in the UK’s history of collaborative theatre practice, being a founding member of the hugely influential theatre company, Impact Theatre Co-operative. MacDonald, now an independent researcher and writer, has previously worked at Dartington College of Arts, as well as St Martins College of Art and Design. She is also a co-founder of the internationally recognized performance journal, *Performance Research*. Holding a PhD in Critical and Creative Writing, MacDonald’s own critical and creative practice continues to defy categorization, creating connections across genres, forms and people, recognizing in such crossings a sum greater than the individual parts. The importance of the informal as well as the formal connections, the unofficial genealogies of live art histories, are scored deeply into MacDonald’s chapter, rendering them visible and important, rather than coincidental or merely incidental.

The focus of my own PhD was on feminist live art practices of the 1990s in the UK and US. That interest in the political dimension and potentiality of live art has followed – or led – me to discuss, in the concluding chapter of this anthology, the various and diverse attachments of politics and live art. This inevitably demands an encounter with the tricky relationships that persist practically and discursively between art and politics. ‘The Politics of Live Art’ thus explores the range of politics that live art engages and stages, at the same time as asking whether and where limits or challenges to live art’s political claims might lie.

## Shared concerns of these times

In terms of organization, though each chapter in this collection focuses on a theme, the overall trajectory is arbitrary and the chapters can be read in any order. Nevertheless, like the work discussed, the themes are expansive, slippery and tricky to hold in place. In fact, on all occasions, they escape the confines of the text's structure, overlapping, repeating and contradicting. Rather than resist this, we have embraced it as a strategy. Following Cixous, we really want to get mixed up with each other. Rather than a historical trajectory that is linear and finite our genealogy is tangled, non-linear and often goes nowhere. Thus, though each of the chapters here can be read in isolation, reading them together allows the identification of significant – because shared – concerns, though the concerns might not be shared in the same way. The permeability of each of the chapters permits a sort of thickening or coagulation of issues. Returning to the mapping metaphor, these overlaps might be considered akin to the 'Deep Maps' of William Least Heat-Moon, the thickening allowing a digging down in place of a vertical surveying (Pearson and Shanks 2001). For example, whilst one chapter focuses specifically on live art's engagement with political issues, all of the chapters engage the political potentiality of live art, whether the central focus is time, action, site, bodies or processes. Thus, the use of duration is explored as a response to managed, 'productive' time, collaboration as a response to the idea of the genius (male) artist, sited performances as acts of resistance to privatized space, etc. Such multiple perspectives allow a multivalent sense of the manifestation of politics in the practices of live art, of the different ways and places in which politics operate, but also of how the same event can engender different political readings – or indeed be read without any mention of potential political affect (which is to suggest that politics or political effect does not reside *in* any work). Including a chapter with a specific focus on politics allows that term and its significations to be more closely scrutinized.

Another recurring concern is the ways in which live art practices have developed a range of support systems. Whilst the first chapter addresses directly the increasing institutionalization of live art in the UK, other chapters acknowledge, too, support structures such as artist-led collectives, cooperatives, international networks, the place of live art in art schools and other educational establishments, and more broadly the relationship between live art and pedagogy. That all of the contributors are also pedagogues, attached in various ways to various institutions, perhaps explains this recurring thematic.

Finally, the preservation of live art – its documentation and recitation – is an issue commented on repeatedly. This focus reflects the current diversity of creative responses prompted by ongoing debates about the status – the ontology – of live art. These range from Trace Collective's *Post-Historical Cluster-Fuck* (NRLA 2010), which saw them shred and bag hundreds of pages copied from the NRLA's archive, to the work of the Performance Re-enactment Society (PRS), a collective founded by Paul Clarke, Clare Thornton and Tom Marshman which aims to garner and utilize memories and documents as a way to revive past performances. For *The Pigs of Today are the Hams of Tomorrow* (2010), a live art weekend co-curated by Plymouth Arts Centre and Marina Abramović's Institute for the Preservation of Performance Art, the PRS invited people to re-enact, for the camera, an image from a performance that had left a deep impression on them. Such profoundly personal homages do not so much attempt to restage past events (an impossible task) but suggest other ways to gather the history of performance. These new performances function as uncanny doubles, the hosts of ghosts mediating the tangible traces or outlines of the old, at the same time foregrounding the relationship between spectator and performer and the dual task of making the work – a work carried in and through and out of the body (mis)memories of those who see them.

Given that our act of writing about instances of live art, here, is also a process of documenting them, of settling them in a more permanent medium than they first appeared, our repeated references to documentation probably also signals our own anxiety, an anxiety attached to making history, to making some things appear (more) visible (more valuable?) at the cost of others. This is political too, and it is an unavoidable danger attached to words; as they sit on the page in front of you, entirely cold and still, it is easy to forget that they too are merely traces of a moment of liveness – one moment in time and space when this mind and this body inscribed these signs onto this white rectangle. Thus, whilst Joseph Beuys appears as a frequent visitor to our collection, this is arguably as much a signal of his re-emergence in these more ecologically challenged/sensitive times – *the time of our writing* – as it is an indication of his enduring influence. The production of history, taking place in history, is marked by the concerns of its own moment of production. So it is that the names of currently fashionable critics recur throughout these pages too (Claire Bishop, Nicolas Bourriaud and Jacques Rancière amongst them). Next week, next year, next decade we would undoubtedly write a different book. But this fact does not, I hope, make this book any less timely a contribution to the field of live art.

## Notes

- 1 Though the Live Art Development Agency register live art as a proper noun, throughout this anthology we have opted to introduce it as a common noun.
- 2 Live Art UK is a consortium of venues, promoters and facilitators of which the Live Art Development Agency is a member.
- 3 See <http://www.thisisunbound.co.uk/>
- 4 The challenge of 'naming' emerging practice is brought to the fore in these reminiscences. The pieces that were part of Chaimowicz's course were called Events, not performances, whilst the theatre project was called a 'Happening' by his tutors, but a 'Theatrical Event' by Layzell. An innovation of artist Stuart Brisley, who had become the 'staff/student advisor' at the Slade at this time, was the Black Room: 'an empty room that could be booked out' for any purpose. As Layzell notes, this would 'now be called an installation space' (Layzell 1998).

# I      Developing Live Art

Jennie Klein

For much of its short existence, performance/live art has existed purposefully on the margins of most art critical, pedagogical and historical discourses.<sup>1</sup> Due to lack of documentation (at least from the early years of performance art practice in the 1960s and 1970s) as well as its ephemeral, time-based nature, performance/live art has, until recently, been given relatively short shrift in publications devoted to contemporary art. Such publications generally spare only a few pages for live performance rather than treating it as a medium that has informed much of the contemporary art production of the past hundred years.<sup>2</sup> In spite, or perhaps because of its anti-commodity status, live art in the UK has nevertheless enjoyed a level of support that is unimaginable in the US. Over the past ten years, artists in Great Britain have benefited from a choice of university degree programmes, mentoring sessions, conferences, networking opportunities and help with producing and managing their work. Young artists who are just entering the field have a slew of resources to support their development as artists, to present their work, and write applications for funding and residencies. Central to this success has been the ability of British live art practitioners and facilitators to keep the definition of this type of art from being fixed while still attracting support from local, regional, national and international sources. By the end of the 1990s the open-ended, DiY performance art scene in Britain had become an integral part of cultural production, with its own Agency, platforms for emerging artists, festivals for established artists and funding schemes for individuals, collectives, producers and managers. Crucial to this transformation was the insistence on the part of those who supported performance art on maintaining the fiction of continuity between the late 1960s and the present time.

Part of the appeal of performance/live art has much to do with its ability to signify romantic ideas that were first associated with the historical avant-garde in the early twentieth century, such as individual agency, psychic/spiritual transcendence, the (suffering or stoic) body and a revolutionary counteraction against the stultifying culture of the middle class. The 'idea' of performance/live art – whether it is motivated by action or a

desire for a heightened spiritual state – invokes a collective desire/nostalgia for a time when art and politics were inextricably entwined and the act of making art was a radical gesture. The romantic aura associated with the performing body of the artist proffers performance/live art as a site of congregation – conversion – for an imagined community of like-minded people united in their opposition to hegemonic, bourgeois values. What is less clear is how live art, much of which remains inaccessible to mass audiences, has not only maintained but increased its visibility in the UK.<sup>3</sup> Of course, in comparison to most other parts of the world, the geography of the UK, a densely populated island that is separated from the rest of Europe by the English Channel, facilitates the exchange of artistic ideas and artwork, which in this case takes the form of ‘bodies’ that are able to move around the country with relative ease, and makes possible the creation of strong regional areas that are favourable to live art. But geography, even a geography that facilitates networks and DiY projects, does not explain the phenomenon of live art in the UK in the 1990s and 2000s. I argue that the success of live art in Great Britain is due in no small part to what might be considered its increasing institutionalization, figured in the network of organizations, venues, promoters and funding schemes that support, promote and produce performance art, alongside educational initiatives to make more – rather than fewer – artists whose work is performance-based.

This opening chapter thus maps the support systems that have enabled an esoteric and poorly understood DiY art practice to become constituted as an identifiable, professionalized ‘field’ in its own right. My institutional mapping begins in 1966 with *The Destruction in Art Symposium* (DIAS) and the Artist’s Placement Group (APG), continues with the publication of *Performance Magazine* and ends in the present with a plethora of institutions, spaces, festivals, platforms, networks and writing schemes devoted to the promotion and dissemination of live art. This history of institutional emergence is rarely acknowledged; most accounts of performance/live art are concerned with the performer, the placement of the performance vis-à-vis contemporary cultural concerns and the engagement of the audience/community to whom the performance is addressed. And yet, the institutional support of performance/live art is as important to what is made and the meaning/affect of that work. As Jen Harvie reminds us, in relation to theatre practice more broadly:

Creative and artistic practice is never realised in a hypothetical ‘blue-skies thinking’ bubble where anything is possible. Instead, it happens in a real world riddled with both material and ideological constraints: limited time and finance, built theatre spaces that are finite in their

adaptability, and things such as government policies and promoters' categories that may encourage or impose certain practices and inhibit or censor others. (Harvie, 2005: 16)

This chapter demonstrates that the unprecedented shift of the avant-garde's epicentre to the UK was neither a happy accident nor the result of a war and emigration, but rather a home-grown movement made possible by strategic, organizational savvy. Such knowledge is perhaps prompted by a familiarity with particular environmental conditions: bureaucratic systems deeply rooted in a former Empire. Invocations to the generative possibilities of performance aside, these structural models are more or less devoid of the romantic excesses of avant-garde and neo-avant-garde art, providing clear and accessible frameworks for artists to make art.

## **1960s and 1970s: Do it Yourself (DiY)**

Most accounts of performance art in the UK place its genesis in the mid-1960s. As befits an art form that appeared during a time of political and social upheaval, the artists who practised performance sought to distance themselves from more traditional art forms and create institutional support that was anti-institutional in appearance and nature. The genealogy of performance art was located in the practices of the historical avant-garde, rather than theatre or dance, in spite of the commonalities that performance had with those latter art forms. Beth Hoffmann, in an important article on the centrality of radicalism in genealogies of performance art, has demonstrated that the defenders of this art form are always at pains to establish a rupture with more traditional media – whether it be theatre or painting and sculpture. 'Specifically within the British context', Hoffmann writes, 'live art emerges not from a model of positive affinity and formal resemblance among works but from a principle of non-identity, the lack of a definition outside the negation, subversion or transgression of a received practice or set of practices – a transgression that in turn serves as an efficacious "cultural strategy"' (2009: 101–02). Hoffmann, who argues that there is in fact less of a break between performance art and its more traditional counterparts – painting/sculpture, theatre and dance – has suggested that the proximity of the art forms has exacerbated the need to re-perform the break between tradition and experiment (97).

This need to establish a break or rupture between traditional and experimental forms can also be seen in the institutions of support for perform-



ance art, which were established outside the university and museum/gallery system. Most of the important early practitioners of performance art were affiliated with universities and art schools, had degrees from those same schools and supported themselves by teaching.<sup>4</sup> Hunter and Bodor make a convincing case (Chapter 3 in this anthology) for the centrality of the artist-as-pedagogue; however, pedagogical activities were not directly connected to the universities and art schools. Just as the artists working in the 1960s and 1970s came up with new terminology such as 'happenings', 'actions', 'auto-destruction', 'Flux' and 'dysfunction' that established a semantic break with terms from the past such as painting and sculpture, so too did artists establish DiY institutions to support and foster this new art form. In order to maintain its efficacy in the face of a radically changing society, performance art by necessity had to appear risky and controversial.

Though Lois Keidan and Daniel Brine would proclaim, in 2005, that the UK was the epicentre of the most radical and experimental live art in the world (Keidan and Brine, 2005), in the early 1960s the most exciting experiments were happening elsewhere: Allan Kaprow, Jim Dine, Carolee Schneemann, Robert Morris and Claus Oldenberg were making happenings in New York; Joseph Beuys had become a teacher/shaman/politician in West Germany; Yves Klein was making art about the void in Paris; and Piero Manzoni was putting his signature on naked women and canning his 'merde' in Milan. As Hunter and Bodor argue, *The Destruction in Art Symposium* (DIAS), organized by Gustav Metzger in 1966, was thus a means of bringing the rest of the conceptual/performance art world to London. Before turning to that landmark event, it is worth noting that the performance art scene in the UK at this time was, in fact, more closely associated with a thriving experimental poetry. DIAS was preceded and informed by the *International Poetry Incarnation* at the Royal Albert Hall on 11 June 1965 (Wilson 2004: 93). The *International Poetry Incarnation* was significant for two reasons. First, it was an international meeting of poets, writers, artists and intellectuals that sought to overturn the oppression of the external world by embracing a politics of internal liberation. As Andrew Wilson has written, 'the International Poetry Incarnation dismissed poetry that had become locked into the printed page in favour of a poetry of event, a carnivalesque poetry, which could embrace psychedelic drugs or an examination of definitions of madness, in its assault on dominant culture' (92). Second, although based in London, it established an important precedent for an experimental poetry that was regional in origin and drew on a number of disciplines, including theatre, art, psychiatric theory and literature.