

This is a report of the mass zoom call organised by The World Transformed and Momentum on Tuesday 5th March entitled '**Kick up the Arts: Arts and Culture during and after Coronavirus**'. Over 200 people attended the call and the speakers were: Stephen Pritchard, Clara Paillard, Hansika Jethnani, Paul Fleming, Chris, Anna & Anahi (UVW) & Dana Ruh.

Over the coming weeks we will be hosting weekly Zoom calls on Tuesday evenings which will facilitate input from all parts of the movement, so we can work together to put pressure not just on the Government and employers, but on left wing political leaders, the Labour Party and trade unions to shape their response to the Covid-19 crisis.

To be kept informed about future zoom calls and all other TWT activities please join our mailing list: bit.ly/TWTjoin

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Introduction

Coronavirus has exposed the deep inequalities of wealth and power in our society, and the art sector is no exception.

Since the lockdown, the arts sector has suffered from an immediate shut down. Theatres, art galleries, music venues have closed and the cancellation of festivals, concerts, community art projects leave the sector in an indeterminate limbo fighting against long term closure. Many crowdfunders and campaigns have been set up in order to protect cultural sites, which may never reopen after lockdown.

Rife with inequalities, through mass privatization, an increased reliance on corporate funding and a diminishing welfare state has meant access to the arts as both a participant and as a maker, has been increasingly difficult, particularly for working class, disabled and artists of colour. It is this specific economy of unequal distribution in the arts that makes the effects of coronavirus so severe.

The current crisis reveals the inherent precariousness that the arts sector is built upon and the limitations in access to funding and representation that public institutions have been unable to challenge and overcome. Even with an £160m injection of funds into Arts Council England,



access is still unbalanced and will not absorb catastrophic effects of live event cancellations and insufficient state financial support for freelance workers.

So we need to develop strategies of solidarity across the sector to recognise the social value of the creative industries and allow culture to flourish in our local communities, not just in metropolitan areas. We believe that within socialist responses to COVID-19 that arts should be integrated into our fights and bring creative forms of protest and analysis to how the crisis deepens economic and social inequalities.

The arts rely on the gathering of people to come together and share or consume artistic content and is often a much needed source of collective joy, something that we are all craving during lockdown. So much more content is being transferred to digital platforms, on one hand creating more egalitarian access to arts and culture, but on the other hand creates even greater barriers to paying artists as we consume more culture for free, often relying on the larger conglomerates of cultural production such as Netflix, provoking the question of how access to arts is skewed by profit, rather than its ability to educate, agitate, comfort and inspire.

In this time of lockdown, we are all turning to art more than ever before as an antidote to social isolation, and hence why we believe it is an important area to frame our socialist response and analysis to Coronavirus.

As it was Mayday last week, we are really excited to be emphasising the importance of sector-wide trade union support. Different fields of the arts sector are often isolated from each other and it's vital that these workplaces enact solidarity not just between artists but all cultural workers, as well as find creative forms of resistance and integrate actions into wider struggles. We have seen this in the countless examples of designers repurposing their sewing machines to make PPE for frontline staff, resistance banners appearing outside homes all across the world and collective singing from balconies to ease the effects of isolation.

We recognise that there are so many different approaches and perspectives on this issue and are really happy to have such an amazing range of speakers providing insight from specific labour struggles in the sector, international perspectives on protecting art scenes and how we can broaden these acts of solidarity to wider struggles during and post covid-19.

Resources

- Save our Scene, Manchester:

<https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/save-our-scene-manchester-salford>

- Venue Music Trust Fund:

<https://saveourvenues.co.uk/#/>

<http://musicvenuefund.com>



- Plus the National Theatre is streaming plays for free:
<https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/>
- The Rainbow Collective Documentary Production Company hosting zoom call lessons in animation <https://twitter.com/TRCdocumentary>
- Virtual Museum Tours -
<https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/travel/a31784720/best-virtual-tours/>
- Daily Reading and Listening lists, sign up at ICA Daily <https://www.ica.art/ica-daily>
- Fantastic analysis of the arts and working class struggle during coronavirus crisis by Harry Josephine
<https://harryjosephine.com/2020/03/20/i-woke-up-and-the-arts-was-gone/>
- Sheffield Transformed Quarentine Film Club
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1IPsmseCoLdW5V1VSe9pq9DDuBhVQ10L0bOb3I_zUUYU/edit#gid=621288684
- Virtual Cinema Club <https://www.facebook.com/groups/622014765033176>
- Free archive Films from BFI
<https://player.bfi.org.uk>
- <http://www.openculture.com/2020/01/14-paris-museums-put-300000-works-of-art-online.html>

Speakers

Stephen Pritchard (Movement for Cultural Democracy)

- During Lockdown, the arts has stopped in what is deemed as accepted forms of arts and culture by the state
- However, it is interesting how much people have come to rely on community and the home and creating art in these spaces
- As community artists, home is where we start from, not galleries or music venues but chalking on the paths, art in windows etc.
- The function of art has changed quite interestingly by Arts Council England directly
- Arts Council England (ACE) recognise there is no going back to its old system
- ACE has done some good work in the coronavirus crisis with new grants however these have created greater competition - not enough money to meet all artists needs
- This will be catastrophic for community art
- Larger arts institutions rely on shops, cafes and merchandise



- £90m injection is not enough to deal with the financial challenges arts institutions are facing
- 10 year arts strategy from ACE - radical shift in direction as it refocuses on communities however they were worried about the reaction of larger institutions
- We need to push to help struggling artists, investing into communities
- People are self-organising on whatsapps, community groups, community art and gardening, as act of performance and collectivity
- Opportunity on a policy level - encourage cultural democracy and the importance of it
- 90% of people don't go to arts and cultural
- A few art spectacles for the masses is not good enough
- What have we lost so much of arts and culture through austerity / Tony Blaire - bands, community choirs, youth clubs...
- Tracy Braven wrote interesting about cultural policy document
- Labour do not have a good record with community art investment/ordinary culture - new labour is responsible for these massive glass citadels for art and we need to reorganise to fight for more embedded cultural policy locally
- "Arts that people create is far better than any opera I've ever seen"
- Call for maintaining pressure onto arts council
- "Let's create" which is the new 10 strategy for Arts Council delivery stage was about shift towards community / everyday culture
- Need to put pressure on ACE to Fulfil radical potential to the "Let's Create" programme
- Many people that need support / working class culture / rather than this narrow definition
- Arts / culture is too narrowly defined and elitist and we (Movement for Cultural Democracy) want to break this.

Resources

- Movement for cultural democracy: <http://culturaldemocracy.uk/>

1. Clara Paillard (President of PCS' Culture group branch)

- PCS is a Contract union, many battles are fought to do with privatisation, 11 museums in wales and scotland, zero hours at Tate, numerous battles for living wage
 - Museums were first to close on 17th March
 - Liverpool museum branch of PCS Spoke at AGM in february putting demands on employers
 - Example of campaign is National gallery and its privatised use of company Securitas and how they were not providing any pay for those who had to self-isolate earlier due to underlying health issue
 - PCS not just those who are part of the union at museums but also orientated around non-unionised workplaces / self-employed people / zero hour contracts / disproportionate effects of BAME, female, working class artists



- Solidarity is key - working with other unions / grassroots organisation that we are linking with including Art workers forum putting pressure on employers
- Impact of 10 years of austerity - sector with precarious workers, don't have a system to support artist production
- Big challenges the sector is facing at the moment is dealing with the furlough system
- Museums will start talking about reopening again soon. How will they ensure the safety of all their staff members?
- Need to talk about a rescue package for the whole sector
- On the bright side - lots of creative activity / solidarity / organising online is happening
- "Don't go breaking our arts"

How to best show solidarity in the cultural sector?

- Join a union and organise collectivity
- Positive outcome - link up solidarity and we can find collective solutions

Hansika Jethnani (Poet and visual artist, Mumbai)

In India, Art as a concept is only taken seriously by a few sections of society

- The street artists have no where to sell their work
- The large institutions have access to rich sponsors and high end arts economy
- Many crafts people - working in textile industry, artisans of their own kind which are the backbone of big institutions
- Ministry of culture in India amplifies arts and culture - long term monuments
- There is no arts council or similar here in India
- Only a few smaller organisations to help and fund artists, however they can become elitist
- The arts and cultural sector is facing unprecedented challenge in India
- Struggling to make ends meet
- Examples of solidarity is The great Bombay Circus - crowdfunding for the lack of shows to put food on the table for its staff
- Seen the closure of arts institution pre-corona and this is enhanced post-corona
- So whilst there is a few community solutions, there isn't a long term solution
- Arts and culture sector in india - need to be made into mainstream practices rather than on the periphery of society
- Seeing the value of art in society - seeing it as a tool of art as social good, positive impact on one's well being
- Whilst covid-19 has deeply affected the sector, these structures are underlying issues



(Hansika also plays her own video piece with footage from Mumbai and a narrative around colonial structures and divisions in India - see [Youtube video](#) for this)

- Arts also needs to be taken more seriously at a state level - there is currently no data on how much the arts sector contributes to GDP in India
- Smaller scale arts workers are becoming more precarious in a similar way to freelancers in the UK
- Even the concept of being a freelancer in uk and even more so in India
There is no institution they can go to for help
- Community pages have started to help artist to get their work out on instagram
- Other than that - haven't seen much from the arts sector in terms of community and collaborative responses
- The arts don't allow you to sustain yourself and hence money is a huge concern for artists in India.

Paul Fleming (Labour councillor for Faraday ward in Southwark, Equity's Central London Theatres Organiser)

3 big challengers of Coronavirus to arts sector / theatre more specifically

- 1) Closure and panic
 - 2) Period of activity
 - 3) Most frightening / hopeful challenges is reopening for theatre industry
- As a union been a remarkable of how the industry is protecting members and respects interest of our members
 - In theatre we have clauses to our collective agreements an also represent independent artists, and set as a sector standard
 - Subsidised causes - able to respond to this crisis in a reasonable way, supporting people, giving notice payments and allowing the industry to slow to a halt
 - Look out to The West End of london - we were faced to this crisis on 16th March with closure
 - How to best protect all of our members which includes independent artists, childrens entertainers, burlesque dancers etc..
 - Government self-employed scheme - doesn't cover enough people e.g. disadvantages of you don't have certain tax credits - takes net profits, new graduates excluded
 - Some artists may have a good year e.g. with royalties and appear much wealthier than they actually are
 - works for a reasonable set of people but not all and there has not been enough media attention on this
 - Worried were going to see most shows close - saved 40 out of 53 shows over a 6 month period
 - This crisis has put the whole industry and the union itself under threat
 - As we turn to inadequate response to the arts sector



- Anxiety growing about reopening and what social distancing guidelines can be put in place e.g. how to rehearse safely, how can you perform without an audience?
- Can't mothball a workforce both active / inactive
- large concern across the industry of the shallowness of govt subsidies
- British theatre industry pushed into commercial model
- Told to Sell more tickets, have commercial tour, have a bar, have a shop, but not all spaces can allow this - how do you survive in the sector without these commercial forms of income?
- Shallowness of government model has been revealed for artists
- One of the biggest theatres in UK only have enough money to survive for 10 weeks
- Subsidised sector will not survive as it will need full restaurants, bars to subsume losses.
- Union membership has increased on West End to over 80% -can made demands of how we reopen
- Should only reopen if its safe for the most vulnerable members e.g. those who are carers, older members
- Will be a period of serious economic downfall for the industry - reveals the vulnerability of the quasi-commercial model
- Union was about to go into negotiations of a 5 day working rehearsal week - an excellent time to fight for this and start these negotiations
- Talk about work/life balance, dignity at work, code of conduct
- Most trade unions got a 5 day working week in 1911
- Chance to produce a bolder vision for the industry
- Need government to protect people in the industry, otherwise there won't an arts sector to reopen

What about participants and free screenings of theatre, how do we make sure the workers get a fair slice?

- Balance for propaganda for the sector - arts are vital for the economy and society
- Case of National Theatre - Equity have negotiated this
- Equity have negotiated with netflix got a collective agreement with Netflix to achieve industry standard rates
- How to show social solidarity to people - as time pushes by, we are clear that what is the point keeping institutions open that is not giving contribution to equity members
- How to keep these institutions open, what is the new model - what is good collectively bargained solutions for broadcast theatre
- Shift the union into grassroots activism
- Responsive to lived experience
- Equalities agenda
- Lead the industry as to what the response is, including 5 day weeks, pension, minimum pay, terms of conditions, visions for carers, core purpose for union etc



- Refreshing variety structure with independent artists, focusing on needs of those who are freelance
- Reorienting equity to the most precarious.

Chris (UVW Design and Cultural workers branch)

- Graphic designer / lecturer
- industry is young - constant rhetoric of youth to frame and small time scales
- Still emerging industry which makes change possible
- Atomised - hard to do workplace organising
- Rampant individualisation culture
- High income inequality e.g. MOMA
- Undervalued 90% of internships are unpaid
- Sector held together by opportunities and favours
- On zero hour contracts, outsourced
- Saw more overlap with gig economy workers - cleaners at the Barbican
- We recognise people have multiple jobs in different sectors
- UVW is a non-sector specific union - networks of solidarity form and lead autonomously through branches
- One of the first UVW campaigns was cleaners at the Barbican - all forms of cultural production - porters, cleaners, - these are cultural workers!
- They are often not afforded basic rights
- Members led, predominantly migrant workers - unionising sectors historically underrepresented e.g. sex workers, legal sector, architects
- Boundary between organising and membership - roles can be shared and are rotational
- Aiming for consent rather than consensus - we have as many voices and faces as possible to represent our group
- Use discord to organise branch - different
- Transparent organising - avoid whatsapp for organisers mental health
- supported by legal sector who helped organise member support in terms of furlough
- Many people fall through cracks of self-employment scheme -
- Scheme takes gross profit - so will see very little financial support
- Only 50% of income as freelance
- Universal credit and 5 week waits - often only option for art workers
- Architectural branch is currently being formed in Manchester
- Arts council income support scheme for coronavirus - inaccessible for many e.g. website went down early on
- Restricting applications to 50% of total earnings
- damagingly reidentifies workers who do not meet this criteria as non-artists

Anna (UVW, fashion sector and front of house independent cinema)



- Studio / rent freeze campaign
- We focus early on - focus when income banished and rent was due
- First package of government subsidies - no alternative means of support scheme, many people fall between the cracks
- Grant Does not cover all expenses e.g. rent for studios - anticipating the loss of income will last therefore believe studio rent freeze is necessary
- work wont pick up overnight
- government guidelines too vague - keep economy going / save lives / work from home ambiguous for those with studios
- Created survey to members, vague to government guidelines
- Some providers of studios are implement late payment fees / increased fees
- Created database to publicly list practices - key demands, all studio spaces to all essential work
- We demand more transparency, rent freeze, no increase in fees

Anahi (UVW Design and Cultural workers branch)

- After survey / letter to members there is a wide diversity of studios, larger with 100s of tenants or smaller
- Not a one size fits all solution - overview of landscape of studios for legal action of tenancy and what action the union can take
- UVW branch - hosting q and a's with legal branch
- Difficult to pin down providers - getting new information everyday
- Regional differences - regional providers in London more extreme in response
- Led us to collaborate with other rent strike including LRU - reflects the wider tenants ecology in london where many tenants are working paycheck to paycheck
- At a months notice - shops and smaller business
- Agility - shorter term solutions - will lead us down to longer road
- UVW is a member led-organisation and as artists come to uvw important to get them part of the campaign
- already a key part to invite them in the solution
- Incredible opportunity to reframe how our industry is shaped and restructured

Dana Ruh (DJ, producer and owner of KMA60 record shop in Berlin)

We are all in the same boat - all gigs cancelled to September

- As a record store owner, we are affected by all changes - economic cycle - certain artists have records in the pipeline, and people are unsure of how to behave, when do we start again
- Releasing some records, but cant have the experience with the clubs
- Flow of records that come out but we cant play it
- I have no income, and I am responsible for staff



- In Germany, the state has taken responsibility by giving support
- This is not helping the creativity of artists in Berlin
- The state has promised financial help for clubs - however when you do the calculations, this will not help all staff
- A lot of quality of artists in Berlin that aren't as skilled at social media and thus this is a chance to let them shine - remember the roots / start to shine
- Being able to come back together as a community and come back to produce work of an even higher standard
- Quality of music has been lacking in Dana's opinion

Is government funding in Germany enough?

- The money is a positive help however depends on how long the crisis lasts for
- Takes time to get back in the business - it is not from 0 to 100%
- E.g. Promoters - can they survive, what is their financial support - build up together, reduce larger fees.

Resources

- Listen to one of Dana's sets:
<https://soundcloud.com/danaruh/sets/cr004-dana-ruh-time-out-of-mind/s-lh5GX>

Resources

- Support TWT: <https://theworldtransformed.org/support/>
- Join TWT's mailing list: bit.ly/TWTjoin
- TWT's guide to running political education online:
https://cloud-cube-eu.s3.amazonaws.com/pupuh35gi0f8/public/documents/How_to_run_your_meetings_online_1.pdf
- Momentum's mutual aid map: <https://volunteercoronavirus.com/>

