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**Instituting the Radical and Radicalising the Institution:
Collective Working Practices and their Potential for more Egalitarian
Theatre and Performance Institutions**

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Abstract

Following Chantal Mouffe's call to engage with and radicalise liberal democratic institutions, this paper considers artist-led theatre and performance collectives which go beyond the utopian performative desire to build consensus and avoid conflict. Instead, I consider collectives that acknowledge the ineradicable dimension of radical negativity and engage with the reality of the social, political and economic moment in which we live; where the austerity politics of the previous two UK governments have left funding and curating institutions more risk averse than they have been for decades, making radical practices and organisations even more precarious. Spaces and organisations that embrace radical negativity are an essential component of what Mouffe calls agonistic pluralism and 'the 'agonistic struggle' that is the very condition of a vibrant democracy.'¹ Despite their precarity, I believe artist-led collective organisations also have the potential to spread risk, share opportunity, and increase resilience in a performance sector increasingly beset by isolated entrepreneurial workers competing for scant resources.

At the same time, art and performance institutions are continually called upon by funding bodies, artists and audiences, to implement more ethical practices, more diverse programmes and leadership. Avoiding superficial horizontalism, I consider how the structures and practices of collectives might influence those of institutions, to disarticulate and rearticulate their hegemonic 'common sense' along more egalitarian lines. Equally, I consider how transient collectives that desire it might be supported through a process of partial institutionalisation; building infrastructure more conducive to long-term, sustainable spaces of productively agonistic political discourse, so that their practices can propagate and influence the field at large.

¹ Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*, (Verso: London, 2013) p. 7

Introduction

This paper consists of an attempt to approach a particular type of collective; informed by both the failures of the past and the realities of the present, by an understanding of the inevitability of conflict and power structures within any collective. To do this I begin by outlining Chantal Mouffe's model of agonistic pluralism, one of many theories that attempt to provide a political structure incorporating multiple perspectives and difference in a liberal democratic tradition. I then go on to explore the often overlooked collective origins of live art and performance, with some brief examples of how agonistic pluralism, socialism and anarchism manifest in examples of collective practice. I end with a more in-depth case study of Glasgow collective and live art festival Buzzcut, which will form a part of my future research. My concern here is to see how collective practices and political theories may equally provide strategies for navigating difference and conflict in the modern world. I want to explore how this political moment, its related social, economic and infrastructural conditions, along with more intangible political rhetoric and affect, influence specific forms of collective working practice in performance. In turn, I wish to see how collectives resist and rework these political influences and practices. People form collectives because they want to institute and inspire change. The radical practices of collectives can influence other artists and groups in the field, and put pressure on institutions to become more radical, egalitarian and caring, in line with Chantal Mouffe's call to engage with, rather than withdraw from, liberal democratic institutions. Collectives, however, can often be short lived, any changes they institute transient. I suggest how the influence of collectives might be strengthened by borrowing institutional forms and going through a process of partial, self-reflexive institutionalisation, becoming more sustainable and allowing radical practices to propagate further, and for longer, in the field of theatre and performance.

Agonistic Pluralism

In an increasingly complex, globalised world, many call for a unifying leftist project, but the mistakes of the socialist past mean it must be a qualified one. Recently Judith Butler called for 'thinking in alliance', as opposed to a 'single or synthetic framework'.² Mouffe and Laclau write that the crisis in socialism is based on 'the illusory prospect of a perfectly unitary and

² Judith Butler, interview with Pierre Chaillan, translated by David Broder, on [<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3718-thinking-in-alliance-an-interview-with-judith-butler/>], [accessed 11/04/2018], originally published by *l'Humanité*

homogenous collective that will render pointless the moment of politics.’³ Mouffe defines ‘the political’ as the ‘dimension of antagonism which can take many forms and can emerge in diverse social relations’.⁴ This establishes what anyone who has had to work with others already knows, whether in an artist collective or an office with its ‘office politics’: political conflict and antagonism does not just take place in government chambers, but in every sphere of human interaction, including artistic creation and collaboration. Therefore, if we want to encounter radical forms of the collective in art and performance, we must begin, like Laclau and Mouffe, with a suspicion of any collective, whether it is an arts institution, an artist-run performance space, or an interdisciplinary performance collective, that presents an image of a perfectly unitary and homogenous collective. Such collective unity and homogeneity may be achieved through obscured authoritarianism, sublimation of the autonomy of group members, and coercion.

Mouffe’s notion of agonistic pluralism is based on the ever-present possibility of antagonism within diverse social relations. The elimination of conflict is neither possible nor desirable, as conflict is constitutive of liberal democracy. Mouffe advocates for agonistic conflict and struggle, which takes the form of a struggle between adversaries, where an adversary is an ‘opponent with whom one shares a common allegiance to the democratic principles of ‘liberty and equality for all’’.⁵ In Mouffe’s theory, a common understanding of the terms on which agonistic debate is conducted must be reached. Conflict is unavoidable because of the second term in her theory - pluralism. She calls for liberal democratic societies and a wider world that is multipolar and plural, in which multiple perspectives and levels of difference must be allowed to coexist and engage in agonistic political debate and struggle. As a whole then, we might think of collectives that adhere to agonistic pluralism as ones which incorporate multiple elements of difference and conflict whilst sharing an allegiance to common values of freedom and equality.

Mouffe has already written about what role art might have to play in agonistic pluralism, in offering ‘spaces for resistance that undermine the social imaginary necessary for capitalist reproduction.’⁶ Disavowing, as many do, the distinction between political and non-political art, she searches instead for ‘the possible forms of *critical art*’, and how they might intervene in the

³ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, (Verso: London, 1985) p. 2

⁴ Mouffe, *Agonistics*, p. 2

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 7

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 88

hegemonic consensus building within public space or the public sphere.⁷ In doing so she considers a number of examples, individual and collective. I believe it is difficult for individual artist practitioners to contribute fully to a neoliberal counter-hegemony, for though their artist outputs may do so, their practices will be imbricated in, and involve tacit support of, the exploitation of the labour and ideas of others for one's own financial and cultural capital. This is the case in the vast majority of even the most critical individual artists, as the creation and presentation of art and performance is always already a collective effort. Multiple forms of labour contribute to any artistic object or event, whether maintenance of the space, administration, or curation. For this reason, I explore instead the notion of the *critical collective*. I suggest that different forms of political and aesthetic collaboration are continually being experimented with in the field of experimental performance, live art and performance art, whether through the collective creation of performance, collective curation and organisation of events, or collective creation of meaning through criticism and spectatorship. Through considering Mouffe's writings in line with examples of such collectives in performance, I hope to begin to show her theories at work.

Instituting the Radical: On the Collective Origins of Live Art and Performance Art

Solo performance is the dominant modality in live art and performance art. This was not always the case, as art and theatre historians frequently cite collective origins for these disciplines. Roselee Goldberg, in her influential monograph *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, characterises artistic movements preceding performance art in the twentieth century, such as Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism, as inherently collective, with collective performance evenings and performances, collective spaces and publications, and shared political and aesthetic ideals. The period directly preceding the advent of performance art proper, which she denotes 'Living Art c. 1933 to the 1970s', is one rooted in the collectivism of alternative and autonomous pedagogy such as in Black Mountain College in North Carolina, where the collaborative proto-happening of Cunningham and Cage, the Untitled Event of 1952, took place. Further, it is a period marked by the often collective performance of happenings and environments, and by collective efforts crossing national, disciplinary and social boundaries, and the cross-influences between visual art, conceptual art, theatre, dance and performance. UK scholars tell a similar story, frequently citing spaces of meeting and collaboration such as the Edinburgh and Cardiff happenings of 1963 and 1965 respectively, or the 1966 Destruction in

⁷ Ibid. p. 91

Art Symposium in London, as origins of performance art and live art in the UK. For these periods and later decades, performance groups like The People Show, Pip Simmons Theatre Group, Welfare State International, Impact Theatre Cooperative and Forced Entertainment were central to advancements in the form and structure of performance art and live art. It is then surprising that from these collective origins it is individual artists who come to prominence, both in histories and contemporary performance. We see a gradual dropping off of group activity and solo performance comes to be the dominant mode within live and performance art. A number of factors could have influenced collective practices in the UK.

The first, and perhaps most obvious is the arts budget cuts, initially brought in by Margaret Thatcher's break with the post-war consensus politics under which industries were nationalised and publically owned. Cultural historian Robert Hewison wrote, on Thatcher's agenda, that 'the British soul was to be remade by creating a new myth of economic individualism to replace the old ideas of community and collectivism'.⁸ Thatcher's legacy of neoliberal policies extend far beyond the conservative party rule and into the following New Labour government, who continued her emphasis on entrepreneurialism (or 'artpreneurialism' in the arts) and art began to be seen as an instrument of functional public service in multi-cultural Britain, rather than a public good. In addition to the economic and cultural individualism brought about by these two governments, a further scarcity of resources was brought about by the austerity politics of the conservative-liberal democrat coalition of 2010. Scarcity of resources encourages individual practice because it is, at least ostensibly, cheaper to fund an individual artist than a group.

Other, subtler factors may have played a part too. Art history demarcates and valorises the art object as the result of that labour which is designated as artistic labour, by that person designated to be the artist. As Howard S. Becker has shown, this operation involves the exclusion and disavowal of numerous other forms of labour necessarily to the creation of the art work and the designation of the art work as art work, from those designated as 'support personnel'.⁹ The art world and dominant gaze of the art world works with capitalism to imbue art objects and individual artists with value and prestige, in order to maximise transferrals of various forms of capital. When performance artists began to name themselves and their bodies as artistic materials and art works, for many an attempt to undermine the economization and

⁸ Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics Since 1940*, (Methuen: London, 1995) p. 212

⁹ Howard S. Becker, 'Art As Collective Action', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 39, No. 6 (Dec. 1974), pp. 767-776

commodification of the art world, they underestimated the recuperative power of capital. Performance artists and live artists have become doubly commodified and doubly individualised by art critics and art history, as both artist and art object. Recent developments of the politics of identity have proved a vital tool in resisting oppression, in allowing marginalised groups to name and resist their oppression, and find solidarity with others oppressed in a similar way. It is also a blunt tool, one that indicates the operation of Mouffe's we/they relation of collective identity formation *par excellence*. Identity politics must be combined with an intersectional politics of solidarity with those differently oppressed, or it leads to splintered factionalism. Numerous calls for unity and solidarity come, necessarily, from a position of privilege, and must come with an awareness of on whose terms that unity is invoked, and of who is excluded. Dominic Johnson links identity politics with his interest in 'identity based Live Art and performance'.¹⁰ Where in 1980s experimental theatre and performance, identity politics and identity based performance frequently manifested in the work of ensembles and groups such as Gay Sweatshop, Women's Theatre Group and Talawa, it is now more frequently explored through solo performance. This is, as ever, a valid and fertile modality of performance, yet it runs the risk of exoticizing and fetishizing marginalised, individual identities, commodifying and selling them back to the mainstream, within a neoliberal cult of the self.

There is, however, a tradition of collective work in live art, dance, and multi-disciplinary practice where we might see Mouffe's theories at work. The Untitled Event of 1952 at Black Mountain College in North Carolina provided a blueprint for egalitarian, avant-garde collaboration. The event was initiated by the collaboration and ideas of composer and musician John Cage and choreographer and dancer Merce Cunningham. Influenced by their ideas in their respective disciplines of including improvisation and indeterminacy, non-musical sounds and non-dancerly movements in their work, and by principles of zen Buddhism they created an event with multiple elements and contributors. Roselee Goldberg writes that '[p]reparation for the performance was minimal: performers were given a "score" which indicated "time brackets" only and each was expected to fill out privately moments of action, inaction and silence as indicated on the score, none of which was to be revealed until the performance itself. In this way there would be no "causal relationship" between one incident and the next, and, according

¹⁰ Dominic Johnson, 'Towards a Historiography of Live Art', in Johnson ed., *Critical Live Art: Contemporary Histories of Performance in the UK*, (Routledge: London, 2013) pp. 13-30, p. 25

to Cage, “anything that happened after that happened in the observer himself [sic]”.¹¹ Though following a predetermined score may not seem radical or anarchist, it is a minimal structure that allows performers the freedom to improvise. The event had audience seated in four banks forming a square with aisles through it, and action happening all around. This included paintings and records played by visiting student Robert Rauschenberg, Cage reading a text on ‘the relation of music to Zen Buddhism, David Tudor playing the piano and pouring water from one bucket to another, plants in the audience Charles Olsen and Mary Caroline Richards reading poetry and Cunningham and others dancing through the aisles chased by an excited dog. These diverse elements were not arranged in a causal or hierarchical relationship, but as equal elements within a non-harmonious, plural and heterogeneous whole. Just as in agonistic pluralism the aim is not a unitary or homogenous whole, but a structure which includes multiple elements of difference. Such is also evidenced in the historicization of such events: as no complete, ‘true’ account of the actions can exist, multiple, differing accounts combine to build up a composite picture.

It is easy to overstate the significance of such an event as a mythical origin story propagated by art historians like Goldberg, though even a mythical origin has its power in shaping practices in the here and now. The event provides, at the very least, a symbol and frame of reference for collective multi-disciplinary performance. A line of influence can and has been drawn from this event and others like it through the environments and happenings of the 60s and 70s, the dance and performance crossovers and collaborations such as those typified by the Judson Dance Group or New Dance in the UK, to contemporary practices in movement research, dance, installation art and immersive theatre. Such practices do not always preserve the freedom and autonomy of performers to improvise, but the spectator’s experience remains, surrounded by disparate elements that must be formed into a coherent narrative in their own minds. The performance *Culture, Administration and Trembling*, a collaboration between Antonija Livingstone, Jennifer Lacey, Stephen Thompson, and visual artist Dominique Pétrin, performed at Fierce Festival in Birmingham in October 2015, combines multiple performers and multiple artistic practices, including contemporary dance to an improvised score, visual art, and bell ringing. Livingstone’s work often combines contemporary dance with folk practices like bell ringing or basket weaving, positing the existence of a world in which such practices would be part of the same cultural reality. Similar to the Untitled Event, this piece also included non-human elements: a Chihuahua belonging to a collaborator and two large corn snakes. As well

¹¹ Goldberg, Op. Cit., p. 126-127

as bringing in other qualities of movement to the already heterogeneous mix, such an addition also questions how we relate to non-human creatures.

Two years later, a performance of *Everything Fits in the Room* at Fierce Festival in 2017, a collaboration between Simone Augtherlony and Jen Rosenblit, similarly disperses the attention of the audience, refusing to resolve into a single narrative or expressible meaning, instead presenting diverse abstract movement sequences and action with objects and set in a warehouse space. The sound, run live by performers Miguel Gutierrez and Colin Self, becomes another performative element, run from a moveable sound-desk-cum-kitchen-worktop, from which Gutierrez prepares a coffee for other performers. This, combined with the performers handing out small cakes, creates a sense of hospitality, and a clash between heightened surreality and the quotidian. Practices such as these, rather than imparting narrative or meaning, rather constitute a pre-linguistic, affective transmission of an imagined reality, somewhere between a mythical collective past and a utopian future, with a heightened sense of conviviality and radically different social relations.

Northern Irish collective Bbeyond and related international collective Black Market International also explore collective performance that might be called agonistic and pluralistic. Karine Talec writes, of Bbeyond, that this Belfast organisation was initiated in 1998 and set up in 2001, to ‘develop and promote performance art in Northern Ireland and create links with performance artists in other countries through exchange projects.’ With modest resources this ‘handful of individuals curated over 155 local events and international exchange projects, with 1,654 performances by 341 artists from 32 countries.’ Aims stated in their manifesto are multiple, along artistic, advocacy, pedagogical and political lines. They include raising consciousness of live art being integral to the world around us, encouraging an interchange of actions and ideas through various networks, and, contributing ‘towards the exploration of the diverse and polyphonic modes of this [live] art practice.’ To do so, they explore simultaneous rather than individual performance (a concept emerging from a weeklong workshop with German artist Boris Nieslony), in their Bbeyond Monthly Meetings. These take the form of a group of artists performing together in a nominated public space, and are ‘self-led, unrehearsed, and improvised, with an emphasis on creative play and freedom’, enabling ‘individual artists to experiment with creative ways of coming together and exploring diverse collaborative and

live/performance art possibilities in response to context and place.’¹² In doing so they create an open space of free, non-hierarchical improvisation which allows for but does not force collaboration, with the added exposure of being seen, critiquing and exploring different uses of public space.

In searching for critical collectivity, US based collective Critical Art Ensemble (or CAE) is an extremely promising example. They define themselves and their aims as follows:

Critical art Ensemble is a collective of five new-genre artists formed in 1987. Since that time, the group has produced artworks, events, and theory that explore and critique models of representation used in the capitalist political economy to sustain and promote authoritarian policies. CAE has also had a sustained interest in the variety of organizational possibilities from which artistic practice can emerge. Of particular interest have been the types of collectives that intersect artistic and activist practices.¹³

They critique ‘the totalizing belief that social and aesthetic values are encoded in the being of gifted individuals (rather than emerging from a process of becoming shared by group members)’. They describe themselves as tactical media practitioners, and use a variety of techniques, and their own mix of disciplines, in a small cellular structure, to create their events and artworks. They advocate for coalitions of diverse interests rather than communities, and praise the Nettime coalition for being anarchistic, rather than democratic. Hierarchy is not naturalised, but rather emerges flexibly in accordance with who is willing to do the work. Unlike other collectives, CAE follows Foucault’s principle that power is productive, and use a floating hierarchy to produce their projects, in which the member with the most expertise on any particular project has the authority. They write that ‘[r]igid equality in this case can be a perverse and destructive type of Fordism that should be avoided.’ This only works because of their restricted size that allows for communication, social intimacy and a diverse range of projects, but their example provides much needed nuance to the discussion around collective practice. Rather than adhering to a particular structure or image of equality, they understand that power, conflict, and even hierarchy may be necessary elements in artistic collaboration. Their case prompts one to look beyond an outward structure or brand, and to the actual practices and inner workings of the organisation. As CAE write: ‘The collective also has to consider what

¹² Karine Talec, ‘Beyond and the Art of Participation’, in Áine Phillips ed., *Performance Art in Ireland: A History*, (Live Art Development Agency with Intellect Books: London & Bristol, 2015) pp. 98-105

¹³ All citations on this collective from Critical Art Ensemble, ‘Observations on Collective Cultural Action’, *Art Journal*, 57:2 (Summer, 1998), pp. 72-85

is pleasurable for its members. Not all people work at the same rate. [...] As long as the process is pleasurable and satisfying for everyone, in CAE's opinion each member should work at the rate at which he or she is comfortable.'

Critical Art Ensemble is somewhat of an ideal case in this regard, but ideas similar to Mouffe's agonistic pluralism operate in a number of collectives. Performance and organisational models that accommodate difference and agonistic conflict, and reflect on their own practices, may constitute critical collectives, which are able to 'contribute to the counter-hegemonic challenge to neo-liberal hegemony'.¹⁴ I believe that a focus on practices of critical collectives provides insight into how collective practices can resist and rework dominant aesthetic, political, social and professional practices, insisting on agency, autonomy and care of individuals. If these collective practices engage with institutions they can provide a model for better institutions, slowly shifting the field in more egalitarian, radical, and caring directions.

Radicalising the Institution: A Case Study

This final section considers how contemporary collective practices of producing and curation might be influenced by and situated within this predominantly aesthetic history of the collective. In considering the case study of producing, curatorial and artist collective Buzzcut, I begin to explore how their practices rework and resist dominant practices in the field of performance at large. The existence of such practices influences the field by providing models of more ethical, egalitarian and radical practices. I argue that this influence can be felt more widely if collectives go through a period of self-reflexive institutionalisation, following Mouffe's principles of agonistic pluralism and engaging with, in order to radicalise, liberal democratic institutions. This process is one which Buzzcut has just begun to embark upon. Buzzcut describe themselves as follows:

//BUZZCUT// is a collective dedicated to creating exciting, supportive environments for artists and audiences to experiment with cutting edge live performance.

//BUZZCUT// looks to open up new spaces for performance to happen, to bring new audiences to live art, and to create new opportunities for artists to make and share work.

¹⁴ Mouffe, *Agonistics*, p. 91

//BUZZCUT// believes in strengthening and broadening communities, in bringing people from different walks of life together in one circle to ask challenging questions.

//BUZZCUT// is about sharing; sharing food, sharing ideas and support, opening up doors and sharing homes.

//BUZZCUT// loves festivals. //BUZZCUT// will bring a free five day festival of experimental performance and live art to the centre of Glasgow every year, with a broad range of artists from different places, different practices, and different stages in their career.¹⁵

Buzzcut festival takes place every year in the Pearce Institute, a community building in Govan, a traditionally working class area in Glasgow, previously the affluent heart of the Clydeside ship-building industry. The festival was begun in 2012 by Rosana Cade and Nick Anderson, and is now run by a larger team with the addition of Karl Taylor and Daisy Douglas. Cade and Anderson are graduates of a course in Contemporary Performance Practice at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, a course dedicated to live art and solo performance practice which provides the opportunity to ‘push yourself and push boundaries’, and promises to leave graduates ‘as an independent and entrepreneurial self-managing ‘eco-centric’ artist with an awareness of the aesthetic, intellectual, social, emotional, political, and ecological considerations of a holistic and sustainable arts practice.’¹⁶ As such it contains the significant though perhaps not unusual combination of radical aesthetics, neoliberal ‘artrepreneurial’ rhetoric, and the importance of the sociocultural imbrication of performance. The festival was started after the two artists’ graduation to fill a hole left in the city and country’s arts ecology by the disappearance of the National Review of Live Art, which had its last edition in 2010, having been in Glasgow intermittently since 1988. As such it was incredibly well placed to provide a platform for artists making radical, experimental live art and performance in Glasgow, Scotland, and across the UK.

The festival is an example of radical aesthetics and radical working and curatorial practices existing in a generative, dialogic relation. The DIY and collective nature of the festival, and the fact that it was providing a much-needed platform for experimental work, meant that the pair were not bound by the usual institutional rules. The festival is informal and anarchic; the emphasis is on providing as much space as possible to as many different performances of all

¹⁵ <https://glasgowbuzzcut.wordpress.com/about/> [accessed 11/05/2018]

¹⁶ <https://www.rcs.ac.uk/courses/ba-contemporary-performance-practice/> [accessed 09/05/2018]

kinds, rather than on a tightly curated festival product with thematic consistency, a fixed purpose or a static position in the performance ecology. The work ranges widely in form from traditional theatre shows to one-on-one, durational, or outdoor walking pieces, ranging from finished pieces from established artists to work-in-progress showings from newly graduated or student artists. Unlike many festivals, these works were not differentiated by the level or experience of the artist; all work sits side by side. Curatorially, the festival is yet another example of a structure incorporating multiple, heterogeneous elements of difference, arranged in a non-hierarchical and non-harmonious whole.

Such an approach is made possible by the festival's financial and working practices. Artists presenting work at the festival are paid a nominal fee. They receive free food within the festival's main space and accommodation with local artists, creating connections between performers and audiences, and local and travelling artists. All performances are free to attend and unticketed, instead Buzzcut operate a pay-what-you-can policy, in which people donate what they can afford for performances. As such the festival attempts to be radically inclusive to people from different social classes and backgrounds. Though the festival has very little money for marketing it tries to be friendly, welcoming and accessible to newcomers and uninitiated audiences. To this end it is key to have a central gathering space where people can sit, drink and eat, as well as get information on performances from an information desk and regular announcements from the festival's producers, delivered in a friendly and informal style. They follow a policy of radical inclusion and accessibility, a policy which gained strength with the addition of producer Karl Taylor, who inputted policies to increase accessibility for d/Deaf, blind and disabled communities. The festival is run for little payment by the team who produce it alongside other artistic and producing commitments. A lack of time and money is made up for by the culture of hospitality, generosity and conviviality created by the festival, its founders, volunteers and community.

Through its collective and non-hierarchical working practices, and the inclusion of multiple diverse elements in terms of both artists and audiences, Buzzcut provides a space of agonistic pluralism in which one can encounter and have dialogue with difference. It is a hospitable, radical and DIY festival which provides a centre point for diverse communities including the local, national and international live art community, and provides a model for hospitable, caring and non-hierarchical curation which is felt beyond the festival. This is not to say that the festival is without its problems, but rather that it contains the potential to prefigure more ethical and

radical practices in the here and now. Pay-what-you-can, nominal fees, unpaid labour and volunteering frequently elicit critiques of exploitation or self-exploitation. Though the festival creates a prefigured reality rooted in conviviality, generosity and a radical gift economy, it's unclear how this relates to the economy at large, unclear what exchanges are taking place with artists who have to support themselves outside of the festival. Do they devalue their product in the neoliberal economy by performing for a lower fee? Do artists ever regret presenting their work in such a heterogeneous environment? As the festival grows, the team expands, incorporating producers from different working backgrounds, which may provide a challenge for their working practices. They may struggle to continue to collaborate informally and in a non-hierarchical manner when some of the team are original founders and others more recent additions, and when difference experience and working methods collide.

The collective has taken a break from this year's festival to face these changes and challenges. Such challenges, I suggest, may be faced by a process of self-reflexive, agonistic institutionalisation. Such a process has already begun, as the group look to create international and local institutional connections, such as through their monthly curated performance night 'Double Thrills' which takes place at the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) in Glasgow. Double Thrills combines emerging local artists with more established artists from elsewhere, again incorporating multiple levels of difference. Through engaging with an established institution like CCA, they infiltrate it with the radical aesthetics and politics of their curated performance and working practices, and create an agonistic mix of both contemporary art and live art audiences. As with any collective, conflict and power dynamics will arise both within and outside the collective's confines, and must be dealt with honestly and in a structure that seeks to use conflict productively rather than trying to reduce all to a homogenous and harmonious whole. Though radical artists and groups are often profoundly critical of institutions, after a certain number of years of existence organisations can hardly avoid being looked to as an institution themselves. A process of partial institutionalisation is not to be considered a failure; if the group retain the radical principles of inclusion, egalitarianism and difference, then such a process allows for these principles to become more permanent influences in the field.

Biography

For the past five years I have worked as a producer and administrator in live art, dance and theatre, working in London with artists and venues such as Project O, Chisenhale Dance Space and Battersea Arts Centre. Last year I began an AHRC funded PhD research project at the University of Glasgow into the practices of artist-led producing collectives in performance and live art, in the context of austerity politics and neoliberal capitalism. I am interested in the intersections of politics and artistic collaboration; in how radical democracy, socialism and anarchism are manifested in how we work and perform together. The Collective Works conference provides a unique opportunity to present the beginnings of my research, to suggest and mould my future directions, and to make meaningful connections and exchanges with artists, researchers and critics working in my immediate field across multiple cultural contexts and backgrounds.