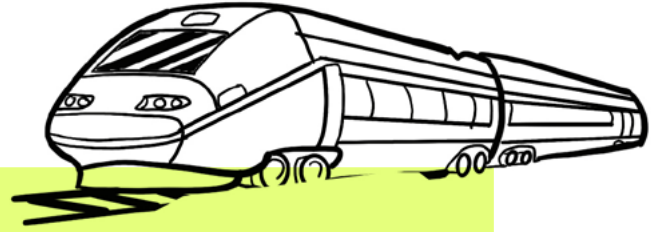


MAKING FUTURES

WHAT IF?

Rethinking Europe's
independent
festival landscape

What if...



What if festivals lined up their dates, so artists could travel by train to each one?

What if artists performing at this year's festival curated next year's festival?

What if the idea of exclusivity were dead?

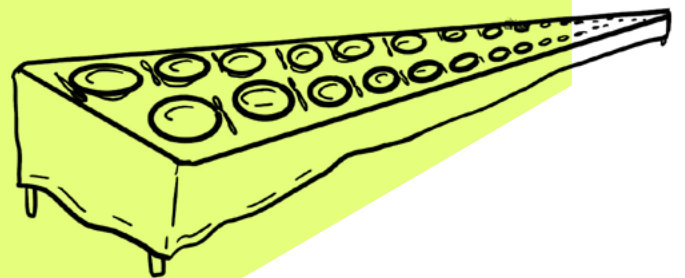


What if festivals happened across borders?

What if the festival had no published schedule, so you find out who is on by watching them?

What if festivals didn't happen yearly but when there was enough to be said?

What if the festival had space for everyone to eat, and provided food every day?



What if...



What if there were space to sleep during the day at the festival?

What if the festival also offered workshops in crafts, gardening, mechanics, skills?

What if there were a day in the festival solely for local artists?

What if success or failure were not decided by audience numbers?

What if there were no more tote bags?

What if the festival always ended with a 24-hour dance marathon?



INTRODUCTION

A year into the Covid-19 pandemic, with many borders between countries again closed, Imagining Futures brought together twelve innovative performing arts festivals for a pan-European experiment.

A future-focused peer network that would spark new connections, support artistic development, explore new models and encourage porous international dialogue.

EUNIC, in partnership with the Goethe-Institut London and England-based festival Transform, invited not the 'usual suspects', but some of Europe's smaller and more nimble festivals: those already rethinking established modes of operation and keen to experiment further through collaboration. Their participation coincided with a period of particular challenge for these festivals' leaders: some were actively bringing re-

configured festivals to life; others were questioning how their next editions could function; all were adapting, rescheduling, regenerating. Imagining Futures became more than a network, offering a deep listening

space and a meditative window to be together, think together, and dream different futures.

In the series of online meetings that took place between May and July 2021, care, well-being and sustainability became prominent topics, with the festival leaders considering their responsibilities to themselves, to their teams, to artists, to audiences, and to the planet. Responsibility brought up questions of power: the everyday power of the director/curator; the enduring power of ▶▶▶

INTRODUCTION

colonialism, visible in the whiteness of the festival leaders' group. Within *Imagining Futures*, these leaders considered together how to share power, how to leave behind the inherited structures and ideologies that so many cultural institutions adhere to, above all how to rip up the rule book and work instead with radical new ideas and provocations that might transform "what is" into "what if".

Imagining Futures itself was transformed by their participation. An initial plan to commission artists to create work in response to the festival leaders' conversations became instead an invitation to nine nominated artists, from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, to enter the dialogue as part of an extended network. This happened online, but also in person, with a five-day artists

residency at Performing Arts Forum (PAF) in France. Here the artists and festival leaders had space to create and practice as well as talk, allowing the conversation to take on playful and visionary new forms.

The unexpected path that *Imagining Futures* took, and the many provocations, inspirations, examples of existing good practice and desired 'what ifs' discussed by the network, continues to inspire and inform the working practices of the participating festivals but also the EUNIC London member organisations. We hope by gathering these materials in a single document to inspire and inform next practice elsewhere too. ●

Amy Letman

Transform

Katrin Sohns

Francis Christeller

Goethe-Institut London

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

Accountability and transparency were repeatedly discussed during *Imagining Futures*: accountability as a process for sharing power, transparency as a practice of care. To honour that dialogue, this note acknowledges that:

All of the texts in this document were originally authored by, or are rooted in dialogue between, the participants in *Imagining Futures*: festival leaders Amy Letman, Anna Mülter, Bouchra Lamsyeh, Carla Nobre Sousa, David Cabecinha, Ellada Evangelou, Hanna Parry, Kate Craddock, Kira Kirsch, LJ Findlay-Walsh, Mike Pony, Nicolette Kretz, Ruth McCarthy and Sabine Cmelniski; artists Angela Alves, Claire Lefèvre, Loucka Fiagan, Mele Broomes, Patrick Scullion, Petra Serhal, Raffi Feghali, Tammy Reynolds and Violeta Gil; coordinators Francis Christeller and Katrin Sohns (Goethe-Institut London); and observer/facilitator Maddy Costa.

All online conversations, and the residency in PAF, were documented by Maddy. Those records were used as the basis of an interim report authored by Bonnie Smith, who synthesised the notes within five key themes.

Those themes, and corresponding provocations, then formed the basis of this document, which has been edited by Maddy, with support and contributions from Francis, Katrin and Amy.

The 'what ifs', the examples of good practice and the dream festival texts were mostly generated during the PAF residency, but in the editing process texts have been repurposed or given new contexts.

These layers of mediation blur the hierarchy often present between festival leaders and artists, resulting in a paradox noted by Nicolette Kretz, director of *auawirleben*: 'A lot of artists and curators think and talk about the same topics – but the two groups rarely do that together.' ▶▶▶



A word cloud made during the first meeting of the participating festival directors and funding partners, establishing the terms and ideas that would be explored further in the conversations that followed.

However, the layers of mediation also create an “objective” voice where, in person, there was challenge, discussion, and many changes of mind. Objectivity itself might be seen, within the inherited systems of coloniality that surrounds this work, as a mask for whiteness, and raises a question: if the dialogues had been recorded by someone who is disabled and/or a Person of Colour, might different information have been recorded or stressed?

Throughout this document, there is a preference for question over statement, suggestion and provocation over fixed ideas. ●

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CARE

Care became the primary theme of Imagining Futures – not surprising, given that the festival leaders were gathering amid a global pandemic, and experiencing enormous challenges that just a year before they could never have anticipated.

Covid didn't produce a need for care at kinship, local, national and global levels: it made the need for care visible and paramount. Together the festival leaders and artists explored care for their peers, audiences, communities, cities, countries and the environment, opening up new questions and ways of working that might enable them to practise care more effectively.

“What happens if you reimagine your festival entirely through the lens of care? Not just the way you work with artists, but the way you exist in every interaction you have with the world.”

Kate Craddock

Festival Director, GIFT,
Gateshead, England

This thinking was embodied during the artist residency at PAF in France, where care meant slowness, more breaks, and more consideration of the participants' lives outside the residency. A model for the future that could be easily replicated elsewhere. ●

Care-conscious work within the Imagining Futures network – now and forthcoming:

Bâtard Festival thinks in terms of ‘before and after care’ for the artists they work with, considering care not just during the festival itself but throughout the year. This ensures that the Bâtard team work with their artists’ specific needs from the beginning of the relationship, and enables them to build a horizontal community in which accessibility and communication can take place easily.

Programmed by a queer disabled curator, Outburst festival’s [Special School](#) invites queer disabled artists to share their work – and has been a key learning tool for the Outburst team, to question its structures and move towards more caring and accessible practices.

As part of her research into ‘radical softness’, feminist choreographer/performer and Imagining Futures art-

ist Claire Lefèvre is exploring the potential for a new role, “performance doula”. making visible the emotional work that is part of the making process of every performance, but often unpaid and underacknowledged.

Baltic Circle publishes [a manifesto](#) of commitments ranging from gender parity to accessibility and affordability. auawirleben theaterfestival also have a manifesto of responsibilities, [Art is no excuse](#), which – inspired by the conversations that took place through Imagining Futures – has now been updated to include a passage about self-care and respecting individual paces of work.

Through the Imagining Futures conversations, Transform were inspired to publish their own accountability and transparency document, while Buffer Fringe are also considering publishing a manifesto. Ellada Evangelou, artistic director for Buffer Fringe, says that the manifesto will “boldly state the content of our collective mind, our strengths and our vulnerabilities. As we are called constantly to be strong as cultural workers and peacebuilders, one forgets that it’s OK to need a breather: the network reminded me of that.” ●

Good care practice - experienced or desired:

- Artists being asked where they would prefer to stay (a hotel, an apartment), being offered a bike to move around during the festival, and being offered food after their show.
- Artists being given choice and flexibility in what they might present at a festival, and being able to offer alternative ideas to what the festival initially proposes.
- Artists not having to explain their care rider.
- Festivals being transparent about the number of hours the team has available to respond to artists.

Key provocations:

- 01** What might it mean for a festival to produce relations over goods?
- 02** What role does context play when considering care?
- 03** Personal and institutional self-care is hard work: does an independent festival actually have the capacity for it?
- 04** Care practices established by artists in the rehearsal room, unpicking ideas around punctuality, professionalism and productivity, struggle to survive the transition into a venue/production schedule. How can the rigid capitalist structure of the festival model be softened?
- 05** How might conversations happening within the bubbles of independent festivals reach the wider infrastructure?
- 06** What work is needed to move from theory to practice: from manifestos, charts, protocols, policies, codes of conduct, etc, to real, embedded structures of care?
- 07** With so much work rooted in traumatic experience being programmed, how can artists avoid their vulnerabilities being exploited?

What if...

... the festival paid people to take care of other people at the festival?

... everyone working on the festival had a fully informed back-up person who could take over in case of illness?

... the festival started with an injury prevention workshop, and offered osteopathy, physiotherapy and a massage station for technicians and performing artists?

... a festival refused to work with spaces that are not accessible, or spaces with problematic values – and talked about the reasons for not having those relationships? (And what if that didn't eliminate all the venues in a city...?)

WHAT IS A FESTIVAL – NOW AND TOMORROW?

“Performance tries to get out of the capitalist system but the system keeps bringing it back. How can the artist-festival relationship think together of ways to resist?”

Ideally a festival is a space that doesn't otherwise exist – a space for acceptance, for refusal, for encounters with the unexpected, and for creative activism. But the intense, time-pressured nature of festivals can also provoke conditions that are inaccessible to many.

What happens when festivals rip up the rule book – conjure the unexpected, but also consider care? This reimagining raises a multitude of questions: about how a festival might be differently organised, what new challenges emerge from that – and how a festival might be accountable, to themselves, their artists, their audiences, their contexts and their funders. ●

Petra Serhal

multidisciplinary artist,
based in Beirut, Lebanon

Key provocations:

01

Do programmers consider the audience labour of attending festivals when putting together schedules?

02

Have festivals become accustomed to aligning their values with 'impact and reach' because that's what funders want?

03

Does intensity equal focus, particularly when it comes to community engagement? How might more time be given to building meaningful communities between artists and audiences?

04

What does slowing down mean for festival processes? What happens when you put emphasis on process over product? Can you achieve the same intensity of a festival over a longer period of time? How?

WHAT IS A FESTIVAL – NOW AND TOMORROW?

The future is now: how festivals in this network are initiating change:

Baltic Circle are collaborating with the [Landscape Rewilding project](#) to put environmental questions at the heart of the festival.

Festival Theaterformen are working with Jess Thom, co-founder of [Touretteshero](#), on shaping a 'relaxed' festival – as opposed to a 'festival of overload' – to allow for more accessible choices for audiences.

GIFT is curating a programme that includes artist-led walks in rural and urban settings, designed to encourage audiences and artists to use the festival environment as a space to take time out, to reconnect with themselves and with each other.

Alkantara Festival have a long-term partnership (described as a kinship) with [Terra Batida](#), an artist-driven network bringing together activists and researchers as 'thinking-partners'.

Transform are experimenting with a slower, "[extended](#)" festival model, rethinking the audience journey to provide moments of connection across several months rather than two weekends.

Ruth McCarthy, director of Outburst, keeps her diary empty of meetings and emails every Friday, using that time to recharge, engage with literature, art and ideas, and think creatively. It's helped her get back to the subversive and bacchanalian 'why' of the festival, and is inspiring other festival leaders to do the same – with the caveat that complex and uncertain funding models make it harder to free directors up in this way. ●

WHAT IS A FESTIVAL – NOW AND TOMORROW?

Good future-facing practice, now and to come:

Artists feeling that there is a context for the festival in the city/ village, that audiences are part of the festival, and that there is a platform to support their work.

Travel being arranged in a sustainable manner.

Loucka Fiagan pointed to the mentorship structure of [WIPCOOP](#) in Belgium. Established artists are encouraged to collaborate with emerging artists for three or four years, and through that relationship the younger artists access the tools they need for a sustainable practice. ●

WHAT IS A FESTIVAL – NOW AND TOMORROW?

What if...

... organisations, movements or causes were given space and time in the festival to further their work – and every curatorial manifesto took a stand against a political issue happening elsewhere in the world?

... the festival reversed social conditions, so minorities become majorities, and abled experience disability?

... festivals were obliged to release their carbon neutrality policies, and form agreements with artists and audiences to address neutralising their impact?

... the festival invited not just artists or writers but economists, politicians, scientists to have conversations with the audience, particularly about the issues that might be encountered in the work?

... funding and organisational structures enabled festival leaders to nourish their curatorial practice with time away from the pressure of delivery?

INSPIRING WAYS OF CREATING, PRESENTING AND TOURING WORK

“Seeing international work that pushes the boundaries of form and aesthetic changes audiences – and impacts artistic practice, sometimes years later.”

Amy Letman,

director, Transform,
Leeds, England

Even before Covid closed borders, the Imagining Futures festival leaders were considering the impact of international travel on the environment and the responsibility of acting sustainably. Visa issues resulting from Brexit were also impacting cross-Channel connections. To shift the dialogue, new questions were raised here: how might a reduction in travel be seen as a creative asset? And what other possibilities for art might emerge?

The festival leaders also discussed what ‘better sharing’ might look like – with Mike Pony, director of Submerge, noting a shift in focus, “from what can we do with artists, to what can we as festivals do together”. This in turn raised new questions: how might a network like Imagining Futures encourage festival leaders to act as trusted curators for each other, travel being shared between a wider group who in turn share programming ideas? And how might artists contribute to these discussions? ●

Key provocations:

- 01** How might festivals reconcile the importance of mobility with environmental sustainability?
- 02** How is the “creative activism” of a festival – its role to provoke change through art and sharing global perspectives – compromised if international travel can happen less or not at all?
- 03** How can festival leaders stop thinking about travel as short trips and start thinking in terms of immersive journeys, which take longer and build better relationships? Can artists be invited on those journeys too?
- 04** What’s the impact of inequalities of geography when it comes to experiencing new work and being able to book artists?
- 05** The exclusivity of the “premiere” often means shows visiting the same country on multiple trips in a year rather than once – or the artist not being offered further opportunities to present their work. Can this be challenged by prioritising ‘tour collaboration’ over ‘national premiere’?
- 06** Does the scheduling of festivals at different points in the calendar prevent more sustainable international touring? How might festival calendars geographically be rethought?

Experiments in creating, presenting and touring work:

LJ Findlay-Walsh (Take Me Somewhere) and Carla Nobre Sousa (Alkantara) have been among the mentors for [Concept Touring](#), a commissioning programme led by LIFT, London International Festival of Theatre, to encourage artists to explore new ways to 'tour, exhibit and collaborate internationally, so that ideas, processes and work can travel, but artists do not'.

Transform and GIFT are collaborating with other England-based festivals Fierce and Mayfest to curate a performing arts showcase at the Edinburgh festivals, to encourage cross-pollination. Transform and GIFT have a background of such collaboration: they have previously co-presented works by Spanish company El Conde De Torrefiel in Gateshead and Leeds, sharing responsibility for travel and freight while each presenting different works.

During Covid, auawirleben curated "aua in a box": a parallel festival that arrives through the post. Nicolette Kretz reflected that these works which involved materials like paper or plastic immediately raised questions around environmental impact. But why does no one ask what the (much larger) carbon footprint of an ephemeral performance is?

Inspired by the Imagining Futures conversations, Mike Pony has invited the network to share inspiring works and artists with him that might feed into the next Submerge festival. ●

Inspiring practice admired by the Imagining Futures participants:

- Participatory work created locally with only a small team travelling, such as Mammalian Diving Reflex's [Haircuts by Children](#), Theatre Replacement's [Town Choir](#), Jerome Bel's [Gala](#), and [Joe Namy's Automobile](#).
- Experiential, installation-based work that uses objects instead of people, such as Kate McIntosh's [Worktable](#).
- Work that happens by telephone or via the post, such as Samara Hersch's [Body of Knowledge \(At Home\)](#), 600 Highwaymen's [A Thousand Ways](#), and [Samara Editions](#).
- New methods of live-streaming work, such as [Live Action Relay](#), streamed from a drone; and digital residencies, such as [3 WOODS](#) curated by GIFT.
- Festivals that also offer encounters with books, films, philosophy, talks, etc. ●

What if...

... artists were asked what the best format is to present their work – not just during the pandemic, but all the time?

... festivals in Europe chose a city outside of Europe in which to perform a copy of the festival?

... the festival recycles itself, so that instead of reinventing itself or presenting new work each year, there might be works shown every year, to see how they grow?

... every festival had a component that involved improving or redesigning a community space, and everyone in the festival contributed to this work?

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FESTIVALS AND ARTISTS

“If you take production out of festivals, what’s left is relationships.”

Hanna Parry,

Artistic director,
Baltic Circle, Helsinki,
Finland

Imagining Futures began as a conversation between festival leaders, with an intention to commission artists to research and develop ideas in response, which might ultimately lead to the creation of new artworks. But the more the festival leaders discussed relationships with artists, the clearer it became that the commission had to be an invitation: for artists to join the conversation too.

Recognising the whiteness dominant in their own group – while also celebrating the fact that Imagining Futures was primarily a group of women – the festival

leaders were attentive to diversity when nominating artists, bringing together a group with wide-ranging backgrounds and experiences. This attention, however, raises other issues, not least the discomfort of artists ‘representing’ accessibility issues such as disability and race (this consideration of race as an accessibility issue was brought to Imagining Futures by participating artists Mele Broomes and Loucka Fiagan).

Care was central to this topic, but so was the question of curatorial power. Who has it? Why and how might curatorial decisions be shared with others? The festival leaders also shared personal experiences of transformative relationships with artists that readjusted power imbalances and addressed coloniality. ●

Key provocations:

- 01** Are artists collaborators or service providers? Particularly when working with international artists, there can be underlying colonial roots from European partners which leads to a cultural hierarchy.
- 02** Artists often find there's a lack of awareness within organisations of the unpaid labour that is done even before performing, and how it drains vitality from the work. How to avoid artist burn out?
- 03** We're in the era of the emergency. How can contracts with artists allow for flexibility and demonstrate humanity?
- 04** How to move away from box-ticking programming led by predominantly white neo-liberal institutions focused on numbers/quotas rather than individual experience?
- 05** Should relationships centre on an exchange of values rather than an exchange of work?
- 06** People of Colour are often engaged to educate and inform institutions – then don't see any change. Why does this keep happening?
- 07** How can a director share curatorial power with their team? With artists? With audiences? Do common institutional structures allow for that? It's important to be inclusive with curation without losing a sense of mission or voice.

Shifting power: how *Imagining Futures* festivals are reimagining relationships to artists, now and tomorrow:

Anna Mülter, director of Festival Theaterformen, Hanover, has been developing a project with indigenous artists from the Amazon, where the translator was seen as a 'cultural bridge' – translating not just language but ideas. The dialogue has led to a slower, interconnected way of working, and has been, for Anna, a good example of how the cultural institution needs to bend to the artist.

Ruth McCarthy, artistic director of Outburst, Belfast, has been developing relationships with artists and producers in South America. Initially all of the meetings took place in English, because that was the common language – but when Ruth recognised the coloniality of this, meetings started taking place in Spanish, with Ruth receiving translation, radically shifting the power dynamics.

The [Artist Constellation](#) developed by Take Me Somewhere, Glasgow, seeks to dismantle hierarchy by connecting artists with each other and with other international festivals, seeing Take Me Somewhere itself as a membrane rather than a producer. 'I feel part of an international community,' says director LJ Findlay-Walsh, 'but how is that being shared with artists? What's the point if artists are not feeling connected too?'

Inspired by *Imagining Futures*, Nicolette Kretz is introducing a new format to auawirleben, called 'Bring a Friend'. Three artists or groups who have worked with auawirleben before will each be invited to curate a production from their context, by an artist or group that hasn't toured much outside their country. 'It gives us the opportunity to involve our artists a bit more in the preparation of the festival,' says Nicolette. 'And by distributing this power of curation we can question our role as gatekeepers of the festival – and of the international scene.' ●

Good relational practice – experienced and desired:

Artists being invited to the festival city/village beforehand, to get an impression of how it works and imagine possibilities for their work there.

Artists being invited to be part of a group of artists attending the festival without presenting work of their own, instead seeing shows, having discussions, engaging with their peers and with the festival itself – ideally in a continuing and growing relationship, through which the artist sees how the research of the festival is developing, and vice versa.

Programmers and curators being clear in saying no and explaining why – doing so can actually deepen relationships. ●



What if...

... artists had the space to ask themselves: is this the right festival for my work?

... the whole process of organising, curating and preparing the festival were open to anyone interested to attend?

... programming a show for just one performance were forbidden – and artists were invited to the whole festival, not just for the duration of their own work?

RELATIONSHIPS WITH AUDIENCES

“Whether we like it or not, a festival creates a community. The same people are at shows and workshops, the same artists are present. Any reaching out is from that starting place.”

Raffi Feghal

storyteller/performer, musician,
peacebuilding consultant,
based in Beirut

Audiences were the silent other of *Imagining Futures*: considered but not present to give their views. Except, of course, artists and festival leaders are audience members too. Clearly words like audience and community need a lot of unpacking: as artist Loucka Fiagan says, community might refer to the local people living in the place where the festival happens, but might also indicate a not-local community centred on values, or a partial community created for that moment.

During the artist residency at PAF, discussion of audience experience quickly ignited debate and disagreement. How a work of art is received is a matter of individual taste – raising a vital question about how a festival might widen its approach to curation. ●

Key provocations:

- 01** How can festivals and artists avoid the ableist consciousness that directs audience experience?
- 02** How can care be distributed to audiences through community work and artistic experiences?
- 03** How might festivals bring audiences into the festival planning and curation process?
- 04** Where does 'community' sit in relation to the making of festivals and of art? How is it defined in a festival context, and what role do values play in this?
- 05** How can festivals and arts organisations live among communities as equals, not as gentrifiers? How might they be local and global, serving the wider communities in which they exist?
- 06** How can festivals or artists create impact or inspire change in their communities and beyond their communities?

How Imagining Futures festivals are rethinking their relationships to audiences:

Transform is working on a programme called 'the collective' where a number of young curators are embedded into the organisation, seeing work, working with artists and team members, and ultimately given responsibility to make their own decisions about which artists to invite to the festival.

Brut, home of imagetanz festival, has been a participant in BeSpectACTIVE!, a cross-European project aimed at involving audiences in creative and organisational processes. Imagetanz has also created a series called 'handle with care' for upcoming artists: a two-week mini-residency in a studio with a public showing at the end. Artists are selected, via an open call, by "beate" - the Brut audience club.

GIFT is committed to working with artists through multi-year projects that connect artists at

different stages of their creative process with audiences and participants local to Gateshead. For the next festival, this will involve GIFT hosting artists in residence in the lead up to the festival, who will be creating new works that will open at GIFT the following year. As part of these residencies, hosted at the library, the art gallery and a woodland park, the artists will be engaging with local audiences and participants through workshops and informal conversations towards developing more meaningful and sustained relationships.

GIFT is also mindful of the wider national and international audiences it has cultivated over the last two years by delivering two festivals in the pandemic solely online. GIFT plans to continue to include opportunities for audiences to engage digitally, to ensure GIFT continues to connect with audiences further afield, or who can't engage in person for access reasons. ●

Audience-attentive practice looks like:

Inter-relating artistic choices and care choices – for instance, placing long performances in venues with more comfortable seats.

Organising transport for the audience. Petra Serhal spoke with admiration of [REEF](#), a festival in Lebanon that put on buses for the audience, when there was a scarcity of public transport options. The result: its biggest audience ever, and an audience keen to reciprocate by getting involved in discussing the work.

Violeta Gil also admired 'Audience School', a project at Teatros de Canal in Madrid, conducted by Natalia Álvarez Simó. It was designed to attract new audiences and build deeper relationships with existing ones. Through a series of conferences and workshops, audiences would hear about the artists whose work would be presented over the following fortnight, receiving context and information that would support them in watching the work. ●

What if...

... the festival had a nursery for young children, with their own curated programme?

... audience members were met by a host, who showed you around the festival site, and how to book tickets, and experienced the festival with you?

... the final day of the festival was a space to reflect, recover and feedback? And what if the artists had agency in the formats of feedback they wanted to receive or be involved in?

... everyone who came to the festival brought a friend who doesn't usually go to the festival?

IMAGINING A NETWORK: KEY LEARNINGS FROM A PILOT PROJECT

As mentioned in the introductory texts, accountability and transparency were key shared values within Imagining Futures. With that in mind, it feels important to share reflections on the structure and organisation of Imagining Futures, learnings and questions that might support the ongoing life of this network or help build strong foundations for another.

1. Balance is key

Imagining Futures initially featured ten 'core' festival participants – five from Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and five from elsewhere in Europe – and four further European 'associate' participants, two of whom left the project fairly quickly, the other two becoming absorbed into a single, stable network. We noticed:

- twelve is a large number for a digital discussion – especially when making decisions related to nominating artists.

- The larger number of British festivals (due to the project being initiated by EUNIC London) sometimes made it hard to keep a fully European perspective

2. Structure and self-organising

The intention for Imagining Futures was always that it would be somewhat self-organising. However, given that the group of festival directors were brought together by nomination rather than application, it wasn't imme- ▶▶▶

IMAGINING A NETWORK: KEY LEARNINGS FROM A PILOT PROJECT

diately clear to everyone involved what connected them or what they might discuss. We noticed:

- Facilitation in early meetings was necessary to enable the group to become self-organising.
- This was the case in early meetings between festival leaders, and again when artists joined the group.
- Even when an invitation is open, some sense of desired outcome is required to feel held within a structure.

3. The impact of slowing down

The initial plan was that festival leaders would meet weekly in May 2021 for four digital sessions, then commission a small number of artists/companies to research and develop ideas in the autumn. These timings would have allowed three months for the commissioning process to happen. Instead, the festival leaders chose to meet less intensively, between May and July. This reduced pressure on themselves – but also reduced the time

for nominating artists, and for organising their involvement. We noticed:

- An act of care in one aspect of the project caused inaccessibility in another aspect. Angela Alves, who was able to participate online but not in person at PAF, made clear: 'I need much more time in advance to plan and manage my capacities in order to meet my own access needs.'
- When funding structures are inflexible, other structures become less flexible and less caring.
- The contradiction between our ambition to allow the artists to design their own residency experience, and not wanting to burden them with administrative work, or require them to invent a framework without fully understanding what had come before, led to the residency being designed for the artists, in a way that could have felt traditionally hierarchical.

4. Care is a doing word

Although the invited artists brought a number of preoccupations with them to Imagining Futures, care remained an overriding topic. Would the residency in France involve talking about care, or practising it too? We noticed:

- By establishing the needs of participants early on, it was easier to practise care.
- Practising care might have looked less productive, given that the 'working day' was much shorter, but the time was still generative: of relationships, shared values and thinking, and in particular materials now contained in this document.

5. Rethinking the peer group

The conversations that happened through Imagining Futures felt unusual, because they invited a radical reconsideration of how an independent festival is programmed and organised, what it represents and what it makes possible. Initially this happened just between festival leaders, but as Imagining Futures continued it happened across the curatorial power divide. We noticed:

- Curators and artists have similar concerns – but rarely have the opportunity to discuss them together.
- By including artists, the festival leaders perhaps lost the opportunity to find commonalities in their struggles, and problem-solve together – but gained perspectives across a wider range of experiences. ●

Alkantara (PT)

Carla Nobre Sousa and David Cabecinha

Alkantara is a Lisbon-based performing arts organisation dedicated to supporting artists and audiences in engaging with critical ideas in arts and society. Its annual festival brings people together for dance, theatre, live performance, parties, and conversations around the work of artists from Portugal and abroad. Year-round, Espaço Alkantara is a place for residencies and research, meetings, workshops, and other public programmes.

auawirleben (CH) -

Nicolette Kretz

The theatre festival auawirleben has been an integral part of Bern's cultural life for four decades. Since its founding, auawirleben has always been programmed around a thematic header and tries to respond to political and social changes with its programme. Today auawirleben brings productions from all over Europe to Bern,

with equal attention paid to productions from the independent scene and those from institutional theatres.

Baltic Circle (FI) -

Hanna Parry

Baltic Circle is an international festival for contemporary theatre and performance organised annually in November in Helsinki. The festival brings intensities into the city, takes stands on current questions, and ignites dialogue. Baltic Circle believes in the aesthetic and affective powers of the arts, and in the potential of social and political agency of performance. The works seen at the festival search for new forms of performing arts and revised modes of production. The festival's cornerstone is a trust in artists, partners and colleagues alike, as well as a bold dialogue with different realities.

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Bâtard (BE) - Sabine Cmelniski and Bouchra Lamsyeh

For more than 10 years, Bâtard Festival has been operating as a platform supporting and presenting emerging artists. This platform investigates in which ways and from which grounds upcoming artists can 'emerge' and it aims to cultivate a bastard spirit of artistic daringness and political reflection. Liveness, togetherness and physicality are at the core of Bâtard's motivations and identities.

Buffer Fringe (CY) - Ellada Evangelou

The Buffer Fringe Performing Arts Festival (BFPAF) is a space of encounter for artists and audiences, aiming to support local and international interdisciplinary, fringe performance art; based on the theme of Displacement (2020-21), it presented hybrid festivals, making space for the presentation of emergent and marginalised narratives, and works challenging preconceived ideas of the "other", locally and internationally. Buffer Fringe explores the possibilities

of arts for conflict transformation through process-based and collaborative models, and ventures to 2022 with a scheme of guest curators and an international advisory team.

GIFT (UK) - Kate Craddock

Gateshead International Festival of Theatre (GIFT) is an annual three day festival celebrating contemporary performance that connects Gateshead's culturally regenerated quayside with the commercially redeveloped town centre, and beyond. GIFT places artistic experimentation and collaboration at its core, and offers a supportive platform for artists to take risks. GIFT provides a meeting point for meaningful exchange between artists and audiences based in North East England, and the wider world.

imagetanz (AT) - Kira Kirsch

Presenting international guest performances, dance premieres by young artists from Vienna and ▶▶▶

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across Austria, studio visits, workshops and talks, the imagetanz festival marks a beloved March highlight of Brut's programme. Regardless of changes to the form and duration of the festival during the pandemic, imagetanz has kept its experimental, young, new and international nature. The latest instalment was called the Emotional Support Festival because we know how hard these times are – for many of us, all over the world. Through improvisation, digitalisation and through the use of hybrid formats audiences were invited to get involved with and shape the present.

OUTBURST Queer Arts Festival (UK) - Ruth McCarthy

OUTBURST Queer Arts Festival is a Belfast-based annual queer arts festival and queer arts development initiative. We focus on greenhousing and showcasing new work from queer artists, writers, activists and thinkers across literature, film, performance, music and theatre, bringing challenging queer ideas to life for wide audiences.

We work with partners across the world to support vital queer arts development, co-learning and co-creation, catalysing vision and action for social change and creating unrepentant queer utopias along the way.

Submerge (UK) - Mike Pony

Submerge is a queer-led Arts producing organisation and international festival of innovative contemporary performance, electronic music, and creative technology in Manchester. The biennial Submerge Festival acts as a conduit between the underground and the mainstream, advocating for wild ideas, and amplifying marginalised perspectives within contemporary arts practice.

Take Me Somewhere (UK) - LJ Findlay-Walsh

Take Me Somewhere is Glasgow's festival of contemporary international performance and year-round sector support organisation. The festival provides a crucial support structure and platform ▶▶▶

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for Scotland's most vital artists, combined with some of the world's most cutting-edge contemporary performance makers. The festival is a space for crucial, diverse voices from here and abroad that take us somewhere in our personal and collective journeys, understanding the globalised and multicultural world we live in; voices that allow us to consider where we are now and envisage what a future somewhere could be.

Festival Theater- formen (DE) - Anna Mülter

Festival Theaterformen has been presenting international contemporary theatre since 1990. The festival debates socio-political themes in new performative forms in close consultation with the city and its residents. The annual programme, which takes place in summer and alternates between Hanover and Braunschweig, includes experimental theatre, participative projects and works in the public space that aim to be accessible to a diverse public on different levels.

Transform (UK) (Im- aging Futures Lead Partner Festival) - Amy Letman

Transform is an engine room for powerful performance. We create exhilarating international festivals and work year-round to catalyse future-gazing artists and creatives to reimagine what theatre can be. We bring bold, brave, vivid and socially-conscious international performance to the Leeds City Region and beyond. Transform aims to shift perceptions of what theatre can look like and represent in the Leeds City Region and across the North, and to enable artists and creative people to take their agency to a new level and create remarkable, internationally resonant performance.

EUNIC

EUNIC – European Union National Institutes for Culture – is the European network of organisations engaging in cultural relations. Together with their partners, they bring to life European cultur- ▶▶▶

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al collaboration in more than 100 countries worldwide with a network of 132 clusters, drawing on the broad experience of their members from all EU Member States and associate countries. EUNIC is a platform for knowledge sharing and for capacity building amongst its members and partners. The EUNIC London members participating in Imagining Futures were [Austrian Cultural Forum](#), [Embassy of Switzerland](#), [Finnish Institute](#), [Flanders House](#), [Goethe-Institut](#), [High Commission of Cyprus](#) and [Portuguese Embassy](#).

Angela Alves

is a Berlin-based choreographer interested in the relationship between health, equality and sustainability. She translates different practices of self-care into performative formats and questions perceptions of 'healthy' and 'sick'.

Claire Lefèvre

is a feminist choreographer, performer and writer currently working in Vienna. She likes to think of herself as a host, welcoming collaborators and audience mem-

bers into kitsch landscapes where politics and poetics are gently interwoven. In continuity with her ongoing research on radical softness as a choreographic strategy, she is currently exploring the idea of becoming a performance doula, a role imagined to dis-invisibilise care work in the cultural field. Claire also teaches writing workshops, and is a contributing writer for Springback Magazine.

Loucka Fiagan

sociology, performative arts and choreography in the ISAC department of the Royal Academy of Beaux Arts in Brussels. Loucka is co-founder of the artistic collective [wedontknwyet](#), who create mixed media pieces which explore the notion of mental illness, otherness, mixed identities and shamanism in modern societies. Their performances are a blend of different mediums: video, text, music and movement, in an immersive space with a fragmented narration.

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Mele Broomes

is an artist, creative director, and a leading voice in dance and performance from the African and Caribbean Diaspora in Scotland. Mele's work addresses racist structures in the creative sector and initiates artistic platforms for Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) through a variety of mediums including dance, performance, visual art, music and design. Currently, Mele is developing Body Remedy, a resource to support the physical and mental wellbeing for BIPOC.

Patrick Scullion

(Rosa Tralee) is a writer, performer and retail worker from Belfast who incorporates elements of video, comedy, prose, drag and stunts into shows that have been performed at Outburst Queer Arts Festival, Dublin Fringe Festival, and in Array Collective's 2021 Turner Prize-winning installation An Druithaib's Ball.

Petra Serhal

is a multidisciplinary artist based in Beirut working mainly in live art and choreography. Her work draws from her ongoing research on the experiential and imaginative aspect in performance and the role of the audience in the performative and choreographed experience. Her work often deals with language and sound in relation to movement and space, body as archive, fragmentation, absence, and embodiment.

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Raffi Feghali

is a director, storyteller, performer, percussionist, theatre sound designer, and peacebuilder. He's directed more than 25 Theatre of the Oppressed, improvisational theatre, and other performances since 2009. As a performer he has performed in more than 60 shows worldwide, under many international directors. Raffi is one of the people who brought improv to Lebanon in 2009 and he has recently embarked on a journey taking him back to his storytelling roots. He launched his first autobiographical monodrama, *Peer Gynt of Bourj Hammoud*, in 2018. Raffi also dabbles in audio; sound design for film/theatre as well as radio dramas.

Tammy Reynolds

refuses to write in third person. I USED TO go on a stage and sing/dance/speak/scream/shout/eat my trauma. I sometimes make money from it. I'm sometimes Midgitte Bardot. I sometimes wear clothes. I'm always disabled. I sometimes enjoy it. I do Live Art. I USED TO sometimes leave the stage and cry and hyperventilate and rage about how it went. I

don't take positive feedback well so to write a bio that makes me look like an accomplished artist doesn't quite fit. I'm not qualified for anything. My first aid training is outdated now and I think my DBS is too. I'm good at making things I want to make. I'm articulate and creative. I'm nowhere near as productive as I should be and I hope I never am.

Violeta Gil

writes and directs. In 2005 she co-founded *La tristura* with Celso Giménez and Itsaso Arana. She is currently a fellow with Helena Mariño at Matadero Arts Centre with a performative poetry project. Her poems are published by *Arrebato*. She's working on a book of essays, forthcoming in 2022. She collaborates with *La Veronal* and *Mucha Muchacha*, and she teaches creative workshops. Dancing, swimming, loving, reading and throwing fireworks are things she really likes doing.

THE DREAM FESTIVAL



The Dream Festival

I was invited by my friend — to this new festival
a hybrid
located around an oasis
in between forests rivers beaches and out at sea
around open fires, alongside rocky cavernous spaces
in a theatre a hotel a restaurant a day care centre
a festival in which the digital truly serves the human
experience

“I’m sure we can arrange something”

There is a library of the festival with all its past
documentations
different strands of the programme intertwined through food
it is not a music festival although there is music
some of the work was created beforehand and some in situ
by people who have been living and working in this
place – some for weeks, others for years

It’s a festival of patience, patient discovery of how to be to-
gether, how to interrelate, how to communicate

There are 34 hours in the day of the festival
you know everybody and nobody
it’s full of traps, jokes, frauds and lies
you feel like you’re part of a community
perhaps watching choreography performed by dancers and
then choreography performed by insects
there are planned pathways, there is room to manoeuvre
dark clubs huddled around a fire
space to be alone with thoughts but still connected

THE DREAM FESTIVAL

Long story short, no one really knows what is the art and
what is not the art

The festival venue is situated in a city but a small city,
everyone locally is involved
you become a member of the festival and could also
become part of the organisation
there's space for creating the future editions of the festival
un año en ciclos
lo que nos dijeron que era política
hace sol

Translators are present, nothing happens only once, there
are no more than three things a day
there is delicious food
the festival leaves you feeling nourished and not
exhausted
there are nap stations
and in sleep the festival continues in dream

Funding for **IMAGINING FUTURES** was secured through EUNIC Global, participating members of EUNIC London and Pro Helvetia.



EUNIC
London



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BUFFER FRINGE
2020—21



TAKE ME SOMEWHERE



This Imagining Futures publication was created and published in May 2022