Performance in a Pandemic

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Routledge: Edited by Laura Bissell (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland) and Lucy Weir (University of Edinburgh)

The COVID-19 pandemic that emerged in early 2020 disrupted the lives of millions around the world as governments stipulated periods of lockdown to halt the spread of the virus. This global health crisis and resulting quarantine has dramatically impacted the landscape of performance-making – it has been both impossible and impermissible to create live performance work in the usual ways. As a result, many artists and makers have moved their practices online, creating digital performances and artworks; meanwhile, others have stopped making work altogether without access to performance venues and live audiences.

In response to this unprecedented situation and its immediate, enduring effects on contemporary performance practice, we propose an edited collection exploring the impact of lockdown on artists and artistic output during this time. This collection also invites reflections on the experience of audiences and programmers of "live" work on digital platforms. We will focus largely on work that has been created in the unique and experimental context of Scotland and the UK, but are aware that during the pandemic geography has become arbitrary as audiences around the world can access digital content online. We are interested in how this moment is blurring borders and boundaries, as well as hybridising mediums. We seek responses from a diverse range of voices and perspectives and will prioritise contributions from POC and disabled artists.

Performance in a Pandemic intends to capture, analyse and disseminate digital creative output in Scotland and the wider UK during the initial period of lockdown (March – August 2020), as well as providing a platform for the experiences of artists whose practice has ceased as a direct result of venue closures. The volume will comprise an edited collection of essays (max 5000 words), artists' reflections and responses to the unique challenges to contemporary performance (live art, dance, theatre) posed by the initial period of lockdown in the UK. We invite contributions from artists, academic researchers and policy makers, and particularly in relation to the following themes:

- How have artists and performance-makers adapted to working on online platforms not designed for this function?
- How have festivals reimagined their programmes to include this new work?
- What about those artists who can't/won't adapt to digital platforms?
- How can participatory work be adapted for this context?
- Has this affected processes of making or aesthetic output?

- Who is getting to see digital performance and what are they watching?
- Does it feel “live”?
- What is the experience of watching performance from home rather than at a venue?
- How will the ways that we are making and watching performance now, affect our access to culture in the longer term, unknown future ahead?
- What new precedents are being set?
- What will performance look like after coronavirus?
- What will it feel like?
- What will survive?
- What will emerge?

Due to the rapidly-evolving situation as we remain in the midst of this pandemic, we have proposed a tight timeframe for contributions, in order to expedite production of the completed volume.

Abstracts (200 words) to be emailed to the editors (l.bissell@rcs.ac.uk and lucy.weir@ed.ac.uk) by 23rd November 2020.
You will be informed if your abstract has been accepted by 11th December 2020.
Draft papers will be due on 1st March 2021.
Feedback will be returned to authors by the editors by the week of 22nd March 2021.
Final submissions due 19th April 2021.
Contributions should not have been previously published elsewhere. The editors ask that authors provide images for which they have copyright.
To complement this publication, we are organising an online panel event in February as part of the Present Futures festival. All authors will be invited to contribute to this symposium event exploring Performance in a Pandemic and would be welcome to share their work on this platform if they wished.

Reference:
CFP: Performance in a Pandemic. In: ArtHist.net, Nov 5, 2020 (accessed Nov 4, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/23859>.