

PRODUCING FOR THE END OF THE WORLD LIVENESS IN INTERESTING TIMES

BY THE UNCULTURED

Part of
Producing Liveness in Interesting Times

the uncultured

NOTE TO THE READER

Below are 3 texts written as openings for the project *Producing Liveness in Interesting Times*.

For personal and professional reasons this project was slower to come to fruition than we'd intended. Each time we thought we were near ready to share something publicly we wrote an opening text. On reflection we can see how different our headspace was in each period. The first (most recent) is dated September 2022, the second November 2021, and the third November 2020.

The opening text, as written in September 2022, when the context we're all living in feels more bleak than ever and we don't know how to open so much as a carton of orange juice anymore.

This project started off with the name *Producing for the End of the World*, but as it now actually feels like it might be the end of the world, it feels a bit gross calling it that. Since we started this project, many of the things that could have got worse about working in liveness in the UK, have got worse. These times are complex, and while there are very many things that we as writers of this feel fortunate for - living, never mind working, in the world today is really hard.

The collection of documents that now live under the umbrella title "*Producing Liveness in Interesting Times*" were written with the aim of being for producers who work in the live arts. However, many of them are about different forms of survival and principles for being in the world, no matter your role or sector - whether that's subverting your paid time, walking away when you recognise it's what is right for you, or pivoting the context of how you work to ensure you can continue to get by.

We've spent a really long time on this, way too long. We're really proud of it and proud that such knowledgeable, brilliant folk have agreed to be a part of it. However, the times we're in have been so interesting, so complex, so extreme that we don't know how to succinctly suggest that this could be of assistance to anyone without it sounding trite.

So we have nothing more to say on it. The documents can speak for themselves, and some of them might speak to you. We hope that it's interesting, or useful, or joyful in some way.

The opening text, as written in November 2021, when the world was really “opening back up”, projects were being rushed to fruition and we were feeling that little had changed.

We wanted to make something for independent producers.

For funding purposes, we said a handbook: practical tips, tricks and shortcuts. A simple and fairly low-cost way to reach as many producers as possible, with something that would hopefully be light-touch helpful.

Between us, we said a field guide: probably something practical but that in essence recognised that what producers really need is support, guidance, and a mate to try and map out what working in this field really means.

We don't know that it's exactly any of that, but it is a thing, a real thing and you're not the only one reading it. It's a thing for producers, and only for producers.

Not, producers-as-well.

Not, producers-might-need-to-know-on-behalf-of-their-artists.

Not, producers-are-welcome-to-submit-applications-to-the-artist-development-programme.

Just one small crease, of a small pocket, in the corner of the internet, just for producers.

You. The person trying to inhabit that in-between space of being entirely responsible and completely replaceable.

You know why we needed to make something for producers. Anyone who wrote other people's Emergency Response Fund applications before their own knows. Anyone who's cut their fee because of someone else's decision knows. Anyone who writes DYCP applications on a practically professional basis but cannot get funding for their own training knows.

Chances are you are a woman or non-binary or queer. Or all of those things. Not dissimilar to lots of other service-based jobs – carers, nursery practitioners, GP practice receptionists, mobile hairdressers.

Maybe you acknowledge your professional identity as someone who fights for the best for those they work with. Someone with responsibilities, who is across everything. Organised, strategic, thoughtful, careful, articulate and capable. Someone who knows the minutiae of relevant policy but can also be a right laugh. Someone who can ask for money without visible shame. Someone who cannot fail, who cannot be tired or sick (and who would ask anyway), who does not experience ill mental health. Someone who can spell. Someone who can contain all emotion. Someone who sounds important when they speak. Someone who listens without speaking. Someone who knows they don't have to be listened to. Someone who won't always be listed on the credits. Someone there's no need to thank. Someone who is both within the 'we', and outside of it. Someone who is definitely not 'the talent'. Both administrative and pastoral, important and impotent, desperately needed but a nuisance.

So here you are, and this is for you. We don't know exactly what it is, but we needed it, the writers within needed it and maybe you'll need it too. There is some practical information in here, because we're indoctrinated into capitalism enough to know that if there isn't the chance of something to take-away no one will bother with it. There's also a fair bit of anguish in here, and some dissent. You can skip through it, view it in any order, or ignore sections entirely. Maybe it will be useful for you, but whatever it is, it is for you.

The opening text, as written in November 2020, as more lockdowns seemed imminent, but glimpses of change within the industry and the world felt possible.

We've eaten all the beans, flushed the last sheet of toilet roll and moved into our pillow-fort bunkers, but it still doesn't quite seem to be the end yet.

Making something arty "happen" right now is almost laughable, but we're going to roll up our sleeves, pop on our masks, and take a big deep breath of our own recycled oxygen and work out how the fuck to take a next step.

Without sounding like we've totally detached from reality, this could be a golden moment to change things: the visibility of the freelance workforce; the persistence of some unbelievable and brilliant arts workers shouting loudly for better conditions; more meaningful relationships between organisations and freelancers; more accessible ways of working high on the agenda. It's a pregnant pause, and we both really want to explore its potentiality for addressing some of the shit we've all been dealing with for years.

2020 was...different, and 2021 looks to be much the same. Live performance will be altered for the foreseeable future. Smaller audiences, socially-distanced ways of working, increased international tariffs, and fewer opportunities and fees available from venues. Freelancers of all forms have had to adapt quickly, without resource, knowledge or skill in order to make money or not get left behind in the shuffle. Live work producers are trying their hand at new ways of working and finding that the answer to most things seems to contain the word digital. Have-a-go culture leaves artists and producers exposed and on the back foot, and could potentially do more harm than good.

In 2020 we had a go at a zine, a film, a novel, online talks, an exhibition and a web-based artwork. We had to make it up as we went along, it was stressful, things were missed, and we don't want to do that any longer. So thank fuck ACE gave us some money to think about better ways of working and to be able to share that in a publicly accessible form.

We're going to be speaking with organisations and freelancers who have made adaptations to their business as usual in order to keep making work happen. We want to find out what they've changed, what ideas we can learn from, what ideas we can borrow or steal and which of their mistakes we can try to not replicate. We've all been having to react and work differently and we feel we need to combine this individual learning as much as possible so that the wider ecology of artists and arts workers can benefit from it, use it, and better it.

We hope that this collection of writing and cheat-sheets for the ways in which people have swerved, shifted and kept shit happening will give you a collection of provocations for ways of working during the next inevitable political, financial or health shitstorm.

This work was commissioned by The Uncultured as part of their project, *Producing Liveness in Interesting Times*.

Producing Liveness in Interesting Times is a collection of writing, thinking and cheat-enabling works by Live Art and Performance Producers and Producer-adjacent arts workers who are working in the UK.

To explore other writings from *Producing Liveness in Interesting Times*, visit:
the-uncultured.com/pliit

Made with support from Battersea Arts Centre, Theatre Bristol and funded by Arts Council England.

Special thanks to all of the contributors; those who attended our LADA DIY: Doing, Undoing and...doing again; Shit's Hit The Fan bursary recipients Beccy D'Souza, Natalie Chan, Rafia Hussain and Siân Baxter; Alan Lane; Eve Veglio-Hüner; Kate Craddock; Book Works; The New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich; Producer Gathering; Regan Mott; Rob Sweeney; and Tracy Gentles.

the uncultured

The Uncultured (Ashleigh Bowmott + Laura Sweeney)
are arts independents working collaboratively
to produce, curate, facilitate and advocate.

the-uncultured.com
[@_TheUncultured_](#)