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To be published in *Dance Research* 41/1, 2023

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“Brexit put us in the fridge, Covid in the freezer”

The impact of Covid-19 and Brexit on UK freelance dance artists

Abstract: This article investigates how Covid-19 and Brexit have impacted the practices, finances and wellbeing of UK dance professionals, drawing on first-hand data collected in early 2021 from interviews, questionnaires and a panel discussion. The testimonies of freelance practitioners from different backgrounds, as well as key stakeholders from national institutions and organisations employing or otherwise interacting with freelancers, present bottom-up insights from the scene. Our research project more specifically explored the ramifications of the pandemic and Brexit, and the impact of these crises on the diversity of the UK dance scene (broadly construed). The voices and findings presented are framed by a discussion of the economic and political infrastructure of the so-called ‘creative industries’ in the country, with particular attention to the freelance creative labour model, risk and precarity. The article concludes by proposing a politics of small resistive steps which might help to mitigate these challenges, working from within the dance ecosystem.

Freelance professionals in the so-called creative industries operate in notoriously risky environments. Yet, while 70% of people working in the British theatre and performance fields are freelance, their plight has arguably been neglected – particularly so in the case of dance artists. On one hand, this may be due to their lack of a (collective) representation and voice, and on the other due to the dance industry’s relatively small size and comparatively modest amounts of public funding in relation to other creative or cultural sectors. The compounding crises of the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit, which temporally coincided in 2020 and 2021 (and whose effects are ongoing), had a detrimental impact on the already challenging careers of freelance professionals, and brought the fragilities of this group into sharp relief.

In this article, we critically investigate how agents in the dance field experienced what Hanna Madalska-Gayer, then OneDance UK’s advocacy manager, called “a double whammy” (Madalska-Gayer 2021) of crises, placing an unprecedented strain on individuals and the UK freelance dance scenes as a whole. A research project led by the University of Roehampton

(UK) in conjunction with the Paris-Lodron University of Salzburg (Austria), entitled *Dancing Through Crises*, examined the impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit by collecting bottom-up insights and original data from stakeholders in the field. Explicitly designed to collate the experiences of the grassroots, the project assembled the voices of a diverse array of agents within the UK dance infrastructure. These included a number of individual freelancers: people whose views have arguably been underrepresented in much institutional discourse, who offered a variety of perspectives. They encompassed British- and EU-born artists, practitioners from various age groups, dancers with diverse abilities, and artists of different ethnicities including artists of colour. We also spoke to a number of institutional figureheads, ranging from the directors of leading theatres (notably Sadler's Wells and The Place) and dance companies (Hofesh Shechter and Akram Khan Companies), to spokespeople for the Arts Council of England¹, various regional organizations and agencies from across the four UK nations, Dance Ireland, and The Freelance Task Force Dance Working Group which champions dance artists.

These testimonies were timely as the changes in working conditions engendered by Covid-19 and Brexit – the latter of which only came into full force in early 2021 with little or no notice of the exact terms of Britain's departure – had forced freelancers to take stock of their field. *Dancing Through Crises* revealed the structural problems and injustices of a system in which most of the workforce is comprised of freelancers. The concurrent crises of Covid-19 and Brexit foregrounded the professional dance scene's embeddedness within wider political and economic frameworks, including the already precarious conditions under which freelancers operate (Sommerlade 2018), and inequalities found throughout the field. Brexit and the pandemic illuminated cracks in the socio-economic model used throughout much of the cultural sector, which depends significantly on forms of flexible labour predicated on mobility, freedom and autonomy and a “normalization (and privatization) of risk and uncertainty” (McRobbie 2016, 15). This model was tested to the core at a moment when its founding assumptions were seriously undermined. Rules introduced during the pandemic entailed a loss of freedom and mobility in the form of stay-at-home orders, travel restrictions and lockdowns which (notwithstanding their indisputable physical health benefits) challenged assumptions of individual agency and civil liberties on which the system relied ideologically as well as structurally. Similarly, Brexit has significantly restricted flexibility and freedom of movement within the EU. While we are only just beginning to experience and understand its impact, our project considered how the erection of additional hurdles for British artists in accessing the

European Union, and vice versa, has already impacted freelancers' professional lives and is likely to do more in the near to medium-term.

This research is part of a wider project investigating the place of dance in the development, confirmation and subversions of Europe from the 20th century up until the present day, in which Brexit (and to a lesser extent Covid-19) represent watershed moments. Among others, we held a conference in Salzburg in 2020 and published an edited collection: *Dancing Europe: Identities, Languages, Institutions* (2022). Our experience has led us to take stock of our own positionalities in relation to this research. On one hand, both authors are continental Europeans, approaching the material in one case from an EU-based perspective outside the UK (but with knowledge of the British dance sector), and in the other from an insider-outsider perspective as someone who holds UK university degrees and has worked in the country for many years. On the other hand, in writing this article we have viewed the scene from quite privileged perspectives, both holding permanent and relatively stable professional roles as dance academics. We acknowledge that interrogating the freelance scenes was in many respects a steep learning curve for us, and in the process of conducting this research we became increasingly aware of how the freelance sector and the dance research community are intricately connected. Freelancers are often employed in university settings, either as visiting lecturers or on fixed part-time contracts, and bring specialist skills and cutting-edge subject expertise to higher-education dance programmes. Equally, freelancers benefit from academic research undertaken, especially events such as public panel discussions speaking to their concerns and written publications which are not paywalled. Thus, dance academics and freelancers form part of the same milieu and exist in a relationship of reciprocity and interdependence.

In analysing our findings and conclusions in this article, we will draw upon existing work on risk, vulnerability and precarity to elucidate the specific situation in which many freelancers find themselves. In contrast to previous work in sociological or cultural studies on related topics, which tends to present arguments in abstracted terms by drawing for instance on theory and policy documents, our investigation is underpinned by empirical evidence collected through a combination of fourteen hour-long, semi-structured expert interviews, an online questionnaire which received thirty-six responses,² and a panel discussion in March 2021 with key stakeholders from the dance scene.³ The project, whose main data were gathered between January and March 2021, received full ethical approval from the University of Roehampton.⁴

This article was preceded by and builds upon the publication of a 24-page research report which presents the conclusions of the project, detailing the impacts of both crises and proposing concrete policy recommendations for the medium-term future (Kolb, Haitzinger, Leon, Baybutt 2021). An online version can be found here.⁵ We also organised a high-profile dissemination event at the University of Roehampton in June 2022⁶, designed to influence policy-makers, and a recording of this is available on Youtube.⁷ We have made the research report available to a number of politicians across the political spectrum, notably from the All-Party Parliamentary Dance Group and the DCMS Select Committee, to influence decision-making and lobby for change, with our efforts complementing those of the freelance sector (see below) and other higher education institutions.⁸ We have also submitted our research report to the Policy Evidence Centre, to share with their consortium of researchers and freelance practitioners.

Through focusing on a specific national context and historical juncture, we seek to gain a sense of the UK dance infrastructure (predominantly) from within, presenting and examining the testimonies of its practitioners and other stakeholders as a means of understanding its configurations and challenges. We aim, in other words, to demonstrate how changes in the wake of Covid-19 and Brexit have concretely impacted the practices, finances and wellbeing of UK dance professionals, in particular noting their ramifications for the scene's diversity (broadly construed). Having identified the main challenges, we will gesture to possible routes towards mitigating them and creating new opportunities for artists, drawing on literature that details resistance to 'freelance' models of labour and sketching what we will term a 'politics of small steps', after what Gabriele Brandstetter (2012, 120), in turn alluding to Paul O'Neill, terms the "small acts" of politics that may lead to a more encouraging future.

This article is structured in three sections as follows: it first provides a summative overview of the pertinent arguments regarding risk, precarity, and contemporary models of creative labour which can be usefully applied to freelance dance professionals. Against this backdrop, it then presents the project data, drawing on a rich collection of voices from within the dance sphere, and accounting for issues that affect all or most freelance artists as well as the challenges faced by specific underrepresented or disadvantaged groups. Finally, we consider the small resistive steps that have already emerged in the wake of the compounding crises, and outline possible avenues for further positive change.

1. Unravelling the risks of the current creative work model

A number of the underlying economic, policy and philosophical issues with the prevailing model of work in the creative arts are addressed in existing scholarly and other research (see for instance Harvie 2013, Lorey 2015, Kunst 2015, McRobbie 2016). In the following, we offer a snapshot of some of their key points, which relate closely to observations raised in the course of our own project. The new work culture in which freelancers find themselves, branded in many discourses as part and parcel of neoliberal capitalism⁹, is noticeably distinct from previous modes of work which were predicated on stable and permanent positions of employment. While freelancers may take on contract work, they are essentially self-employed, and a freelancer's typical portfolio career entails a multitude of short-term jobs: moving from project to project or holding down several at once, often with periods of non-employment in between.

The increasing flexibilization of the workplace and employment markets, in particular in the hard-hit cultural sector due to the erosion of public (state-based) systems of support, is often seen to stem from the neoliberal Thatcher government's regency from the late 1970s onwards (see McRobbie 2016, 19). The notion of precarity has been used to capture this structural transformation in labour organisation. Freelancers are not employees, and their work has become individualised: each person is responsible for their own fate. Positions that were once publicly subsidised or funded by companies, including as dance critics and administrators, are now largely unsalaried roles performed by independent¹⁰ individuals on a freelance basis. As we will argue below, this brings significant risks on different levels – economically, politically, and aesthetically – which are not denied even by those who wholeheartedly embrace or propagate the model. The assessment and evaluation of these, however, is contentious and even in scholarly literature their treatment is nuanced.

Among the attractions of the new working regime for many young people at the beginning of their artistic careers is its flexibility; notably the choice over with whom and where to work, and the potential to develop specific interests and passions. As McRobbie says of the cultural industries, with a nod to governmental guidelines expounded in DCMS Green Papers¹¹, the mode of work is promoted as being exciting and freeing individuals from “bureaucracy and ‘red tape’” (McRobbie 2016, 29). This liberation of the workforce is proclaimed by Thatcherite and post-Thatcherite economics as making it more independent and autonomous from

traditional structures. In theory, it provides young people with greater scope to craft their own cultural and employment identities; frees women from traditional models of marriage and domesticity by giving them a choice of work patterns; and offers opportunities for upward mobility for ethnic minorities and other traditionally disadvantaged groups. We will examine in Section Two to what extent these stated aims correspond to the realities practitioners face.

For dance artists at least, risk is *per se* not an unattractive notion. As Kristine Sommerlade convincingly argues, calculated risk-taking is often part and parcel of their artistic identity, as “the theatre dance field attaches prestige and value to those who have a ‘different style’ and overthrow the existing order” (2018, 142). The vocabulary of ‘buzzwords’ embedded in the rhetoric of the new cultural industry model, such as innovation and an experimental mindset, is by no means alien to those in such fields. However, as Masquelier claims in his excellent essay, with allusions to Foucault’s text *The birth of biopolitics*, the system also “compels the individual to become an ‘entrepreneur of himself [*sic*]’ [...] by adopting the form of conduct seen to be the most appropriate for the challenges posed by the ‘dynamic of competition’” (Masquelier, 2019, 137). Consequently, individuals “come to ‘accept’ and adjust to the reality of personal responsibility, competition and precarious life” (Ibid.).

While flexibility may bring freedom and independence, this autonomous status also leads (freelance) workers into a precarious existence lived against the demanding backdrop of a market-based society (Masquelier 2019, 138-140). Their precarity in turn means that individuals are often pitted against each other and obliged to compete with their peers, leaving little space for collective action. Devoid of social and economic safety nets, such as union memberships, benefits including pension schemes with an employer’s contribution, and paid annual leave, they are essentially left to fend for themselves. Self-employed cultural workers are hence subject to constant fear of failure, for which, according to the new logic of work, they have only themselves to blame: as McRobbie (2016, 23) remarks, “Self-blame where social structures are increasingly illegible or opaque serves the interests of the new capitalism well, ensuring the absence of social critique”. The freedom promised by this new work culture thus constitutes a double-edged sword: the rewards of success as an entrepreneur are considerable, but so are the penalties for (perceived) shortcomings.

Other commentators, including theatre and performance scholar Jen Harvie, have highlighted the problematic underpinnings of the idea of artistic entrepreneurialism and its propagation (as

desirable) of traits such as risk-taking and innovation. Harvie's book was published in 2013 when the Coalition-led government had recently taken office, and was engaged in significant cuts to spending on the arts. The policies of the previous New Labour governments (which lost power in 2010) had emphasised the economic efficiency of markets whilst also making significant investments in the UK creative industries as a potential area of growth in a post-manufacturing economy. Yet as Harvie recognises, even under this regime artists and culture were "*instrumentalised* as economically important" (2013, 64, our emphasis). This instrumentalisation required the arts to become more business-orientated, rather than focusing on their critical, aesthetic or social contributions. Tellingly, Harvie draws on an example from the visual arts, Damien Hirst – reportedly the UK's richest living artist – to illustrate the level of economic potential New Labour assigned to the arts industry. This is a world apart from dance, which, as one of our respondents – Anne-Galle Thiriot – remarked, "in the arts tends to be the last child" (Thiriot 2021). Despite recognising some benefits of the entrepreneurial artist model, Harvie takes a critical stance overall, admonishing the 'artepreneur's' individualist outlook and emphasis on self-interest, as artists are compelled to prioritise themselves over others in competition for recognition and funding, and the relentless pursuit of productivity and profit (*ibid.*, 63). These, as she argues, damage the social fabric, creating inequality, uneven and unfair distributions of income, and divisiveness as opposed to egalitarianism and the pursuit of a "collective good" (*ibid.*, 64).

McRobbie's treatment of the creative industries also focuses on the self-employment regime and its propagation of an "individualized outlook" (2016, 23). Publishing three years later, against a fast-moving political backdrop in which first the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition, and then a majority Conservative government had overseen a significant reduction in public support structures (both economic and ideological), McRobbie paints an altogether bleaker picture of the arts' relevance in governmental thinking. Instead of being instrumentalised economically, by this time they had already begun to be relegated to the margins: "After all the hype of the Blair years the DCMS has, in 2014, once again returned to the shadows of government, denuded of power and influence, without as much as a sign of an artist on the web pages" (McRobbie 2016, 62). Fast-forwarding another six years, in a now infamous advert published by HM Government in 2020 in the midst of the pandemic, a ballet dancer, 'Fatima' (not her real name) was blatantly advised to retrain and reskill. The advert, depicting a ballet dancer tying up her pointe shoes, reads: "Fatima's next job could be in cyber (she just doesn't know it yet). Rethink. Reskill. Reboot" (Jordan 2020). While this was

pulled soon afterwards, the message it contained was, clearly, that her job was not worth saving. Might this be seen as an apt example of Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti and Leticia Sabsay's critique of "forms of institutionalized violence that render certain populations disposable" (Butler, Gambetti, Sabsay, 2016, 5)? "There are", as one of our panel members remarked, "lots of questions and fears about the fragility of independent artists' practices" (Moore 2021).

2. Voices from the dance scenes

Challenging economies

In the words of Sir Alistair Spalding, Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Sadler's Wells, one of the world's leading dance organisations: "This [Covid-19] crisis has shown a lot of weakness in the performing arts, and one of the biggest is that 70% of the workforce is freelance and they're extremely vulnerable" (Spalding 2021). The effects of the pandemic tested the viability of freelancing as a career path to its very limit, even before the full ramifications of Brexit have been felt. Despite differences in their respective positions and divergences over how to navigate the terrain, all respondents to our project agreed that Covid-19 hit freelancers particularly hard. Qualitative answers to our online survey reflect the extent of the perceived devastation: "As a freelancer dance in all forms is dead, we can't train, rehearse, perform or create – nothing"; "The independent dance sector has been decimated" (Kolb et al, 2021). In a sphere already noted for its precarity (see for instance Kunst 2015 & Sommerlade 2018), the effective halt on employment, cancellation of tours and performances, lack of access to studio space, loss of secondary jobs, delays and cancellations of funding applications, and the fact that many had little or no financial "cushion" (Kolb et al 2021), vastly exacerbated levels of deprivation.

While the UK put in place various policy measures for the creative industries during the pandemic (Towse 2021), their merits were strongly questioned and varyingly perceived by our respondents. While permanent staff could be furloughed, freelancers, as several noted, 'fell through the cracks' as they were not covered by furlough schemes, and many were also ineligible for the SEISS (Self-Employment Income Support Scheme) if, for example, they had only recently graduated or had "quit their full-time employment to become self-employed" (Anonymous A 2021). In consequence, a number found themselves "on the breadline" (Lansley

2021)¹², and some had to move back in with parents or rely on partners. Some artists left the country altogether – as one respondent testified: “Dear friends and colleagues have moved to other parts of the world because it wasn’t sustainable for them being here any longer, which is a combination of Brexit and Covid, one amplifying the other” (Anonymous D 2021).

The Culture Recovery Grant, administered by the Arts Council and financed by governmental and National Lottery funds, aimed at “safeguarding nationally significant cultural and heritage organisations” (Cebr report 2020, p). One respondent, who prefers to remain anonymous, commented that it was not easy to find ways to incorporate freelancers’ fees within this subsidy (Anonymous C 2021), corroborating economist Ruth Towse’s prediction that post-Covid support measures were likely disproportionately to benefit the dance profession’s traditional ‘elite’, represented by national institutions such as the Royal Ballet (Towse 2020). Thus, the crisis revealed a rift in the sector itself between individuals (freelancers) and larger established companies and institutions. While by intent, a significant amount of the support grants awarded to companies might have been expected to be spent on freelancers too, in reality, as interviewee Anita Clark, Director of The Work Room in Glasgow, admonished:

It kind of came in this way that it trickled down, and there have been instances where that’s maybe worked and been really useful, but again the big budgets went to big organisations that were in crisis mode, and are still in crisis mode, are surviving by having lots of staff on furlough, and actually, probably didn’t have the capacity to carefully hold all that, and so it has become quite polarised [...] It is the capitalist trickle-down model that has failed all over the shop, so why are we perpetuating it? (Clark 2021).

Even those larger institutions that recognized the needs of their freelance workforce had limited ability to support them. As Sir Alistair Spalding explained, since Sadler’s Wells has a “80% dependence” on audiences and ticket sales and is thus heavily reliant on live attendees, they were placed “in a big financial hole, so we weren’t in a position to be very generous to the freelancers that we had to let go on some of these projects” (Spalding 2021). Leading company director Hofesh Shechter similarly noted that while productions could be moved online, “the digital space means we can’t pay freelancers more because we don’t get the revenues coming in, so their careers and their livelihoods are compromised severely” (Shechter 2021). It was acknowledged that while there were benefits to the shift towards digital formats in terms of increasing and diversifying audiences – augmenting both reach and accessibility – it did not

provide an adequate income stream (not to mention foregoing the benefits of in-person engagement and the embodied nature of the profession).

Added to the actual financial challenges and frustrated efforts of many dance artists to sustain themselves during the pandemic, further issues were raised about the ways in which financial support, where it was available, was labelled and channeled, and what this revealed about the (external) perception of artists. Anita Clark, for instance, levelled criticism at the pejorative labelling of financial support for creative freelancers: “how it’s been branded in the last while has been under ‘hardship’, whereas the funding for organizations has been talked about as ‘cultural recovery’” (Clark 2021). She poignantly argued that the rhetoric used to describe individuals seeking support associated them with failure and deprivation; they thus were tarnished with an image of vulnerability, as a victimized population who needed charitable protection. This rather contradicts the euphemistic talk of the freelance model ‘liberating’ artists from traditional constraints; not to mention undermining claims that the artistic and cultural industries are an economic powerhouse (albeit that these are less frequently heard since the New Labour era).

It may well be the case that freelancers find it difficult to voice concerns about the precariousness of their careers during ‘normal times’ or what Angela Woodhouse termed “the ‘fragility of the independent dance sector in the sense of resources’” (Woodhouse 2021), and hence these issues have often remained invisible. Indeed, one of our interviewees referred to challenges such as the impossibility of affording a mortgage. In a work culture where one has, at least in theory, a choice of multiple options, in the freelance universe the promotion of self-identity, autonomy and personal success is of crucial importance. Admitting vulnerability goes against the grain of both neoliberal ideology (where it is someone’s fault if they fail) and certain idealised notions of artistry, where creative labourers are seen as non-conformists and do not, or should not, adhere to societal or political conventions. Jacky Lansley, the Artistic Director of Dance Research Studio, expressed a somewhat ironic stance on this point: “The freelancer is often regarded as the radical outsider and alternative. What does this mean? That you just don’t get paid, you know [laughter], or that the Conservative Party are terrified of us” (Lansley 2021). Yet the escalation of insecurities during the pandemic went hand in hand with a greater willingness on the part of dance professionals to open up as regards these issues. As one respondent admitted, “the uncertainties are influencing me in that I am panicking a lot”

(anonymous A 2021), before reflecting further that “The general feeling is a lot of panic and a lot of depression [...] quite heart-breaking” (ibid.).

Another possible effect of the dire financial situation has been a (re-)emphasis on the more competitive elements within the dance profession. This corroborates Masquelier’s argument that the new labour economy, in which workers operate independently, leads to their perceiving each other as rivals for jobs, status, money and so on, rather than colleagues with whom they share commonalities. As Karl Jay-Lewin, Creative Director of Dance North Scotland, remarked:

There is so much polarisation going on in the world at the moment, and I felt it with the freelancers the other day, they were turning on friends and colleagues. It wasn’t really easy to identify, but it was just felt, I felt there was this kind of divide and rule mentality [...] I think there is lots of raging going on at the moment [...]. There is a lot of anger amongst freelancers, understandably, and sometimes I was getting confused where the blame was being apportioned. And when I suddenly felt like a victim, like I was being attacked, I felt like going ‘I get only four days a week and [am] also an artist’, ‘Pity, don’t attack me, I’m one of you’ kind of things. (Jay-Lewin 2021).

We can interpret the rift between freelance artists and those who are salaried (and thus perceived as being somehow unfairly advantaged) as a consequence of the new individualized economy – which not only leads to people blaming themselves if something goes wrong, but also their peers. Yet, as this is clearly unproductive in terms of effecting change for all, we will try to show how such anger can be channeled more usefully by identifying possible avenues for change in our concluding section.

Mobility, bureaucracy and Brexit

Our interview data confirmed that for a number of people, freelancing is a lifestyle choice and a range of participants did, in various respects, fully embrace the mobility it offers: professionally, geographically, and aesthetically. One respondent, who runs an inclusive company, mentioned that “as an independent dance artist I work for other people, and I enjoy the diversity that that affords me as a freelancer and being able to move between different things and work for different people” (Anonymous D 2021). Hofesh Shechter, who in our

interview was generally critical of the insecurities that accompany a freelance career, nonetheless said of his former own experience that “I loved that it was short stints of work, and I had this philosophy: if the project is great, then amazing, if it’s horrible then it has a time limit and you know it’s going to finish.” (Shechter no date). Another independent artist remarked on how their lifestyle, prior to the crises, was highly cosmopolitan in terms of international travel:

I’m very lucky, I have a very rare career in how much I work internationally. I didn't have a home or a fixed address for the first two and a half years after I left (*a European school where they did postgraduate study in choreography*). I was going all over the world so the combination of Brexit and Covid has suddenly shut that lifestyle down and I don't think I know anybody else who had that particular lifestyle, literally nomadic. (Anonymous A 2021).

Some of the downsides of this degree of flexibility were, of course, revealed when the pandemic struck: having led such a ‘nomadic’ existence, a number of freelancers had nowhere to go to weather the storm. On the other hand, most interviewees deemed the effects of the pandemic on travel and mobility to be time-limited. Brexit, by contrast, was seen as both more impactful and as having longer-lasting effects, which potentially endanger the cultural industries as a whole. The following quotes give a flavour of respondents’ views:

“The whole creative sector in the UK is threatened by not having access to these locations, environments, opportunities within Europe.” (Chaudhry 2021).

“Brexit is a long-term problem. If we don’t sort mobility out, it’s a huge problem for our industry.” (Hansford no date).

“[F]or the long-term impact of Brexit [...] that is an eroding of opportunity, and the work opportunity and the financial opportunity and what that means in terms of artistic collaboration and exchange as well.” (Clark 2021).

With the Immigration Act being signed into law in late 2020, free movement between the UK and other EU countries ended on 31st December of that year, following a transition period of eleven months after the official date of Brexit. Different challenges have presented themselves

for medium-to-larger companies and theatres, and for individual freelancers. For the former, primary concerns relate to cabotage rules, dwindling interest and subsequent lack of funding from European co-producers due to rising costs, in particular those involved in tackling questions of visas and employment law: "...with Brexit comes a whole tsunami of [...] additional bureaucracy and paperwork and complexity in terms of tax, and social security and freight cabotage rules. And it may be that these partners [...] start to think over time: you know what, it's too much of a hassle to work with a British company" (Chaudhry 2021). Of course, this also impacts on the freelancers whom the companies employ, and it is also likely to have considerable effects on diversity, as will be discussed below.

Freelance individuals or founders of very small companies (micro-businesses in economic parlance) are also worried about administrative hurdles, notably the complex visa, work and passport rules which differ from country to country¹³, which make touring across Europe a more complex and hence time-consuming venture. As Assis Carreiro from the Freelance Task Force explained: "The biggest challenge in the future is what touring looks like and what touring means, because if you tour to one country in the future in Europe, it will be a very different scenario than having to tour in three or four countries because every European country has different rules and regulations and none of us quite knows that they are" (Carreiro 2021).¹⁴ This disadvantages smaller companies and individuals as these preparations add to the invisible, unpaid time spent preparing for shows, tours or events, placing more risk and responsibility on their shoulders and making touring, and possibly their international careers as a whole, less viable. In practice, as choreographer Rita Marcalo attested, her small company (Instant Dissidence) "can't afford to jump through all the hoops" that are required to "tour to the EU with UK artists" (Marcalo 2021). Assis Carreiro added that "If you don't have an administrator and you're a freelancer it is really hellish unless the company hosting is going to do all the paperwork for you" (Carreiro 2021).

A second-order effect of the new restrictions has been the increased reluctance of EU-based companies to employ British dance artists, due to Brexit-induced costs and bureaucracy. As one anonymous interviewee told us:

Organisations in European countries are already not sure if they want to invite people to audition [...] I certainly have noticed a change in the contacts that I am trying to make

and the relationships I am trying to build – there is something very very unsure, people aren't as good at replying to emails (Anonymous A 2021).

Anxieties are thus mounting over whether the “awareness that I am a British/British-based artist [is] blocking their decision to work with me or not” (Anonymous A 2021). Perusing online job adverts in the field, it is apparent that more and more European dance organisations mention an EU passport as a requirement for application.¹⁵ As Hofesh Shechter commented, such as trend potentially foreshadows “a disaster for [...] all the British students in schools hoping to get jobs. It's heart-breaking, literally if you can't get a job in the whole of Europe, or some of Europe - it's quite crazy” (Shechter 2021).

By way of contrast, it was interesting to hear independent artist Adam Moore's perspective on the opportunity to work overseas, expressed in response to Assis Carreiro:

Assis [...] said ‘before we were travelling wherever we wanted to’, and I find that really interesting because I wasn't, and I know many other artists from various different intersections with thoughts about the financial critical issues, and for them it's always been a critical issue – finances have never not been a critical issue (Moore 2021).

It is noteworthy here how the perceived effects of changes may differ between groups of artists, albeit unusually in this case the *more* disadvantaged (economically) appear to suffer *less* from new restrictions on mobility, as they did not have the financial means to be mobile in the first place. While the nomadic lifestyle of artists is typically seen as encapsulating freedom and self-empowerment, Moore's comment illustrates that in reality, as Butler puts it, “freedom can only be exercised if there is enough support for the exercise of freedom, a material condition that enters into the act that it makes possible” (2014, 2). For someone who lacks the funds to travel (nationally or internationally), the freedom to do so is only theoretical, hence additional legal or administrative hurdles make little difference in practice.

On the other hand, the claim by political advocates of the freelance labour model – that it enables ‘upward mobility’ – may be called into question on grounds that it excludes those whose family or financial backgrounds cannot contribute to the basics of successful networking, for instance at the level of education or professional contacts. Individualisation, in other words, does not guarantee opportunity or flexibility of career paths, which depend on the

underlying social and financial means of support each individual can draw upon. As these in turn are unequally distributed between different groups of artists, the freelance model fails to eradicate injustices based on factors such as ethnicity, class or gender. As McRobbie argues (2016, 30), “Age, gender, ethnicity, region and family income re-emerge like phantoms [...] from the disguised hinterland of this new soft capitalism and add their own weight to the life chances of those who are attempting to make a living”; shifting, rather than eliminating their challenges and arguably making them harder to pinpoint. This leads appositely into our next area of discussion.

Diversity at stake

An important aspect of the research project was how to assess the effects of Brexit and Covid-19 on the diversity of the (freelance) scenes. This included consideration of what the data revealed about the assessment and distribution of risks according to an individual’s specific circumstances and position within the dance ecology, though it also threw up questions of funding, audience demographics and geography. A major insight we could draw from our findings was that both crises were understood by most participants as posing risks to diversity. The most-cited concern was their impact on under-represented groups of artists, including people “from lower economic backgrounds, women or female-identifying performers, non-binary performers, black artists” (Moore 2021).¹⁶ It was also flagged in discussions that several other groups, such as freelancers with children (especially mothers), older artists, and people with disabilities were also seen to be disproportionately affected, although for reasons of space we will allude to them here only in passing. Our interviews and panel discussion coincided with the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder and the ensuing protests, so the Black Lives Matter campaign was at the forefront of many respondents’ minds. The coronavirus lockdowns (as one of their few beneficial side-effects) gave more time for reflection on these significant global movements, as was noted by many respondents who highlighted the pandemic’s impact on people of colour. The second group most frequently mentioned in our discussions and questionnaires were young professionals: emerging artists who had only recently graduated or just started their career. We will return imminently to the specific challenges faced by these two groups, but before doing so will outline, in summative form, other concerns raised around diversity.

One intriguing emergent theme was the allocation of public funding through the Arts Councils representing the four constituent nations of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). “It is an absolute imperative”, one figure from a major arts organisation remarked, that subsidy “reflects the people of [the nation] in the sense that it’s their bloody money” (Anonymous C 2021). When taxpayers’ contributions are at stake, it is paramount that the distribution of funds – as well as programming and policies – correspond to the priorities of a broad section of the population(s); a concern which can only be heightened in a climate of (likely) dwindling resources post-Brexit and the pandemic. One respondent self-critically raised the issue of representative art by pointing to what he felt was the arts sector’s one-sided engagement with the agendas and values of the liberal middle-class, and by implication its lack of understanding or concern for the views of working-class communities. He used the 52%-48% Brexit referendum vote, which as numerous analyses have shown was strongly demarcated according to economic, social and educational parameters,¹⁷ to highlight an implicit class bias among artistic circles:

For me voting for Brexit is nonsensical, so then I have to think if half the country voted for it, it makes one realise the bubble that one’s in. I think it’s a wake-up call to many of the liberal middle classes in England: how much we don’t listen or empathise to the working class in this country. [...] Our values are intellectual and aesthetic and people [...] indulge in that [...] It’s not that simple because there are people making magnificent work in the UK which is specifically aimed at a wider audience, so I’m being very simplistic, but contemporary dance is certainly a bubble [...] (Anonymous A 2021).

The challenge of producing demographically representative work, and catering to non-traditional audiences in particular, also has geographical ramifications. The social divide in British society is to some extent reflected in regional polarisation, with both traditional and new working-class voters, and is termed the “precarariat” tending disproportionately to live outside of London and South-East England (SAGE 2013). Placing greater emphasis on areas other than the South-East has been part of the current government’s ‘levelling up’ agenda, which aims at spreading opportunities more equally across the UK, in particular to “forgotten communities” (Government 2022). This follows, of course, a significant period of underinvestment and cuts to (arts) funding, including in the North of England, which caused some of the stated disparities in the first instance. As Hannah Madalska-Geyer of OneDance UK remarked, rectifying the imbalances may well necessitate more future cross-regional

collaboration: “something that we’re also working very hard on in terms of that joined upness whether that’s across the UK, including all of the nations across the UK and not just England obviously, [or] cross sector” (Madalska-Geyer 2021).

Domestic networking may also be important as a way of mitigating the projected decline of international networks and collaboration in the wake of Brexit. Eddie Nixon, Artistic Director of The Place, sounded a note of caution about the consequences of waning numbers of EU students and professionals at UK dance institutions and companies:

It’ll change the demographic of cohorts of students who study here together and graduate together and the networks of those students. People who do make it here – they also might not stick about. They will perhaps gravitate towards other places, where it might be easier to practise, where the economic circumstances are better for them to practise, their movement can be a bit easier or freer. [...] It’s something that you can only calculate over decades, about [...] how the creative pollen of a scene becomes different, becomes more homogenous somehow. (Nixon 2021).

Nixon’s concern for diversity relates partly to the breadth of cultural backgrounds, languages and styles that in future will (or rather will not) feed into the UK dance sector, which is in turn likely to impact the variety and quality of its output. A similar theme was picked up by Farooq Chaudhry:

So arts and culture is about relevance and one of the ways for it to be relevant is to be able to be dynamic, to be diverse, to keep challenging, to keep bringing in new perspectives. So if it suffers through this it can start to just stop taking risks, being safe, pulling back, regurgitating old narratives because they can’t find new ones anymore. And this is the probably biggest existential threat: it’s not so much about the business, it’s also about the art itself. (Chaudhry 2021).

If Chaudhry is right, the exploration of experimental forms is at risk of being replaced by a tendency to more ‘tried-and-tested’, commercially driven programming choices in order to secure box-office revenue. What is at stake are not only the careers of individual freelancers, but the advancement of the genre in terms of developing new styles or movement languages, and hence the diversity of the British dance scene as a whole.

Alongside these broader conceptions of diversity, there was an emphasis among many respondents on the vulnerability or marginalisation of two sections of the freelance population in particular: emerging artists, and artists of colour. It was notable in both these discussions how real-life experiences seemed to reflect and illuminate ideas discussed in existing literature, including Lorey and Butler’s arguments that experiences and perceptions of precarity and vulnerability differ according to each person’s social position or grouping. Age, class, gender, race and ethnicity, physical ability and other identity markers shape individuals’ perceptions of, and responses to, the socio-economic circumstances with which they are faced. Theories of intersectionality also seemed pertinent to a number of responses, as will be indicated below.

For emerging artists, a common question was how to cater for their needs and help them thrive in an environment where it is increasingly difficult to profile their work on international (especially EU) stages. It is widely recognised that for young artists’ career trajectories, shaping and developing their artistic practices alongside – or under the tutelage of – more established practitioners is a key to entering and establishing positions for themselves in the field. As Kristine Sommerlade writes, in acknowledgement of Bourdieusian theories, “Newcomers to the field, for example, have to meet codified entry requirements through auditions or other forms of screenings which require them to showcase live and/or recorded samples of their work”. This is partly because they require recognition by “established dance artists and teachers who hold legitimised positions in the field’s hierarchy”, who as “gatekeepers can validate a dance artist’s accrued physical, symbolic and cultural capital” (2018, 83).

In the panel discussion in March 2021, it was suggested that young artists will be less likely to receive invitations to present their work in European Union countries due to the additional red-tape, and apprehension was voiced about whether the increased costs of booking them will be seen as justifiable when measured against box office returns. Assis Carreiro remarked that “the biggest challenge is [...] emerging freelancers who don’t have a big file of reviews and videos of their work, so it is much more difficult to justify why they should have the work and not someone from [their own] country [...]” (Carreiro 2021). In a similar vein, Virve Sutinen, Artistic Director of the International Festival in Berlin, *Tanz im August*, recognised the need to

secure this exchange between the artists, especially the young and emerging artists, because for their career this feels devastating that the gates are closing and the thresholds

are getting higher for anyone to travel or to develop your thinking and your work in a more international context. (Sutinen 2021).

Both Carreiro and Suttinen refer to the importance of the dance scene's networking structure for young professionals in particular, who they surmised could miss out on important opportunities to publicise their work outside the UK, secure the backing of arts organisations, and build their portfolios and reputations. In the medium- to long-term, this is likely to affect the dance sector as a whole since networking and knowledge exchange, which are part and parcel of the European touring and festival circuit, are important factors driving innovation and experimentation.

Race and ethnicity was another major focus of discussions on diversity throughout the project.¹⁸ For some dance professionals, the pandemic and death of George Floyd had triggered greater awareness of their privilege as white artists, whilst for several participants it presented an opportunity (as one black British respondent put it) to “take in things a little bit more and realise there is so much systemic challenge”, in recognition that “contemporary dance is [...] a very white middle class art form” (Anonymous B 2021). Covid-19, as several sources highlighted, had a more severe impact on people from ethnic minority backgrounds because the socio-economic situation of these groups was often more challenging to begin with: “Artists who don't have anyone or anything to fall back on”, one institutional respondent remarked, are more likely to leave the profession (Anonymous C 2021). It was seen as important to acknowledge differential levels of vulnerability and their replication in working conditions:

What we see writ large across society is the people who are in the most vulnerable conditions are often those who are marginalised by other characteristics, who have had the least privileged upbringing and had experienced poverty and marginalisation, and how structures replicate [themselves] and therefore how they end up in the most financially precarious employment positions (Clark 2021).

Clark's comment echoes Butler's claim that “vulnerability and invulnerability have to be understood as politically produced, unequally distributed through and by a differential operation of power” (Butler 2016, 5). In a similar vein to Clark, Alistair Spalding highlighted that artists from socially deprived areas, who also tend to be “more diverse in terms of [...] ethnic diversity”, will be “hardest hit” as they are often disadvantaged in terms of education:

[They] don't get the support necessarily to go through education that other middle-class people would do, people from other sectors of society. [...] The situation with education and what's going to happen with young people coming through is really going to damage the prospects in that way as well. (Spalding 2021).

Clark and Spalding draw connections between black and minority ethnic groups, poverty, and educational outcomes, suggesting these factors need to be considered together rather than in isolation. It is useful here to draw on the concept of intersectionality which holds that processes of marginalisation and inequality can be explained by interlocking frameworks of power and oppression. It was developed by black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who realised that black women faced intersectional discrimination on the basis of both race *and* gender, leading to greater exclusion than either (white) women or (black) men experience. She argued that the “the failure to interrogate patriarchy in anti-racism, the failure to interrogate racism and feminism [...] continue to shape modern politics.”. If not addressed and contested together, racism and patriarchy “often wind up reinforcing each other” (Crenshaw 2016), and the problem with much identity politics is that “it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (Crenshaw 1991, 1242). The concept of intersectionality has now been expanded to include other layers of social identity such as class, nationality, disability, age, and so on.

Artist Rita Marcalo in our panel discussion made comparable links between different elements of social identity, which in combination shape the impact of socio-economic adversity on each individual. In her view, a significant obstacle to career development is “how much time when you're an emerging artist, if you are from a particular socioeconomic background, you have to spend on a regular job to pay the bill” (Marcalo 2021); the implication being that those who are more established in the field or have greater means are intrinsically advantaged, by being more able to focus on their art. The particular challenges of being an emerging artist may thus intersect with economic status, which in turn has a correlation with ethnicity.

As another respondent maintained, the link between ethnicity and income becomes more evident in situations of crises:

I'm black, I'm gay, and I'm an older dance artist who performs, that's my intersection. If I think statistically, people of colour earn less than our white counterparts for doing the same jobs, so if there is Covid and Brexit happening, it's going to diminish your

income and be more detrimental to people of colour as well [...] because I suppose that people of colour are not going to be in the higher echelons of society and the tops of [...] like OneDance UK. They might not be the CEO of it, they might be workers there, but not getting the top bucks. Same in conservatoires or lecturing in dance, so I suppose there is going to be a knock-on effect on income (anonymous B 2021).¹⁹

When dealing with forms of oppression or disadvantage, two issues further were brought up. Whilst it was acknowledged that efforts have been made by funding organisations such the Arts Councils to protect diversity through the dissemination of grants, including strategic funding to groups such as “black and minority ethnic applicants” (Equality 2016, 6), the ways these have been administered and channeled through targeted pots of funding was viewed critically by a number of respondents, especially those of colour. One raised an issue of ethnic stereotyping in which different people are ‘lumped together as having certain issues’, and suggested some funding bodies award subsidies to artists of colour *merely* on the grounds of their racial identity rather than the merit of their work:

You get pigeon-holed, I can only do ‘Black art’ to do with slavery or civil rights, and that’s necessary, but my friends and I are like what if I want to make a piece about daffodils? Why does the work have to be in Black History month, or maybe Chinese New Year [...]? Is there pots of funding if I go into my slave trauma? [...] It feels sometimes as if ‘oh but we’re not looking for that today, you need to fit here’ to get that pot of money or even to be recognised in that art form. (Anonymous B 2021).

The requirement to fit into a ‘corset’ of protected characteristics arguably mitigates against artistic freedom and agency, if it incorporates a requirement to produce particular types of art or address specific themes. Admittedly, some respondents viewed the issue pragmatically: one noted that as a mixed-race, bisexual woman with a disability, she had benefited from the strategic approach to funding – wryly commenting that “I am aware I tick a good few boxes” (Anonymous D 2021). However, the way in which artists are categorised according to specific demographics and types of discrimination was flagged as problematic and reductionist by others. One participant pointed to its potentially exclusionary nature: “it’s very challenging [...] when you start to talk about specific protected characteristics and identity politics, it is at the risk that you exclude some in favour of others” (Anonymous C 2021). While our project revealed almost universal support for a more diverse dance sector, there was less clarity over

what exactly this means and how best to achieve it: conceptions of diversity were themselves highly diverse. There was some common recognition, though, of a link between the promotion of diversity and the economic backdrop; the latter being clearly impacted by the concurrent crises. For the future, enhancing equality and inclusion in UK dance may require a reconsideration of existing structures of funding and finance. As Eddie Nixon bluntly put it: “Equity costs money. If you want to achieve equity you’ve got to remove the resources from where they are [...] To really consider these ideas about access and inclusion, the resources have to be spent differently” (Nixon 2021).²⁰

3. A politics of small steps

What, then, can be done to tackle the various challenges outlined in previous sections? A number of solutions were proposed during our discussions. Some of them would require significant large-scale changes to address current deficiencies in artists’ security and welfare networks. These in turn would typically require significant state support, organisationally or financially, such as a system similar to the French *intermittent* (Spalding 2021),²¹ the *passport talent* (Thiriot no date),²² or a universal basic income to combat precarity in situations like the pandemic. With regard to Brexit in particular, new agreements around touring, work permits and visas are needed to alleviate the current barriers to freedom of movement. This depends on changes or adaptations to the post-Brexit settlement between the UK and EU, which hinges on political decisions at higher institutional or Political (with a capital ‘P’) levels.

In this section, however, we seek to investigate the ‘small steps’ that could shift the *status quo ante* of the dance industry primarily from within. The idea of bottom-up, incremental acts is discussed by dance theorist Gabriele Brandstetter in her 2012 essay *Written on Water: Choreographies of the Curatorial*, and (separately and in a different context) by Isabell Lorey, who in *State of Insecurity* calls for “permanent singular refusals, the small sabotages and resistances of precarious everyday life” (2015, 111) to subvert neoliberal systems. In accordance with these theorists, we will explore how our respondents proposed, and at times had already implemented, new and initially small-scale ways of collaborating, sharing, and disseminating knowledge within the dance ecology to effect change in the UK dance sector. Whilst as noted earlier, inequalities in the structure of dance practice and production in terms of income, job status and identity became all too apparent during the crises, our research also revealed possible avenues of resistance and the potential to build different, less hierarchical

structures. There are several overlapping issues here. On one hand, respondents proposed changes of an attitudinal kind, meaning they centred on building different kinds of communities and systems of care as an antithesis to current individualised market conditions in which artists compete to assert themselves. Others advocated a rethinking of and about the structures of the dance ecosystem, suggesting pragmatic acts which enshrine new ways of operating in the field and may improve the situation of freelance professionals at various levels. Many of these were triggered by, or emerged in the wake of, the pandemic.

Traditional bodies of organised labour, such as trade unions, have little role in the kind of labour economy that has developed in the dance sector, and it may be argued that the wider political shift away from a social democratic model strongly favours the interest of employers. As Isabell Lorey observes: “There are no lobbies or forms of representation for the diverse precarious” (2015, 9). As we noted earlier, the competitive environment in which freelancers operate can at times lead to ill-will between practitioners and strife within the community, exacerbated by a scarcity of resources. This raises the question of what can and should take the place of unions and other forms of formalised collective bargaining. In addition to Lorey, a number of authors have explored avenues of resistance to the status quo, foremost among them Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Charles Masquelier. The discussion of how resistance is possible under the current regime of work revolves around the identification of counterpoints to the individualisation and increasing isolation with which such work is commonly associated.

Butler et al identify the lack of a collective voice as a crucial issue and call for the development of “new modes of collective agency that do not deny vulnerability as a resource” (Butler, Gambetti & Sabsay 2016, 7). Some of these appear heavily reliant on congregations in public spaces, in the form of demonstrations or other physical manifestations of collective solidarity, to counteract the precarity experienced by individuals. These may or may not be an effective way to address the specific concerns of dance freelancers. Yet in opposing both the construal of a person as fully autonomous, and traditional ideas of ‘protection’ (which are seen as confirming existing structures of dominance and submission), Butler importantly recognises the relational character of vulnerability – that is, its dependence on one’s degree of acceptance and support by others. Looser networks, notwithstanding their relative weakness in protecting labour rights and lobbying employers, have the potential to create a more collective culture to combat the culture of individualism and (by some respondents’ own admissions) self-interested

attitudes which lead artists compete for resources and status, rather than genuinely collaborating across their field.

In contrast to visual artists, who as Lansley remarks often prefer to work in a solitary fashion (“people like a visual artist or a writer want[ing] to work in their own time at their own pace” (Lansley 2021), dance professionals are typically already engaged in collaborations and networks. Networking has indeed become even more crucial in a climate of dwindling resources and state support, but the challenge is to create new forms of coming together and togetherness, not in the traditional political sense but in terms of acknowledging relationality with others: building what Lorey calls “practices of care” (2015, 97) or, as Butler puts it, “bodies in alliance” (Butler 2011) against the (arguably) fetishized notion of the artist as an autonomous individual. Such forms of organisation focus less on the need for protection (e.g. paternalistic support of a higher-ranked dance institution or government body), and more on consolidating important connections within the dance ecology itself. As Karen Wood insightfully argues, “being part of a collective and recognising that the voice of that community is louder together than individually, gives power and acknowledgment to that community” (2021, 606).

There is clearly a danger that strained resources in both the freelance sector and higher-education institutions, which are often powerhouses of dance research, will also negatively affect relationships within the field, and in their wake, stakeholders’ positionalities (including our own as professors of dance studies). When one of these communities is weakened, so will be the other(s) – for instance due to lower potential audiences, fewer creative inputs, or reduced theoretical underpinnings. The field (in Bourdieu’s sense) or *milieu* (cited in philosopher Isabelle Stenger’s essay “An ecology of practices” which acknowledges that the identity of practice is never independent of its environment 2005, 187) is sensitive to changes and will be affected by a reduction in freelance opportunities or a decline in the diversity of freelance dance, especially in a broader climate of populism and nationalism. Thus, resistant collective practices become paramount.

Dance North Scotland director Karl Jay-Lewin poses a related question: “how do we create environments and forums where people really feel like they can take agency and make decisions that directly affect themselves and who we are?” (Jay-Lewin 2021). His own answer involved moving towards a less top-down and competitive system of dance organisation: “I

suppose part of my wish and interest in the subterranean, mycelial, rhizomic is that actually maybe it's less vulnerable." By referring to mycelium and rhizome – a subterranean plant with an organic branch-like network structure – Jay-Lewin drew on a well-established metaphor for thinking about power systems (proposed for instance by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 1987) as a framework for a new collaborative practice. The rhizome undergoes a process of “ceaselessly establishing connections” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 6) on a horizontal level intertwined with nearby stems. For Jay-Lewin, the dance profession should abandon top-down cultures in favour of co-relationality and networking; a change which can and should take place primarily “on a local level, on a small level, a mycelic level, without actually compromising what it is we want to do” (Jay-Lewin 2021). Moreover, while overhauling formal executive structures can be a difficult undertaking from within the dance community, resistance can also be spawned by adapting our attitudes and behaviours within them: “There is something there that is, which allows, is about resilience, ultimately is about freedom, about acknowledging the structures that are there and operating how we want to operate anyway” (ibid.).

Informal, practical and trust-based support networks played a significant role when the crises struck. It was apparent that many institutions – especially smaller ones which were intimately acquainted with their members’ needs and able to react swiftly to the changing circumstances – showed genuine concern for their freelance staff and worked hard to help them. Partly, this was done by providing an informal source of solidarity in times of hardship: Anita Clark described how her company “feels like a little support group”, reminding her that the “professional companionship bit has been really vital in finding a way through things”. This sense of community is easier to achieve on a local scale: “The bigger networks and things can’t quite hold the same safe space for uncertainty and doubts and questioning” (Clark 2021). But quite apart from the “companionship” found in shared spaces, Clark also cited small but vital practical steps the company had taken to assist freelancers. For instance, its membership fee was suspended following the first lockdown, and money originally designed for international projects and contingency funds was repurposed to provide swift maintenance to artists who missed out on the SEISS. Other successful support measures by institutions cited by our respondents included artist bursaries, crowdfunding initiatives, trusts and foundations, online classes and free coaching services.

The Freelance Task Force was initiated in 2020 by Fuel, a theatre company and independent producer, along with over one-hundred sponsors, in response to the pandemic. Supporting self-

organization and dialogue, this group engaged in conversations with a number of institutions, ranging from OneDance UK and ACE (Arts Council England) to Equity, to identify the needs of freelancers and improve their circumstances. One such institution was Sadler's Wells: as early as March 2021 when we interviewed its director Sir Alistair Spalding, discussions and negotiations were already underway:

There is a lot of thinking going on, and in dialogue with freelance groups, the Freelance Taskforce etc, about this issue and how we can make it better in the future, so we're talking about what means, and what the contract looks like – not the official contract, but what the contract would be with freelancers in the future, how we work with them. (Spalding 2021).

The Taskforce's conversations with dance institutions have now been translated into a concrete plan of action, outlined in a set of five principles, which is available online.²³ It is centered on fair pay (which also reflects planning and travel costs), inclusion (by re-evaluating structural norms), representation in decision making, transparency (over nature of work and budgets), and sustainability (acknowledging the precariousness of work and providing support at all career stages). In terms of pay, for instance, as one freelance respondent remarked: "It's important to determine what the role is, how much you should be paid in theatre, film, commercials, etc. to standardise things" (Anonymous B 2021), as well as acknowledging the considerable time devoted to preparation and bureaucracy – especially in the context of reduced international mobility post-Brexit. As a continuation of the work initiated by Fuel and the resulting Taskforce, the *Creative Freelancers: Shaping London's Recovery* programme – an initiative of the Mayor of London – enabled freelancers to come together and make policy recommendations, with a specific view to the post-Covid recovery of London's cultural industries.²⁴

Rectifying differences of treatment and opportunities within the profession remains a key element in this agenda, notably through the principle of inclusion. Under New Labour, for instance, it was often unquestioningly asserted that the creative class was "meritocratic, open to talent and unlikely to be bound by prejudices about race, gender or sexuality" which "led to the hope that these sectors opened up routes to participation among those from excluded groups" (Oakley 2006, 262). Yet it is important to acknowledge that systemic inequalities are still problematic, and often insufficiently recognized, features of the UK dance scene; and so

more attention should be given to differing situations, positionalities (which are not always reducible to singularised protected characteristics), career stages (such as avoiding an exclusive focus on mid-career practitioners), and forms and styles of practice. This acknowledgement of difference would help produce a more nuanced picture of the arts than is often assumed, in political circles but also at times by artists themselves.

Small but active steps taken at both individual and organisational levels may diversify the dance sector. The former include the recognition that processes which are unintentional rather than deliberate can lead to marginalisation. Stina Sommerlade, for instance, observes that after graduating from conservatoires or universities, many artists initially collaborate with peers from their old institutions, even if such alliances are sometimes fragile and temporary (2018, 144). This equivalent of an ‘old boys’ network’ results in the *de facto* exclusion of emerging artists who did not graduate from the larger or more established schools, inhibiting their access to work opportunities. At an institutional level, representation on boards has been highlighted as an important stepping stone towards greater inclusivity, for instance by this freelance respondent:

So I think you have to look 360 who’s on your board [...]: not just one woman, or one BAME person, with different experiences who are great at their jobs, but [that] they’re a picture of the society you want to see, and as we research that the more diverse your group, the more profitable and rich your ideas because you’ve got people to challenge you, and say ‘actually that’s not my lived experience, let’s look at it in a different way’. (Anonymous B 2021).

Amid the competitive ethos of the new work model, it is tempting to blame oneself for failures. But it is important, as a small but important step to resisting this logic, not to misconstrue systemic inequalities as down to personal shortcomings, but to acknowledge that the capacity to experience (degrees of) freedom and execute entrepreneurial skills depends heavily on one’s social position.

Lastly, while the two compounding crises have been discussed in tandem here, it is important to bear in mind that “Covid and Brexit are two separate issues that do overlap and intersect at different points and it is quite hard to tackle them together” (Moore 2021). While both share features such as an impact on mobility and financial challenges, Brexit is likely to have longer-

term implications for the UK's dance scene in terms of career development, visibility of artists, residencies and the flourishing of the dance scene as a whole. One thing, however, appears certain: tackling the concerns of freelancers requires a concerted effort on behalf of all stakeholders in the field – including the freelance community itself, as well as institutions and organisations, funding bodies and political agencies.

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¹ One of the four main bodies in the UK promoting and funding the arts, the others being the Arts Councils of Wales and Northern Ireland, and Creative Scotland.

² We would like to thank Alexandra Baybutt and Anna Leon for their extraordinarily valuable contributions to the project and material for this essay.

³ Panellists included Adam Moore (Independent Artist / Choreographer), Angela Woodhouse (Choreographer), Assis Carreiro (Dance Freelance Task Force), Eddie Nixon (Artistic Director, The Place), Hanna Madalska-Gayer (Advocacy Manager of OneDanceUK), Rita Marcalo (Dancer, Choreographer and Artistic Director of Instant Dissidence), Sheila Creevey (Chief Executive Officer of Dance Ireland) and Virve Sutinen (Artistic Director, Tanz im August – International Festival Berlin).

⁴ Approval was granted in February 2021 (ARTS 21/ 004). All questionnaire and interview respondents had the choice of remaining anonymous.

⁵ <https://dancingthroughcrises.wordpress.com>.

⁶ Speakers included Farooq Chaudhry OBE (Co-founder of the Akram Khan Company), Michelle Dickson (Director of Strategy, Arts Council England), Wendy Houstoun (Movement and Theatre Artist), Adam Moore (Independent Artist and Choreographer), and Sir Alistair Spalding (Artistic Director of Sadler's Wells). The Chair was Professor Christopher Bannerman (Director of ResCen Research Centre).

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afhAZtzW4MU> (accessed 21 November 2022).

⁸ As a case in point, Karen Wood is leading a British Academy funded project entitled "Freelance Dance Artists and Representation" which aims at driving collective action. See <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-directories/current-projects/2022/freelance-dance-artists-and-representation/> (accessed 15 October 2022). Another initiative was Perform Europe (<https://performeurope.eu/nutshell>) which sought to develop policy recommendations for European institutions and EU member states.

⁹ A very useful definition of the term ‘neoliberalism’ is provided by Jen Harvie: “the contemporary form of economic practice that privileges the ‘liberty’ of individuals to trace as they please and, in so doing, promotes private enterprise within apparently ‘free’ or ‘open’ markets over publicly regulated economies” (2013, 63).

¹⁰ See also Aujla’s and Farrer’s definition: “The term ‘independent dancer’ is commonly used within the UK dance industry to describe practitioners who work in multiple roles on freelance contracts” (2016, 4).

¹¹ McRobbie specifically refers here to the Green Paper on “Culture and Creativity: The next ten years”, published in 2001, which is available online: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/16352/1/Culture%20and%20creativity%20the%20next%20ten%20years.pdf> (accessed 19 February 2022).

¹³ This website gives an overview of the work permits required for different EU countries: <https://www.britcham.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Short-Term-Work-Permits.pdf> (accessed 14 March 2022).

¹⁴ To our knowledge, only one country (Spain) has so far signed a bilateral agreement with the UK, which covers at least music tours; see Maciuca (2022), <https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/news/music-tours-uk-eu-musicians-brexite-spain-306861/> (accessed 20 May 2022).

¹⁵ See, for instance, the following advertisement: <https://www.entertainersworldwidejobs.com/dancer-jobs/dancers-singers-wanted-european-contracts-22610> (accessed 24 April 2022).

¹⁶ Another respondent conceived of diversity more broadly: “Diversity for me is in every sense from the minutiae of being a human and the wider questions around diversity in terms of body, brain, gender, sexual orientation, race, nationality and everything in between” (anon. 16032021).

¹⁷ Various reports have been published on this; see for instance Goodwin & Heath (2016) for an apt summary, and the following report looking at voting by social class <https://www.statista.com/statistics/518395/brexit-votes-by-social-class/> (accessed 4 May 2022).

¹⁸ These terms were used interchangeably in many discussions, so in the following we will not draw a distinction between their meanings which are treated in some literature as a dichotomy between (mostly) biological characteristics, and cultural expression and identification. The fact that many (white) people prefer the use of the terms ‘ethnicity’, ‘diversity’ or ‘inclusion’ over the “more murky” discourse around race was noted by one of our respondents of colour (REF).

¹⁹ Challenges for non-white artists also extend to training opportunities, peer networking, and lack of both visibility and representations at board levels. While networking and boards are briefly discussed in our closing section, these issues need to be addressed more fully elsewhere as they are testimonies to more widespread systemic challenges not exclusively related to (albeit exacerbated by) the crises.

²⁰ More generally, in the medium-term future it is likely that artists, even more than before, will “operate within increasingly financialised parameters” (Upton-Hansen, Kolbe and Savage 2020: 172) driven by the need to repay debts induced by the pandemic, adverse impacts of Brexit on the national economy, and most recently investments in support for Ukraine and the associated sanctions.

²¹ This following site offers an explanation of the special unemployment insurance scheme in France, termed *régime des salariés intermittents du spectacle* (scheme for intermittent workers in the performing industries): <https://www.etui.org/publications/art-managing-intermittent-artist-status-france> (accessed 4 April 2022).

²² A long-term visa or residence permit: <https://france-visas.gouv.fr/en/web/france-visas/international-talents-and-economic-attractiveness> (accessed 28 December 2021).

²³ See <https://www.5guidingprinciples.com/post/resource-3> (accessed 2 January 2022).

²⁴ Their report, published in December 2021, is available here: <https://fueltheatre.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/CF-SLR-Evaluation-Report-v2.0.pdf> (accessed 19 November 2022).