

Crisis as a Catalyst for Change: COVID-19, Spatiality and the UK Live Music Industry

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Abstract

Since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, live music spaces – and the practices which produce them as economically viable – have found themselves in crisis. In spite of a UK government announcement on the 25th of July 2020 which allocated £2.25 million to support 150 music venues across the country, the processes of allocation, the conditions under which this emergency funding is allocated, and capacity to secure medium-to-long-term sustainability of the live music industry in the UK, remains unclear. In this paper, we present a Lefebvrian analysis of live music, highlighting the complex ways in which space is produced and consumed within a live music environment. By extending this framing to consider Lefebvre's conceptualisation of dominated and appropriated space, we argue that the economic viability of live music stems from its spatiality, and that ongoing responses to the crisis require greater sensitivity to the spatial practices of music production and consumption.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19; UK live music; Lefebvre; spatiality; transformation.

Introduction

The COVID-19 outbreak continues to bring about rapid and dramatic changes to our social and cultural lives. For those involved in a range of sectors deemed “unessential” by national governments, this period represents a time of adaptation and for many a scramble for economic and cultural survival. In relation to the live music industry in the UK (1), professionals, funders, governments, and academics alike found themselves trying to quickly come to terms with the implications of this pandemic for music and for the arts more generally. As part of our own attempts to make sense of the unstable and ever-changing context for live popular music in the UK, we wrote an article for *The Journal of Media Art Study and Theory* mid-way through 2020 in the midst of the initial period of lockdown (Taylor, Raine and Hamilton 2020). In that article, we proposed that an analysis of spatiality, drawing upon Lefebvre’s (1991) trialectics of spatiality, represented a useful model through which to understand and address the crisis’ impact upon live music and its economic ramifications. Drawing upon a range of examples from two live research projects – each attempting to reframe and respond to this sudden change in circumstance – we argued that by framing the impact of COVID-19 on the live music industry as a crisis of spatial materiality first and foremost (as opposed to the focus on economic impact which dominated media and industry narratives), it may be possible to consider alternative approaches to supporting live music in the immediate term. Equally, we argued that this approach could be used to target economic assistance in a way which looks towards longer-term adaptations in addition to reacting to immediate existential threats.

In the prevailing months since the writing and subsequent publication of that article, the situation has continued to develop at a rapid pace. In the UK, further lockdown restrictions were imposed, first in November 2020 and then again January 2021, tempering optimism around the ability of cultural (and other) activities to “return to normal” with the approval and initial roll-out of vaccination programmes in late 2020. Although the various vaccination products have the potential to allow for the possibility of a return to – amongst other things – live music, it is far from clear as we write this follow up article whether, for instance, music festivals planned for summer 2021 will be able to take place. As such, many of the concerns and questions around how the live music sector can survive, be supported through, and ultimately recover from the current pandemic, remain unanswered. Equally, widespread uncertainty as to how best such support might be targeted and delivered prevails. Where our previous paper sought to establish the usefulness of a Lefebvrian analytical model in theorising around the impact of COVID-19 on the live music industry in the UK, and the potential that it offers for considering alternative perspectives on how best to support it through this existential threat, this paper aims to more robustly flesh out and advance that Lefebvrian theory into a trialectics of live music spatiality. In the pages that follow, we use this theoretical frame to critically consider the extant approaches of government and industry alike, and call for a more detailed and concerted reflection upon emerging grassroots practices as we progress through 2021 and into 2022.

Considering space through Lefebvre’s trialectics of spatiality offers us a means to consider production and consumption during a time of crisis. By considering the transformation of musical production and consumption through Lefebvre’s concepts of “dominated” and “appropriated” spaces, we argue that roadmaps to a post-pandemic live music industry must also reflect upon the adaptations, innovations and appropriations of musical practices and processes during this

period of disruption. As global initiatives and movements – such as Black Lives Matter (#BLM), #MeToo, and Keychange – highlight, the processes, practices and politics of the global music industries do not benefit all involved in the production and consumption of music equally. If the live music industry is to benefit from the transformatory opportunities of the pandemic, we argue that tools for a critically reimagined industry can be glimpsed in the appropriated spaces. These practices and ideas transgress the hegemony of government crisis management measures and could potentially subvert industry attempts to return to a so-called normal which does not benefit all. In this, we occupy a provocative role in the ongoing debate, posing questions and highlighting the existence of new options.

The Production of Live Music Spaces

The live music industry is inherently spatial in nature. The power of live music experiences, and by extension, the economic systems which capitalise upon these experiences, lie in music's "spatial and temporal qualities" (Jones 1995: 7). The performance of live music is produced and consumed within material spaces, "embedded in the visual and spatial dimensions of the physical stage" as a "bounded form" of interaction spatially and temporally (Holt 2010: 252). As such, we believe that researchers seeking to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on live music economies might usefully apply theories of space and spatial materiality as a lens through which to do so.

To this end, we argue that the work of Henri Lefebvre is particularly useful, especially as his work has been foundational in a range of attempts to consider the changing relationships between place, capitalism and culture. From the perspective of Lefebvre, and those who have subsequently built upon his work, economies of capitalism are not simply concerned with the production of things within space but are actually acutely concerned with the production of space itself (see Prey 2015). That is to say that capitalism not only subsumes existing spaces but is also existentially engaged in the production of its own spaces. It seeks to appropriate and dominate pre-existing spaces, redefining them through "alienating relations of production" under capitalism (Lefebvre 1991: 49), while also actively producing new spaces through the creation of new sites and forms of consumption. While this interrelation between capitalism and space can be applied to all areas of production and consumption, it is arguably most acutely felt in relation to the production and consumption of culture, and (in particular) music. As Taylor (2015: 2) reminds us, capitalism is not merely an economic principle, but also "a social form [which] profoundly shapes people's relationships to each other, and their relationships with cultural forms such as music". Capitalism as an economic principle shapes not only the systems and processes through which music is produced, distributed and consumed, but also the ways in which people understand and experience that music. To talk of a live music industry, or of creative and cultural industries more generally, is to implicitly accept the deeply intertwined relationship between capitalism, contemporary western experiences of culture, and (importantly) the spaces in which this culture is produced and consumed. For Lefebvre, space is not some kind of fixed entity that pre-exists human interaction. Rather, it can be seen as something which is fluid and dynamic, which is actively produced and transformed through sociality, in a "constantly mutating process" (Peters 2015: 2). Whether with reference to bricks-and-mortar live music spaces, virtual live-stream spaces, or hybrid combinations of the two, the relationship between place, spatiality and materiality are continually transforming (2). Just because events have

moved online does not mean that spatiality does not come into play. Virtual streams have their own materiality and spatiality and are rooted (physically, symbolically, representationally) in physical spaces.

Before we can engage with how live music spaces come to be dominated and appropriated, it is first necessary to explore how they come into being through Lefebvre's constantly mutating process. This process can be broken down into three aspects of space, which Lefebvre refers to as "spatial practice," "representations of space," and "representational spaces" (1991: 38), which we discuss in terms of live music and the COVID pandemic in the following sections. We are exploring these aspects of space in relation to two of very few live music research projects in the UK whose lifespan encompasses the COVID-19 pandemic and the unfolding recovery, rather than taking a retrospective position (as will projects more recently funded by targeted calls, such as UKRI and DCMS COVID-19-focused grants) (UKRI 2021). This article explores and sets out a potential theoretical framework for considering this emerging data, and to help make sense of a changeable context within which we find ourselves (see also, Taylor, Raine and Hamilton 2020). Previous scholars, such as Prey (2015), have used this framework to reflect upon changing digital listening practices, for instance, and we have expanded this application to consider changing experiences of spatiality and materiality in the places of music production and consumption – on and offline – during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Live Music Spaces as Perceived

The first of these aspects, which Lefebvre (1991: 38) terms "spatial practice", refers to the sensory and sensual aspects of space, in which space is understood in relation to physical experience, or "space as *perceived* through our senses" (Prey 2015: 4, emphasis added). This aspect of space can be understood as phenomenological in nature and speaks to the aspects of space as experienced and understood through the senses. In the context of a live music venue, for example, this aspect of space would first refer to the corporeal elements of that space which can be observed, touched or heard. Rough concrete walls and pillars, perhaps, or low ceilings; perpetually sticky wooden floors; stacked speaker systems and hanging lights. It would also refer to the sonic characteristics of the room – how reflective the concrete walls and pillars are in relation to similar spaces, perhaps, or the way in which a particular bass frequency resonates in a particular corner of a live music room. It would even extend as far as the olfactory (and, if either brave or foolish, to the gustatory) experience of this space – that unmistakable mingling of sweat, drinks, and smoke machine fluid that is instantly evocative of a particular kind of live music space. In other types of live music space – the concert hall, for instance – the sensory experiences would alter in line with the different architecture, furnishings, acoustics and social sounds of such a space: plush carpet underfoot; the polite clink of glass piercing the low murmur of chatter in the bar; the hush descending on the hall in the moments before a performance begins. Other music spaces too produce their own types of familiar sights, sounds and smells, but taken as a whole these sensory thrills can be understood as forming a key part of the live music experience.

Perhaps more importantly from the perspective of this paper, this aspect of space might also be understood as accounting for the experiential aspects of the spatial practice of both performers and audiences within this perceived space. While the liveness of a performance is undeniably *understood* in terms of complex subjective

judgements on the part of an audience (Auslander 2008), at its heart is its physical and experiential happening as perceived spatial practice – as something visual, auditory, and tactile, through which wider cultural meaning is produced and understood. As Dale has noted, as well as being actively and phenomenologically experienced, such conceptions of space are often “taken for granted through the habits of the body” (2005: 657). As such, experiences of spatial practice are understood through our own “habituated ways of engaging our bodies with a certain materiality” (ibid: 657) and our subconscious familiarity with particular organisations of space. That is to say that within a live music space, much of the spatial practice through which we collectively and individually understand an experience to be one of live music, is sensory: the smell of a packed room above a pub is unmistakable, as is the rib cage rumble from an arena’s sound-system bass notes, or the loaded silence in the half-second before a seated concert hall audience applauds the end of a song. These are the sensory thrills most of us – industry professionals and audiences alike – have been denied by the on-going pandemic, and it is our collective and individual memory of them that (above all else) make us pine for live music’s return. As we will show in the next section, it is the manner in which live music spaces are conceived that helps facilitate the sensory experience we are temporarily denied.

Live Music Spaces as Conceived

The second aspect of Lefebvre’s trialectics of space is what he refers to as “representations of space”, or *conceived* space. Where the spatial practice of perceived space refers to meanings inherent to material and physically experienced qualities of space, *conceived* space can be taken to refer to the cultural meanings of space and the “deliberate construction of space to embody certain conceptualizations in materialized form” (Dale 2005: 657). This aspect of space can be understood as the deliberate construction and transformation of space so as to embody a particular set of meanings, or to foster particular forms of spatial practice. It is, according to Lefebvre, the dominant space within society and, by extension, for any system of production and consumption:

the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent - all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived. (Lefebvre 1991: 38).

Returning to our hypothetical live music venues, this aspect of space refers to the ways in which a live music space has been designed and framed as such. On a base level, this might refer to the way in which a venue has been laid out and designed, such as the decision to position a stage in a particular spot, or at a particular height, within the material limitations of the room itself. More significantly in the context of this paper, this conceived aspect of a venue is the dimension through which it is created as an economic space, and as a site of production and consumption. It is significant that Lefebvre characterises this space as “dominant” (1991: 39). In doing so, he is asserting that the forms of spatial practice which exist within a space, and the ways in which the meanings of such practice are received and understood by an audience within that space, are dictated by the ways in which that space is conceived. The band packing an upstairs room above a pub will likely find themselves in such a position because of efficient promotion (of their tour

specifically, but also of their records to media outlets, and so on), and – all things being equal – will likely move to a mid-sized venue on their next tour. The busiest time to visit the bar or merchandise stand is when the band is not on stage. These nuanced and complex space-making processes that construct the conceived space of the live music venue have not been understood by crisis policy makers, who have at worst announced venue closures with no guidance and only partial financial support – completely disrupting the economic and cultural processes of these spaces – and at best (and in between lockdowns) suggested that live music venues temporarily reopen as socially distanced bars and restaurants.

However, the implementation of COVID-19 restrictions – whether in the form of reduced opening times and limited capacities, or through the outright closure of live music spaces as part of the government's measures – can be seen as a re-conceiving of these spaces. Just as the audiences of live music have been denied their access to familiar sensory thrills, the industry stakeholders and practitioners who organise and combine their activities to deliver such thrills have likewise been denied access to the essential sites of commerce around which their business models are built. Indeed, as Gebhardt (2017) shows, the business models, practitioner networks and practices, the conceived spaces and the audience sensory experiences that coalesce to comprise what we understand as live music were established in the Victorian era, with music hall and Vaudeville, and have remained largely unchanged since then (even as aspects of technology, genre, society, et cetera. have altered). The experience of the concert hall or the small, boisterous music venue, relies on a cultural and economic memory and lineage that has been abruptly halted in its tracks by a public health emergency. We cannot smell the sweat of fellow concertgoers, or dance in a muddy field, because the conception of the sites of such experience rely on spatial arrangements (and business models) that are temporarily impossible.

Whilst this predicament has thus far been framed by government and industry organisations alike as a temporary one – voiced through the desire to soon return to “normal” – the recent imposition of further restrictive measures in the UK seem likely to continue into the summer of 2021, producing a second lost season for annual music festivals and an uncertain year for live music more generally. What is at stake here can be understood in terms of Lefebvre's third aspect of space, that is, how a live music space is made whole, is collectively understood as such by the lived experience and, as such, can operate as a business offering audiences paid access to particular and interconnected spatial, musical experiences. This is discussed in more detail in the following section.

Live Music Spaces as Lived

The third, and final, aspect of space is what Lefebvre refers to as “representational space,” or space as “directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols” (1991: 39, emphasis added). In this lived aspect of space, the material meanings of perceived space are experienced and understood through the lens of conceived space. It is, as Dale puts it, “phenomenologically experienced space overlaid with ‘imaginary spaces’ whereby the material and the cultural are fused: the social creation of space so that signs, images and symbols are made material.” (2005: 657).

Returning once again to our examples of hypothetical live music venues, this aspect of space refers to the totality of one's subjective experience of that space, accounting for both the sensory experience of spatial practice within that space,

and the ways in which that spatial practice is understood and made meaningful through the frameworks of commerce, culture and taste. This element hinges on collective action and understanding. The audience, musicians, promoters, and bar staff, all perform their roles within a given physical space, conceived as a music venue, which in turn shapes how those roles are to be performed. The band shows up on time, and works with venue staff to create a good sound. Meanwhile, the audience buys tickets and drinks and take their seats before the performance begins. The band plays, the audience applauds, they dance, drink and mingle with each other, and then they ask for more. The band obliges. For all concerned, the performance of these roles relies on the business models and established practices that continue in a lineage long established. Taken as a whole, this is the live music experience and how it is understood, remembered and continually performed. Again, this coalescence is temporarily curtailed. Music venues are empty spaces; musicians cannot perform in them; audiences cannot dance (or buy tickets); promoters cannot plan. Although the present crisis has been framed primarily in economic terms (Taylor, Raine, and Hamilton 2020), and certainly presents itself most urgently in those terms for those involved in the business of live music (the musicians, promoters, et cetera.), the totality of the problem extends far beyond that. The economics of live music rely on and form part of a set of practices, long established in the collective memory, that face an existential threat. We argue that the robustness of collective memory and practice as it relates to live music is currently being tested in ways not seen before and can be understood in simple terms as follows: unless music venues can be performed as live music spaces, through the spatial practice of artists and audiences, they run the risk of no longer being conceived as such.

It is towards combating this existential threat that many involved with live music have been forced to turn their attention to since the pandemic began. As we outlined in our previous paper – and in a manner that may resonate with readers' own experience of cultural, social and economic life over the last twelve months – many have looked to alternate means to continue (at least some semblance of) the collective performance of live music spaces. Live-streamed performances have allowed musicians (and promoters) to maintain relationships with their practice and audiences, venues have taken to social media to maintain connections with and/or garner support from clientele, and in some cases have adapted business models for home-delivery of alcohol, food and merchandise. Meanwhile, governments and other agencies have provided (partial) financial and other support to venues and musicians, and industry groups have continually lobbied governments for further support, often engaging the public through campaigns such as #LetTheMusicPlay. What we see as being at the root of this activity is a collective desire to maintain the collective understanding and performance of the live music space, from which everything flows.

As a way of understanding the present situation, and alongside providing a model through which to frame how live music spaces come into being, Lefebvre's work also provides an additional lens for examining the forces presently coming to bear on those spaces, which we discuss in more detail in the next section. For Lefebvre, these forces can be described in terms of how spaces come to be dominated or appropriated. There is a tension between the two, albeit one that can be understood to have emerged over the course of the response to the pandemic, rather than being in natural opposition. How the tensions between the dominated and appropriated spaces of live music play out over the remainder of the pandemic (and the longer-term recovery from it) is likely to influence the manner in which live music spaces are conceived and performed in future.

The Transformation of Live Music Spaces – “Dominated” and “Appropriated” Space

Considering the manner in which we have framed live music spaces in the context of the discussion above, we can understand live music spaces as becoming manifest as such through a symbiosis of perception, conception and experience. Since many of the activities that facilitate that symbiosis have been temporarily curtailed, it therefore follows that live music spaces have been transformed since the pandemic began. By examining the manner of the transformation, we can begin to understand the consequences of these transformations on how live music spaces are being currently produced, and also how they may be produced in future. Again, Lefebvre’s work provides a lens through which to examine this. Using the above trialectics, we will consider within this section two ways in which spaces may have been transformed. Lefebvre distinguishes between “dominated (and dominant) space, which is to say a space transformed – and mediated – by technology, by practice” (he offers military and state power as examples of this form of transformative force, but we would argue that commerce is similarly valid) and “appropriated space”, referring to a more loosely defined category of organic adaptations of spaces in line with the needs of a particular group inhabiting them at a given time (1991: 164).

For Lefebvre, dominated spaces are “invariably the realization of a master’s project”, introducing a “new form into a pre-existing space” resulting in a dominated space which is “usually closed, sterilised, emptied out” (ibid: 165). It is not a significant stretch to apply this logic to the approach taken by government in relation to the live performance sector, wherein spaces have been “dominated” through legislation and its enforcement, transforming the ways in which spaces can be used (i.e. limited capacities, fines associated with large indoor gatherings, forced closures, either directly or indirectly). As previously highlighted with regard to the spatial triad, these dominations of space take place primarily through a reconceiving of that space – a transformation not of its physical qualities, but of the forms of spatial practice that reconceived space will accommodate.

An appropriated space, on the other hand, speaks to a far more organic transformation of space. A transformation through appropriation might be said to have occurred when that space has been “modified in order to serve the needs and possibilities” of a group which inhabits or makes use of that space (ibid: 165). These appropriations are led not by deliberate and premeditated decisions to reconceive that space, but spontaneously, through the lived aspects of space, as they are transformed through (and form the purpose of) practice.

It is important to be clear that we are not seeking to draw a blunt dichotomy between a totalitarian image of dominated space on the one hand, and a utopian image of appropriated space on the other. The transformation of a space through power and transformation through practice are clearly not mutually exclusive:

Dominated space and appropriated space may in principle be combined – and, ideally at least, they ought to be combined. But history – which is to say the history of accumulation – is also the history of their separation and mutual antagonism. The winner in this contest, moreover, has been domination. There was once such a thing as appropriation without domination – witness the aforementioned hut, igloo or peasant house. Domination has grown *pari passu* with the part played by armies, war, the state and political power. The dichotomy between dominated and appropriated is thus not limited to the level

of discourse or signification, for it gives rise to a contradiction or conflictual tendency which holds sway until one of the terms in play (domination) wins a crushing victory and the other (appropriation) is utterly subjugated. Not that appropriation *disappears*, for it cannot: both practice and theory continue to proclaim its importance and demand its restitution. (Lefebvre 1991: 66, emphasis in original).

Nor are we arguing that the transformation of live music spaces is not necessary, or indeed inevitable, in the face of a global pandemic. Indeed, we are of the opinion that this process of transformation is already in motion, whether we like it or not. The ways in which audiences think about live music – those conceived aspects of space that Lefebvre describes, and the meanings and values attached to them – are already being transformed, although it will ultimately fall to governments, funders, and key industry players to shape what the end result of this process of transformation will be. As the provocation for this special issue suggests, we believe that there is significant potential for this crisis to be viewed as a catalyst for change within the live music industry and beyond. However, as we will seek to demonstrate in subsequent sections through discussion of two academic research projects exploring live music during the pandemic, in order to arrive at a discussion of the potential afforded by change, we must first consider the ways in which such change might be brought about.

In order to further explore the transformation of spatial practice through dominated and appropriated live music spaces, we will reflect upon insights gained through two ongoing research projects. The Birmingham Live Music Project (livemusicresearch.org 2021) (funded by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC)) was initially designed to explore how the live music ecology of Birmingham is constituted, and to examine its approaches to challenges related to national and international change, most notably Brexit. In early 2020, the project agreed with its funders a shift in focus towards questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and, alongside gathering data related to an interactive venue map and a series of stakeholder surveys, the project has since organised several online panel events featuring stakeholders and organisations at local and national levels that sought to collectively explore live music's response to the pandemic. Similarly, starting in January 2020 (and ending in early 2022), the Scottish Jazz and Blues Project (funded by PLACE, Scottish Government) aimed to capture the state of the contemporary jazz and blues scenes in Scotland – through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and organisational data – and to provide recommendations for further development. Although these aims remain central to the project, the findings also offer insights into the responses of jazz festivals, musicians, promoters, educators, and public funders – gathered through phone interviews, virtual focus groups and online surveys – during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to this particular geographical focus, examples from musicians and music organisations across the UK have been chosen and reflected upon.

COVID-19 and the “Domination” of Live Music Spaces

Government policies have dominated the majority of commercial spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. The enforced closure of “non-essential” businesses during national lockdowns in March and November 2020 was again instigated in January 2021. Similarly, a period of regional tiers, enacted across Autumn 2020 and varying according to infected regions, brought with it an associated range of social distancing regulations and early closing legislation transgressions of which were

punishable by significant fines. Even a “Roadmap for Recovery” (Rodzbicka, Hamilton and Behr 2020) – announced in July 2020 – was based on the arrangement of live music spaces according to a series of restrictive measures and sanctioned activity organised around five levels. For live music spaces – performance venues, recording studios, rehearsal studios and so on – these transformations represented clear acts of legislative domination – a *reconceiving* of the *meanings* of these spaces – reducing complex places of production and consumption to spaces devoid of purpose and action. While clearly necessary in the face of a global pandemic, this domination of all “non-essential” spaces – to include live music – has been framed by the UK government as a temporary and necessary solution to a deadly global problem; a short-term sacrifice necessary for an eventual return to “normal”. However, given the transformative impact of current measures on these live music spaces, and by extension, the economic models through which they are monetised, questions remain as to what a “new normal” (to borrow from government phraseology) might look like.

Equally, the UK Government Cultural Recovery Fund (open to applications and so far allocated in two waves), has similarly aimed to support cultural organisations until partial or full opening in March 2021, cocooning businesses in their pre-pandemic state rather than supporting innovative approaches to industry transformation during this period. Local and national funding body responses (such as Arts Councils and city councils) have also followed suit, honouring or withdrawing support from live music organisations and music festivals as budgets are reconsidered.

These dominated approaches to the COVID-19 pandemic have exposed the power relationships evident within the UK live music industry and the existence of a hierarchy of live music venues, and indeed cultural forms, genres and geographical biases. For example, the allocation of Cultural Recovery Fund support can be broadly plotted with reference to cultural venues and organisations that have a history of previous governmental funding and fit into official discourses concerning national cultural identity. It is notable that very few grassroots organisations received money, venues that include live music as part of their wider offer were fewer still (Hamilton 2020), exposing the lack of bid writing awareness, knowledge and skills at a grassroots level. This was to a limited extent offset by the actions of the Music Venues Trust (MVT), who provided support to grassroots venues applying for the Cultural Recovery Fund with notable success. Relatedly, the cultural value of the UK music industries in general, and grassroots organisations in particular, does not translate well in the stark economic terms of the present arrangements concerning government support. Yet, they are widely recognised as invaluable in relation to supporting local scenes, accessing diverse audiences and contributing significantly to UK music. Indeed, the requirement of economic viability for government support is somewhat ironic when considering that many recipients of government arts funding would not be financially viable without the very public funding they have regularly received in pre-pandemic times. As Lewis notes, the public funding of cultural activities is inherently political, a matter of “priorities, not ideals” (1990: 1). Researchers such as Behr and Brennan (2014) have highlighted the peripheral and problematic place that live music occupies in UK cultural policy (in this case in Scotland).

Centralised attempts to control the impact of COVID-19 have led to the forceful transformation of live music spaces through restrictive regulation. On a government policy level, these measures have been implemented by decision makers with little to no knowledge of the live music industry and have amounted to the closure of these spaces to prevent the spread of the virus, and the provision of funding which,

in effect, pays venues (or, at least, those that have benefited from the fund) to remain closed. This approach relies upon unequal individual and organisational access to funding, knowledge and networks. This is an issue for the grassroots and informal elements of the UK live music industry (where there is less experience of applying for funding, or where organisations may lack organisational or financial histories to even qualify for such funding), and exposes problems relating to unequal access (socio-economic, regional, generational, gender-based barriers experienced by individuals in these dominated spaces).

This UK government narrative of treading water until a return to “normal” is also evident in music industry reports and engagement with policy makers. For example, the UK Music (2021) *Let The Music Play: Save Our Summer 2021* report focuses on the survival of the UK live music and festival industries through a return to their pre-pandemic form, rather than on their reconfiguration (see also Raine forthcoming). In this sense, the current domination of live music spaces by both UK government and central music industry organisations places a (perhaps understandable) emphasis on survival and post-pandemic industrial recovery, but as a consequence instigates minimal long-term transformation, particularly in relation to the structures and processes of the sector. Alongside initiatives and such as Keychange and organisations such as the Musicians Union (MU), we wish to question this approach. We are not seeking to argue that measures to prevent the spread of COVID are not necessary, nor are we arguing that venues should (or could) reopen as they previously were. However, it seems apparent that in order to safeguard the ongoing economic viability of one of our most valuable cultural assets, this model of dominated live music spaces has revealed and invites critique of the status quo. Equally, this approach ignores the potentially transformatory opportunities offered by the appropriated spaces, transformed by music practices during this period.

As we consider in the next section, appropriated live music spaces offer kernels of transformation for reimagining and restructuring the UK live music industry with gender inequality, diversity, and regional growth in mind. It is clear that a process of transformation has already begun in all aspects of our lives. In this, we may wish to consider that we may not be able (or – in some areas of life – be altogether willing) to return to a pre-pandemic “normal”. These kernels of transformation hint at what we can do to ensure that responses to the pandemic have the potential to achieve something beyond mere survival and desperate attempts to return rather than renew. If those transformations that persist emerge only through the dominated spaces of this period, it seems certain that the problematic power structures of the pre-pandemic UK live music industry will also be replicated and will remain central to processes, practices and politics going forward. If we look to learn lessons from the appropriated spaces of this uncertain and transformatory period, we may begin work on the development of new options for producing and consuming live music that do not come with the cost of exploitation, unequal access, and the unequal distribution of power, money and influence that has so far stunted the development of a diverse and reflexive industry.

‘Appropriated’ Live Music Spaces

In terms of appropriated space – more organic transformations of space through practice – we can see glimpses of transformative and disruptive models for a reconfigured music industry. Due to the opportunistic and DIY nature of their creation, these approaches are currently disjointed and do not form a consistent

whole. Equally, their potential longevity – particularly without more formalised support and wider implementation – is questionable. However, we argue that these examples are indeed valuable and require further industry (and scholarly) reflection in the months and years that follow. This period of creative appropriation offers those working in the live music industry new options: new ways of accessing and engaging with audiences; new ways of selling and consuming music; new ways of performing and making music; and new ways of disrupting dominant power structures within the sector. We already have models that offer the seeds of such options emerging at a grassroots level as individuals and organisations attempt to transform their musical spaces through practice. As revealed by the Birmingham Live Music Project, many venues in the city turned to live streaming and crowdfunding technologies in order to maintain financial and other relationships with their client bases (3); the Scottish Jazz project meanwhile revealed how musicians and promoters turned to live music streaming in an effort to maintain the performance, teaching and collaborative practices associated with jazz music careers at grassroots levels (Taylor, Raine, and Hamilton 2020: 229). Activity of this kind is representative of the dexterity and fleet-footedness of entrepreneurial and cultural actors operating at grassroots level. Yet, although much of the recovery funds and other support so far offered by the UK government have been well-intended, it has taken the form of a top-down approach which, either inadvertently or by design, has served to reinforce existing power structures and preconceptions; as such, might be seen as an attempt to dominate these spaces rather than to empower musicians to create approaches that offer solutions and, in the long-term, begin to rethink the industry. Formal support of creative approaches such as those revealed above, in addition to offering essential financial support, would help formalise and stabilise the potential opportunities for the UK music industry through the new approaches, cultural practices and business models emerging out of the pandemic.

On a more functional level, concerted development of these early models will be essential for dealing with the immediate problems facing live music. Implicit throughout both the support offered and the restrictions imposed has been the promise of a return to the halcyon days of “normal”. Yet, as we write this article in January 2021 – a return in time for the 2021 summer festival season seems increasingly unlikely. With only a percentage of the population likely to be vaccinated by early summer, a restarting of live music venues and festivals will likely be significantly disrupted by ongoing social distancing regulations. Financially viable hybrid and purely virtual festival models, in particular, are essential for the UK music industry in the short term. As jazz festival teams in Scotland have noted, the issue lies not in how to create and share high-quality virtual gigs, but rather in encouraging audiences to pay for material which has previously been made freely available as part of marketing activities. More creative and experiential methods of capturing live music virtually, that speak to the wants and expectations of audiences, are necessary. If certain (or most) elements usually enjoyed by live music audiences are no longer possible, we must search for alternative options and new experiences that foster a discovery of music and a coming together of people. We argue that these kinds of creative and experimental methods are unlikely to come about through a funding system which seeks primarily to preserve the existing status quo. Ultimately, such innovations are best driven by musicians and live music professionals within the spaces and practices of live music, rather than by external powers primarily concerned with a return to “normal”.

Small independent festivals – such as Thinking/Not Thinking, a grassroots, musician-led improvised music festival based in Birmingham – represent useful examples of the transformative creation of new spaces through practice. Organised in August and September 2020 in between lockdowns and tier restrictions, Thinking/Not Thinking offered a series of socially distanced seated gigs along the Birmingham canal network. Not only did these events appropriate a previously non-musical space, but the performances also engaged with these different surroundings, with musicians responding to the noises and the happenings of the canal, people coming and going, and the sound of birds, planes overhead, and the hustle and bustle of a persisting industrial city, developing new forms of musical-spatial practice in response to these newly created live music spaces. Equally, the Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra (GIO) have appropriated virtual spaces such as Zoom as a means to engage through regular jam-sessions and one-off festivals with a wider range of improvising musicians across the world and, significantly, to create experimental video material through virtual collaboration.

Readers will doubtless have similar examples in mind, where small scale events and organisations have made partially successful forays into new models of practice, but the absence (to date) of any formal, mainstream mechanisms or business models that would make such activity viable on a large scale does not mean that we should dismiss their value to larger organisations and events. True, these grassroots organisations are not restricted by fears of economic collapse due to their voluntary nature and freedom from any significant overheads. However, in this, grassroots organisations represent a laboratory for experimentations with the live music experience, and a space to think through issues of access, engagement, and to test new models for the immediate future. With regard to that, we note with interest that Bandcamp – an e-commerce platform and network popular with grassroots musicians and labels – launched a ticketed live streaming platform in late 2020 and agreed to waive fees until the end of March 2021 (Bandcamp 2020). That a company operating in the grassroots space would make such a service available to its network of practitioners hints at the longer-term viability of the practice; this runs counter to narratives (and thus support) associated with a “return to normal”, since such a return is predicated on the live streaming of concerts no longer being necessary. Should that be the case, opportunities related to how those practices may develop, and how they may alter existing practices, structures and relationships in future, could be lost.

Conclusion

The economic viability of live music stems from spatiality, with the continued existence of this industry, and the creative practices that sustain it, dependent upon functional live music spaces which meet the needs of the musicians, audiences, and live music professionals whose spatial practice gives them meaning. In this paper, we have framed ongoing attempts by government, industry bodies and practitioners, and grassroots stakeholders to protect and maintain live music in Lefebvrian terms of dominated and appropriated space, illustrated by examples revealed through two live music research projects examining responses to the pandemic. In doing so, we have attempted to prompt a debate that challenges assumptions and (dominated) approaches in dealing with this ongoing crisis, and to best support the needs of professionals within the UK music industries. Through greater sensitivity to the spatial practices of music production and consumption,

alternative and, arguably, more suitable, economic models could be developed and implemented.

In the short term, for many gigging musicians – and the myriad live music professionals whose livelihood depends upon them – the current model of support, predicated on a domination of live music spaces through legislation, coupled with a funding system aimed at preserving pre-COVID conceptions of live music in stasis, has failed to deliver the security that they need. Beyond the minority of artists who have been signed to major labels able to support them through the current crisis, most musicians have experienced an increased reliance on money made through live performance, particularly with the rise of music streaming platforms (such as Spotify and Apple Music). This highlights the difficulties of sustaining a career during crises such as the one we currently face. Amongst the twenty Scottish jazz musicians interviewed by one of our authors, music teaching income has also been disrupted. Occupying temporary, part-time and fixed term contracts, the closure of schools, colleges and universities during national lockdowns and the revisiting of institutional budgets following predicted or actual reduction in student numbers have led to more precarious educators being cut from departments. Some musicians who offered private tuition reported lost income from older students not wanting to continue their lessons online. Having lost both gigging income and teaching income streams, several musicians interviewed focused on monetising live-streamed performances and gaining increased control over the sale of digital downloads and new music through one-off payments and subscription options on personal websites. As has been noted elsewhere (see Medbøe and Raine 2021), the realities of digital listening platforms for musicians fall short of the promise of an unlimited global audience and the inclusion of music on promoted playlists. Although very few musicians considered the live-streaming (and teaching) activities they have experimented with in response to problems associated with the pandemic to be a profitable approach, the existence of such activity – along with the aforementioned emergence of Bandcamp’s live streaming service – does hint at the potential for a disruption of the domination of tech companies and the potential benefits of encouraging and nurturing of alternative music consumption practices. We view the potential of such approaches in a similar vein to the work of the Music Venue Trust described earlier, which encouraged and assisted grassroots venues in the negotiation of funding processes they may not have considered in “normal” times.

The examples offered in this paper are precisely the types of emergent practice that have the potential to effect lasting change through the subversion of existing power structures. We argue that many of the limitations of the current response to this crisis have been due to the framing of the COVID pandemic problem in purely economic terms, and the subsequent dominant (rather than appropriating) approach to ameliorating those problems. Although the issues facing organisations present themselves most urgently in financial terms, and while support (of any kind) is welcome given that immediate threat, the actions of government and industry bodies have nevertheless largely been based on a wider framing of live music eventually returning to “normal”. This in turn has exposed the inequalities inherent in existing structures. At the same time a response from grassroots practitioners reveals the potential for challenging and subverting those structural inequalities. Although many of the new practices associated with live music that have emerged through the pandemic are experimental and not yet able to fully account for lost revenues and opportunities, they nevertheless highlight the potential for alternate modes of practice.

As individuals and groups create and share live music, new appropriated practices will continue to emerge, some easily visible to music fans and researchers alike, and some hidden in DIY spaces and word-of-mouth contexts. We consider this article to be part of an ongoing process, with the potential applications of a Lefebvrian frame developing as the situation unfolds. In the run up to and unfolding of summer 2021, we will be gathering examples of transformative practice and examining their wider potential for transforming the UK's live music and festival industries. In particular, we must reimagine and instigate new options that reflexively consider issues of gender inequality, diversity, and geographical dominance. A return to "normal" that halts potential progress in its tracks is arguably a lost opportunity.

Endnotes

(1) It is beyond the scope of this article to explore the multitude of ways in which music industries in other nations have been impacted upon by government-instigated COVID-19 regulations and national lockdowns. Equally, different countries are at different stages of post-pandemic recovery, with standing live music events in a range of venue sizes already underway in Australia and New Zealand at date of writing, whilst UK-based festivals are currently making decisions in relation to the 2021 festival season. We also focus on *popular* music in the UK.

(2) Already we are seeing promoters and festivals considering hybrid models for future events, with in-person and virtual audiences experiencing the same live performance which is simultaneously experienced in real-time by both.

(3) These findings are part of an ongoing research project but have been discussed as part of a blogpost on the project website. See Hamilton 2020.

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