**East African Soul Train:**

**Producing Performance and Creating Atmosphere**

**Abstract**

Despite a diverse and vibrant contemporary artistic scene, East Africa sees less international exposure than other regions on the continent; this article argues that a new approach to understanding the complexities and value of performance in the region is fundamental to developing the sector. East African Soul Train is a pop-up residency, which takes artists on a journey to connect and collaborate with other artists from across the region and beyond. This paper explores how an emphasis on the production of atmosphere can challenge outcome-based narratives currently driven by academics, funders and practitioners thinking about performance in the region.

Contemporary art and performance in East Africa have not been widely researched. Academic examinations of cultural practice in the region – in both Performance and Development Studies – have primarily focused on Theatre for Development (T4D), which involves the application of art and performance to address a range of developmental goals (Prentki 2015, 7). Many artists are frustrated due to a lack of mobility, opportunities and resources for their contemporary creative practice. I am Co-founder and Creative Producer of East African Soul Train (EAST), a pop-up residency on East Africa’s historic tracks. EAST brings artists from different places, different disciplines and with different levels of professional experience together. The ambition of the project is to push individual practice and the creative sector forward in a way that celebrates its vibrancy, diversity and social potential, whilst creating opportunities for artists in the region. Rather than focusing on defined outcomes, our concern in the project is to create an environment – an atmosphere – that encourages trust, challenging artists to connect and collaborate with new people and practice from across the region. Using EAST as a case study, this paper explores what atmospheres are and how they manifest in this performance project. The primary question being, can a study of atmosphere challenge cause and effect narratives that have dominated much theory and practice, and offer a more complex – and accurate – reading of the value and impact of performance in the region.

Geraldine Hepp (Gigi) – Co-founder and Creative Director of EAST – had thought about going on an extended train journey with artists since 2007. Inspired by a large photo of a red locomotive, which caught her eye during a jam-session and brought the trans-Siberian railway to mind, the initial idea was to use the rhythms of the train as a base-line for a musical and visual exploration, a project that drew on the context of the train and the space/time limitations it presented. Nine years later, Gigi and I met in Kenya when collaborating on a programme for cultural managers working in East Africa. After a journey on the Lunatic Express in Kenya, together we founded EAST in 2016. The Lunatic Express, as the old colonial train in Kenya is known, is a unique historical artefact, with an atmosphere of its own. With no power or phone signal, passengers are suspended somewhere between the past, present and future. It is a sensory environment, full of sounds: doors along the tight corridor swing open; windows shake and smash; there is a consistent rattle against the tracks which seeps through the gaps between carriages; milk slurps and swirls, spilling out of the chipped 1920s crockery; a bell rings. The train is filled with distinct smells: the must of old linen; the faded and aging burnt orange interiors; the heat of the sun, setting and rising across Kenya’s vast plains. Have you ever been on a train journey and found yourself immersed in a deep conversation with a stranger? When I first travelled on that old train, I was struck by how I was forced into an intense connection with my fellow passengers, how time was suspended and the space itself seemed to encourage creativity and focus.

Perhaps because our first sensory experience is in an enclosed space, moving to a beat, we enter a different state on train journeys. EAST brings bodies, materials and environments together; time spent collaborating, creating and chatting – squeezing in and squeezing past – sweating amongst the dust and the insects – the atmosphere – is fundamental to the project. EAST is a collaboration between individual creative professionals and organisations and has been shaped by a collective of creatives from the region and beyond.[[1]](#endnote-1) The project aims to raise the profile of the region’s contemporary arts scene whilst making space/time for creative risk-taking. It is an emotional and physical experience; it pushes boundaries, inspiring participants to experiment across disciplines and explore alternative narratives. It is not comfortable or easy, but this intense journey looks stimulates connection and trust, acting as a creative catalyst for new work and ideas. To date, there have been two editions of the project on Kenya’s Lunatic Express. The project has grown significantly from a two-day pilot project in 2016, powered by the Kenyan media outlet What’s Good Life, to a five-day pop-up residency in 2017 funded by the Belgium foundation Africalia and the British Council. Since the closing of the standard gauge railway in Kenya, we have undertaken a seven-day pilot version of the project in Tanzania, June 2019. As such, this paper primarily draws on my experiences of producing EAST17.

In February 2017, the second edition of the project started in Nairobi with two-days of workshops at the National Railway Museum. We then boarded a 24-hour train journey across Kenya’s historic tracks. Ninety-nine people – a handful of stakeholders, over sixty artists, twenty-five passengers and the team – jumped on-board, before arriving on the Kenyan coast for a day of community building and an evening of performances. Rather than focusing on defined outcomes, our emphasis was on creating an environment – an affective atmosphere – that may, or may not, stimulate trust, connection and act as a catalyst for new ideas. To achieve this, we drew on the existing environment, enhancing and manipulating materials and objects; using lighting and props to heighten spaces, bringing bodies together in a variety of confrontational ways. Designed by Mirembe Musisi, in 2017 amongst the rattling corridors and splattering milk there was the sanctuary, a silent cabin filled with germinating seeds sought to provide relief from the intense environment; clocks and watches were suspended through the dining wagon; origami and fabrics, masks and images, lined the corridors; pieces of old machines and neon sculptures filled the ‘glitch’ cabin, a distorted vision of the future. There was also a care cabin, where passengers could go for some respite, a conversation or just some peace. Different groups huddled in cabins and corridors: as you moved through the train you moved through different moods, in some corners people were euphoric, in others there was a sense of deep frustration; some people were partying whilst others shut their doors and slept in their cabins. In EAST, time and space are compressed and intensified; atmospheres move between confined bodies, materials and carriages, ever shifting along the tracks, everyone experiencing and feeling something different. In his article *Affective Atmospheres* (2009), Ben Anderson describesan atmosphere as ‘a kind of indeterminate affective “excess” through which intensive space-times can be created’ (80). Why might ‘affective atmospheres’ be useful when thinking about and making contemporary performance in East Africa?

It is not unusual to place emphasis on the environment, and the atmosphere(s) evoked, in performance or even commercial projects. It is thus surprising how little theoretical work, especially in Theatre and Performance Studies, there has been that explores the concept of atmosphere. The emphasis placed theoretically (and financially) on instrumental performance practice, such as T4D, is not representative of the regions cultural sector. Whilst I am aware of a handful of projects, in four years of living and working in East Africa I have never seen a ‘live’ example of T4D. Since the mid-1990s, a closer relationship with the development industry has increased financial support for the arts in such contexts. However, there remains fragmented policy, mixed messages about what art can and can’t do *for* development. And, despite the claims made and the emphasis placed on the instrumental value of performance, ‘the arts occupy a particularly fragile position in public policy, on account of the fact claims made for them, especially those relating to their transformative powers, are extremely hard to substantiate’ (Belfiore 2010, 5). Whilst a number of funders are sympathetic to the advancement of artistic practice beyond the realm of instrumental work, commissioning and grant-giving is often tied to international development agendas. Grants for arts and performance are generally small scale and made on a short-term basis to ‘reliable’ artists. Financial support for EAST has been assembled from a patch work of one-off grants from foundations and small companies, and the project has been continually referred to as inherently ‘risky’*.* To open up new opportunities for contemporary art and performance in the region, it is paramount we step away from linear and deterministic approaches of thinking about, and funding, artistic practice. Moving away from cause and effect narratives does not mean that there is no social, cultural, political or economic value. Instead, this article challenges readers to consider where impact is located in such performance projects.

In recent years there has been an affective turn in Applied Performance, led by James Thompson, which has looked to move debates in the field beyond the instrumental value of theatre interventions and recognise the affective qualities of performance practice. Whilst an important shift, affect has tended to be attached to individual and self-reflexive experience: ‘affect refers to emotional, often automatic, embodied responses that occur in relation to something else – be it object of observation, recall of a memory or practical activity’ (Thompson 2010, 119). Again, this approach is confounded in more recent explorations of the value of Applied Performance in developing contexts by Strupples and Twaiwa (2016); Flynn and Tinius (2015); and, John Clammer (2014). Whilst these accounts highlight how cultural practice can foster agency (social, political and economic), dialogue (between local, regional and international communities) and reflectivity (both for the individual artists and audiences), value is established by a determinist – cause and effect – agenda, and experience tends to be attached to individual and self-reflexive experience, failing to consider the contagious, contingent and relational elements which have been fundamental to the study of affect and atmosphere in Human Geography.

Philosopher Gernot Böhme asserts that the term atmosphere is used as a metaphor to describe ‘a certain mood hanging in the air’ (Böhme 2017, 294). Böhme’s argument is that atmosphere cannot be assigned to one space or one subject, instead it is ‘something in between subject and object’ (2017, 281). In EAST we anticipate how certain atmospheres *may* feel, but the impact is located in the contingent, contagious and relational qualities of objects and bodies in a confined space together. In the podcast Lugezigezi, Maimouna Jallow – a writer, storyteller and performance artist based in Kenya who was mentor in EAST17 – reflects on the challenges of working with a group of:

“amazing artists who all have their own dreams, desires, skills and experiences and everyone wants to take part in that creative process […] we all went through a process of transformation trying to create what we came up with in the end. There were tears, I can tell you that! Deep felt things that came up from the bellies of our stomachs and found release and, at the same time, so much joy and support.”

Maimouna Jallow, 2017.

Borne out of a number of experiences and a deep connection formed between nine women on the journey – together – they processed their stories, creating a collaborative and powerful piece of performance entitled *Punani* (2017). The piece was created in a relational way, contingent on the different skills and experiences of each woman, their energy – at times trauma – and power were contagious amongst other participants and audiences along the way. The existing, and heightened, environment – the distinct smells, sounds and spaces – were fundamental to bringing participants together in a unique experience, where they can connect and create freely. The environment impacted the connections, creative processes and performance piece: “on the train you’re going on a journey that has a destination. But at the same time, it is a circular process. In the last few days we have completely lost our sense of time, because things are going at a different pace […] you’re in a creative bubble” (Jallow, 2017).

In exploring *why* atmospheres might be useful in performance, I am drawn to Helen Nicholson’s study of affective learning, one of the only studies of atmosphere in Applied Performance, where, it is argued that current debates in Applied Performance fail to acknowledge the contagious and contingent qualities of ‘atmosphere in creating productive pedagogical encounters’ (Nicholson 2015, 167). Nicholson’s contention is that affective ‘atmosphere invites ways of thinking about affect that recognises its collectivity and materiality’ (Nicholson 2015, 169). In her exploration of theatre and learning, Nicholson illustrates how environments, buildings and institutions – alongside the performance and participants – all play a role in generating affect. In moving away from a human-centred approach, Nicholson is offering a more complex – and I would argue accurate – reading of affect, arguing that the recognition of atmospheres ‘requires a new kind of affective pedagogy that radically decentres human cognition as the primary focus of learning’ (Nicholson 2015, 182).

Our focus in EAST is to create affective atmospheres that generate trust. Trust is important in the region because whilst there is a thriving cultural scene, especially in the main cities, artists still struggle to make ends meet; whilst audiences want to consume art, they are not necessarily prepared to pay the price, and with limited subsidy it is all too often independent artists that lose. Due to limited resources, mobility and opportunities for connection in the region many artists experience a lack of trust amongst their peers and the wider cultural community. Artists are concerned about their peers stealing their ideas and partners not honouring their financial commitments and therefore many artists end up working in silos. There are limited donors that support the arts in the region; building relationships with funders is difficult for artists and resources tend to be distributed amongst a handful of well-networked individuals and organisations. All of these factors have contributed to a general feeling of mistrust and resulted in many artists failing to take creative risks, which in turn could develop the sector. Bringing people together in a confined space for an extended period of time, which pushes their physical and emotional boundaries, forces people to reconfigure their relationships and put trust in one and other where it wouldn’t otherwise be necessary. This is not always comfortable or easy; many artists experience a range of emotions from euphoria to frustration in a matter of hours. In the final performance, Ife Piankhe, a poet from Uganda who was also the MC for the closing event in 2017, asserted how destabilising the journey had been: ‘we came on a train here and it was very *agitating*! But what that manages to do is bring things to the surface’ (Closing Performance, Feb 3, 2017). The performance – the communality, the collaborations and the new practice that emerged from the journey – illustrated the trust generated by the atmospheres throughout the project.

Anticipating, but not knowing the outcome, means actively put trust in the artists and handing over the outcomes of the project to the collective. Specific outputs are not defined in the project: there is a performance opportunity, but it is not compulsory; we hope artists will connect with new people from across the region, but it is not obligatory; we design processes that anticipate and encourage interdisciplinary work, but it is not mandatory. For a sector often tied to a development industry – one that anticipates actions and determines effects – this degree of freedom is unusual. When reflecting on the project one participant exclaimed: ‘thanks for allowing the messiness of creative process and trusting artists to do what they are best at, creating and inspiring’ (Project Evaluation, Feb 6, 2017) . As Helen Nicholson argues, ‘it is generally understood that trust involves a correspondence between belief and expectation, commitment to a person or situation, responsibility for oneself, co-operative behaviour and care for others’ (Nicholson 2002, 82). Nicholson argues that trust is something that is in flux, it is communal, contingent and contagious. Trust – like atmosphere – is not a static construct, instead it is relational, being continually negotiated and renegotiated. It cannot be generated in a simplistic way, the result of a single component or activity. Instead, it is something more complex and manifests in multiple ways. Atmospheres, like trust, are not created by the environment alone, they are both objective – they flow out into the world – but they are also subjective, unlike things, places or objects ‘they are nothing without a subject feeling them’ (Böhme 2017, 281). Individuals’ bring with them their own story, which influences how they contribute and respond to the environment. Sara Ahmed argues that ‘bodies do not arrive neutral, if we are always in some way or another moody, then what we will receive as an impression will depend on our affective situation’ (Ahmed 2014, 36). As a team we recognise the contribution materials, environments and people make to generating an atmosphere of trust. We also acknowledge the *effect* of ones’ emotional state on the way atmospheres are taken up and reconstituted by participating subjects. As such, we aim to transcend and leverage the contextual opportunities and limitations from a production point of view, as well as a conceptual perspective, at every stage of the process. We do our best to manage the expectations of participants and enable them to enter the space in an open way: the information and materials available, the transport and welcome, food and accommodation all contribute to how an individual feels and their ‘affective situation’; making everyone feel – in their own ways – supported, informed and valued, is integral to generating a caring atmosphere where trust can manifest. ‘Anxiety is sticky’; if an element is out of sync it can shift the ‘certain mood’, seeping into a space, jumping from body to body and altering how things are perceived and experienced. Atmospheres are contingent and contagious.

In her text *The Transmission of Affect* (2010), which argues that affect and atmospheres jump, shift and move between bodies, Teresa Brennan asserts that

the transmission is also responsible for bodily changes; some are brief changes, as in a whiff of the room’s atmosphere, some longer lasting. In other words, the transmission of affect, if only for an instant, alters […] the subject. The ‘atmosphere’ or the environment literally gets into the individual’ (Brennan 2010, 1).

In certain circumstances people seek atmospheres out; sometimes, as a certain mood is transmitted from one body to another – literally getting into an individual – they take a subject by surprise; sometimes, for example in a political gathering, they make us act. But, located somewhere between bodies and things, they are always relational and ‘nothing without a subject feeling them’ (Böhme 2017, 281). Atmospheres are messy and chaotic, they ‘navigate and traverse objects, places, people and events; they are ephemeral and material, affective and social, human and non-human, spatial and temporal – each dualism marking the performativity of atmosphere’ (Nicholson 2015, 168). Atmospheres are performative, the ‘pull’ or ‘charge’ alone doesn’t do anything, but when experienced, when felt, ‘it can set into motion a set of actions that can, under certain felicitous circumstances’ bring about change (Butler 2010, 148).

Rather than focusing on defined outcomes, our emphasis in EAST is on creating the conditions – an atmosphere – that may, or may not, stimulate trust and thus connection, acting as a catalyst – a *propensity* – for new work. What might the value of such a precarious notion be? Whether being used for economic or political means it is widely accepted that atmosphere can move people and have a real effect on the world. In his book *Encountering Affect* (2014), Anderson explores how atmospheres have become both economic and political commodities. Using the marketing company ScentAir UK as an example, Anderson explains how the company ‘sells the promise of atmosphere manipulation: the capacity to explicate the affective background of sites and turn atmospheres into resources to be harnessed for economic value-creation’ (Anderson 2014, 25). This argument is echoed by Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* 2nd ed.(2014), who asserts that communities, institutions and governments play on collective emotions to generate feelings of pain, hate and fear, which in turn make people act. Whilst it is acknowledged that these emotions affect some bodies more than others, it is argued that emotions are ‘often construed as an instrument: as something that we use simply to persuade or seduce others into false belief’ (Ahmed 2014, 194). In EAST the subjects’ encounter with atmosphere, their transmission and transformation of affect, the fact atmosphere can be experienced in different ways, at different times, by different people, in this context gives atmosphere its power. Atmosphere is a resource in EAST, a catalyst, for relational agency. Moving away from a deterministic approach does not mean that there is no social, cultural or economic value attached to performance. Instead, atmosphere offers an alternative framework – that can recognise the contingent, contagious and relational qualities of performance – for thinking through such interventions.

In EAST people confounded or transmitted atmospheres, pulled each other into new moods, or transformed their experience. Subjects felt a certain power in this – an agency – in the open-endedness and the realisation that you could determine and affect other people. For example, Ejuku Mark, a percussionist from Uganda, took his drum into different spaces throughout the journey. At times his rhythms would instigate a euphoric atmosphere, transforming conversations into a celebration. At times Ejuku worked with what was already happening, holding a repetitive beat in the background, and consolidating what was already in play. His rhythms and beats also set the foundations for a number of performance pieces. When reflecting on the project, Ejuku explained how the process helped him rediscover his power as a drummer, not only as a supporting percussionist, but an artist in his own right that could shift the atmosphere, that could take centre stage. As boundaries were crossed and pushed, as artists became aware of the subjective and objective, contingent and contagious elements at play, people were brought together in an intense connection.

Agency remains a buzzword in contemporary development discourse. Following Sherry Ortner, I argue that in East African development discourse the word ‘agency’ too often ‘calls to mind the autonomous, individualistic, western actor’ (Ortner 2006, 130). Such an understanding of ‘agency’ reiterates the cause and effect narratives peddled by the development industry, and fails to take into account the complex, context specific, factors in play in the emergence of agency. Ortner argues that ‘agency is not some natural or original will; it takes shape as specific desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity – of (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts and meanings’ (Ortner 2006, 110). Moving away from the definition of agency as a ‘reflexive choice in situations where people could have acted otherwise’, Burkitt sees agency as relational, contingent on ‘action that produces an effect on the world and on others’ (Burkitt 2016, 332). Agency comes into being not through autonomous, individual, actions, but instead through action taken in a complex subjective, objective and relational matrix. In this definition of agency, no one is ever just an agent or a recipient, instead in any given moment we are ‘acting upon others and being acted upon by others to varying degrees’ (Burkitt 2016, 336).

In his exploration of flying a kite, Tim Ingold argues that,

the dance of agency, it turns out, is a threesome in which each partner [the kite, the air, the flyer] acts upon, and is in turn acted upon by, the other two. Take away one partner, and the performance will fail. (Ingold 2013, 99)

In this regard, atmosphere – like agency – is always a dance between the subject(s), the object(s) and bits in-between, each element’s agency coming into being through its relational engagement with the other components in this complex meshwork. *X EAR X* is a film directed by Emily McCartney in collaboration with 16 artists during EAST17 (McCartney 2017). It was presented alongside a live performance-installation in the project’s closing event, and subsequently online. It was a dance of agency between a number of movement artists, filmmakers and photographers, and also involved visual artists, passengers and staff from the railway. It was a product of a range of emergent ideas, experiences and approaches to creating work, as well as an environment, equipment and objects that were not static, but on a journey, each with their own degree of agency. Each component was continuously affecting and being affected as part of this complex meshwork. Following L. Malafouris, I argue that agency, like atmosphere,

is in constant flux, an in-between state that constantly violates and transgresses the physical boundaries of the elements that constitute it. Agency is a temporal and interactively emergent property of activity, not an innate and fixed attribute of the human condition. (Malafouris 2008 34).

If one ‘partner’ had acted or brought something different to the collaboration, the final product would have changed.

In order to demonstrate agency, subjects (or objects) must be able to reconfigure an aesthetic experience in relation to how it is significant to their own experience, how they perceive it and how it affects them. Whilst there has been a move away, to some extent, from dogmatic lessons in T4D, a tendency remains in applied performance and more generally in development contexts, to assume what should be perceived and felt by participants. If the project is not about dictating a specific lesson, it is about participants asserting their agency, which looks like placing ‘one’s body meaningfully in front of an audience and therefore asserting the value of the embodied being’ (Plastow 2015, 121). Atmospheres – in their openendness and the essentiality of a participant taking them up and reconstituting them based on their own experiences – demand agency.

My contention is that a focus on atmosphere is pertinent because, not only does it allow one to recognise the multiple environments, materials and subjects constituting a given artistic event, but it allows for what Chantal Mouffe describes as an ‘agonistic’ democracy. Mouffe’s argument ‘is that only in the context of a perspective according to which “difference” is construed as the condition of possibility, of being, that a radical democratic project informed by pluralism can be adequately formulated’ (Mouffe 2000, 19). Her argument is that ‘to negate the ineradicable character of antagonism and to aim at a rational consensus […] is the real threat to democracy’ (Mouffe 2000, 22). Through leaving space for an experience to be taken up through sensed experience – through seeing the different experiences of bodies as the condition of possibility – a focus on atmosphere allows for a radical and democratic performance project. Such a performance project is particularly pertinent in context where actions, and their anticipated effects, are dictated by external forces. EAST has been a catalyst for a range of creative connections, collaborations and projects in East Africa and Europe. As a consequence of the trust generated, connections forged, and creative risks taken, traces of EAST have been seen in Kampala Fashion Week, in Salooni – a travelling, modular, multidisciplinary art installation exploring black hair – in events and performances in Kampala, Kigali, and Nairobi as well as on global streaming problems such as Spotify. Yet, we don’t know what – if anything – will emerge before we embark on the journey. Whilst the effects or outputs are unknown, may be the value – and impact – lies in the generation of *potential*, of an affective atmosphere that only comes into effect as it is experienced and enacted in a relational way.

Recognising the limitations in the creative sector across the region – the lack of mobility, resources, autonomy and connection, that in turn have had an effect on creative risk taking – EAST looks to offer new ways of making performance. Our focus is on setting the conditions – the *generators* – in which affective atmospheres can appear. The *generators* of atmosphere in EAST are multiple: the environment itself, the various subjects involved – artists, audience, stakeholders – the resources, logistics, production set-up, communications and materials available at any given moment all contribute to creating the conditions for different atmospheres to emerge. In 2017, once the pull, the *propensity*, was created the project took on a life of its own. Everything was in flux. We handed the outcomes over to the artists, atmospheres and agency shifted and jumped between people, emerging through the interplay of bodies, props and the environment itself. Malcolm Bigyemano, a filmmaker, graphic and performance artist from Uganda, reflected on how frustrating the journey had been at times for him. He had arrived with a clear outline of what he wanted to produce during the project, yet was challenged by the environment, the ideas and methodologies of other creatives. As such, he was forced out of his comfort zone and felt disappointed that he didn’t produce something immediately tangible. However, for Bigyemano, EAST resulted in a range of encounters and conversations with artists he wouldn’t have necessarily connected with, in the aftermath he produced an extended episode of the podcast *Lugezigezi* (Jallow 2017), in which he interviewed artists from the project, collaborated on the film *X EAR X* (McCartney 2017) and teamed up with an animator after the residency to explore developing a short film about their experience.

Whilst there has been little academic exploration of atmosphere in Applied Performance, especially in East Africa, I have argued that value and impact can be located in the pull, the *propensity*, the atmosphere, and all its contingent and contagious complexities. A new approach to understanding performance in the region is fundamental to developing the sector; limited, outcome-based approaches – which are driven by funders of artistic practice in the region – constrain the physical, emotional and creative potential of the cultural sector in East Africa. In EAST artists were affected, experienced and interacted with each other and the environment in different ways, but they all shared a unique experience. EAST connects people: an underground Congolese hip hop artist can reach out to a successful Kenyan music producer about collaborating, because they shared a unique experience. Shifting the focus of a project away from specific outputs to affective atmospheres, places trust in participating artists. My contention is that this trust, the essentiality of artists’ engagement, transmission and transformation of atmosphere, can act as a catalyst for relational agency, which in turn can have a range of on-going effects including new ideas and practice. Since the project begun in 2016, we have engaged over 100 artists and seen new cutting-edge collaborations in film, music and the visual arts between participants of the project, new networks, performance and professional opportunities, as well as friendships between artists and stakeholders from across the region. In a time of change, when hegemonic perspectives that have dominated social, political and economic thought are revealing their dysfunction, EAST focuses on the power of connecting creatives, inspiring risk-taking and reimagining old narratives, pushing the boundaries of artistic practice and geographies, and expanding the impact of work through collaboration and a focus on atmosphere.

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1. EAST is a collaboration between individual creative professionals and organisations. It is shaped by a collective of creatives from the region and beyond. Founded by Geraldine Hepp and Poppy Spowage in 2016, EAST has been brought to life through collaborations with organisations, ventures and foundations such as What’s Good Studios (KE), Distant Relatives Backpackers (KE), Creatives Garage (KE), British Council (EA) and Africalia (BE). The core team making things happen throughout one or more editions has featured: Adam Chienjo, Brian Msafiri, Checkmate Mido, Chrissie Thompson, Evans Campbell, George Gikaria, Geraldine Hepp, Jojo Abot, Maimouna Jallow, Marion Munga, Marla Degathi, Mirembe Musisi, Patience Asaba Katushabe, Poppy Spowage, Sarah Drain, Sarah Mallia and Yule Burlefinger. Our current partners include: CDEA (TZ), Creatives Garage (KE), BASATA (TZ), TaSUBa (TZ), Burning Man (US), Techne and Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK), Goethe Institute (EA), British Council (EA), MeshWorks (UK), Africalia (BE), Bayimba (UG) and FireFly (TZ). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)