Producing Performance, Producing Atmosphere:
Looking Beyond Development in the Production of Art and
Performance in East Africa

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Abstract

This practice-based research took place in East Africa, which has a vibrant, diverse and dynamic contemporary cultural scene. However, with limited government support and commercial opportunities, artists and organisations remain reliant on international donors, who maintain a strong focus on addressing economic and human-centred development goals. In response, this research project explores the affective, collective and material qualities of art and performance. This is done through an examination of the author's work as a producer with Nyege Nyege International Music Festival in Uganda (2016 - 2018) and East African Soul Train (2016 – 2020), a creative adventure and pop-up residency for artists centred around a journey on the region's historic railway. This research addresses the role of the producer, recognising that this practice has been overlooked in the academy. It also considers how the producer works across – and integrates – the social, aesthetic and material worlds of a project. Taking production as a starting point, this thesis then investigates how atmosphere, uncertainty and empathy can be experienced in the moment of performance and open up new possibilities for artists and audiences. The central argument is that affect is crucial in art and performance, and atmosphere offers a way of recognising its relational, contingent and contagious qualities. The proposition is that although atmospheres are inherently uncertain, they are also generative, future-orientated and can open up new possibilities. This thesis argues that atmospheres have a change-making potential, which offers a way of conceptualising creative practice beyond instrumental paradigms. Finally, drawing on the methodologies of the producer, this research explores one way of bringing artists, thinkers and their patrons together to reimagine ways of making and supporting contemporary East African art and performance.

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A Beginning...

When I was recently asked why I began working in the arts and performance, I immediately recalled Anne Bogart's description in *Theatre & Feeling* (2010). Like Bogart, 'I initially chose the theatre because it grabbed me by the collar, thrilled me, confused me, and then tossed me into a swirl of unfamiliarity, proposing by example that the scope of life can be far wider and wilder than ever I imagined' (2010, xiv). I have always been attracted to the fleeting 'sweep of feeling, of emotion, of adrenaline, surges of dopamine and serotonin' felt in moments of art and performance, and, as a researcher and producer remain excited about the role I can play in generating 'magnetic forceful affect' (Bogart 2010, xiv). By focusing on how affect is generated and manifested, I will reimagine the relationship between art, performance and change in East Africa.

I have spent over ten years creating moments of performance: coordinating and producing arts events, training and exchange projects in the UK, Asia, East Africa, and Latin America. Between 2010 and 2014, I worked with People's Palace Projects (PPP), an arts and research organisation based at Queen Mary, University of London. Founded and led by Artistic Director Professor Paul Heritage, PPP focuses on bringing artists, activists, academics and audiences together in a wide range of participatory arts projects, performances, educational initiatives and debates in order to explore social justice and human rights issues.[1] PPP's portfolio of work demonstrates that art and performance in and of itself has a social function. Its cultural exchange and arts projects, in Brazil and the UK, bring together the social, the aesthetic and the material in surprising, beautiful and impactful ways. I believe we need more of this type of work, which continues to be an inspiration for my research and practice. Throughout my Undergraduate and Masters

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[1] For more information about their work and current programme visit their website: http://peoplespalaceprojects.org.uk/en/.

degrees, as well as during my time with PPP, I found a home at Queen Mary Drama department. Whilst I have always been interested in international and socially-engaged creative practice, the department's focus on contemporary performance and live art excited me. Gradually my attention shifted from performance interventions with a specific community, centred around an issue of social injustice, to focusing on, what Heritage describes as, 'powerful, intense productive' artistic moments (Heritage 2010, 28). In my work I remain committed to raising the profile and developing platforms for contemporary art and performance practice, which is dynamic, cutting-edge and has the potential to be intensely productive.

PPP introduced me to the role of the producer. My work centred around the supporting structures of art and performance, doing what was necessary behind the scenes to make a creative project come to life. This included fundraising, engaging different artists and stakeholders, taking care of logistics and production requirements, financial, organisational and event management, festival curation, hosting people, reporting and thinking strategically about the positioning of a project. I was starting to become a producer. I was interested in reflecting on what that meant and understanding how I could develop my practice. However, when I started to look for literature on the subject I came up short. Outside of arts management and administration, which failed to capture the creative and strategic potential I saw in the role, little scholarly attention had been paid to producing. A lack of clear definition meant that there were mixed messages from different individuals and organisations about what producers should do. For example, a radio station sees a producer as the person who sets up the content for a broadcast, whereas in film a producer typically plans and coordinates various elements of a production, including the writing, directing, editing and securing finance. I am a producer of live events and work with different creative disciplines. Depending on the initiative, my work can include overseeing the curation, taking care of artist and audience's needs, managing communications, the organisation and the team, securing and looking after partnerships and finance. This type of work has escaped much consideration in practice, and, apart from learning on the job, there were scant opportunities to develop my knowledge and skills.

I left the UK for Kenya in the summer of 2015. My ambition was to find out more about East Africa's cultural scene, to begin thinking about a doctoral project and what it meant to be an independent creative producer. I had met a number of East Africans the previous year in Malawi and it had sounded like there was a cultural renaissance happening in the region. I wasn't disappointed. I was instantly struck by the intense creativity I saw in every direction, but also by the sense of community amongst artists making things happen. I wanted to roll my sleeves up, get involved and learn about this exciting scene. My journey has been 'far wider and wilder than I could have ever imagined' (Bogart 2010, xiv). There are multiple places to start thinking through art and performance in East Africa, this is just one point of departure and one of my stories.

It was colder than you would think and I was staying on the couch of a friend of a friend I'd been connected with when I was still in the UK. I set up camp in the corner of the living room, and at night piled all the Maasai blankets I could find on top of myself, hoping that the mosquitoes wouldn't find their way in. I pinned a postcard up on the wall above my pillow and tucked my bags away between the sofa and an old piano. I had travelled in Southern Africa, but it was my first time in the East. I'd met a number of Kenyan musicians at Lake of Stars music festival in Malawi the previous year; Nairobi's cultural scene had sounded so cutting-edge. But, back in the UK, it had been impossible to get a sense of it, to connect with people, to find much to read or even see online. I had trolled through books, academic journals and hundreds of websites, asked friends and colleagues. I was pointed in the direction of a few organisations and projects, but it was clear I had to visit.

When I arrived I didn't really know anybody, but I was staying in a big house where people were always coming and going, welcoming and generous. I was introduced to creatives, pointed in the direction of organisations I should visit and invited to different events. That first week was packed full – I visited PAWA 254, a cultural hub, founded by political activist Boniface Mwangi, for creatives to meet, network, share and collaborate on social impact projects in the heart of Nairobi; Sarakasi Trust, a dance and circus school for aspiring acrobats; Creatives Garage, a creative space where young people were producing events, music, film and graphic design every hour of the day; and, I even wandered into a

contemporary dance class at the GoDown Arts Centre. I went to Alliance Français and saw Cameroonian musician Franck Bijong play, stumbled across a blues-jam in a dive bar near Dagoretti Corner, and went to an electronic club-night on the rooftop of a shopping mall. There was Thursday Nite Live, curated by Abdi Rashid Jibril at 'Choices', hiphop blasting out of distorted speakers on every bus I jumped on, and tango classes in the living room. I visited Mathare Community Radio Station and spent a number of days with Turning Tables, a film and music production company, who were producing popular music videos for marginalised artists in and around Kibera. I was welcomed into contemporary art galleries such as Circle Art Gallery and Kuona Trust, now known as Kunoa Artists Collective; I had long conversations with illustrators, theatre makers and photographers. In all corners of the city, Nairobi seemed to be overflowing with creative energy.

Research Notes from Kenya, August 2015
Edited in London, December 2016.

Throughout this thesis, when I use the term 'East Africa' and the 'region', I refer to my work and experiences in Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya and Tanzania, rather than the formal East African community, which includes Burundi and South Sudan. Kenyan writer and academic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o describes East Africa as 'a kaleidoscope of colours, cultures, and contours of history' (1993, 28). Despite the differing communities and contexts, creatives from, living and working in these four countries are experiencing similar opportunities and challenges, and often refer to their geography as 'East Africa' or their practice as 'East African'. Whilst recognising the plurality of the region, my ambition in using 'East Africa' is to speak to these commonalities, broadening the relevance and application of this research. I also look to connect my work to a wave of projects that are together increasing the international exposure of contemporary art and performance from the region.

When I began this research, East Africa's popular and contemporary cultural scene was, and remains, predominantly absent in the academy. After just a few days in Nairobi it was clear that there was a stark disconnect between what was happening in the region and what

was being represented and explored in the western scholarly discourse I had been exposed to. Research about art and performance in East Africa seemed to focus on plays, playwrights and indigenous forms of performance. And any work explicitly examining social change tended to emphasise instrumental performance practice such as Theatre for Development (TfD), which involves the application of arts and performance to specifically address a range of development goals (Prentki 2015, 7). In the essay, 'Wishing for a World without 'Theatre for Development': Demystifying the case of Bangladesh', Syed Jamil Ahmed argues for 'just plain and simple theatre – theatre that never ceases to 'develop', theatre which allows debate, dialogue, reflexivity, dreaming the impossible and the fight to infinity' (2002, 218). In the wide variety of contemporary and popular live music, dance, film, visual arts, poetry and circus I saw in those first few days in Nairobi, there was no development, at least not in the sense that Ahmed describes. There was 'debate, dialogue, reflexivity, dreaming the impossible' but not workshops or performance that looked to directly address issues of economic or human-centred development (Ahmed 2002, 218). To paraphrase Anne Bogart, the work that I saw grabbed people by the collar, thrilled them, confused them, and tossed them into a swirl of unfamiliarity (2010, xiv). In this research and my practice, I have focused on looking beyond development paradigms to understand the *potential* of such moments of art and performance.

Alongside the evolution, and as part of the execution of this research, I have been independently producing a range of arts and performance projects across East Africa, in collaboration with a diverse community of individuals and institutions. This has included working with The Hatchery (2015-16), a social innovation training programme for cultural managers working across the region run by the Amani Institute and supported by Hivos. In 2016, I produced a series of events in Nairobi with Ghanaian artist Jojo Abot and Africa-Na-Ladi, a multimedia collective that aims to create a community of young underground and alternative African artists. I also co-founded East African Soul Train (EAST), a pop-up residency and creative adventure for artists from across the region and beyond. To date, there have been two editions of EAST in Kenya (2016 and 2017) and, since the closing of the standard gauge railway in Kenya, we ran a pilot version of EAST in Tanzania (2019). I have worked extensively with Nyege Nyege, a community-based

arts organisation in Kampala, Uganda, which included producing 'The Ghost in the Machine' (2016) a three-week residency and performance project in Kampala, led by UK-based digital artist Gary Stewart with seven emerging artists from across the region. I have also produced three editions of Nyege Nyege International Music Festival (NNIMF), 2016-2018. NNIMF – 'The irresistible urge to dance' – is an immersive journey into the sonic landscape of East Africa, which brings the most cutting-edge musical acts from around Africa and beyond together in a magical setting on the shores of the River Nile in Jinja, Uganda. In 2017, alongside the festival, I ran a training programme for young East African producers, supported by the British Council.

During my time in East Africa, I have witnessed a range of highly-funded festivals and exhibitions that have lacked the audience and dynamism of contemporary and popular work happening metres away in recording studios and pop-up performance venues. Yet, these events continue to be supported year on year, able to fulfil – or at least shoehorn their work into – the limited but required social impact narratives. Kenyan musician and cultural producer Muthoni Ndonga, also known as Muthoni Drummer Queen, shares my frustrations. Via her Instagram stories, she urged her followers to look beyond the limited narratives and agendas being peddled by funders: 'East African artists, FUCK THE GIMMICKS. Are you a real artist? Do that! Make epic art. Be great. Create global cool only. Be an excellent rep for East Africa when you tour. Fuck working to make what gatekeepers told you is dope. That whack shit needs to end. Plus, it doesn't work globally, so what's the fucking point??' (Ndonga 2019). New ways of conceptualising the potential of creative practice in East Africa are urgently needed. Whilst over the last twenty years there has been increased international funding for the arts in East Africa, and a growing exposure of work around the globe, there still remains fragmented policy and mixed messages about what art *can* and *should* do. Although many people who are making and supporting performance practice in the region do so for social reasons beyond its instrumental application, it is an outcome-based narrative, oscillating around what the arts can do *for* development, that continues to be affirmed in research and policy. In response to this I have looked to reimagine the relationship between art, performance and narratives of social change.

This research project is practice-based and my work with NNIMF and EAST forms the basis of *Producing Performance, Producing Atmosphere: Looking Beyond Development in the Production of Art and Performance in East Africa*. There is a creative portfolio of work that accompanies this thesis, which provides an introduction to both projects and I invite you to read in its entirety to get a sense of the work. I also point to particular images, audio and films throughout the thesis. Critically, there are two films that give a visual introduction to each project. There is a QR code which links to *Nyege Nyege Festival: What Went Down in 2016* (2017), which can be found on page 12 of the portfolio, and one to *Kovu Safarini* (2017), a short film showcasing artists from the 2016 edition of EAST, on page 61. I reference material throughout the thesis that can be accessed via the QR codes in the portfolio. How you will listen or watch these will depend on your smartphone. On an iPhone simply go to your camera and point it at the code; it will then automatically load the video or playlist. This should also work on your Android device but, if not, please download the free QR & Barcode Scanner app from the Google Play store. Once downloaded, open the app and point the screen at the code. It should then open the link.

Figure 1: Main stage Nyege Nyege International Music Festival, 2017. Photographer: Ian Kacungira.

Whilst I believe in art and performance's capacity to challenge, recalibrate and have a social effect on the world, I have reckoned with the term 'change' throughout this research project. In contexts such as East Africa, narratives of change are often conceptualised in a linear way and associated with the development industry. As a white European producing creative work in East Africa the idea of producing 'change' evokes uncomfortable images of white 'heroes', which I don't wish to convey and nor does it reflect my work or ambition. Instrumental social 'change' in this sense is also not an explicit agenda of either of the projects I have produced, or of the popular and contemporary practice I point to more widely. The *potential* of performance is a motivation of mine. As such, throughout this thesis, I employ the term 'change-making', to point to a more expansive notion of change and the complex, multiple and contradictory role(s) performance can play. I borrow the term from Yoko Akama, Sarah Pink and Shanti Sumartojo's book *Uncertainty and Possibility: New Approaches to Future Making in Design Anthropology* (2018). By change-making they 'do not mean a solution-based approach or formulate cause-and-effect' (Akama, Pink and Sumartojo 2018, 3). Rather, they 'see change-making as a form of intervention in a process that involves the opening up of many possibilities' (Akama, Pink and Sumartojo 2018, 3). Given the context of this project, this is an active and political decision. Change-making is not done in isolation and should not be seen 'as progress, a utopic vision, or to produce predictive, prescriptive steps in linear ways' (Akama, Pink and Sumartojo 2018, 11). Instead, I employ the term as a way of moving forward 'in ways that are open, responsive and with care' (Akama, Pink and Sumartojo 2018, 5).

How this Research is Organised

In the rest of this chapter I outline some of the ways in which East African art and performance – in practice and research – is intricately intertwined with development. With limited governmental and commercial support, artists and organisations remain reliant on resources from international donors and foundations, which often maintain a strong focus on opportunities for economic growth and human-centred development. Whilst over the

last twenty years this has seen increased international support for the arts in the region, theoretical research has maintained a limited social and aesthetic scope. What has been affirmed in contemporary research and policy is an outcome-based narrative oscillating around what the arts can *do* for development. It has been widely argued that instrumental paradigms for understanding the role of arts and performance have, historically, not been effective. And, in the case of East Africa, the arts remain in a fragile position, with short-term and risk-averse funding structures, and, in some cases, this is also affecting the scope of contemporary work being produced. *Producing Performance, Producing Atmosphere: looking beyond development in the production of art and performance in East Africa* emerged out of an urgently needed response to this context.

In Chapter Two I consider my approach to research in this doctoral project. I provide an outline of the role of the producer and introduce the projects NNIMF and EAST that have formed the basis of this research. I then outline the ways in which I have worked and who I have worked with in an effort to ensure this research remains future-orientated and relevant in both scholarly discourse, development and participatory performance practice. Finally, I summarise the specific methods I have employed for gathering and analysing data beyond the production of work itself. Accompanying this thesis is a portfolio of my practice, presented as an art book, which provides an introduction to my work and that I cross-reference throughout. This material points to different atmospheres and moments that I have analysed in this the body of this thesis. It also provides an audio and visual impression of the cutting-edge and productive creative work that has motivated this project, and which I remain committed to raising the profile of amongst researchers and audiences around the world.

In Chapter Three I introduce the concept of atmosphere and why it has been fundamental to my practice. As a producer, my attention is on how atmospheres are produced, unfold and how they manifest. Whilst atmospheres are slippery and hard to grasp, I describe how their relational, multiple and ever-evolving nature has offered me a new way of conceptualising my practice and its relationship to change-making. I argue that atmosphere offers a way of accounting for the collective and material qualities of affect,

which have escaped consideration in much performance research. Using my experiences producing NNIMF I explore how atmospheres manifested in the festival context and how I generate them as a producer. In EAST we used atmosphere to engender particular affects and catalyse new creative practice. I explore how this worked and, using the concept of agency, begin to consider the change-making potential of art and performance.

In Chapter Four I expand on how uncertainty has played both a disruptive and generative role in my practice. Uncertainty is a particular characteristic of atmospheres. Rather than shying away from uncertainty, this chapter introduces the different ways I have encountered it in my practice. Using my experiences of producing NNIMF and EAST as an example, I explore how uncertainty in performance can be productive, is future-orientated and can open up new possibilities. In relation to my own practice, I unpack Alice O'Grady's proposition that 'to embrace risk ... is not only a question of aesthetic choice, a playing with form, and a structuring of technique, [but] it is also a political stance that indicates commitment to openness as meaningful encounter and exchange between humans' (O'Grady 2018, ix). In my practice, engaging with the concepts of atmosphere and uncertainty has been a way of recognising the unique qualities and potential of art and performance.

In Chapter Five I interrogate my work as a producer and consider how some of these ideas might be applied in practice. I consider how interpersonal relationships have been a critical support structure in my own practice and in the work that I produce. I use storytelling as a way of understanding how I build connections between the social, aesthetic and material worlds of a project. Constructing a space for uncertainty and affect in development paradigms is urgently needed. It is through having a multifaceted perspective that I have found ways to connect disparate narrative threads. I argue that as a starting point for developing more future-orientated perspectives we need to create more spaces and a culture of robust empathy between those making, researching and supporting artistic practice. Before reflecting on, and looking beyond, this research project in Chapter six, I use a strand of work we are developing in EAST as an example of how such an environment can be created.

A Creative Context | Art and Performance in East Africa

East Africa has a vibrant and diverse art and performance sector. Major cities across the region are host to a variety of exhibitions, concerts and performance events; creative companies and cultural organisations are infiltrating communities, occupying dive-bars and industrial warehouses. Beaches, forests and the banks of the river Nile have been transformed into sites for large-scale installations and festivals; there are live music venues and record labels promoting everything from jazz and pop, to electronic and traditional fusions, alongside those specialising in 'world' music. Studios are distributing local dancehall on USBs, artists are being represented on global streaming platforms such as Spotify, and there are reality TV shows, such as Coke Studio, that platform talent and collaborations between artists from across the continent. The frenetic electronic sounds of Tanzanian Singeli are spreading out from the ghettos of Dar es Salaam, whilst Nu Nairobi is connecting Kenya to the world. Live art and performance elements are featured in installations, and technology and digital media are being employed increasingly in art-making and its dissemination. New music, theatre, storytelling and film festivals are appearing year on year, and gradually these activities are seeping out of the region's capitals to more rural areas. Artists and organisations are showcasing, promoting and distributing art and performance. And, as a result of social media, shifts in international programming and a wave of initiatives, there has been a recent surge of interest in contemporary East African arts around the globe. Both NNIMF and EAST in different ways are part of this cultural scene.

By 'contemporary' art and performance I refer to works of music, dance, film, festivals, visual arts, design, fashion, theatre and literature which are current. Mercy Nabirye, Head of Dance of the African Diaspora explains that 'contemporary is something which is 'of the now', it is ever evolving' (British Council and Royal African Society 2019, 15). Kenyan filmmaker Wanuri Kahiu describes how contemporary African arts are 'future-

looking: all kinds of art that there are currently and are yet to be explored ... it's a shape-shifting thing that will continuously change' (British Council and Royal African Society 2019, 14). Writer and curator Nadia Denton argues that contemporary African art features 'content on a par with similar international work' (British Council and Royal African Society 2019, 15). For example, 'contemporary African film would be content that pushes the boundaries of what Africa is, that rightfully grants African filmmakers a place at the global table of world cinema and shows something different that we perhaps have not seen before' (British Council and Royal African Society 2019, 15). There is a huge amount of cutting-edge contemporary creative practice happening in the region.

Despite this eclectic landscape, there is little government funding for the arts across East Africa. In my experience, work supported by state institutions in Uganda, is often market-driven, related to garnering specific types of exposure, or because of a covert interest in reinforcing particular values and messages. Artistic subjects are not formally included in the National Curriculum in Kenya, Uganda or Tanzania (Hivos 2015, 10), and many peoples' experience in Nairobi is that there are 'no trade organisations or government body supporting young artists' (Zur-Szpiro 2018). There are a number of relatively successful commercial endeavours such as art galleries in Nairobi, Kampala, Dar es Salaam and Kigali; bars, restaurants, hostels and office spaces in these capital cities double up as music, dance and theatre venues; and there are a handful of lucrative large concerts showcasing popular musicians most months. Some of these mainstream events attract sponsorship from corporations operating in the region, such as breweries, telecommunication companies and airlines, which are supporting their growth. Even popular underground events such as NNIMF are now receiving private sector support.

The festival NNIMF is run by Nyege Nyege, a Kampala-based arts collective that also have an artist residency and community studio, two record labels (Nyege Nyege Tapes and Hakuna Kulala) as well as the artist booking agency AfroLudo and legendary party crew called Boutiq Electroniq. The festival's corporate sponsorship started in 2015, and in 2018 Nyege Nyege started to generate income for artists via the record labels, international tours and the festival. NNIMF now holds the promise of a successful social

enterprise that can continue to subsidise other activities associated with the collective. Narratives of enterprise and entrepreneurship – of sustainability – are increasingly popular in attracting donors and partners. Whilst I don't negate the significant global imprint of interventions such as Nyege Nyege, and the importance of self-reliant and sustainable work, a profit-driven model is not a viable option for every artistic endeavour. Consider EAST, a pop-up residency, creative adventure and artist development programme; the focus is on process rather than on outcomes. We look to work with artists from all disciplines, including those which are less popular with audiences or hold limited commercial opportunities. My practice straddles the commercial and not-for-profit sectors, and, in different ways, both are challenging in East Africa's emerging market. The result is that the majority of creatives have to subsidise their work with 'side-hustles', whether that is holding down another occupation, testing out commercial opportunities, or working with international non-governmental organisations (INGOs).

With little government support and limited commercial opportunities, for both the production and distribution of contemporary art and performance, many artists and cultural organisations look to international governments, donors and foundations to subsidise their practice. These include embassies working in the region, multilateral organisations such as UNESCO, the World Bank and the World Health Organisation, as well as large INGOs such as Save the Children and Oxfam. However, things are changing: there are funders working in the region specifically focused on cultural development, including organisations such as Africalia (Belgium), African Culture Fund (Mali), Alliance Français (France), Arts Collaboratory (Netherlands), British Council (UK), Ford Foundation (US), GiZ (Germany), Goethe Institute (Germany), Hivos (Netherlands), Music in Africa (South Africa), Prince Claus Foundation (Netherlands), Stichting Doen (Netherlands) and The African Arts Trust (UK). Many of these institutions are interested in the contemporary cultural scene and are sympathetic to the advancement of artistic practice beyond the realm of instrumental practice. Regardless of this, commissioning and grant-giving is still very much tied to development narratives, and is often determined by identified social, economic, cultural or political causes, for which specific outcomes are required. For example, work that offers creative skills training, addresses market access

for artists, information gaps for particular audiences, or practice that explicitly comments on issues facing civil society, such as the empowerment of marginalised communities. Donors tend to support quantifiable elements of creative programmes that chime with international agendas.

In the journal article 'Beyond the Predicted: expanding our understanding of creative agency in international development through practice and policy', Polly Stupples explores this tension, arguing that 'most donors who support the arts strive to articulate what the arts can do for development's core concerns of economic growth and human-centred development' (2017, 54). Stupples draws attention to the fact that even those committed to supporting the arts' broader agentic qualities often 'employ forms of monitoring and evaluation that are reductionist', such as a 'logical framework (a common planning, monitoring and evaluation tool in the development context) [which] requires predetermined outcomes, usually quantifiably measurable and within a short time-frame' (2017, 55). The value of work remains tied to what it can do *for* development. I add that leading workshops in fundraising, monitoring, evaluation and reporting for East African cultural managers, as part of The Hatchery (2015-16), reinforced how these systems privilege those with a certain experience, cultural diplomacy and western linguistic dexterity. Taking the lead from Dutch funders such as Stichting Doen, Stupples argues for the wider use of more expansive monitoring and evaluation tools to capture the agentic qualities of performance. Expanding on this, I believe that there is a need to challenge the assumption that artistic practice in contexts such as East Africa must explicitly address specific social issues in order to justify its value.

A Development Context | Art and Performance in East Africa

Ideas of development have been in operation for centuries, but throughout this written thesis by 'development' I refer to an *industry* that many people cite was born in 1949, a by-product of president Truman's inaugural address (Prentki 2015, 10). In this speech,

Tim Prentki argues that Truman set the trajectory for a new mode of imperialism, a 'paradigm with which we are still living' (2015, 10):

> More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas … those who do not live as 'we' do are lacking the benefits of our economic and political systems. (Truman 1949)

Truman's speech led to a range of explicit development interventions in the 'global south' by multilateral organisations and foreign governments, as well as INGOs, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social movements, all looking to contribute to the alleviation of poverty, injustice and inequality. In many ways 'development' in Sub-Saharan Africa is considered to have 'failed': despite persistent intervention for over half a century, 'measures of poverty [in Sub-Saharan Africa] suggest that the range of development policies implemented in most of the continent have had very little success, and in some cases have exacerbated the marginalisation of large groups of people' (Willis 2011, 203). What constitutes development, who should fund it, its locations, its actors, how it should and can be measured, is widely contested. However, whether a failure or not, what cannot be contested when living and working in countries such as Uganda is how prolific the development *industry* is. Development is big business. Between 2016 and 2017 Sub-Saharan Africa received close to 50 billion USD total net official development assistance, and Uganda was Sub-Saharan Africa's seventh largest recipient (OECD 2019). In Uganda, and more widely in the region, development is where the money is, it is where the jobs are, and it is where opportunity lies.

The primary focus of post-colonial development interventions from the 1950s was on economic policy, where the aim was to relieve suffering, increase world trade and strengthen liberal democracy (Truman 1949). By the 1990s there was a shift from focusing on resources to recognising the role of people-centred development, which aims to build human capacities, ensuring that communities have the tools and knowledge to actively participate and drive their own 'development'. The realities of this expansion in policy have been widely disputed. In *Theories and Practices of Development* (2011), Katie Willis

suggests that whilst 'the increased importance of grassroots initiatives and a focus on rights could be interpreted as positive steps towards human-centred processes and definitions of 'development', far too often these trends have been shaped by a continued faith in the market as the key actor in development' (208). Willis continues to argue that despite the positive side-effects of such a move, 'given current global inequalities in economic and political power and relationships of dependence, the scope for autonomous development decisions by the peoples' of the South remains a distant dream' (2011 208). Regardless of whether it was an unsubstantiated move, an emphasis on authentic participation, on agency and self-empowerment, alongside a move towards in-country programming, harnessing local knowledge and fair(er) working practices in the 1990s, gave way to more opportunities for collaboration with the development industry. This included the increased employment of creative practices such as TfD, which looked to address development concerns in interactive and participatory ways (Prentki 2015, 9). Whilst, of course, there was other creative work happening – in national theatres, in recording studios and in independent cultural spaces across the region – it was instrumental practice, which could predict and measure outcomes, justifying its value via development criteria, that was increasingly receiving international patronage. As such, alongside those working in TfD, contemporary artists and cultural organisations were increasingly wrapping elements of their practices up in development narratives to gain access to much-needed funds.

The Material Realities | Art and Performance in East Africa

With little research exploring the other ways art and performance might catalyse change, it 'is often difficult for development practitioners to articulate the value of the arts to development processes beyond their instrumental use to achieve predetermined development outcomes' (Stupples and Teaiwa 2015, 33). Currently, being able to present work in a way that is predetermined is often a prerequisite of creatives for certain funders: "we ran creative workshops and/or a performance with/for a community who are now

more sensitised to [insert relevant social, environmental and/or economic issue]". Even programmes that do look beyond development paradigms, and point to a more expansive notion of contemporary culture in East Africa, still predominantly focus in on a work's utilitarian value and how it resonates in specific social, cultural, political and economic ways. Funders are looking for 'results' that can be conceptualised in a linear way and neatly aligned with their broader activities, tied up and easily accounted for in a theory of change. In her essay 'The Art of Unsolicited Participation' (2017), Sruti Bala posits that 'the political economy of applied or community theatre in the Global South is a subject that has received some, though far from comprehensive, attention in the recent past' (275). Bala continues: '... while this is a crucial and highly contested subject in itself, represented and defended by very different points of view and schools of thinking, impact is rarely directly formulated in terms of how *development policies* in turn affect theatre practices' (2017, 275) [emphasis own].

Tanzanian scholar and practitioner Vicensia Shule (2010) argues that a reliance on international support for the arts in Tanzania, and the ways it has shaped and stifled the creative sector, has been recognised as a problem since the 1970s. Through producing contemporary art and performance in East Africa, I have come to understand that the lack of state, corporate and commercial opportunities for the arts, and consequent reliance on international development-centred support, is having a series of material effects on contemporary art and performance. All too often in this context 'the development subject is reduced to a functional rather than an imaginative or intellectual one, and artists from the South valued *only* insofar as they can address the problems that are seen to define them and their community' (Stupples 2017, 55) [emphasis in original]. If this persists, cutting-edge and radical artists will continue to be compelled to define the impact of their work via a set of reductive criteria to gain access to funds. Rather than being recognised for the valuable contribution they are making to East Africa's – and the world's – cultural landscape, recognition for artists too often comes from the social, political or economic good that they're doing. Development scholars Polly Stupples and Katerina Teaiwa argue that this cements a tendency in discourse surrounding artists in developing contexts: 'leave aesthetics to the *superficial* artists of the first world and let artists of the third world think

and act on their political issues' (2015, 5) [emphasis original]. At times, this in turn 'promotes self-censorship on behalf of emerging artists and arts organisations in order to get funding and thus limits broader creative, intellectual, expressive and ultimately 'cultural' exploration' (Stupples and Teaiwa 2015, 5).

This instrumental tendency is having an impact on who can participate, the stories that are told and creative experiments that are supported. The emphasis of performance practice on a social problem, also reinforces an unhelpful and widely criticised binary of 'suffering Africans' and 'Western' solutions. As Kenyan actress and influencer Patricia Kihoro asserts, an image of 'strife and fighting and corruption and starvation and all these negative things' is still projected internationally, 'it's something that we really struggle with; yes, we do have some of those things going on but it is not the only thing that represents us' (Zur-Szpiro 2018). In the 2018 documentary *Nu Nairobi: Inside Nairobi's Music Scene*, one artist highlights that 'it is profound how common it is for Westerners to misperceive what is going on, on the continent, [for example] the expectation that African music sounds very tribal and has all these sounds that are not in contemporary urban music' (Zur-Szpiro 2018). The *Contemporary African Arts: Mapping Perceptions, Insights and UK-Africa Collaborations* (2019), undertaken by Royal African Society and British Council, found that 'there is a huge opportunity to programme a wider range of contemporary African arts and culture in the UK, deepening the British public's understanding of Africa and its creative industry' (British Council and Royal African Society 2019, 5). For example, only 13% of 2,000 respondents in the UK were able to name a specific example of contemporary African arts and culture (British Council and Royal African Society 2019, 5). And, despite the great strides being made by many cultural producers, East Africa's creative sector still sees less exposure than other places on the continent such as South Africa and West Africa, which in turn affects wider perceptions of the region's artistic potential.

The limited exposure, but also the narrowed scope of arts and performance, has also not strengthened the position of the arts in Africa. Molemo Moila, Deputy Director of Johannesburg Contemporary Art Foundation, highlights:

The main challenge facing artists and curators on the continent is the lack of 'ongoing and sustainable financing of work, projects and programmes to enable evaluation and improvement over time. We struggle to actively, systematically grow and improve at an institutional, infrastructural level because so much [funding] is one off and project based. (British Council and Royal African Society 2019, 72)

In response to the increasing instrumentalisation of the arts under Britain's New Labour government, in 2009 Eleonora Belfiore published 'On bullshit in cultural policy practice and research: notes from the British case' in the *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. Belfiore's arguments against cause-and-effect narratives have been widely applied, especially in regard to a European and North American context:

Philosophers and scholars have struggled to describe and understand the way that people respond to the arts uninterruptedly since the times of Plato. Any simple, straightforward solution to this riddle, or any impact evaluation toolkit that promises to evaluate the transformative power of any form of aesthetic experience in "10 easy replicable steps,' thus bypassing or refusing to address such complexity, is likely to be – let us be honest – bullshit … If it had been possible to demonstrate incontrovertibly a causal link between arts participation and educational attainment or crime reductions, then surely, there would be no pressing need to *keep proving* it. The problem is that, for all the evaluation and performance measurement requirements imposed on the sector, such incontrovertible evidence of impact simply is *not* there. (Belfiore 2009, 350-351) [emphasis original]

Belfiore's argument is relevant to creative development interventions: demonstrating a direct causal link between arts participation and increased capacity around approaching an issue of development simply is *not* there. Cause-and-effect narratives are not strengthening the position of the arts in such contexts; fragmented policy and mixed messages about what the arts can and can't do *for* development remain. 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 for them, especially those relating to their transformative powers, are extremely hard to substantiate' (Belfiore and Bennett 2008, 5). In East Africa, despite relatively consistent support from such institutions, the arts are still seen as inherently 'risky'. Consequently,

grants are often small-scale, activity-focused and short-term, awarded to 'reliable' artists and organisations. This has led to an overexposure of a handful of established organisations, which have been relatively consistently supported over the last ten years (Hivos 2015). The results – the value – of creative practice, on the whole lie beyond the creative realm. Expenditure is justified via a range of limited development criteria, and subsequently most donors revert to articulating 'what the arts can do *for* development's core concerns of economic growth and human-centred development' (Stupples and Teaiwa 2015, 3). Following James Thompson's argument in *Performance Affects: applied theatre and the end of effect* (2009), when the explicit effects rather than the aesthetic act persists as the main and necessary objective, the performance can become an 'adjunct, the expendable adjective [rather than] the dynamic texture of the work through which it finds its force' (132).

My argument is not that creative practice cannot have an effect on issues of development, but when framed in a linear way the vibrancy, multiplicity and *potential* of contemporary art and performance I described in the beginning of this chapter is lost. The irony is that this instrumental emphasis in the financing of work, which is often reflected in research, is not representative of the region's wider cultural sector. However, in the absence of an alternative way of accounting for value, artists and funders alike fall back to employing linear explanations to describe the role of the arts in the region. In my experience, artists and stakeholders, but also funders, talk the right talk even if their interest is not driven by a normative change agenda. Everyone is pretending! And, for me, this demonstrates a 'lack of connection to a concern with the truth' and an 'indifference to how things really are', to quote Elenora Belfiore, in essence it is 'bullshit' (Belfiore 2009, 345).

An Academic Context | Art and Performance in East Africa

Given the dynamic cultural scene I have witnessed and participated in, and the multitude of insightful thinkers and practitioners from and working in East Africa, it is surprising

how little publishing in western scholarship there has been around the region's contemporary cultural scene. There have been a number of edited collections, which in their focus include contemporary arts practice and provide a relatively holistic impression of East African art and performance. For example, Kene Igweonu and Osita Okagbue's recent series, *Performative Inter-Actions in African Theatre* (2014), includes a wide range of practices and examples of 'indigenous performance such as masquerade theatre, ritual performances, musical theatre, and Theatre for Development, to the more contemporary forms such as the video films of Nollywood' across the continent, as well as specific examples from East Africa (1). There is also the James Currey African Theatre Series, which in 2019, edited by Yvette Hutchison, Chukwuma Okoye and Jane Plastow, published its 18th edition. Most relevant to this research are *African Theatre 17: Contemporary Dance* (2018) and *African Theatre 14: Contemporary Women* (2015). This series increasingly looks beyond traditional development narratives and considers the *many* roles theatre and performance can play in the contemporary world. There are examples of indigenous, historical and popular performance practice from across the diaspora, continent and East Africa. Explorations of contemporary East African art and performance are also starting to appear more regularly in popular theatre journals, and academics such as Samuel Kasule, Mwenda Ntarangwi and Alfdaniels Mabingo are looking at the implications of contemporary dramatists, dancers, musicians and filmmakers across the region. However, whilst there are examples, Kene Igweonu points out that 'much of what is already published in the area of African theatre and performance focuses on the analysis of plays, playwrights and indigenous performance forms' (Igweonu 2011, 27). I would add, in comparison with what is happening on the ground, that there is a disproportionate emphasis on TfD in this field of theatre and performance research.

TfD grew traction in the 1990s in response to changes in the development industry, but its origins in Africa are typically traced back to Ross Kiss and Martin Byram's educational programmes in Botswana in the 1970s (Ebewo 2017, 150). TfD is part of a canon of work affiliated with theatre practitioners such as Bertolt Brecht, Paulo Friere and Augusto Boal's infamous *Theatre of the Oppressed* (2008). As a genre, TfD is often aligned with

'projects and workshops that exhibit elements of the radical roots of the subgenre in Marxism and Popular theatre' (Prentki 2015, 9). Generally, TfD is considered a radically participatory, interactive and egalitarian way of tackling issues of development. In the monograph *Theatre of Good Intentions: challenges and hopes for theatre and social change* (2013), Dani Snyder-Young emphasises that 'Theatre of the Oppressed and other radical forms of cultural intervention, in the north American context at least, are dependent on the institutions in which they are housed, and as a result, are subjected to pressure from those institutions' (44). Snyder-Young points out that art projects do 'not happen in vacuums, and institutional resources (be they funding, use of institutional space, or access to participant communities) do not come without strings' (2013, 38). Looking to Kathleen Berry, Dani Snyder-Young asserts that 'institutional embedment tends to water down 'revolutionary' or legitimately 'resistant' agendas – in schools, Theatre of the Oppressed is more likely to be sold to administrators as teaching 'critical thinking' or creative problem solving rather than as a 'rehearsal for revolution' (2013, 44). This 'institutional embedment' and 'watering down' has become increasingly apparent in development contexts, with TfD and other artistic practices being sold to administrators as 'HIV education', 'civil society capacity building' or 'gender violence prevention' (Berry in Snyder-Young 2013, 44).

Despite much contemporary art and performance being intimately entwined with development narratives in African theatre and performance literature, TfD is one of the few areas where tensions between performance and its support structures are discussed. This body of work dates back to the 1990s, where David Kerr pointed to the challenges of TfD practice that divorced itself 'from the underlying structural causes of underdevelopment'(1995, 161). This dialogue continues today. Whilst Tim Prentki (2015) acknowledges that a tension exists between interventions that are positioned as politically radical and their relationship to the development industry, he asserts that if TfD 'makes a right turn and continues down the path of accommodation, it will become the exclusive property of governments (increasingly rare in an era of permanent austerity) and NGOs, and be wielded as a tool with which to support and encourage pro-social behaviour' (Prentki 2015, 246). Following scholars such as Vicensia Shule (2011) and Ola Johansson

(2011) amongst others, I would argue that TfD has already taken this turn. In my experience, the reality is that development policies have not only affected theatre practices that are specifically interested in addressing development challenges, but have also had a material impact on the wider cultural scene in East Africa.

Whilst TfD's limitations and structural challenges are increasingly being acknowledged in research, on the whole its essentially transformative power is still being reinforced (Busby 2017; Okuto and Smith 2017; Plastow 2015). As a practice-based researcher, working internationally and occupied with narratives of change-making, there are many elements – namely the tensions – from this body of work that resonate with me. Against a backdrop which continues to position TfD as inherently good, I remind myself that performance practice and research 'reproduces the same hierarchies that plague the world at large, the same assumptions of who can speak, who must listen, and who is even invited into the conversation' (Snyder-Young 2013, 3). In her reflection on TfD in Northern Uganda, Laura Edmondson points out that 'theatre activism that depends on a separation between helper and helped is hardly transformative but instead props up tired notions of intact subjects versus fragmented victim with all the socioeconomic hierarchies that this binary entails' (2018, 288). When reading about examples of TfD, I am often struck by narratives of separation, where participants are endowed with or, as a consequence of their participation, acquire access to transformative skills or knowledge they didn't previously have.

Whilst there are many local organisations and facilitators leading TfD programmes on the continent, western commentators and international collaborations account for a significant amount of work being documented in scholarly discourse. Tim Prentki outlines that particularly in Africa 'TfD has had strong roots from the start in universities, such as Makerere (Uganda) and Nairobi (Kenya)' (2015, 94). Those writing about practice are often practitioners, as well as researchers, and connections between universities around the world aid access to initiatives and communities. With its spirit of social justice, crisis alleviation and 'empowerment', I believe that there is a risk and, at times, an implicit assumption, that TfD and similar practices manage to operate outside of neocolonial

systems and the pitfalls of development, 'empowering' and 'transforming' the lives of audiences, artists and participants for the better without having to question their methodologies and the wider effects of their work. Like other development practices, at times TfD may be propped up by, and risk reinforcing, post-colonial socioeconomic hierarchies.

In 2012, Teju Cole drew attention to what he describes as 'The White-Saviour Industrial Complex'. Cole argues that Africa provides fertile ground for white saviours, 'a liberated space in which the usual rules do not apply: a nobody from America or Europe can go to Africa and become a godlike saviour or, at the very least, have his or her emotional needs satisfied' (2012). Advocates such as @nowhitesaviours are tirelessly pushing for a recognition of white privilege and the damage it can do to communities across Africa. For example, challenging international advocates, volunteers and missionaries by asking what their relevant skills and knowledge are, and how they intend to 'make a difference' (No White Saviours 2019). @nowhitesaviours draws attention to the potential problems with short-term interventions, with flying in and flying out, and leaving little trace or legacy. They amplify subtle exoticisation that reinforces a divide between 'us' and 'them', and challenge people to recognise, rather than turn a blind eye, to the by-products and unintended consequences of their interventions. Western and white privilege are a structural reality; when interventions are centred around separative, instrumental narratives of transformation, tensions around socioeconomic hierarchies such as white saviourism are ever more pronounced. Importantly, a recognition of such tensions does not eradicate them; it is important everyone asks what their relationship is to the social structures they seek to address. Given this background, I am surprised that TfD – despite the attention that has been drawn to its innate tensions by a range of academics – continues in, predominantly, the same aesthetic and social formats. In my experience, TfD is also not reflective of the wider cultural sector and the work that is actually happening on the ground. In 2020, I question whether TfD and its associated practices remain the most effective, relevant and appropriate ground for an exploration of art, performance and *potential* in East Africa. I also question who it is best serving.

There is an opportunity in research to further explore the *multiple* roles art and performance can play. Kene Igweonu and Osita Okagbue make an argument for African theatre and performance's inherently functional nature, asserting that in Africa, 'each performance form engages in a dialectical relationship of mutual affect with their respective local socio-cultural contexts' (2014a, 1). In other words, 'it is not just entertainment but is often geared towards fulfilling particular social or aesthetic functions' (Igweonu and Okagbue 2014a, 2). Whilst Igweonu and Okagbue are pointing to a much broader understanding of utility, there is a tendency to fall back on linear arguments that focus on the implications of the arts on specific issues of development. And, as long as artists and funders in the region lack the vocabulary to describe the various ways their work has an impact, they too will remain reliant on instrumental narratives to justify the value of a creative intervention. Through an exploration of the change-making potential of art and performance, I look to make a contribution to this underexplored area of research.

Through my work, my ambition is to create opportunities, platforms and raise the profile of the region's diverse contemporary cultural scene. I believe this is only possible if we consider the perspectives and experiences of those making, supporting and thinking about creative practice. As a producer and researcher, I navigate these areas of a creative project, which has given me a particular perspective on the challenges facing the sector. Producing artistic events as a practice has received minimal attention; this research looks to change that. It is at the intersection between the social, aesthetic and material worlds of a project that I have found the concept of change-making useful; for me it offers a way of understanding the *multiple* functions of East African art and performance. I have undertaken this research in a way that recognises the problems of global socioeconomic hierarchies, outlined in this chapter, which I am very much implicated in and continue to affect the field. Focusing on change-making has enabled me to move forward in ways that are open and responsive, with care, and also helped me to look beyond 'normative structures, boundaries and practices' that are limiting performance practice in East Africa (Akama, Pink and Sumartojo 2018, 5). In this thesis, and in my practice, I have focused on looking beyond development paradigms to understand the *potential* of moments of art

and performance. Through my holistic approach, my hope is that this project speaks to scholars, but also to creatives and their patrons.

Chapter Two | Producing Research

In Chapter One I outlined some of the ways that development-centred narratives are impacting the creative work being researched, supported and produced in East Africa. As such, I have looked to reimagine art and performance's potential role beyond instrumental paradigms. I have done this through my practice as a producer and by paying attention to how atmospheres, uncertainty and empathy manifest in my work. As a producer I work across the aesthetic, social and material worlds of a creative project, which has given me a particular perspective on art and performance in East Africa. However, producing as a practice has received little theoretical attention. As such, producing as a methodology has become a focus of this research project, as well as a means of enquiry. This chapter introduces the reader to both how I understand my practice as well as how it has informed my approach. I will begin by exploring the role of the producer and the ways in which attention to this methodology can open up new ways of conceptualising art and performance in East Africa. I will then introduce the two projects – Nyege Nyege International Music Festival (NNIMF) and East African Soul Train (EAST) – that have formed the basis of my research. This chapter then considers how I have approached the research and who I have worked with in an effort to ensure this research remains ethical, future-orientated and relevant in both scholarly discourse and contemporary arts and development practice. Finally, I outline the specific methods I have employed, in addition to my practice, for collecting, analysing and presenting my findings.

My Practice: Producing

I have been producing performance projects in East Africa since 2015, my focus is on creating platforms and opportunities for the region's artists, whilst raising the profile of the region's contemporary arts scene. On the whole, my work takes place behind the scenes. In addition to the audience, artists and those supporting a project financially, there is often a sizable crew in the background making art and performance possible. Depending on the scale, this crew can include: fundraisers; lighting designers and sound engineers;

directors and dramaturgs; designers, costume and set-makers; a sales team, including experts in marketing, PR and communication strategy; security personnel; operational and administrative staff; vendors, volunteers; and those coordinating different areas of a production such as stage managers. This is not to mention the places, spaces and cross-sector partnerships, technology and materials, necessary in many artistic endeavours. Film and television credits offer an illustration of the diversity, scale and of what goes on behind the scenes in certain productions.

As a producer, my work involves working across and overseeing the different areas of a creative project in order to bring it to life. I am the link between what happens on stage and that which is going on behind the scenes. I straddle both 'the internal world of a project to devise, structure and support the process that will bring it to fruition', and the external world, positioning an idea, building and holding 'together the frameworks of relationships and of meaning that will attract the necessary support and finance, and engage those for who it is intended' (Tyndall 2010, 2). In 2010, with Arts Council England and The Jerwood Foundation, Kate Tyndall published *The Producers: Alchemists of the Impossible* (2010). This book is an edited collection of short interviews and insights from prolific producers working in predominantly a contemporary UK context. The collection is one of the few resources available that focuses on the role. Tyndall points out that 'the producer is a role that has struggled to establish itself in the arts' (2010, 2). Over the last ten years this has, happily, started to change. Performance scholar Bertie Ferdman suggests that this is a consequence of 'artists and audiences [looking] for new ways to interpret, program, produce, finance and experience work' (2014, 5). There is often a strategic drive to many producers who look to find new ideas and ways of working, making the impossible possible. However, despite this, we still rarely hear from producers. In an effort to capture the scope and fluidity of the producer's role, throughout this research project I have been interrogating what producing means to me, what it has involved and how as a methodology is can offer a new way of conceptualising art and performance in East Africa. Over the course of this research project, I have come to understand that producers can take a creative idea and amplify it, position it in a wider context, draw the right people and partners in, whilst understanding and looking after their interests. Producers can push an

idea just a little bit further, and can help to 'realise new responses and routes through the complex changes in our globalised world, [unlocking] so much of the 'public value' of the arts, and [working] with artists to create experiences beyond our imaginings' (Tyndall 2010, 2).

Despite the breadth and potential significance of the role there are only a handful of theoretical explorations of the producer. These are mainly in film studies and arts administration, where the focus lies predominantly with the financial and organisational responsibilities associated with the role. In *Performing Policy* (2015), Paul Bonin-Rodriguez points to the growth of the artist-producer in the United States of America. Bonin-Rodriguez argues that, in response to financial cuts and policy changes, since the 1990s artists have had to double up as producers: 'writers, musicians, visual artists, and performing artists – have been charged to function as producers of their creative works as well as the creative visionaries of their art' (Bonin-Rodriguez 2015, 3). This is echoed in East Africa, where limited resources mean that artists often have to attend to production concerns, combining the 'one who makes art with one who makes art possible' (Bonin-Rodriguez 2015, 25). In these circumstances producing is positioned as an adjunct, a necessary, but tedious, part of creative practice, which requires artists to attend to 'concerns of financing, space, staffing, training, marketing, and contracts, among other concerns of production' (Bonin-Rodriguez 2015, 3). Whilst I understand not all artists are good at all these elements of production, this distinction between the artistic and the less 'sexy' elements of performance reinforces an unhelpful binary. It fails to recognise the strategic potential of the role and underestimates the criticality of having the right supporting structures in place – the labour, finance and partnerships – to enable the successful execution of an initiative. All too often it is the absence of these material elements that limits the realisation and social and aesthetic potential of creative work. This distinction also fails to capture the creativity inherent in those tasks, which are often considered more mundane or tedious. Independent theatre producer Eleanor Lloyd feels similarly, highlighting that 'producing is creative, in its very nature. Both in the arts side, but also in economics, the structures, the excel spreadsheets are things of creation… the: how are we going to solve this problem?' (Theatre Voice, 2019). If, as Tyndall argued,

the producer can help 'realise new responses and routes through the complex changes in our globalised world', how can this multifaceted role offer an opportunity to reimagine hegemonic structures in the narratives surrounding East African art and performance practice (Tyndall 2010, 2)?

The Producers: Alchemists of the Impossible (2010) draws attention to the unique, creative and varied contribution producers have made to the UK cultural sector. Tyndall highlights that there are many different types of producer: '...the producer as a long-term collaborator, the producer as an initiator of projects and ideas, the producer as an organisational leader, the producer as fast moving independent, the producer as cultural and social activist, the producer as entrepreneur and business brain, the producer as innovator, the producer as facilitator and support, the producer as guru empowering others' (Tyndall 2010, 3). Tyndall also highlights the amalgamation 'of different skills in different areas' needed in production: '...people skills, finance skills, business skills, creative skills, fantastic powers of persuasion' as well as an 'instinct for finding [a] way through a set of problems' (Tyndall 2010, 3). In different projects I have adopted varying guises, drawing on the skills and knowledge necessary to bring a specific project to life. I have been both a visionary for a project from its inception, such as EAST, and supported the realisation of other peoples' creative ideas, like NNIMF. My work has involved fundraising, budgets and spreadsheets, managing teams, artists and partnerships, materials, equipment and venues, audience and strategic development. Without a blueprint to follow, through this research, I have come to understand that the defining feature of my practice is an ability to work across the aesthetic, social and material elements that bring a performance to life.

As a producer, I find myself positioned at the intersection of the aesthetic, social and material worlds of a project. My effectiveness as a producer relies on an ability to figure out how these different elements can complement each other. My work is not about erasing difference, but instead around balancing the different interests that come together in each project. As I have grown in my practice over the course of this research project, I find myself increasingly attuned to the nuances, challenges and questions that arise within and

between these different spheres. For example, I have learnt to understand the distain some artists hold against particular stakeholders, who they feel don't respect or financially recognise their work, alongside comprehending the pressure venues and donors are under to maximise brand exposure and prove value for money. This allows for a more sensitive and productive negotiation between everyone involved. I continue to develop a deep awareness of my own positionality within this matrix. I can't deny the privilege and challenges I face working in East Africa as a white British producer. My whiteness, my gender, my history, my financial security, all impact on relationships and affect both the internal and external worlds of a project. I'm increasingly aware that my effectiveness at creating intense, productive and equitable environments, is reliant on recognising my power (or lack thereof) in particular situations, and acknowledging when it is useful for me to intervene or to leave space for others. For example, whilst my position as a foreigner might be helpful in engaging new international partnerships in a project, it may be less effective in securing connections with local authorities, both of which have been essential to bringing NNIMF and EAST to life.

For me, producing is an expansive, relational and messy practice, where I am continually navigating, negotiating and adapting in order to make a project happen. Engaging with the social, material and aesthetic parts of a project has given me a particular perspective. It has become clear through working with artists, funders and various communities in an East African context, that there are multiple reasons why people engage with art and performance. In my experience, specific economic or human-centred development outcomes are rarely a sole motivation for why people make, support or participate in contemporary creative practice. Whilst I am committed to the change-making potential of performance, I have discovered that my role in aligning different agendas is also rarely to do with achieving a definitive development outcome. Instead, my focus is on generating or maintaining a particular atmosphere in and around the moment of performance. There are many different elements behind each of these moments. In exploring how my multifaceted perspective might contribute to this urgently needed reimagining of change, I have found Anthropologist Tim Ingold's conceptualisation of "making" useful. Making is:

> … a process of *growth*. This is to place the maker from the outset as a participant in amongst a world of active materials. These materials are what he [sic] has to work with, and in the process of making he 'joins forces' with them, bringing them together or splitting them apart, synthesising and distilling in anticipation of what might emerge. The maker's ambitions in this understanding are altogether more humble than those implied by the hylomorphic model. Far from standing aloof, imposing his designs on a world that is ready and waiting to receive them, the most he can do is to intervene in worldly processes that are already going on. (Ingold 2013, 21) [Emphasis original]

Ingold's theories of making and his approach to understanding growth captures the liveness of producing. Producing performance is never fixed or static, it is ever evolving. It is messy, multifaceted, unpredictable and inherently relational. Ingold's assertion is that a maker can only anticipate and cannot predict an outcome. The producer is one protagonist amongst many other people, active materials and forces; weaving components together, pre-empting what might emerge and engineering bodies, places and objects in particular ways to bring forth connections and mitigate potential dissonance. The producer splits and synthesises different elements, foreseeing, responding and reacting. Producing – and performance itself – is a process of growth. When applied to producing and performance, Ingold's conceptualisation of the maker and making can disrupt linear, cause-and-effect narratives. Due to the relational nature of production we can never actually know what will happen next or predict exactly how a performance will manifest.

As I argued in Chapter One of this thesis, new ways of conceptualising creative practice in East Africa are urgently needed. It is through the heterogeneous lens of the producer that I have sought to do this. In theoretical and practical work, attention has focused on centre stage, on the participating artists, or outward towards the audience or community a project looks to affect. In an attempt to demonstrate value, as Sruti Bala points out, most, 'assessments related to theatre-based developmental or social work [are] concerned with the impact that theatre has on the lives and problems of its beneficiaries, stakeholders and target groups' (Bala 2017, 275). An instrumental cause-and-effect justification is sought, which, as argued, has not strengthened the position of the arts in East Africa. For me, working across the internal and the external worlds of a project as a producer, engaging

with its multiple aesthetic, social and material roles, has opened up a new avenue for exploring art and performance in East Africa. Maintaining attention on my practice – and the contemporary work that I am producing – has compelled me to consider the change-making role of the affective, collective and multiple nature of performance. Throughout this thesis I have used the concept of atmosphere to account for the affective and relational qualities of performance.

The Projects: Nyege Nyege International Music Festival and East African Soul Train

The two projects that form the basis of this research are NNIMF and EAST. Whilst very different, both have been created communally, are experienced collectively and are international, contemporary and popular. In different ways, both projects look to create intense and affective aesthetic experiences for all their participants. NNIMF is an annual electronic music festival set on the banks of the River Nile in Jinja, Uganda. It was founded by Derek Debru and Arlen Dilsizian in 2015, and has quickly become a household name in the world of electronic music. Known for its cutting-edge curation and respected for showcasing the freshest sounds from the African underground music scene, the festival connects underground musicians from across Africa with one another, as well as with producers and musicians working with African music outside of the continent. NNIMF is a DIY festival. It began as a party centred around a range of artists that happened to be in the same place at the same time. Initially, the festival was cash-rolled by its founders and managed by a community of volunteers with little to no experience organising events of this scale. Each year NNIMF has doubled in size and attracted a range of donors, corporate sponsors and high-profile artists. In 2018 partners included MTN (UG), Ugandan Breweries Ltd. (UG), Coca Cola (UG), Boutiq Electroniq, Talent Africa (UG), Radio City (UG), Boiler Room (UK), British Council (KE), Jumia Travel (UG), Brussels Airlines (BE) and Mookh Africa (KE). In 2018 we saw in excess of 10,000 audience members, and now, led by a small team, every year the festival engages over

300 artists and 300 staff from around the world. There is a link to a video on page 12 of the accompanying portfolio which gives an impression of how the festival looks and feels.

Figure 2: Host Darlyne Komukama and the crowd at the eternal disco stage during Uganda's Boiler Room debut, Nyege Nyege International Music Festival, 2018. Photographer: William Kane.

After being introduced by a mutual friend, I began working in a voluntary capacity with Debru and Dilsizian in 2016, and produced three editions of the festival (2016-2018). My work centred around financial and operational management. This included: the financial management; overseeing logistics, including transport, accommodation and subsistence for staff, artists and audiences; supervising the site and stage set up as well as operations throughout the weekend; managing security teams, production staff, box office, as well as specific partners and stakeholders. NNIMF is now considered one of East Africa's most significant cultural events. Alongside providing a platform for underground artists, the festival's long-term ambition is to support other activities throughout the year, including the development and distribution of new sounds from across East Africa to the world. As mentioned, Debru and Dilsizian also started two internationally renowned record labels,

Hakuna Kulala and Nyege Nyege Tapes, which in 2018 were reviewed by Trax Magazine as 'pioneering, avant-garde, on the edge of traditional music, sound experiments and a certain vision of the dancefloor … Nyege Nyege manages to capture the underground music of this region of the world, while highlighting not to disassociate them from Ugandan roots' (Couteau 2018). Debru and Dilsizian are music fanatics and, looking beyond development, the focus of all Nyege Nyege's initiatives has been to contribute to the local arts and cultural industry by creating platforms and opportunities for upcoming talented artists from across the region.

EAST is a pop-up residency and creative adventure centred around a journey on the region's historic train tracks that Geraldine Hepp and I co-founded in (and I have produced since) 2016. EAST is a collaboration between individual creative professionals and the team making things happen throughout one or more editions has featured: Adam Chienjo, Brian Msafiri, Checkmate Mido, Chrissie Thompson, Evans Campbell, George Gikaria, Jojo Abot, Maimouna Jallow, Marion Munga, Mirembe Musisi, Patience Asaba Katushabe, Sarah Drain, Sarah Mallia and Yule Burlefinger. EAST has been brought to life through collaborations with organisations, ventures and foundations. Partners 2019-20 include: Africalia (BE), African Culture Fund (ML), CDEA (TZ), Creatives Garage (KE), BASATA (TZ), Bayimba (UG), TaSUBa (TZ), Goethe Institute (SS), Goethe Institute (TZ), Goethe Zentrum (UG), Burning Man (US), British Council (KE), Nafasi (TZ) and FireFly (TZ). A link to the short film *Kovu Safarini* (2017) can be found on page 61 of the portfolio, and provides a visual introduction to the project.

Hepp – also 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 that 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, Hepp and I met in Kenya when collaborating on The Hatchery, a programme for cultural managers working in East Africa. When I heard her idea, I said: 'let's test it, let's take the train'. My role in our partnership was initially about making it

happen. After thirty hours on the train – experiencing moments of inspiration, disagreements and the practical realities – together we built EAST.

Figure 3: Artists at Nairobi Railway Station, East African Soul Train, 2017.
Photographer: Gilbert Bwette Daniel.

EAST started as a journey amongst friends. Now we actively bring artists, thinkers and cultural stakeholders together to co-create, connect and re-imagine. Our ambition is to curate a space for creative risk-taking that builds trust and connection, generates new practice and raises the profile of the region's contemporary art and performance scene. It is an emotional, physical and creative experience; it pushes boundaries, inspiring participants to experiment across disciplines and explore alternative narratives.

To date, there have been two editions of the project in Kenya. It started as a two-day journey on Kenya's 'Lunatic Express' railway, powered by the Kenyan media outlet What's Good Life, which grew significantly to a five-day pop-up residency in 2017, with workshops, masterclass artists and public performances, supported 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 in 2019. The next edition is scheduled for July 2020, where participants will meet on the shores of Lake Victoria in Mwanza, and take the three-day train journey to the Indian Ocean. Across past and future editions of the EAST journey, there are pop-up performances along the tracks, and we dive deep into conversations and creative processes. In the Tanzanian iteration, when we arrive at the coast there will be two days to develop a public performance and/or installation in partnership with TaSUBa – East Africa's oldest arts college. TaSUBa is located in the coastal town of Bagamoyo, which was a slave port during the Omani empire. The railway was later built along the same slave route. In addition, TaSUBa is significant because it was established by Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's founding father, and demonstrates his commitment to the power of the arts in defining a new national culture for Tanzania, post-independence from German (1880-1919) and then British (1919-1961) colonial rule. After EAST's public performances, any work created lives on with the artists, digitally in the project archives that are available to all participants via non-commercial creative commons, and on our social media pages. Externally, EAST serves as a two-way interactive communication platform: projecting what is happening in East Africa to the world, and connecting interested audiences back to artists and audiences in the region.

As the project has evolved, we have seen traces of EAST and its collaborations across the region and beyond. At Kampala Fashion Week, in Salooni – a travelling, modular, multidisciplinary art installation exploring black hair – in events and performances in Kampala, Kigali, and Nairobi, at academic conferences and arts events in Europe, as well as on global streaming platforms such as Spotify. EAST has been referenced as a catalyst for both the 'Nu Nairobi' movement spearheaded by Taio and EA Wave, and the 'Freehand Movement' developing visual storytelling strategies to foster creativity in children. Hepp and I have come to understand that the potential of the project to catalyse new creations, connections and perspectives is a product of the unique environment and atmosphere of EAST. Our vision for EAST has evolved in tandem with this doctoral project, and the potential of atmosphere in activating future collaborations remains a

central question. Across EAST's three editions we have experimented with generating atmosphere and catalysing affect by enhancing the material, social and aesthetic components of the project. In regard to EAST my role includes the financial and organisational management, but central to our collaboration is the process of conceptual co-creation, leveraging the material, social and aesthetic limitations and opportunities from a production point of view at every stage of the process. As I will explore through this written thesis, producing EAST as part of this research and testing ideas, collecting data, analysing our practice and trying a new approach the following year, has been essential to the development of this research.

My Approach: A Producer and Researcher

As well as the role of the producer and its potential being a focus of this project, my practice has also informed my methodology. My role as a producer and researcher has impacted how I have worked, who I have worked with and the knowledge generated by this enquiry. The duality of my role as a producer and researcher at times has felt contradictory: one is fast-paced, the other often still; one can be solitary, the other perpetually collaborative; one demands quick responses, the other needs space. At times, the practical delivery of projects has dominated, and thus limited my time to focus on other elements of the research. For example, pulled in all directions in the midst of production, I have struggled to always carve out the time to capture, to document and to reflect in the moment of performance in a methodical way. This happened in EAST 2019 when I had a series of questions about atmosphere, uncertainty and empathy that I wanted to discuss with some of the participants via semi-structured interviews. However, trips to the hospital, to the bank, to the bar to look after people, and taking on the roles of stage manager, lighting designer and sound technician simultaneously, all in order to make sure a performance happened, left me with little time for more traditional fieldwork methods. Something that was essential to delivering one element of the research – my practice – left me feeling like I was falling short in another. However, reflecting on the ways other international performance researchers operate in the region – their positionality, their

access to different forms of knowledge, their understanding of the cultural and social nuances, their commitment and capacity – reminds me of the particular perspective my dual role has given me. I have had the space to reflect on my practice and continue to grow into my role as an independent producer. Simultaneously, my role as a producer of contemporary art and performance has given me an identity beyond that of an international researcher. It has enabled me to create a life in Uganda, which has opened up research opportunities whilst demonstrating 'a sense of commitment that [my] research is not simply detached theorising, research for research's sake, but rather research to make a difference, exemplifying strongly felt commitments to particular communities and/or individuals, ongoing commitments to place, and (critical) commitments to the normative notion of 'development'' (Smith and Jenkins 2012, 76).

This is an ethnographic doctoral project. Dwight Conquergood argues that 'ethnographic rigor, disciplinary authority, and professional reputation are established by the length of time, depth of commitment, and risks (bodily, physical, emotional) taken in order to acquire cultural understanding' (Conquergood 2013, 83). Conquergood posits that 'ethnography is an embodied practice; it is an intensely sensuous way of knowing. It is one of getting data, it seems to me, by subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own personal situation, to the set of contingencies' (2013, 83). My practice and the ways EAST and NNIMF have evolved, has required a deep cultural understanding. In producing performance, it has not been possible to separate myself from certain emotional and physical risks, even if I had wanted to. As a result of my practice I have been predominantly based in Uganda for over four years. It is a place of extremes, and it has been hugely rewarding – but not without its challenges. I nearly died from a snake bite, after standing on a Burrowing Asp in Tanzania. I have been hospitalised after contracting malaria, typhoid fever and have suffered from a range of parasitic-infections. I have been hustled by people I thought were friends and colleagues, and had my heart broken. Corruption, colonialism's residue and the power of conservatism have all been part of my day to day life. But, over time, my practice has also meant I have developed strong, open and honest relationships with artists, organisations and stakeholders from and living across the region, as well as a diverse friendship group. Uganda has become a home.

I have come to know what resilience looks like and what a strong sense of community can achieve. I feel deeply implicated in the region's creative industries and believe that commitment has been felt by many of my East African colleagues.

Over the course of this project, the boundaries between my life, my work, and my research have blurred. Critical to the evolution of my work with NNIMF, EAST and this doctoral project has been friendship. Many of my colleagues, collaborators and the projects' artists have become great friends. Kathleen Gallagher outlined in *The Methodological Dilemma Revisited: Creative, Critical and Collaborative Approaches to Qualitative Research for a New Era* (2018), that more often than not research is 'celebrated as 'innovative', 'original', and 'singular', denying the communities and relations from which it always emerges, denying even the love that we intuitively understand as valuable in most other parts of our lives and yet rebuff in research' (7). This is not the case with *Producing Performance, Producing Atmosphere*. The role of my friendships was not intentional or, as Gallagher described, 'strategically aimed at gaining further access' (Gallagher 2018, 95). Instead, it evolved organically as a consequence of my relational practice, and the fundamentality of interpersonal relations in the production of performance and building a life in Uganda. I recognise that this research and my practice would have looked very different without the strong relationships with my friends, colleagues and collaborators. Whilst, as Gallagher argues, 'historically, researchers have lived inside such paradoxes: build rapport but don't get too close; ask for deeply personal opinions from your research participants but don't share your own for risk of 'leading' your respondents,' this has been impossible in this project (2018, 94). Instead, echoing western ethnographers including Gallagher (2018), Sarah Pink (2015) and Dwight Conquergood (2013), in this research I've tried to weave together my different roles as producer, researcher and friend, each expanding and deepening the other.

Gallagher asked: 'what does it mean to love one's research? To love one's collaborators? To love, even, one's discipline(s)?' (2018, 93). In this project, finding answers to these questions has sometimes felt like a burden. It would be impossible to even begin to explore all the lines of enquiry that have emerged throughout this research. Friendship has ensured

an on-going commitment and nuanced appreciation of the research context. I have had open conversations about what I can, and is appropriate for me to, contribute as an international producer and researcher based in East Africa. This has resulted in maintaining a focus on how my work, and contemporary art and performance in the region more widely, speaks to dominant global structures and practices, which, as a white European, I am also implicated in. It has meant that I have continued to pay attention to the relational and affective qualities of performance that are important to me, my colleagues and my friends, but have escaped consideration in much western performance research. My love for my practice and collaborators has also meant that at times I have been tentative and selective in this written exploration. This has been fundamental to remaining ethically comfortable and being respectful of my peers. Gallagher claimed that 'love as a methodology means that when you physically leave 'the field', the discomfort of the relational is still with you, you may well ask the question, was it enough? This 'enough' is a complicated idea' (2018, 103). As I leave 'the field' – at least in regard to this specific project – I feel the discomfort of the relational and my answer is, 'no, this is not enough' (Gallagher 2018, 103). Contemporary arts and performance in East Africa remain underrepresented and under-estimated. This is just one story that I felt comfortable telling as a white British woman; there are many others that need to be told. *Producing Performance, Producing Atmosphere* has not had a linear trajectory: identifying a gap, carrying out the research, analysing and communicating it. Instead, my role as producer and researcher has led to a cyclical process: testing, witnessing, analysing, testing, reflecting and testing again. As Sarah Pink described in the second edition of *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2015), as new understandings emerged in my practice, it became shaped by, or reshaped, my theoretical thought, and this will continue (143).

I did not set out to undertake a *sensory* ethnographic project, but the fundamentality of affect in my practice as a producer has impacted the research methodology. In *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2015) Sarah Pink describes how sensory ethnography is 'a methodology based in and a commitment to understanding the senses provides a route to forms of knowledge and knowing not accounted for in conventional forms of ethnography' (Pink 2015, 53). Pink continues that, 'it often leads us to the normally not

spoken, the invisible and the unexpected – those things that people do not perhaps necessarily think it would be worth mentioning, or those things that tend to be felt or sensed rather than spoken about' (2015 53). My attention to how things feel in my practice, has enabled me to understand the nuances of 'no's' that actually mean 'yes'. I can now often read between the lines and spot undercurrents in conversations. I can sense my way through tentative situations and predict people's expectations of a project, enabling me to work better with its internal life and also more effectively position it. I am better at navigating the limitations of what I do or say, and also when I should ask for help.

A sensory ethnographic approach has made it impossible to turn a blind eye to the structural inequalities that persist across the region, and with the rest of the world, how I am personally implicated in them and the ways in which the development industry can protract them. It is why I have continued to return to the moment of performance itself. Because, despite the persistent need to shoehorn most creative practice into traditional development narratives, I continually *sense* a commitment to something beyond those frameworks amongst the creatives I produce work with, the partners who support it, and those that participate in it. There are linear and impact-driven conclusions that can be drawn about an event such as NNIMF, for example the economic benefits for artists and the community. However, as Ugandan DJ Kampire Bahana asserted, 'few people throw or even go to a good party with the intention of being political' (Murray 2018). My *sense* is that just because a creative initiative does not have an explicit social agenda, does not mean that it doesn't hold change-making potential. Looking forward, producing and throwing some of the region's best parties, 'in ways that are open, responsive and [carried out] with care' also has a political dimension (Akama, Pink and Sumartojo 2018, 5). How might paying attention to the often unspoken reasons why we like to throw a good party, and how we create them, open up ways beyond development paradigms to think about some of the other roles of art and performance practice in East Africa?

Like change-making, Pink suggests that sensory ethnography is future-orientated. Pink argues that scholars are increasingly being urged to 'become involved in research that seeks to intervene in the world, to make change and to have 'impact'' (2015, 188). Pink

urges readers to recognise the role that a sensory approach can play in understanding the unknown and uncertain future (2015, 188), and points to the sensory turns across the academy that are 'increasingly orientating scholarship towards the future' (2015, xii). In the journal article 'Dissonant emotions, divergent outcomes: Constructing space for emotional methodologies in development' (2012), Kate Hardy also recognises these sensory turns. Hardy outlines that 'from organisational theory in the workplace to contentious politics and the academy, emotions are re-emerging as an important category to contend with in exploring and explaining social behaviour', but also highlights the 'neglect of emotion in development studies' (Hardy 2012, 114). Since the special issue of *Emotion, Space and Society*, 'Emotional methodologies – The emotional spaces of international development' which was published in 2012, there has been an increase in scholarship exploring emotion within development spaces. However, Hardy's argument that the 'dominance of reason over emotion' still persists in much development research and practice, resonated with my experience (2012, 114). In their editorial for the same journal, Matt Baillie Smith and Katy Jenkins argue that considering emotion in development practice and research is one way researchers might commit to Shalmali Guttal's call for 'creating and expanding spaces for counter-hegemonic discourses and conversations' (Guttal 2007 in Smith and Jenkins 2012, 75). As an inherently affective discipline, performance has the potential to be part of this expansion. In this research project, maintaining a focus on the production of affect in performance, whist often messy, contradictory and inconclusive, has been my way of keeping 'an openness to an uncertain future' (Pink 2015, 194).

Methods, Documentation and Ethics

Producing projects with a focus on atmosphere has provided me with the scope to generate, to observe and to collect a specific type of data in and surrounding the moment of performance. My practice has been critical in accessing the internal world of a project, and understanding the implications that production, systems and processes have on specific moments of performance. It has also enabled me to work with a diverse range of

funders, partners and institutions, and revealed the ramifications that the positionality of a project can have on a creative work. My practice has deepened my understanding of East Africa's contemporary cultural sector, which has demonstrated the challenges and opportunities involved in trying to reshape the terms of debate about art and performance's relationship to change. This research has been cyclical: participating in multiple editions of both initiatives has given me the opportunity to adapt systems, processes and plans after analysing and reflecting on my experiences, and then try a different approach. Both EAST and NNIMF have also been a space for me to understand and develop my practice as a producer.

As I have outlined previously, the role of the producer has not received much attention in scholarly discourse and often lacks recognition in practice. As part of this research, supported by the British Council, I set up a training programme I ran for young producers alongside NNIMF in 2017. Running the programme was a driver in finding ways to describe the vast intersecting web of roles and responsibilities involved in producing a festival. This included finding a vocabulary for the affective and relational elements of production as a practice, and performance itself, that are rarely articulated. Whilst there were limitations with the programme – my role producing the festival afforded little spare time – it was the first time I had to find a language for the intangible and unspoken elements of my practice. I designed and ran workshops, activities and hosted conversations with the participants, some of which was captured via photographs, voice recordings and evaluation forms. In undertaking this programme I began to recognise the significance of creating a culture of robust empathy and the importance of interpersonal relations in production, which I explore in depth in Chapter Five of this written thesis.

It is important to clarify the distinction between the research methods I have used, and my role as a producer. The two are inevitably interlinked and inform each other, but I have found that a systematic methodology has enabled me to both document my practice and interrogate the political, social and cultural context in which the research is situated. I have therefore employed a range of specific methods to gather data in and relating to the moment of performance. This has included documenting my own affective experiences

through research notes. In the throes of production, where I am being pulled in many different directions, it can be a struggle to find the time to effectively capture my own experiences or observations. As such, when something moves me – a particular energy, a reaction, a feeling, an observation – I have taken a snapshot. I have used voice notes, photographs or jotted down a few sentences on my phone that would remind and transport me back to that moment at a later date. After the event I return to these snapshots, flesh them out, edit and re-edit them, in an effort to capture my emplaced and embodied feeling. I have included a number of these thick descriptions in the body of this written thesis. However, words can only do so much. 'You had to be there' is a phrase often used when recounting such moments, and performance and atmosphere are ultimately ephemeral and ethereal. Saying that, I have included these edited research notes to add another dimension to the text and visual material, and to provide the reader with another way of imagining the research environment.

My friends and colleagues have been critical collaborators who have offered new perspectives throughout this research. In the midst of conversation over dinner or a drink, with permission, I have often recorded conversations that have resonated with the themes of this doctoral project. Gathering the perspectives of other people working in the sector, and exploring how they are approaching and addressing similar concerns in their own work, has been important in the positionality of this project. I have also undertaken semi-structured interviews and conversations with friends and colleagues, including NNIMF Co-director Derek Debru, film director and cultural provocateur Arnold Aganze, EAST Co-founder and Creative Director Geraldine Hepp, curator Robinah Nansubuga and visual artist Michael Soi. In addition to a range of semi-structured interviews with artists during EAST 2019, in 2018 I carried out five extended interviews with female artists about their artistic practice and experiences producing large scale events in East Africa. These included Darlyne Komukama, Kampire Bahama, Gloria Wavamunno, Kemiyondo Coutinho and Muthoni Ndonga. At the beginning of all these conversations, I have introduced the research and secured permission to use elements of the discussions in this project.

In 'Documenting Audience Experience' (2017), Joanna Bucknall and Kirsty Sedgman point out that 'the process of making live performance produces a range of ephemera, documents and artefacts' (144). Over four years I have gathered a mass of documentation created as part of the projects. This includes materials generated by professional designers, photographers and filmmakers, by participants and audience members attending the events, as well as things associated with my own practice: sound recordings, photographs, marketing and publicity materials, internal documents, working budgets and accommodation templates, notes on the back of napkins from when my phone ran out of battery, thousands of emails, messages and hours upon hours of film footage. Whilst an important part of my process, I have not ended up pointing directly to these materials in this written thesis. This is because relevant information would need to be sorted, deciphered, extracted and re-formulated, which would require resources beyond the scope of this research. Also, in the throes of production my own capacity is often stretched, which has left gaps in the documentation that I managed to save. Consequently, whilst it would illustrate the extent of the research, I do not believe it is particularly useful for the readers or my own work in shaping this argument. Instead, I have produced an accompanying portfolio.

In the portfolio I have selected and presented material in a way that creates an impression of the two projects more generally, and highlights specific moments, atmospheres and themes that emerged and that I draw on in the written part of this thesis. I have included research notes, pertinent quotes and a selection of images produced by professional artists, photographers and filmmakers engaged in each project. In the portfolio there are a number of QR codes that direct the reader to short films produced in the projects, and also to a Spotify playlist of sounds that have followed me throughout this project, and which can be played to evoke an atmosphere whilst reading the thesis and/or its documentation. As an introduction to the two projects the portfolio can stand alone and be read separately, but I also point the reader to specific visual material that illustrates examples throughout this written thesis. Alongside desk-based research exploring areas of discourse that this doctoral project draws and builds on, I have used three concepts – atmosphere, uncertainty and empathy – to analyse my findings and organise this written thesis.

The presentation of the illustrative material reflects my commitment to carrying out an ethical and effective doctoral project. Too often, for international onlookers, East Africa conjures up images of exotic tribes, wild animals and, occasionally, the white sands of Zanzibar. In 2020, global mass media still portrays East Africa as impoverished, sharing images of flies crawling on anonymous black children's faces from rural and dilapidated communities, that are 'saved' by white 'heroes' from organisations such as Comic Relief. It was fundamental to me that this project captured the beautiful, professional, inspiring and affective energy of the contemporary art and performance scene in East Africa. I believe these images are all too often missing in global representations of 'Africa', and can contribute to shifting and shaping narratives moving forward. The images and video included were originally created by professional artists in the respective projects. In the case of EAST, all work and content is available via the project archives for use by the collective under non-commercial creative commons licenses[2]. In NNIMF, photographers and filmmakers were engaged to generate content for the festival and/or is publicly available. In all cases artists have been appropriately credited for their work, and permission has been granted from the event organisers. Both NNIMF and EAST engage a range of cross-sectoral partners and funders, and adhere to professional industry standards. I have also received ethics approval from Royal Holloway, University of London, for this specific project, which has been updated as the research has evolved. I have considered the ethics, my values and the contribution of this work throughout, and built this into my approach to the research from the outset.

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[2] For more information about non-commercial creative commons licenses:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

Chapter Three | Producing Atmosphere

Geraldine Hepp and I developed the first edition of East African Soul Train (EAST) alongside The Hatchery (2015-16), a social innovation training programme for cultural managers working across the region. Hepp, managed The Hatchery in her role as Global Community Manager for The Amani Institute, an organisation committed to the development of the next generation of change-makers. The project was supported by the Dutch funder Hivos. I joined the team in the second half of the programme. I worked in a voluntary, and then freelance, capacity, running specific workshops around fundraising, monitoring and evaluation, and then later supporting the project's internal and external communications. The Hatchery engaged a range of artists, cultural managers and stakeholders working in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania, and looked to support them with developing the tools and knowledge needed to manage more sustainable and impactful cultural organisations. The emphasis of the programme was innovation: moving away from the one-dimensional, donor-focused funding landscape that persists across the region, whilst exploring the unleashed social, political and economic potential of the cultural industries.

I had only been in the region for a few months when I started working on The Hatchery, and learnt a huge amount about East Africa's creative sector during this time, much of which I explored in Chapter One. Firstly, it was clear that there were generally very limited resources across the creative sector. Grants were predominantly short-term, small-scale and risk-averse, and only a handful of individuals and organisations were consistently receiving them (Hivos 2015). However, the fulfilment of impact narratives, and the linguistic prowess necessary for securing development-centred grants, for many, ended up taking precedence over the work itself. There was a lack of innovative programmes within organisations, and work was often focused on following a blueprint, a tried and tested formula, that satisfied funders' requirements. It was a somewhat hostile environment, where challenges around resources had led to a lack of trust amongst artists. People seemed fearful of sharing or losing their ideas, and protective over their limited

funding. In addition, there was a scarcity of collaboration amongst creatives and, consequently, the available resources were not being maximised. For example, organisations were often running very similar projects in close proximity to others, whilst there were huge gaps in other areas of the creative industries. This was reinforced by the challenges to mobility, which kept artists and organisations working within their silos. In all of this, artists were being forgotten. There were few spaces for artists to just be creative, as they were continually having to negotiate the day-to-day pressures of working in such a precarious sector. The Hatchery did connect organisations working across the region, it inspired a number of new creative projects whilst contributing to organisational capacity and skill development for some of the participants. It also highlighted the legacy of a risk-averse climate: the lack of resources and the persistence of impact narratives were affecting artists and organisations. The vibrant, dynamic and innovative contemporary art and performance scene was being subsumed by development agendas. Hepp and I were both interested in these issues of trust, connection and collaboration amongst creatives, but with EAST we wanted to focus on artists. Rather than concentrating on defined outcomes, with EAST our emphasis was – and remains – on creating an environment where contemporary artists can connect, play and take creative risks beyond the cultural, social and economic challenges of everyday life.

Part experiment and part leaving party for Hepp who was moving to Brazil, EAST started as a creative adventure amongst friends. Doing a project on a train had been a long-term ambition of Hepp's and, after undertaking the journey on Kenya's 'Lunatic Express' line from Nairobi to Mombasa in preparation for the project, we had both been struck by the space-time compression experienced on the two-day journey. A couple of weeks before departure the Kenyan media company What's Good Live came on board with $3,000, which covered some travel and accommodation costs. There ended up being 54 participants who were predominantly from or based in Kenya, although there were some international artists including Winnie Lado (Uganda), Jojo Abot (Ghana) and Joanne Corrigall (South Africa). Some of the 2016 artists' profiles can be found on pages 70-71 of the accompanying portfolio. Different artists curated cabins to engage others, and to generate and test new ideas. For example, there was a cabin for visual arts, for music

production and even a silent cabin, which poet and LP collector Evans Campbell quietly guarded throughout the journey. On pages 64-65 of the portfolio you can see some examples of what the cabins looked like and their activities. It was a success. New work was generated, we hosted a public work-in-progress performance/installation at Distant Relative's Ecolodge and celebrated together on the coast. Artists went home, Hepp left for Brazil, and I returned to Uganda.

Figure 4: Artists looking out of the window on the 'Lunatic Express', East African Soul Train, 2016. Photographer: Lena Giovanazzi.

We didn't have a fixed vision for the project moving forward, but a few months later Jinku, a Kenyan DJ Producer and one fifth of EA Wave, called Hepp and told her about all the collaborations and projects that had emerged from the journey. In the months following EAST 2016 there were presentations of work created as a result of the project, programming opportunities from connections were forged, and creative collaborations continued amongst participants. It was also said to be a spark for the Nu Nairobi movement, which looks to amplify the city's underground music scene and challenge

misconceptions about African music. In tandem, we had started conversations with an international cultural funder about a second edition of the project.

What was special about this project? Suddenly it became necessary to articulate what we were doing within a more traditional funding context. We had to describe and evidence why the project was important and impactful but, of course, we wanted to avoid falling into the pitfalls of the development industry, which we were all too familiar with from our work on The Hatchery. There was the train itself that was significant, but it was also about bringing creatives *together* in that unique environment, which compressed and distorted time and space. When I started to interrogate what my own – and the wider team's – role was in the project, I realised it revolved around creating an experience for creatives with creatives. Our job was to set the conditions: heightening the environment, bringing the right people together and holding that space. It was about the atmosphere. Through EAST I came to understand atmosphere as something in between environment, content and experience. As cultural-political geographer Ben Anderson describes, atmospheres are 'perpetually forming and deforming, appearing and disappearing, as bodies enter into relation with one another' (2009, 79). Atmospheres 'are never finished, static or rest' and as such they can be difficult to grasp (Anderson 2009, 79).

When I began to look for explorations of atmosphere in relation to art and performance in East Africa, I came up short. Therefore, after this chapter explores the lack of attention being paid to the collective nature of affect, I will use EAST and Nyege Nyege International Music Festival (NNIMF) to analyse what I have discovered about atmosphere and how it manifests in relation to my art and performance practice in East Africa. Taking one moment from NNIMF, I explore how atmosphere was designed, managed and played out in the festival context. This chapter looks to make a contribution, from a performance perspective, to a growing body of work across the social sciences that is exploring how atmospheres manifest in economic, social, cultural and/or political life (Ahmed 2014; Anderson 2009 and 2014; Bille, Bjerregaard and Sørensen 2015; Edensor and Sumartojo 2015; McCormack 2018; Pink and Sumartojo 2019). I have used atmosphere as a way of understanding contemporary art and performance's multiplicity

and functionality. I then examine how with EAST we have harnessed atmospheres to encourage trust, connection and inspire new creative practice. Maintaining a focus on atmosphere in an artist development programme has meant embracing its relational, contingent and contagious potential. Consequently, EAST has looked, felt and manifested very differently year to year, and artist to artist. Using the concept of agency, I then consider why atmospheres are critical in this performance project, and begin to think about their relationship to change-making more widely.

Collective Affect and Performance

Led by James Thompson's *Performance Affects* (2009), in recent years there has been an 'affective turn' in socially-engaged performance, which has led to a range of work examining the role of affect in creative practice, and its relationship to social change (Hurley 2010; Nicholson 2011; Shaughnessy 2012). Thompson argues that 'by working solely in the realm of effect, where performance communicates messages or concentrates on identifiable social or educational impact, the practice becomes restricted or weakened' (Thompson 2009, 7). The focus is on moving debates beyond the instrumental impact of performance practice, arguing that in 'failing to recognise affect – bodily responses, sensations and aesthetic pleasure – much of the power [of performance] can be missed' (Thompson 2009, 7). Thompson's argument is that when identifiable social or educational impact persists as the main and necessary objective, the importance of the practice itself can be forgotten. In my experience, this can lead to creative work being undervalued, inadequately supported and cuts to funding being justified. Whilst an important shift, in performance affect has tended to be attached to an 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 2009, 119). This is echoed in Erin Hurley's description of affect as 'an organism's automatic reaction to an environmental change; this reaction is a subjective

experience, meaning that only the person whose blood is rushing to his or her extremities can feel it' (Hurley 2010, 17).

Increasingly, an emphasis on affect is being adopted in explorations of the role of performance in contexts of development such as East Africa. For example, in the edited collection *Anthropology, Theatre, and Development, The Transformative Potential of Performance* (2015), anthropologists Alex Flynn and Jonus Tinius 'argue that political performance can bring about radical changes in people's conceptions of themselves and their understanding of wider political subjectivities' (2015, 18). Bringing together insights from a range of practitioners and scholars from different disciplines, including theatre, sociology and gender studies, Flynn and Tinius develop an argument about the value of performance's affective qualities: 'there is a powerful ethico-aesthetic quality inherent to these political performances that *moves* people, one that causes them to *reflect* and therefore consciously decide that they will interact with the world in a different manner' (2015, 18) [emphasis original]. The editors assert that the collection is 'rooted in a critique of instrumentalised art performances, often related, but not limited, to TfD' and that they seek to reorient scholarship 'towards a focus on the potential for self-reflexivity and the desire for self-determined transformation' (Flynn and Tinius 2015, 21).

Throughout the collection of essays, it is argued that, in certain examples of performance, audience and/or participants 'experience a deep sense of introspective interrogation, and through this ethical and affective inquiry of the self, in a shared space, those people present come to new understandings of the world, *together*' (Flynn and Tinius 2015, 14) [emphasis original]. The emphasis and value of the performance practice is on the individual's transformation. Whilst that transformation is borne out of 'a relational, precarious and collective context' – and there is a demonstrable shift in focus away from the didactic lessons of TfD – the development value lies outside of the moment of performance (Flynn and Tinius 2015, 20). The transformation also tends to conform with instrumental understandings of performance's role, and so even if that change oscillates around an individual's experience of affect, rather than social issues, a linear trajectory is maintained. In addition, there is a risk that the aesthetics of the practice itself – beyond

the relational format of art and performance – are not considered. In turn this can mean that the *art* itself is forgotten whilst falling into utopian narratives about a creative work's role. As argued in Chapter One of this thesis, such tendencies have not strengthened the position of the arts in development contexts such as East Africa: in this situation, *performance* remains the 'adjunct, the expendable adjective [rather than] the dynamic texture of the work through which it finds its force' (Thompson 2009, 132). Whilst I am sympathetic to the dialogical and potentially democratic potential of the spaces of performance, in this research I have asked how we can reimagine the relationship between the aesthetic form and relational affect in a way that looks beyond normative impact agendas, and recognises the dynamic texture of art and performance.

In *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a pioneer in queer theory and literary studies, argues that 'affects can be, and are, attached to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of things, including other affects' (19). Affects are material and relational in nature. With EAST, whilst individuals are affected to varying degrees by different elements of the project, so are the *collective* and the *environment*. Affects don't just do things to the individual, they also infuse relationships, shift conversations, embed themselves in the cabin walls and stick with unsuspecting passengers beyond the journey. Following Sedgwick, we do not feel and are not affected alone. As a result of its relational nature, affect can never be wholly predicted. There is something unruly about affect, 'it exceeds us by happening against our will' (Hurley 2010, 14). We can see this in the context of a music festival such as NNIMF, where an uncontrollable urge to dance takes over individuals but also a group of people on a specific dancefloor. In turn, this can affect the quality of images circulating around the whole event. Whilst Hurley recognises the uncontrollable and unpredictable quality of affect, emphasis is focused on the individual. This fails to account for the contagious, contingent and relational qualities of affect, which have been fundamental to its study in other disciplines and that I have experienced producing two very different projects in East Africa. Sedgwick's claim is that the 'freedom of affects gives them a structural potential' (2003, 19). This research is occupied with the unruly, relational and material nature of affect – and how these elements may give

performance a structural potential in regard to change-making – which has escaped consideration in much performance research.

In 'Affective Atmospheres: Performative Pedagogies of Space' (2015), Helen Nicholson asserts that 'atmosphere invites ways of thinking about affect that recognises its collectivity and materiality' (2015, 4-5). When trying to understand what was special and why EAST and NNIMF were important, I kept coming back to atmosphere, which offered a way of accounting for affect's relationality and how it plays out in material and collective ways in my practice. In regard to theatre and learning, Nicholson posited that we may 'have underestimated the effective, contagious and aesthetic qualities of atmosphere in theatre that has educative potential, however broadly learning may be construed' (2015, 3). In my work I have found atmospheres, in all areas, critical to the ways in which projects play out. Whilst there has been very little work surrounding the sociology of atmosphere in theatre and performance studies, there has been significant investigation into atmosphere across the social sciences, where the general consensus is that in 'interrogating atmospheres we can arrive at new ways of thinking about the relationships between people, space, time and events; the sensory and affective modes through which we engage with these; and the possibilities that researchers, designers and policymakers have to make and intervene in the world' (Pink and Sumartojo 2019, 2). Interdisciplinary scholars Shanti Sumartojo and Sarah Pink point out that despite this, atmospheres 'are difficult to grasp and hold onto, making it a challenge to describe, research and analyse them' (2019, 15). Consequently, 'this has meant that in much existing research, atmospheres are either only discussed theoretically or discussed as given elements of our experience but only partially theorised' (Pink and Sumartojo 2019, 15). Studies have 'tended to centre on the philosophy rather than the sociology of the concept: how it comes to matter in social life' (Bille, Bjerregaard and Sørensen 2015, 33). Building on these gaps in contemporary research, in the following section I analyse what I have discovered about the nature of atmosphere through producing it in the context of a music festival in East Africa.

Figure 5: Otim Alpha and the crowd at Uganda's Boiler Room debut, Nyege Nyege
International Music Festival, 2018. Photographer: William Kane.

Squeezing my way through the crowd, I can feel my calves burn as I march up a particularly steep section of the pathway. 24,767 steps so far today. People are sitting and legs are hanging off every ledge. Branches and vines seeping out of every crevice, and if you look closely enough there's a large spiders web in a nearby bush that catches the roaming fluorescent light every few seconds, at which point you can just make out its lodger. Bodies, beer and flesh everywhere: bare legs in hot pants and cleavages creeping out of cropped tops; open Hawaiian shirts, hats and bikinis; sequins, sunglasses, feather headpieces and fur. A-symmetric UV patterns coat hundreds of bodies and faces. Anything is possible. Are there any rules? A whiff of burning charcoal from the nearby Rolex stand makes its way down from the top of the hill, carried by a light breeze. The sun is going down and the light is changing quickly. But it is still warm. Grabbing a semi-cold beer from a local bar – balancing it between phones, charging cables, power banks and walkie talkies – I look for a seat. On route to a balcony overlooking the Eternal Disco Stage, I catch eyes: a smile, a wave, a hello – so many people and I'm not

sure who I know and who I don't. Everyone is moving, chatting, ready – there is an anticipation circulating. Looking down at all colours, shapes and bodies on the dance floor: sweating, laughing, waiting for the music to start. What's going to happen next? For a moment I could be anywhere… But then I look up, at the rainforest canopy: umbrellas, buckets and UV string; spotlights distorting the foliage. And out, at the River Nile: a magic eye looks back, with a small wooden platform made out of crates in the foreground. The light is disappearing, but I can still make out bodies splashing in the river. Someone swinging off a twelve-foot iron structure in the river. The sculptures alight! Volume up. Cameras on. Snap, snap, snap. An electronic rumble. A flute. The DJ begins. It's intoxicating. A swarm of people descend – overwhelmed by an uncontrollable urge to dance. The moment is broadcast live to hundreds of thousands of people around the world. I don't know what is going to happen, but it *feels* good. It *feels* like this is why I make performance.

Research Notes from NNIMF 2018
Edited in Kampala, Uganda, November 2018.

Through these research notes I have tried to capture an atmospheric moment I experienced and was involved in producing at NNIMF 2018. Otim Alpha and Leo P-layeng, from the Acholi tribe in Northern Uganda, are known as the kings of Acholitronix. For over ten years they have been reinterpreting wedding songs known as 'Larakaraka' into hyper-frenetic electronic tracks, which have recently been shared with audiences around the world. The moment documented above was the beginning of their Boiler Room debut. On page 44 of the portfolio you can find a link to a video of the same moment, alongside some still images of the two musicians. Boiler Room is an independent music platform that broadcasts underground music as it happens, connecting club culture to the wider world through live-streaming, audio and film. Since 2010 Boiler Room has built a massive online community and a unique archive featuring over 4,000 performances, by 5,000 artists, spanning 150 cities. In addition to the performance's physical audience, the event is also broadcast to Boiler Room's three million Facebook followers, who could also watch this moment.

In *Atmospheres and the Experiential World: Theories and Methods* (2019), Pink and Sumartojo suggest that whilst 'we live in atmospheres, we talk about them and we move

through them [they] are impossible to capture, elusive to define and continually beyond our grasp as they ongoingly transform (1). In 'Staging atmospheres: Materiality, culture, and the texture of the in-between' (2015), Bille, Bjerregaard and Sørensen point out that atmosphere 'can be encountered in everyday language as 'ambience', 'sense of place', or the 'feel' of a room, and more philosophically in terms such as Stimmung, 'mood' or 'attunement'' (32). However, regardless of whether 'atmospheres are discussed colloquially or academically, there seems to be something slippery and poorly defined about them' and they are extremely difficult to articulate (Bille, Bjerregaard and Sørensen 2015, 32). Philosopher Gernot Böhme, whose work on atmospheres centres on their relationship with aesthetics, argues that 'since the eighteenth-century atmosphere has been used as a metaphor describing a certain mood hanging in the air' and 'today atmosphere may be defined briefly as tuned space, i.e. a space with a certain mood' (2017, 296). During the moment at NNIMF described above, the space had been tuned and there was a certain mood hanging in the air. In the video this heightened sense of awareness that this performance was being broadcast to the world can be heard in the crowd's screams and in Darlyne Komukama's introduction to the performance (Creative Portfolio, 44). Everyone was on edge, waiting. It was exhilarating and positive. In the video the energy is almost tangible as the performance begins and the crowd starts to nod their heads, finding the beat. It was an organised chaos, voices and bodies in every direction, suddenly coming together and joining the dancers in their rhythm.

Bille, Bjerregaard and Sørensen argue that 'atmosphere is never exclusively a psychological phenomenon, a state-of-mind, nor solely an objective thing 'out-there', as an environment or milieu; atmospheres are always located in between experiences and environments" (2015, 32). During this moment the atmosphere was not solely created by the backdrop, the dancers or the crowd. It was located somewhere in between the River Nile and feather headdresses, caught amid the vines and the glitter, suspended in and around the five-inch spiders, UV paint, and everyone experiencing it. The atmosphere was made up of a 'constellation of people and things' (Bille, Bjerregaard and Sørensen 2015, 32). As a producer, my work is located in this liminal space, oscillating around the 'coexistence of embodied experience and the material environment' (Bille, Bjerregaard

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and Sørensen 2015, 36). In producing NNIMF I quickly realised just how many individuals, teams, materials and competing agendas were at play in any atmosphere. The creative portfolio points to the scale of this, capturing some of the set designers (28-29), communication teams (26-27) and technicians (38-39), not to mention the artists and audience behind every moment (36-37).

Figure 6: Backstage with Boiler Room, Nyege Nyege International Music Festival, 2018. Photographer: Zahara Abdul.

As one example, the technical setup for the Boiler Room broadcast was extensive. A Funktion1 sound system was brought in from Kenya for the Eternal Disco stage. The system travelled overland from Nairobi with four technicians, a journey of approximately 18 hours without border delays. This ensured high quality sound and that the festival met industry standards, creating the best platform for artists to perform on, as well as a sonic experience for the audience, all in a rainforest in Uganda. With no power on site, the festival's production partner had to link up a generator that was large enough to power the stage 24/7 for four days, as well as lighting the dancefloor and adjacent areas in that corner of the jungle. The livestream of the event involved the installation of an internet mast and

an ethernet cable on site, which was undertaken by MTN, one of the festival sponsors in 2018, and required seven international crew members to execute the online broadcast. Pathways were fixed, banisters installed, and cables tapped down. Even a rainmaker was called in an effort to keep the tropical storms at bay, and tarpaulin was on standby to cover the sound system and equipment. The line-up included fifteen acts, some of which were live such as Otim Alpha and Leo P-layeng who needed to be sound-checked prior to their performances.

Producing is a collective activity. I'm not an artist, an electrician or a lighting expert, instead I make sure all these people can come together to create a moment. For NNIMF, my work involved communicating, understanding everyone's needs, what was necessary to meet them, and weighing up how essential it was to the overall vision. In the creation of a single moment – of atmosphere – everything had a knock-on effect. For example, the mast and the sound system had to be in place before acts could be sound-checked, and therefore we could be (pretty) sure the livestream would go to plan. Each delay or change – of which there were plenty – meant I had to continuously renegotiate and realign agendas amongst the external partners, team members and artists. For instance, once the festival was in full swing and we did a soundcheck prior to the first Boiler Room performances, a decision was made that it was necessary to shut down the other stages in order to prevent sound bleed on the broadcast for the first acoustic acts. With less than an hour to go, this meant negotiating with artists, technicians and stage managers and making changes to the line-up across the four other stages. Images and links to short clips from some of the other Boiler Room performances, including the acoustic act 'Stella Chiweshe meets Ekuka', can be found on page 40-41 of the portfolio, with behind the scenes shots on pages 38-39. The videos and images give a sense of the atmosphere. However, capturing the huge operation behind this mood, without including the thousands of WhatsApp messages, emails, invoices and receipts, is a little more difficult.

Across the festival much of my role was advising and ensuring that the wider team understood any financial implications, logistical challenges and anything that I deemed posed a risk to the overall vision – essentially managing the behind the scenes. There were

often conflicting ideas from different members and stakeholders about what was essential to generating a particular mood: be that an artist, the set or a certain food vendor. From my particular position, I have come to understand that every element – however small – has the potential to contribute, but also detract, from the overall ambiance. I had to make judgement calls on the spot, for example weighing up the budgetary, logistical and cash-flow implications against an aesthetic decision – anything from bringing in eight additional artists to buying one more pot of paint. Everything was interlinked. Whilst the deco team needed extra wood to finish the stage, this reallocation – due to cashflow – could pose a delay to the site team who were finishing the toilets; both were essential to how a moment would play out, just from very different perspectives.

In producing NNIMF it became clear that atmospheres were both objective – the stage design, for example – and subjective – 'nothing without a subject feeling them' (Böhme 2017, 2). The atmosphere is held by the swarm of people hovering around the DJ and the dancers, but is also experienced differently by every pair of hot pants and each Hawaiian shirt. In the festival context there are many subjects: audience, partners, artists and the team. Working across the social, aesthetic and material worlds of NNIMF meant engaging with all of the participants' different needs and expectations. So much of my role was about pre-empting how different people would *feel* at particular moments, considering how that could affect the atmosphere and, given that, what might be necessary for creating the most affective environment. As Ben Anderson outlines, affects 'are impersonal in that they belong to collective situations and yet can be felt as intensely personal' (2014, 80). Not everyone would have had an as intense experience as me for Otim Alpha and Leo P-layeng's performance: how atmospheres affect an individual is influenced by that person's specific history, context, expectations and current disposition. If I hadn't spent weeks coordinating the live broadcast and understood what it potentially meant for the festival and the artists, if I had had one less beer, or if I didn't know the musicians who were about to perform, this moment would have felt, and I would have experienced it, very differently.

As described in Chapter Two, NNIMF is set on the banks of the River Nile in over four acres of tropical rainforest. Each year, everything from stages to toilets, from water supply

to electricity, has to be built from scratch or installed. There are limitations to what is possible in this context, and artists and audiences alike will struggle to find their home comforts – this is all part of the NNIMF experience. However, knowing in advance that there won't be hot water, that there will be mud, and that a good night's sleep is unlikely does affect how one *feels* about it in a moment. Similarly, making sure toilets are clean and accessible for everyone, that there is hot food and cold beer available 24/7, and that transport to and from the festival site is relatively simple, makes a big difference to the individual and collective experience. For example, in 2018 there was food and drink available in the artists' area day and night, and Rasta Kitchen cooked for over 500 artists and staff, three times a day. There are some images of Rasta Kitchen on pages 30-31 of the creative portfolio. I made sure that all these elements of infrastructure were in place in the lead-up to the festival. Throughout the weekend I double-checked they were still running, and if they weren't, I did my best to solve the problems as quickly as possible.

As with affect, atmospheres are also relational – forming and deforming as people, materials and environments converge and disperse. Cultural theorist Sara Ahmed posits 'bodies unfold into worlds' and 'we are touched by what comes near' (Ahmed 2014, 210). Ahmed argues that a 'body might bring a lively atmosphere with them' and consequently 'that situation becomes lively' (2014, 222). Atmosphere is 'generated by those who are around, becoming something that can be 'put down' as well as 'picked up' by others' (Ahmed 2014, 222). As can be seen in the video, people 'pick up' the dance moves, the rhythms, the whistles. And, if someone had been distressed on the dancefloor, that affect may have touched and been picked up by other people, in different ways. Similarly, if people are stressed or dissatisfied this *feeling* can be infectious and caught by others. This is particularly pertinent with artists who are performing and coming into relation with thousands of audience members.

Take Sho Madjozi, also known as the 'Black Cinderella', who was one of the headline acts in 2018. The South Africa musician came to perform two gigs at NNIMF for a symbolic fee, a week before playing in New York with Cardi B and Janet Jackson (Lemaire 2019). The last thing the organisers would want is for her to feel stressed or

dissatisfied and for the audience to catch onto that. So, giving her the full Nyege Nyege treatment was critical, which included making sure she was looked after and had everything she needed to have a great time. During an interview at the festival, Sho Madjozi explained how amazing it was to headline NNIMF. She continues '... it's a different vibe. I love Africa and it's so rare to find all the different Africans in one place. Nyege Nyege is African, it's inclusive, it's love, Nyege Nyege is beautiful and Nyege Nyege is doing the most' (Nyege Nyege International Music Festival 2019b). Images of Sho Madjozi's two performances can be found on pages 14-15, and 34-35, of the creative portfolio. Materials and the environment also have the potential to affect each other and people in similar ways. A moment and how it is 'picked up' can depend on a myriad of factors such as the weather (hot and sunny), on the music starting at a particular time (just before sunset), on the temperature of the beer (ice-cold) and smell in the air (circulating whiffs of burning charcoal). Therefore, alongside the programming, I tried to ensure the best possible experience for everyone involved, by making sure that the objective elements were in place, alongside people – be that artists, audience or team – having access to what they needed to enjoy the experience.

Figure 7: Sho Madjozi headlining the main stage, Nyege Nyege International Music Festival, 2018. Photographer: Muhammad Ali Kanch.

Gernot Böhme asserts that atmospheres are totalities: '...atmospheres imbue everything, they tinge the whole of the world or a view, they bathe everything in a certain light, unify a diversity of impressions in a single emotive state' (2013, 2). Using the theatre as his main example, but also drawing on architecture, advertising, politics and art, Böhme argues that atmospheres are designed 'by certain agents or factors, in particular by sound and illumination, but also by the geometry of a room, by signs, pictures, etc.' to achieve a particular objective (2017, 3). Böhme argues 'that art would be pointless if it could not be assumed that a given audience would experience in the same way an arrangement with which atmosphere is created on the stage … the artist, the designer, the architect will want to know what he or she has to do to ensure that a public will experience his or her objects' in a specific way (2017, 57). At the heart of Böhme's assertion is a contradiction: given the relational nature of atmosphere, and of the production necessary to generate it in an event the scale of NNIMF, it would be impossible to guarantee the unification of all participants in a particular experience or in a single emotional state. Every encounter is laced with a subject's – and object's – expectations and feelings. These differ depending on cultural, social, economic and political experiences. As Edensor and Sumartojo argue in 'Designing Atmospheres: introduction to Special Issue of Visual Communication' (2015), I have found that, whilst it is possible to 'design' a specific atmosphere with the intention of enrolling people in a particular feeling or atmosphere, you 'can never be sure whether a crowd or a group will charge the atmosphere with unwanted or unexpected tones or play the roles envisaged' (252). This is echoed in *Atmospheres and the Experiential World* (2019) where Pink and Sumartojo point out that 'atmospheres cannot *make* people feel particular things, precisely because it is the way that people feel about things that make atmospheres perceptible' (4).

Despite the careful management of all the co-existing elements behind any given moment, due to the relationality of production itself as well as atmosphere, things didn't always go to plan. In 2018 equipment was held at customs, there were power cuts and the installation of the ethernet cable took much longer than anticipated. Bulbs blew and the bespoke 12-foot sculpture in the River Nile didn't stay alight, fizzling out after a couple of minutes. Fireworks went off unannounced, the entire festival was cancelled and reinstated days

before, there were unanticipated guest appearances and surprise collaborations. The water supply broke, phones were stolen and drinks were spilled. Heavy rainfall before the festival meant pathways flooded and there was mud everywhere. Then blazing sunshine throughout most of the event meant that all the ice melted. Each element had an impact on the atmosphere, and not always as would be anticipated. Much of my work involved managing the fallout of these things and doing what was necessary (if it was necessary) to get things back on track: ankle deep in mud, dripping with sweat, running with 20kg of CDJs around the site; staying up all night rebooking missed flights, and buying a round of drinks to get people back in the mood. As NNIMF Co-director Derek Debru highlights: 'a good festival needs some unexpected glitches along the way – a little bit of chaos is all part of the magic' (Lemaire 2019). It is these surprises that shape the aesthetic and the atmospheres of the entire event. Despite all the issues, crowd numbers double each year. People continue to dance, shout and cover themselves in glitter. International artists don't leave. Local artists head off on European tours.

So, while NNIMF's music and cutting-edge curation has built the festival's reputation, the atmosphere is its USP. The Nyege Nyege spirit – an uncontrollable urge to dance – is simultaneously edgy, curious, chaotic, respectful, joyful, inclusive, safe, wild, exhilarating, mad, impulsive, surprising, dark, celebratory, underground and eclectic. It gets into people and it is what engenders all types of participation in the festival. It sells tickets and captures the imagination of audiences around the world. It attracts partners such as Boiler Room, and draws some of the world's most cutting-edge musicians to East Africa. People want to *feel* and be a part of creating the festival experience. Even commercial partners – sponsors, vendors and service providers – want to associate their brands with the festival's atmosphere. Journalist Camille Storm described NNIMF's atmosphere as a spirit, 'exciting and liberating' (2018); it has also been referred to as 'cocoon-like' (Macdonald 2017) and 'unifying' (Cobby 2019). After attending the festival, journalist John Twells asserted that 'in over two decades of festival-going, I've never witnessed anything that comes close to Nyege Nyege' (Twells 2018). Away from the challenges and conservatism of everyday life, NNIMF's sense of freedom chimes strongly with the underground resistance of much club culture around the world.

Critically, the atmosphere is shaped by all the festival's participants. As Co-director Derek Debru highlights: 'Nyege Nyege creates an environment, and you [the artist, the audience and even the team] create an experience on the basis of that. Not everything should be spoon-fed' (Lemaire 2019). For me, as a producer, the 'design' and the open-endedness of NNIMF was a continuous balancing act. But in analysing my practice in relation to the festival, I have come to believe that the openness of NNIMF and its atmosphere is potentially intensely productive.

Producing Atmosphere | East African Soul Train

Although difficult to grasp, in the contemporary world atmospheres are employed in a host of ways to provoke specific behaviours. Bille, Bjerregaard and Sørensen point out, as marketing researcher Philip Kotler claimed, 'the atmosphere of the place, is more influential than the product itself' (2015, 33). This proposition has been widely accepted and, in spaces such as shopping centres, homes and schools, atmospheres are used to make us 'feel safe, calm or stimulated to specific ends, such as complying with public security regimes or buying things' (Pink and Sumartojo 2019, 122). There is a commercial incentive to considering atmospheres, 'centred on the ability to lure people to do something they might otherwise not have done' (Bille, Bjerregaard and Sørensen 2015, 33). In *Encountering Affect* (2014), Anderson argues that atmospheres have become economic commodities. Using the marketing company ScentAir UK as one 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' (2014, 25).

Focusing on the social, cultural and political potential of emotion, affect and atmosphere, Ahmed argues that communities, institutions and governments also play on collective emotions to generate specific feelings, such as pain, hate and fear. Ahmed highlights 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). Ahmed's position is that

'when a feeling becomes an instrument or a technique it is not that something is created from nothing' (Ahmed 2014, 227). In other words, a 'staged' feeling, emotion or atmosphere evolves from something. The 'designer' anticipates a response or reaction to a set of specific circumstances – 'a wavering impression of nervousness can strengthen its hold when we are given a face to be nervous about' (Ahmed 2014, 227). Ahmed's argument navigates the terrain between the employment of atmospheres for specific ends, such as evoking nationalistic behaviours, alongside their contingent, contagious and relational qualities, experienced, for example, in a moment of protest. Despite their precarious nature, atmospheres make people *feel* 'things' and can move people to action. However, as I have outlined, there are few examples interrogating what atmospheres might *do* in art and performance. With EAST atmospheres are critical to the ways in which the project plays out. In the following sections I examine how I produced atmosphere and how it is harnessed during EAST.

Figure 8: Filmmaker Anna Cardovillis walks through the corridors of the 'Lunatic Express', East African Soul Train, 2017. Photographer: Lena Giovanazzi.

Have you ever been on a train and found yourself immersed in a deep conversation with a stranger? Perhaps because our first sensory experience is in an enclosed space, moving to a beat, something happens on train journeys that allows us to enter a different state of mind. With no power or phone signal, passengers move between the past, present and future. It is a sensory environment: doors swing open; windows shake and smash; there is a consistent rattle against the tracks. Milk slurps and swirls, spilling out of the chipped crockery. A bell rings. An insect crawls out of the faded, musty, burnt-orange interiors; you can smell the heat of the sun. Suspended for days in a nondescript location, somewhere in the savannah. While we experience limitations in the tight corridors and cabins, our minds travel far, taking in the vast landscapes, feeling a constant rhythm and movement shaking our bodies. Time spent collaborating, creating, chatting – squeezing past and squeezing in – sweltering, sweating and gasping for air amongst the dust and mosquitoes as the train rolls over East Africa's historical tracks – chug, chug, chug – is fundamental to the project. EAST brings bodies, materials and different environments together in a variety of ways. It is not comfortable or easy, but the journey, the train itself – its atmospheres – *do* things.

Research Notes from EAST 2017
Edited in Kampala, Uganda, May 2017.

EAST is a pop-up residency and creative adventure centred around a journey on East Africa's historic railways. The project brings artists and thinkers together in a unique environment. The ambition is to curate a space for creative risk-taking that builds trust and connection, generates new practice and raises the profile of the region's contemporary art and performance scene. There is something particular about the journey and its atmospheres, which are captured by the short film *Kovu Safarini* (2017), a link to which can be found on page 61 of the portfolio. The East African railways are steeped in shared colonial and postcolonial histories. The carriages are uncomfortable, hot and dirty. The food is sparse and the drinks are served warm. Suspended for days in these conditions, and in tight proximity to relative strangers, is a challenging physical and emotional experience. With nowhere to hide, this intimate and intense environment pushes participants' limits. Artists, thinkers and the team have to support one another through this challenging journey. The creative process also inspires participants to experiment in a space outside their particular socio-economic constraints, and look beyond geographic and disciplinary boundaries. Throughout the journey the cabins of this historic train become

creative cells for intensive collaborations and deep conversations, there are pop-up performances that engage other passengers, spilling out throughout the train and along the tracks. Our experience is that the trust built through the adventure and its atmospheres lead to deep connections, honesty and an ability to share our realities as artists and people in a profound way.

The train's atmospheres act like a pressure cooker. When Hepp and I first tested the route from Nairobi to Mombasa, suspended in time and space away from the challenges of everyday life, we found a creative focus and engaged in deep conversations, both of which catapulted our personal and professional relationship to new heights. In the podcast Lugezigezi, which was recorded following EAST 2017, Maïmouna Jallow – a writer, storyteller, performance artist, and artistic mentor for that edition of the project – described the time-space compression as follows:

> On the train you're going on a journey that has a destination. But at the same time, it's a circular process. In the last few days we have completely lost our sense of time because things are going at a different pace, things are… you're in this creative bubble. On the train we had our workshop from midnight to 3am and when the group asked me what time it was, I was like "3!" and the group was like "what!". (Jallow 2017)

The train's atmosphere intensifies everything. Jallow describes how everyone she worked with 'went through a process of transformation trying to create what [they] came up with in the end' (Jallow 2017). Jallow explained that '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' (Jallow 2017). The journey and the train capture the imagination of participants and audiences, but are also integral to the process. Whilst the atmospheres don't do anything in themselves, I argue that, as Human Geographer David Bissell describes, 'affective atmospheres must be understood as the relational *potential* for things to act or change in a particular space' (2010, 273) [emphasis own]. Following Bissell, the train's atmosphere is a '*propensity*: a pull or a charge that might emerge in a particular space, which might (or might not) generate particular events and actions, feelings and emotions' (Bissell 2010, 273) [emphasis original]. The 'pull' or 'charge'

alone doesn't do anything. However, when experienced and reconfigured in relation to one's own experience, this propensity can generate particular things (Bissell 2010, 273).

Figure 9: Artists' workshop in a cabin on the 'Lunatic Express', East African Soul Train, 2017. Photographer: Martin Kharumwa.

As EAST's producer, my work centres around trying to create the effective *pull* or *charge* towards our ambitions: generating trust, connections and new creative practice. In collaboration with Hepp, in the first instance this involves making the journey possible. Despite being a smaller scale event, as with NNIMF, there are a range of aesthetic, social and material considerations that sit behind every moment of this adventure. Firstly, for every edition we undertake we work with a range of local and international partners from East Africa's oldest art college TaSUBa to Belgian donor Africalia. Whilst we continue to explore more diverse funding models, as an artist development programme, focused on raising the quality and profile of the region's contemporary art and performance scene, we are currently heavily reliant on donor support and in-kind contributions from partners. This means grant applications and nurturing relationships, aligning agendas between the project and funding trends without compromising our vision for the programme. Just to

hire particular wagons and carry out the project on the train comes with a range of necessary partnerships: with the railway companies, with the transport police and with other authorities such as BASATA, the Tanzanian Arts Council. Sometimes the service is delayed for days, and strong relationships with station masters and the restaurant service are essential to making sure that the carriages even turn up. Even getting everyone from across the region to the departure point is a challenge in itself. Hosting people on the move – feeding, watering and accommodating participants, in this challenging context with no electricity, limited space, and the occasional cockroach – is no easy feat. However, I do this because I believe there is a *propensity* in this environment, which differs from a typical conference, industry fair or even residency programme. The train's atmospheres are an essential part of stepping outside of one's comfort zone, experimenting and taking a creative risk.

Throughout the project the team and I look to amplify atmospheres of trust and connection in different ways. Across the three editions of the project, we have experimented with mood: manipulating the temporal dynamics and heightening certain elements of the journey through material intervention. This was most significant in 2017, when set designer and curator Mirembe Musisi joined our team. Musisi led a group who used lighting and props to heighten spaces within spaces, enhancing or playing with the train's atmospheres and designing specific cabins that reflected or anticipated particular affects. You can see examples of these installations on pages 88-89 of the creative portfolio. There was the sanctuary, a silent cabin filled with germinating seeds which sought to provide relief from the intense environment; clocks and watches were suspended through the dining hall; 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 past and future. There was also a care cabin, where passengers could go for some respite, a conversation or just some peace. We underwent all these interventions in an effort to pre-empt and intensify the atmospheres of the train. Once this creative bubble was established, we also wanted to include future-orientated prompts and points of reflection to spark artists' imaginations and amplify the *propensity* of the experience.

Figure 10: Installation by Mirembe Musisi in a cabin on the 'Lunatic Express', East African Soul Train, 2017. Photographer: Imeldah Natasha Kondo.

Whilst overseeing material interventions, I pay particular attention to the contingent, contagious and subjective elements of affect. In *The Transmission of Affect* (2004), Teresa Brennan argues that affect and atmospheres jump, shift and move between bodies. Brennan's argument is that: 'affects do not only arise within a particular person but also come from without. They come via an interaction with other people and an environment … emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another' (3). This contagion is not just psychological, Brennan argues 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' (2004 1). This was exemplified when, in 2017, we encountered a number of issues on departure from Nairobi train station. Firstly, the service, which never runs on time, was set to leave early. This resulted in a lot of last minute changes to our schedule. Our relationship and agreements with the railways were not as robust as we thought, and, whilst we had negotiated access to the train prior to

departure to set up the installations and allocate sleeping cabins, we only ended up having a few minutes. There were 99 people: as the bell rang and everyone else jumped onboard, momentarily, it was total chaos. Luggage was lost. Artwork broken. Cables forgotten. This put a huge strain on the already overworked small voluntary team. These atmospheres of frustration and distress were slowly seeping into different participant's experiences, literally getting into individuals and sparking already short fuses. At the risk of derailing the whole project, I spent eight hours talking to different people, bringing them back on side and into a place where they could participate and experience the other – intended – atmospheres of the project.

This situation did turn around and very quickly more celebratory and creative moods took over, such as the collaboration that can be seen on pages 80-83 of the portfolio. However, what this demonstrates is that every meeting, meal and night's sleep holds the potential to influence the quality of the whole experience. 'Because *feeling* matters' (Hurley 2010, 77), in my position I try to acknowledge the emotional life of all participants, pre-empting how affects jump, move and shift between bodies. This can be as simple as ensuring that there is coffee in the morning or a cold beer on arrival, checking in or being someone that people can approach. Throughout the whole project I do my best to manage the expectations of participants and enable them to enter the space in an open way: the information available, the transport and welcome, food and accommodation all contribute to how an individual feels, and therefore their affective situation. Making everyone feel – in their own ways – supported, informed and valued, is integral to generating a caring atmosphere where trust, connection, and new creative practice can manifest. Atmospheres are critical beyond the train too, and we arrange the flow of the whole project to account for this. These different spaces can be seen in the accompanying portfolio, specifically on pages 76-77 where you see the interior and the journey set against the expansiveness of the coast. Similarly, what is projected and how EAST is positioned externally can also alter the internal world and atmospheres of the project.

Whilst EAST is designed to evoke certain things, due to the project's relational nature, it can never be wholly predicted. Part of my work involves supporting the curation of

participants and bringing the 'right' people together: a balance of artists, thinkers and stakeholders; of disciplinary interests; of introverts and extraverts, of ages, genders and experience. Whilst the project and its atmospheres have catalysed ongoing connections, collaborations and new creative practice in each edition. Year on year and artist to artist this has looked and manifested in surprising ways, resulting in different bodies of work each time. For example, a fashion designer working with a dancer to create a live art installation, or DJs and poets coming together to make a short film. In the portfolio from page 70-75 you can see some of the profiles of the different participants that have taken part each year.

In the first edition of EAST, in 2016, there was a high-energy party vibe throughout, and the project ended up being considered a catalytic factor in the Nu Nairobi movement, led by Taio and EA Wave amongst others. A hype oscillated around EAST, which helped us to secure support and establish a more structured programme for 2017. With the resources to engage more people in an increasingly professional residency, the second edition saw 99 participants, more creative outputs that were of a higher aesthetic quality, as well as the continuation of multiple collaborations and opportunities post-project. Images from the 2017 work-in-progress presentation at Distant Relatives Ecolodge can be seen on pages 104-107 of the portfolio. Following the closure of the Kenyan standard gauge railway between Nairobi and Mombasa in summer 2017, we had a hiatus and resumed with a pilot edition in June 2019, in Tanzania. The third edition had a total of 16 participants, who were predominantly mid-career and particularly focused on their craft. The project was more focused, outputs high-quality and, whilst there have been fewer instances of continued collaboration between artists outside of the project (at least to date), we saw the engagement of large and diverse local audiences throughout the journey and at our destination. One stakeholder commented on how they were 'struck by how powerfully EAST 2019 managed to connect a large public audience, who do not normally have access to contemporary art and performance events, and immerse them in new ideas, practice and, at times, abstract work' (Creative Portfolio, 126-127).

A focus on atmosphere makes it impossible to unify the project or its participants in a singular experience. As you move through the train, you move through different moods: in some corners people are euphoric, in others there is a sense of deep frustration; some people party whilst others shut their doors and sleep in their cabins. Consequently, the connections, collaborations and work that emerges is vastly different. Take three film projects from EAST 2017 (links to two of them can be found on page 114 of the creative portfolio): the first, *Speak Soon* (2017), is a short film about leaving things behind and trying your best to move to the next part of your life with grace, directed and edited by Nikissi Serumaga. It is a deeply intimate portrayal of snippets of different peoples' experiences, histories, as well as a particular interpretation of the project's atmospheres. It follows Serumaga's journey on the train and the different atmospheres experienced, captured through voice notes and film footage. The audience also meet Lydia Kasese, a Tanzanian poet and catch snippets of her story through her work, as well as Kenny, a local passer-by Serumaga engaged with in conversation on the beach. *X EAR X* (2017), a short film by Emily McCartney, was created in collaboration with 16 other artists on the same journey. It is an intense and surreal piece that moves between fiction and reality. It is dark, haunting and captures a sense of colonialism's scars as well as its continued presence today. It indicates an altogether different set of atmospheres; the entrapment of the train is set against the freedom felt on the tracks. Finally, there is the documentary that we commissioned as a project. The vision was to follow EAST from a passenger's perspective, to capture the intensity of the environments and the creative collaborations that emerged. Over three years later, it is yet to be completed. This is a consequence of the original team's personal circumstances, our capacity and resources to manage the process effectively, and a host of things beyond our control, including robberies and broken hard drives.

Whilst *Speak Soon* (2017) and *X EAR X* (2017) are both beautifully executed, apart from a number of artists that collaborated on both films, and of course the train itself, there is little commonality between the two pieces. Harnessing atmospheres means recognising that they are experienced – taken up and put down – in different ways, by objects, the environment and participants throughout the process. Each film is a product of both the

makers historical and contemporary experiences, as well as the bodies, atmospheres and materials that they encountered and collaborated with along the way. Recognising relationality in a project such as EAST means specific outcomes can be hard to predict and those that are, such as the commissioned film, don't always go to plan.

EAST navigates the space of employing atmospheres for specific ends – generating new contemporary creative practice – by recognising the potential of their contingent, contagious and relational qualities. As such, specific outcomes cannot be guaranteed: 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 new, interdisciplinary work, but it is not mandatory. Trying to keep this essence, especially when working with particular funders is a challenge: just because EAST does not have instrumental intentions does not mean that it does not *do* things. Many participants have commented on what a formative and catalytic experience EAST has been, directly linking atmosphere, trust and connection with the creative outputs. For example, on social media one participant explained how they 'spent yesterweek with a collective of some of the most beautiful creatives on historic train tracks built by our ancestors. It was a wonderful learning experience for me, full of collaboration, hard work and growth ... my life will never be the same'. Through my engagement with atmosphere as a producer, I have come to believe that it is their open-endedness that gives them a structural potential. Whilst EAST has very different intentions to the music festival, we also look to create an environment in which the participants determine their experience: both the aesthetic of the moment but also how it manifests in and beyond the project.

Agency and Atmosphere | East Africa Soul Train

During EAST, artists confounded or transmitted atmospheres, pulling each other into new moods, or entirely transforming their experience. Some artists felt an agency in the project's open-endedness. 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 and a collaboration with Evan's Campbell following the project. When reflecting on EAST, 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, and that could take centre stage. Others found the freedom challenging. Malcolm Bigyemano, a filmmaker, graphic designer 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 relationality of the project. The environment, other creatives and the project's methodologies disrupted his fixed ambitions for the project. EAST resulted in a range of encounters and conversations for Bigyemano, and in the aftermath he produced an extended episode of the podcast *Lugezigezi* (2017), in which he interviewed artists from the project, collaborated on the film *X EAR X* (2017) and teamed up with an animator after the residency to explore developing a short film about their experience. However, initially he had felt frustrated and disappointed that he didn't produce something immediately tangible. Other artists just didn't get it, and were left questioning why they were there, what they were supposed to be doing, and struggling to understand what they could possibly get out of the experience. As a producer, handing over the outcomes of a project, especially when it doesn't work, is a challenge. This cultivation of relational agency leaves participants, partners and the project vulnerable. But it is also a particular intersection of art and performance practice, with change-making, which is rarely articulated.

In *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power and the Acting Subject* (2006), Sherry Ortner argues that in development discourse, the term agency too often 'calls to mind the autonomous, individualistic, western actor' (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' (2006, 110). Moving away from the definition of agency as a 'reflexive choice in situations where people could have acted otherwise', in 'Relational agency: Relational sociology, agency and interaction' (2016), Ian Burkitt claims that agency is contingent on 'action that produces an effect on the world and on others' (332). The argument is that agency occurs 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). Importantly, agency is not something reserved for human subjects, but environments and objects can also be affected by and affect agency.

Figure 11: Collaboration with percussionists Checkmate Mido and Ejuku Mark in a cabin on the 'Lunatic Express', East African Soul Train, 2017. Photographer: Jude Clark.

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, like atmosphere, agency is always a dance between the subject(s), the object(s) and bits in-between, each element's agency develops through its relational engagement with the other components in this complex meshwork. 'The kite's flying is surely the combined effect of the flyer, the kite *and the air'* (Ingold 2013, 99). Each elemental, material, and human participant is 'alive' and able to affect any given situation: if there is no wind 'even in the air, a kite will not fly' (Ingold 2013, 99). Through focusing on atmosphere, acknowledging its relational qualities, during EAST we hand over the outcomes of the project to the participants. The project and its atmospheres can be a catalyst, but they only come into being when adopted by participants in relation to their sensed experience. As a producer, the best I can do is set the conditions – making sure the kite is light, the flyer is reliable, and, if necessary, there is a wind machine on hand. All of these actions are done in an effort to ensure the kite flies. However, whether it will actually fly, what that will look like, how fast and for how long, in what direction and who will interact with it, remains open.

Through this research I have come to understand my work as a producer, and performance, more widely, as a relational, collective and material practice. As such, in projects such as EAST, whilst I can create an environment, it is the objects, subjects and context itself that shape the aesthetic experience. As I highlighted earlier in this chapter, whilst there has been a move in contexts such as East Africa to recognise the affective potential of performance practice, this often oscillates around an individual. Following philosopher Jacques Ranciére, there is a political dimension to this. My feeling is that often whilst researchers and practitioners 'deny using the stage to dictate a lesson or convey a message' and that 'they simply wish to produce a form of consciousness, an intensity of feeling, an energy for action', it is often assumed 'what will be perceived, felt' (Ranciére 2009, 14). So, for example, the affective qualities of art and performance lead to a reconceptualisation of a participant's position in society, a reflection on their rights and a new-found confidence to exert them in particular

circumstances. Such a conceptualisation relies on normative interpretations of what a positive outcome looks like and can be sold to funders as such. However, in this, the vibrant, dynamic and atmospheric nature of art and performance can quickly be lost again, subsumed by instrumental development agendas. In *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), political philosopher Ranciére argued that in a truly emancipatory creative project, subjects must be able to reconfigure an aesthetic experience in relation to their own 'regime of perception and signification' (2009, 49). Ranciére argues that aesthetic efficacy is 'a paradoxical kind of efficacy that is produced by the very rupturing of any determinate link between cause and effect' (Ranciére 2009, 63). Ranciére's argument chimes with Ingold's interpretation of agency, and the rupturing of a linear trajectory, but adds an explicit political dimension. Contemporary artistic interventions can 'help sketch new configurations of what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought and, consequently, a new landscape of the possible' (Ranciére 2009, 103). However, 'they do so on the condition that their meaning or effect is not anticipated' (Ranciére 2009, 103).

As argued, whilst in EAST I try to anticipate how different atmospheres will play out, it is impossible to wholly predict them. EAST is experienced in very different ways by its participants:

> Thank you Soul Train for creating a context that allowed me and many other people to [re]connect more and more profoundly with our creative selves. It's been a safe haven this journey, where masks could fall off, boundaries were challenged and pushed and redrawn, discoveries made, magic happened. Thanks for allowing the messiness of the creative process and trusting the artists to do what they are best at, create and inspire.
>
> Artist Feedback, East African Soul Train 2017

So much love for all the magic makers I met at EAST2017. Thank you all for opening me up to a world of possibilities, honesty and understanding. Now let's move the world with our art.

<div align="right">Artist Feedback, East African Soul Train 2017</div>

What you guys have created is amazing on so many different levels. To be able to inspire and let creativity flow in its best form, the feeling of freedom, openness and humbleness are tools I think need to be present. You have given us all of that.

<div align="right">Artist Feedback, East African Soul Train 2017</div>

What strikes me about these examples of feedback is the connection between relational agency and vulnerability. For the participants, the ability to affect relies on an openness to being affected; the experience of vulnerability – of masks falling off – is a generative tool. In EAST, acknowledging the precarity of atmosphere in performance does not negate a wider social impact, providing social impact is understood as change-making: 'a form of intervention that involves the opening up of many possibilities' (Akama, Pink and Sumartojo 2018, 3). In a context such as East Africa, where the creative sector – particularly its funding mechanisms – are in need of innovation, there is something particularly appealing about finding a vocabulary to describe the relational, ever-evolving nature of art and performance. In looking beyond development paradigms to understanding why contemporary and popular art and performance practices in East Africa have a change-making potential I have arrived at atmosphere through my practice as a producer. Through producing NNIMF and EAST I have come to understand that atmospheres are powerful, not in the consigned ways that they will take effect but in the *uncertainty* of how they will unfold.

Chapter Four | Producing Uncertainty

Figure 12: a conversation between the train's manager and the author on the three-day journey between Mwanza and Dar es Salaam, East African Soul Train recce trip, 2019. Photographer: Geraldine Hepp.

On March 15th 2019 I left Kampala, Uganda, at 10pm on a Friday evening. I arrived in Mwanza at 4am on Sunday. 30 hours. Misplaced border papers, blown tyres and just one arrest, meant a fifteen hour bus journey quickly doubled. I was on my way to the small port city of Mwanza, on the shores of Lake Victoria in Northern Tanzania. The closing of the standard gauge railway in Kenya, between Nairobi and Mombasa, had meant that we needed a new route if we were to continue with East African Soul Train (EAST). Mwanza to Dar es Salaam seemed like the best alternative in the region. It was a central meeting point, with – in theory – good bus connections from the south of Tanzania, as well as from Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Kenya. After an abrupt arrival in 2017, we also wanted to extend the journey. It was also almost a three-day journey on the old train that ended on the coast, with access to the vibrant cultural scenes of Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar and Bagamoyo. The train, established during German East

Africa in 1905, and extended by the British in the 1930s, holds similar colonial undertones to the 'Lunatic Express' in Kenya. And, with much of the infrastructure dating back to this era, the aesthetics and atmospheres of the journey chimed with our project. After a few hours' sleep I met Boaz, a bank clerk and hip hop artist based in Mwanza, who was helping me make arrangements. We scoped out possible taxi drivers, restaurants and hotels before heading to the station to collect our tickets. Despite pre-booking we were informed that there would be no sleeper wagons available until Tabora. A night's sleep away… Later that day Dancer and Choreographer Adam Cheinjo and Geraldine Hepp arrived on a bus from Nairobi and we headed to the train station.

We were squeezed on a wooden bench. The carriage quickly filled up, and in a few hours people were curled up and sleeping below our feet, above our heads and across our laps. We glugged down a bottle of wine as cockroaches crawled around the window ridge and the samosa salesman touted for business in-between the snores. I couldn't move my arms. We drew to a stop in the early hours of the morning. After waiting for a while – still with no sleep and not wanting to miss out connection in Tabora – we decided to walk. Led by a few phone lights we carried our luggage through bushland in the dark. We followed other passengers and a couple kilometres later we all bundled into a car for a dollar each and were dropped at the next station. The lorry that had broken down on the tracks was eventually removed. After three nights I had a bed… or at least something resembling one. We chugged slowly across Tanzania's savannah, stopping for anything between five minutes and three hours at stations along the way. To say the least, it was unpredictable. On arrival, exhausted, we had three days of back-to-back meetings in Dar es Salaam and Bagamoyo. Potential partners and donors were charmed by the project, but there were still so many unknowns without taking into account the process itself. The idea of undertaking this journey with artists seemed absurd. Still, despite the uncertainties, two months later we took sixteen creatives on the train, and will do it with up to forty in the summer of 2020.

Research Notes from EAST Recce trip, 2019
Edited in Kampala, Uganda, April 2019.

In looking beyond development to understand other ways art and performance interacts with change in East Africa, I have turned to the concept of uncertainty. Uncertainty is a defining feature of atmosphere, but it is also something I have encountered in a variety of ways in my practice: as part of the social, economic and political governing systems; as an environmental and methodological reality; and an aesthetic device. In the research

notes I look to capture some of the contextual uncertainties and the ways in which we encountered ambiguity in EAST, in addition to the open-ended artistic process explained in Chapter Three. Hepp took photos throughout our adventure, these images can be found on pages 96-99 of the creative portfolio. Following Yoko Akama, Sarah Pink and Shanti Sumartojo in *Uncertainty & Possibility: New Approaches to Future Making in Design Anthropology* (2018), I have come to understand that 'uncertainty, paradoxically, plays a disruptive and generative role' in my work and potentially more widely creative practice (2). Rather than shying away from the tempestuous qualities of art and performance, this chapter asks how uncertainty has manifested in challenging, but productive ways during Nyege Nyege International Music Festival (NNIMF) and EAST.

The term uncertainty is employed in a variety of situations. It is used to describe an economic, social and/or political context: 'these uncertain times'; a specific environment or methodological challenge: 'we are uncertain if that will be possible'; and an affect or feeling: "she felt uncertain". Whether describing a subject, object, environment or general mood hanging in the air, uncertainty suggests an unpredictable state of being. Uncertain beings, things and situations are indeterminable, contingent and liable to change. Whilst uncertainty is often used to suggest a negative state, I am interested in its generative potential. To explore this, firstly I analyse the relationship between uncertainty and risk, illustrating how, historically, uncertainty has been positioned as something to be mitigated and, consequently, how its avoidance can become an instrument of governance. After examining how this has impacted areas of my creative practice, I analyse some of the paradoxes of uncertainty as a contextual and aesthetic reality in NNIMF, before looking at how and why I have embraced uncertainty as a curatorial device and a political position in EAST. Throughout this chapter I look to explore how different types of uncertainty have collided in the context of my work in East Africa and interrogate the potential of uncertainty as a way of moving beyond 'normative structures, boundaries and practices' that are compromising elements of art and performance practice in the region (Akama, Pink and Sumartojo 2018, 5).

Risk and Uncertainty

Uncertainty as a term is often conflated with risk. But for sociologist Ulrich Beck, the defining difference between the two notions is that 'risk is what is insurable while uncertainty is not' (Lash 2018, 126). Identifying the risks inherent in uncertainty is one way of grasping, holding and pinning uncertainty down. Risks can be anticipated, predicted and subsequently avoided, uncertainty on the other hand is unknowable. For example, whilst uncertainty is inherent in EAST, the sleeping wagon not arriving in Mwanza can be identified as a risk. As such, in the actual project two months later, I did my best to mitigate this risk by forging stronger relationships, negotiating a larger booking and creating clearer agreements with the railway authorities. In my personal and professional life, my prevailing experience of uncertainty and risk is that they should be avoided. Uncertain, unpredictable or unknown situations, beings or things, are generally seen as inherently *risky*, potentially dangerous and destabilising. Risk and uncertainty are predominantly associated with things going wrong, changes to plans and crises that could have been – and should have been – avoided.

In the introduction to the edited collection *Risk, Participation and Performance Practice: Critical Vulnerabilities in a Precarious World* (2017), Alice O'Grady highlights how we live 'in a world obsessed with risk calculation, prediction and invention' (8). This echoes sociologist Pat O'Malley, who in *Risk, Uncertainty and Government* (2004) outlines the ways in which 'risk-based routines and practices of government pervade most areas of our life', pointing out that 'whole industries have been established to manufacture and sell commodities that secure us against risks to health, property, personal security and virtually every hazard that can be imagined' (1-2). Elements of the producer's role could be seen as part of this contemporary trend: managing the smooth operation of a project in whatever way necessary to realise a vision in the *best* (or least risky) way possible. Both O'Grady and O'Malley's reference points are based in a Western context. Whilst risk and uncertainty remain a major preoccupation of the contemporary experience more widely, they also manifest in particular ways in the East African context. As I have illustrated in

the opening of this chapter, the extent to which I am required to engage with uncertainty is increased by the context's limited infrastructure. For example, there wasn't a replacement sleeper wagon or train for days. As such, we had to travel overnight in the overcrowded carriage despite paying for other tickets. Also, if we missed the connection in Tabora we would be stuck for days, hence trekking in the dark for miles in the early hours of morning. In the end, there are also lots of ambiguities around authority: at this stage it was unclear whether it was the head office or individual station masters who were responsible for the sleeping wagons arriving in Mwanza and the reliability of the service.

The springboard for much scholarly work on risk and uncertainty is Beck's *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (2011). Beck is interested in uncertainty and risk from a variety of angles, and explored the multiple and, at times, contradictory ways it manifests in contemporary society. Beck linked a growing occupation with risk to modernisation, arguing that modernisation has meant that society is no longer constrained by the boundaries of the past, which in turn has led to an increase in individual freedoms and risk-taking activities. Whilst alert to the smaller self-produced risks of the modern age, Beck's particular focus is on the major threats such as man-made climate change, financial crises and global terrorist networks facing contemporary society, which he argues are an unintended by-product of modernisation. Beck draws attention to contemporary societies' growing preoccupation with uncertainty and the simultaneous growth of the risk industry, arguing that 'the hidden central issue in risk society is *how to feign control over the uncontrollable* – in politics, law, science, technology, economy and everyday life' [emphasis in original] (Beck 2011, 41). In their consideration of Beck's work, Adam Burgess, Jamie Wardman and Gabe Mythen highlight that central to 'Beck's reading is that the very institutions and instruments responsible for risk management are now part of the problem, wedded as they are to the frames of reference and types of solutions that produced the problems in the first place' (2018, 1). Consequently, the growth of risk-centred interventions is happening simultaneously to societies' depleting confidence in and 'active mistrust of corporations, scientific institutions and government' (Burgess, Wardman and Mythen 2018, 2). Beck's thesis highlights the paradoxical nature of the risk society and the emphasis on the globalised markets freed from regulation to remedy the

world's ills, whilst they (intentionally or not) are the simultaneous cause of the world's most uncontrollable threats.

Much theoretical work in this area focuses on how a pervading fear of uncertainty has enabled risk to become an instrument of control that is commonly used as a tool of governance to further particular sociopolitical ideologies. This occurs on a macro scale in regard to law-making, but also on a micro scale where individuals self-manage risks to their finances, physical and emotional health and personal safety out of fear of what *could* happen. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2014), Sara Ahmed describes how 'fear works to contain bodies within social space through the way it shrinks the body, or constitutes the bodily surface through an expectant withdrawal from a world that *might* yet present itself as dangerous' (Ahmed 2014, 67) [emphasis own]. In other words, a fear of uncertainty encourages risk avoidance, both in regard to the individual who self-disciplines, actively avoiding potential risks, and in governing institutions that use potential threats to justify the implementation of particular systems and management of various projects and people.

We can see this on the train in EAST. The authorities use a fear of insecurity to justify the significant police presence on the railways. But, in turn, a police presence on the train and at the stations inspires many (including EAST's artists) to self-govern: being respectful of the law and local customs in an effort not to disrupt the status quo. O'Grady argues that 'as the world begins to feel riskier than ever, we run the risk of closing our doors, barricading ourselves in, and preventing open contact with the unknown and unknowable (2017, 25). Following Beck, O'Grady argues that 'it is in these very circumstances, however, that adopting a stance of radical openness becomes even more urgent' (O'Grady 2017, 25). I'm not suggesting creatives shouldn't be respectful, but I do think it is sometimes useful to question who and what certain normative behaviours are serving as a way of opening up new possibilities. On the train, some artists connected with the security forces who, once off duty, joined jam sessions singing, drumming and collaborating: an opening up of threats but also possibilities on both sides. Beck's assertion is 'that the horizon dims as risks grow'; 'someone who depicts the world as risk will ultimately

become incapable of action' (2011, 9). He continues, 'the salient point here is that the expansion and heightening of the intention of control ultimately ends up producing the opposite' (Beck 2011, 9). The argument is that to open up to uncertainty is to open up to new possibilities and futures, for risk fixes one in the past.

Contemporary art and performance, as a collective, material and relational practice, can be positioned as future-orientated in this way. EAST, in its uncertainty (both aesthetically and contextually), has the potential to open up new ways of working and types of creative practice. It is its innovative format – in which risk and uncertainty are fundamental – that is appealing to artists, thinkers and stakeholders, as well as the project's financial backers. It captures people's imaginations. However, there is a tension that arises when those supporters come from or hold a development perspective. Development – with its focus on addressing the global challenges (or threats) 'we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice' – is a part of the prevailing risk industry (United Nations 2020). The development industry's premise is based on the reduction of threats facing some of the world's poorest communities. Whilst the eradication of particular risks may be an appropriate response for certain urgent and humanitarian crises, when the same logic is adopted and applied to creative practice, some of a work's essence can be lost. When interventions are tightly tied down to methodologies and logic frameworks inherited from particular areas of the development industry, where there is little room for failure, innovation or alternative outcomes, the allure and change-making potential of a project such as EAST can be lost. In turn, projects can fall back to linear justifications, which have not strengthened their position in public policy more widely. For example, we were asked about the economic benefits of EAST and to justify funding of the project on that basis. Whilst it is possible to frame the project as such, these outcomes are (very) tangential and the relational and aesthetic essence of the project is quickly lost in such descriptions.

In the rest of this chapter I explore how contextual and aesthetic uncertainty have been both challenging and generative in my work. I am interested in recalibrating understandings of uncertainty as negative, for as Akama, Pink and Sumartojo argue,

uncertainty 'brings with it possibilities. It does not close down what might happen yet into predictive untruths, but rather opens up pathways of what might be next and enables us to creatively and imaginatively inhabit such worlds with possibilities' (2018, 3).

Contextual Uncertainty | Nyege Nyege International Music Festival

In *Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa: an Introduction* (2017), Elizabeth Cooper and David Pratten assert that uncertainty is a state of being that 'critically shapes ways of knowing and being on the continent' (Cooper and Pratten 2017, 12). I do not want to protract sweeping generalisations that position 'Africa' as uncertain. Instead, I recognise that representations of the continent as 'unknowable', 'insecure', 'chaotic' and 'dangerous' have justified the implementation of 'order', 'structure' and 'systems' under colonial and post-colonial rule, which have caused extensive political, social and economic problems. However, both in the production of art and performance, and in my day-to-day life, my experience of uncertainty has been particularly pronounced in Kampala, Uganda, and working across the region. For example, the journey I described in the opening of this chapter is not surprising or unusual, it was just unfortunate. Even leaving the house in the morning can end up feeling particularly 'risky': there are potholes and heavy and unpredictable traffic alongside sporadic law enforcement at the side of a road. I have carried everything from animals to suitcases on the back of a motorbike, been splashed by flooding drains and had near misses with thieves. In addition, in Uganda, more than 75% of the population are under the age of 30 and the country has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Sub-Saharan Africa (Among and Munavu 2019). According to the Uganda National Household Survey (2016-17), up to 90% of people are in the informal sector, on low wages, without job security, working project-to-project and on a freelance basis (Iyamuremye 2019). This leads to a lot of unreliability, with institutions, organisations and individuals largely operating on a day-to-day basis, unable to effectively plan for the future due to social, political, economic and contextual precarity.

In an interview about NNIMF, with the popular music publication Resident Advisor, Co-director, Arlen Dilsizian asserted that to put on a festival in Uganda is 'to flirt with disaster … everything is fluid' (Coultate 2017). As with EAST, in the making and execution of NNIMF, various types of uncertainty collide: the 'risky aesthetics' of the festival format, the precarity of the Ugandan context, and risk-management narratives, employed as an instrument of governance by a range of stakeholders. As a consequence of the precarious context, the who, what, why, how and when is constantly changing. Whilst this has been extremely challenging and at times the whole event has been in jeopardy as a result, it has also opened up unforeseeable opportunities for the festival and some of its participants.

In 2016 I joined NNIMF as the festival's producer. My role involved reducing – or at least managing – much of the uncertainty surrounding the event. I tasked myself with holding the vision for the festival, whilst identifying all the possible risks and making contingency plans to mitigate them. This stretched from overseeing the finances and cashflow: ensuring we could always pay suppliers and that a plan of action was in place if income was delayed, to identifying all the potential risks in any given situation. For example, take the crowd pictured on pages 42-43 of the portfolio. Behind the scenes I had looked to address the potential risks participants may face. This included making sure pathways and banisters were fixed, cables and wires were secure, that there were marines patrolling the riverbanks 24/7, as well as police keeping a close eye on the crowd, performers and equipment. My role included making sure that dark corners were well lit, undercover security were effectively briefed and double-checking that backstage remained secure. It involved making sure that the Red Cross tent was up and running and that the fire brigade was still on call. This was all without detracting from the festival's free, chaotic and spontaneous atmosphere. For example, whilst a police presence is critical for safety, this needs to be balanced with their presence having an explicit impact on the atmosphere.

My general approach was that if something could be identified as a problem, it could be diminished, avoided, a solution sought and solved. I tried to find a way around a set of problems, and was disappointed in myself when I didn't. For instance, in 2017 we had a major problem with the camping experience: there were delays in the delivery and set-up

of tents and mattresses, accompanied by torrential rains, meaning that on the first night lots of revellers didn't have places to sleep. I took this 'failure' and the disappointed campers' experience to heart: I hadn't done enough to ensure what needed to happen, had happened. The following day the remaining tents did arrive, and, after a few extra hotel bookings, in the end everyone had somewhere to sleep. But as a producer I wanted to ensure that artists, the team and audiences, but also partners and stakeholders, had the best experience possible. From infrastructure to logistics, I did my utmost to put things in place, avoid clashes, crossovers and surprises between them, making every stage of their engagement (however tangential) as smooth as possible. For me, part of the thrill of producing a festival in Uganda came from 'flirting with disaster' and managing uncertainty: a donor pulls out and an associate doesn't pay on time; a partner is not happy with the publicity; there is still no running water on site the day we open; twenty additional artists are added to the line-up two days before; there is a backlash in the popular press; the stage, the sound system and the lights turn up late; there are thieves in the security detail; and it rains, and it rains, and it rains. But – somehow – it all comes together.

Over three years some of my efforts to bring clarity to particular situations were successful. For example, surviving the tent disaster of 2017 came with a lot of learning; from then on, the camping experience has been much more comfortable, organised and efficient, as can be seen from images of the site on page 32-33 of the portfolio. Over the festival's evolution different economic, logistical, political, environmental and infrastructural uncertainties that were disruptive have become easier for the whole team to predict, prepare for and to navigate. However, after three years of producing NNIMF, I have also come to accept, that due to the collective, material and relational nature of production, some things will never turn out as planned. Whilst the implementation of certain systems and processes can make things momentarily smoother, simpler and easier to manage, eradicating uncertainty in the festival context is impossible. My contingency-upon-contingency plans were still contingent on people, objects and the environment, which is ever-changing.

Figure 13: Hibotep's Boiler Room debut with her twin sister Houdini, Nyege Nyege International Music Festival, 2018. Photographer: Zahara Abdul.

Over the course of this doctoral project, I have grappled with the contradictions that arise when the 'success' of my practice oscillates around the navigation – or eradication – of uncertainty. On reflection, some of the most productive and positive elements of the festival have emerged from its inherent precarity. For example, one of the most significant parts of the festival is the community that make it happen every year. NNIMF was 'born out of an act of sheer collective madness in the rainy season of 2015' (Nyege Nyege International Music Festival 2019). The festival has encouraged, and grown out of, a community. On pages 20-21 of the portfolio you can see some of the core team members that have been making it happen since day one: Production and General Chief of Happiness, Patience Asaba Katashube; Music Producer, DJ and Troupe Manager, DonZilla Lion; DJ, Photographer and Communication Mastermind, Darlyne Komukama aka Decay aka Cardi Monáe; Nyege Nyege Co-founder and Label Head, Derek Debru; DJ Kampire; and Filmmaker and Tour Manager for Fulu Music, Arnold Aganze, aka Zizuke. Despite the festival's profile it has remained a challenging feat to pull off, Debru refers to it as a 'monster' (Lemaire 2019). In the absence of reliable partners, given the unstable

political situation and infrastructural challenges, a community has evolved who make the festival happen. Staff, partners, friends and artists – year on year – come together to create something out of nothing, often with no financial recompense. Cooper and Pratten argue that, in many communities on the continent, 'people have learned from experience that socially distant forces are unreliable and largely beyond individuals' control, and that access to resources is dependent upon the contingencies of social networks' (2017, 16). It is argued that 'social infrastructure, interpersonal collaborations become [fundamental] in the context of inadequate and unreliable official policies and economies' (Cooper and Pratten 2017, 16). It's important not to romanticise: as NNIMF's profile increases so do people's expectations, profit-driven agendas and opportunities for capitalist co-option. But, as well as relying on personal connections to actually secure resources and support, at NNIMF 'people's interpersonal collaborations [have] come to constitute infrastructure in its own right' (Cooper and Pratten, 2017, 16). Rather than limiting or 'narrowing down' opportunities, the festival's 'uncertainty and insecurity [have prompted] people to extend and deepen their social relations and engagement' both with each other and with the festival (Cooper and Pratten 2017, 16).

Unsurprisingly, then, the Nyege Nyege script is never fixed. Different members of the team and the festival's associates are continually rewriting, responding and improvising in response to the ever-changing social, political, economic and environmental conditions. Whilst uncertainty is commonly positioned as something to be avoided, in the three years of producing the festival I have seen the potentiality of spontaneity, of protocol not always being set or adhered to, of the hustle and there being space for new ideas and collaboration to emerge. It is a reactive environment: people respond to the influx of tourists and jump at opportunities offered by the festival and the surrounding areas. From carparks to taxi ranks to food stalls, new businesses crop up surrounding the festival, which also respond to and serve our needs. Hotels sell out throughout the town, and if we need an extra pair of hands – or 20 – to help install the toilets or clean the venue, we can normally engage people within a few hours. On page 13 of the portfolio there is a link to a short video of everyone arriving at the festival and the businesses that crop up around it. It is a country where there is just not enough camping equipment for an event of this scale. Yet, there is

always someone keen to take the risk and start a new business, importing pop-up tents from China and building the campsite from scratch. And, if it doesn't work out, there is nearly always someone ready to step into the breach. It is this sense of hustle and spontaneity that has enabled the festival to be produced in just a few months every year. The precarity of the context means that it is a flexible environment: the festival can often find a last-minute hotel room for artists, offer space for a vendor who registered late and jump on opportunities for new partnerships with international media with just a few hours' notice. Out of this uncertainty many people have grown international careers, be that as artists, through brand or business development, or through their skills developed as part of the team. Without the uncertainty, without anything being possible, the horizon of opportunity for artists, businesses and audiences would narrow. Without the risks the degree of potentiality around the festival would be reduced.

Risky Aesthetics | Nyege Nyege International Music Festival

> Navigating the unknown is an essential part of the creative process, indeed any process where development, progression, illumination, enlightenment, understanding is seen as a joint mission, a journey undertaken alongside others and where either the destination, the outcome, the precise route, or even the reasons for the journey are not yet fully realised in the minds of the travellers. (O'Grady 2017, ix)

O'Grady's edited collection *Risk, Participation and Performance: Critical Vulnerabilities in a Precarious World* (2017) emphasises the risk inherent in creativity itself. She positions the collection as 'standing in opposition to all that appears fixed, predetermined, and finished, [embracing] the risks associated with leaving gaps, spaces, cracks, and crevices for people to explore' (2017, x). The essays highlight the relational nature of performance and the risks that audiences, actors and members of the public are often urged to take as part of the aesthetic act. O'Grady also draws attention to the risks inherent in practice where 'the artwork or performance structure itself which, through the process of becoming open, may lose its form completely and collapse' (O'Grady 2017, 2). O'Grady

names this type of work – 'where the outcome is not fully known and where there is some degree of surrender, or relinquishing of control in the presence of others' – as 'risky aesthetics'. Agency and vulnerability are critical components of a 'risky aesthetic'. Importantly, it is argued that 'to embrace risk in this way is not only a question of aesthetic choice, a playing with form, and a structuring of technique, it is also a political stance that indicates commitment to openness as meaningful encounter and exchange between humans' (O'Grady 2017, ix).

Figure 14: Audience by the main stage, Nyege Nyege International Music Festival, 2018. Photographer: Tweny Benjamin.

This political dimension, of participants shaping the terms of the debate, echoes in much TfD work and its associated practices in East Africa. Paulo Freire famously argued that the 'refusal of risk prevents us from becoming actors in the world' (1998, 23). Freire directly links the ability to take risks with agency. This notion was developed by Augusto Boal and forms the foundations of much TfD practice: 'perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal for revolution' (Boal 2008, 19). In much contemporary practice and literature, there are discussions surrounding

participants' learning techniques, determining content and undertaking creative interventions in their community to achieve a particular aim, such as changing attitudes around disability. Whilst the content – or how it is made – is somehow 'risky', the aesthetic of interventions remains relatively familiar: workshops, short public performances in informal spaces and audience participation.

In African theatre and performance studies there has been a move theoretically and an urge to consider the affective qualities of performance. But its risky *aesthetics* – performance's relational, contingent and multiple nature has been lost in narratives surrounding much practice in East Africa. Therefore, a cause-and-effect agenda can be maintained. This trend stretches to other forms of art and performance in the region. Even in a creative intervention such as Nyege Nyege, where so much emphasis is on the moment of performance and its atmospheres, there is a tendency for development donors and foundations to focus on discussing audience numbers, social media reach and specific artist's development opportunities. These are valid and important outcomes, but linking these to why a festival matters, and its specific – risky – aesthetic form, can be lost. Whilst funders seem comfortable with supporting work that is 'grounded in *stories* of risk, vulnerability, memory and resistance', in contemporary art and performance projects with an emphasis on form itself, without tangible outcomes, are often considered too risky to support (Zoutou 2017, 207) [Emphasis added]. Consequently, funding can remain project-focused, short-notice, short-term and hard to come by. I have always been surprised by this considering that an artistic intervention's form – such as the festival environment with people gathering to create and celebrate together – is the very thing that has posed a threat as well as an opportunity to those in power around the world for centuries. I am concerned with deconstructing the prevailing understanding that performance practice itself is *too* risky to invest in, specifically in a context such as East Africa. Instead I ask what it might mean in East Africa to embrace collective, material and relational form, 'to be open to uncertainty, to weigh up the odds, and to welcome the possible' in East Africa (O'Grady 2017, iv).

To exemplify the high level of uncertainty I was dealing with, in 2018, a matter of days before the festival opened, it was cancelled by the authorities on moral and ethical grounds, as shown in the newspaper reports and link to a TV report on page 46 of the accompanying portfolio. Simon Lokodo, Minister of State for Ethics and Integrity in Uganda, publicly asserted that 'the underlying motive beneath this heavily advertised event, may compromise the national integrity of our nation and put our citizens at risk of deviant sexual immorality' (Ampurire 2018). Journalist John Twells pointed out that 'the sensationalism seemed sinister, an attempt to mobilise religious fears and shutter cultural development and interaction' (Twells 2018). In a press interview Lokodo claimed that the festival was close to devil worship; he stated that, alongside drug-taking and nudity there would be open sex (without limits), homosexuality and bestiality. This occurred in 2018, the festival's fourth year, as it began to draw large local, regional and international crowds, and attracted growing attention from the press. Consequently, all of a sudden it was on the radar of the authorities. The language employed by representatives of the Ugandan government oscillated around the festival's uncertainty: potential risks were identified – albeit untrue and inaccurate – and fear was used to justify the cancellation. NNIMF's risky aesthetic – crowds gathering, celebrating, dancing together, potentially intoxicated – posed a threat to dominant sociopolitical ideologies and, simultaneously, the profile of the event afforded an opportunity for particular officials to reinforce conservative values.

Despite having the legal permissions in place, for the week leading up to NNIMF 2018, the festival was suspended. This put the whole team and event under huge pressure: as the founders, production partners and security team entered negotiations with the authorities, suppliers and vendors delayed the delivery of stalls, equipment and even infrastructure, such as stages and barriers, until there was confirmation that the festival would go ahead. Local services including hotels and transport providers were anxious about the festival honouring their commitments, all whilst hundreds of artists and thousands of tourists – from across the continent and beyond – boarded flights and buses headed to the source of the river Nile. At this point the vast web of long-standing personal and professional relationships that the whole team had in all different areas were critical. At some points, my international position reinstated confidence that the festival would meet its financial

promises regardless, at other points it was more effective for me to step back and encourage local producers to handle tricky negotiations in a culturally diplomatic way. Alongside the teams' intercultural makeup, the festival's local and international standing provided huge traction. On the one hand the festival has a great impact on the local economy: 'from casual workers to hotel owners, from rolex sellers to restaurant owners, artists, craft sellers, cab drivers and other local entrepreneurs, everyone benefits […] the city of Jinja has witnessed a twentyfold increase in business during the time of the festival'(Daily Media 2019). Simultaneously, as an event with a global reputation and international partnerships, the press quickly caught on, drawing attention to the grounds for its cancellation.

Strategic alliances, relationships and pressure from a range of directions, meant that the team was able to change the course of events, and the day before NNIMF 2018 opened the government re-granted permission. Ironically, with over 10,000 attendees it was recognised as the 'Best Overall Tourism Event in Uganda, 2018' (Daily Media 2019). Whilst the festival was reinstated and did go ahead, at different points, there were still attempts by the authorities to 'pin down the theatrical moment as tightly' as possible (O'Grady 2017, ix). In the first instance, there was an increase in police and military presence across the event. There was also a range of restrictions put in place around the visibility of anything deemed politically controversial or morally corrupt, which included any references to oppositional politics, open discussions of sex or anything considered to be advocating for the LGBTQ+ community. On the first full day of the festival there were a number of complaints from undercover officers. Some vendors were removed, and tensions were building around the use of what was deemed lewd and sexually provocative language on the main stage microphones. Backstage in the dim light, my mobile phone ringing constantly, I could sense the crowd's high energies growing alongside tensions inside the security team, and I felt like there could be serious physical and emotional risks posed to some artists. Therefore, in discussion with some of the team members, we made a decision to suspend a performance deemed too risky by the authorities, in order to ensure the safety of two performers. This moment brought into focus the context, conditions and conservative assumptions that the festival was being forced to operate around. But rather

than focusing on the content, I want to emphasise that it was the festival's risky aesthetics – those which couldn't be wholly predicted, rehearsed and subsequently controlled – that were particularly threatening to the authorities who were responsible for the risk-management of the event, whatever those risks were deemed to be. It was the festival's format that was powerful, and, as mentioned, posed a threat from one perspective but also, as will now be discussed, an opportunity from another.

From its inception the festival has aimed to be a safe and inclusive space for a range of people from diverse communities. Nyege Nyege as a festival, a studio, cultural space and a party crew profiles marginalised and underground artists from across the region who, for a host of reasons, have not had the opportunities or exposure that their talent warrants. This has included female artists, musicians working outside of the mainstream pop industry, those from rural communities and members of the LGBTQ+ community. John Twells argued that 'there's certainly something egalitarian about Nyege Nyege festival, and freedom tends to rattle the resolve of most politicians, Western, African or otherwise' (Twells 2018). The following day for Boiler Room's Ugandan debut, where the festival would be broadcast to audiences around the world, it was fundamental that the egalitarian energy of Uganda's dancefloors – its atmosphere – was showcased. Fuelled by their general sass, the artists whose performance had been cancelled the previous day took to the dancefloor throughout much of the Boiler Room programme. Teamed with an extremely eclectic local and international crowd, with costumes, feathers and glitter, with men, women and non-binary people of all ages twerking, dancing and cheering, with sets from indigenous musical troupes alongside electronic DJs, it was a euphoric moment. The sense of uncertainty, of freedom, of power, of community, of rebellion, of difference and of fun was palpable. It was in the air. Dripping from the trees and people's brows. It was a positive, vibrant and diverse expression of East African contemporary society and culture. Links to a collection of short films by Boiler Room of some of these moments of the dancefloor are available on pages 40-41 of the portfolio.

Despite our best efforts to create a safe and inclusive space, the 'extreme state homophobia still weighs heavily on inclusive spaces of expression such as Nyege Nyege' (Lacaille

2019). Against this backdrop, in the world of electronic music, NNIMF is now considered 'one of the most diverse parties in the world' (Bahana 2019). In a recent interview about the festival, Ugandan DJ, Kampire Bahana, asserted that 'as the country (and the world) becomes more unequal we need spaces where people can mix across class, where women and sexual minorities can participate on equal footing' (Bahana in Murray, 2018). Kampire described how in 2018, after the festival was reinstated:

> It felt especially good this year to see everyone show up for Nyege Nyege Festival more vivacious and vibrant than ever. Few people throw or even go to a good party with the intention of being political. I became a DJ because I love music and wanted to hear the tracks I love on a massive sound system. But clearly there is something inherently political about young, female or queer people getting together to dance. So, it was meaningful to see so many Ugandans turn up to reject fake news and false moralising and not forget all the challenging realities of daily life, but for a few days, exist beyond them. (Bahana in Murray, 2018)

Figure 15: DJ Kampire's Boiler Room debut, Nyege Nyege International Music Festival, 2018. Photographer: Muhammad Ali Kanch.

In this moment of performance, captured by Boiler Room, many different manifestations of uncertainty collided. The festival's risky aesthetics met a live broadcast, which featured technical glitches, and artists who arrived on stage late. This sat against a backdrop of governmental risk-management and the relational infrastructure that had been born out of an uncertain context and had made this moment possible. Teenagers performed alongside elders – techno, hip-hop and Kadodi – and in this intersection of uncertainties the potentiality of the moment felt particularly potent, vital, 'meaningful' and 'inherently political' (Bahana in Murray 2018).

Whilst the pinning down of an aesthetic moment would be easier in a traditional performance setting where there are fewer variables, for me, it is the precarity and potentiality of NNIMF, its uncertain and ephemeral nature built into the aesthetic encounter, which is political. A dance floor in Uganda, where everyone has the ability to dance and contribute to the evolution of that moment, is radical. As I looked down on the dancefloor during the first Boiler Room performance it was the diverse participation of people from all different backgrounds that felt so significant. Against a backdrop of various systems of risk-management, it represented a disruption of the status quo and an opening up of possibilities, whether those are interpreted as negative (by the authorities) or positive (by marginalised communities).

Ahmed urges her readers to recognise that 'to express hope for another kind of world, one that is unimaginable at present, is a political action, and it remains so even in the face of exhaustion and despair' (2014, 186). There were other worlds, ways of being and opportunities folded into these uncertain aesthetic moments at NNIMF which, in an increasingly risk-centric world, are sparing. My initial reaction when we cancelled the dancers' first performance was that, as the producer, I had to rectify the situation, to do something to ensure that there was a platform for the artists and 'transform' their experience. However, if I had managed to pull off such a feat and pinned a performance down so tightly that nothing could go wrong, ultimately, everyone – including the performers – would have 'become incapable of action' (Beck 2011, 9). Instead, what is necessary, and is increasingly radical in a Ugandan context, are uncertain arenas, where

everyone can participate equally in shaping, reconfiguring and challenging the aesthetic moment. These moments on the dancefloor were generated in that particular place, with that group of people in a moment of time. In her article 'On Resistance in Human Geography' (2019), Sarah Hughes urges scholars to look to the sidelines, to take 'seriously the ambiguous, unremarkable, (un)intentional subjects, materials and practices which contain the potential to keep open the conditions for future claims to be made' (16). Despite the absence of a development-centred agenda attached to the festival, with its focus on the hedonistic energy and ephemeral moments, NNIMF's risky aesthetic – and an acceptance of its inherent uncertainty – opens up new possibilities, which gives it a political and change-making potential.

A Politics of Trust and Uncertainty | East African Soul Train

In *Uncertainty and Possibility: New Approaches to Future Making in Design Anthropology* (2018), Akama, Pink and Sumartojo argue that uncertainty 'does not close down what might happen yet into predictive untruths, but rather opens up pathways of what might be next and enables us to creatively and imaginatively inhabit such worlds with possibilities' (Akama, Pink and Sumartojo 2018, 3). The authors make an argument for 'how uncertainty might be harnessed as a technology for producing new and open ways of understanding, making and imagining the world' (Akama, Pink and Sumartojo 2018, 5). It is argued that 'embracing uncertainty involves acknowledging that we do not and cannot know exactly what will happen next' but with that comes new possibilities (Akama, Pink and Sumartojo 2018, 36). In trying to reimagine the significance of the moment of performance I firstly began with an exploration of atmosphere. Through producing atmospheres, I have come to understand them as inherently uncertain and so far in this chapter I have explored how NNIMF's uncertainty has been both challenging and generative. In the festival model this emerged somewhat organically. By comparison, the EAST team has used uncertainty as a curatorial tool to generate alternative perspectives, different ways of working and catalyse new creative practice.

EAST began with the premise that risk, trust and failure are inherent parts of the creative process. Hepp and I wanted to establish an artist-focused programme that built trust, encouraged collaboration and included space for creative risk-taking, of which there was a lack of in regional arts programming. In EAST we use uncertainty as generative technology and specific outcomes are not defined: each year there is a theme, but this is a launch pad for artists and not intended to be restrictive. There is a performance opportunity, but it is not obligatory. We hope people will forge new connections, test out interdisciplinary techniques and take creative risks, we anticipate collaborations that continue beyond the project, but none of this is mandatory or guaranteed. We look to harness and generate atmospheres where artists feel supported and respected, making it more likely they can trust in the process, themselves and in others. Our emphasis remains on creating an environment where artists can play, experiment and take creative risks – fail and try again – across disciplines and geographies. In each edition we have approached this in different ways, and the outcomes that emerged looked, felt and resonated in different ways.

In 2016, our methodology was relatively freeform, with a handful of friends and artists curating cabins around a particular theme or offering. There were moments where everyone came together for conversations and workshops, and there were creative prompts and performance opportunities. More importantly, artists were free to play and engage with people and processes as they wished.

> I tripped on the edge of an endless piece of orange fabric as I stumbled into the dining room; the rattle of the sewing machine sang in harmony with the rumble of steel on tracks. The cloth complemented the burnt orange upholstery and the dated interiors were overridden by a vibrant energy. Bodies moved in, between, across and under Nicola Armitage as she worked. We were curious, excited, inspired. People gravitated towards Armitage, towards the fabric: drawn to the possibilities, to the play. Dancer and Choreographer Adam Chienjo wore the final piece, and together they experimented, played and moved together, in and around the restrictions and possibilities of both the space and the fabric. These moments were captured by filmmaker and photographer Lena Giovanazzi, within the confined spaces of history, on the train, and then between elaborately assembled wires, which had to be negotiated in an installation created at the coast. The images of

this peace captured the essence of the project; it embodied and captured different conversations between artists, played with conceptual and physical boundaries and revealed the potential of an intricate interdisciplinary experiment.

Research notes from EAST 2016
Edited in London, UK, November 2016.

Figure 16: Collaboration between Nicola Armitage, Adam Chienjo and Lena Giovanazzi, East African Soul Train, 2016. Photographer: Lena Giovanazzi.

Further visual documentation of the creation and presentation of this collaboration can be found on pages 11-117 of the portfolio. In these research notes I have tried to capture how a new conceptual piece of creative work emerged from the project's uncertainty. Free to play in an inspiring environment and with an open brief, Armitage described how the process took them back to the source of their creativity, reminding them of why they became an artist in the first place. Throughout the project Armitage worked rigorously on her own with her sewing machine, but also with new artists she hadn't worked with before. Armitage moved from fashion, to dance, to performance art, in a way that she hadn't had the opportunity to do. Armitage wasn't limited creatively by the constraints of agendas

and expected outputs. From this environment emerged a thoughtful and poignant new work of art. In EAST we have taken this idea of creative re-birth forward in the title and in the positioning of the project, looking to build on the environment's uncertain and generative potential more explicitly.

In 2017, with support from Africalia and the British Council, we exchanged the curated cabins for intricate installations throughout the train, led by Mirembe Musisi. Jojo Abot, a Ghanaian artist expressing herself through music, film/photography, performance art, literature and installation work joined our team as Artistic Director. We also engaged a range of 'artivators', experts in their field from across the region to guide the artistic processes. These included: Kenyan DJ and producer, Blinky Bill; Ugandan Fashion Designer and Director of Kampala Fashion Week, Gloria Wavamunno; Maimouna Jallow, a Gambian/Spanish writer and storyteller based in Kenya; Mzungu Kichaa, a hip hop artist and musician based in Tanzania; Kenyan musician, Michel Ongaro; Ugandan Photographer, Martin Kharumwa; Jackie Manyaapelo, a South African dancer and choreographer; and Kenyan visual artist, Michael Soi. In total there were 99 participants including artists, passengers, academics and creative industry stakeholders, some of the participants' profiles can be seen on pages 74-75 of the portfolio. Despite the project's new-found infrastructures, and with that the expectations and obligations we felt as a team, we tried to maintain focus on process and keep the project open.

> Cabins were filled to the brim. People were everywhere: legs hanging out of bunkbeds, torsos squeezed against door frames and cigarettes burning out of windows. Creatives from all walks of life huddled together, alongside the odd bag of maize and stray chicken. There were bursts of laughter, people clambered on tables to hit a harmony and balanced between two carriages to record the rumble of the train on the track. The sounds of a classical guitar echoed down the corridor and were captured by the beat of a drum or an iPhone. Dancers jumped out of cupboards and the walls were transformed into a string installation. All too quickly it came to an end. But, on the coast, this eclectic energy was translated onto the stage. Projections by passengers and filmmakers, poetry by funders, sat together, alongside emerging and internationally renowned musicians. The work-in-progress was full, vibrant and incredibly diverse.
>
> Research notes from EAST 2017
> *Edited in Kampala, Uganda, May 2017.*

Figure 17: Collaboration between filmmaker Emily McCartney and contemporary dancer Adam Chienjo, East African Soul Train, 2017. Photographer: Emily McCartney.

In these research notes I have tried to capture the energy that intense – and often surprising – connections forged, as well as the diverse creative practice that was produced. The journey offers the opportunity to spend long periods of time with people who wouldn't normally come together. Away from expectations, with time for conversation and experimentation, the barriers between emerging and established artists, between passengers and creatives, between the team and industry stakeholders dissolved – or at least was momentarily suspended. Many have commented on how inspirational this was creatively: bringing an end to one musician's writer's block. Relationships and opportunities for collaboration opened up between stylists, filmmakers, musicians, festivals and illustrators, as well as industry stakeholders. These continue today and I believe this is intimately linked with the environment and the project's openness. Images and of the work-in-progress performances can be found on pages 104-107 of the portfolio.

After moving the project to Tanzania in the third edition in the summer of 2019, we boarded the train with just 16 participants. Our emphasis was on developing a more formal

interdisciplinary creative process, which was facilitated by Co-artistic Directors, Adam Cheinjo and Sarah Drain, and drew on their own work and 'Social Sculpture' practice as taught by interdisciplinary artist Shelly Sacks. The process focused on finding common ground as artists working in different disciplines, establishing what moved them and how they could co-create an experience, performance or artwork that embodied their shared vision. Whilst the process was rigorous, the outcome, as always, was open-ended.

Figure 18: Public performance of a collaborative piece by Safina Kimbokota and Diya Naidu, East African Soul Train, 2019. Photographer: Ian Kacungira.

Seven people squeezed up and against each other in the doorway of a two-bed cabin. Necks strained around the edges of the door, trying to see what was going to happen... From the darkness a gong was hit, and the erratic sound of hundreds of lids, bouncing, leaping, rattling escaping over the edge of what appeared to be a flat bowl under the physical pressure of the train rumbling along. The scene gradually was brought into focus by a red torch, and an intimate and tender exchange between two artists emerged. Drawing together visuals and movement, with just the train and their props as a soundtrack, their bodies negotiated each other, and, whilst just an initial glimpse into an early idea, wove themes of motherhood, birth and ancestral histories together. Safina and Diya packed their

suitcases and carried their burdens down the corridor. As this short piece drew to an end, the audience followed them, captivated. Standing in the dark corridor we were all silent for a few seconds, deeply moved and left wanting to know more.

Research notes from EAST 2019
Edited in Berlin, Germany, November 2019.

These research notes capture an early showing of a collaborative piece developed by artist Safina Kimbokota and contemporary dancer Diya Naidu, images taken from the final performance can be found on pages 124-127 of the portfolio. Kimbokota is a visual artist from Tanzania, and this was her first time presenting work outside of a more traditional gallery setting and it was also her debut performing in front of an audience. The piece took the audience on a journey through the grounds of TaSUBa arts college. The predominantly local audience, who don't normally have access to the contemporary art and performance scenes of the region's capital cities, were captivated. We had also seen this along the tracks as work spread out through the train and onto the platforms. Naidu, a dancer and choreographer from India, explained how for her the power of creative practice to serve communities – through the simple act of coming together across cultures, geographies and disciplines – became evident once again. Through these three examples of work that emerged I have looked to demonstrate how in EAST uncertainty and atmospheres, whilst precarious, can be productive. The creative practice that would have emerged would have looked very different if the project was more rigid, less experimental and, critically, not on the train.

As EAST's producer, part of my work involves positioning the project in a wider context in terms of fundraising, catering for physical and digital audiences and, through this research, in academic discourse. In describing the value of a project such as EAST it is very easy to fall back on the descriptions of specific experiences, audience numbers and social media reach. However, this fails to acknowledge the connection between atmospheres, their uncertainty and change-making potential. In *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility* (2017), Franco 'Bifo' Berardi argues that at any moment 'possibility is not one, it is always plural: the possibilities inscribed in the present

composition of the world are not infinite, but many' (10). When thinking about EAST I try to recognise this: there are multiple possibilities in any given set of circumstances, the question is how they will manifest?

As described through the research notes, in any given moment, there were multiple possibilities in terms of formation, content and outcome – who engaged, what was created and how it was shared – was always open. The 'outcome(s)' – or the future – was determined by that particular formation of objects, people and environments in that place at that time. Berardi refers to this process as 'potency': 'the subjective energy that deploys the possibilities and actualises them ... the energy that transforms the possibilities into actualities' (2017, 11). Rather than employing a 'deterministic strategy [which] aims to subjugate the future, to constrain tendency into a prescribed pre-emptive model', after setting the conditions, EAST hands over the outcomes to the artists. Potency being 'the condition that enables transformation – according to the will of a subject' (Berardi 2017, 19). This approach recognises 'the artist [as] the creator of new concepts and precepts, disclosing new possible horizons of the social experience' (Berardi 2017, 312). This chimes with previous discussions of relational agency in Chapter Three. I would like to draw attention once again to O'Grady's argument that being open to uncertainty and risk is 'a political stance that indicates commitment to openness as meaningful encounter and exchange between humans' (2017, xi). For me, through this research, I have come to understand my work is about creating an environment, but the potency or change-making potential is determined by those experiencing it. This is now an active and political position.

In exploring the politics of uncertainty, it is important to explicitly recognise the role that trust plays. Trust is intimately linked with risk and uncertainty, as Beck argues, '...investing in the face of risk presupposes trust. Trust, in turn, is about the binding of time and space, because trust implies committing to a person, group or institution over time' (2011, 44). Trust is also relational, as it involves investing in somebody, it suggests having confidence or faith in something, and implies a vulnerability and an expectation from the beholder. EAST has been referred to as 'risky' by various partners, not only as a

consequence of its format but also because it is supported on a project-to-project basis and not housed within an established organisation. To be clear, I believe accountability is important. With this *trust* from funders, stakeholders and artists comes a sense of responsibility, and as a producer I take this very seriously. When people haven't had a transformative experience, when we have failed to deliver certain elements, and when things beyond my control have just gone wrong, I find it very difficult. But, as Beck points out, too much attention on risk avoidance can fix us in the past, furthering normative structures, boundaries and practices.

In many situations only certain people are trusted to take risks and are afforded the opportunity to fail, and this manifests in various ways in relation to EAST. A long history of inequitable global power structures – the persistence of colonial and post-ocolonial systems – has meant certain communities are constructed as more reliable or trustworthy than others. This distribution of trust is based on gender, sexuality and class, as well as a host of other social categorisations that have been used as a point of discrimination or disadvantage. These groupings are racialised. Achilles Mbembe asserts that 'race is what makes it possible to identify and define population groups in a way that makes each of them carriers of differentiated and more or less shifting risk' (2017, 74). Mbembe argues that racialisation is employed to 'mark population groups, to fix as precisely as possible the limits within which they can circulate, and to determine as exactly as possible which sites they can occupy—in sum, to limit circulation in a way that diminishes threats and secures general safety' (2017, 74).

Colonialism and post-colonialism are not consigned to the past but are still ingrained in today's global power structures. And, despite their social intentions, this is no less evident amongst donor institutions and communities, in NGOs and in creative organisations. In 2019, Vu Le asserted in the blog article 'The privilege to fail: How the benefits of trust and failure are not equitably distributed' (2019) that whilst there is much discussion of 'failures' in the non-profit sector and risks required, 'funders and donors of our work are severely risk-averse, and so non-profits also become risk-averse'. Arguing that risk is fundamental to the development of the non-profit sector, Le draws attention to the fact

that the people granted permission to fail are 'mainly leaders with privilege – white folks, men, especially white men – who get the trust to fail'. Le continues: '... black, indigenous, people of colour, women, especially women of colour, people with disabilities, meanwhile must often painfully earn each ounce of trust, and our failures are seen as liabilities, a confirmation that we do not have the skills or knowledge of our white male counterparts' (2019). The premise of Le's argument is that 'the inequitable distribution of trust leads to the inequitable distribution of resources' (2019). Marginalised individuals and organisations are positioned as less trustworthy. In turn, reliant on resources, such groups can end up more risk-averse, and experience a closing down and folding up of potential futures and dimming of 'the horizon'.

Whilst EAST's team is always diverse, it is safe to say that in some ways the project, and myself as a white woman working in East Africa, will have benefitted from such inequitable structural systems. As suggested, working with international donor communities is often easier when in possession of a – Western – linguistic dexterity and cultural diplomacy in order to navigate one's way through particular processes. My 'expertise' or 'legitimacy' compared with my East African counterparts, whilst not explicit, will at times have also been racially constructed. Akama, Pink and Sumartojo assert that, often, uncertainty 'is operated from a position of confidence and privilege (by those who can afford to be uncertain, or by those who cannot but will take the risk anyway)' (2018, 32).

Whilst it is often assumed that risk, and therefore trust, are an inherent part of creative practice, in reality, this has dissolved somewhat in the face of the development industry. In my experience, even donors committed to creative risk-taking do so within specific frameworks, in which potential 'risks' and 'failures' can be identified, and, if not avoided, managed. Freeform creative work with undetermined outcomes doesn't attract funders. Reliant on this finance artists and organisations find themselves in a catch-22. On the Ford Foundation's 'Equal Change Blog', Kathy Reich highlights that in the current climate, 'too often, non-profits find themselves dependent on short-term, highly restricted grants, which keep them tied to rigid time frames and deliverables' (2017). Reich asserts that this

context 'can stifle investments in areas that are critical to impact [including keeping] non-profits on a treadmill of short-term thinking, where they become reluctant to innovate, take risks, learn, and scale their efforts' (2017).

To recap, when working on *The Hatchery* (2015-16), it was evident that this climate has led to a culture of mistrust amongst artists and organisations in East Africa. With only limited resources, which are risk-averse in the first place, artists and creative organisations are often fearful of losing their ideas and/or not securing funds. As argued, this in turn has led to a lack of collaboration and innovation, both of which are essential to the sector's development. As a white European I am implicated in these hegemonic systems that I am looking to challenge. However, as a producer and researcher I have an opportunity to look for new – more equitable ways of engaging and challenging them. EAST's risky aesthetic evolved in response to this climate. Through its risky aesthetics in effect we make space for every object, subject and even the environment has the opportunity to impact the course of events and take control over their own experience.

British producer David Jubb argues that 'great artists put their mind, body, heart and soul on the line to discover new things' (2012, 34). I am committed to working with contemporary artists because I believe that they open up new ways of seeing and being in the world for audiences and wider communities. What is particularly exciting about the creative scene in East Africa is that there is still so much untapped knowledge. Musician, Novelist and Professor of Economics, Felwine Sarr, argues: '...the future is open. That she remains open to all of us. And that it is the task of Africans to think and formulate their own future and to find their own metaphors for it' (Sarr in Utlu 2019). Sarr's argument, echoing Achilles Mbembe, is that, to date, modes of knowledge creation and societal norms have been dominated by European models. However:

> Europe is no longer the centre of gravity of the world. This is the significant event, the fundamental experience, of our era. And we are only just now beginning the work of measuring its implications and weighing its consequences. Whether such a revelation is an occasion for joy or cause for surprise or worry, one thing remains certain: the demotion of Europe opens up possibilities. (Mbembe 2017, 25-26).

Figure 19: Work-in-progress performance with Jojo Abot and Blinky Bill, East African Soul Train, 2017. Photographer: Jude Clark.

Sarr's argument is that 'Europe has been heard a lot in the last five centuries, Europe has spoken a lot and undoubtedly given a lot to humankind – one has to acknowledge that. But I think it is time for Europe to learn to listen' (Sarr in Utlu 2019). He continues, Europe needs 'to understand that we live in a world where there are a multitude of different archives and traditions that are significant and fruitful. The challenges we face as humankind are so great that we will need all the resources' (Sarr in Utlu 2019). Artists in the region are not just opening up possibilities for Africa, but potentially for the whole world. As a white European producer and researcher living and working in East Africa, there are many points throughout this doctoral project where I have doubted whether I should be making a contribution at all. And, if I continue to work in this space, how I can effectively contribute to this Africanist narrative. For me, moving away from traditional development paradigms and focusing on creating uncertain, open and future-orientated creative spaces, listening to what might emerge from equal dialogue, given the context, is how I have negotiated this tension.

Finally, I have explored how my work as a producer in East Africa requires me to work at the intersection of multiple forms of uncertainty: contextual, methodological, systematic and aesthetic. My practice has meant engaging with concepts of risk, trust and failure. Le argues that NGO funders 'all need to take bigger risks and accept the bigger failures that are part of the bargain' (2019). Afterall, as I have discussed, uncertainty – both as a threat and as a promise – can be productive. Through this research, I have come to understand the potential of uncertainty and atmospheres, and explored how they can open up uncharted territories and new ways of making, supporting and participating in contemporary art and performance in East Africa. This, as outlined in Chapter One, is urgently needed in practice and in scholarly discourse. Over the course of this research, I have come to understand that a future-orientated approach to performance-making, which comes from embracing uncertainty, is critical to my practice and part of the contribution I can make in this context.

Chapter Five | Producing Performance

In this research I have looked to demonstrate the change-making potential of contemporary creative practice. The research has sought to find a way of reconceptualising the role the arts can play in East Africa, and to explore performance's collective, material and affective nature. To address this, I have examined how atmospheres were generated and manifested in two of the creative projects I have produced. I have come to understand that atmospheres are inherently uncertain, but also that uncertainty can be generative and future-orientated; they open up rather than limit possibilities. In East Africa the development industry serves as a backdrop to the creative sector and this is unlikely to change in the near future. I have discussed how this industry can inadvertently stifle creativity. However, an outright rejection of development agendas wouldn't be helpful, for I will continue to work within this context and, for now, the arts remain reliant on some of these support structures. Nevertheless, my pragmatic side has struggled with applying my discoveries about atmospheres and uncertainty into this wider context.

Whilst concepts of change-making can work in theory, this chapter asks how broader thinking and consideration of the multiple roles of art and performance can be fostered in the sector more widely? For example, producing a 10-step plan for artists to work more effectively with change-making and development organisations – or vice versa – would undermine my argument for openness, reaffirming cause-and-effect approaches to practice and research. Also, whilst I am keen to develop alternative narratives about the role of the arts and performance, I recognise that the complex and relational nature of my discoveries could sit at odds with transactional tendencies and the need for accountability in the development industry. In addition, whilst current trends in the sector are not necessarily working and, as argued, are having a material impact on artists, organisations and audiences, things can't remain endlessly uncertain. Festivals, arts projects and creative programmes just wouldn't get produced. In this chapter I grapple with these questions by interrogating my methodologies as a producer. To help me think through these questions,

I shall use the idea of storytelling as a way of connecting these potentially conflicting narratives.

For me, storytelling across the social, aesthetic and material worlds of a project has been an open, relational and empathetic process. It has allowed me to consider alternative perspectives, to align different agendas and embrace multiplicity in the work that I produce. Hearing and telling different stories has enabled me to reimagine the multiple social, aesthetic and material functions of performance, as well as exploring the ways these resonate with different stakeholders. I believe such an approach can be scaled and creating a more robust and empathetic culture in East Africa's creative sector could be a starting point for other people to develop new vocabularies to articulate the significance of art and performance beyond its instrumental functions. In East African Soul Train (EAST) we are planning to develop a strand of work which fosters conversations about how and why we create work between artists, stakeholders and their patrons. Our ambition is to harness atmospheres to generate trust, connections and new practice with artists for audiences. We are now keen to explore how this unique environment can catalyse new relationships between those making, thinking and supporting creative practice, with the ambition of creating stronger platforms for artists and raising the profile of East African arts and performance.

The Social, Aesthetic and Material

I first became interested in reimagining the relationship between the social, aesthetic and material elements of performance when working between Brazil and the UK with People's Palace Projects (PPP). In comparison with the UK, much of Brazil's cultural programming was based on the premise that there is an inherent social value to cultural participation. This narrative was particularly strong in the Pontos de Cultura (2004-2012), a government programme in Brazil, established by the Ministry of Culture under then Cultural Minister and Musician Gilberto Gil, which looked to direct 'funding towards forms and structures

of popular culture' (Heritage 2013, 12). As Paul Heritage highlights, for Gil, diversity 'is what makes Brazil Brasil. The challenge [was] to create public policy that can maintain, develop and celebrate the 'imperfect mosaic' that is Brazilian culture' (Heritage 2013, 15). The Pontos de Cultura programme aimed to deconstruct European social and cultural frameworks which had long dominated Brazilian cultural policy (Heritage 2013, 12). It was a response to the growing capitalisation of culture in Brazil, a side effect of dominant corporate funding structures (Emer Sader in Heritage 2013, 13). The Pontos de Cultura programme injected funding and resources into existing arts projects and organisations in 'urban and rural Brazil that aim to awaken, stimulate, and project that which is characteristic and most positive in communities in marginalised societies' (Heritage 2013, 13). In April 2010 there were over 2,500 Pontos de Cultura projects. As Heritage argues, 'artists and arts organisations [were] encouraged to deliver according to their own agendas, and maintain whatever was their original generative spirit' (Heritage 2013, 23).

As Visensia Shule argues, elements that chime with this philosophy can be seen in a Tanzanian context, particularly in Mwalimu Julius Nyerere's efforts to harness the 'potential of the arts in building an independent nation soon after independence' (Shule 2010, 160). Whether Ngoma (an East African dance), drama or acrobatics, Nyerere believed that the arts held an inherent value. Nyerere associated investment in Tanzania's creative sector with regaining cultural pride and fighting against cultural imperialism, post-colonial rule. As with this later example of Brazilian cultural policy, the moment of performance didn't have to sit at odds with its support structures or its social potential. Instead, they could work together in interesting ways. Shule points out, that despite Nyerere's initial intentions, the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programme in the 1980s saw the 'withdrawal of budget allocations to social services such as theatre [and a] 'ploughing' towards development' (Shule 2010, 171). Nyerere was committed to the 'generative spirit' of creative work, and from the late 1970s sympathised with the growing 'syndrome of artists needing to beg to donors and the state, which enslaves them' (Shule 2010, 171). I carry this belief in the inherent 'generative spirit' of the arts in my work. Through my practice I interact with artists, technicians and curators; physical and digital audiences; partners, stakeholders, as well as commercial, governmental and philanthropic

funding bodies. All while overseeing the internal world of the project. Rather than three distinct entities, I have found the social, aesthetic and material worlds of a project to be in constant dialogue, and that they can interact in complex, multiple and surprising ways in the production of contemporary art and performance.

East Africa's contemporary cultural scene in reality is vibrant, dynamic and diverse, but representations by the mass media, donor communities and the academy often fail to capture this. By producing work in the region, I quickly realised that there are limited ways to articulate the value of the arts, and that their representations fail to capture the majority of peoples' motivations for making, participating and even supporting artistic work. In an interview with Ariane Zaytzeff, Rwandese artist Odile Gakire Katese commented on this. Katese was being asked about her intentions behind drumming workshops that she offers to women, and pointed out that all too quickly we give up on 'the notion of joy, of pleasure' (Zaytzeff 2015, 95). Katese's suggestion is that when talking about women and drumming in Rwanda there is a tendency to jump to narratives of empowerment, discussing the social implications of having a space where men are not in control and women can make their own rules. Whilst this is one possible outcome of the programme, as Katese points out: 'so why do you want women to play drums? Well, because it brings pleasure, first. Because it is exhilarating, it's… oh my god, it's fun to play drums! First of all, I would like to just answer this' (Zaytzeff 2015, 95). For Katese the affective qualities of the aesthetic act are paramount. In my experience, explicit social outcomes are not the reasons audiences attend events or why people become artists in the first place. Over the years I have also had a number of conversations with representatives from the donor community who share artists' frustration at having to meet certain – limited – criteria. There need to be more transparent conversations between creatives and their patrons in order to develop new vocabularies. Without a doubt, this emphasis on the social qualities of art and performance is having an impact on the work that's being created.

This side-effect chimes with broader arguments on the relationship between the aesthetic and socially-engaged creative practice. In *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012), Claire Bishop argues that too often in participatory

performance projects, 'the status of the artist's intentionality (e.g. their humble lack of authorship) is privileged over a discussion of the work's artistic identity' (23). There is an 'emphasis on process over product' (Bishop 2012, 19). Bishop argues that 'one of the biggest problems in the discussion around socially-engaged art is its disavowed relationship to the aesthetic' (2012, 26). In short, alongside asserting that much socially-engaged participatory practice has been co-opted by neoliberal systems, Bishop argues that in general 'the urgency of this *social* task has led to a situation in which socially collaborative practices are all perceived to be equally important *artistic* gestures of resistance: there can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of participatory art, because all are equally essential to the task of repairing the social bond' (2012, 13) [emphasis original]. Bishop urges her readers to pay more attention to aesthetics in participatory practice, arguing 'that it is also crucial to discuss, analyse and compare this work critically *as art*, since this is the institutional field in which it is endorsed and disseminated' (Bishop 2012, 13) [emphasis original]. Echoing Bishop, my practice has demonstrated that 'there is an urgent need to restore attention to the modes of conceptual and affective complexity generated by socially orientated art projects' in East Africa (Bishop 2012, 8). Through my exploration of change-making, atmosphere and uncertainty I have also found that 'the aesthetic doesn't need to be sacrificed at the altar of social change, because it always already contains this ameliorative promise' (Bishop 2012, 29). However, the reality is that many of the – already limited – funding structures in East Africa cannot disavow their relationship to social outcomes.

In *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (2011), Shannon Jackson draws attention to the implicitly social nature of art and performance practice, but also points out the necessity of public bodies of governance in its production. Jackson highlights the unhelpful binary between the *social* and the *aesthetic* that has emerged in much performance research. Jackson's assertion is that, whilst 'for many the word "social" signifies an interest in explicit forms of political change, for other contemporary artists it refers more autonomously to the aesthetic exploration of time, collectivity, and embodiment as medium and material' (2011, 14). Therefore, dependence on these terms 'can make for drastically different understandings of what we are in fact encountering'

(Jackson 2011, 4). Like me, Jackson is interested in an expanded vision of socially-engaged practice and argues that 'by emphasising – rather than being embarrassed by – the infrastructural operations of performance, we might find a different way to join aesthetic engagement to the social sphere' (2011, 29). Occupied with challenging anti-state positions in contemporary performance research, which look to recalibrate the relationship between the social and the aesthetic, Jackson reminds her readers that 'no one can ever fully go it alone' (2011, 9). Focusing on artists based and/or operating in European and North American contexts, Jackson explores the political systems, institutions, financial structures, technologies and people supporting acts of performance: 'performance's routinised discourse of disruption and dematerialisation' is joined with 'one that also emphasises sustenance, coordination and rematerialisation' (2011, 29-30). Whilst interest often focuses on the action centre stage and/or with an audience, Jackson examines the stage management, props, structures and frameworks that hold up the moment of performance. I have purposefully employed 'material' alongside 'social' and 'aesthetic' throughout this thesis, in recognition of the significant role these infrastructural elements play in my practice and beyond.

In my practice I interact with all these elements of a production. But the common denominator is the relationships I nurture. Whether it is with patrons, internationally-renowned artists or a security guard, my relationships – and consequently being able to understand, balance and align multiple perspectives in a project – help me bring it to life. Co-founder and Creative Director of EAST, Geraldine Hepp, vehemently argues that, despite the necessity of paying attention to interpersonal relations in the production of any project, this aspect of the producer's work is rarely discussed or supported. Until I found a way of articulating this labour as part of this research, I struggled with how invisible it remained to most people, and how rarely it was acknowledged – financially or otherwise. Whilst the scale of both EAST and Nyege Nyege International Music Festival (NNIMF), and the amount of people involved, is evident in the array of images in the accompanying portfolio, I have also struggled to visually present the critical role that relationships have played across all areas of both projects.

In 2017 I ran a training programme for young producers alongside NNIMF, which was supported by the British Council. When I really considered what a festival producer's training programme would include (apart from technical skills, such as using particular financial management systems), I arrived at relationships and mutual understanding across the festival as a whole. It was a major challenge finding effective ways to communicate the essentiality of interpersonal relations to the execution of the festival. Whilst these areas of production are rarely articulated, they are an essential prop to the material and dematerialised acts of performance.

I spent half-day workshops creating large maps illustrating the various material, social and aesthetic bodies that need to all be considered at any given time and were interlinked. It was about communicating the importance of understanding the artists', audience or suppliers' needs and expectations, as well as balancing these with those of the festival. Talking about props in the broadest sense of the term, Jackson argues that 'the prop's resonance comes in the ease of its withdrawal, its shelving, its losing – despite its vital importance for the constitution of selves and worlds (Jackson 2011, 80-81). She continues: '...the vitality of the prop comes in the precarious realization that the object you hold is also one that holds you' (Jackson 2011, 81). As Jackson asserts, despite their vitality, like props, intricate patterns of understanding can be easily withdrawn, lost or shelved in the moment, in exchange for something seemingly more urgent. The significance of these relationships only becomes apparent in their absence, when you realise that this relationship is also something that supports you.

To return to the camping experience in 2017 discussed in Chapter Four, where there was a significant delay in the delivery and setting up of tents, interpersonal relations turned out to be a key missing element. Whilst I understood the implications of the camping experience on artists and audiences, I hadn't foreseen – or personally developed the relationships – in order to understand the challenges suppliers were facing. In Uganda you are rarely told 'no'. But I've learnt that hearing 'yes' doesn't necessarily mean something will happen. It is important to be able to read between the lines, for people to understand your position (and you theirs) in order to arrive at an open discussion about the realities

and what it might take to solve the problem at hand. And, even then, it doesn't necessarily go to plan. On reflection, when the first tents didn't arrive a couple of days before the event, I realised that I didn't have, and hadn't invested in, the relationships that I needed to overcome the challenges we were facing. The vitality of these relationships only became apparent in their absence, when I realised as a 'prop' they were also something that was supporting the project more widely. Inter-relationality – not just with artists or communities, but across the whole world of a project – has been critical to my practice and the realisation of artistic endeavours. Underdeveloped relationships, or just a failure to consider particular stakeholder's needs, be that a specific audience, partner, supplier, venue or artist – only becomes apparent in their absence. An understanding of the multiple perspectives is crucial to developing stories that resonate with different participants, which then enrol everyone in the relational endeavour that is art and performance.

The Storyteller

> Find the story. At its best, producing is an artform that has the potential to connect unconnected narrative threads. You introduce a lot of people to each other: artists, audiences, politicians, funders. In order to find opportunities to make it work it's necessary to align a lot of different human desires. Find the story because it is the most powerful way to get something done … because it's the way that most of us interpret the world around us. (Jubb 2012, 34)

Whether producing a music festival, residency programme, panel event, theatre show, public intervention, gig, exhibition, film screening, house party, exchange programme, meeting, dance class, launch or an opening, storytelling has been fundamental to my practice. I have found storytelling to be essential to building relationships and connecting different narrative threads, from identifying and harnessing opportunities, to aligning, at times very different, human desires. I tell stories in almost all areas of my work: In funding applications, meetings, emails, reports, social media, workshops, with suppliers, the team, in discussions with participants, supporters and venues. As British producer David Jubb points out it is the best way to get something done.

Figure 20: Artist and poet Ife Piankhi sharing one of her stories for the journey, East African Soul Train, 2017. Photographer: Jude Clark.

I first came to understand the importance of storytelling by watching Paul Heritage weaving narrative threads together in PPP's programmes and publications. Heritage is a storyteller, and in projects such as Points of Contact (2010-2012) he used this methodology to curate exchanges of ideas between artists, policy makers and young people. This work has really shaped new partnerships, vocabularies and ideas about the role arts and culture can play. And, in turn, produced powerful, intense and productive moments. I have also seen the significance of storytelling in the evolution of NNIMF. Through the art of storytelling, NNIMF Directors Arlen Dilsizian and Derek Debru have effectively engaged international and local audiences, industry specialists, party-heads, government officials, record labels, donors, creative organisations, volunteers, artists and corporate partners from across the world, all of whom have been essential to the festival's growing global reputation. Integrating NNIMF into their "listener's" experience and reformulating the narratives surrounding the festival in a way that resonates with their

very different audiences, has been critical to the execution of East Africa's biggest electronic music festival.

As I have grown in my practice, along with Hepp, I increasingly focus on storytelling as a way of attracting the right audiences, artists, partners and funders to EAST. As discussed previously, EAST looks to offer development opportunities, and it is a point of connection, for creatives, as well as a platform to showcase and raise the profile of contemporary East African arts. It takes many different people and elements to realise this ambitious project so as a concept, storytelling is a way of connecting these disparate threads. As a result, opportunities are found to enrol the necessary people into the project and a range of different desires are successfully aligned. So, rather than focusing on the task-driven elements of producing, I use storytelling to speak to the creativity and strategic potential of the producer's work in engaging not only audiences, artists, partners and funders in a project, but also venues, suppliers and the team I work in.

In interrogating my role as a storyteller, I have found Walter Benjamin's definition useful. Benjamin distinguished the storyteller from the novelist by arguing that storytelling is a dialogical act. Storytelling is a relational act, contingent on both the 'reader' and the 'teller': 'the storyteller takes what he [sic] tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale'(Benjamin and Zohn 1963, 83). With EAST we seek to engage in a dialogical relationship with a range of different audiences, and the narrative is always tailored to who is 'listening'. By the 'who' I mean up to fifty thousand people who, thanks to the alluring quality of EAST and consequent online interest, come to us via social media. This high level of interest goes to show that there is a shortage and a thirst for East African contemporary art and performance around the world, this interest can be channelled towards contemporary narratives. We share what is happening in East Africa to the world and connect interested parties back to creatives in the region, and we curate work from the project that will resonate with our 'listeners'. This involves reformulating stories from the project in an accessible language which resonates with global contemporary trends. There are, of course, also physical audiences: on the train itself, at the stations and for the

presentation of the work-in-progress at TaSUBa. These audiences are from predominantly local and rural communities without access to the contemporary art scenes of the region's capital cities. Engaging them means framing things in an entirely different way to the online audience. For example, asking the town crier to place more emphasis on work that is familiar, such as music, and accepting a few confused expressions and giggles as a dancer weaves his way along the railway tracks. For the public performance there are also students, journalists, funders and curators in attendance who are excited about engaging with some of East Africa's most cutting-edge contemporary artists. They need to hear a different story to ensure their attendance, which is critical to the project's artists.

EAST is all about artists – it's about the underground Congolese hip-hop artist developing their craft, building a connection and having the opportunity to collaborate with a successful Kenyan recording artist. It's about that musician finding an exciting stylist to work with on their next video, and that filmmaker forging the connections necessary to produce their next short. Rather than conveying specific information, Benjamin argues that the storyteller looks to absorb narratives and reformulate them in relation to their listeners: 'Story-telling is always the art of repeating stories' (Benjamin and Zohn 1963, 87). The greater the storyteller, the greater a narrative's claim on the listener: 'the more completely it is integrated into [the listener's] own experience, the greater will be his inclination to repeat it to someone else someday, sooner or later' (Benjamin and Zohn 1963, 86). To achieve our objectives the curation of artists is a careful balancing act; we need different characters, different disciplines and levels of experience. We work extensively with partners across the region who nominate potential participants. Then as a team we make a judgement on who will benefit, and contribute the most, to the overall programme. Whilst EAST offers development opportunities for young artists, we also need creatives with experience who can inspire others, influence the quality of work and offer robust opportunities for continuing collaborations. People jump on board for different reasons. For some it is a more formal residency opportunity, for others it is a platform to showcase their work. EAST offers a space to play, to get out of a creative block, to meet new people, even just experiment with no obligations attached. Therefore, after sensing an artist's motivation, I may highlight particular elements of the project in

the story that I am weaving, so it resonates with their desires or aligns them with the project's intentions. I do my best to make the strongest claim I can on their particular experience, to get them excited and engaged in the project.

In addition to artists and audiences, it also takes a huge number of partners to make a project like EAST happen. For example, we need relationships and in-kind support from arts institutions, hotels, the Tanzanian arts council, police and the railway authorities to name a few. Each relationship is important for different reasons, and I weave and spin narratives to find mutual connections, which are sometimes obvious and sometimes more surprising. For example, we were told a story about how the railways are under pressure to increase passengers and ticket sales as the new high-speed railways nears completion. We need the railways to support the project and thus I may put a marketing spin on a story I am telling at a meeting. This could include EAST sharing select images and testimonials with the railway for them to use in advertising, in exchange for the guarantee of sleeper wagons arriving in Mwanza on time.

In her TEDTalk 'The Danger of a Single Story' (2009), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie argued 'how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story'. As storytellers we affect but can also be affected in the process. The narratives we tell have to be aligned within the dialogical, relational and contingent matrix that is storytelling. EAST has been affected in positive ways by the stories people have shared about the project. For example, a number of people noted the profound impact connecting to mentors, peers and stakeholders had had on them. Consequently, this has evolved as a fundamental intention of the project in later editions. Similarly, since 2016, many participants have commented on how they reconnected with the 'source' of their creativity by participating in the project. As a result, the idea of 'creative re-birth' has been built into EAST's explicit ambitions moving forward. There have also been moments where EAST was at risk of being co-opted in ways that didn't align with our values. For example, an offer of corporate sponsorship in exchange for advertising content might not work in everyone's favour, including both individual artists and the project's brand. Sometimes it is possible to understand desires and expectations from a distance, and work out how to align them

with other elements of the project. But assumptions can sometimes fall short: the marketing opportunity didn't actually resonate with the railways and the corporation didn't plan to use the project in the way we had imagined. This is why interpersonal relationships are so critical to my work. For example, our recce trip to Tanzania, described in Chapter Four of this thesis, was fundamental in forging the necessary partnerships for the third edition of the project.

Through focusing stories in different ways, we have looked to ensure that partners and individuals want to be – or more importantly genuinely feel – part of the project. We want our donors and partners to feel invested in the work they support. Therefore, in a grant application focused on artist's mobility, I would emphasise the limitations to mobility in the region. I would highlight that in EAST artists have the opportunity to connect with creatives from across East Africa and further afield, and that in our experience the journey inspires deep connections and catalyses new work. For another donor, whose interest is in the public reach of the programme, I would elaborate on the different audiences and communities that EAST engages with, the project's audience numbers, its visual allure and the potential of what just might emerge from such a dynamic environment.

It is important to highlight that the use of storytelling is not cynical. These different narratives don't override one another. As I have illustrated all the potentially conflicting and competing elements are intrinsically linked and are essential to bringing EAST to life: from artists with different types of experience to donors interested in reaching particular communities. As a project, EAST has multiple stories and various elements which resonate with different 'listeners' I was aware of this whilst designing and curating the presentation of this research. For me, it was important that NNIMF and EAST were presented in both the thesis and creative portfolio in a way that could speak to an academic audience, but also to the multiple creatives, audiences, partners and patrons that have made every edition possible. Joining a host of other cultural producers working across the region, one of the critical ambitions of EAST is to disrupt dominant and unhelpful narratives about art, development and 'Africa'. This is one reason why it was so important to me that the creative portfolio of vibrant and diverse audio and visual material, could sit

comfortably on any coffee table around the world, demonstrating this particular side of East African arts and performance.

Adichie's argument is that too often people project a single story of Africa and that, 'the single story creates stereotypes' (2009). Adichie continues that 'the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story' (2009). For example, EAST can result in a tangible economic benefit for one artist as a result of future programming via a connection forged in the journey. But for another artist it is the connection formed with a creative from another context that is important to them. And, for another, it is having time in a unique environment, away from the socio-economic challenges of everyday life, to test out new ideas. It is the tendency to stereotype in public policy and scholarly work that makes me uncomfortable with the cause-and-effect narratives that are continually projected around East African art and performance. My argument is not that this work doesn't exist, or doesn't matter, but that it is not the only type of work. Adichie's provocation is that 'the consequence of the single story is that it robs people of dignity. Makes [the] recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasises how we are different rather than how we are similar' (2009). In the cultural, social and political positioning of a project such as EAST it is possible for the storytellers – the producers – to challenge such limited narratives and give, what Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe calls, 'a balance of stories' (Achebe in Adichie 2009). At times this means foregoing particular partnerships that demand a singular focus that cannot be aligned with the multiple foundations of the project. Relationships, generated through storytelling, are a fundamental infrastructure to my practice and producing projects such as EAST. An ability to tell multiple stories has brought new partnerships in fruition and a new creative concept to life. Ultimately, the final section of this thesis calls for a consideration of the following question: how might learnings from my own methodologies be applied in a wider context to help reimagine the single stories being told about art and performance in East Africa?

Figure 21: Collaboration between Nayianoi Sitonik and Mirembe Musisi ahead of the public work-in-progress , East African Soul Train, 2017. Photographer: Jude Clark.

I understand storytelling – identifying, understanding and appreciating another's position and being able to put yourself in their shoes – as an empathetic act. I argue that a sense of empathy is often absent in the relationships between those making, thinking and supporting performance. As such, I have explored what cultivating a more robust empathetic culture might mean and could look like. In *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education* (1998), Megan Boler asserts that traditionally 'empathy belongs to a class of "altruistic emotions" that go by different names' including pity, compassion and sympathy (157). Boler asserts that, while 'sympathy commonly refers to a sense of concern based not on identical experiences but experiences sufficiently similar ... empathy is distinct from sympathy on the common sense that I can empathise only if I too have experienced what you are suffering' (1998, 157). It is argued that 'empathy requires identification. I take up your perspective and claim that I can know your experience through mine. By

definition, empathy also recognises our difference—not profoundly, but enough to distinguish that I am not in fact the one suffering at this moment' (Boler 1998, 159). Empathy is generally understood as an embodied response: the ability to put oneself in someone else's shoes rather than, as is the case with sympathy, compassion or pity, simply feeling or having the capacity to recognise the hardships another person is experiencing. In *The Dark Sides of Empathy* (2019), Fritz Alwin Breithaupt argued that 'as a social species we are shaped by empathy' (loc.39). It is argued that empathetic emotional connection with other beings can be life-changing, even life-saving, as well as increasing our sensitivity 'to more subtle forms of oppression and masked forms of violence' (Breithaupt 2019, loc.142). Breithaupt highlights how empathy is often associated with the development industry, and a motivation for 'humanitarian aid workers, donors, peacekeeping soldiers, and those who work for organisations like Doctors Without Borders' (2019, loc.142). Whilst empathy for a specific humanitarian crisis isn't a motivating factor behind my creative practice, I do interact with people and funders who are occupied with these types of struggles. Breithaupt argued that as a term "empathy" can be 'oversimplified and glorified', and as a result of its altruistic associations assumed to naturally lead to 'morally correct behaviour' regardless of the intervention (2019, loc.37). As argued in Chapter One, this can at times been seen in creative practice with a spirit of 'empowerment' which can override the ways it might reinforce post-colonial socioeconomic hierarchies.

Breithaupt draws attention to the fact that empathy is not necessarily altruistic: 'like most other human abilities, empathy probably serves the empathiser first and foremost and not the target of empathy' (2019, loc. 154). Take storytelling in EAST, it can serve the 'teller' as much as the 'listener'. Storytelling is, therefore, reciprocal: the wider project benefits from individual's engagement as much as the individual reaps rewards from the project. Breithaupt also describes empathy as an aesthetic experience. It is argued that we can 'imagine ourselves into the shoes of someone else precisely because their situation *seems* clear to us ... we can empathise because we can aestheticise – clarify – the situation of the other' (Breithaupt 2019, loc. 193) [emphasis own]. Empathy can make a situation *seem* clear to us, regardless of whether that situation is actually another's reality.

Breithaupt illustrates how empathy can be egotistical and can lead to polarised understandings of the world through one lens. Given the context, it is important to point out that there are other troublesome sides of empathy: for example, empathetic sadism (personal pleasure gleaned from others' challenges) and vampiristic empathy (using empathy to expand one's own life experience). As discussed in Chapter One, these narcissistic sides of empathy can be seen in areas of the development industry and are increasingly being highlighted by activists, such as @nowhitesaviours, who instigate campaigns via social media to draw attention to the prolific issues with voluntourism, white heroism and the perpetuation of particular stereotyping and demeaning narratives of 'Africa' globally. Breithaupt's observations mirror Boler's argument: whilst empathy can inspire particular actions in certain circumstances, it does not necessarily lead to justice, and instead can be passive. For example, empathy can inspire participation via donations. But based on an assumption rather than the reality, it might not lead to positive or productive outcomes for everyone involved, including the potential so-called 'beneficiaries'.

Boler uses 'passive empathy' to describe 'those instances where our concern is directed to a fairly distant other, whom we cannot directly help' (1998, 158). Boler argues that in an educational setting 'passive empathy' is not sufficient because, 'at stake is not only the ability to empathise with the very distant other, but to recognise oneself as implicated in the social forces that create the climate of obstacles the other must confront' (1998, 158). Moving beyond passive empathy is critical in development contexts and amongst funders, practitioners and researchers. Too often, interventions, including examples of creative practice and research, are executed with *passive* empathy, which absolves the – often international – actor 'through the denial of power relations' (Boler 1998, 162). However, reliant on the distant other, creatives and their patrons continue to engage with one and other on these limited terms.

Boler offers 'testimonial reading' as an activity through which we can arrive at a more effective conceptualisation, and employment, of empathy in educational settings:

Testimonial reading requires a self-reflective participation: an awareness first of myself as a reader, positioned in a relative position of power by virtue of the safe distance provided by the mediated text. Second, I recognise that reading potentially involves a task. This is at minimum an active reading practice that involves challenging my own assumptions and world views. (Boler 1998, 165)

Testimonial reading emphasises the role of the listener. 'Testimonial reading' can lead to a deeper understanding of one's own position and relationship to various systems of power, as well as that of a subject. It can reveal both individual and group proximity to the social, aesthetic and material interventions that they are realising. 'Testimonial reading' requires an active engagement with assumptions about systems of power and can open up the possibility of a more robust and empathetic environment. I use the preface 'robust' to distinguish the emotional and political action I am describing from the ways empathy has been, and continues to be, misused in relation to Africa and the development industry. Testimonial reading requires us to question situations that *seem* clear to us; rather than assuming how it feels to walk in another's shoes, it demands that we listen deeply, garnering an understanding of the shoes and how we – ourselves – may be implicated in their construction. As Boler argues, in testimonial reading, 'what is at stake is not only the ability to empathise with the very distant other, but to recognise oneself as implicated in the social forces that create the climate of obstacles the other must confront' (1998, 164-65).

An increasing attention to what Boler describes as testimonial reading in my own work – recognising first myself and relative position(s) of power in my relationships, alongside storytelling's dialogical, multiple and relational nature – has enabled me more and more to move forward with my practice and research in a way that is 'open, responsive and with care' (Akama, Pink and Sumartojo 2018, 5). On reflection, EAST – its relational nature, the atmospheres we look to cultivate, as well as the environment itself – encourages elements of testimonial reading. Through the intensity of the journey and in the time spent together, stories that *seemed* clear to people are gradually dismantled. Given the format, which pushes people emotionally and physically, it is hard to maintain anonymity, distance or at the very least not feel confronted in some way. As a collective we try to

create a space for these challenges: in the agreement below there is a clear emphasis on openness, fluidity and courage. In EAST your active participation is in some ways demanded. We become witnesses, which Boler argues is an essential element of testimonial reading and cultivating empathy: 'in contrast to spectating, [witnessing] is a process in which we do not have the luxury of seeing a static truth or fixed certainty' (1998, 186). At the heart of EAST is collaboration. Whilst the environment can be challenging, in my experience it does encourage robustly empathetic connections and spark creative practice that goes beyond that of a traditional industry fair or workshop.
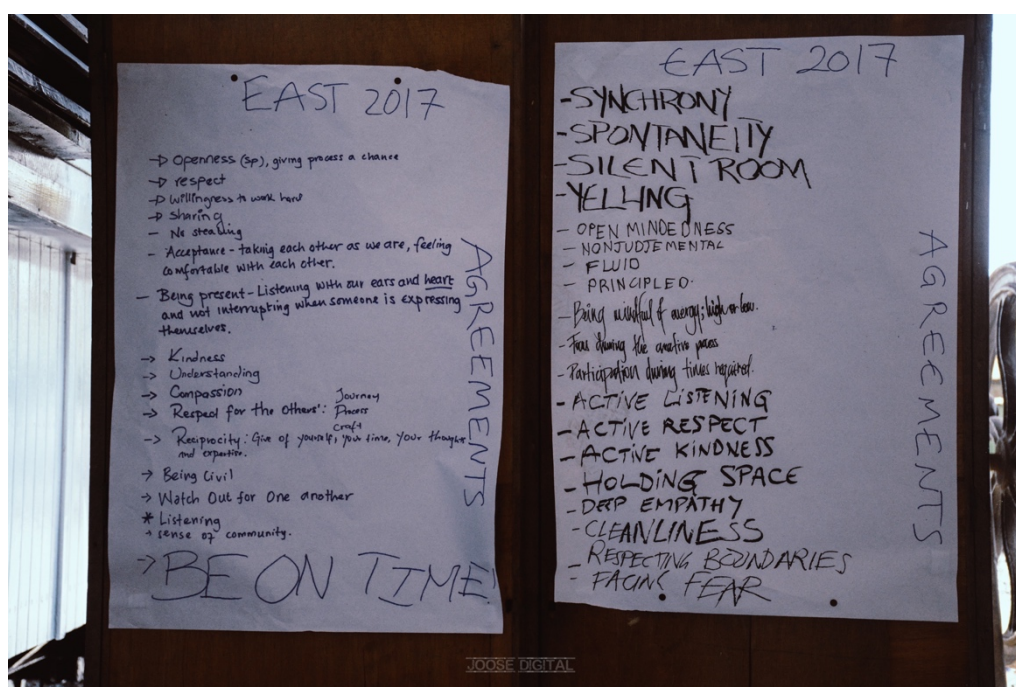

Figure 22: Collective agreements made ahead of the journey, East African Soul Train, 2017. Photographer: Jude Clark.

Whilst the emphasis was originally on creating connections between artists, during EAST 2017 we piloted a strand of work that integrated a number of stakeholders into the journey. The premise was about how the project's atmospheres could generate trust, collaborations and catalyse new ways of working, not only between contemporary artists but also with those supporting and platforming their work. Something we felt was essential due to the lack of exchange and connection between those working in the social, aesthetic and

material spheres of arts and performance. EAST 2017 included the participation of a representative from one of the project's funding partners, an internationally renowned curator, two directors from regional cultural hubs and a European festival programmer. This was in addition to a host of passengers, creatives and mentors who had a dual role working in their respective disciplines but also as respected industry stakeholders. Our ambition was for the stakeholders to join the other creatives, connecting and building trust with one another, which would potentially open up new ways of working together.

Figure 23: Conversations between artists and creative sector stakeholders, East African Soul Train, 2017. Photographer: Gilbert Bwette Daniel.

The stakeholders were privy to the tears, to the parties and to all the project's failures. They were exposed to the heat, the dust and the mosquitos, but also had the chance to tell stories and develop relationships with artists and each other which otherwise they might not have had the opportunity to do. I believe that understanding people more deeply, the different agendas, interests, motivations and challenges facing various participants, provides the foundations necessary for taking a risk on something new, such as programming an artist they weren't familiar with before. The stakeholders also had the

time to reconnect with their creative selves, to re-think the drivers for artists in their practice, and also interrogate their own incentives as development practitioners. The benefits were reciprocal, as artists had a space to connect more effectively with the potential funders and programmers of their work and crucially, dismantle assumptions – something that there is rarely an opportunity to do.

Too often empathy as a driver for funders, artists or even audiences ends up being tokenistic or passive. Relationships are based on an assumed conceptualisation of a common cause, why it matters and how it can be addressed. This stalls the cultivation of multiple stories, leading to a closing down as opposed to an opening up of opportunities for future-orientated collaboration between donors, artists and audiences. Developing spaces and cultures of robust empathy takes time and investment. But in turn might open up new ways of thinking, making, supporting and participating in creative practice together. Importantly, these more empathetic relationships are not always comfortable or easy: things that might have *seemed* clear can reveal themselves differently. In EAST it meant remaining open to being affected personally and professionally – being vulnerable – and willing to change. It was also an opportunity to recognise oneself and one's relationship to the various systems of power EAST spoke to. The theme of EAST 2017 was identity: Kovu Safarini – the scars acquired along the way. The topic intentionally raised questions around structures, race and privilege: 'Who am I? Who do I want to be? We aim to explore aspects of our shared and personal history that have brought us to where we are today' (EAST 2017, welcome information).

The theme of identity certainly opened up dialogues and led to some emotionally charged engagement between stakeholders from the previously disparate social, aesthetic and the material spheres of the creative sector. On the whole, there was a huge amount of generosity, positivity and radical thinking emerging amongst all participants. But, at times there was also anger, frustration, and guilt, which momentarily changed the atmospheres. As a white woman and EAST's Co-founder and Creative Producer, myself and the project were deeply 'implicated in the social forces that create the climate of obstacles the other must confront' (Boler 1998, 158). The industry stakeholders – whether European or East

African – were also implicated in different ways in the project's systems of power. Quite rightly, the culture of EAST cultivated and encouraged me as a white European to confront and interrogate my relationship with the different structures of power in the project. I spent six months considering what – if anything – I could offer in this space. Deep, reciprocal connections with other people made me challenge things I *seemed* to understand about the social, aesthetic and material worlds of a project. For example, it reminded me of the urgent need and potential of fun, pleasure, dissent and freedom creative projects such as EAST could foster and how many of these narratives were missing in many of the sector's support structures. It also emphasised that there are always multiple stories and experiences, good and bad. For some, a project like EAST is a transformational opportunity; for others it resonates in a different way. In the case of EAST 2017, it wasn't just me that was confronting these realities, but representatives with very different investments in the creative sector that the project had brought together. I strongly believe it is a lack of reciprocity, dialogue and robustly empathetic engagement between the sector's *different* stakeholders, which is fixing narratives in the past. Through developing a space in EAST for intense interaction and storytelling between creatives, their advocates and supporters we are looking to impact this and catalyse new ways of working, together. One specific outcome of EAST 2017, was that after participating in the project, Africologne Festival in Germany began programming East African artists for the first time.

In this chapter I have grappled with the complexity of the role of the producer, arguing that empathetic relationships shape practice. Locating this within a wider discourse reminded me of why I was inspired to undertake this research project in the first place. Working across the social, aesthetic and material worlds of a project: developing relationships; creating stories; and, being open to being affected has given me a particular perspective about some of the challenges and opportunities in the East African contemporary arts and performance scene. Looking forward to EAST 2020, our intention is to build on our experience in 2017, bringing people from across the sector together to exchange, discuss and create with one another in a way that usually isn't possible. This includes artists from East Africa, India, Europe and the US, Pan-African thinkers from

across the continent and the diaspora, as well as festival programmers. The ambition is to catalyse new stories that can challenge hegemonic practices and begin to reimagine 'normative structures, boundaries and practices' in the region, the continent and more widely in art and performance (Akama, Pink and Sumartojo 2018, 5). We hope that this will spark new opportunities for contemporary East African artists and the sector as a whole.

Chapter Six | Feeling Ways Forward

Figure 24: Artists Safina Kimbokota and Diya Naidu in the public presentation of work-in-progress, East African Soul Train, 2019. Photographer: Ian Kacungira.

Feeling is a good place to start and to end. This research has an attention to the affects of art and performance at its foundation. The work that the arts do 'in making, managing and moving feeling in all its types' is the reason why I was – and so many others are – drawn to making, participating and supporting creative practice (Hurley 2010, 9). Yet, feeling as a motivation, as atmospheres, or as an outcome of art and performance practice, are often under-acknowledged. This is particularly pronounced in contexts such as East Africa, where in practice and research there is such an emphasis on tangible and development-centred outcomes. Feelings are messy and mean different things to different people. As Sara Ahmed points out, 'even if we regularly talk about having feelings, as if they are mine, they also often come at us, surprise us, leaving us cautious and bewildered' (2014, 210). Through this research I have asked how attention to the relational qualities of affect,

and its change-making potential, can offer a way of reimagining the relationship between art and performance in East Africa.

Art and performance initiatives in East Africa often emphasise what they might do *for* the development industry's concerns. In this project I have looked beyond these normative paradigms in a consideration of the role and value of creative practice in this context. Considering producing as a practice, how it can help us understand art and performance in new ways, has been a focus of the research, as well as a methodology for the enquiry. Through my practice, I examined how affect was generated and manifested in two projects that I have produced. Paying attention to moments of performance – and all the social, aesthetic and material elements that brought them to life – I arrived at atmosphere. As I explored in Chapter Three of this thesis, atmosphere has offered me a way of exploring art and performance's affective, collective and material nature. Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated that these qualities have been underestimated in discussions about East African art and performance, and have also escaped much consideration in the wider field performance research.

Atmospheres are hard to grasp, to research and to analyse. In a move away from the philosophy of atmospheres, this research joins a growing body of interdisciplinary work looking to understand how atmospheres come to matter in social life (Bille, Bjerregaard and Sørensen 2015, 33). I have found atmospheres to be unruly, contingent and contagious, but have also come to understand that it is these qualities that can give art and performance a structural potential. An added complexity is that atmospheres are created and experienced in a relational way: they feel differently to each person. In focusing on atmosphere there is a handover of the outcomes to the variety of environments, objects and subjects participating in any given moment. With this relationality, born out of the intricate intermingling of the myriad of elements that constitute atmosphere, comes uncertainty. Embracing atmosphere's uncertainty is a political decision in an East African context, the potential of which lies in disrupting hegemonic and directive narratives. Since undertaking this research, my sense more than ever is that, rather than pinning down moments of art and performance, there is a need to open them up to understand their

potential role in a more expansive way. As explored in Chapter Four, whilst uncertainty is sometimes challenging it can also be productive: opening up new possibilities rather than fixing us in the past.

It is through the term change-making that I have found a way of articulating the potential impact of openness. Change-making offers a way of moving debates beyond instrumental narratives, without disavowing the critical relationship that the arts have with the development industry. As a producer committed to changing the landscape of the region's contemporary arts scene, I have grappled with the fact that the sector's support structures – which artists and organisations are so reliant on – will still struggle to adopt such an open approach. One reason for this is a disconnect between people working in the social, aesthetic and material worlds of a creative endeavour, and a lack of trust, connection and understanding of their different stories. I have approached this challenge by considering how elements of my practice might be scaled in order to open up new ways of making, supporting and participating in creative practice more widely. For me, my inclination to trust in atmosphere, to take risks and to embrace uncertainty in performance, is a product of understanding mine and others positionality, and the interpersonal relationships I form in the projects I produce. This has led to an ability to balance, to align and to hold the multiple and, at times, competing agendas of artists, audiences and their patrons. In Chapter Five of this thesis, I explored a strand of work that we are developing in East African Soul Train (EAST), which looks to connect creative sector stakeholders and artists in an environment that inspires a culture of robust empathy. Our ambition in this work is to spark connections and rich conversations between people from different areas of the sector. Together, exploring why and how we make work, the opportunities and challenges we all face, and thinking together about finding new, multiple, ways to do this more effectively in the future. Consideration of such an approach could be applied more widely in the field of performance, particularly in areas where there remains a disconnect between public policy, programming and the work that artists are making.

I arrived at this research project through paying attention to what was happening on the ground in East Africa, what artists were creating and what was popular with their

audiences. This didn't align with much of the work I had previously read about in western scholarship about performance and development, or with the narratives that the donor community were often insisting upon. Through my practice, I have come to understand that dialogue about art and performance's value is often based on a set of unhelpful premises, namely about what creative work can do *for* development agendas. Whilst this may be one factor, the motivations of my peers, artists, audiences and funders rarely seem to involve specific development concerns. In effect, many people are pretending in order to secure much needed financial support. The appetite for instrumental narratives driven by the development industry, while well intentioned, can serve to hinder the arts. As the donors hold the purse strings, there is an inevitable tendency for artists to adapt their creative outputs in order to satisfy funding criteria. This is frustrating for artists, creative organisations as well as funders. For, as argued in Chapter One, cause-and-effect arguments linking creative practice with specific social outcomes have historically been difficult to prove. Consequently, this emphasis has not strengthened the position of the arts in East African public policy. For example, whilst financial support from the international donor community in the region has increased in the last 20 years, grants remain predominantly small, short-term and highly restricted. This makes it hard for artists and creative organisations 'to innovate, take risks, learn and scale their efforts' without a commercial dimension (Reich 2017). This is having a material impact on the work created and, in turn, audiences' experience. I have a strong appreciation for the aesthetics as well as the productive potential of contemporary East African art and performance. The lack of opportunities for East African artists to develop their craft, and platforms for the work that they create, is what drives my producing practice. This research has been my attempt to reshape the terms of the debate, and begin to develop alternative ways of conceptualising and articulating the roles of art and performance.

Despite having a critical role in producing much art and performance, we rarely hear from the producers themselves. Whilst many creative practitioners do take on elements of the producer's role, attention to this specific practice is rare. Embarking on this research there was no blueprint for what a practice-based doctoral project by a producer should look like, so it has been a challenge to connect the findings I made through my practice and research,

as well as presenting them visually. I have had to interrogate what producing means – at least to me – and how it can offer a refreshing perspective, whilst considering the ways being a producer has impacted my own methodology. Through this doctoral project I have found ways of articulating the parts of art and performance practice that are often invisible, whilst also questioning why they matter. The tensions between my roles as a producer and researcher has had limitations. They are two distinct roles and, at points, the need to make a project happen has meant my ability to document, reflect and analyse in the moment has been affected. For example, had time allowed, I may have also undertaken more formal interviews regarding cross-sector connections that emerged in EAST 2017 and 2019. Producing is also a relational activity, it would have been impossible to do justice to every person who has made the projects and these ideas come to life. By analysing and documenting these specific elements of Nyege Nyege International Music Festival (NNIMF) and EAST I don't want to negate others. There are so many other stories that could – and should – be shared about these initiatives, let alone art and performance practice in East Africa more broadly. We need to hear more from diverse and contemporary African theatre and performance scholars. I recognise that much of the literature I draw on throughout this thesis comes from outside the continent and the diaspora too. This is a structural problem about inequality that needs to be addressed and extends far beyond African theatre and performance studies.

Speaking more broadly, there is an opportunity in theatre and performance studies to further explore the work of producers. Producing is a set of practices that cuts across the different areas of a performance project. Paying attention to the internal and external worlds of a project, examining its aesthetics and communities alongside its support structures, has given me a particular multifaceted perspective. As outlined in Chapter Two, producers often find 'new ways to interpret, program, produce, finance and experience work' in order to bring an idea to life (Ferdman 2014, 5). In addition to the task-driven elements of my practice, I have demonstrated that producers have the capacity to shape and shift cultures more widely. My role in EAST and NNIMF was initially about making something that had not been done before possible: supporting an electronic music festival in Uganda become sustainable and bringing artists together for a residency on East

Africa's historic railway. Both are now part of a wave of projects that are changing the face of East African contemporary art and performance globally. The projects have also introduced new types of performance to audiences in the region and beyond, as well as new ways of working to artists and partners operating in East Africa.

Over the last five years I have witnessed a range of artists grow in their practice. I've seen new dance companies being established, friends becoming internationally renowned DJs, my peers working on blockbuster movies, young musicians producing their own festivals, and visual artists winning international recognition. This is the creative practice I was excited by at university, during my time at PPP and that still motivates me today. Producer David Jubb argues that 'great artists are like great scientists. Inventors of the human spirit' (Jubb 2010, 34). These stories and new – affective – experiences for audiences don't emerge from one-off opportunities. They are a product of a vibrant, diverse and dynamic creative sector, which has been made possible by a range of producers who are finding new ways to create platforms for artists, despite the limitations. What would be the result if attention was paid to their work, their findings, and the sector was supported in more robust ways?

As the Royal African Society and British Council assert, contemporary African arts are 'not just for Africans, or people of African descent ... it is important and helps us [all] to see diverse perspectives on Africa' (2019, 19). To elaborate:

> Africa is many things, African people are many things and African narratives are many. Ultimately, there is a multiplicity on the African continent. I want to use that same sense of multiplicity and bring it into the arts. For me, contemporary African arts is anything that authentically narrates the multiplicity of African stories. (Patrick Sam in Royal African Society and British Council 2019, 86)

Patrick Sam, who is a poet and chair of the National Arts Council of Namibia, highlights the diversity of contemporary Africa and its arts. Nearly three decades earlier in *Moving the Centre: the Struggle for Cultural Freedom* (1993), Kenyan writer and academic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argued that 'the persistence of a certain vocabulary – the primitive, the tribal

community, simpler societies is a reminder of the remote kinship between scholarship and colonialism' (28). Thiong'o's argument is that recognition of a pluralism of cultures, literatures and languages is increasingly important in the global community (1993, 10). These arguments hold true today and are still emphasised by African scholars such as Achille Mbembe (2017) and Felwin Sarr (2019). Sarr argues that 'If you look at our African societies you can see that they are producing a lot of social innovations in many different fields. But most of these innovations happen where they are not seen, where they are not named, not thought theoretically and therefore are not noticed' (Sarr in Utlu 2019). East African contemporary art and performance are a part of this untapped mosaic of knowledge, which could have a wider impact. It is shocking how little of this work is being engaged with in the academy. But, as Sarr argues, the future is open. Thiong'o highlights that 'it is important to remember that social and intellectual processes, even academic disciplines, act and react on each other not against a spatial and temporal ground of stillness' (1993, 28). In embracing pluralism, there was, and remains, an opportunity in African theatre and performance research to have a tangible effect on the world at large.

A World without Theatre *for* Development

Affect's relational qualities matter in development studies. In recent years there has been a move to consider how attention to affect and emotion might disrupt hegemonic development research and practice. But as Daryll Humble (2012) argued, too often the ways emotion is featured in development studies is limited and instrumental, pertaining to the researchers' narrative rather than the wider context of the work. A more plural, nuanced and holistic approach within the development industry at large remains important. This has to be balanced with the accountability necessary to maintain confidence from the global public funding bodies that support much of this work. This is a challenge that goes beyond the arts. Whilst beyond the scope of this research project, there is an opportunity for further interdisciplinary study and research in this area, especially with initiatives such as the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). GCRF is a £1.5 billion UK fund launched in 2015, which looks 'to support cutting-edge research

that *addresses* the challenges faced by developing countries' (GCRF) [emphasis own]. One of the major limitations to the arts and cultural sector in East Africa, where there is a lack of government support and commercial opportunities, is an over-reliance on the development industry and their models for accountability. Rather than focusing on what art and performance can do *for* development, a consideration of how creative work can help researchers and practitioners feel their way forward in new, multiple, ways, is critical. I argue that there needs to be a continued effort to ensure this is done 'in ways that are open, responsive and with care' (Akama, Pink and Sumartojo 2018, 5).

Feeling our way forward, in EAST 2020 we will develop elements of this research, bringing together a variety of artists, researchers and creative sector stakeholders to think collaboratively about how and why we make creative practice, and consider new ways of working more effectively together. Current programming demonstrates that many stakeholders are looking to tap into and support the exciting contemporary and popular arts in the region. What is needed are new ways of articulating and accounting for why it matters, and this research makes a contribution to this conversation. Whilst what will emerge is uncertain due to the relational, contagious and contingent context of EAST, our ambition is to catalyse new conversations and ways of supporting East African contemporary arts. This warrants further research, and in my own work I am excited to continue to explore why atmospheres matter for artists and their audiences, which might be useful in reimagining the sector more widely. EAST, like this research, is one starting point rather than a conclusive answer.

My biggest ambition for this project is that it connects my work to 'a vibrant generation of theorists and practitioners who are moving theory and practice in the African context forward in ways that engage theatre practitioners from any context' (Hutchison 2012, 151). As I have outlined, this research is not only relevant to work in the field of African theatre but more widely in the study of art and performance, where there is also a need to open up, rather than pin down, the moment of performance. I have been lucky enough to be a part of a wave of projects showcasing East African arts and performance globally. During my time working with NNIMF the festival has grown a global reputation, and

become an annual platform for underground East African artists every year, who are now performing to audiences around the world. As this specific project draws to a close, with EAST we are also exploring ways of expanding our work on a global scale. In the summer of 2020, we are hoping to undertake a research trip to explore what EAST would look like in India. Following our conversations from the last edition of the project, we will explore what it might mean to create an environment that connects artists, thinkers and stakeholders from two different very contexts, but with shared histories of oppression. As EAST 2019 artist Diya Naidu asserts: 'connections between such contexts, rather than with the global north, feel so crucial in terms of where we are in history'. Development research and practice needs opening up, expanding, to become more future-orientated and less fixed on past models that are not working. Through this research I have tried to open up a range of possibilities, demonstrating that one can look beyond current development paradigms and towards a future of art, performance and 'theatre that never ceases to "develop", theatre which allows debate, dialogue, reflexivity, dreaming the impossible and the fight to infinity' (Ahmed 2002, 218). And, amid talks of the future, I urge for more attention to be paid to producers, their role and their discoveries from reimagining ways forward for art and performance.

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