

Art for the labour movement and everyday acts of political culture

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'struggle does not bring peace and quiet, but the promise of more growth'

Roger Howard, 1971.

1. Friendship, hope and solidarity

In November 2017, more than 200 trade union activists, community organisers, cultural workers and educators congregated in the South West of England, in the University of Exeter's Drama department. Through a day-long programme of talks, workshops, screenings and performances, participants shared knowledge about the role of cultural practice in workers' movements and other forms of social struggle. We shared creative techniques, and discussed challenges, opportunities and questions emerging from ongoing campaigns. This event, called the *Liberating Arts Festival*, was a larger scale version of *The Art of Trade Unions* gathering, held a year earlier at The Place Theatre in Bedford.¹ Both events were organised as a result of discussions held over the course of about four years between Banner Theatre, Townsend Productions, Reel News, the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU), Professor Joyce Canaan and me. This chapter, focusing on my collaboration with Joyce specifically, takes stock of this work as well as some of the historical legacies and current practices that inspired us.

A word more about the organisers gives important context for understanding the events. Banner is a Birmingham-based socialist theatre company that was founded in 1973. It is one of the only groups from the radical community theatre movement of the 1960s-1970s in the UK to still be creating work in partnership with trade unions, and the *Art of Trade Unions* and *Liberating Arts* events picked up the group's legacy of working to strengthen the relationship between cultural workers and industrial organisers. Townsend are a newer theatre company, established in 2011 and based in Bedford. Like Banner, they tour to community venues and trades clubs as well as theatres and arts-centres, and they have formed

¹ The full programme for the *Liberating Arts Festival* can be viewed here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/e/2PACX-1vQNjwMRgdU0IkSm4XyKY38i6Q8ZjeUJpZQ5EvlHpq-i5IlqVCrkWvgutkDxJ-HmYcpaN0SCQueFhJ1l/pubhtml?gid=373959996&single=true>

links with unions and trades councils across the country. They use educational methods in post-show sessions to strengthen audiences' engagement with their performances. Reel News are a London-based activist video collective, funded by individual donors and rank and file union branches. As well as using video to document social campaigns internationally, they also help workers film their own struggle and participate in other forms of direct action. The GFTU, created at the 1899 Trades Union Congress in Manchester to administer strike funds, these days offer training to affiliated unions, including arts and culture unions such as Artists' Union England and Equity. They utilise popular education methods in their programmes and foster a broad interest in the role of cultural political practice. I met Joyce in the earliest phase of my work on the union events, and she became my friend and closest collaborator. Given the focus of our work together and my work as a researcher and maker of political theatre, I am most familiar with Joyce's thinking in the interdisciplinary terrain we began to explore together between popular education and the politics of performance.

While the organisers focused on different aspects of the events, we shared a basic imperative: to rekindle interest in the labour movement for fostering radical culture, and to introduce anyone keen to integrate such work into their political activity to those interested in making it. We would achieve this by involving artists in discussions to inform the organising of the events and in sessions facilitated according to principles and practices of popular education. Joyce in particular fought for this as foundational for sustaining the kind of democratic dialogue and rigorous critical exploration appropriate for building a shared political vision and a movement. The combined personal experience of our organising committee, all of whom harnessed, produced or analysed cultural practice for its political effect, gave us hope that our events would lead to new friendships, lasting collaborations, and strategies to strengthen the labour movement.

I say we 'hoped', not because evidence of the integral role of art and culture in political organisation is lacking, but in recognition of the hostile context in which we worked, where legal and ideological elements stifle workers' ability to organise. As well as wringing strength from the trade unions, neoliberalism's grip has tightened around other traditional strongholds of the left, as radical artists and critical thinkers must overcome pervasive cultures of individualism and marketisation before they can even think about beginning their work. Environmental catastrophe and deepening inequality generate waves of protest across the globe in the early 21st century, but broad alienation from socialist culture and conditions

of precarity present formidable barriers to sustained action, and as wealth continues to consolidate in the hands of a few, that which is soulful can too easily burn out. As Joyce remarked in 2016: ‘capital [...] is devouring people and planet; we can say asphyxiating both’ (Canaan & Hillman 2016). Her words resonate so strongly in summer 2020 at the time of writing, they send a shiver down my spine.

However, this was the same suffocating environment that motivated us to organise. We were part of the protest waves, the same burned-out workers, and we were frustrated at tackling structural inequality in ad-hoc and isolated ways. Therefore, as well as our individual experiences, it was the contours of the neoliberal landscape, mapping isolation and division, that convinced us that working on the events was a tactical manoeuvre. This is insofar as cultural practice can, beyond any instructional work, develop necessary components for collective action, such as emotional connection, community, and solidarity.

In fact, studying the cultural work of social movements demonstrates that where the stakes are at their highest for the people involved, or where individualist cultures appear most entrenched, rather than falling to the wayside, at these critical junctures counter-cultural approaches often become centralised. Moreover, cultural practice has the capacity not only to build on or enhance components conducive to collective action - it can actually generate them in hostile conditions like those outlined above. Frequently misunderstood as an optional appendage to the ‘real’ work of political organising, cultural practice sits at the heart of struggles that shape social and political history, providing the glue that holds a movement together by transforming ideas and feelings, generating shared activities, and building collective consciousness and a way of life (see for example Grindon & Flood 2014; Hillman 2019; Issa 2007; Reed 2005).

In 2016 Joyce and I reflected on some of these points and introduced our work on the union events at Collective Encounters’ first International Theatre & Social Change conference in Liverpool.² As it happened, I was unwell and unable to travel, and Joyce had to deliver the paper alone on my behalf. This chapter is in part a way of returning that favour, and the following sections trace the paper’s key points. First, I draw on my historical research to

² <https://collective-encounters.org.uk/ourwork/research/>

reflect on how agitprop theatre has operated effectively and been sustained within workers' movements of the last century. I claim it remains an effective tool for the contemporary activist, despite its decline and lack of critical attention since the 1980s. This is followed by Joyce's account of her work, ongoing at the time, with the *Movimentos Trabalhadores Sem Terra (MST)* or Landless Workers' Movement. This section builds the case for the political efficacy of cultural forms by observing how art politicises through affect and emotional engagement, as well as by being incorporated as a routine element of organising strategy. At the end of the chapter I consider how themes of effect, affect and integration discussed up to this point mapped onto our trade union events, and consider what the events produced, not just on the day but also through the collaborative process of getting them organised.

2. Workers' theatre: histories, legacies, and models of resistance

By the time I met Joyce in 2014 I had benefited first-hand as a political theatre maker from working in collaboration with trade unions and trades councils, who had recently provided me with support to get an anti-cuts play I had written off the ground. As well as financial help, the expertise and enthusiasm of individual trades unionists also shaped the script, and a few even joined our troupe of volunteers to act in or produce the show. After it had taken place, unions brought new audiences to experience the performance at meetings, galas and rallies. This process unfolded organically from my work as a union rep, and it was only when I began to reflect on the project for related written research that I realised how concertedly I had stumbled into the rich seam of practice that is theatre in workers' movements. This experience, the engagement with the project from participants and audience, and even my own deepening politicisation as a result of writing and directing the piece, consolidated my belief in theatre's enduring political agency and fundamentally changed the trajectory of my research.

Up to that point I had learned about political theatre primarily through a lens of failure and decline. At least from my perspective studying cultural history in the UK in the early 2000s, the fractured neoliberal landscape described above had not only weakened organising capacity and the industrial bases that historically had supported vibrant ecosystems of radical art, it had also eroded the cultural and analytical frameworks that had helped sustain them. Postmodern scholars worked to reconfigure the relationship between art and politics rather than analyse workers' theatre on its own terms, while postmodern artists unpicked traditional political positions rather than standing in alignment with them. The conviction that art will

wield a political axe to its aesthetic detriment became so entrenched you can still hear it repeated even in the most radical corners of the art world, impacting approaches to cultural practice passed on to younger generations. Radical cultural activity of course continued to propel anti-capitalist movements around the world, but it was as though the radar to detect or document this had lost its coordinates or had temporarily been switched off.

In an effort to learn more about work similar to my own, I turned my attention to creativity in the alter-globalisation movement and also the history of agitprop and workers' theatre. In relation to the latter, I was struck by the seriousness with which union and party leaders and the rank and file had taken theatre-making at various points since the 1920s, and how this had manifest in vast networks of volunteer players and massive membership numbers of theatrical organisations, for example, or the regular enlistment of theatre-workers by trades unions and other political organisations for specific campaigns (see for example Howard 1971, 76-82; Stourac & McCreery 1986, 123; Brigden & Milner 2015, 328; Itzin 1980).

I was also persuaded by common-sense accounts of theatre-makers working in different countries and at different moments of the 20th century, whose experiences of applying practice and meeting audiences had led them to conclude that of course taking working-class plays to working-class audiences is an effective strategy to help workers' tackle localised problems, and to stimulate union organisation (see for example Brigden & Milner 2015, 337; Itzin 1980, 304-5.) This is partly a reflection on the scale and enthusiasm of audiences in large centres, mass demonstrations and other outdoor locations. While touring shows could reach thousands of workers, the reception from 2,000 engineers who watched Unity Theatre perform on flat-back lorries in Platt fields in 1954, for example, was enough to convince Manchester Unity Theatre 'conclusively, if proof were ever needed, the usefulness of a workers' theatre' (Brigden & Milner 2015, 336).

Meanwhile, audiences themselves have tended to define their experiences of agitprop theatre in terms of revelation and renewed conviction, while their provocation to direct action during or immediately after experiencing the theatrical event, as well testaments to plays working to strengthen conviction over time, all speak to the profound impact of live performance when it is embedded in political struggle (see for example Innes 1972, 138; Hillman 2015: 381, 390; Stourac & McCreery 1986; Weston 2019). If many on the left have lost sight of this, it has not escaped attention of the far-right who not only violently attack left-wing troupes, but also

co-opt theatrical forms traditionally associated with left practice to advance their own cause (see for example Deshpande 2007; Itzin 1980, 260-1; Mahiyaria 2020; Monks 2009).

Meanwhile, the gradual strangulation of radical community theatre by government censorship and defunding speaks to the seriousness with which those with a vested interest in maintaining power have taken this practice (see for example McGrath 1990, 22, 77, 121; Gottlieb et. al. 1988, 113-123).

However, workers' theatre is more than a combination of aesthetic forms susceptible to being borrowed or crushed by external forces. It is a manifestation of ideology based on principles of egalitarianism and democracy, and as well as its message and formal components this is encapsulated in its methods and processes, which have impacts of their own. Stourac and McCreery discuss the agitprop of the Communist Youth League of Germany (KJVD) in the late 1920s, whose volunteer players acted as 'the collective creator' in a new type of ensemble 'in which beginners were taught to learn, and teachers learned how to teach' (114). As well replacing bourgeois divisions of labour and power with a theatre where 'the interest of all participants (the audience included) was at stake' - they also note that this collective sharing of responsibilities and control, and structural guarantees for each member, 'ensured continuity even during the times of greatest upheaval'. Alongside revolutionary commitment, they attribute the collective approach as the force that kept the groups going against all the odds (116).

Despite historical pressures and the professionalisation of political art, principles and processes underpinning early agitprop have nevertheless reappeared in cultural practice enlisted by political organisers for specific campaigns. Theatre-makers working with trade unions in England in the 1960s -1970s, for example, devised their work collectively and understood the basic ideology of agitprop to be 'that anyone could and should learn to do it', with groups like Banner communicating to their audience that 'what we do, in fact, is something you could do yourselves, much better than we can' (Itzin 1980, 39-41; Bowdler 1975, 5).

These artists also collaborated with one another to create networks of support for their niche practice within their own industry, including specialist trade unions that would operate in light of the specific conditions of their labour. The organisation 'AgitProp' was set up in the UK in 1968 to provide 'a comprehensive information and communications service for all

those who are working towards a revolutionary transformation of our society'. Impressively, this included an Entertainments Booking Agency, a Lawyers' Group, a Publicity Group, a Music Group, a Special Effects Group, and a Street Theatre Group, as well as publications, libraries and conferences to disseminate information and coordinate operations (Itzin, 1980: 40). Following this was the formation of The Association of Community Theatres (TACT) in the mid-70s, as well as the Theatre Writer's Union (TWU) and the Independent Theatre Council (ITC). These organisations gave creative and financial support to radical theatre-makers, helping playwrights win the living wage, but also a central base for equipment for hire/loan/sale, and help for groups who struggled to redefine their own identities when the Arts Council's criteria was found to be limiting and exclusive (Itzin, 1980: 178, 312-313).

The Art Of Trades Unions day and *Liberating Arts Festival* can be understood as a direct legacy of this work. Members of TACT and the TWU were among our delegates, and fed into discussions about building new structures of support for radical working-class art. Meanwhile, Salford Community Theatre, one of the young companies attending the events, had their work funded by the Future's Venture Radical Arts Fund, which is the financial legacy of radical political theatre group Welfare State, formed in 1968. Their cast members have also talked in familiar terms about their rehearsal process. Beth Redmond described rehearsals for their 2019 play about dockers' strikes in Salford in the 1950s as 'rejecting individualism and re-learning collectivity' and having 'the basic foundations of a socialist society instilled in us throughout the process of making the play'. 'If anything went wrong,' she explained, 'we would quickly get over it and work together to make it better again. ... We understood that solidarity means not leaving anyone behind' (Redmond, 2019).

Had a more sympathetic and actually less politicised academic lens been applied to workers' theatre of the 20th century, a sense of its formal ingenuity and socially progressive elements, as well as any shortcomings, might have helped develop further legacies of this kind.

Theatrical conventions indigenous to agitprop, like or speech choruses, or the blurring of performer/audience space, as well as traditions of collective-writing, for example, might have been analysed for generating strength and solidarity within movements, as well as the sustainability of cultural work itself. Assessments of the work as simplistic could have been balanced by an appreciation of how it broke with conventions of the bourgeois theatre as a matter of course, to engage working class audiences and performers in all sorts of locations, in inventive and interactive performances (Bridgen Milner 2015, 329-331, Stourac &

McCreery 1986, 93, 98, 106; Itzin 1980, 302). In fact, that working-class practitioners of these movements routinely took participatory performances into communities usually excluded from mainstream political discourse, should give pause for thought, especially in contexts where the democratisation and accessibility of cultural practice are increasingly compromised by squeezed budgets and funding bodies regulated by neoliberal agendas (Brigden & Milner 340; Jancovitch 2015). In such an alternative reading, those who made hopeful theatre, or who wrote hopefully about it, might have been understood as addressing the specific contexts of risk and hardship in which the work was developed and/or performed, where hope makes the difference between succumbing to exploitative conditions, or fighting hard for the rights of working people (Hillman, 2018).

3. Hope, love and militancy: the collective culture of the MST

In our conference paper for *Collective Encounters*, Joyce asked how intrinsic qualities of art and culture progress political struggle today by provoking hope and other emotional responses from participants. She did this by introducing cultural practices of the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST) who she was working at the time, and where as she put it: ‘pedagogy is a key to the struggle, and culture is a key catalyst’ (Canaan & Hillman 2016). She was interested in the way the MST harness cultural forms, which ‘vibrate with people in ways that words alone can’t’. This section is based on her reflections.

The *MST* are an inspiration to workers’ movements the world over. They are thousands of rural working families who have fought for land reform and against social injustice in Brazil since 1984, winning millions of hectares of land and access to schools and healthcare through occupations and other direct action. 40 years of hardship and intensifying state violence in recent years culminate in increased murders, arrests, harassment, theft, and violent evictions of occupiers, as well as systematic attempts to legally debilitate the movement, under the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro (Lacerda, 2020). Despite this, in 2020 the *MST* remain mobilised and are the biggest producer of organic food in Brazil, running hundreds of cooperatives, agricultural industries and other organisations (World Development Movement website, 2014; Lacerda, 2020).

In our paper, Joyce quoted Caldart (2009) on how the *MST* use cultural forms to combat extraordinary pressures and contribute to the formation of ‘a new social subject that calls itself *Sem Terra*’ (*people without land*)’ (Caldart 2009). Joyce then introduced the term

mística, which according to Daniela Issa in her important article ‘Praxis of Empowerment: *Mística* and Mobilization in Brazil’s Landless Rural Workers’ Movement’ has ‘in conjunction with organisation, strategy and leadership [...] transformed an otherwise amorphous and alienated mass, through identity formation, from passive to active agents as an organized social movement’ (Issa 2007, 134).

While there is no direct English translation, Issa describes *mística* as ‘the representation through words, art, symbolism and music of the struggles and reality of [...] the landless movement’ (Issa 2014, 125). Issa notes certain formal conventions of *mística*, while speaking to the diverse and spontaneous approaches taken in their production: ‘*Místicas* follow generic recommendations such as providing participants with the lyrics of a song when music is presented, but they do not have to start with any particular set of practices (poem, singing, theater) or incorporate the use of any particular set of objects [...] every time they are practiced’ (128). A *mística* ‘can take anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours, except when it marks an important event or requires rehearsal (for mime, dance, or theatrical representation)’ (131).

These representations are produced for meetings, marches, and other events by MST committees or working groups, as part of the movement’s general organising procedures. Issa explains: ‘if a march is organized, for example, there are committees to attend to such concerns as the participants’ health, food, representation in the media, and *mística*’ (130). These committees are rotated to avoid the production of *místicas* occupying anyone’s sole focus, becoming competitive, or ‘the task of “specialists”’ (Ranulfo Peloso, *ibid*, 131). Joyce elaborated this point in the paper by introducing the term *obrigação*. Literally translated as ‘obligation’, in the context of the MST’s work it points to this democratised, routinised mode of cultural production, which it is considered as much a core part of organising as any other activity in the everyday art of collective action.

Crucially though, as well as describing *mística* as performances of a counterhegemonic narrative that are embedded in the organisational structure of the MST, Issa explains that the term also refers to ‘an abstract emotional element’, strengthened and created in collectivity, ‘which can be described as the feeling of empowerment, love, and solidarity’ (125, 130). Joyce picked up on this, because it is this element that is usually referred to when *mística* is described as a highly effective mobilising strategy. It is here, too, that we are afforded

glimpses of *how* cultural practice operates in the service of political struggle and organisation, in terms of its indigenous elements.

MST members describe *mística* as inspiring critical reflection but also courage, and a selflessness or collective consciousness that produce the possibility of change. This is associated with narrative construction, where witnessing ‘representations of our life and what the struggle means to us’ are described as providing nourishment and motivation (130). Beyond the telling of history though, the impact of *místicas* is also bound up in the emotional experience of constructing and participating in the performative event, and cultural forms such as music and song serve to intensify this (Bogo, 2002 149 in Issa 2007, 134). MST members interviewed by Issa explain that *místicas* actually derive from the emotional involvement of the MST with their struggle: ‘It comes from within, your hope of a dream...’, as well as producing emotional responses ranging from indignation, sadness and crying, to joking around, ‘smiling, singing [...] feeling happy’, and ‘[feeling] good about participating in the struggle’ (ibid, 129-130).

According to the MST these emotional responses, combined with the elements of *mística* that ‘teach you’ and ‘make you question’, serve to produce a militancy and collective consciousness that makes the MST’s struggle possible even in the most adverse conditions (ibid 130). One member describes ‘the militant’s *mística*’ as ‘the realization that I want land, food, and life for others, not just for me. Another defines *mística* as ‘love for the cause’ and explains it is ‘the source from which we feed and continue fighting’. She claims that ‘without *mística* we cannot be militant’, while another member claims categorically: ‘the militant does not live without *mística*’ (ibid).

Issa concludes that ‘without hope and the belief that the movement can effect significant change in Brazil, the struggle would be far more challenging’, and that it is by utilising ‘the extraordinary power of [...] art and symbolism’ that the MST has promoted ‘solidarity, self-sacrifice for the common good, and the family’ and reinforced ‘the class politics that the forces of neoliberalism have fractured’ (134). Joyce’s work with the MST, as well as her research via Issa and others, offers depth to our understanding of the power of culture in contemporary struggles in workers’ movements whose day-to-day activity has changed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people for the better (Issa 130, 134; World Development Movement website 2014). The MST employ cultural forms to such effect and in such

difficult circumstances that it blows out of the water the notion that cultural practice does not remain a fundamental tool for collective struggle and emancipation today.

Like early worker-led agitprop, the cultural work of the MST resists entirely or troubles straightforward categorisation of 'art', raising important questions about how culture is defined in dominant discourse. The work of the MST is one example of contemporary cultural practice created by working-class people who do not necessarily identify as artists, document or showcase their work, or conceive of it in any of the given terms currently ascribed to political or applied theatre, or activist-art. This suggests we should take a step back from offering quick definitions of what political art is or isn't, and assertions as to who makes it, especially when these exclude the kind of embedded practices I have been discussing. Taking account of such work, on the other hand, offers a broader lens that can begin to account for cultural activity generated at the grassroots, all over the world, on a daily basis, and which operates as the beating heart of social and political movements.

4. Reviving the cultural heart of the British labour movement

Joyce never made it to the *Liberating Arts Festival* due to ill health, but themes underpinning our research and work together were reflected in its design, as they were at *The Art of Trade Unions* day which we attended together the previous year. Sessions at the *Liberating Arts Festival* attended to factual but also experiential elements of political cultural practice, by producing them in experimental environments and also through direct action. Music and theatre performances, film screenings and workshops developed participants' practical and affective understanding of political art, while BP or Not BP's workshop led to a protest at Exeter's Royal Albert Memorial, against Big Oil sponsorship of cultural institutions.

Other sessions provided space for cultural workers and trade unionists to think through structural opportunities or challenges of connecting their work. This raised issues including for example voluntary work, precarity, and fair pay, and led organically to questions of how supportive infrastructures might operate to support radical working-class art, such as those I outlined in the section about the history of workers' theatre in the UK. Ideas put forward included creating databases and forums where politically minded cultural workers could find one another, share problems, contacts and material resources. An outward facing platform was also considered, where activists could go to find political artists and engage them on particular campaigns. A more ambitious idea was to work towards creating an Arts Council

to fund radical practice within England and Wales' Trade Union Congress, staffed by dedicated activists and cultural workers.

In this way the events reinvigorated discussions on political culture that had been left at a loose end for many years, while bringing into the fold younger artists, who offered crucial fresh approaches to cultural-political work, whether or not they were already formally connected into the labour movement, and whether or not they considered themselves 'artists' or 'activists'. New and productive relationships were developed that were intergenerational and which worked across trade and craft specialisms and different political backgrounds. Meanwhile, input from organisations including Equity, the recently founded Artists' Union England, Unite the Union's *Show Culture Some Love* campaign organisers, and organisers of the Tolpuddle Martyrs festival, for example, helped connect participants with the pulse of ongoing projects working in the same vein.

Discussion among the organising committee in the run up to the events also led to positive subsidiary projects. The GFTU announced the launch of Albion Educational Training at one of our meetings in 2014, which would offer public courses as an ethical alternative to commercial training for unions, companies and third sector organisations, while '[deepening trade union appreciation of how culture can strengthen struggle; encourage more cultural workers to strengthen progressive political culture; and develop a strategy to make political cultural work sustainable into the future]' (*Liberating Arts* meeting minutes, Quorn, 18th July, 2016). Banner Theatre, reelnews and Townsend Productions were invited to become co-partners, and plans were announced to employ a development officer to co-ordinate the *Liberating Arts Festival* the following year, who would also work to 'build up a network of political performists/artists/cultural workers for the future; [and] encourage trade unions to provide funds for the arts (ibid).

The decision was also taken during our meetings to plan the events, that they would be co-created with participating artists. Joyce and I spoke to as many artists as possible ahead of *The Art of Trade Unions* day, learning philosophical and practical aspects of their diverse approaches. We shared with interviewees the organisers' intentions for the events, and also asked the artists what they hoped to get out of them. We then fed those responses back into committee meetings to inform decision making. This extended the democratic ethos of our project and operated in alignment with the kind of co-creation adopted in the movements and

campaigns that we were studying. We hoped this approach would also increase the relevancy of the events for all involved, while enriching understanding as to how art functions politically. Our interview de-briefs to one another, as well as comments made by artists in the interviews themselves, suggested that this had happened.

During the last conversation I had with Joyce, just a few weeks before she died, she told me excitedly about a project she and a colleague were embarking on, which would explore dialogue as a methodological approach to producing knowledge. My dialogue with Joyce was cut short, but it was clear to both of us that the kind of everyday creative practices we were learning about in workers' movements past and present are key to effective political organisation, and for nurturing cultures of friendship, hope and solidarity that sustain activists in late-neoliberal capitalism.

The events we worked on together taught me a great deal, and not least that the left needs forums like the *Art of Trade Unions* and *Liberating Arts* to keep histories alive and develop new practice. We should remember that activity of this kind, no matter how small, leads to more activity, whether that manifests as a direct and intended outcome of the work, or an unintended consequence. It is no coincidence that cultural workers making bespoke practice for industrial and community campaigns in the 1970s resolved to create their own trade unions, or that the AET evolved through conversations between political cultural workers and trade union activists who were planning a few one off events at the start of the 21st century. The UK labour movement should take heed of its own history, as well as the work of international movements, to embrace the everyday art of collective and cultural creation and revive its militant heart.

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