

I chose to apply to the Lisa Ullman Travelling Scholarship to visit PAF (Performing Arts Forum) in St-Erme in northern France because it's unlike any place I've engaged with as an artist before. PAF is an autonomous space for professional practitioners and activists in the field of performing arts, visual art, literature, music, new media and internet, theory and cultural production, and scientists who seek to research and determine their own conditions of work. Initiated and run by artists, theoreticians and practitioners themselves, PAF is a user-created, user-innovative institution.

During my time there I researched the history of the building and surrounding area through archival material kept on-site to consider the ways in which a structures such as PAF might support queer ways of working in the arts and being in the world. I wanted to use time there to reflect upon access considerations, queer methodologies for practice and dissemination of practice, the potential for similar models in the UK, and to compare experiences of professional dance platforms across Europe and consider networks for future touring.

The experience of actually being at PAF was both nourishing intellectually and difficult to navigate in many ways. What my time there truly revealed to me was that the space itself is constantly in flux, changing from week to week or even day to day, due to people coming and going to use its facilities and contribute to its upkeep. It was bought in the mid 2000s by Jan Ritsema, a Dutch theatre and performance maker, known in dance for collaborating with Anna Teresa de Keersmaeker and teaching at P.A.R.T.S in Brussels. The aim was to create space for artists to live in and work together over varying time frames and the basis for the project was to create a "non-hierarchical" space. Since Jan's death the building has been collectively bought by artists to maintain its legacy. When I was on-site there were approximately 30 other artists some of which had been there for 6 weeks and others only there for a matter of days.

One of the guiding principals of the project is "to make things possible for others" but what I found was asymmetrical knowledge-holding. Because there's no staff, the space is completely reliant upon resident artists making newcomers welcome – which wasn't as straightforward as it might seem. Those who knew and those who didn't created a disequilibrium and those who knew weren't always generous with information. I felt that PAF is a project that relies upon so many unknown factors, which can ultimately make the place inaccessible unless you, or someone you are with, has previously been there. Perhaps this felt like a microcosm of the "art world".

The building is vast, a former convent and girls school, later a German war hospital in both world wars – the surrounding area was effectively the western front in WW1. There are commonwealth graves in the village of mostly teenage soldiers and the building also housed a religious cult in the 1980s. It was truly fascinating and unsettling to delve into the history of the building and the area and I found myself considering the ways in which these histories might shape the current conditions of the space and how we are all products of historical lineages of brutality and war born from imperialist ambitions; reflected in our current moment in the sufferings of many people, not least those subjected to genocide in Gaza.

From 2011-2021 PAF hosted the queer conference Elsewhere and Otherwise and every summer hosts a Summer University. From conversations with other residents I concluded that I'd be interested in returning to PAF if there is a greater structure holding residents together. Perhaps this is what I found most challenging about the space otherwise – that it becomes a collective place of residence and work but with the feeling that there lacks a common goal. It was a good backdrop to be considering access in, due in part to its problems in that area, and my conclusion is that it's a model that would be near-impossible in a UK context where property prices are so high.

It's a space that can only continue to exist because of the relative lack of value of the building and the wider regional challenges of rural exodus and poverty – no-one is interested in buying historic buildings in the area. However, I did hear of a UK project called the Bidston Observatory near Liverpool that follows a similar model and I'd be very curious to visit it in the future to compare it with PAF. In an increasingly unstable funding climate for the arts, it would be interesting to research how unfunded models can exist – not to use as data to justify or continue this downward trend – but instead to consider the ways in which artists themselves can reclaim spaces to make work on their terms.

Whilst I don't think my time at PAF was a totally "successful" experience in relation to my needs, its "in flux" nature is both its strength and weakness. If I'd come to the space on another week or month my time would have undoubtedly been completely different. In some ways because this is so stark at PAF, since it relies on residents for its upkeep, it serves as a reminder that all spaces that aim to support artists are similarly in flux and constantly changing in relation to the people who uphold the structure, whether there's staff present or not.

Despite some of the difficulties outlined above, I did find the time to reflect on my practice and its evolution over the last few years absolutely invaluable. This year has been very challenging for me and some time away from home to regroup and re-orientate my work towards the public engagements of the coming months (performances at South London Gallery and The Lowry and workshop at The Work Room) and was truly beneficial. This year I've also been working to facilitate artist Aby Watson's access support needs through projects at Tanzmesse (Dusseldorf), Festival Théâtre de Bretagne (Rennes) and HZT (Berlin) and I was able to continue to formulate my own strategies to this facilitation and to consider ways to support myself to support others.

Conversations with Nora-Swantje Almes have been instrumental in considering avenues for work outside of the UK which is increasingly important for me, born in the UK but of Polish heritage and raised between Scotland and France. Our discussions always expand my understandings of the working structures within dance and the arts more broadly in Europe. Her observations are particularly valuable in helping me orientate my practice in relation to other artists and makers working internationally. We spoke about the work of other artists such as Florentina Holzinger, comparing support for queer makers within and beyond the UK where the reactionary climate, particularly in relation to trans-inclusiveness, is increasingly concerning. She is generous in connecting me with others and in opening doors to new avenues to make work. For example, through her invitation I spent time at Bergen Kunsthall in Norway this summer on residency which was foundational to the solo work I'm developing this year.

In addition to this work, the fund kindly let me expand the project to include travel to Paris to spend time with choreographer and artist Myriam Lefkowitz, shadowing her teaching at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Decoratifs (ENSAD) in Paris. This was a truly enlightening experience and through this time offered many pathways through some of the questions that motivated my application to LUTSF. Two workshops were created for two groups of students respectively in their second and last years of their BAs about relationality in performance. To be able to observe Myriam's facilitation and the students' responses was incredible – some of the conversations that the groups had will stay with me for a long time. Many of the art students at the school have had very little education in performance or choreography and to witness their revelations around the possibilities of these practices was really unique. The students are fine art students and the ones that elect to join Myriam's sessions are interested in integrating choreographic and performance

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practices into their other disciplines such as sculpture and painting and to witness students navigating trans-disciplinary thinking was very special.

Overall, the funding by LUTSF enabled me to reflect upon the fragility but also resilience of myself and my work and the ways in which resilience is only possible because of my reliance upon others, our interconnectedness, and the work I undertake to support them in turn. This seems to me the most compelling definition of practice and one that extends far beyond the studio.