

Lisa Taylor (LT) It's been obviously a really rough six months for everyone. What impacts have you seen over the last six months and how have those evolved? I'll go first to Gillian.

Gillian Moore (GM) Well, the Covid19 pandemic has been devastating for the arts, for the cultural sector in general, both for the big institutions and some of the smaller ones, and also really crucially for artists, the majority of whom are freelance or performers for visual artists.

It's been absolutely devastating. We are in the business in the arts, especially in the performing arts, of bringing large numbers of people together and in congregation to have an experience jointly to watch very often large numbers of people performing to them. And that's the one thing we just can't do and we still can't do six months into this.

So, it's meant huge loss of income in the Southbank Centre's case, it's well documented. We've lost 25 million pounds in this year of our income. We've very sadly had to make numbers of staff, redundant people who just can't work for whom there is no work while the venues are closed to the public.

I'll talk later about glimmers of hope, but it's a devastating event for the arts and something that I don't think any of us could have predicted.

LT - That's very true. I think one of the questions I'd had for you, perhaps more than the other two as well, is did government's eventual slug of support make a difference?

GM - Well we, of course, welcome the government's recovery fund in recognition of the quite unique challenges felt by the arts and cultural sector. I mean, I think it's true that during this time and the government has recognized this that people have tongue to the arts.

I mean, that's the irony, people have turned to poetry, to reading, to music, and streaming music, watching films online. People need the arts more than ever, so it's really important that the arts are in a robust place to bring us out of recovery a bit like I would say after the Second World War with the settlement then, when the Arts Council was funded, when the Southbank was born, as it were with the Festival of Britain. We're really encouraged by some statements that have come out.

However, this you know the cultural intervention-- Southbank like many other organisations has applied for funds but that won't stop um the redundancies because we're already, when the time has come in, we're already in a stage where if this was on much longer, which it looks like it will, there isn't work for people to do and we can't keep people on indefinitely just as has happened very sadly also in the sectors such as hospitality, and travel, and tourism.

LT – Thanks, Gillian. Aida, when we met in June about [immediate economic recovery](#), you said perhaps we weren't considering everyone who was involved in the creative sector. What kind of workers should we be considering when we're looking at the impact over the six months and moving forward?

Aida Esposito (AE) - I think quite naturally we thought immediately of artists, of musicians, of theatre performers, actors. But as things got worse and as the situation went on, what we came to understand unfortunately quite viscerally was that actually there's an incredible ecology that sit behind what I call first-tier artists and practitioners, i.e. the ones that you might know about you see on a regular basis.

We're talking about costume designers. We're talking about stage setters. We're talking about sound engineers. We're talking about roadies who go on and support touring bands. We're talking about an incredible ecology of full-time, part-time, freelance skilled workers, incredibly skilled specialised workers being absolutely decimated by the last six months.

LT – Paul, you help guide two arts charities, I mean, and one of them to do specifically with space. But there's been an assumption that the smaller outfits are just immediately going to pack up and die, but from what I understand they have some survival strategies. What are you seeing and what are you involved with?

Paul Augarde (PA) - To take what Gillian said, it's been battle stations for the last six months. You know, dried-up revenues, commissions cancelled, regen projects and events cancelled, whilst overheads continue, especially those tied in with private landlords. Many of the creative practitioners can't access the central funding anyway. So, there's been real pressure on those in a sector that's financially fragile anyway; it's been decades of underfunding.

Like others, the organisations I've been working with have been giving notice on offices, losing staff. And Gillian is right, that public sector money has been welcome, though sometimes it's been slow and it won't stop everything. But I sat on Creative Land Trust Resilience Panel, which was distributing the Mayor's £1.5m to creative workspaces in London. And I have to say my massive takeaway from it was the immense commitment of the sector towards the creative practitioners and the work, including support for their own tenants.

Immediately, in March, it was rent holidays and rent windows, service charge waivers, and hardship funds that already existed within their set-ups were boosted and made more accessible. Business advice was put in place immediately for creative practitioners to pivot and look at different ways of marketing themselves and selling, or indeed reshaping their businesses.

I think there's something here which is a real lesson around protection of tenant base. I think the sector would probably say they didn't do it for business reasons, they did it for altruistic reasons and to strengthen the broader creativity, but actually it's been really good business.

From my experience – and there are many exceptions, I'm sure – private landlords haven't on the whole been very flexible at all; they have occasionally offered rent windows, but that rent generally needs to be repaid after the fact and they couldn't carry out evictions anyway, so that pressure is just kicked down the road and will be so extreme it will crack many tenants anyway. What they'll end up with, of course, is a lot of commercial space and no big market queue for people to come and take those spaces.

I think what the creative workspace sector has done really cleverly is support that occupier market, support that base. So, as and when we come out of this, they will still have a strong market and a strong set of tenants. Whereas, I suspect within certain parts of the private sector, that won't be the case and they won't have built that strength.

LT – Gillian, what caught your attention there?

GM - It's interesting that in many ways, the arts organisations that are the most vulnerable in this are the ones who have decreased their reliance on public subsidy and increased their reliance on earned income.

Currently, for an organisation like the Southbank, all we have this year is our Arts Council grant because all the earned income is not there. So, it was previously absolutely viewed as a good thing to decrease public subsidy to get in – as we have at the Southbank –cafés, and restaurants, and have commercial hires for conferences, and all of that to support the arts programme. And you know, that's what we've done and I've really reduced our reliance on public subsidy.

In a situation like this, we have of course had to be as kind as we possibly can to our commercial tenants, and we hope they'll come back, and revive, and stay healthy. But it's interesting that continental Europe, which has a much higher public subsidy model for the arts, you know, they're fine because they're not thinking, "Oh my goodness, is the burger bar going to go bust or be able to make their rent?" They're just thinking, "Actually yes, we're doing our great art and the government is supporting us because it's part of the contract that we have with society." I just think it's interesting that what we thought previously in another world was a virtue, is actually turned out to be a problem for many organisations.

LT - Thanks, Gillian. Aida, when we spoke, you talked about this. You had encouraged people, as a creative strategist to diversify, what's been happening with that?

AE– Absolutely. I mean, I spent half my career talking to arts organisations and artists about diversifying their risk-portfolio in so many ways and their profit-making portfolios. And that was everything from opening a bar in your premises if you were a theatre to offer pre- or post-theatre drinks through to leasing out your staff's expertise for the speaker circuit, and educational purposes, etc.

Ironically, as Gillian's rightly said, a lot of these mechanisms ~~why~~ whereby organisations were able to make additional funding commitments and increase their finances considerably in some instances actually, were all closed all at the same time. So, there wasn't even a step change in opportunity, I guess, and that has been devastating for many organisations.

Having said that, some organisations – and accepting that a lot of the organisations I'm referring to here are smaller organisations– so, a little bit more fleet of foot, possibly able to pivot a little bit more quickly than a larger organisation like the Southbank, although not exclusively the case, as evidenced by somewhere like Ally Pally – some operators have been using their buildings for alternative purposes from supporting food charities in getting food distribution vehicles out, through to hiring out or loaning out their kitchens from the cafés and bars that are closed so people can make food for those same purposes, hosting necessary stockpiling of charity goods, of things like that.

So, I think in some instances, organisations have been able to pivot slightly and use their venues in different ways to help respond to the crisis and some businesses have been better than others at being able to respond, so, I think last time we

spoke about someone like Fashion [?] in Haringey who pivoted their fashion manufacturing factories to make the PPE kit, a very, very much needed in the first couple of months of the pandemic. So, were able to use their skills, expertise, and machinery for another purpose that was helping a wider societal need.

So, I think there are some great examples like that that we are seeing. Certainly, as we continue down this track, we all know how exorbitantly expensive it is to open venues like theatres if they're not operating, if they're not able to operate at full capacity. Lots of people have gone on record, and the media speaking about the cost of that being so prohibitive that actually organisations need to stay closed.

But I think, within that, there are some opportunities and the onus is on all of us to think about how we can help bring those venues back to life because the reality is, we as society need those venues, we rely on them as places we go to as living rooms in our city to enjoy. So, I think there's a real imperative for us both within the sector, within government, and beyond to think laterally and innovatively about how we can help those venues open up. Maybe not for their full intended purpose, but so that they are part of society and we can use them again in some capacity.

LT – Paul, you do a lot of work with councils, as does Aida, trying to make the case for an economic connection between culture and place, and the vibrancy of an area. What are you seeing, and can we make that case?

PA - It's a case that we should be making loudly and very, very proudly. I think last year, we topped £100bn that the creative industries gave to the UK economy, with £50bn in London; fashion alone was £28bn. The scale of the creative Industries' input to the economy is extraordinary.

I've been working in East London with fashion, and the fashion industry in East London alone is worth £1.4bn, which equates to the UK fishing industry. Think of how they push their line, and we're hesitant to. I think partially, it's because we see creative Industries understandably as being about identity. It's not about bottom line, it's about who we are, and where we are, and what our places are. Part of it I think is getting better at selling that, getting and making that economic case.

The other point, though, is making the case more strongly about the power of cultural identity. I was listening to an interview with Deborah Mattinson, who wrote *Beyond the Red Wall: Why Labour Lost* those 'red wall' seats in the Midlands and the north to the Tories.

There was lots of overlaid reasoning and Brexit, etc. but there was a key bit that stood out to me about local identity bound up with cultural identity which was often linked to creative industry. When you think of Stoke and potteries, or Nottingham and lace, and Wakefield and textiles— the man in the street is citing those as a really important part of their understanding of themselves and the place they live in, hence, a huge sense of loss that's come about because of those industries moving on.

And that's powerful not just in terms of losing voters, and that's happened, but also in a sense of a community's aspiration and front-footedness. And that kind of power needs to be put alongside economic power to say, "Yes, it's nice. Yes, these are our living rooms. Yes, this is how we relax," but it's also a huge economic driver and huge cultural identity driver. And those two columns, I think. are those that hold up society.

Also, there's a really interesting bit around: do people expect their theatre for free now? their theatre, and their music, and their podcasts, and you know. And there was stuff that was sent through to me in lockdown where I had to pay £1.50 and I didn't do it, you know, "I'll do the free thing." So there's a bit of a challenge there and there needs to be a push back. The music industry managed it but now the theatre industry may need to do similarly.

LT - Aida, what did you want to add?

AE - I just wanted to add that what we've seen through this pandemic in particular I think is the better the places we live, the better and healthier we are as society. We've seen the evidence and we've also seen the gaps actually with people who have outdoor space people, who don't have outdoor space, people's proximity to their local park. We talk about the [15-minute city](#) now, you know, how accessible are our immediately needed amenities to us?

I think the economic imperative there for councils, public sector and private sector developers, quite frankly, is to take on board some of the learning-- that we should learn from the pandemic and we should learn from what the needs have been for families, for individuals, and for collectives, how important the public spaces are, how important the private spaces are, and how important the access to amenities are.

Actually, there is an economic argument there because if your communities are healthy and happy, they're going to be more productive, they're going to be more agile, they're going to collaborate more, they're going to make more money.

LT - Gillian, in our prep call, you'd connected health and well-being and the arts, and you'd also talked about sharing out the arts. What's the relationship between the arts and 'services' and how should we build on that?

GM - One thing I feel strongly about and I've always believed is that we do need to rather lose our obsession with the idea of art for art's sake in the in the arts industry. Of course, there's a real magic and a real truth in what an artist can imagine and think and tell us about the world.

But I think this decoupling of what-- this sort of abstraction of what the arts are about in comparison with what they can actually do for us, in a way, we sort of go down that road at our peril and it's a relatively recent idea, so you know, we do know now, we've got lots of scientific evidence that singing is good for people's physical and mental health. We have lots of evidence that the fact that playing an instrument does the same. There has been an amazing recent study which has shown that older people who are taking part in a dance programme have an absolutely enormously decreased rate of falls which then cost the NHS a great deal of money, so the cost of the dance programmes are covered many times over by this.

And I also think that coming out of this period, arts organisations and artists should think even more about what could be a different context for us. Of course, I want everybody to play at the Southbank and they always will. But during this time, we've been reaching out to people and there's been a lot of talk about digital art online.

One of the most important things I think my colleagues have been doing at the Southbank is a project called Art by Post which is reaching some of the 20% of people in this country who do not have digital access, who don't own a computer, or who can't get online, and getting them to work with artists to write poems and to create paintings, and drawings, and visual arts. And then we're bringing it back onto the site and some of these are beginning to appear in an outdoor exhibition at the moment.

So, the idea of getting out there and also, I think something that's very exciting is that arts organisations basing themselves in different places, so perhaps you know a theatre company in a hospital, there are examples of that.

It's just been announced that our one of our wonderful resident orchestras, The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment will be taking up-- will be making its home in Acland Burghley School, a comprehensive school in North London and they'll just be there. The kids will be rubbing shoulders with musicians when they queue up for their dinner, they'll be hearing rehearsals, they'll be having lessons, they'll be coming to the Southbank to rehearsals and concerts.

So, that kind of getting the arts back into the fabric of life is something that I think is urgently needed and there's lots of examples of ingenuity in that. But I think it can this period, this extraordinary period can really help us accelerate that and invest in that idea.

LT – That's really an exciting way to look at it; thinking about culture, and place, and how they relate is really key. Paul, you come from placemaking and culture – do you see potential for this relationship changing?

PA – Yeah. I think Gillian and Aida are spot on. It's about where we are more now, so we're spending more time in our suburbs, and in our estates, in our outer London places, so we're there more, but to Gillian's point, absolutely: this is an opportunity not to lose the institutions, but to ensure that cultural activity and creativity happens everywhere.

As an anecdote, I had a fight a few years ago with Southbank over a sculpture that discovered in 2016 by Peter Laszlo Peri, 'the Sunbathers', made for the 1951 Festival of Britain. At the time I worked in Poplar in East London, the district centre of which was the living architecture exhibition for the Festival of Britain, so essentially the post-war Utopian vision of how we were going to live with each other.

We were talking to Historic England about the potential of displaying the Sunbathers permanently in the middle of this district centre, in one of the poorest areas in London. After some wrangling, the piece ended up at the Royal Festival Hall. And the reasoning was understandable; hundreds of thousands of people go to the Royal Festival Hall each year including school trips, all the rest of it.

But my argument was about where one encounters culture. People *expect* to see culture at the Royal Festival Hall, it's suffused with it. Therefore I question the amount of impact that has, whereas a piece of culture put in the middle of a district centre with a very localised market, with a 50% Bangladeshi population, with a high level of child poverty-- that kind of place and that kind of impact is huge; it may reach fewer people, but people who otherwise wouldn't have this experience.

I think if we could take that thinking-- take what Gillian said about the creative industries being more fluid and more willing to move, take Aida's point about where we're spending time now, there's a huge opportunity to democratise culture. And I don't just mean outreach, I mean, as Gillian says, doing it properly on people's doorsteps in people's neighbourhoods.

LT - Aida, you told me a story about an art walk in Haringey that ties to this, not just about where is art, but who makes it. Can you tell us about that?

AE - It's interesting, Paul talks about democratising art; I think art always has been democratic. I think society and humanity have shown throughout time that we have an innate desire to create and we see that in wall paintings, we see that in hieroglyphics, we've seen that through every culture on this planet, so I think there is already a democratisation. I think there's probably an unravelling about how that is equally shared, how we access it, who has permission and who doesn't.

But the story Lisa is referring to is a really lovely one. We had some residents in South Tottenham on a street called Roslyn Road, quite a lovely little road in Tottenham, who decided amongst themselves as neighbours that they wanted to share with one another what they've been doing during lockdown: some were knitting, some were sewing, some were crocheting, some were painting. And we're talking about children, old people, young adults, married couples, every [permutation] of society you can possibly imagine.

And between neighbours, they set a date and agreed to share their artwork on their front windows, so that in a socially distanced way, neighbours could walk up and down the road, and just see what other people are creating.

This came to our attention at the council. Some of the larger institutions are thinking about collecting items from this period and how people have responded, and we were trying to work out a way to create an exhibition or a collection. That for me, is that question of democracy. I just stopped and I thought, "Well, who are we? How important are we in this process? Community's gone ahead and done exactly what it's wanted to do."

So, we sat down with the people from the road's residents association, local community groups, and that included people who were doing first aid and food charity work in the area and agreed that it would be nice to invite the surrounding streets to be part of this initiative, and so it grew. And in six weeks, we had I think 50 or 60 different windows on different roads within South Tottenham sharing and showcasing artwork.

What we were able to contribute as a council were additional art kits and we paid for art workshop classes. So, for community members who perhaps didn't have access to the resources to make something to show and share or didn't have windows on lower ground that could be seen, perhaps they were living in a high-rise estate, we gave them opportunities to facilitate showcasing their work.

And it happened on the August bank holiday weekend it was a huge success. More than anything else, we got lots of beautiful images on social media, but the request of whether it could be bigger, and whether it could be annual, and whether other areas, other neighbourhoods could participate. Which again goes to the point that actually the democratisation of art is already there, it's our role as sector specialists, to enable that to occur more readily and to provide either the resource, the expertise, or sometimes just the materials and the time to allow those activities to happen naturally and organically.

LT - Thanks, Aida. I want to take it back up the scale, this idea of supporting and democratising art is great and having it be local and citizen-driven is fabulous. But there's something to having a big anchor institution or cluster like the Southbank Centre that adds a lot of sort of agglomeration value. I'm wondering Gillian, what Southbank Centre is thinking about how the nature of the institution and the place might evolve?

GM - Well, if you take Southbank Centre itself, which is the three concert halls, Festival Hall and Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, the Hayward Gallery, and all the outdoor spaces, it is a kind of embodiment of that sense of place. And if you then add the other institutions along the Southbank – the National Theatre, the Film Institute, and then going right along that way to the Tate, and arguably to the London Eye in the other direction – you know, you have an absolutely extraordinary cultural district and an amazing place.

A key thing about the Southbank, I guess since the 1980s, was when Ken Livingstone and the Greater London Council opened up the foyers during the day to be free from 10 AM til 11 o'clock at night – and the very [architecture itself](#), going back to the 1951 Festival of Britain, in itself was democratic.

The Festival Hall, in comparison with the great concert halls of Europe and America like [Carnegie Hall](#) or the [Concertgebouw](#), they've got a grand façade and there's just enough room in the public spaces inside if you want to buy a ticket and maybe buy a glass of wine, but that's it.

In the Festival Hall, consider the actual proportions of the architecture: two-thirds public space inside to one-third concert hall space; transparent, you can see in, glass walls, you can see what's going on inside this huge ballroom; and outside, these enormous public spaces where people do just wander past and gather.

And to your point, Aida and Paul, about coming across art in unexpected places, we've always tried to do that on the site itself. So, the idea that you might just come across [Bryn Terfel](#) singing outside with a thousand people, or Billy Bragg or a young band, or a dance programme happening on the ballroom, and it's all free. Something like 40% of what we do at the moment is free.

That's really been a guiding factor in what we're doing, and we're doing it even now during this lockdown because there's an outdoor exhibition called Everyday Heroes about frontline workers, which people can just come along and experience for free.

But of course, you've got to get there in the first place, you've got to know about it. People do happen across the Southbank because they just happen to be wandering along the riverfront with their families or whatever. But we can never take for granted—we do know that even people who live half a mile away or a mile away, kids who live on local estates, they've not seen the River Thames. So, we have to make lots and lots of extra effort to be in different places.

And that's something I don't think Southbank's necessarily done enough of, I'd like to see happening more of that in the future. This idea I was talking about, you know an orchestra in a school, or an art centre on an estate, I think that is a really powerful idea for the future.

And one thing that we do a lot of is working with arts organisations are around the capital and around the country through our national programmes. So, our Hayward Gallery, for example, has a touring programme which works on the ground locally with small galleries, sometimes you have tiny galleries that are the size of my living room. It's really important that we do that in London as well; that we kind of spread the jewels around.

Nonetheless, this what you call 'agglomeration' is really important. The idea that world-class culture of all kinds is happening every day in these big venues is a really exciting thought. Our duty is to bring it out, and to show people, and make it as accessible as possible, and also to benefit— You know, just thinking of classical music for example, I think that London is the music capital of the world, many people say that. I definitely don't think, for example that all young people growing up in London know that or benefit from it, I think very far from it.

So one thing that I will be, and am, campaigning for is that the big cultural institutions work together— we're very good at being in competition with each other to bring the best thing, the most glamorous act, the most phenomenal orchestras to our venues. But are we really working together to make sure that, for example, the young people of London benefit from that? or for example, if you are disenfranchised in London, are you benefiting from that? And also are we showing all the voices that we need to in a diverse city such as London?

LT - Thanks, Gillian. That ties in a way to some work that Aida's been doing. Everyone's a bit hamstrung to a degree in that you have government funding, Aida works with councils, as does Paul, you all work with private sector, so you may be a bit curtailed. But Aida, you've got the '[Vitrine](#)' commission going up in Nine Elms that's making a statement, not just to disenfranchised people but *from* people who've been disenfranchised. can you talk about that?

AE - For the last two years we have been running the Covent Garden Market **Vitrine** Art Commission targeting local emerging talent: artists who on their way up, who have something very interesting to say across 2D art forms.

We use the facade of the Covent Garden Market flower market, so that's a 100sqm space, one of the largest canvases in London at last count and right on Nine Elms Lane facing the Thames. It's a huge platform by anyone's definition and we purposefully, through this commission, looked to invite talent that needs that next step up, needs that visual identity, maybe needs a space they haven't had before, they may not have shown in the gallery before.

What we try to do is for that work to speak of the times and we had an extraordinary response this year. We launched this year's commission right on the cusp of lockdown, and we were incredibly worried that people wouldn't respond at all and that artists in particular were so worried about how their next bill was going to be paid, where their next meal was coming from that they wouldn't have time to even contemplate a commission.

We determined to go ahead and that was very much of the credit of St Modwen, who put forth quite a bit of additional funding to help us champion and open up the competition further, to ensure that all finalists would be paid a fee to develop their work further before a final selection panel was brought together to choose a work.

The work is also a paid commission, so what it offered an opportunity for artists to earn money during a period where most galleries were shut down and most work was being pulled. [You can see Eyal Granit's 2019 winning artwork [here](#)]

I'm super excited about this work because I feel that it truly does fulfil the ambition to showcase and share and celebrate great contemporary work that has real message behind it. And together with Art Night, our partners as in this commission

series, we can't wait for you all to come past and see it. It will be up for a year so there's plenty of time. And I would challenge anyone to not be overwhelmed and enthralled by what they see.

LT – Is there a chance that we could just be online for culture; that we just don't need physical spaces quite so much? Paul, you're laughing, I'm going to come to you.

PA – So it will all just be online from now on, everyone sitting in tiny little boxes? This is lovely, but, no, I don't think that's a likelihood. Having said that, I think there is a rediscovery or a discovery of online as a public space.

If I'm allowed to give a little plug to UP Projects where I'm a trustee, they've been running a project for three or four years now called [This is Public Space](#) about online content, which is very powerful. So, instead of just taking content and putting it online, really understanding online as a public space that people can interact with, and walk through, and enjoy.

What happens in 20 years' time? Do we have online streaming of theatre as a mainstream option, next to the 'going to the theatre' bit, and is that okay? I mean, for ages, we've had National Theatre Live which does very well. People going to their local cinemas and watching theatre which has opened it up to loads of people. I remember going to something, a couple of years ago, and as I walked out there was a little old guy who must have been 85 who was walking with a stick. And he said, "I've watched theatre all my life and now I can't make it up to town, I can't get there. But this is five minutes away from home and so I can do it all again," and he loved it.

Maybe the pandemic has got us over a hump which is allowing us to see online as public space, a bit like getting us over the hump of home working. It's sort of just broken that, and maybe there is a there is a possibility that we can explore creatively; that's really exciting.

LT - In the prep chat Gillian and I spoke about the power of audience; you had a quite particular response to something very different from Covid...

GM - Just last week, I sought out a short video I'd done for the Southbank. It was at the start of the year, before we'd heard the words Covid-19. And the video has me sitting in an empty Royal Festival Hall all on my own. There's a drone shot of all 3,000 seats and I'm talking about the power of the live experience of sitting in a big auditorium with 3,000 other people and the fact that it's all about this congregation, this joint experience, even if you're focusing on one solo pianist on the big stage of the Festival Hall and that people are almost-- 3,000 people I say are almost breathing together.

And I've watched it and I shuddered at that thought, I mean it's exactly the opposite of what we are allowed to do or able to do now! How the world has changed in so short of time. But of course, I can't wait to get back to that.

In the meantime, though, the next best thing is that we are bringing musicians together this autumn so the walls of the Royal Festival Hall will be resonating to music being performed there. We're going to do 31 orchestral concerts which will all be online: some talks, some gigs, hopefully some comedy, all going out into the online space.

And what that's about is keeping a connection with those people who will hopefully come back and breathe together with other people when it's safe to do so. But also, we're keeping those musicians, those artists, those writers working and doing what they do, and that's really vital, because we do not want our musicians going off and being delivery drivers or house painters because then we could very quickly lose this extraordinary artistic culture that we do have in this country.

LT - I want to stick to this topic; the idea that you work across digital and live, and local and large scale. Do you think the relationship between online / offline is going to change in the next, say five years, will we see less live culture?

AE - In some ways, I think it's too early to tell. I just want to go back to a question you asked Gillian about the impact she saw immediately and through this process, and 'devastation' was rightly the word that she used, and that I think would be at the top of everyone's list in terms of the creative industries.

But what we also saw were sparks of ingenuity, incredible selflessness, especially on the digital platform which has often been berated as a very negative echo chamber in many ways. So, I think we have to give credit to the digital world to a certain degree and everyone's turning to digital in a moment of need and anxiety, and I think digital did a lot of good.

Arts organisations of all shapes and sizes were able to go online, share work, show work, make work for other people. I heard a collective of artists from the Fontaine community in South Tottenham made a Spotify soundtrack to raise money for the [Bernie Grant Arts Centre](#) visual arts theatre-based organisation in Tottenham, because they're really struggling.

And that was completely selfless, that was a gesture that was unexpected, and has just gone live with a very selfless desire behind it to be of help to the local community, and I think digital has really helped speed that process along for people. The immediacy with which we can reach people with digital is really important.

Having said that, I totally subscribe to Gillian's point about congregation. The arts are able to bring people together where there is no need for shared language. There is not even a need for a shared understanding of what you're seeing, witnessing, listening to. It is an incredible power, it's why I work in the arts, the ability to reach people that you might not otherwise reach, the ability to share an experience. And that desire for congregation I think by society will remain, irrespective of the advances of digital over this coming period.

I think arts organisations will become much more savvy about how they use digital to augment what they're trying to do, what they're trying to say, and how they show work. And hopefully in an ideal world we will have a digital world which is complementary, another public sphere, another public space to use and engage with, alongside physical manifestations.

LT - You're all aware of London's Borough of Culture programme. Waltham Forest did a brilliant job with the kick-off and I'm aware that towards the end, they re-channelled some remaining funds towards Covid community support. Just a short comment on the value of something like a Borough of Culture. Is it meaningful? What do you think it can do?

PA - I think the value broadly of the Borough of Culture is that out of nowhere it created 32 'Boroughs of Culture' that thought culture might be important. Suddenly these ideas were formulated and conversations were had. So even for those of us who were working in boroughs that didn't get the award, culture stuck its head up above the parapet, and we could grab onto it, and start working with it.

So, to that extent, I think it has been very useful. In the Lower Lea, we based it on fashion, on the basis that fashion belonged there, many of the local community worked in it, there was a latent skill base especially from the first-generation immigrant population, and going back to the cultural identity question, there was cultural identity in the place. Bringing in an institution like the London College of Fashion gave it scale and linked it into City Hall and wider policy but it also made sense to people on the ground; it worked for the practitioners working from their front rooms and from small studios and plugged into an identity that made it all feel cohesive. I think that's the trick, it's about balancing those two things.

LT - Aida, what one thing do you look forward to now?

AE - I don't want us to forget that households and the way they are structured in some instances just are not suitable to having multiple people of different generations all living in the same place trying to work, not having outdoor space, not having access to green space, not having a lively public realm, not having the amenities you need close to hand, because the second something goes wrong, that's when you notice those things missing and then as soon as it's fixed, you forget about it.

I just don't want us to forget, and I want us to employ our creativity and our imagination as we have done over the six months to deal with the problems we have by reaching out to neighbours, by reaching out to councils and government, and by reaching out to one another and including our cultural institutions, to find those solutions we need, but for those solutions to not be temporary. I think we need to think—we've seen the systemic breakdown of a lot of our arts sector largely because the financial ecology in which they sit is really uncomfortable and has been for a really long time.

LT – Paul, what one thing would you want to see coming out of this?

PA - Many of us have become more creative during lockdown. I dusted off my accordion for the first time in 10 years much to my family's dismay, but other people have been painting, and writing, and reading, and watching films, etc, so there's that sort of literal creativity, but next to that, I think we've been behaving more creatively in how we have managed our work life and our home life.

What I want us to do is hang on to both that literal creativity, to the activity, in that way but also the way of thinking. And what I'd love to happen is that we take those forward, both as individuals and communities, and make sure that that makes us more open to protect the extraordinary cultural treasury that we have in this country.

LT - Gillian, what are you looking forward to most?

GM - It would be easy to say I'm looking forward to welcoming people back to the Southbank, and welcoming artists and people so that they can bump into each other, interact with each other, and people can have great experiences of art. What I won't be saying, as has been said by both Paul and Aida, is that I want to get "back to normal", because I totally agree, we have to have learned from this and we have to really talk to people about what they want from the big cultural institutions, and also really find a way that we can ensure that everybody in a city like London benefits from the fact that it is this great cultural meeting place.

LT - That's perfect. Thanks to all three of you, great to have your time today, and it was a wide-ranging discussion but I think we covered a lot of useful points and there's a little bit of optimism for how we move ahead in terms of meeting challenges with innovation and creativity.