



FEATURE

What We Learned from Spaced Out

26 Apr 2018

by [ArtRabbit](#)

We've organised our takeaways from the 2018 Spaced Out Conference and compiled the highlights below so that everyone, including you, can also join in on these important discussions.

Tom, ArtRabbit's founder and director, was invited to speak on the panel at Spaced Out, a one day conference organised by [DACS](#) and [Artquest](#) that discussed changing artists' spaces and our fluctuating relations to it. While Tom was on stage speaking on our behalf about the role and future of virtual spaces, we soaked up all the thought-provoking knowledge and interesting debates from throughout the day.

The conference was split into four parts: the Studio Space, the Domestic Space, the Business Space, and the Virtual Space. You can watch the proceedings [online here](#), or read on for a condensed version of the day. We've organised our takeaways and compiled the highlights of the conference below so that everyone, including you, can also join in on these important discussions.

On Studio Space:

Chaired by Russell Martin, director of Artquest, this segment featured a keynote by Eyal Weizman, the director of Forensic Architecture, who walked audiences through the immensely significant and timely work undertaken by his organisation. Revelations include covert military campaigns that ended in civilian deaths, drone strikes that were denied, and government cover-ups of Neonazi murders. Some soundbites to consider:

- There is a profound relationship between exercising control over your space and your place in the world.
- Evidence production (that which Research Architecture engages in) is necessary in a world of post-truths and fake news.
- Destruction of fact is a part of violence itself, just as places of violence are inherently places of exclusion.
- If the artist becomes the land developer, does the artist not feed into the hegemony of capital, thus removing themselves from art par excellence?
- Why is it that certain physical postcodes of studios have cultural capital so that if your artist studio is somewhere undesirable, gallerists won't come visit?



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#SpacedOut Conference part 1 on Studio Space with
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On Domestic Space:

This space featured a keynote by artist and plumber Sovay Berriman, who gave an inspiring account of her move from a struggling artist living below the headline to taking up a new trade at the age of 43 so to first and foremost get paid, and continue her practice without compromising her agency of space. Interesting points that came up:

- So many artists live like students well into their 30's and 40's, with multiple roommates and constant precarity.
- The gig economy that has been on the rise is something that artists have experienced for decades. Picking up a new trade might help your own domestic space, but wouldn't it only contribute to the underlying systemic problems of a neoliberal society?
- Artists are often obsessed with "performing" the art world, "performing" a successful industry.
- "Space does not exist; it is just a metaphor for the structure of our existence." -Louise Bourgeois

- What of the issue of homelessness? We are seeing the biggest rise in homelessness in recent years, not due to immigration but due to older generations having their homes foreclosed on.
- What are the outcomes and significances of a crossover between the domestic and the commercial?



On Business Space:

We went into Business Space not expecting anything too exciting because, let's face it, the term "business" presupposes the soulless end goal of profit. By the end of the panel, however, everyone was on the edge of their seat and sweating from the heat and tension of the exchanges made. This was not least due to keynote speaker Farzana Khan of Platform London and Voices That Shake. Her impassioned speech about the subjugation of brown and black bodies, the violence done to marginalised peoples, and the sovereignty of whiteness in public and art spaces which underpins the business models that abound might've been uncomfortable but was necessary to hear for the largely white audiences and panel members. It set the precedence of the panel discussion, reinforcing the idea that business models need to be inclusive and actively undo the damage that these power structures have caused, both historically and currently. Other points of distinction include:

- Our art should reflect a truth or authenticity, but this is not being upheld by the way that our society is being engineered.
- Artists should ask themselves: What is your art hinged on? Is it valuable because it allows you to accumulate things, or because it expands the notion of the human condition?
- If we really want to commit to building a London and a world that is sustainable, it has to make room for those of us that are unseen in it to be as authentic as possible, and right now, these bodies are tokenised, marginalised, criminalised.
- Change is not the same thing as gentrification. Gentrification, by definition, happens at the expense of others' vulnerability, and is a well-documented process of social cleansing.
- Popular leftist rhetoric will always bring up the problematics of economic infrastructure, but what of the spiritual or the authentic? How can we reconcile these seemingly disparate but causally intertwined phenomena?



On Virtual Space:

The last segment was on Virtual Space, and our very own Tom Elsner took part in the panel, chaired by Mark Waugh of DACS with a keynote by Ruth Catlow, co-founder of Furtherfield. In discussing virtual spaces, Ruth spoke of the role of making the invisible visible, of the problematic conflation of "free service" with "freedom", and the potential use of blockchain technologies in the arts to manage the shifting network ecologies. Other interesting highlights from the panel include:

- Over 50% of people think that the internet has bettered their life, but only 12% think that it's bettered society.
- The internet owes much of its existence to pornography, to the constancy of libidinal forces in the universe.
- We're trained as individuals, and the internet is so connective, but it also grossly individuates. What then is the fate of subjectivity when we encounter this clash of ideologies?
- What about the attack on public spaces, and the parallel attacks on virtual public spaces? What can artists and other creatives do to address this issue?
- How do we address the rampant monopolisation of virtual spaces by Big Data and internet empires? In the wake of Cambridge Analytica, what are the responsibilities of those of the cultural sector working in virtual spaces?



While the debates were vivid and issues discussed were widespread, the expansive nature of the topic at hand meant that we were left with little time to discuss in depth certain topics that we at ArtRabbit are particularly interested in and that drive our work. These topics included the need of politics before innovation, the need for a multitude of voices, and the issue of filter bubbles, especially in light of the previous discussion about post-truth and business monopolisation, and the tendency of virtuality to produce these spaces of dead air.

Further on filter bubbles, philosopher Hannah Arendt explains how reality can be defined through shared experiences that are accessible to multiple observers. Arendt further describes: “the end of the common world is come when it is seen under only one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective.” Dominant algorithms and centralised server networks, like the Google Empire, in spite of its utopian veneer, enforces this mono-perspective. We would like to see more practitioners in the virtual space addressing these issues by building networks and platforms that do not apply tactics of control, constant growth, and reciprocation, but instead develop sustainable business strategies that go beyond the advertising-based revenue model.

The conference ended with a film screening of *Surviving the State*, a film produced by [Voices that Shake](#) exploring the relationship between youth violence and gentrification. Have a look for yourself:



We left the conference so full of food for thought, and with the happy kind of frustration that fired us up. The questions outnumber the answers at this point, but good questions are always a promising place to start.

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