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**TOOLS TO CREATE  
AGENCIES AT PORTLAND  
WORKS: THE CRAFT OF  
COMMUNING**

**JULIA UDALL**



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

# Tools to Create Agencies at Portland Works: The Craft of Commoning

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# Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the tools required to produce Agencies of Commoning in a community of makers whose future was under threat from speculative redevelopment.

The focus of this study, the Grade II\* listed Portland Works is home to artists, musicians, metal workers, carpenters and hackers. In response to the threat of closure and the landlord's intention to turn it into flats, over 500 people, including myself, came together to purchase the Works in order to continue it as a place of making. Implementing an Asset Lock that prevents it being demutualised and sold for profit, tenants, shareholders and volunteers run it for the benefit of the community, developing cultural, educational and manufacturing business activities. Drawing on the context of craftsmanship at Portland Works, I consider how the tools we developed enabled us to achieve and understand the social, political, democratic, economic and pedagogical agencies required to gather and form a community, produce and sustain a set of non-commodified resources and engage in the 'Commoning' processes of learning and democracy.

'Tools' frequently occur in research into Commons and participatory spatial practices, however in both activist and academic contexts there is little examination of what a tool is beyond that it is linked to action. In addressing the questions of what tools are, how they produce agencies, and the kinds of agencies that are required for Commoning, I make an original contribution to knowledge. Through actively participating in the co-design and co-production of a number of tools at Portland Works, including collaborative mapping, I explore design as distributed agency, bringing together the human and non human in the production of change. I argue that through the production of and reflection upon 'tools' a collective and nuanced understanding of the agencies required for commoning in this context can be produced.

In suggesting in this thesis that Portland Works is an Urban Commons I am arguably making a bold claim. Not everyone involved in its production would necessarily recognise the term, or see it as such. Some would not show interest in this as an idea, and perhaps others would disagree with it, at least as being a driver of the project. Those involved come from a range of political standpoints, social values, and concerns. But this is why I think it is of interest and worthy of academic investigation. Commons are not out-of-reach utopias, planned carefully beforehand by a homogenous group of people who understand in theoretical terms exactly what it is they should do, which tools to make and use, and which investigations they need to undertake in order to stake out their claims. Instead, they are something that is made through doing with others, sometimes falteringly, and always experimentally. The situation of being actively involved enables me to develop knowledge in this case.

Through my involvement from the first days of the Change of Use planning application that would have seen many businesses close, through to Portland Works purchase, repair and development, the aim of my participatory research has been to take part in, support, challenge, critique, extend and at times, valorise our actions. Ten of those involved in saving Portland Works also took part in a collaborative mapping process that forms a key part of this research. In using this meta-tool we collectively recorded over 170 tools for Commoning. Their breadth and diversity tell of the massive mutual undertaking of those engaging in a diverse and creative socio-pedagogical process, leading to the transformation of a small part of the city, and those who have taken part in its remaking. The telling of the story enables a critical exploration of the tools required for communities to come together to safeguard their assets in ways that are equitable, just, sustainable and in solidarity with those holding similar concerns.

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## Chapter 1

# The craft of Commoning at Portland Works

My thesis is an activist one, enabling the collaborative design and exploration of a number of tools required to create Agencies of Commoning at Portland Works. Portland Works is a Grade II\* listed cutlery factory that is home to a range of makers- including artists, musicians, metal workers, carpenters and hackers. In response to the threat of closure and the landlord's intention to turn it into flats, over 500 people, of whom I was one, came together through a Community Share Issue to purchase the Works and continue it as a place of making. Tenants, shareholders and volunteers run it for the benefit of the community, developing cultural, educational and manufacturing business activities and implementing an Asset Lock that prevents it being demutualised and sold for profit. In doing so we opposed the forces of gentrification, and proposed an alternative future, that grew from the claims of a multiplicity of voices.



Fig. 1.1 Shareholders gather outside of Portland Works on day of purchase. Photo: Karl McAuley

The original contribution of this thesis is an engaged understanding of the tools required to achieve Agencies of Commoning at Portland Works. Commons have seen renewed interest in recent years as a radical alternative to the capitalist economy. In the face of climate change and the extremely unequal distribution of resources they are understood as potentially a more democratic, just and equal way to sustain ourselves as a society.

Commons can be understood as a *non-commodified* set of resources and the community who shares and takes care of those resources through processes of commoning. These resources can take many forms, for example natural, (such as a river or woodland), immaterial Commons, including cultural and digital Commons, (such as music, an idea, or an act of care) or public space, (such as a village green or park).<sup>1</sup> Themes and topics investigated in recent literature include Commons as differentiated publicness,<sup>2,3</sup> as strategy of post-capitalism,<sup>4,5</sup> as autonomy and self-organisation,<sup>6</sup> as historic practice,<sup>7</sup> as institution.<sup>8</sup> There are also a number of projects to map the Commons,<sup>9</sup> and investigations into tactics required to operate within wider government and legislative systems.<sup>10</sup>

*Commoning* as the process for governing the Commons is an important focus for study. Art and Architecture collective STEALTH.unlimited for example argue that the management of the Commons “[...] may be its most defining and political aspect”<sup>11</sup> However, there are few detailed case studies into the tactics, strategies and tools used in the production of a particular Commons from the point of view of a commoner over

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1 Mapping the Commons, (2015), <<http://mappingtheCommons.net>> [access date 20<sup>th</sup> August 2015].

2 For example: Heidi Sohn, Stavros Kousoulas and Gerhard Bruyns, ‘Introduction: Commoning as Differentiated Publicness’, *Footprint*, 16 (2015).

3 For example: Stavrides, Stavros. ‘Common Space as Threshold Space: Urban Commoning in Struggles to Re-appropriate Public Space.’ *Footprint*, 16 (2015).

4 For example: Architektur, An, ‘On the Commons: A public interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides’, *An Architektur*, 23 (2010), 4-27.

5 Gidwani, Vinay and Amita Baviskar. ‘Urban Commons’, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 46.50 (2011) 42-43.

6 For example Anne Ryan, ‘The transformative capacity of the Commons and commoning’, *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 21.2 (2013), 90-102.

7 See for example: Peter Linebaugh, ‘Meandering On The Semantical-Historical Paths Of Communism And Commons’, *The Commoner*, (2010).

8 Marc Neelen and Ana Džokić.

9 Mapping the Commons.

10 For example Susannah Bunce, ‘Pursuing Urban Commons: Politics and Alliances in Community Land Trust Activism in East London’, *Antipode*, (2015). Also: Michele Vianello, ‘New Rights and the Space of Practices: Italian Contributions to a Theory of the Urban Commons’, *Foot print*, 9.1 (2015), pp. 35-49.

11 For example: STEALTH.unlimited (Marc Neelen and Ana Džokić), ‘Instituting Commoning’, *Footprint*, 16 (2015).

time. In attending to this gap in knowledge through this thesis I investigate a single case in depth, in order to actively take part in the process of commoning, and enable myself to look beyond a single aspect (such as a legal framework, or governance structures) to consider commons as incredibly complex, diverse and precarious entities. The case that I study here is an industrial building, a place of business. Until its community purchase it was private property, with tenants working to make profit from selling their goods. In the moment of its possible loss, its common aspects and potentials were brought to the fore, and it is these qualities that make it a good case for study.

In suggesting Portland Works is an Urban Commons I am arguably making a bold claim. Not everyone involved in its production would necessarily recognise the term, or consider it to be such. Some would not show interest in this as an idea, and perhaps others would disagree with it, at least as being a driver of the project. Those involved come from a range of political standpoints, social values, and concerns. But this is why I think it is of interest, and can help further understanding of Urban Commons. Commons are not out-of-reach utopias, planned carefully beforehand by a homogenous group of people who understand in theoretical terms exactly what it is they should do, which tools to use, and which investigations they need to undertake in order to stake out their claims. Instead, they are something that is made through doing with others, sometimes falteringly, and always experimentally.

### Why investigate Tools in relation to Commoning?

Focusing on the tools used to make Commons is a productive area of study for a number of reasons. Commoning is a participatory and spatial practice, and in such practices practitioners frequently refer to 'tools', yet what they are and how they are made are rarely addressed if at all. It is implied that tools are considered as a way of handing over knowledge or to enable others to act. In the world of materials, making and manufacturing of which Portland Works is a part to use a tool means to construct something or to take it apart and remake it; it implies change. If Commoning is a transformational process concerned with the sharing of resources and ways of doing, looking at tools seems a useful way to understand what is done, by what means, in which ways and with what motivations. In this context of a cutlery factory where tools are made and shared the term has even greater resonance, and allows for a potentially deeper understanding of what they are.

## Tools to create spatial and urban agencies

I consider that tools of spatial practices are emerging from four broad and overlapping contexts. Firstly those that have grown from Urbanism and Town and Regional Planning and are largely communicative, secondly, those that have come from professional and technical knowledges associated with architecture, conservation, and urban design; thirdly those that have come from community empowerment and engagement and finally those associated with political activism, and artistic and creative practices. In each instance these tools and toolkits expand the notion of tool from something that is a physical object that you hold in your hand, to also include sets of procedures or ideas that extend your ability to act with others.

Participatory practices in the professional context of architecture and planning in the UK have largely grown from a history of consultation, often through public meetings.<sup>12</sup> Usually organised by the Local Authority, their aim was largely communicative, and the role of professional representatives was to make rational and neutral decisions between alternatives. Participation in these early institutional settings is often conceived as information gathering, the aim being for professionals to be able to make better-informed designs and decisions. These approaches, which still continue today treat consultee others almost as data (static, knowable, determinate and available), which, if gathered rigorously will enable the correct design to be produced. The tools produced by planners, architects and other consultants in these contexts are often communicative, or function to compile; imploring or enabling citizens to inform about their identity, their lives, or their needs. Those initiating the process are often not active participants but rather take a managerial role. The aspects of community involvement are a controlled and predetermined part of the more conventional professional processes.

In contemporary architectural practice, the toolkit is an increasingly widely used metaphor in participation work for 'how to' guides, often signalling the architect, conservationist or urban designer stepping back from a role as author, to one of facilitator, or perhaps not being present at all at the stage of activity the toolkit is designed for. The tool here is the visible point of a broader set of professional knowledges, around such tasks as how to survey a site, how to understand scale or historical context, visualising proposals, or to understand technical things such as site ownership, or engaging with statutory obligations. Often these kinds of toolkits emerge

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<sup>12</sup> For example: Jeremy Till, 'The negotiation of hope', *Architecture and participation*, ed. by Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu, Jeremy Till, (London: Routledge, 2005) pp. 23-41.

from architectural practices or through advisory bodies, such as The Architecture Foundation and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment or Historic England.

Fig. 1.2 ‘Creative Spaces’ Toolkit published by The Architecture Foundation sets out approaches to participatory design

Fig. 1.3 ‘Heritage Works’ Toolkit published by Historic England (formerly English Heritage) sets out Good Practice in reuse of historic buildings

Fig 1.4 ‘Building in Context’ Toolkit published by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) sets out approaches to ensuring good design in terms of the setting of buildings.

They set out how those outside of the profession can effectively engage with it on its own terms. In using such tools, those participating do so through existing structures and abide by existing rules, with little or no opportunity to transform them. Taking the form of case studies, action plans, and summaries of policies, the authors of such toolkits usually remain invisible, the audience is abstracted, and there is a foregrounding of methods or procedures. They aim for some level of citizen empowerment, but only as far as possible whilst still conforming to existing processes and programs. These kinds of tools are only occasionally accompanied by analysis or critical commentary on the ethical, economic, political or social framework in which they sit. More typically they presented as something apolitical, and which takes a neutral stance.

Community development and engagement workers develop and use tools to facilitate groups in conversation or planning and project development. There is a strong pedagogical element to these toolkits. Whilst there are overlaps with the tools from professional bodies, and Planning processes the emphasis is on democratic decision-making, and empowerment. Formally these tools are often to be used in meetings or workshops, taking a written or verbal form. Enlisting methods from educational approaches such as Participatory Action Research, they are often tools for collaborative learning, which consider both the formation of communities and their relationships once

together.<sup>13</sup> These tools often focus on management and governance because they are frequently used to vouch for the legitimacy of a decision or organisation as being representative of a community.

'Fig 1.5 Stepping Up' toolkit published by the Welsh Government & other partners sets out how to develop and manage community assets formerly in public ownership

Fig 1.6 'Community Development Toolkit', published by Groundwork sets out approaches to developing groups and community driven projects

Fig 1.7 'Community Planning Toolkit' funded by the Big Lottery and published by Community Places sets out approaches to involving communities in decision making

Critical and activist practices in arts and architecture expand the notion of how cities are made and to varying degrees valorise the practices and people outside of the professions of architecture, planning and urban design. Tools in this sense tend to be more ad-hoc, being made as the project progresses, in response to particular conditions 'on the ground' and the group of people who are acting. In this context the development of the tools is often as important as their use; they often emerge as part of the participatory process.

These tools are diverse, including object interventions, the publication of 'zines, hosting events, oral history projects, building systems, flyers, collaborative inquiry processes, art performances and interventions, often drawn from cross-disciplinary approaches. Enabling performance, and physical transformation of sites through intervention, such tools disrupt the everyday, inviting us to re-examine and reimagine the world around us.

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13 Whyte, William Foote (ed.) *Participatory action research*, (US: Sage Publications, Inc, 1991).

Fig 1.8 'Beautiful Trouble a toolbox for revolution' assembled by Andrew Boyd sets out tactics and theories for activist engagement

Fig 1.9 'Tools for Actions', Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) sets out physical tools for urban interventions

Fig 1.10 'Urban Act' published by aaa invites the naming of tools in its mapping of alternative practices

Tools can also be found in the digital Commons as ways of networking, organising, enabling peer production, and resisting commodification.<sup>14</sup> They include such things as licenses, communication tools, ways of protecting anonymity, mapping tools, tools for social accounting, open source versions of document and image production programmes or data, tools that enable sharing of goods and services, or portals to access free journals. They are the product of many hands, in many different situations. They could be understood as trans-local, with their community of users not defined by geographical location. Through peer sharing, such tools are often extended and modified by others.

**Despite the numerous examples of toolkits and tools in digital Commons, community organising, architecture, urban design and activism, there is little analysis of what tools are, beyond that they linked to action. I consider the question of how they create agency to be a gap in knowledge and an opportunity for exploration and contribution. In addressing this I intend to explore how tools are made, what kinds of knowledge they produce and how it is shared. Through examining this idea in the context of Portland Works, a case where physical tools are at hand on a day-to-day basis, I can gain insights into their use as a practiced relation. It is important that I am directly involved in the design and use of these tools, because *it is only through use that a tool becomes a tool.***

I do not therefore begin this research with a preformed toolkit, but instead with a number of concerns that have led to the generation of a number of tools.

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<sup>14</sup> P2P Foundation (2015), <[http://p2pfoundation.net/Main\\_Page](http://p2pfoundation.net/Main_Page)> [access date 24th August 2015].

## Research questions and objectives

In this thesis I seek to investigate what we did and how, as a group acting mutually to save Portland Works from speculative redevelopment. I do so through attending to the following questions,

- In the context of gentrification and loss of affordable space for small-scale industry and making in UK cities, how can communities come together to safeguard these kinds of spaces in ways that are just, equitable and sustainable?
- What role could the making of ‘Urban Commons’ have in this process, and what kinds of agencies are needed for commoning?
- What kinds of tools are required to achieve Agencies of Commoning?

In the context of Portland Works, in Sheffield I explore:

- What kinds of tools are needed for gathering claims publically, especially those who may not usually be heard when deciding the future of small-scale industrial, workshop and studio space in the city?
- What tools are needed to support the participation and maintenance of a diverse social group who are concerned with this place? How are group boundaries defined, negotiated and challenged?
- What kinds of tools are needed for reclaiming and securing Portland Works as a non-commodified part of the city?
- What kinds of capacities and resources are needed to maintain Portland Works as an Urban Commons? What kinds of tools help in securing, making or sustaining these capacities and resources? What tools can support their allocation in democratic and equitable ways?
- What tools might we require to reformulate individual desires as collective ones in ways that are just and equitable?
- What tools are needed to enable learning in ways that empower, and enable the development of genuinely co-produced knowledges?

## Participation, co-design and mapping

In carrying out this research into tools for Urban Commons I primarily use three methods; they are: **active participation in a single case, the co-design of tools and collaborative mapping**. The following four examples also use such methods to investigate Urban Commons. Through focussing on a single case, Portland Works, and by paying attention to the day-to-day activities and issues I can position myself as an active and engaged participant, seeking to transform the situation. This approach allows me to address my research questions not only through listening and seeking to understand others perspectives, but to act as a designer and activist, engaging in different kinds of knowledge production. I take the stance that to be a commoner allows for a very particular understanding of Commoning that would not be achieved through analysis from the ‘outside’. The length of involvement with this case enabled me to examine and take part in change over time, and points of transition, which are crucial to investigating Commoning, and enabling the development of a wide range of tools. In addition to the generation of shared knowledge, activist research is also concerned with actively taking a part in creating change in that situation which you study.

The following four contemporary examples also use similar methods to research Urban Commons and offer lessons for the development of my thesis.

The atelier d'architecture autogérée (aaa) initiated project R-URBAN based in Paris can be understood to be an urban common in which research plays a central role. In R-Urban the initiators seek to create “closed loop systems of living, producing and consuming between the urban and rural.”<sup>15</sup> Located in the Colombes neighbourhood of the city, it consists of a number of trans-local projects, ‘AgroCité’, RecyLab and ‘ECoHab’, each contributing to life in the city; agriculture, recycling and residential units respectively. As coordinators ‘aaa’ have taken an active participatory role in its initiation and development, whilst also documenting and writing about the process. One approach to this is the invitation to a number of academics to report on different aspects of R-Urban’s functioning. Each in-depth action-research report seeks to challenge and contribute the thinking and doing of those involved.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> R-Urban, <<http://r-urban.net/en/sample-page/>> [access date 24<sup>th</sup> August 2015].

<sup>16</sup> Reports are produced by Constantin Petcou, Doina Petrescu, Katherine Gibson, Kathrin BÖhm, Fionn Stevenson, Mathias Heyden, and Anne Querrien, (R-Urban), <<http://r-urban.net/en/action-research/>> [Access date 24<sup>th</sup> August 2015].

These reports were written as collaborators and co-researchers, visiting and spending time in the situation. They responded to questions that were raised through the production of the Commons, such as how to extend the network internationally, how to sustain such an approach and what it means to consume and produce in a closed-loop system. Reports were always publically presented on site, and discussed by the commoners, that allowed for feedback and testing of the ideas. Other methods included collaborative mapping of the networks produced, and sharing tools for physical intervention on site through the project website.

The 'Mapping the Commons' project takes forward a number of case studies in cities across the world. Their approach is to locate the instances of Commons, and to define them either as Natural Commons, Cultural Commons, Public Space Commons or Digital Commons with a view to informing people about different kinds of actions and commonly held resources. The research team then collaborates with commoners in a location to create short documentary films about each case in such a way as relationships and differences could be understood across the examples.<sup>17</sup> The researchers theorise mapping as "reflection, a work of art, a social action"; mapping is not just a record, but a way of engaging in the situation.<sup>18</sup> Through their undertakings they pose a series of questions around how Commons can be located, protected and understood in contemporary society.

New Cross Commoners collective map and write about their process of forming a Commons in Lewisham, south London, close to Goldsmiths College, where many participants study or teach. Through their blog they share a toolbox of theories, games and tactics, both practical and theoretical that helps them explore the Commons with others, and to investigate how sharing can be more autonomous.<sup>19</sup> Tools themselves are not theorised. In documenting them they offer some analysis of how certain games, maps and activities work as a tool to help create an urban commons. The toolbox on their website is added to as their investigations progress, detailing who brought a particular tool or topic of conversation. The emphasis is on the development of an understanding of what a Commons is and which resources could be put under common management, and how different types of resource will require different forms of management.

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17 Demitri Delinikolas, Pablo de Soto and Daphne Dragona, 'Mapping the Urban Commons A new representation system for cities through the lenses of the Commons', *Hybrid City*, 29 (2013).

18 Mapping the Commons.

19 New Cross Commoners, <<https://newxcommoners.wordpress.com/>> [access date 24<sup>th</sup> August 2015].

## Activism, Practice and Design-research

“What are the real possibilities for you the architect in your position in society, not as hero who is going to save society, but as worker who is engaging practices that have the possibility of opening up new ways of doing things here and there...”<sup>20</sup>

'I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area... [...] I don't write for an audience, I write for users, not readers.'<sup>21</sup>

This PhD thesis is hybrid; it is 'by Practice', 'by Design', 'by Activist research'. It is 'by Design' because in making it I have designed a series of tools, with others and this is supported by a written text that sets out my theoretical position. The elements of design and theory have mutually informed the development of one another. In setting up such a process I have researched by writing briefs, and working in a way that is both iterative and projective.

It can be understood as a PhD 'by Practice' because it allows me to explore my practice, developed with architects, academics and community activists over the past ten years working in Sheffield, and establish my approach. This work included being employed as an architect, and later as a director of a social enterprise architectural practice, teaching and researching in the University Of Sheffield School Of Architecture, and being employed as a Community Architectural Researcher by Sharrow Community Forum. These aspects relate to the interdisciplinary nature of the work, which in part involves me working with an expanded notion of the discipline of architecture and urban design, and in part collaborating with others to engage in different approaches and ways of thinking to help us to define the objects and subjects of our research. This practice-based aspect of the thesis explores the skills that I have developed, and crucially, how I position myself ethically.

My approach to practice is drawn from an understanding that cities are made in many ways and by many people. If when working as an architect you simply respond to briefs from already wealthy or powerful clients as they are given to you, it is unlikely that you

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20 David Harvey, 1996, 'Poverty and Greed in American Cities', in Saunders, Reflections, p.104.

21 Michel Foucault, 'Prisons et asiles dans le mécanisme du pouvoir', in *Dits et Ecrits, t. II.*, (Paris: Gallimard, [1974] 1994), pp. 523-524.

will be able to affect real change or attend to questions that matter to people. In the case of Portland Works, it was not with the owner of the building that new rich possibilities lay, but with the many others who would lay claim to it during the process of resisting a market driven future. If, as I will go on to explore in this thesis, we can understand design as potently distributed in its agency, its power is in its ability to assemble many things, human and non-human in ways that enable other possibilities and relationships. It is therefore only through engaging with the city in many ways with many others that transformation may occur.

My concerns, and approach to this research are driven by my experiences growing up in Nottingham, as part of a politically conscious left-wing family, living in a council house and privately rented accommodation, often on a low income, and being aware of the impact of inequality. Mutuality and support for one another when it was needed was something that was important to change this situation. My mum, who in taking often low-paid roles in sales, charities and community newspapers was always conscious of the potential to add value and hidden community benefits in relationships. She worked to bring together small businesses in collaborative networks often in the face of some employers whose goals and awareness of community value was as an instrument of profit. The practices of developing conversations and solidarities between people became a role I understood.

Beginning my architectural education at Glasgow School of Art, during a student project I found that my inclination was to talk to people in the sites we were assigned, and through this process I could develop a much more engaged and rich beginning for my projects. This understanding has been extended through being part of Sheffield School of Architecture- at a time when the research group 'Agency' was forming, and Doina Petrescu and others initiating and participating in the PEPRAV trans-local network, Agency members Tatjana Schneider and Nishat Awan were working with Jeremy Till to produce the Spatial Agency book and website, and the student-led Live Project programme was in full swing. Agency's focus on transformative architectural education and practice was a feminist and political agenda, and one that I found to be resonant and inspiring. Those involved in these networks have helped me to critique and reflect upon my practice. Through each of these different roles, as researcher, as teacher, as architect, as activist, I developed affinities and opportunities for learning.

Closely tied to my ethical position, is my final assertion, that this thesis is activist scholarship. There is a political commitment to solving a problem, whilst engaging in

rigorous academic research on that problem with others. In conducting this work I sought to contribute to saving Portland Works from speculative redevelopment. I consider that the research outcomes are improved by addressing inherent tensions, contradictions and ethical dilemmas that we faced in acting together to try to create change. The aim as Paul Chatterton and Jenny Pickerill suggest is to:

‘[...] Identify more complex forms of contention and resistance politics that are not simply oppositional but simultaneously weave ‘anti’, ‘post’ and ‘despite’ capitalisms. This is the dirty [in the case of Portland Works often quite literally], real work of activism that expresses a pragmatic ‘get on with it’ an antagonistic ‘no’ and a hopeful ‘yes’.’<sup>22</sup>

The aims of activist research are to help understand and change inequality, oppression and violence. It should be carried out together with those who are subject to these things. In doing such research together we aim to formulate strategies, and achieve the agencies necessary to transform these situations. I found through working with communities that I wished to push forward my thinking and to create a space for us to reflect upon what we were doing. From the work of colleagues at Sheffield School of Architecture, particularly that of Doina Petrescu’s collaborative projects as part of Atelier d’architecture autogérée (AAA) ‘Eco-BOX’, and later ‘R-URBAN’, I was aware that engaging in theory and being critical about what you were doing could help to initiate, support and politicise social action. This role must be understood however as one who works with, rather than works on, or seeks to take control. At times this may involve being in a position of leadership, but it can also mean teacher, facilitator, listener, and most often worker.

As Studio Polpo colleague Cristina Cerulli and I state in our publication on the early days of our Portland Works campaign<sup>23</sup>, in some research paradigms there is an association of methodological rigour with the absolute control over the research process by the academic; this misconception is often a barrier in recognising rigour within activist research. The commitment to collective and egalitarian knowledge production demands precisely the opposite; the letting go of control and engagement in a research process that is open, responsive and horizontal. Openness in this context might mean that the goals of the research change throughout the process as the participants change, and their shared understanding and values are altered. The process deciding the aims and modes,

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<sup>22</sup> Chatterton, Paul, and Jenny Pickerill, ‘Everyday activism and transitions towards post-capitalist worlds’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 35.4 (2010) pp. 475-490.

<sup>23</sup> Cristina Cerulli and Julia Udall, *Reimagining Portland Works*, (Sheffield: Antenna Press, 2011).

understanding the knowledges that you build together, and deciding what to do with them should be a collaborative and critical one. Crucially it must also be shared in ways that respond to these needs and concerns.

This thesis, (the maps, the glossary of tools and the writing and photo essays) are one of the ‘outcomes’ of this collaborative research, together with my contribution to the establishment of Portland Works as an Urban Commons. The aim of the written and mapped outcomes could be understood to be to support, challenge, extend and at time valorise what we have been doing together, as well as thinking about the kinds of knowledge produced by such an approach. As with our activities at Portland Works, the written aspect of the process has also not been ‘one-way’; tenants, campaigners, former students, and colleagues have all helped me by reading, discussing and critiquing what I have set out. This has not only been to work to ‘get the story right’ but to make our shared account something that is useful and meaningful for those involved. The generosity of those involved in Portland Works giving their time to do this is testament to the friendships that we developed as a result of our shared endeavours.

In this research I am heavily entwined with what I am doing. An early record shows that by year 1 of my PhD I had already committed over 2,500 hours to Portland Works (in addition to my PhD). Now I have lost count. In understanding what this kind of involvement means in terms of my claim to knowledge in this instance, I would argue that in activist research knowledge can be understood to be valid if it is of use to create change and if it helps us to achieve agency, and challenge existing structures and ways of thinking. Anthropologist Charles R. Hale, says that in this test of usefulness activist research:

“[Endorses] the basic constructionist insight about the politically situated character of all knowledge production [and] also contains a built-in inoculation against the excesses of radical relativism (“all knowledge claims are equally valid and justifiable”) and nihilistic deconstruction (“all knowledge claims are reducible to underlying power moves”) sometimes associated with the post-modern turn.”<sup>24</sup>

To be active and passionate is neither to compromise objectivity, nor to make an account that is simply equal to any other. Drawing on the work of Feminist Donna Haraway, we

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<sup>24</sup> Charles R. Hale, ‘What is activist research?’, *Social Science Research Council*, 2.1-2 (2001), p.14.

can understand that this kind of research is not just about showing the construction and radical contingency of everything, but is about providing a better account <sup>25</sup>

In developing the notion of Situated Knowledge, Haraway states that knowledge must be accountable, and through being locatable, critical, and acknowledging its partiality, can make claim to a particular kind of objectivity. She argues that:

“Relativism is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally. The "equality" of positioning is a denial of responsibility and critical inquiry. Relativism is the perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity; both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective; both make it impossible to see well. Relativism and totalization are both "god tricks" promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully, common myths in rhetorics surrounding Science.” <sup>26</sup>

So to be engaged is important, to acknowledge it is crucial, as Donna Haraway goes on to say:

“Above all, rational knowledge does not pretend to disengagement: to be from everywhere and so nowhere, to be free from interpretation, from being represented, to be fully self-contained or fully formalisable. Rational knowledge is a process of on-going critical interpretation among "fields" of interpreters and decoders. Rational knowledge is power-sensitive conversation”<sup>27</sup>

Through the research process it is important to set out where we begin from and to attempt to make explicit the power relationships and the exercise of power in the research process.

To acknowledge our partiality and our privileges is important ethically and politically. Radical activist collective Colectivo Situaciones argue that life is incomprehensible, incoherent, and contradictory and has incalculable capacities, which we can only ever understand incompletely. They therefore argue that all moves to abstraction, which are often found in research within academic conventions and institutions, lessen life's inherent potential and dynamism. In researching the production of an Urban Commons

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<sup>25</sup> Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14.3 (1988), pp. 575-599.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.589.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.590.

this is important because emphasis should be placed on the getting there, rather than an idealised and utopian notion of what it is we should achieve. Research should not be about providing a critique of those actions that deviate from a predetermined path, but rather to enable understanding how and why we work in the way that we do.

Colectivo Situaciones introduce the concept-tool of the Researcher-Militant, where their aim is to disrupt hierarchical distributions, whilst building and expanding points of commonality in meanings, visions, and values:

“Rather than use research as a tool to categorise and separate knowledge from practice, militant research operates transversally, becoming part of the process that organises relationships between bodies, knowledge, social practices and fields of action.”<sup>28</sup>

The Researcher-Militant therefore seeks to remain open, and plural, avoiding the reductive, and therefore potentially reactionary attitude of seeking ideals and models of how things should be, in order to:

“[... Establish] a positive connection with the subaltern, dispersed, and hidden knowledges, and the production of a body of *practical knowledges of counter-power*.”<sup>29</sup>

Stressing the importance of both political and social operating together, Colectivo Situaciones understand politics as the struggle for power and the social as value and meaning producing. Political struggle is crucial because it aims to activate capacities and resources and to confront inequalities. However, in order to avoid becoming idealising, the political must always be hand-in-hand with social practices. This is because struggle and confrontation are not in themselves productive and it is only through social relations that meanings, values and understandings can be created and changed. Thinking about the ‘how’ with the ‘why’, together suggests that the ends should not justify the means, and the researcher must let go of some control and be willing to be changed by the process.

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28 Micropolitics Research Group (2009) <<https://micropolitics.wordpress.com/2009/09/29/studies-in-transversality-1-militant-research>> [access date 24<sup>th</sup> August 2015].

29 Situaciones Colectivo, ‘On the researcher-militant’, trans. Sebastian Touza, in *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments Against Neoliberal Globalization (Cultural Spaces)*, ed. by Mark Cote, Richard J.F. Day, Greig de Peuter, (University of Toronto Press, 2003).

This kind of approach to thinking about research or change brings with it a need for reflexivity. When speaking of the community of the Commons, this implies a need to understand how the collective is operating and constructing knowledges, and to ask of yourself those questions that might trouble your assumptions. **By understanding the partial position from which you are attributing, both individually and collectively, and the resources you have to attribute to the object of your research, it is possible to modify and reconfigure your actions.** The aim is to recognise the social structures and the effect on your actions and choices, therefore enabling you to alter your relationship to them. This is a key motivation for me as a research in drawing attention to our shared tools.

## Tools for collaborative PhD research

The co-design of tools is both the focus and the method of this research: I designed tools that were useful to address the concerns at Portland Works, and also produced tools that would enable me to conduct this thesis research, in a way that allowed it to be a participatory and reciprocal process. These tools included initiating, hosting and facilitating talks, conferences and seminars related to topics that were of interest to me to support development of theory. These were also understood as a means of opening out the academic conversation to others involved with Portland Works, and/ or my practice or teaching. This was driven by a desire to engage in theory with the same people who I was acting with to try to create change, because I hold strongly to the idea that this is an evolving and discursive process, rather than one that operates outside of action.

An example of one of event as tool for research is the Arts Council England funded ‘Co-series, which I developed with artist Charlotte Morgan. In order to develop our thinking on the multiple ways in which we engage with the city, in parallel to my work with Portland Works and the University of Sheffield<sup>30</sup>. The series aimed:

“To create a space in which to share practice, projects and ideas within a small group including specialists and non-specialists. The overarching theme of the series draws focus on the potentials of support, communality,

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<sup>30</sup> Within the University as part of the Lines of Flight series, I initiated a number of seminar and workshop sessions including with the Micropolitics Research Group, Lecturer David Forrest from the School of English, Sophie Handler author of *The Fluid Pavement* (Sophie Handler, *The Fluid Pavement*, 2006) and Artists Lucy Livingstone. The Mapping Agency sessions also formed part of this. See Lines of Flight, <<https://linesofflight.wordpress.com/>> [access date 25th August 2015].

collaboration, co-production, coexisting and cooperation in domestic, professional, social and educational contexts.”<sup>31 32 33</sup>

The three talks focused on three key aspects of a co-produced city, first “Co-Working-Making Diverse Economies” and this was hosted at Portland Works<sup>34</sup> The second event, Co-housing/living/building, was hosted at another project in progress- Shirle Hill Co-Housing.<sup>35</sup> The final event, hosted at Bloc Projects artspace, was Co-Dreaming.<sup>36</sup> This site was also at the early stages of development. Situating the talks at locations of co-produced projects in the city was important because the discussions allowed for a more mixed audience and engagement with the topics. In doing so, I brought some of the thinking and research from my thesis back to places and people who were engaging in such work, and new networks were formed.

Teaching tools, both in terms of teaching about the theories I was developing about tools, and developing tools for teaching, was an important part of my methodology. The process of commoning is closely tied with thinking about how we might learn from one another, and therefore to actively participate in such a process I needed to improve and reflect on my pedagogical skills. At the same time, the process of teaching helped me reflect upon my own learning, and to invite those whom I was teaching to question me, and our actions at Portland Works and bring their own meanings, visions and interpretations into the conversation.

Through setting up teaching initiatives such as the Live Projects and student placements across both the Social Science and Arts and Humanities Faculties, with Portland Works as project partner a framework for research and learning was established. I also engaged in interviews and informal mentoring of students working to develop thesis projects about Portland Works, in which different framings were introduced. Teaching is framed in this case as also being a means of design research; students were set briefs in which they had to proactively respond with designs for the future.

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31 Art Sheffield, <<http://www.artsheffield.org/2013/events/making-diverse-economies-charlotte-morgan-julia-udall/>> [access date 25th August 2015]. We welcomed Andy Abbott, The Precarious Workers Brigade, Kim Trogal, Myfanwy Taylor and Florian Kossak.

32 Sheffield Architecture Calendar, <<http://www.sheffieldarchitecture.info/2014/05/co-housinglivingbuilding.html>> [access date 25th August 2015]. We welcomed Sarah Staton, Cristina Cerulli, The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home and Jeremy Till.

33 Bloc Projects, <[http://www.blocprojects.co.uk/supported\\_projects/co-dreaming](http://www.blocprojects.co.uk/supported_projects/co-dreaming)> [access date 25th August 2015]. We welcomed Hester Reeve, Sam Vardy and Paula McCloskey, Jane Rendell and Renata Tyszczuk.

34 Portland Works, <<http://www.portlandworks.co.uk/makers>> [access date 25th August 2015].

35 Studio Polpo, <[http://www.studiopolpo.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=160%3Ash&Itemid=56](http://www.studiopolpo.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=160%3Ash&Itemid=56)> [access date 25th August 2015].

36 Bloc Projects.

During my thesis research I published three journal articles, one book chapter, a photo essay and an editorial and a book, as well as attending academic conferences, each of which allowed me to refine ideas and subject them to peer review. The topics chosen, which included practices and tools, writing as an activist researcher, teaching as a means of research and economies of participation, enabled me to consider particular strands of my thesis in depth. I also engaged in self-published work during this time, which allowed me to share thinking in progress with those with whom I was working- this included fellow PhD researchers and people involved at Portland Works. This allowed me to think about style, contenting and framing in terms of the audience, how others might use my work and what might be future topics of study.

Each of these tools contributes to my collaborative PhD research and the following inserted diagram sets out a timeline of their use.

Key Talks, Conferences & Events

November 2005  
Presentation of John Street Live Project to Urban Design and Town and Regional Planning  
Role: Architecture Student

April 2008  
Formation of Distinctive Sharrow Action Group  
Role: Initiator/ Coordinator  
Community Architectural Researcher

August 2009  
Presentation of Distinctive Sharrow at RGS-IBG Conference  
Role: Author/ Community Architectural Researcher

November 2010  
Temporary Urbanism Symposium, MA in Urban Design, Opposing practices: Making claims to the 'Works' in a post-industrialised northern English city.  
Role: Invited panel host & presenting

January 2011  
Student projects as a tool to create agency', Our city: the value of civic engagement in the curriculum: University of Sheffield 6th Annual Learning and Teaching Conference  
Role: Invited panel host & presenting

April 2011  
'Knowing Common Grounds – Perspectives on 'social change' from research and practice in the School of Architecture' Julia Udall and Anna Holder at the University of Sheffield Faculty of Social Sciences Postgraduate Student Conference: 'Social Change': Different Disciplinary perspectives within the Faculty of Social Sciences'  
Role: Presenter

February 2012  
Birth of Baby  
Role: Mother

November 2012  
The Commonwealth Caf   
Role: Initiator/ Convener/ PhD Researcher

January 2013  
Lines of Flight Mapping Workshop 1+II  
Brussels/ Sheffield  
Role: Initiator/ Convener/ PhD Researcher

November 2013  
Lines of Flight: Finding your voice in activist & performative research  
Role: Initiator/ Convener/ PhD Researcher

December 2013  
Arts Council England (ACE) funded Co-Series Part I Making Diverse Economies  
Role: Initiator/ Convener (Held at Portland Works)

June 2014  
ACE funded Co-Series Part II Co Housing/Living/Building  
Role: Initiator/ Convener

November 2014  
Invited Panel member: 'Manifesto For Wealth', as part of The Guild of St George's 'Wealthy Weekend'  
Role: Invited panel member

February 2015  
ACE funded Co-Series Part III Co-Dreaming  
Role: Initiator/ Convener

June 2015  
'One Great Workshop' Workshop, Talks, Exhibition and Industrial Walks through Sheffield  
Role: Initiator/ Convener

Teaching & Practice

September 2005  
John Street Triangle Live Project  
Role: M.Arch Student

December 2005  
Distinctive Sharrow Steering Group  
Role: Member

September 2006  
Live Project Live Project, Investigating Engaged Pedagogy  
Role: M.Arch Student

November 2006  
M.Arch Thesis project, John Street Triangle  
Role: M.Arch Student

July 2007  
Commence work at Sharrow Community Forum  
Role: Community Architectural Researcher

December 2008  
Module Design Tutor, Sustainable Urban Environments  
Department of Landscape, University of Sheffield  
Focus on Sharrow/ Distinctive Sharrow Toolkit

August 2009  
Appointed as Director of Studio Polpo

December 2009  
Masters in Urban Design School of Architecture, University of Sheffield  
Role: Post Graduate Design Tutor  
Focus on John Street Triangle/ Sharrow

September 2011  
Portland Works Live Project I  
Role: Client

October 2011  
100 Hours History MA Placement- Portland Works, Sheffield 2011, Developing outreach materials for site  
Role: Client/ Mentor

September 2012  
Portland Works Live Project II  
Role: Client/ Mentor

October 2012  
100 Hours History MA Placement- The Commonwealth Caf , Sheffield, 2012 researching Edward carpenter and the commonwealth cafe  
Role: Mentor/ Client

September 2013  
Studio DIT Masters in Urban Design & Masters in Architecture (M.Arch)  
Focus on collaborative Design & Research-by-Design Methods  
Role: Post Graduate Studio Design Tutor

September 2014  
Portland Works Live Project III  
Role: Mentor

November 2014  
Studio Future Works Masters in Architectural Design & Masters in Architecture (M.Arch)  
Studio integrated with Stories of Change Research project- Energy, Industry & Community  
Role: Post Graduate Studio Design Tutor

Research & Publications

November 2005  
Publication of John Street Triangle Live Project

October 2007  
Speak to tenants at Portland Works and other John Street Triangle sites in role as 'Community Architectural Researcher'

April 2008  
Publication of Distinctive Sharrow Toolkit  
Role: Author/ Community Architectural Researcher

March 2010  
Funding: Fast Track Knowledge Transfer Partnership with SSoA/Little Sheffield Development Trust

August 2010  
Publication of Knowledge Transfer Workshop Document

September 2010  
Commence PhD University of Sheffield

February 2011  
Publication of 'Re-imagining Portland Works', Antenna Press (2011)

January 2011  
Publication of 'Opposing practices: Making claims to the 'Works' in a post-industrialised northern English city' Trans-Local-Act, PEPRAV (2011)

February 2012  
Leave of Absence from PhD (birth of baby)

February 2012  
Ethics Approval Upgrade Approval

June 2012  
Publication of 'Making Portland Works' in ATLAS: Geography Architecture and Change in an Interdependent World, Black Dogs (2012)

November 2013  
Publication of 'Colloquium: Exploring Common Grounds Architectural Methodologies' in 'Dialectal Learning' Udall, J. & Holder, A., 'Architectural Education', field volume 5, issue 1, (2013)

December 2013  
Publication of 'The Diverse Economies of Participation', Udall, J. & Holder, A., in 'Kriyis, M and Kaminer, T Ed. Footprints, Issue 13 The Participatory Turn in Urbanism, (2013)

September 2014  
Commence Post Doctoral Post Arts and Humanities Council Connected Communities 'Stories of Change: Energy & Community, Past, Present and Future'

October 2014  
Publication of 'Locating and building knowledges outside of the academy: Approaches to 'engaged' teaching at the University of Sheffield' in 'Teaching in Higher Education' Udall, J., Ferriss, D. and Stewart, K. (2014)

November 2015  
Publication of 'Editorial, Demystifying Social Architecture Research Methods, Demystifying Architectural Research, Eds Flora Samuel and Anne Dye (RIBA, 2015)

September 2015  
Submit PhD Thesis 'Tools to create agency: The craft of comming' (2015)

Portland Works

January 2009  
Formation of Portland Works Committee

January 2009  
Submission of first Planning Application by Portland Co.  
Role: Professional advice (working in architecture practice)/ Community Architectural Researcher

January 2010  
Submission of second Planning Application by Portland Co.

June 2010  
KT Workshop/ Declaration of intention to form Industrial and Provident Society

January 2011  
Formal constitution as Portland Works Little Sheffield

June 2011  
First Issue of Community Shares

November 2011  
Planning Application withdrawn

September 2012  
Elected as Director of Portland Works Little Sheffield

February 2013  
Purchase of Portland Works by Portland Works Little Sheffield

April 2013  
Second Issue of Community Shares

September 2013  
Re-elected as Director of Portland Works Little Sheffield

August 2014  
Step down as Director of Portland Works Little Sheffield

August 2015  
Establishment of the Friends of Portland Works (Charity)

Roles

M ARCH STUDENT, SHEFFIELD SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE (DISTINCTION)

TEACHING UNDERGRADUATE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE MODULE IN SHARROW

TEACHING MASTERS IN URBAN DESIGN, SHEFFIELD SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

ARCHITECTURAL ASSISTANT, BIRKETT COLE LOWE ARCHITECTS

VOLUNTEERING/ ACTIVISM, SHARROW, JOHN STREET TRIANGLE & PORTLAND WORKS

DIRECTOR STUDIO POLPO ARCHITECTS

COMMITTEE MEMBER, PORTLAND WORKS LITTLE SHEFFIELD

COMMUNITY ARCHITECTURAL RESEARCHER, SHARROW COMMUNITY FORUM

CHAIR, PORTLAND WORKS, BUILDING GROUP

CHAIR/ MEMBER, BUSINESS EDUCATION & CULTURE, PORTLAND WORKS LITTLE SHEFFIELD  
DIRECTOR, PORTLAND WORKS LITTLE SHEFFIELD

POST DOCTORAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATE, STORIES OF CHANGE

RA FAST-TRACK KT, LSdT/ SSOA

PHD RESEARCH, SHEFFIELD SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

PHD RESEARCH, SHEFFIELD SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

## Thesis overview

This thesis is structured in eight chapters, of which this section concludes the first, introductory chapter.

**Chapter 1** introduces my investigation into the tools required to create Agencies of Commoning. I introduce my thesis as a hybrid of ‘research by Design’/ ‘research by Practice’, ‘activist research’, setting out my ethical position. I go on to present the aims and research questions of my study, giving an overview of my research structure.

**Chapter 2** presents Portland Works, Sheffield, as home to a community of makers under threat from gentrification pressures. I situate this case in the contest of local regional and national policies, and the speculative redevelopment of the city. Through an exploration of Little Mesters and the DIY arts and music scene in Sheffield I set out the networks, practices and understandings that provide the source for resisting these pressures and remaking Portland Works otherwise.

**Chapter 3** makes claim to Portland Works being an Urban Commons, as a place taken into shared ownership, and run by a community. I examine the notion of Commons, through its history, as both an institution and as an understanding of shared resources.

**Chapter 4** conceptualises agency. It then goes on to set out Agencies of Commoning, as political economic, social, pedagogical and democratic.

**Chapter 5** investigates the notion of tools, understood through, and exploration of, craft and design in relation to Portland Works.

**Chapter 6** explores mapping as a tool to create agency, and introduces 10 collaboratively produced maps, which account for over 170 tools of the tools we have designed, made and used to create and sustain Portland Works as an Urban Common.

**Chapter 7** sets out the story of the production and sustaining of Portland works as urban common through a series of tools and agencies.

**Chapter 8** draws conclusions from the preceding chapters, drawing together the theories and accounts from previous chapters in relation to my thesis questions. It sets out topics and questions for further study raised by this thesis.

Portland Works is a Grade II\* Listed Integrated Cutlery factory, initially built by RF Mosley Ltd in 1877. It lays claim to being the first place in the world where stainless steel cutlery was manufactured, when in 1914 Harry Brearley brought his new invention to the site.<sup>i</sup> A number of small-scale metalworking and manufacturing tenants have continuously occupied it since the 19th Century.<sup>ii</sup>

Portland Works is the largest of 11 historic metalwork buildings within the John Street Triangle Conservation Area.<sup>iii</sup> Its long curved front elevation occupies a prominent position at the corner of Randall and Hill Street, which bisect and bound the triangle respectively. There is approximately 30,000 sq. feet of workshop and studio space in blocks of two and three stories organised around a large courtyard, which contains a central engine house, chimney, and forge. It is typical of its type and date, comprising of brick loadbearing walls, slate roofs, concrete floors, and timber single glazed windows extending along both internal and external elevations on the first and second floor. The rear block has a vaulted ceiling, providing accommodation suitable for heavy machinery at first floor.

The narrow floor plan and the regular pattern of columns and windows make Portland Works flexible in design and therefore suitable for firms to expand and contract their floor space, taking on, or leaving adjacent workshops as required. Many of the workshops contain original fixtures and fittings, some of which, such as the drop hammers in the central forge used by Wigfull Tools, or timber and metal workbenches found in many of the units, are still in use by the firms renting the workshops.<sup>iv</sup> Workshops are basic, with no integrated heating system, (tenants, if they heat their workshops at all tend to bring portable heaters) rudimentary or no internal finishes, and have badly maintained shared facilities such as toilets. Few repairs had been carried out in the last 30 years by the landlord, leading to deterioration of the built fabric, which was no longer wind and watertight.

Tenants have modified the building in many places to suit their changing business needs, through subdividing space, extending workshops and making ad-hoc repairs to leaks and structural problems. In 2009, the rental income for the building was around £55,000 annually, within individual rents varying quite significantly, but the average being £2.20/sq. ft. For many of the tenants this was around the upper limit they were able to afford, so the poor building conditions were something they tolerated. Tenants rarely had clients that wished to visit them on site, and so the appearance of the building made little financial difference to their revenue. The cold, damp and leaks prevented a significant number of tenants using their space during winter months and machinery and work was damaged because of leaks.

In 2013 after a five year campaign in response to a Planning Application for Change of Use that if successful would result in the closure of the Works, 500 shareholders came together to purchase it, to in the first place enable its retention as a place of making and then to develop it for community benefit.

To set the ground of this research, I begin with a sense-making description of events, thoughts, conversations and activities that happened over the period of a few days in 2012, collaged together as a 'recollection' of a single day and place, just before we complete the community purchase of Portland Works.<sup>v</sup> In introducing this account I wish to argue that cities are socially produced, yet the spaces and places that are lived and worked in by communities are increasingly under threat from speculative redevelopment. In order for the people who care about a place to be able to safeguard its future in ways that are just, equitable and sustainable they need to be able to act together, politically, socially and economically.

*I enter through the dark archway of Portland Works into the courtyard, swerving around greasy puddle forming as Richard jet-washes oil from old motors in the doorway of his shop The Gentlemen are rehearsing, their guitars making synchronic time with the bass rhythm of Andy working the nineteenth-century drop hammer as he makes tools in the forge. I am glad of my heavy boots as I tread on the sheets of metal lying over a hole in the ground: This isn't my first visit.*

*I look at my watch, slightly nervous: today we meet the surveyor to get a valuation of this rather ramshackle but beautiful Victorian cutlery factory. The figure that he pronounces will be our goal. His words will determine how many shares we need to sell over the next year order to purchase the building... we hope that this figure will be low enough to leave us with a little bit over... We are pretty certain there won't be enough spare to replace the dangerous wiring, or repair leaking roofs, but we hope for a little bit more than the capital costs – perhaps enough to cover propping up a dangerous column, reconnecting the fire alarm, or pay a manager to help us in the first few months.*

*I press the bell of Stuart Mitchell's workshop. A loud and raucous sound heard over the noise of his grinding machines. We walk out together onto the roof. Derek, the Chair of our Community Benefit Society is pointing up at a dislodged gutter with buddleia sprouting from it, drawing the gaze of a man with a clipboard. What he is saying is drowned out by windowpanes vibrating and drums from down below beginning a well-rehearsed solo. The man with the clipboard, smiling at Derek, must be the surveyor, about to tell us our lot. We hesitate before we walk to them: his words will decide how many evenings and weekends we have to invest over the next year. Each pound of the valuation means additional work for the tenants and volunteers: selling shares, applying for loans and grants. Together it will represent thousands of hours at computers, meetings and with biro, form filling instead of walking in the hills.*

*We go over, and Mark, the surveyor is introduced. Stuart and I join the tour, cautioning Mark about the step only bolted to the runner at one side, suggesting that the left handrail is best avoided all together. We present the bowed back wall with its water stains lurid green against the artists' attempts at a white gallery space. Looking across to Stag Works Stuart explains how his mum and dad were knifemakers before him, first there now here... We say 'we want to keep Portland making things for another 100 years'. He seems charmed, as people do.*

*Soon we are back in Stuart's office. You can tell we have guests because Stuart has bought a pint of milk to go with his strong filter coffee. Perched in the corner Mark begins, '...Well, by one measure, this building is worth zero. It's in such poor condition...' 'Yes,' we say enthusiastically, 'our conditional survey says there is over £800,000 of urgent work...' He goes on, 'But by another, the rental income, well... it's a 10x multiplier... so, I would say £450,000.' 'But,' (I nearly bellow), 'that income, surely it's dependent on the building not collapsing, not setting on fire, that we can keep tenants in here? Without urgent repairs, replacing felt and slates before the damp roof structure gives up, these workshops won't be in rentable condition much longer.' 'Yes', he says, 'but your business plan shows that you have a waiting list of tenants, that as a Community Benefit organisation you can put together good, solid, funding bids for money to make it wind and watertight, you can manage it for a reasonable sum of money... It's convincing as a viable business... So it's reasonable to suppose the value is around £450,000...'*

*Small talk follows and he hands us his card. I am due back to work at the Community Forum... As I drift back, all I can think is how without our plan, our work over the past few years this building would be worth zero. What's worse is that by this measure, the more we do build another future for this place, the more work we have to do to raise money to cover further increases in prices. Work we haven't even done yet promised to the landlord as further profit. Yet, and this is worse, if we don't buy it he can just hold onto it, keep collecting rents, let the holes in the roof get bigger, see the tenants slowly leave until the only answer is flats or demolition...*

In the very act of taking Portland Works into community ownership we were faced with the commodification of our shared labours. We could understand that the production of the Commons is not a one off event, but an on-going struggle to resist enclosure.



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i Robert F Mosley was the owner of the first company to manufacture stainless steel, at the time based at Portland Works. Harry Brearley worked with Ernest Stuart who was then the 'Cutlery Manager' to R. F. Mosley & Co Ltd. In 1914, Harry Brearley approached the cutlery manager of R.F. Mosley & Co., Ernest Stuart, with his new invention 'rustless steel' and prototypes were manufactured at Portland Works. Sheffield Cutlers started the regular manufacture of Stainless Steel Cutlery in 1919. International Stainless Steel Forum, *100 Years of Stainless Steel*, (2012) <<http://www.stainlesssteelcentenary.info/stainlesshistory#>> [accessed 24th August 2015].

ii Portland Works, 'History', <<http://www.portlandworks.co.uk/history/>> [accessed 24th August 2015].

iii Sheffield City Council, 'John Street Conservation Area', (2014) <<https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/planning-and-city-development/urban-design--conservation/conservation/conservationareas/john-street.html>> [accessed 15th August 2015].

iv Jim Horsfall, 'Wigfull Tools', <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/jimhorsfall/5400930145>> [accessed 15th August 2015].

See also: Portland Works, 'Wigfull Tools', <<http://www.portlandworks.co.uk/makers/wigfull-tools>> [accessed 15th August 2015].

v This account is a version of part of an article published in Footprint magazine. Julia Udall, and Anna Holder, 'The 'Diverse Economies' of Participation', *Footprint*, 7.2 (2013), pp. 63-80.

## Chapter 2

# Portland Works as urban space under threat

Portland Works is a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Grade II\* listed metalwork factory that currently houses workshops and studios for about 35 tenants, who are part of 30 businesses working in metalwork, joinery, arts and music. In 2009, the landlord applied for Change of Use Planning Application to convert it from 'Industrial' uses to 'Residential and Office' Use.<sup>1</sup> There was greater profit to be made from housing or from selling on the building with planning permission for housing and businesses than in collecting rents or attempting to sell the building with the current industrial and creative tenants in place. If the landlord were successful in his Planning Application he would have the legal right to close the Works and evict the long-standing tenants, who in some cases had been operating a business from the premises for over 50 years. The result would be that many of the tenants would be forced to cease their businesses, either because relocation costs were prohibitive, or that they could not find suitable affordable alternatives. Those who could continue to trade were concerned that they would have to move out of town to an industrial estate, no longer sharing a building with similar businesses and friends.

The tenants at Portland Works for the most part have actively chosen to spend their days manufacturing and making things, rather than expanding their companies and becoming employers and managers. In making this choice the money they have to spend on rent is limited as their profits are dependent on their own labours, rather than capital investments or the exploitation of workers. Due to demolition and displacement over the past 30 years, Portland Works is one of few remaining buildings in the city with a mix of maker tenants from the arts, music and manufacturing. The work culture, (of helping each other either through lending equipment, repairing things for each other or sharing skills), has evolved because of a need to be independent while knowing they can rely on each other. Support in precarious economic times, together with a desire to build a

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Previous page: Figure 2.1 Portland Works Chimney. Photo: Martin Pick

<sup>1</sup> See Sheffield City Council, 'Planning Portal ref: 08/01850/FUL'.

meaningful social life, means they care for one another. Significant time and effort is invested into these ways of being together and losing it would mean the loss of a unique way of working and living together in Sheffield.

It is important to understand a little of the history of the kinds of businesses and creative activities that were happening in Portland Works, and this is where I begin. Portland Works is home to a number of Little Mesters; a term used for Sheffield's self-employed master craftsmen for over a century. The characteristics of the Little Mesters and the DIY art and music scene not only reveals what was under threat in this instance, but goes some way to explain the interest in this particular building and the kind of campaign that followed. The building, and its working practices were similar to those that had defined the city in many ways over many generations. Portland Works' significance and the networks and relationships that had been established over time enabled certain kinds of actions to be taken, and support to be gathered. The resonance the call had was because of the many intertwined concerns that this project raised around art, the metal trades and the music industry.

In the UK there has been deindustrialisation on a scale not experienced elsewhere in Europe. The loss of large firms and industry has severe implications for smaller-scale industry that were part of their supply chain.<sup>2</sup> Manufacturing played an important part in the UK economy from when Portland Works was built in 1870s until almost a century later, when due to lack of investment and other structural issues there was a rapid decline throughout the region, and the North of England in particular. In the context of Sheffield the loss of much of the Steel Industry led to tangible impacts on the urban and social fabric of the city, associated with the loss of employment. This occurred not only around the Don Valley where the huge scale manufactories were based, but also around what is now the Cultural Industries Quarter of the city where Little Mesters rented workshops and worked to carry out repairs and produce small high quality items required as part of the supply chain.

In light of the increasing number of empty buildings, and the loss of employment Sheffield City Council set out a number of policies to address this. In this chapter I explore how national government policies that encouraged the densification and large-scale redevelopment of city centres.<sup>3</sup> Combined with support for certain kinds of culture

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<sup>2</sup> Aditya Chakraborty, 'Why doesn't Britain make things any more?', *The Guardian*, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2011, <<http://www.theguardian.com/business/2011/nov/16/why-britain-doesnt-make-things-manufacturing>> [access date 20<sup>th</sup> August 2015].

<sup>3</sup> Anna Minton, *Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century City*, (Penguin, 2012).

and leisure following ideas of the creative city, together with speculation in the housing market, considerable pressure was put on the property market around the John Street Triangle where Portland Works is located.<sup>4,5</sup> These features of the neoliberal city could be understood as ‘trickle down urbanism’ where by making cities attractive investments for large developers and for the middle classes, the benefits are supposedly felt by the city as a whole.<sup>6</sup> I argue that largely these benefits are not distributed, and in fact, the impact of such an approach to regeneration often exacerbates problems of exclusion and, through dispossession economic and social and spatial inequalities. Together with the impact of powerful stakeholders such as universities on the property market, these factors contributed to Portland Works coming under threat as a place of making and manufacturing.

Much literature perceives the decline of industry as inevitable and almost as a background ‘context’ to gentrification processes in the UK choosing instead to focus on the displacement of working class housing residents, or the impact on the creative industries, or the exclusionary and exclusive nature of the culture and leisure uses that replace them.<sup>7,8,9</sup> I wish to understand gentrification from the perspective of the businesses. Undoubtedly Sheffield, as with many other northern cities in the UK, no longer has the majority of its workforce employed in manufacturing; however the skills developed during its industrial past have led to the continuation of a number of specialist businesses, and long standing networks based on skills, friendships and trade. In addition, what was a unique mix of manufacturing and arts and music makers on site would have been lost. I therefore argue that the further fragmentation, displacement and in some cases forced closure of these small and micro businesses represents a neglected yet

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4 Richard L Florida, *The Rise of The Creative Class: and how it's transforming work, leisure and community and everyday life*, (Basic Books, 2002).

5 CBRE, ‘UK Property Market Outlook 2015’, (2014),  
<[http://www.cbre.co.uk/portal/pls/portal/CBWEB.utils\\_news\\_public.show\\_image?id=17794&field=doc1&trans=n](http://www.cbre.co.uk/portal/pls/portal/CBWEB.utils_news_public.show_image?id=17794&field=doc1&trans=n)> [accessed 15th August 2015].

6 John Gallagher, ‘Sugrue: Trickle down urbanism won’t work’, *Detroit Free Press*, (Detroit, 2014),  
<<http://www.freep.com/article/20140223/OPINION05/302230041/Sugrue-Trickle-down-urbanism-won-t-work-Detroit>> [accessed Sat 15th August 2015].

7 See for example, Christopher Hamnett: Chris Hamnett ‘Gentrification, Postindustrialism and Industrial and Occupational Restructuring in Global Cities’, in *A Companion to the City: Volume 6 of Wiley Blackwell Companions to Geography*, ed. by Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

8 Peter Marcuse, in *Cities for People, not for Profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City*, ed. by Neil Brenner, Peter Marcuse and Margit Mayer (Routledge, 2012) pp. 185-187

9 Tom Slater, ‘Missing Marcuse: On Gentrification and Displacement’, *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 13.2-3 (2009) pp. 292-311. Also: Kate Oakley, ‘Include Us Out –Economic Development and Social Policy in the Creative Industries’, *Cultural Trends*, 15.4 (2006) pp. 255-273

important negative impact of gentrification not only in terms of the displacement of the working class, but in terms of the kinds of economy that can be found in the city.<sup>10</sup>

In the case of Portland Works it is the increase in demand for housing, and the loss of workshop and studio space elsewhere in the city that lead to the landlord purchasing it for speculative redevelopment. This is a pattern repeated throughout Sheffield, threatening the remaining small-scale industry on the periphery of the city centre that is already pressured by global trade in goods and commodities. **I consider that this is not just a case of accelerating an inevitable process, but is actively reducing opportunities for the resilience and development of these kinds of industries and communities, diminishing what is possible in the city for particular constituencies.**<sup>11</sup> It raises questions of social justice, equality and sustainability and goes right to the heart of the question of how life is sustained in cities.

## Sheffield, a city of Little Mesters

The city of Sheffield's industrial landscape is comprised of a large number of small-scale factories known as 'Integrated Works'<sup>12</sup> which would house a number of self employed craftsmen known as Little Mesters. A 'Mester' is a master craftsmen specialising in high quality goods, particularly cutlery and tools and from the 15<sup>th</sup> Century until the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Little Mesters would have carried out the entire production process of these goods in workshops within their own homes. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century onwards, individual 'Mesters' moved to renting a small workshop in a larger factory building, sharing resources such as the furnace, each carrying out a different skilled part of a manufacturing process, such as forging, grinding or finishing. Each product would be made in collaboration with others. This pattern is in stark contrast to other industrialised cities in the north such as Manchester, Derby, and Leeds, which are dominated by large factories owned by a single company with workers as employees.<sup>13</sup>

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10 Julia Udall and Anna Holder.

11 Saki Bailey, Gilda Farrell and Ugo Mattei, 'Protecting future generations through common', *Trends in Social Cohesion No 26* (Council of Europe, 2014).

12 Victoria Beauchamp, Joan Unwin, John C Bramah and James Symonds, *The historical archaeology of the Sheffield cutlery and tableware industry*, (Sheffield : ARCUS, 2002).

13 Of course Sheffield also had a number of very large steel manufacturers, with huge factories and workforces. At its height in 1969 South Yorkshire was producing 3.6 million tonnes a year, with one factory along the Don Valley, Templeborough producing 1.5 million tonnes each year (Figures obtained from the Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau (ISSB)). Now these companies, for the most part owned by international corporations produce much smaller volumes of specialist steels with much-reduced workforces.

As the steam engine became the main source of power in Sheffield factories, firms moved away from their riverside locations along the Don and Derwent Valley and into the city centre. This had a defining effect on the urban, economic and social landscape, creating networks of production and often friendships between makers. The authors of ‘One Great Workshop’, a report commissioned by English Heritage into the significance of Sheffield’s industrial architecture, described Sheffield as ‘One Great Workshop’ for the production of cutlery and edge tools- a huge factory which scatters its separate departments in different parts of the town, but still retains them all like so many links in a chain’.<sup>14, 15</sup>

**These bonds were made and remade through the passing of materials, goods, orders, repairs, friendships, and the sharing of energy, and tools. The way in which manufacturing emerged shaped the architectural design of the Works buildings, the relationship between housing and factories, and the fine urban grain of the streets.**

Some of the large cutlery firms employed workers directly, but the majority subcontracted work out to independent ‘Little Mesters’. As products became more complex and ornate, and there was a shift to the development of large numbers of items following the same design, individual Mesters began to take on one part of the process, such as making handles, or forging the blade. The authors of ‘*One Great Workshop*’ argue that independence of the makers (relative to that of other cities) gives considerable advantages both to manufacturers and makers:

“The manufacturers were able to respond quickly to a specialist and perhaps short-lived demand without requiring large capital investment, and the crafts people enjoyed their freedom to work for any employer, and were not at the mercy of a single employers fortunes.”<sup>16</sup>

Although this perhaps portrays too favourable an image of the working conditions when work was incredibly physically demanding, often dangerous and repetitive, these were highly skilled jobs and the relationships with the people with whom they worked with

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<sup>14</sup> Nicola Wray, Bob Hawkins and Colum Giles, *One Great Workshop: The Buildings of The Sheffield Metal Trades*, (English Heritage, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> One Great Workshop’ was referenced in The Penny Magazine, 1844 a publication set up in 1832 to disseminate useful information to the working classes (see archive) Archive.org, <<https://archive.org/details/ThePennyMagazineOfTheSocietyForTheDiffusionOfUsefulKnowledge>> [accessed August 15th 2015].

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 32-33.

and dealt had a more or less personal character.<sup>17, 18</sup> Mesters rented their own workshop, set their own hours, and to some extent determined their own working conditions.<sup>19</sup>

**Sheffield then had a long-standing network of small and micro businesses, with strong relationships, their own tools, and systems of teaching and learning. Much was shared within these networks, out of necessity and friendship, and these practices endured.** Through workshops, tools, machinery, generations of families, friendships, apprenticeships, factories and networks of trade there is continuity until the present day, despite reduced numbers of people working in these industries. Well into the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the city maintained its reputation for metalwork and goods bearing the ‘Made in Sheffield’ stamp were well regarded and trade routes well established. Until the late 1970s, Sheffield had virtually full employment, with almost 50% of the workforce employed in manufacturing, making the full occupancy and activity in factories such as Portland Works well within living memory.<sup>20</sup>

## The decline of manufacturing in the city

The increasing globalisation of trade and manufacturing, the Oil Crisis on the 1970s and corporate restructuring led to rapid decline in the sector. This affected Sheffield more forcefully than other UK cities, and the advent of the Thatcher Government in 1979, compounded this, through privatising key industries, including two that were crucial to the region of South Yorkshire, steel and coal.<sup>21, 22</sup>

The impact was immediate, with many factories closing and the unemployment rate exceeding the national average by 1981. By 1984 manufacturing, which had employed

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17 Ibid., pp. 39-40.

18 Under the conditions of larger factory production, by contrast, the average worker is often deskilled, and replaceable, in an impersonal production apparatus. Tasks were very closely supervised and controlled, both in terms of the intensity of work and the hours of the working day. In *Capital* Volume 1, Karl Marx considers this change as being a move from the formal subjection to capital to the real subjection to capital in a factory, “The production of absolute surplus value turns exclusively upon the length of the working day, whereas the production of relative surplus value, completely revolutionises and the technical processes of labour and the groupings into which society is divided. It therefore requires a specifically capitalist mode of production, a mode of production, which, along with its methods, means, and conditions, arises and develops spontaneously on the basis of formal subsumption of labour to capital. This formal subsumption is replaced by the real subsumption.” Karl Marx, *Capital: Critique of Political Economy v. 1*, trans. by Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990), p. 645.

19 Ibid., p. 13.

20 See promotional film: *Sheffield: City on the Move*, Sheffield City Council (1971). Which can be viewed here <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ta22CtZx7sw>> [accessed 15th August 2015].

21 Anne Power, Jörg Plöger and Astrid Winkler, ‘Sheffield City Report’, *Phoenix Cities: The Fall and Rise of Great Industrial Cities*, (Policy Press, 2010). p. 13.

22 Ibid., pp. 149-170.

half of the city's workforce, now only employed a quarter, and with this there was the knock on effect of loss of employment in sectors that were supported the metalwork industry. In terms of the physical fabric of the city, this led to many of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century brick Works buildings standing empty, or being demolished. In the John Street Triangle large-scale single story industrial sheds replaced many of the brick factories.

Traditionally skills had been handed down from parent to child, but fewer young people were taking on these jobs, which were often long apprenticeships, in poor working conditions, requiring long hours, and even for those expert in their trade.<sup>23</sup> Global markets had increased the price of raw materials, such as steel, pewter and silver. Speculation on these commodities could mean a large increase in costs between setting the price for selling manufactured goods and buying in the raw materials required to produce them, driving down profits and increasing risk. At the same time as unemployment was increasing, cheap, low quality imports flooded the market. With decreasing disposable income, it became even harder to convince people to purchase these high quality, but relatively expensive hand-made products. At Portland Works this meant a reduction in the number of firms and workers within each of the firms. Machinery was sold off and skilled workers became unemployed or took up other trades and jobs. There was a loss manufacturing infrastructure, and a break in the passing on of the various skilled trades.

## The rise of the music industry, and cultural producers

In parallel with the decline of manufacturing in the city this period saw the rise of the electronic and synthetic music scene in Sheffield. In the 1970s and 1980s, acts such as The Human League, Heaven 17, Cabaret Voltaire, ABC and later LFO, all had major record deals and national and international chart success. They originated in Sheffield, and their recording studios and rehearsal spaces were often started up in the recently partially vacated metalwork buildings in the city, side by side with industry.<sup>24</sup> The accommodation was very cheap, and often just on the outskirts of the city, close to where people lived and the pubs in which the bands performed. Portland Works was a typical example of the new mix of people; factories now often had a mix of tenants, with manufacturers, artists and musicians side by side. The 'hammer rights' associated with many of the factories including Portland Works, and their location within industrial areas also enabled musicians to make noise in buildings that didn't necessarily have expensive

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<sup>23</sup> Howard Gospel, 'Decline of Apprenticeships in Britain', *Industrial Relations*, (26. 1, 1995), pp. 32-34.

<sup>24</sup> *Made In Sheffield*, dir. By Eve Wood, (Plexifilm, 2003).

sound insulation.

Much of this scene was tied to a Do-It-Yourself ethic, as an anti consumerist stance, where musicians would make their own promotional materials, produce and record their own records, and even build their own studios. Industrial tenants had modified the buildings to suit the changing needs of manufacturing, often due to the combined inaction of landlords, limited funds, understanding their own needs well and having the skills and access to materials that was required. The 'DIY' culture continued with respect to the artists and musicians. At Portland Works Def Leppard moved into their first studio, and the adjacent Stag Works became home to a labyrinthine network of studios and production and rehearsal rooms.

The rapid loss of manufacturing jobs in the city meant that many young people were out of work so the development and retention of music, film and art in the city began to be seen as a potential, if partial answer to this.<sup>25</sup> These activities had grown spontaneously in the city and they had achieved their success without financial support from government or business. The electronic and music industries were considered by the City Council to have some key benefits to the city. The first of these benefits was as branding, enabling Sheffield to have a place on the world stage. Secondly, it was seen as potentially contributing to the local economy and requiring relatively low investment to do this. Finally, it was considered as enabling social inclusion, because they could be considered a potential positive career path for young people whose parents had worked in the steel or coal mining industries. However, the scale of this contribution in face of the massive losses of manufacturing was always going to be fairly limited.

There was a concern from the City Council and those in the local music industry that due to a lack of support and infrastructure in the city, once successful, bands and artists would relocate to London to develop their careers.<sup>26</sup> In order to counterbalance this pull from the Capital, Sheffield City Council set up the Department for Economic Development and Employment (DEED) in 1981, which was set up to develop growth sectors in the non-traditional industries.<sup>27</sup> It pursued regeneration policies to support small-scale media and cultural industries that were indigenous to the city. This was an

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25 Adam Brown, Justin O'Connor and Sarah Cohen, 'Local Music Policies in a Global Music Industry: Cultural Quarters in Manchester and Sheffield', *Geoforum*, 31.4 (2000), pp. 437-451.

26 Eve Wood.

27 Anne Power, Jörg Plöger and Astrid Winkler, p. 155, Table 7.1.

opportunity for musicians and artists to engage in training and have grant support for their activities. By the mid to late 1980s however pressure from Thatcher's Conservative Central Government in the form of Rate Caps and the removal of key regeneration functions from local government control meant that much of this funding was cut or redirected.<sup>28</sup> Sheffield City Council was obliged to comply with approaches that encouraged privatisation and used public investment to attract large-scale private investment in order to be more forward thinking and improve its image in order to compete with other cities.<sup>29</sup>

## Rebranding Sheffield: The Heart of the City

In his paper "Re-imagining the city centre for middle classes" which examines Sheffield's urban and economic policies within this context, political scientist Max Rousseau argues that the negative image that cities such as Sheffield had even prior to the deterioration of its manufacturing industries had a performative effect:

“[...] In the eyes of public relations departments and politicians [...] this situation constitutes a powerful brake on the middle classes settling in their city; it is the main item that influences them to try and construct a ‘counter-image’, presenting their city as a far more attractive product.”<sup>30</sup>

He suggests that this image was reinforced by the industrial decline of the 1980s, and narratives that surrounded this within the media of the city being backward looking and nostalgic for its lost industrial past, and therefore there was a rejection of this history by those seeking to attract investment.

In mainstream discourses, success in a globalised world is primarily understood as a question of time, with accounts framing poorer nations or less affluent cities as being 'behind' richer nations or cities, with the possibility of 'catching up' through acting on neoliberal policies such as deregulation, or reduction in taxes, or public investment to support private companies. In the case of Portland Works and the small scale metalwork industries in Sheffield, this contributes to discourses of their inevitable decline. Geographer Doreen Massey states that acknowledging inequalities produced in capitalism

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-17.

<sup>30</sup> Max Rousseau, 'Re-Imaging the City Centre for the Middle Classes: Regeneration, Gentrification and Symbolic Policies in 'Loser Cities'', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 33.3 (2009), p. 772.

are a spatial phenomenon, rather than a temporal one is of importance politically.<sup>31</sup> This is because these depoliticising narratives of ‘progress’ fail to make visible interdependencies, how resources are extracted and allocated, how decisions are made, and what the interactions and shifting relations are. This rhetoric of progress and regeneration constituted a threat to affordable space for small-scale industry in the city, which was seen as part of an out of date understanding of the city, having little to contribute to its future.

By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the numbers of metalworkers in Sheffield was continuing to decrease, yet there still remained a broad range of specialist skills, particularly in the old metalwork factories scattered around the city.<sup>32</sup> However, rather than see them as a potential for development, in the case of Sheffield narratives of progress contributed to the pursuit of a number of policies that sought to create a new image for Sheffield that would attract new multinational private investors into the city centre. The most prominent of which was the ‘Heart of the City’ Masterplan, conceived in 1994.<sup>33</sup>

The scheme, which divided the Inner City into eleven Quarters, each with a distinct identity, deployed public investments with the aim of increasing land values and improving its image.<sup>34</sup> Each area had an Area Action plan to support its creation, and they would be focused on in turn. The Cultural Industries Quarter was seen to be crucial to the economic development of the city, and the Cultural Industries Agency was set up to manage its development, and attract European Funding.

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31 Doreen Massey, ‘Spatial Justice Workshop - Spatial Justice Radical Spatial Foundations’, (The Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster: 2016) <<http://www.westminster.ac.uk/law-and-theory/events/2011/spatial-justice-radical-foundations>> [Accessed 16th August 2015].

32 The numerous Listed metalwork factories in the CIQ required building work to be carried out to a very high standard, overseen by English Heritage, and this resulted in relatively high costs for the development work, and high rents. In one particular case at Butcher Works, this led to considerable public finance to encourage a private developer to invest because the site was seen as too important to the Masterplan to be allowed to fail.

33 The loss of businesses from the city centre was exacerbated by the ‘Thatcher’ Governments removal of planning laws that restricted urban expansion outside of city centres resulting in the development of a number of very large out of town shopping centres. In Sheffield in 1990 ‘Meadowhall’ shopping centre was built on the outskirts of the city and the consequence of this was a dramatic reduction in the number of people shopping in Sheffield, and the consequent closure of many of the high street shops, cafes and leisure facilities. Many other firms moved out of the city centre to sites that were accessible by new major roads. The loss of activity in the city centre led to a massive drop in land values with the result that many Integrated Works were demolished during this period, with those on the periphery of the city replaced by single story industrial warehouses. Although rents were cheap during this period, there was little investment in manufacturing, or support for these kinds of business. This was also a contributing factor to policies to reinvigorate the city centre.

34 Primarily this would be achieved through public investment in a series of high quality public spaces a winter garden and an art gallery.

## The Cultural Industries Quarter

The Cultural Industries Quarter and associated CIQ Agency were developed as a continuation of the Council's Department for Employment and Economic Development Strategy (DEED). In the area designated to become the CIQ, a number of Listed 'Integrated Works', some of the small-scale 'clean' manufacturing particular the heritage crafts, and the arts and cultural activities which were already taking place, particularly around film and music were deemed to be of value. High profile Sheffield bands, artists and producers had established themselves in the area at a time when it was largely still industrial and affordable.<sup>35</sup> They were perceived by the council and the CIQA not only as an important part of the music scene, but as 'cultural assets' that could attract investment to the city from other sectors, such as business, property development and the leisure industries.

The CIQA strategy allocated public money to support the existing arts and heritage crafts through what they termed a "consolidation" phase, which aimed to work at 'local' level to develop resources, access, facilities, training and workspaces. Later phases, termed 'Development', 'Attraction' and 'Impact', would endeavour to make an impact at regional, national and international level and seek to bring in significant private investment through creating the ground for 'higher level' investment.<sup>36</sup> Officers sought to use the distinctiveness of the kinds of economic activity within the city to promote Sheffield. The core public investment and policy was aimed at mobilising the property market in an area where it has previously been 'reluctant to invest'. By the time the 'Cultural Industries Area Action Plan' was published, the area was described as a "semi-derelict and under-utilised part of the City Centre".<sup>37,38</sup> The way in which the site was represented demonstrated an intention to open up the area to external investments and occupants from elsewhere, portraying the light industry and small businesses in the area as comprising of little that could in itself be generative of economic growth.

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<sup>35</sup> Eve Wood. Groups such as The Human League, ABC, Artery etc.

<sup>36</sup> Nick Oatley and Cath Mackie, 'Sheffield's Cultural Industries Quarter', *Local Economy*, 11(1996), pp. 172-179.

<sup>37</sup> Cultural Industries Quarter, 'Cultural Industries Action Plan', adopted 15<sup>th</sup> May 2001  
[http://www.integreatplus.com/sites/default/files/CIQ\\_action\\_plan.pdf](http://www.integreatplus.com/sites/default/files/CIQ_action_plan.pdf) [accessed 15th August 2015].

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p 29.

## Outside of the Cultural Industries Quarter

The CIQA strategy was potentially one that could safeguard small-scale affordable spaces within the city, on sites that had a history of being used for such activities. The site that was chosen for the CIQ was to the east of the city and was bounded by the ring road. At that point Planning Officers and Urban Designers considered that by focusing their limited resources and encouraging businesses within a dense and well-defined city centre location they would enable better networking opportunities and would have greater impact for the majority of residents. However there were concentrations of cultural activity around the outskirts of the city at West Bar, John Street and The Wicker. Much of the work of the CIQA at the time was to attract activities from the periphery into the city centre. Public money was invested into higher profile, city centre developments, and away from the blocks and neighbourhoods on the edges of the city.<sup>39</sup> These blocks housed the buildings that were the places that bands musicians and producers would start out their careers, such as the John Street Triangle where Portland Works was located.

### 2.1 Map of Cultural Industries Quarter to Portland Works, Sheffield City Council and Julia Udall

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<sup>39</sup> The numerous listed metalwork factories in the CIQ required building work to be carried out to a very high standard, overseen by English Heritage, and this resulted in relatively high costs for the development work, and high rents. In one particular case at Butcher Works, this led to considerable public finance to encourage a private developer to invest because the site was seen as too important to the Masterplan to be allowed to fail.

The policies of the time could have been an opportunity to support activities such as those within the John Street Triangle, as the networks and activities crossed the ring road 'border' and were interdependent, working to serve different stages of careers, or kinds of music being produced (especially the DIY scene which was not profit-driven). Despite some efforts to develop the city in ways that acknowledged that these activities were interconnected, ultimately the money and support was concentrated within the CIQ in order to make visible physical changes to the urban realm. For many businesses relocating to within the CIQ was not sustainable, and ultimately resulted in their closure.<sup>40</sup> Despite the reports' assurances, there was a failure of the CIQA to sufficiently appreciate the importance of affordable rents, the strength of creative activity in the neighbourhoods and the degree of distrust many involved in the music and arts had for city centre activity and attitudes to culture.<sup>41</sup>

### Attracting the middle classes to the city centre

In 1999 the New Labour government commissioned Richard Rogers to chair the 'Urban Task Force' to "identify causes of urban decline in England and recommend practical solutions to bring people back into our cities, towns and urban neighbourhoods."<sup>42</sup> The stated aim was to attend to three perceived urban problems; the decline of northern post-industrial inner cities, the spatial segregation associated with poverty, and how four million new homes might be built appropriate for a changing household demographic without encroaching into the green belt or the countryside in the next 25 years. The report that followed, 'Towards an Urban Renaissance' suggested that by developing 'high quality' housing, and encouraging young professionals back into the city centre, urban sprawl could be avoided whilst creating vibrant and diverse cities, within a new vision for urban living.<sup>43</sup>

The argument within the Urban Renaissance Report was that by encouraging private housing developers to take on sites in the city centre, and develop them as housing and leisure activities for young educated middle class consumers, 'no-go' areas would become

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<sup>40</sup> Notably this included 'FON Studios' which had moved from the Wicker area of the city to the AVEC building (now Access Space) in the CIQ.

<sup>41</sup> Many thanks to Colin Havard and Alan Deadman both for their insights into what was happening at this time; conversations and emails with them have both informed me and enabled me to read papers and documentation of this time in a much more critical way.

<sup>42</sup> Lord Richard Rogers Chair of The Urban Task Force for The Department of Transport Environment and Regions.

<sup>43</sup> The Urban Task Force, 'Towards an Urban Renaissance', (Routledge, 1999).

populated with activities that spilled out onto the streets and spatial segregation would be challenged. At the time Town and Regional Planning and Geography commentators, including Ash Amin, Loretta Lees, Libby Porter & Kate Shaw welcomed the focus on reversing the decline of city centres, but questioned the report's lack of attendance to political and social questions about whom the city is for, and who would be displaced.<sup>44</sup> <sup>45, 46, 47</sup> Through speaking about the types of use and activity that were appropriate to cities, rather than people, the question of who was being pushed to the edges was evaded.

The approaches that were set out by the Urban Task Force were part of a wider discourse that argued for the creative and cultural industries as regenerative activities. American urban theorist Richard Florida's *'The Rise of the Creative Class'* argued that through supporting 'creatives' you could kick start the economic and urban regeneration of a city. Florida contended that it was through attracting entrepreneurial activity of highly educated middle classes, rather than supporting traditional working class industries, that economic growth would occur and the benefits would be felt by the city as a whole. Florida suggested that revitalisation would occur through lots of small and distinct 'start-ups' rather than the city being reliant on one homogenous industry.

In order to attract these 'creatives' cities must be diverse and provide leisure activities and an urban environment that appealed to this young middle class demographic, which are authentic and unique:

“Authenticity comes from several aspects of a community---historic buildings, established neighbourhoods, a unique music scene, or specific cultural attributes. It comes from the mix---from urban grit alongside renovated buildings, from the commingling of young and old, long-time neighbourhood characters and yuppies, fashion models and "bag ladies." An authentic place also offers unique and original experiences. Thus a place full of chain stores,

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<sup>44</sup> The Urban Renaissance report and the 'Urban White Paper' that followed in 2000, and the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal sped up a process that was already underway in many northern cities in the UK, including Sheffield, involving the large-scale demolition of housing. Fran Tonkiss remarks that five times the amount of housing was demolished in the Pathfinder scheme as was replaced and that this constitutes a displacement of the working classes on a massive scale from prime city centre sites. The market and the plan: housing, urban renewal and socio-economic change in London. Keddie, Jamie and Tonkiss, Fran *The Market and The Plan: Housing, Urban Renewal and Socio-Economic Change in London*. City, Culture and Society, 1 (2) (2010). pp. 57-67

45 Ash Amin, *Collective Culture and Urban Public Space in City Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action* (Routledge 2008).

46 Loretta Lees, 'Gentrification and Social Mixing: Towards an Inclusive Urban Renaissance?', *Urban Studies*, 45.12 (2008).

47 Kate Shaw and Libby Porter, *Who's Urban Renaissance? An international comparison of urban regeneration strategies*, (Routledge, 2013).

chain restaurants, and nightclubs is not authentic. You could have the same experience anywhere.”<sup>48</sup>

High rents and the attractiveness of a city to start-up companies are derived from the idea that they are not comparable to another product or space, and this value is produced by discourses, traditions, folk lore, collective memories, narratives. Through marketing them as consumable product it is possible to extract surpluses from local differences, and cultural variations. Little was said about inequality, the impacts of such high rents, or who had the experiences and who was relegated to becoming ‘character’ for consumption of wealthy others.

Through utilising such strategies the result is to integrate cultural activities and public funds into systems of neoliberalism. Those who owned and developed property made greater profits than those producing the culture that produces and supports this increase in value. The emphasis is on city as ‘experience’ for the wealthy, where those who produce this ‘authenticity’ may be displaced by the resultant increase in rents and often do not have the income to partake in the leisure activities that result. However, in order to maintain this valuable diversity and avoid the chains and bland corporate developments that may threaten its status as unique, affordable rents must be retained, and it is the state that must support this. Those businesses that do not fit with the picture are priced out or actively discouraged through planning policies.

In order to be successful in these neo-liberal terms of the ‘creative city’, a place must also compete not only regionally, but also nationally and internationally. Town and Regional Planner Lee Crookes notes:

“Urban policy under New Labour was driven essentially by an entrepreneurial agenda that acknowledged and responded to a new social and global economic order in which people and places were required to be more competitive. In particular, tackling social exclusion was just as much a part of this [...creating the] supply side [...] as it was a commitment to creating the conditions, skills and infrastructure that would support the knowledge economy.”<sup>49</sup>

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48 Richard Florida, ‘The Rise of The Creative Class: Why Cities without Gays and Rock Bands are Losing the Economic Development Race’, *Washington Monthly*, May 2002, <<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2001/0205.florida.html>> [accessed 16th August 2015].

49 Lee Crookes, ‘The Making of Space and the Losing of Place: A Critical Geography of Gentrification-by-bulldozer in the North of England’ (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield, 2011), <<http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.575488>> [accessed August 16th 2015].p. 73.

The image portrayed and its uniqueness is therefore an important part of this. The ideas of the 'Information City', 'Innovative City' and later, the 'Digital City' were put forward, to portray Sheffield and the towns that surrounded it as a future-focused and able to compete with similar-sized conurbations in the UK and Europe. This is important because it shapes funding streams, large bids and priorities in the city. In the case of the CIQ and the arts and cultural sectors within Sheffield one impact was in terms of the decisions about which businesses contributed to this vision, and which were perceived as unmarketable as part of the brand, and which skills and industries would be supported.

The focus of these mid-nineties policies for the CIQ had been cultural business and industry. With the publication of 'Towards an Urban Renaissance', Sheffield followed many other northern cities and the role of residential accommodation became an important part of regeneration policy. The CIQ started to shift towards a cultural and leisure focus, and many sites were designated for housing. The introduction of housing would significantly raise the cost of land, and bring with it restrictions on traffic, noise and certain uses. Many manufacturing businesses, largely employing Sheffield's working class, fell into Use Classes that were deemed to be unsuitable for the city centre, which was now framed as a place of leisure and consumption rather than work and production. This would further exacerbate the loss of industrial and studio spaces within the city centre and ultimately contribute to gentrifying pressures from housing development within the John Street Triangle.

Change of Use and demolition applications were granted for a number of sites, reducing industrial sites, and increasing the amount of office space within the area, with a view to attracting commercial businesses from elsewhere. The public sector would be relied upon to support those businesses that were considered valuable to the area, but were not viable in this inflated market:

“If the City and the Quarter are to benefit from these funding and investment opportunities [...] The overall aim must be to stimulate higher value business, commercial and residential uses without putting at risk users such as artists, craftspeople and fragile start-up businesses whose presence is key to the success of the CIQ, but who can only afford low rentals. The public sector and non-profit organisations...[have] a key role to play in continuing to provide this kind of affordable accommodation.”<sup>50</sup>

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50 Cultural Industries Quarter.

This approach to regeneration relies on the public sector and third sector to continue to sustain ‘affordability’ for small and micro businesses, and their security relies on the continuation of the CIQA as a state funded.<sup>51</sup>

## Gentrification and the displacement of industry

In understanding what this process means in terms of social justice we need to consider the impacts of the processes of gentrification. The price of real estate is derived from an expectation of future rents, the rate of which can be increased through a higher demand, or through an increased availability of finance or debt finance. The market for property is not the same as other commodities because of the time it takes to build new property. Important to understanding this market is paying attention to the time-lag from demand to the mobilisation on site and then completion of a habitable building, which means that stimulating demand through financial instruments such as increased access to mortgages does not necessarily elicit an increase in supply, but rather, inflation in prices.<sup>52</sup> As much if not more money can then be made on trading existing stock than by building new through increased demand for a particular site or area. Increase in price is also achieved through a number of means including increasing density on a site, developing more luxurious property, changing the use, developing a Masterplan for different uses, or through obtaining planning permission for any of the aforementioned more profitable uses for the land. In the case of the later, the developer does not even have to build, but can sell on the land for a profit due to the possibility of future rents.

Accumulation and urban transformation under capitalism is then, by dispossession. Friedrich Engels’ essay “The Housing Question” drew attention to this phenomenon of displacement:

“This takes place above all with centrally located workers' houses, whose rents, even with the greatest overcrowding, can never, or only very slowly, increase above a certain maximum. They are pulled down and in their stead shops, warehouses and public buildings are erected [...] The result is that the workers

<sup>51</sup> As much of the urban development work in this area had been funded with European Union Objective 1 funding this was unlikely to be sustainable, as after the enlargements of the European union in 2004 and 2007 Sheffield no longer had some of the poorest regions in the union.

<sup>52</sup> In *Rebel Cities* David Harvey shows how Sub-Prime mortgage debt increased in the US from \$30 billion in 1990s to 21 times that- \$625 billion in 2005. It is estimated that housing stock at the same time could only be increased at a rate of around 2-3% per year. David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: from the right to the city to the urban revolution*, (Verso Books, 2012) p. 47.

are forced out of the centre of the towns towards the outskirts; that workers' dwellings, and small dwellings in general, become rare and expensive and often altogether unobtainable, for under these circumstances the building industry, which is offered a much better field for speculation by more expensive dwelling houses, builds workers' dwellings only by way of exception."<sup>53</sup>

In this description he notes the spatial nature of the way in which these inequalities manifest themselves.

At the time Engels is writing, the pressure is to increase cities as centres of production, and it is housing that is being displaced, but the wider point is the inevitable limits on the revenue that is possible to achieve from certain functions or from tenants, whose ability to pay is limited by their earnings as wage labourers. Engels argues therefore that in gentrifying an area of the city you do not solve the problems of cramped conditions, or squalor, or demand for very cheap accommodation, but instead displace them because the economic conditions that led to them in the first place still exist.<sup>54</sup> In the case of businesses the impact can be even greater than being displaced, because they are only viable when they can trade in certain locations within the city.

Small manufacturing businesses, with their need for low rent, easily adaptable spaces, and a location that was easily accessible, and close to amenities such as cafes, were good neighbours for the cultural industries. However, as residential accommodation became more common and the businesses moved out, there was also a loss of cheap spaces for cultural activities. There is an inherent tension if you deliberately inflate the prices of land in attracting new tenants, but need to subsidise those businesses that make it a desirable area to use, and who contribute most to the city. Essentially you are destabilising businesses that were previously self-sustaining through policy. Despite the stated desire of the CIQA to maintain some of the manufacturing uses, those that were considered unsightly, unattractive, intrusive, or incompatible with 'high-end' commercial and leisure uses would be pushed to relocate, or even if not overtly done, the change of character, as understood in planning and urban design terms would lead to their displacement. Although it might be considered that the number of businesses that close as a result is

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53 Friedrich Engels, *The Housing Question*, ed. by C.P. Dutt, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1942). p. 57.

54 There is therefore a specifically class relation when understanding urbanism under capitalism. Drawing on Marx and Engels's assertion that value and surplus value are only ever produced through the labour process of production, Geographer David Harvey argues that, "Urbanization has always been...a class phenomenon, since surpluses are extracted from somewhere and from somebody, while the control over their disbursement typically lies in a few hands." David Harvey, 'The Right to the City', *New Left Review*, 53 (2008) p. 1.

relatively small, they need to be understood as ecology, with relationships and reliance on one another. At the same time, the spaces available for new activity are also reduced.

## A battle for roots up development in the arts and music industries

These developments added gentrification pressure to the CIQ area and increasing numbers of creative tenants moved out of the area. Those involved in the studios on the edges of the city worked to advocate for investment in these alternative sites, which they saw as crucial to keeping the music industry alive, and to some degree they were listened to by Sheffield City Council and the CIQA. They had seen the drop off of music making in cities such as Manchester and Leeds where the property market had been over inflated, and the loss of cheap studio space at a rate and extent even greater than experienced in Sheffield. In particular Little Sheffield Development Trust (LSDT), was established to advocate for more ‘roots up’ development at this time, and wanted to shift the emphasis onto the neighbourhoods and smaller scale studios.<sup>55</sup> Whilst in the early years these sites had suffered because of lack of investment or because key businesses had relocated into town, they were now feeling the additional pressure on the sites themselves arising from speculation.

The directors involved with the LSDT were based in Stag Works in the John Street Triangle Conservation area, in Sharrow, a neighbourhood to the south west of the CIQ. Due to their location and understanding of the music industry, their efforts were focused towards Stag and the adjacent Portland Works. This part of the city had undergone a very similar pattern of change to the CIQ, where a number of the 19th Century factories were demolished from the 1970s onwards and replaced with low-density, single-story warehouses. Portland Works and Stag Works were the largest metalwork factories that remained, but there are also a number of smaller works such as Kenilworth, Clifton and Harland Works. Although diversifying from the uses of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, it remained as a compact and dense area of skilled employment. The remaining 19<sup>th</sup> Century integrated works continued to house small metalwork companies, making things such as tools, or knives, but artists and musicians began to take on some of the low cost, often poorly maintained workshops for their studios.

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<sup>55</sup> For a short history of the relationship between Portland Works and Little Sheffield Development Trust see Planners Network UK. Planners Network UK, ‘Portland Works’, <[http://www.pnuk.org.uk/portland\\_works.htm](http://www.pnuk.org.uk/portland_works.htm)> [accessed August 25th 2015].

Since 1998 The John Street area was defined by Sheffield City Council's Unitary Development Plan as a 'Fringe Industry and Business Area'.<sup>56</sup> This designation, along with its edge-of-city centre location had maintained cheap rents and had contributed to the organic way in which different uses had grown up side-by-side, mixing retail, leisure, and light industry and manufacturing. There were strong creative networks within this area that enabled technical, musical and career support for bands and DJs starting out, and cheap subletting of rehearsal space<sup>57</sup> which combined to form the North of England's largest concentration of music studios. World-famous act, Def Leppard had their first studio in Portland Works and the massively influential alternative record label Warp Records started out in Stag Works (where Alan Smyth would later produce the Arctic Monkeys first record), 2Fly and Headcharge (which ran a number of very successful club nights in the city) amongst others.<sup>58</sup> The success of these bands, labels and artists, led to the development of other small-scale studios and the establishment of related businesses. Building on these developments, Little Sheffield Development Trust worked with the CIQA to develop proposals and a funding bid for supporting young musicians and increasing the amount and quality of recording space within Stag Works with the aim of safeguarding it for the future.

## The influence of big business: Super casinos and the two universities

During the time of putting together the bid, Sheffield United Football Club, which at the time was 50% owned by a large property developer 'Scarborough Group International' (Scarborough Group 2014), has its ground on the eastern edge of the John Street Triangle and in the early 2000s owned a number of sites throughout the area.<sup>59</sup> Their interest in developing a hotel, and in 2005, a Super Casino on the site put further pressure on land values in the area, and encouraged other developers to consider what

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56 Sheffield City Council, 'Conservation Appraisal Study for the John Street/Bramall Area' (Sheffield City Council, 2010), <<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:H2p8Aw0aGv8J:https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/dms/sc/c/management/corporate-communications/documents/planning/conservation/conservation-areas/john-street/John-Street-CAA--CAMP-2010/John%2520Street%2520CAA%2520%2526%2520CAMP%25202010.pdf+%&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>> [accessed 16th August 2015].

57 This is something learnt through spending many years working in this area and also speaking with Alan Deadman in 2005, as part of the John Street Live Project. Alan Deadman is a DJ and festival organiser based at Stag Works, and is very active and well known in the music industry in Sheffield.

58 Eve Wood.

59 Some of these sites were along the east edge of the John Street Conservation Area, Bramall Lane that had been occupied by used car lots, due to planning restrictions that prevented anything permanent being built on it, due to an as yet unrealised plan to widen the main road, or to extend the tram to south Sheffield. The Council were seeking a Masterplan produced by the Football Club for these sites. See 'New look at plans to widen Bramall Lane', *Sheffield Telegraph*, December 24th 2008, <<http://www.sheffieldtelegraph.co.uk/what-s-on/new-look-at-plans-to-widen-bramall-lane-1-450196>> [accessed August 16th 2015].

were previously classed as ‘tertiary sites’ for residential development.<sup>60</sup> In some cases this increase in land values was as much as ten times in the fifteen years between 1990 and 2005, and a high profile site sold by Sheffield City Council for £800,000 in 2007 was sold on with Planning Permission for residential development by a private developer the following year for £4 million.<sup>61</sup>

In 2002 and 2003, Sheffield University had started to sell off its halls in the southwest suburbs where land has become very expensive and Sheffield Hallam was expanding. Sheffield Hallam University relocated its Art School from a wealthy suburb into the CIQ, and in doing so demolished a number of Integrated Works that were home to artists, musicians, small scale manufacturing and other cultural producers, reducing the amount of accommodation that was available. At the same time there was a massive increased demand for housing in the city centre and areas to the southwest of the city where students could easily reach the two university campuses, with another key cultural venue converted into Sheffield University Technical College. Over the next five years, a number of multinational firms that built student housing, such as Unite, started to buy up land in the southwest and north of the city centre around the two university campuses. Attraction and retention of university graduates was an important aspect of the cities approach to regeneration, and so these kinds of development were supported in Planning Policy. Unite built a large block close to Portland Works, resulting in significantly raised land prices. Further pressure was added by the 2005 development of ‘The Forge’, a six-storey, 300-bed complex of private student housing was built on the roads bounding the north of the John Street area.<sup>62</sup>

The impact of this rise in property prices within the John Street Conservation Area was felt in terms of proposals for the Stag Works, which became more precarious. Although a small-scale, ‘support-what-is-already-there’ and work with the existing owners option was preferred by the majority of directors at the LSDT, the purchase of Stag Works by the developer City Estates, and their proposals to convert it into flats meant that was no longer viable.<sup>63</sup> The new landlords substantially increased rents, by 17% and some tenants, particularly those working in manufacturing began to leave. This necessitated

60 ‘Gambling Act 2005’, Act of Parliament, (London: Stationery Office, 2010) (c. 19) Part 5 — Operating Licences, p. 40.

61 Sharrow Community Forum, (Unpublished report, 2008).

62 Although Sheffield, unlike neighbouring Manchester and Leeds did not experience the same extent of ‘luxury’ residential apartment developments during the boom years of the late nineties and early noughties, -gated student housing communities and privatised public spaces did start to appear, on the outskirts of the city centre.

63 The new landlord’s concurrent feasibility study to turn Stag Works into residential accommodation, which would have been more lucrative, showed that it would have been incredible expensive due to the narrow floor plans requiring external stairs to be built to enable access to the flats. This was a boost to the Stag Works project as it made the sale of the building to LSDT more likely if they achieved their funding target.

funding to purchase Stag Works outright and so the scale of the proposals and number of stakeholders and aims for the project increased. The CIQA worked with LSDT to get small grants for consultants to develop surveys and feasibility studies for the purchase of Stag and running as studios, music production facilities, and rehearsal and performance space. This led on to the submitting of a large European Regional Development Funding Bid (ERDF bid) to carry out the proposals.

Due to the additional cost of the purchasing of Stag Works the scale of funding bid was necessarily much larger, and with this came requirements to make a greater impact. Stag Works was fairly 'rough and ready', and although the priorities of the musicians were for affordable rents and access to equipment, rather than upgrading the fabric, there was pressure from the funders to take an approach of full refurbishment, where the transformation achieved through the money would be visible. A plan was formulated which looked at some very high-end office and studio space that could be rented by the hour, and would in effect subsidise cheaper studio space. However, the ERDF bid, made in 2006 was unsuccessful. This left the musicians and artists within the John Street Triangle in a precarious position, occupying buildings with private landlords, that were under greater pressure from speculative redevelopment with little stake in how they would be utilised.

## The New Retail Quarter and the loss of small-scale business space

In the mid 2000's Sheffield City Council commissioned a Masterplan for a New Retail Quarter (NRQ) at a site adjacent to the CIQ. Property developer Hammerson's Sevenstone proposal, which aimed to 'rival Leeds and Manchester for retail' got Planning Permission.<sup>64</sup> This would lead to increased speculation on property in Sheffield, and it was considered likely higher rents would be achieved upon its completion. Sheffield City Council made a number of the Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) and began demolition of a large part of the city centre they sought to prepare the ground for the building of the new leisure and retail blocks.<sup>65</sup> In 2004 laws around compulsory purchase orders in the UK had changed, replacing public good as the benchmark test with

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64 The Masterplan was developed by architects Building Design Partnership and featured buildings from a number of critically acclaimed architects including Hawkins Brown and Foreign Office Architects. Hammerson own a number of shopping centres and city centre sites throughout the UK and Europe.

65 This decision made prior to the financial crisis would have seen what were largely independent businesses being replaced by international high street chains. For large developers such as Hammerson's, risk and investment is considered over a large portfolio of land, and Sheffield, which, since the election of the coalition government, had suffered large cuts in public investment, became a substantially less attractive investment. Due to the numerous delays and Sheffield City Council's eventual decision not to go ahead with the development, sites and buildings in this part of the city centre stood empty for many years.

economic benefit. In her book *Ground Control*, journalist Anna Minton states this has severe implications for democracy and what is possible in cities.<sup>66</sup> She argues that this change in the law opened the way to the assemblage of city centre sites on a massive scale and resulted in the privatisation and control of large portions of our cities by multinational corporations, which had previously had a multiple patchwork of ownership. In Sheffield City Centre many small businesses were bought up and closed down many years before any new units were to be built on those sites. Whole blocks stood empty and firms that had been in the city for decades shut down for good. The New Retail Quarter would be large-scale homogeneous redevelopment with units that could only be used for retail purposes, with the likelihood that restrictions would be placed on how and when parts of the city can be accessed and what activities were permitted.<sup>67</sup>

Although the area that was to become the New Retail Quarter in Sheffield had previously largely been comprised of retail units, it had been a mix of small-scale shops with other functions at first and second floor, under multiple-ownership. Their design and scale left open the possibility of their use for non-retail purposes, with little work required. In developing these proposals for the New Retail Quarter there was a further reduction in the city of the kind of accommodation used by arts, cultural and manufacturing users. A number of Planning Applications for sites in the CIQ, the proposed NRQ, along with the adjacent John Street area were submitted in 2007, but put on hold as the financial crisis unfolded and banks became increasingly disinclined to lend. In the case of the large scale developments and those proposals that were for the conversion of Listed buildings required considerable investment, and although in many cases tenants had already been evicted projects would not commence for a number of years, if at all.

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66 Often at the same time as taking ownership these new retail areas were overlaid with a system of management and maintenance called Business Improvement Districts, which contract firms to carry out the security and maintenance for one of these privatised areas of the city. There is an increasing emphasis on minimising risk, the development of retail spaces that will attract the highest rental income, and the production of architecture and landscapes that are cheap to maintain and easy to control. Place becomes a product, where the guiding principle is to improve the profitability and with it takes on a contract for its maintenance and management. Anna Minton. *Ground Control: Fear and happiness in the twenty-first-century city*. (Penguin UK, 2012), p.56

67 In addition to this there has been further privatisation of aspects of the urban realm. From the 1990s, primarily through Private Finance Initiatives, successive governments have been handing out multi million pound contracts for city centre redevelopment to private companies. Private Finance Initiatives are a form of contract where private finance, underwritten by public finance is used to carry out building and future maintenance and management of public infrastructure. Often secured for large portions of cities or entire town centres they include the financing, building, maintenance and management over a long period, usually of 25 years or more. They had two benefits in the eyes of the Conservative Government that initiated them; he first being ideological, they are essentially the privatisation of government contracts, with staff often being transferred from the public sector to the private sector; the second is more pragmatic that the future costs of a project are kept 'off the balance sheet. PFIs are a very controversial form of contract as governments for a number of reasons. Prominent among them is the criticism that Governments can borrow at much lower rates that can be obtained through private capital, so the argument that they are encouraging competition and lowering cost is problematic. In addition if the companies go bust it is the public that has liability for the debts.

## Protecting employment in Sharrow: Sharrow Community Forum and Distinctive Sharrow

At this time, which was one of significant demand for commercial property in Sheffield, Sharrow Community Forum were concerned about the impact on their neighbourhood, and wanted to safeguard space for employment uses beyond those offered by the retail uses in the district centre.<sup>68</sup> Their then director, Colin Havard, who would later become manager at Portland Works was keen for the response to be a proactive one, rather than responding negatively to each and every Planning Application. There were two potentially large plans for Sharrow, the first being China Town and the second being the Masterplan of Sheffield United Football Club. Although relations between these landowners and the Forum were good, they were both powerful players, that owned, or hoped to gather together investment for the purchase significant amounts of land. Sharrow Community Forum set up the 'Distinctive Sharrow Project' as a way to facilitate discussions between the forum, planners and developers.<sup>69</sup> Intervention could be timely as the Council were consulting on the Sheffield Development Framework and there was an opportunity to influence its development.

Under the 'Distinctive Sharrow' banner Sharrow Community Forum commissioned a Masterplan with local architectural firm, Bond Bryan as consultants. Their report largely focused on the district centre and main road system, proposing major redevelopments that would require substantial investment on behalf of the City Council. There was no direct mention of the firms and cultural activity in the neighbourhood. The report did not engage in questions of the feasibility of the proposals, and once published the council stated it would be highly unlikely the proposals could be realised. Extensive consultation with residents carried out by the forum during the plans development resulted in very lukewarm reception, and the report remained 'on the shelf'. A particular criticism was that people in the neighbourhood did not recognise the place in which they lived, and could not see their role or relationship to the proposals or how it would positively contribute to their day-to-day lives.

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68 See for example, 'Sheffield Proving a market Hotspot', *The Yorkshire Post*, April 5th 2007, <<http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/business/business-news/sheffield-proving-a-market-hotspot-1-2444743>> [accessed August 16th 2015].

69 One of the projects within this was hosting a Live Project with the University of Sheffield Architecture Department that would investigate the future of the John Street Triangle. This was considered to be a significant moment for the area because of the pressure for development and the creation of the Sheffield Development Framework (SDF) by the Planning Department. As one of the students involved in the project, and newly moved to Sheffield, this was my introduction both to Sharrow, the Forum and Sheffield School of Architecture. The project looked at the way in which the buildings and spaces might be developed to better fit with the needs of the local Contd community. The report was very well received by the forum, which, as an organisation advocated a roots-up approach fitted well with the neighbourhood. Despite the students presenting to the Planning Officer and a representative from the Urban Design Department, who were very positive about the approach, it did not make clear or convincing enough representations regarding the SDF to influence the policies for the area.

## The Distinctive Sharrow Toolkit as roots up development plan



Fig 2.3 Distinctive Sharrow Toolkit Focusing on Portland Works Mapping possible sites for actions  
published by Sharrow Community Forum Courtyard

At this point in time I completed my Masters (M.Arch) and approached Sharrow Community Forum, who employed me as a ‘Community Architectural Researcher’ in the neighbourhood, for two days a week, whilst I worked in a commercial architectural practice for the remaining time. Through working directly with the forum, I began to develop the Distinctive Sharrow Toolkit.<sup>70</sup> The toolkit aimed to develop a ‘roots-up’ plan where people could get involved in developing their neighbourhood driven by their desires for change and supported by their knowledge of the area. Focusing on large scale, small scale, opportunity and development sites, the toolkit set out different ways of acting, specific sites where it might be feasible, the ease of achieving a specific project, and who needed to be involved to make it happen. The small scale approach looked at small permanent interventions in the built fabric that might have a large impact, the large scale looked at big changes which would require either significant input from Sheffield City Council, and the opportunity sites focused on temporary activities that may change the way in which sites were perceived or used, development sites looked at how working proactively with developers investing in the area might enable community projects to be achieved.

The document was available as a PDF from the Sharrow Community Forum website, and 100 copies of the toolkit were printed and distributed, with the proviso that if

<sup>70</sup> Julia Udall, ‘Distinctive Sharrow Toolkit’, in *Networks of Design: Proceedings of the 2008 Annual International Conference of the Design History Society (UK) University College Falmouth*, ed. by Jonathan Glynn, Fiona Hackney and Viv Minton (Universal-Publishers, 2010) pp. 33-34.

someone took one, they should do something with it. As a result the Distinctive Sharrow Action Group was formed and began to carry out activities and projects in the neighbourhood. The group had half a dozen or more regular members, ranging from people working in local shops, to architecture students, teachers, and artists, all living or working locally. More people joined for events and activities that the core group established. The first projects were small scale ‘quick wins’ with varying success, but the group became visible in the neighbourhood and networks and relationships were established, including with Planning Officers, community groups and small businesses. Sheffield City Planning Department wrote the toolkit up as good practice, and discussions continued with partners such as Sheffield United Football Club.

## Changes to Planning Policy in the John Street Triangle

The space for small-scale employment uses within the neighbourhood continued to be precarious within Sharrow. In the 2007 Sheffield Development Framework, the John Street area was changed from an area of ‘Fringe Industry and Business’, to a ‘Flexible Use Area’, in order to stimulate further speculation. The latter is defined as having ‘Mix of housing and other non-industrial uses with no preferences’ with Use Class B2 General Industry being explicitly restricted (although some of the light industrial processes could argue they fall under use class B1 Business).<sup>71</sup> This change of classification had major implications for an area with over 20 buildings dedicated to industrial and music uses, many of which had many small-scale enterprises within one building.<sup>72</sup>

The amount of housing within the adjacent streets continued to increase, and shops and small businesses around the adjacent Shoreham Street local centre began to close. At this point in time there was no housing actually within the John Street area, but following the change of designation, Planning Permission was sought for a residential blocks of ‘Key Worker Housing’ that would provide over 2000 beds within the John Street Triangle area. The major concern for many of the businesses if residential accommodation was built adjacent to their site and the noise was considered to disturb the new residents, “[...] the planning system can be used to impose conditions to protect incoming residential

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71 The Planning Portal defines the ‘Use Classes’ as follows “B1 Business - Offices (other than those that fall within A2), research and development of products and processes, light industry appropriate in a residential area. B2 General industrial - Use for industrial process other than one falling within class B1 (excluding incineration purposes, chemical treatment or landfill or hazardous waste).” Department for Communities and Local Government, ‘Change of Use: Planning Permission’, <<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/>> [accessed August 16th 2015].

72 For example, Stag Works is recorded to house over 25 businesses, many of whom had been there for over a decade. Caroline Jackson, *John Street Triangle Business Audit*, (Sharrow Community Forum, 2011). <<http://www.portlandworks.co.uk/research/the-john-street-triangle-conservation-area-business-audit-2010>> [accessed August 16th 2015].

development from an existing noise source.” (Department for Communities and Local Government September 1994) P15 if tenants of the new residential accommodation complain.<sup>73</sup> Sharrow Community Forum were concerned about the loss of employment and the introduction of a large new student population with little or no stake in the area.

## A Planning Application at Portland Works

On 8<sup>th</sup> April 2008, Terry Smith, and Peter Blundell, an architect and estate agent working under the name of Landtask on behalf of the Portland Co. (landlords John Holland and Vince Steele), submitted an application for Change of Use from a cutlery factory to residential accommodation on behalf of the current landlords Vince Steele and John Holland. This was classed as a ‘major development’ and, if successful this would enable its “Partial demolition, refurbishment and alterations to buildings to form 77 apartments and 78 square meters of Office Space” (Sheffield City Council 2008). This would have led to the closure of the workshops and studios located within the cutlery factory. The Planning Application was invalidated in April and August 2008, but developing a more detailed submission, additional fees were paid and a site notice posted on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2013 (fig 1), and public notices placed in the local press (fig 2), the official consultation period of 21 days commenced. (Department of Communities and Local Government)

At the time of the Planning Application Portland Works was home to 35 tenants, all of whom were occupied making things, including rock, pop, and experimental music, fine art, tools, kitchens, windows, coat pegs, chastity belts, knives, performance art, and providing artisan and building services such as repairing motors and vintage bicycles, silver plating, roofing and engraving (Portland Works IPS 2010).<sup>74</sup> Many of these small firms and individuals had been at Portland Works for a number of years, or had occupied similar buildings in the surrounding area. The tenants were generally paying rates at the lower to bottom end of market, and they were operating on their own or with up to four employees. In my role as community architectural researcher at Sharrow Community, tenant Frances Cole approached me to offer guidance on the Planning Application. I already knew the area through my work at University and through the year I had spent at the Forum and offered to help as much as I could.

<sup>73</sup> Part III of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (states that) “local authorities in England and Wales have considerable and wide ranging powers to tackle noise problems... Fines of up ... to £20,000 where the nuisance arises on industrial, trade or business premises”. ‘The Environmental Protection Act’, Act of Parliament, (London: Stationery Office, 1990) p. 35.

<sup>74</sup> Derek Morton, volunteer then Chair of Portland Works carried out an unpublished survey of businesses within the building and they were documented through portrait photography of makers, and links to their businesses on the Portland Works Website in Summer 2010. See Portland Works, ‘Our Makers’, <<http://www.portlandworks.co.uk/makers/>> [accessed August 16th 2015] for profiles of current makers.

Many tenants had been renting workshop space for as long as 40 years, and for some, their workshop had been with their family for two generations yet a successful Change of Use application would have triggered the right of the landlord to evict the existing tenants.<sup>75</sup> The tenants were very concerned about this as for many the costs of relocating their business would have been prohibitive, and they would have had to close their businesses.<sup>76</sup> Some tenants, both in Portland Works and the surrounding area had direct experience of the diminishing availability of affordable space in the city, and had already relocated a number of times. For others, the concern was linked to the community of Portland Works, and the loss being this particular place, which was one of the few remaining examples of this type of Works in the city.<sup>77</sup>

Some of the manufacturers were using tools and machinery that would be prohibitively costly to relocate, and some were still using original grinding wheels, drop hammers. An additional concern, both for the metalworkers and musicians, was that Portland Works was one of the few buildings in Sheffield which still had hammer rights allowing for noise to be made during the day; with a change of use this would be lost, as it was granted to the building rather than a business. Those in adjacent buildings such as Stag Works, which was predominantly music studios, interspersed with some light manufacturing, metalwork and jewellery-making, could therefore also be forced to close their businesses should the Planning Application for Portland Works be successfully implemented.

The impact of profit being extracted from achieving planning permission is that the landlord of a site that has obtained Change of Use may evict existing tenants. The building however was likely to remain empty for a number of years until the land has been sold on to a developer interested in building, or the market is perceived to be at a point where the carrying out building work is a worthwhile risk. During this process of potentially repeated resale, the site is in limbo; it is this state of 'being empty' that often makes it easier to sell. Meanwhile, the impact of the disused site on the surrounding area may be detrimental, and those occupants of the site have been displaced. Light industry,

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75 Andrew Cole of Wigfull Tools had been at Portland Works since the late 1970s and Stuart Mitchell took over a workshop, which his parents had run their business 'Pat Mitchell Knives' from the 1980's. Previously Pat Mitchell Knives had a Workshop in the adjacent Stag Works.

76 At an initial public meeting in January 2009, 36 people attended the majority of who were tenants. They spoke about how much it would cost to relocate machinery, and the problems associated with finding suitable affordable space in the city. Artists based at the Works spoke of other studios closing, and new space being priced significantly higher than the accommodation they had previously occupied.

77 English Heritage, (2003) <<http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/resultssingle.aspx?uid=1271036>> [accessed 12th June 2001].

manufacturing and start-ups, especially those in music and arts are very ‘rent sensitive’ and particularly under threat from gentrification. This is because they tend to need a lot of space, yet have relatively low incomes, and due to the fluctuating nature of their incomes, or inability to pay deposits often require the flexibility of renting rather than owning a property.

In the case of Portland Works, the Application for Change of Use was made just as the Global Financial Crisis was taking hold. The impact of this in terms of Portland Works was a virtual halt on lending which almost guaranteed that even if successful the property would not be developed for some time. Although this was perhaps more frustrating as it would mean it would likely sit vacant for some time, it also eased the time pressure on our attempts to oppose it. The landlord did not submit the full application, or push for it to go to Planning Board as rapidly as he might have done one year previously.

### What right to Portland Works?

Portland Works and its businesses were under serious threat, and this seemed to be part of a much larger pattern in the city where accommodation for light industrial, small manufacturing and creative business was diminishing. Although the council had expressed a desire to support the cultural industries, there were tensions between initiatives that sought to encourage investment in the residential and high end commercial sectors, with the need for small scale affordable, easily adaptable units. Speculation and debt had contributed to a massive increase in prices, and a change in the way land was used and who it was for. The interdependent relationship that had grown between manufacturing and arts in the city was not fully appreciated, nor was the informality of many of the spaces and networks that crossed boundaries such as the ring road. Yet, in these long standing networks and relationships there was strength and possibilities for the future. The skills of the tenants, both in manufacturing and the arts and their willingness to repair and modify the buildings to suit their needs gave them tools to engage in the spaces that they shared. Activist and community work to campaign for and support such activities, together with long established practices of collaboration and mutuality combined to provide a good basis to act against the landlords plans, and work to safeguard shared assets in ways that are just, equitable and sustainable.

The desire and ability to begin to act against the Planning Application did not come from nothing. The work and care of those before made the space for this struggle to take place. In understanding this, philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s call for ‘The Right to the City’

has particular resonance.<sup>78</sup> In this work he argues for a new urban politics, in which those who make the city have the right to make decisions about the city. This is an idea which is contingent, and is not about a utopian vision, worked out in advance, but instead, about the struggle of producing a city in ways that are negotiated between people. In his call for the Right to The City, Lefebvre argues that, “The architect, the planner, the sociologist, the economist, the philosopher, or the politician cannot out of nothingness create new forms and relations. More precisely the architect is no more the miracle worker than the sociologist. Neither can create social relations, although under certain favourable conditions they can help trends to be formulated (to take shape). Only social life (praxis) in its global capacity possesses such powers- or does not possess them”.<sup>79</sup> What Lefebvre is proposing is a radical shift, rather than reform or resistance to what already exists that begins with those who contribute to the life of the city. He argues that there is a right to make a claim to decisions about the future of the city.

It is also in his analysis that we can understand the scale of the challenge, and what it means to engage in such a process. Lefebvre’s call is tied to his tripartite definition of space, which includes perceived space, conceived space and lived space. This is important because to transform space all three of these facets should be transformed- both the concrete space encountered as physical entity, our perceptions and representations of space and the interrelations between these two that we encounter from day to day that is a fundamental part of our lives. This is not just a physical transformation it is the social production of space. Geographer David Harvey says that it should be understood as a shared and intentional struggle for change, and collective rights:

“[...] It is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.”<sup>80</sup>

What this right would imply in the context of Portland Works is that the decisions of developers would be part of the collective decision making processes, rather than determined either solely through the rights of ownership or the rights of the state.

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78 Henri Lefebvre, ‘Le droit à la ville’, *L’Homme et la société*, 6.1 (1967), pp. 29-35.

79 Ibid., pp. 150-151.

80 David Harvey. p. 23.

How then should we stake a claim to Portland Works, in what form and with which tools? In a place that could be understood as intertwined with the fates of other buildings and businesses how to understand the community of Portland Works? In the face of the desires of wealthy and experienced developers how could tenants and others be heard and create a future for this place and their businesses that was more just, equitable and sustainable?

## Chapter 3

# Portland Works as Urban Commons

In understanding the Portland Works campaign to oppose the Change of Use Planning Application and the subsequent collaborative reimagining and enacting of alternative futures, I consider the emerging notions of Urban Commons and commoning. Drawing on historic practices of the Commons, there is renewed interest in the idea for those who see this as an alternative to the public/private binary when thinking about what we share, and how it is distributed. Commons can be understood both as institution and set of non-commodified resources, with a community that seeks equity, solidarity, diversity and self-management. The resources, be they natural, spatial or immaterial are held in common by a particular community that cares for and takes responsibility for their continuation. In doing so a customs and politics of commoning must develop amongst a community. **The question of how the ‘politics of the common’<sup>1</sup> develop in the case of Portland Works, and its transformation from contested urban space to Urban Common is central to this thesis.**

As a result of the application for Change of Use at Portland Works people have gathered around and together begun a process of struggle for the right to be part of its future. As part of this process, through a Community Share Issue with over 500 shareholders, the building has been taken into common ownership and out of the commercial property market through an Asset Lock that prevents demutualisation. This process began because of a shared perception of a threat, that through processes of acting, thinking and being together became a shared concern. **I therefore wish to claim Portland Works as an Urban Common.** It is now being developed for community benefit by the member shareholders who own the building, based around negotiation, collaborative actions, and care. Plans for the future include supporting business, education and culture on site, and making contributions to the life of the city.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Hardt, ‘Politics Of The Common’, Contribution to *Reimagining Society Project* (Hosted by Z Communications, Boston 2009).

In suggesting Portland Works is an Urban Common I am arguably making a bold claim. Not everyone involved in its production would see it as such, or be familiar with the term, some would not show interest in this as an idea, and perhaps others would disagree with it, at least as being a driver of the project. Those involved come from a range of political standpoints, social values, and concerns. But this is why I think it is of interest. **Commons are not out-of-reach utopias, planned carefully beforehand by a homogenous group of people who understand in theoretical terms exactly what it is they should do, and which experiments they need to undertake in order to stake out their claims. Instead, they are something that is made through doing with others, sometimes falteringly, and always experimentally.** In needing first to gather together a community of concern, then to apply an Asset Lock to stop further speculation on the Portland Works site, and in needing to develop ways of working together I argue we are ‘commoning’. I therefore wish to use these experiences and our activities at Portland Works as a way of exploring these ideas.

Portland Works provides a good case for study because of its precarious existence within the city for a number of years. Tenants have worked to maintain the building, and their businesses in the face of many challenges, with few resources. In this investment and in the strategies and tactics that have been developed to sustain life in this place, there is however the basis for creating something different, and beyond the capitalist modes of production, as Alex Means argues:

“Because of their precarious and marginal status to this order, the poor are obligated to generate alternative frames of the common—informal legal arrangements, modes of production, cultural communication, labour, and tactics of resistance and struggle—these frames represent possibilities for a new constituent power.”<sup>2</sup>

It is because of a need to act together with others that we can begin to understand the potential for Commons to meet our needs and desires as an emerging group. The application for Change of Use became a moment to galvanise as geographer Paul Chatterton contends, “Each building, public space, policy document, speech or strike is an opportunity to intervene, educate, build alliances, propose alternatives and signpost new directions...”<sup>3</sup> Often the impetus to come together and try to make cities in non-

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2 Alex Means, *Commonwealth: Part 1*, (Critical Stew: 2001), <<http://criticalstew.org/?p=3176>> [access 9th August 2015].

3 Paul Chatterton, ‘Seeking The Urban Common: Furthering the Debate on Spatial Justice’, *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 14.6 (2010) p. 236.

capitalistic ways comes from experiencing these moments of loss or oppression, refusing them, and understanding that there are already tools to hand for making other common futures possible.

## The city as Commons

Commons as resource take a number of forms; Natural Commons, which are such as rivers, a woodland, or marsh; immaterial Commons; such as a song, an act of care, or idea, and Urban Commons. Following Lefebvre's assertion that those who produce the city through social labour should have a right to make decisions about its production, we can understand the city as vast Urban Commons produced by collective labour.<sup>4</sup>

However it is not always discernable that the city is socially produced. In the case of Portland Works it is the assertion of the landlord's rights through the Planning Process that makes these Commons visible and the struggle to retain them necessary. It is through contemplating what would be lost, and that it is much greater than the cost of the land, that it is possible to see the work and care that has produced this place.

Geographer Nicholas Blomley in his article, 'Enclosure, Common Right and the Property of the Poor', argues that when landlords enforce capitalistic property rights through demolition or redevelopment they are dispossessing people who had until that point considered it to be their right to access or use the space,

“...The Commons is both produced in and productive of a particular place. In a crucial sense, the claim to the Commons of the poor...is based upon and enacted through sustained patterns of local use and collective habitation, through ingrained practices of appropriation and ‘investment’. By virtue of being in place for a long time and using and relying upon the Commons, residents both acquire and sustain a legitimate property interest...the poor have ‘invested’ in that space.”<sup>5</sup>

The people using a space may not own it, or be contributing to it in the fiscal or financial sense, but they are contributing value in other ways. In the case of Portland Works this investment has been both financial, in terms of rent and buying and fitting machinery in their workshops, and in other ways, to do with bonds of friendship and care that have

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<sup>4</sup> Henri Lefebvre.

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Blomley, 'Enclosure Common Right and The Property of The Poor', *Social and Legal Studies*, 17 (2008) p. 320.

emerged from their shared working lives over long periods of time.

Commons as a form of economy is politically and ethically alternative to capitalist economy, reframing ideas of ownership and rights. In the context of today's neoliberal society, many institutions and forms of Commons, such as Community Land Trusts (CLTs), Community Interest Companies (CICs), and Community Development Trusts can be understood as a progressive rethinking of land tenure. Political philosophers Antonio Hardt and Michael Negri in their influential 2011 book, *Commonwealth*, state that the 2008 financial crisis has become a question for both left and right, which reaches to the foundations of capitalism.<sup>6</sup> The answers that are brought forth in response to this crisis are either privatisation or nationalisation, each of which is a regime of property. Through the concept of 'Commonwealth', Hardt and Negri suggest that commoning could provide an alternative form of organisation and approach to sustaining ourselves, which forms institutions that enable more just and equitable relations. Concern and care for the environment is intrinsic to the notion of the Commons, which foregrounds the negotiation of the use of resources, our interdependence, and long-term sustainability. Faced with the crisis of global capital, global warming and diminishing resources, many are turning to the notions of the common to consider how the resources of a finite world can be more equitably distributed.

The development of 'Commons' and the processes of Commoning are a struggle against market-driven ways of ordering society and indicate a radical transformation in relations. Political economist Massimo De Angelis sets out a clear and useful definition:

“First, all Commons involve some sort of common pool of resources, understood as non-commodified means of fulfilling peoples needs. Second, the Commons are necessarily created and sustained by communities [...] Communities are sets of commoners who share these resources and who define for themselves the rules according to which they are accessed and used [...] In addition to these two elements; the pool of resources and the set of communities; the third and most important element in terms of conceptualizing the Commons is the verb 'to common'; the social process that creates and reproduces the Commons.<sup>7</sup>

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6 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*, (The Belknap Press of The University of Harvard: 2011).

7 An Architektur, 'On the Commons: A public interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides', *An Architektur* 23 (2010) p. 6.

Crucial to this understanding is the notion that we should not take for granted the community as pre-existing or the procedures to produce share and sustain resources and associations as pre-established. Instead, De Angelis and Stavrides argue they must be co-created through social-pedagogical and democratic processes, in a particular situation. To understand these processes it is useful to draw on historical practices of commoning, and consider critiques of such approaches.

## Historical practices of Commoning

‘Commons’ is a term used in England, Wales and Scotland for over 600 years to describe certain parts of the land. It does not denote something public, but rather something owned collectively or by a single individual, and indicating rights of people, known as commoners, the use of and access to these resources. Ecologist Garrett Hardin famously criticised the idea of the Commons in *‘The Tragedy of the Commons’*, in order to justify self-interest and privatisation. He begins:

“Picture a pasture open to all. It is to be expected that herdsmen will try to keep as many cattle as possible on the Commons. Such an arrangement worked satisfactorily for centuries because of tribal wars, poaching and disease keep both man and beast well below the capacity of the land. Finally [...] comes the day of reckoning [...] the long desired goal of social stability [...] the inherent logic [of which] remorselessly generates a tragedy. As a rational human being each herdsman seeks to maximise his gain [...] by grazing more animals] the positive component is a function of the increment of one animal [...] the negative component is a function of the additional over grazing [...] shared by all [...] the negative utility is shared by all [...]”<sup>8</sup>

Hardin concludes that the ‘rational herdsman’ will keep introducing more and more animals, and this too is the case for all of the other herdsmen who share this land until the pasture is overgrazed and can no longer sustain anyone. He states that this is the inevitable Tragedy of the Commons.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Garrett Hardin, ‘The Tragedy of the Commons’, *Science*, 162.3859 (1968) pp. 1243-1248.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1244. Although it is worth noting the example of the ‘Made in Sheffield’ brand, which could be considered to be an example of the Tragedy of the Commons. It operated for a number of years guaranteeing quality of all products made in the city- and was something held in common. In the 1980s many makers in the city bought cheap imports, did some finishing work and branded them with Made in Sheffield- the result was a massive drop in quality and a loss of faith in the brand. This occurred in the context of massive job losses in the city, and can perhaps be understood as the manifestation of a breakdown of relationships between those who made things in the city.

Hardin's tragic Commons with their interchangeable rational herdsmen are inconsistent in their logic because land in this fictionalised account is held in common but interests are held privately, rather than in relation with others as Commons implies. Hardin's description is closer to the functioning of a capitalist system where the costs are externalised and the benefits kept to the individual. Nobel prize winning political scientist Elinor Ostrom challenged Hardin's account and argued that there are many historical and contemporary instances of the successful management of Commons.<sup>10</sup> She states that Hardin's argument presupposes that people "are **norm-free maximizers of immediate gains**, who will not cooperate to overcome the Commons dilemmas they face."<sup>11</sup> Through studying the practices of commoners over decades Ostrom argues instead that through taking a long-term view and developing practices and procedures for shared governance, commoners can create an even more successful system of sharing resources than would be possible through privatisation or state control.

To act as commoner is to partake in negotiations about how to sustain yourself and your community over time, rather than to fight to determine the outcome according to your own individual will for short-term self-satisfaction. Success as a commoner is not aligned with achieving your goal *above* somebody else's, but by developing your goals always in relation with others. In his analysis of Hardin, Massimo De Angelis argues,

"By assuming that Commons are a free-for-all space from which competing and atomised 'economic men' take as much as they can, Hardin has engineered a justification for privatisation of the Commons space rooted in an alleged natural necessity. Hardin forgets that there are no Commons without community within which the modalities of access to common resources are negotiated... This also implies that there is no enclosure of Commons without at the same time the destruction and fragmentation of communities."<sup>12</sup>

It is through understanding commoning as a practice where **individual interests get reformulated as collective ones through practices of learning and negotiating. These commoning processes are both produced by and constitute social bonds.**

In the context of the feudal system, the rights of the common included things such as gathering firewood, fishing, harvesting fruit, places to wash and clean garments, and the

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<sup>10</sup> Elinor Ostrom, 'Coping With Tragedies of The Commons', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2 (1999) pp. 493-535.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p 493 (my emphasis).

<sup>12</sup> An Architektur, p. 58 (my emphasis).

right to graze animals. **Commoners evolved a form of collective self-governance and management through regular meetings where knowledge and experience of using the resources of a place were shared and developed.** Manorial courts defined the extents of the Commons and the rights associated with them, and would be responsive and contingent; the landowners did not always win the judgements. This was to ensure sustainability of resources, because if too much was taken or it was taken at the wrong time of year the resource became scarce and you would have nothing to eat the following year. You took into account the impact of your actions on the ability of the Commons to provide in subsequent years.

In the enactment of these practices, Commons became social spaces; people were doing things together and through the negotiations, sharing of knowledge and labours they became part of their everyday lives. Learning (what worked with a certain crop, the type of soil, where the wind blew) happened between people over a number of years through commoning. Marxist historian Peter Linebaugh traces this ‘right of the common’ back to 13<sup>th</sup> Century England, and asserts that these practices were customs, which forced the King to grant them as rights.<sup>13, 14</sup> **This analysis is important because it gives us an insight into how Commons evolve over time from social practices and customs and how they can be a force for change.**<sup>15</sup>

The act of taking the land into private ownership by the state known as ‘the Enclosure Acts’, which happened primarily between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, and led to the criminalization of many people, who relied on these resources to survive. Six million acres of land were enclosed through over 4000 legislative acts.<sup>16</sup> The more intensive farming techniques that could be used on larger land plots reduced the labour required, increasing profits for the land owners and driving down the cost of labour. Linebaugh suggests that as the urban proletariat they were “commoners without Commons” thus

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto Liberties and Commons for All*, (University of California Press: 2009) the appendix contains the 1680 translation of The Great Charter of The Forest.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Linebaugh ‘Enclosures from the bottom up’, *Radical History Review*, 108 (2010), pp. 11-27.

<sup>15</sup> The process of enclosure and then the practices of pushing for change and the resultant conceding of rights continues; following the failure of The Right to Roam Bill 1884 and subsequent Bills it was only through practices of rambling, walking as resistance that these rights were established finally in The Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000. An important 20<sup>th</sup> Century example of resistance was the 1932 mass trespass on Kinder Scout in what was to become the Peak District National Park by radicalised industrial workers in Manchester. The Mass Trespass is commemorated by regular Early Day Motions (most recently Early Day Motion 3005 supported by 14 MPs). UK Parliament, *Early Day Motion 3005*, (2012) <<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2010-12/3005>> [accessed Aug 14th 2015].

<sup>16</sup> Susannah Bunce, p. 4.

put in a subordinate position, dispossessed and displaced.<sup>17</sup> It is the process of enclosure and the subsequent displacement of people led to rapid urbanisation.

The enclosures still have a substantial legacy in England today in terms of rights of access and property as Journalist George Monbiot points out.<sup>18</sup> Only 4% of land is registered as Commons, and there is a right to roam over only one fifth of this small fraction, “Today one per cent of the people own between 50 and 75 per cent of the land [in England]. It is impossible to be precise, as the landlords have successfully resisted a census since 1875. In Scotland, the enclosures – or Clearances – were both more rapid and more complete than in England. Thousands died when they were dispossessed, tens of thousands were forcibly loaded onto ships and sent to the colonies. Today, half of Scotland is owned by 600 people...”<sup>19</sup> The continuing unequal distribution and rights to the land leads to its scarcity and the limits on the ways in which it is used.

The Enclosure Acts forced people into dependency on wage labour, and created debts and a system of interest payments, **which projected into the future, determining future obligations and reducing choices.**<sup>20</sup> In the agrarian model land is essentially a productive force at the root of the economy, but also an active part of the ways in which people develop relationships, under collective self-governance. Enclosure took common land from people which they previously would have had free access to, and who therefore had to pay higher rents or move away to the city to work in factories to survive.<sup>21</sup> Critical urban geographer, Stuart Hodkinson argues that as part of the process of enclosure it was **strategically important to close off any other ways of sustaining oneself outside of wage labour in order to keep the number of wage labourers high and wages low.**<sup>22</sup> This was done in part through arguing that non-capitalist ways of being were immoral, and standing in the way of progress:

“Primitive accumulation [...] required a sustained ideological assault by pro-enclosure propagandists both on what Hardin (1968) would call the ‘tragedy of

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17 Peter Linebaugh.

18 George Monbiot, ‘A Land Reform Manifesto’, *The Guardian*, February 22nd 1995, p. 2.

19 Ibid., p. 2.

20 See Parliament UK Between 1604-1914 Parliament passes a total of 5,265 enclosure Acts (of these 3,828 were passed during 1750-1819) UK Parliament, ‘Managing and owning the landscape’, <<http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/towncountry/landscape/keydates/>> [accessed August 14th 2015].

21 Peter Sheldrake, *Elephants on Roller Skates*, (Lulu.com: 2013) p. 109.

22 Stuart Hodkinson, ‘The New Urban Enclosures’, *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 16.5 (2012) pp. 500-518.

the Commons<sup>23</sup> and the commoners themselves ('conservative', 'lazy', 'wasteful', 'drunks', 'barbarians', 'thieves', etc.) [...] These interventions helped to eventually win the argument for enclosure in Parliament (which was in any case dominated by landowners), who passed into law a 'system of stern measures' designed to prevent people from finding alternative survival strategies outside of wage labour as well as to maximize productivity within the labour process and subdue the poor who resisted, by attacking traditional rights (to common), customs (to holiday) and workers' collective action."<sup>24</sup>

This shift in subjectivity alters the symbolic and practiced relationships between human and land and land and animals and human and animal.<sup>25</sup> Hodkinson's analysis makes clear the impact of enclosure goes beyond that of dispossessing people of land and resources, but actually **seeks to change practices and the morality of how people sustain themselves and are together.**<sup>26</sup> The transformation associated with these Acts still defines the way in which we understand the link between morality and wage labour and can be frequently found in right wing political rhetoric and press<sup>27</sup> today that seeks to perpetuate the idea that the poor are poor by choice.

## Commons as market value

Enclosure and privatisation is not confined the bounding of the land in England, Wales and Scotland within a 200-year period however, but is a continuing and continual occurrence that is necessary to the continuation of capitalism. In conversation with architect Stavros Stavrides, political economist Massimo De Angelis, argues that too much attention is focused on primitive accumulation, and other forms of enclosure are under-represented in left struggles:

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23 Garrett Hardin.

24 Stuart Hodkinson, p. 504.

25 In their essay *Rights of Common, Ownership, Participation, Risk*, feminist architectural practice MUF talk about the rights relating to the sustenance of animals such as eating of acorns or beechmast by pigs (pannage), grazing of sheep or cattle (herbage), where the Commons also denotes a relation between animals and the land.

26 Stuart Hodkinson, pp. 500-518.

27 Perhaps most famously in the words of the then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, "Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul." Ronald Butt, Interview with Margaret Thatcher for the Sunday Times Venue 10 Downing Street 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1981 (Editorial comments 1500-1600 Importance Ranking Major Word count 2985) Recent instances include Conservative Government Ministers David Cameron, George Osborne and Liam Byrne's use of the phrases 'strivers or skivers', 'shirkers or workers' and 'hard working families'. Andrew Sparrow, 'MPs vote on 1% benefits cap: Politics live blog', *The Guardian*, 8<sup>th</sup> January 2013, <<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/blog/2013/jan/08/mps-vote-benefits-cap-live-blog>> [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2015].

“...Because capital seeks boundless expansion, and therefore always needs new spheres and dimensions of life to turn into commodities [and] because social conflict is at the heart of capitalist processes- **this means that people do reconstitute Commons anew, and they do it all the time. These Commons help to re-weave the social fabric threatened by previous phases of deep commodification and at the same time provide potential new ground for the next phase of enclosures.**”<sup>28</sup>

We look after one another in times of hardship, and we are creative in order to make life together richer. We collaborate with one another at work. These acts of mutuality that form our social relations all offer possibilities for profit.

Neoliberal economic policies are still predicated on the privatisation of state owned assets, (such as transport links, energy companies, or prison services), but they are also increasingly about privatising natural and immaterial Commons. Hardt and Negri’s analysis of contemporary urban life in ‘Commonwealth’ shows us that the ‘immaterial’ forms of labour are now central to capitalist production.<sup>29</sup> They argue that we need to expand our understanding of what it is that we think of when we talk about ‘the Commons’: moving from an idea of them being simply ‘natural’ Commons such as the air, the sea, the woods, and the soil.

We need to understand that natural resources are increasingly managed by humans and technologies, or are part of complex, interdependent and hybrid assemblages, and in doing so we should question the split between natural and produced, instead framing them all as forms of life. Today the process of enclosure might take the form of the diversion of water from a river that supplies a community to feed industrial processes or the patenting of a medicine that prevents communities using generations old cures for illnesses they had passed on for generations. These forms of common often comprise of assemblies of both natural and immaterial.

The enclosure of immaterial Commons deprives the population of access to certain kinds of resource and crucially, alters the kinds of relations people have with one another. Karl Marx argued that industrial production was hegemonic not because it was the most common form of labour, (which at the time of Marx’s writing was still agriculture), but

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<sup>28</sup> An Architektur, (my emphasis).

<sup>29</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.

because it came to dominate the kinds of social relations that we have.<sup>30</sup> The qualities of industrial production were imposed across economies and over society as whole; for example through temporalities such as the working day, and the proliferation of the clock, and the wage structure. Hardt and Negri point out that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century industrial production is no longer the dominant structure and these immaterial forms of labour now preside, with the qualities involved in these roles are becoming hegemonic and are being imposed over society as a whole. Jobs and professions such as air stewardess, nurse, retail assistant and teacher are defined as emotional work. Whilst containing some material aspects: bringing drinks, giving safety information, administering medicine, the major component is care and the production of affects. Hardt and Negri call this form of production either ‘immaterial production’ or ‘biopower.’<sup>31</sup> This means that our very way of being with one another can be dominated by the needs of the market, but at the same time much of what we do on a day to day basis is about collaboration and the development of relations and strategies for acting mutually.

By enclosing immaterial Commons, however you limit what is possible. Philosopher John Holloway points out the violence of the appropriation of property in the capitalist system:

**“What one person has done becomes the precondition of the doing of others [...] there are no clear dividing lines.** What happens then, under capitalism, is that this flow of doing is broken, because the capitalist comes along and says, “That which you have done is mine, I appropriate that, that is my property.”<sup>32</sup>

Common access to academic papers understanding the medicinal properties of a plant, a musical score, or the building blocks of a computer programme enable others to examine and build on them further.<sup>33</sup> This is demonstrated through what are known as ‘Knowledge Commons’ such as Wikipedia, or computer programmes such as Linux and the ever-increasing offerings held under Creative Commons License.<sup>34, 35, 36, 37</sup> If we

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30 Karl Marx.

31 Ibid., pp. 132-133.

32 John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power: Transcription of a video by O. Ressler, recorded in Vienna, Austria, 23 min., 2004, (2004)* <[http://www.republicart.net/disc/aeas/holloway01\\_en.htm](http://www.republicart.net/disc/aeas/holloway01_en.htm)> [accessed 11th August 2015].

33 Internet Activist Aaron Swartz was sentenced to consecutive life sentences for downloading and sharing academic papers. He understood the knowledge as common to the world and recognised the injustice of it being available only in elite institutions, largely in the Western world. This is poignantly explored in Storyville’s *The Internet’s Own Boy*. *The Internet’s Own Boy*, dir. by Brian Knappenberger (Participant Media, 2014).

34 Charlotte Hess and Elinor Ostrom, *Understanding Knowledge As Commons From Theory To Practice*, (MIT Press, 2011).

privatise and restrict access productivity is reduced, but also crucially equity and justice are damaged.

**Commons problematize private ownership as artificial and potentially destructive as distribution is driven by profit, rather than determined by negotiations of how to meet our collective needs, both now and in the future in ways that are just and equitable.** In *Caliban and the Witch*, activist and feminist scholar Silvio Federici emphasises both the impending devastation that these new forms of enclosure hold for the majority of the population and also the potentiality of working with and from the many instances of the production of Commons:

“...The neo-liberal attempt to subordinate every form of life and knowledge to the logic of the market has heightened our awareness of the danger of living in a world in which we no longer have access to seas, trees, animals, and our fellow beings except through the cash-nexus. [Yet they] have also **made visible a world of communal properties and relations that many had believed to be extinct or had not valued until threatened with privatization.**”<sup>38</sup>

If we also consider urban and immaterial Commons we can see that we start from a point of abundance, but must always struggle against further enclosures.

## The value of the Commons at Portland Works

At Portland Works the things the tenants do for one another, and the culture that is produced make both the Works and the surrounding neighbourhood a desirable place to live and work, whilst also increasing value within the market. In this case the failure of the landlord to repair the building is offset by tenants making repairs to the building for one another, so each repair of the steps, or of a roof, makes it possible for the landlord to continue to collect rental income. In order to derive what the landlord considers to be

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35 Brett M. Frischmann, Michael J. Madison and Katherine J. Strandburg, *Governing Knowledge Commons*, (Oxford University Press: 2014).

36 Ibid., p. 4.

37 Simone Aliprandi, *Creative Commons A User Guide: A complete manual with a theoretical introduction and practical suggestions*, (Ledizioni, 2011).

38 Federici, Silvia 'Feminism and the Politics of Commons', Issue 1, *Conversations on New Feminism and Art*, (uz)bu))na))), (2011) <<http://www.uzbuna.org/en/journal/conversations-new-feminism-and-art/feminism-and-politics-Commons>> [Access date: 23rd August 2013]

sufficient profit, he is reliant on the activities and work of tenants in their care for one another and the place that they use.

The arrangement the landlord holds with the tenants, for the vast majority, informal, could also be seen as a way in which they can continue to enjoy ‘affordable’ rents, which in some cases was so cheap as to be used as storage space. However, the gap between what he invests, and what the tenants can reasonably be expected or are able to invest is not enough to allow for the building to be maintained in a habitable state, and therefore is not a sustainable arrangement. Unlike the principles of the common where the long-term continuation is a fundamental consideration, the landlord is largely concerned with being able to derive maximum profit each year, for as long as is possible with minimum investment on his part.<sup>39</sup> If the Change of Use application is successful the tenants long term use will not confer any rights, as the legal mechanism associated with such allows him to evict all tenants.

The combination of the cultural value of the historic metal trades, the architectural fabric of the building and the current cultural uses in the surrounding neighbourhood come together to contribute to the rental income that is achievable. The care for the building shown by the tenants that goes beyond doing the minimum to make it habitable, and often is inscribed in skills and gestures that show understanding of the fabric and use of the building as it has changed over a number of years. At Portland Works it is important to understand that the kinds of resources that we begin with are not just physical things, such as a building, place or tools, but the help of maker might offer another in repairing a machine, directing a lost client to the right workshop, or fixing a step on a staircase to another tenants studio, and the knowledge of how to make something that is passed on and developed over time. These things both support the businesses at Portland Works and make life more enjoyable. **Yet, not only do they sustain the value of the Works for the landlord, they make its reclaiming as common more viable. These activities, friendships and practices of solidarity became a strong basis for mutual action in light of the Planning Application.**

## Commons as resource, Commons as institution: a role in the city

Commons can be understood both as resource and as institution. First as shared resource, but then also as the struggle to continue that shared resource and the modalities

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<sup>39</sup> As he also retains the rights of ownership, and refurbishing a listed building would be more expensive than knocking it down and starting again, the profit motive does not lead to a desire to retain the existing fabric, unless its character and status can sufficiently increase the value of the property.

of its reproduction in ways which are not commodified. If we acknowledge the richness of a Commons, and the obligation to work in solidarity with others, this raises questions about what kind of role Urban Commons have in the city. In their Footprint Journal editorial for on Commons, Heidi Sohn, Stavros Kousoulas and Gerhard Bruyns draw on the work of sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato, to state that cooperation produces collective public goods, ‘When socialised (exchanged, transmitted, diffused, shared and consumed) the modalities of the collective increase the value of such goods whilst creating new and differentiated forms’.<sup>40</sup> They argue that the Commons can be productive of new relations, new ideas, new spaces and new possibilities. The potential impact is not only developing practices of being in common, but also of creating resources that can enable other actions and support other people and places within a network of commonality.

Commons then can take a role in the city. How can this be understood in relation to the welfare state, public services and civil action? Does the Commons overlap, duplicate, or replace such activities and services? In the context of policies of austerity across much of Europe and certainly within England there has been a push from right-wing governments for the people to take on in a voluntary capacity those services and roles that have previously been funded through taxation and supported by the Welfare State. The aim of such policies, most notably the ‘Big Society’ in England and Wales, has been to privatise many government contracts, and reduce costs through charity and community support taking on what was previously within the public sector. The ideas of common ownership and community run services are a part of this.

The ‘Big Society’ a flagship policy idea of Conservative Party leader, David Cameron formed part of the legislative programme of the 2010-2015 Lib-Con Coalition Government in the form of the Localism Bill.<sup>41</sup> The Government states it wishes to, “Create a climate that empowers local people and communities, building a big society that will take power away from politicians and give it to people.”<sup>42</sup> This will be enacted through a transfer of power from central government, with the purported purpose of supporting charities, co-ops and social enterprises based locally, and a wish to encourage people to volunteer in their local area.

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<sup>41</sup> UK Parliament, ‘Localism Bill’, (2010) <<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-12/localism/stages.html>> [accessed August 14th 2015].

<sup>42</sup> Cabinet Office, ‘Building the Big Society’, (2010) <<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/407789/building-big-society.pdf>> [accessed August 14th 2015].

The Localism Bill takes a strong ideological position, which is anti ‘big government’ and there is a pronounced focus on shifting resources and control of services to private companies and individuals and the third-sector, with the majority of associated contracts thus far awarded to multinationals rather than the charity or third sector.<sup>43</sup> Community ownership in this context is used as a tool to reduce land ownership by Local Authorities and reduce services provided by the public sector. An example of this is the Community Assets England legislation. By declaring a building an ‘Asset of Community Value’ communities are given time to raise funds to bid for, buy and take over running public or private assets.

Those formulating the policies and rhetoric of the ‘Big Society’ have drawn substantially on the work of Philip Blond’s ‘The Red Tory’ and the associated Think-tank, ResPublica, which Blond founded in 2009.<sup>44</sup> <sup>45</sup> The Red Tory is strongly anti-welfare state, and instead proposes that empowering social enterprises, charities and other elements of civil society will solve problems associated with poverty. ‘The Red Tory’ advocates a number ethical consumerist ideas to create the Big Society including shopping local, local currencies, shops run by local communities and buying British, all of which go against conventional capitalist logic based on consumers purchasing goods at lowest cost. These approaches could be understood to be mutual in form, and rely on collaboration. However from a government perspective the market remains the measure of value and success is determined by capital measures, as Political theorist Nathan Coombs argues, “the implication being that co-operatives are fully compatible with the political regime of self-interest in neoliberal economics.”<sup>46</sup> The focus is on how productivity can be raised, and therefore profits through mutuality.

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43 Patrick Butler, ‘Charities: Corporate 'Bid Candy' for the Big Society?’, *The Guardian*, 22 June 2011. “For example on the Workfare program, Ministers described the Work Program as a "massive boost" for the "big society". But it's increasingly looking anything but: not only did private sector corporates win 90% of the prime contracts, but also it appears the much-trumpeted sub-contractor market is not looking too healthy for the voluntary sector either. Charities complain they are mere "bid candy": used as window dressing by big corporates keen to buff their bid credentials, then quietly ignored or squeezed out once the contract is in the bag.” See also: Dennis Campbell, ‘Far more NHS contracts going to private firms than ministers admit, figures show’, *The Guardian*, April 25th 2015, <<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/apr/25/far-more-nhs-contracts-going-to-private-firms-than-ministers-admit-privatisation>> [accessed August 14th 2015].

44 Phillip Blond, *The Red Tory*, (Faber and Faber: 2010).

45 “ResPublica was established in 2009 by Phillip Blond. We are a multi-disciplinary, non-party-political research organisation, which combines cutting-edge analysis with practical-impact to create bold solutions to enduring social and economic problems...Our research combines a radical, civic philosophy with the latest insights in social policy analysis, economic modelling, behavioural economics, management theory, social psychology and technological innovation to produce original, implementable solutions across six major project areas: Economy, Welfare and Public Services, Environment, Children and Families, Security, and Civil Society and Social Innovation.” ResPublica <<http://www.respublica.org.uk/about-respublica>> [accessed August 14th 2015].

46 Nathan Coombs, ‘The Political Theology of Red Toryism’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 16.1 (2011) p. 92.

Social action is taken to support one another and to tackle social problems but this is stripped of any political intention. Coombs contends that the ideology of the Red Tory portrays the concerns of the 'local' as something that can be considered largely in isolation, dealt with best by those living in a location without 'interference' from central government:

“Detaching social conservatism from neoliberal economics, demarking concern for the poor from class struggle (or any other disruptive forms of social partisanship), establishing a clear role for elites in social management and promoting localism and small-scale employment initiatives against the hierarchies of the state and multinational corporations [...] The ‘moralized market’ (that Blond) advocates comes down to a form of local protectionism and firewalling the various layers of socio–economic activity: local, national and global”.<sup>47</sup>

Coombs argues that this form of morality-driven action emphasises an elite who will guide the masses in making the right choices, whilst seeking to sustain the status quo. It requires a transcendent morality that is shared amongst an immediate and homogenous community in order to be 'self-reliant' and self-supporting.

Forms of cooperation in Red Tory ideology, and the kinds of institutions they produce are at odds with the aims of workers movements, such as the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers, which not only sought to sustain a population in times of hardship but also to develop solidarity between causes, and support further interconnectedness, equity and internationalism. Rather than seeing places and concerns as diverse and interdependent, the Red Tory, and following this, the Big Society, requires that they should be self-sufficient and independent. In this conception there is no impetus to redistribute wealth between different areas of the country, or wards within cities, or to recognise that not every part of society starts with the same resources and capacities to develop mutual support. Public goods and commonality in this sense are perceived as taking responsibility for those things that are not accounted for by the market, rather than as potentially transformative force.

**Such approaches co-opt volunteer work into supporting the market, or a reduction in taxes by appropriating the social structures usually associated with left wing politics, but eradicating the idea of social change.** In her essay 'Place is

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 82-83.

now, time is everywhere' Valeria Graziano considers the impact of this:

“To self-organise was once a strategy of resistance in the face of the omnipresent bureaucratisation of workplaces and public institutions alike. Now, self-organisation is encouraged within new productive units that nevertheless fit perfectly well in the outsourcing model of global scale corporations, feeding the precarisation and deregulation of labour [...] to engage in volunteer initiatives was once a way to refuse a life dedicated purely to a professional career. Now forced volunteerism (such as internships and enforced community service) is the new predicament of a workfare state that is left to manage a spiralling crisis of a jobless society [...] the key issue seems to be that many of our wishes have been granted in form but not in content.’<sup>48</sup>

Graziano states that the appropriation of forms of mutuality and self-organisation traditionally employed by the Left, is now a strategy employed by the Right to bring more people under the control of the market. Within this there is a deliberate move away from any notion of class struggle that these forms and approaches may have been traditionally associated with.

The relationship with the state and the market is a challenging one for those seeking to develop an Urban Commons, because it could be instrumentalised to prop-up policies of austerity and the reduction in services. The processes of sustaining a Commons are not easy, often depending on the capacities of those involved, their access to resources and the contingencies of the situation. If a group of commoners take on such a role but is not sustained it could lead to a lack of support where it is needed most. In the context of governments pursuing policies of austerity, any such failure could be used as justification for cuts to funding or open the door to further privatisation. In the case of Portland Works the dilemma is less pronounced, as the building and land were taken from private ownership into common ownership, and it does not seek to replace existing public services. However, Portland Works as an Industrial and Provident Society is ‘for the benefit of the community’ and in determining and developing what these obligations are and to whom these questions are important. An Industrial and Provident Society is a mutual society that allows shares to be issued, and profits should be put back into the company and used for the benefit of the community.<sup>49</sup> The partnerships that are formed

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48 Valeria Graziano, ‘Place is Now Time is Everywhere’, *Trans Local Acts Cultural Practices Within and Across*, eds. Doina Petrescu, Constantin Petcou and Nishat Awan, (aaa/preprav: 2011) p. 133.

49 Community Companies, ‘Industrial and Provident Societies’, <<http://www.communitycompanies.co.uk/industrial-and-provident-societies>> [access date 24th August 2015].

and the kinds of activities pursued could very well be co-opted.

## Boundaries of the Commons

Whether we understand Commons as resource, or Commons as institution, the notion of boundary is important. They are part of what differentiates the common from publicness, and sets out how resources are shared and with whom, who takes part, and the practices and relationships that emerge in this context. Boundary in Commons is different from that which might be understood in private property, as it is necessarily both more porous and more fluid, and could be understood better as threshold. Stavros Stavrides reminds us the aim of creating a common is to overturn dominant ways of doing and types of spaces and therefore so this is a space of transition. Some rules and certain commitment or care is required because of aspiration to be egalitarian and produce an anti-authoritarian space, “Thresholds create the conditions of entrance and exit; thresholds prolong, manipulate and give meaning to an act of passage.”<sup>50</sup> Being aware of the change implies the need to alter approach or awareness and it is through these thresholds that Commons can resist being co-opted by the state or private sector.

Institutions enable durability, and enable people to understand what they are joining and how this is possible. However, but they are also prone to exclusivity and ossification. In order to support diversity and resist becoming an enclave these boundaries should be constantly renegotiated and the workings of the threshold, in terms of who can join should be questioned.

The notion of boundary presents a number of challenges, particularly around the question of the scale at which the resources need management. Some resources can be managed by a small group of people who know one another well and can directly engage in all decisions, but when the number complexity and scale of resources increases this relies on nested forms of organisation.<sup>51</sup> Who and how commoners have access to the shared resources present a further challenge. This may not operate in a homogenous way. In the case of Portland Works this is of particular importance in relation to those commoners who are tenants and run their businesses from the site, in contrast to those who do not work in the building and have a different relationship to the resources that we share, both in terms of their involvement in their production and use and their

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50 Stavros Stavrides, ‘Common space as Threshold Space: Urban Commoning in Struggles to Re-Appropriate Public Space’, *Footprint*, 16 (2015).

51 Elinor Ostrom, ‘Reformulating the Commons’, *The Swiss Political Science Review*, 6.1 (2000) p. 29-52.

reliance on them to sustain themselves. It is through negotiating questions such as these and the resultant generation of rules and norms of the institution that forms the process of commoning and keeps the institution alive.

Portland Works is a place of work, a place of making, which enables certain ways of living and being-in-common. The emerging practices of commoning support life in the city in ways that is both diverse and rooted in place. These struggles are made at different points of intervention, by different alliances of people, and therefore require different kinds of agencies. How we work together to imagine, decide, and make the future of this common is just as important as the protection from commodification that the purchase allowed. Paul Chatterton points out in his paper, *'Seeking the Urban Common'*:

“It is also important to look beyond [...the] physical attributes to see Commons as complex social and political ecologies which articulate particular social spatial practices, social relationships and forms of governance that underpin them to produce and reproduce them.”<sup>52</sup>

As an institution a Commons is constantly remade through socio-pedagogical processes, and the terms upon which it is constituted should be continually questioned. It challenges representative democracy because people take part in both making it and making decisions about it. Collective self-governance allows for an embodied and engaged decision making process.

**Commons do not just meet people’s basic needs in order to sustain themselves from day to day; they create an opportunity to engage in questions of politics, the social, and in learning with others, through the processes of commoning.** To work to transform Portland Works into an Urban Commons is to do much more than prevent a handful of businesses from closing, it is to struggle for a livelier, more creative and just engagement with the city.

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<sup>52</sup> Paul Chatterton, ‘Seeking The Urban Common: Furthering the Debate on Spatial Justice’, *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 14.6 (2010) p. 626.

## Chapter 4

# Agencies for Commoning

### Why does agency matter to commoning?

In this chapter I examine why agency matters to processes of commoning, how we can conceptualise agency, and what kinds of agency are required in the production of an Urban Commons. I begin by understanding notions of transformation, and agency as comprising of iterative, practical evaluative and projective aspects. I then go on to define the kinds of agency that are achieved in the production of the commons, drawing on a definition of the commons as a community, a set of non-commodified resources and the practices of learning and democracy required for the institution of commoning. Agency is crucial in the situation at Portland Works because a diverse group of people need to act together to change the situation they are in, from a position of being under threat to acting positively to develop a sustainable alternative.

Agency is our ability to act freely, and to make a choice in a particular situation, within particular social structures. Commoning is tied to notions of transformation and ***integrates and politicises social development and personal subjective change***. This must be a mutual process because commoning involves reconstituting individual interests as shared ones. A transformative agency recognises that it both creates and responds to shifting conditions and allows for the possibility of purposeful change.<sup>1</sup> Italian activist and theorist Antonio Gramsci developed the notion of hegemony, asserting that we have shared norms, which make up our understanding of what is good and just and possible, and these limit what we can sustain.<sup>2</sup> He maintains that it is not enough to fight for *political* change; for true transformation we must also shift our shared cultural understandings. Agency is therefore needed for commoning because the space is contested rather than neutral.

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1 Doina Petrescu, Prue Chiles and The Agency, 'Agency: alternative practices and alternative worlds', *Architectural Research Quarterly*, 13 (2009), pp. 109-111.

2 Peter Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment Philosophy Hegemony and Marxism*, (Brill: 2009) pp. 52-67. See also: Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies', *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies*, (Psychology Press, 1996), pp. 272-294.

Culture is made through images, practices, stories, discourses and figures of speech. Although culture is a form of politics, it may not appear to be, as we stop noticing its political aspects and it becomes ‘common sense’. The power of cultural hegemony lies in its invisibility, in those things we take for granted and imagine always were and can never be different. Gramsci argued that a culture is never completely hegemonic however, and there are always “counter-hegemonic” activities.<sup>3</sup> These cultural activities can become a starting point for transformational change, and imagining and remaking the world differently.<sup>4</sup> At Portland Works this could be understood as the tenants’ acts of sharing and doing things in common, such as lending tools, and helping one another. These practices, which were already established to some degree, became a starting point for acting together to develop an alternative to the market-driven future.

## Agency and micropolitics

Communicative strategies are only part of the picture in terms of how people express and achieve their desires in groups. To explore this further we can draw on the notion of micropolitics. Put simply, micropolitics is the use of informal or formal power by groups and individuals to achieve their goals within organisations or institutions. In order to understand it we must pay close attention to techniques and processes. In ‘A Thousand Plateaus’, philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue that our preferences, attitudes and perceptions contribute to the formation of desires, beliefs and judgments as political subjects.<sup>5</sup> Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis came from trying to understand the rise of fascism in Germany, Italy and Spain in order to observe qualitative differences between these instances and in to comprehend what led to the 1968 uprising in Paris.<sup>6</sup> They argue that if we just analyse the macro-political in such situations, we miss those things that are very important in terms of understanding how change happens. It is the small things about how we relate to one another, the choices we make on a day-to-day basis, that come to have an impact on the macro political level.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Beautiful trouble: a toolbox for revolution*, Ed. by Andrew Boyd and Dave Oswald Mitchell, (Or Books, 2012) p. 222.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*, (Bloomsbury Publishing, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> Sidewinder, *Micropolitics and the Left*, (Dublin: Anarchist Writers, February 2014)  
<<http://anarchism.pageabode.com/sidewinder/micropolitics-left>> [accessed August 31st 2015].

<sup>7</sup> This also works in the other direction as Caeron Craine explains, “What happens politically as the macro-level has roots in our physic affairs and small interpersonal dealings with one another. If the macro-political structure has become repressive, we should look at how it is pulling form and organising desire.” Caeron Craine, ‘Microfascism’, *The Mantle*, (June 5<sup>th</sup> 2013) <<http://www.mantlethought.org/philosophy/microfascism>> [access date August 8<sup>th</sup> 2015].

Desires should be understood as productive; it is not just about the object of desire but the structuring of those things around it. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's work, philosopher Cameron Crain states,

“One's sense of personal self is itself a product of desire related to a broader social structure. At its [...] limit, my desire relates to all of history and how I perceive it. What my desires produce [...] is not so much objects, but rules. What I want ends up structuring my behaviour.”<sup>8</sup>

Our small personal affairs, and the strategies we develop to achieve our desires are political, and although some of these do not seem to be, because we can't understand how they affect others, it can be in their sum total, as a milieu that they begin to matter. To understand agency in relation to the commons we must look closely at the strategies and ways of being that are shared, and how these are mobilised in order to achieve our goals.

### A working definition of agency: 'Iterational, projective and practical-evaluative'

So how can we understand agency in relation to notions of commoning and transformation? In their essay 'Learning through the Lifecourse', Biesta and Tedder encourage us to understand agency as something that is achieved, rather than possessed, "Agency...is not something that people have; it is something that people do."<sup>9</sup> Commoning processes require a group of people to come together to self-manage a set of resources, and in doing so must engage in social-pedagogical and democratic processes.

As a form of transformative social change this has social and political aspects, requiring the ability to be critical and to closely understand a situation. In their paper, 'What is Agency?' Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische define human agency as a tripartite, temporally embedded, social process, which is:

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Gert Biester and Michael Tedder, 'Agency and Learning in The Life Course: Towards an Ecological Perspective', *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 39 (2007) p. 136.

“...Informed by the past (in its “iterational” or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a “projective” capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a “and temporally embedded, practical-evaluative” capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment).”<sup>10</sup>

In definitions that consider agency a moral capacity, agency comes from an advance plan or intention; it comes from the will of a subject. However according to Emirbayer and Mische’s tripartite definition, this is only part of what enables us to act. The first element in their tripartite definition, the iterational aspect, relates to social practices, the second relates to care for the future, and the third aspect is about understanding the situation of the moment. The three elements are dynamically interrelated. **In Commoning, rules and decisions are negotiated through situated social practices and customs. They draw on a particular communities capacities and understandings to imagine and care for a shared, and transformed future, and therefore require such a situated and relational understanding of agency.**

To understand the iterative aspect of agency it is useful to examine Practice Theory, which has been developed by a number of theorists, notably Pierre Bourdieu Anthony Giddens and Michael Foucault.<sup>11, 12, 13</sup> In his 1977 work “Outline of a Theory of Practice”, Pierre Bourdieu states that each agents’ conditioning, and past experiences are internalised within themselves and makes up their conception of the choices available to them in terms of what they consider to be possible or rational. The values, dispositions, lifestyle choices, and expectations of particular social groups that are acquired through these activities and experiences make up their ‘habitus’, which orientates rather than determines actions. This is not consciously coordinated or governed. Institutions are reproduced and perpetuated through these daily practices and then become part of the structures that go on to shape peoples’ options. As we respond to changes in the world, we re-formulate our understanding of the past in an attempt to understand the emergent present and what might be possible in the future. Through choosing to draw on past

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10 Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, ‘What Is Agency?’, *The American Journal of Sociology*, 103 (1998) p. 963.

11 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1977); *The Logic of a Practice*, (Stanford University Press, 1990); *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984).

12 Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradictions in Social Analysis* (Macmillan 1979); ‘Comments on the Theory of Structuration’, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 13 (1983); *The Constitution of Society Outline of The Theory of Structuration* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

13 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality. Vol. 1.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980); *Vol 2 The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990).

patterns of thought and action embedded in practical activity, actors maintain stability and help to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time.

In thinking about processes of commoning the iterative aspect is important because it is closely tied to how we understand one another's' histories and ways of doing. Past achievements, both collective and individual can become the basis of future actions. Mutual practices can be built upon and extended, and in bringing together heterogeneous social groups, the diversity of practices can provide a foundation for learning. In "Towards a Theory of Social Practices", Sociologist Anthony Reckwitz defines 'practices' as routinized behaviour, consisting of several interconnected elements, which cannot be reduced to any one of the elements.<sup>14</sup> Theories of social practices state that there is always interplay between each of these elements, which are carried by an individual, who is defined as both a bodily and mental agent. Each individual may partake in a number of practices, each comprised of these elements but not necessarily connected to one another; this makes them unique. Reckwitz defines the significance of this as being that therefore, "...She or he is not only a carrier of patterns of bodily behaviour, but also of certain routinized ways of understanding, knowing how and desiring."<sup>15</sup> Valorising these embodied knowledges, and seeing them as interdependent with conceptual knowledges must broaden the focus of the research project in order to take into account encounters, experiences and emotions. It also suggests that if knowledge is produced in such a complex and interconnected manner, it is not possible to generalise beyond a particular group and situation.

In trying to reformulate individual desires and needs as shared ones, commoners are working not only to create new goals, but also to establish new practices and ways of being in common. In thinking about the resilience of the commons, continuity is crucial and the iterative aspect of agency reminds us of the need for repetition and learning through doing together over time. As architect and activist Doina Petrescu points out, practices are important to creating lasting change, which others can build upon, "For resistance to be cumulative, there must be recurrence, repetition, continuity and long-term social temporalities."<sup>16</sup> This also suggests that one has the capacity to 'make space' for future actions of others by introducing them to, and establishing, practices that

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<sup>14</sup> Anthony Reckwitz, "Towards a Theory of Social Practices: A Development of Culturalist Theorizing", *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5.2 (2002) pp. 243-263.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>16</sup> Antonio Negri in conversation with Anne Querrien, Doina Petrescu and Constantin Petcou, 'What makes a Biopolitical Place?', *Urban Act: A Handbook for Alternative Practice*, (aaa/PEPRAV, 2007) p. 297.

transform what people feel is open to them, or by making relations to practices that may open up new possibilities.

Communities form and re-form relations not only through shared cultural histories, customs and memories, but also through different understandings of the future.

Emirbayer and Mische define the second part of this triad, the projective element as:

“...(Encompassing) the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors’ hopes, fears, and desires for the future.”<sup>17</sup>

These many ‘yet-to-comes’ might relate to feelings of responsibility to future generations, imaginings of a good society, expectations, aspirations and what we consider possible. In their paper ‘Community and Future in Philosophy’ Johan Siebers and Elena Fell point out, “The future of community is not merely a postponed present... The future is a realm of would-be potentialities and is richer in content than the present reality that it will become.”<sup>18</sup> These imaginings of the future are unresolved and multiple, where many different understandings and conceptions can be held together at once.

The desire to create change, and the wish to project alternative possibilities, happens when we become aware that routinized forms of action, and relied upon practices are no longer satisfactory in helping to resolve emergent problems, or when we are confronted with something that shifts our view of what is possible or desirable. Drawing on Heidegger’s terming of this “pre-conscious, affective engagement of the world that constitutes its forestructure of action”, as ‘*care*’, Mische and Emirbayer suggest that: <sup>19</sup>

“In this way, (Heidegger) firmly links projectivity to the motivational structure of action; actors invest "effort" in the formulation of projects because in some way or another they care about (not just "have an interest in") what will happen to them in the future.”<sup>20</sup>

Through linking care and the projective aspect of agency, Mische and Emirbayer seek to

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17 Emirbayer and Mische, p. 963.

18 Johan Siebers and Eleanor Fell, *An exploration of the relation between the concepts of 'community' and 'future' in philosophy*, (AHRC: Swindon UK, 2011).

19 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh and Dennis Stambaugh (Sunny Press, 2010) pp. 184-194.

20 Emirbayer and Mische, p. 963.

restore the split that they saw emerging in the seventies and eighties between strategy, (resource mobilisation and claim-making) and identity, (the development of shared meanings, identities and solidarities). In her earlier paper, “Projects, Identities, and Social Networks” Ann Mische is critical of this split between strategy and identity, in which she suggests, “...Strategies are stripped of meaning and reflexivity, while [identities] are temporally flattened out and shorn of their orienting power.”<sup>21</sup> In processes of commoning, the how and the why and the means and the ends should evolve together, rather than be predetermined as utopian ideal, or as social practice shorn of any political intention.

The part care plays in our ability to act relates also to our self-awareness and inclination to acknowledge our concerns, whether privately, or publically. In this respect care is important to both individual and mutual agencies, as architect Kim Trogal points out, in ‘Caring for Space’:

“You are doing, because you care about someone or something. At the same time care can limit action, that perhaps “I can’t” is uttered because you care for something else that you consider more important. Acknowledging that you care about something makes it easier to make conscious decisions about whether or not you want to participate.”<sup>22</sup>

To admit care for something, which can often be quite personal, relies on trust. To collectively acknowledge ‘we care’ takes good social relationships. Care can be for the future, for others, as motivation, or as restraint.

Commoning as engaged practice, and therefore the third aspect of the triad, the ‘temporally-embedded practical-evaluative’ capacity to understand and respond to the contingent present is crucial. Emirbayer and Mische define this as:

“It entails the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations”.<sup>23</sup>

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21 Anne Mische, *Projects, Identities and Social Networks: Social Networks: Brazilian Youth Mobilization and the Making of Civic Culture Centre for Studies of Social Change*, (The Working Paper Series, 1994).

22 Kim Trogal, *Caring for Space: Ethical Agencies in Contemporary Spatial Practice*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, (The University of Sheffield, 2012) p. 10.

23 Emirbayer and Mische, p. 963.

They suggest that this work, which is communicative in scope, is complex, interpretative, and reflective. Learning takes place in social interactions as a ‘practical-evaluative’ aspect of agency, in which actors are conceived as agents acting within nested and intersecting systems in an intersubjective process, across space and time. The practical-evaluative aspect of agency is the ability to learn in the moment, with others, and respond to contingencies as active subjects, offering the possibility of change.<sup>24</sup>

## What kinds of agency are Agencies of the Commons?

If we take forward such a working definition of agency how then can we understand it in relation to the processes of commoning? Urban Commons can be understood as a **common pool of resources, the community to sustain it and the processes of democracy and learning needed to ensure that it’s future is imagined and reproduced in ways that are just and equitable**, what kinds of agency are required? I propose that there are particular kinds of agencies needed for commoning, which I define as being **economic, political, social, democratic, and pedagogical**. I seek to explore these kinds of agency in the context of commons and commoning, in order to understand how the kinds of agency we require at Portland Works can and have been achieved.

## Economic agencies and the mobilisation of resources

Economic agencies are required in order to secure and allocate non-commodified resources in more just, equitable and useful ways. This requires ethical collective decisions. Drawing on the work of feminist economic geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham, I contend that this requires a shift in our understanding of economy. In their 2006 book, ‘A Postcapitalist Politics’, J.K. Gibson-Graham argues that the way in which we represent the economy has substantial effects on our agency and ability to act ethically.<sup>25</sup> Gibson-Graham critique many familiar representations of the capitalist economy to understand how these representations can take hold of our imagination and start to shape how we think about our relation to capitalism (and our opportunities to act outside of it, or past

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<sup>24</sup> In their 2007 paper, ‘Learning in the lifecourse’ Biesta and Tedder take forward Emirbayer and Mische’s conceptualisation of agency as way to understand how learning happens throughout a person’s life, “It helps to explain the rise of biographical learning itself. . .in which active subjects. . .reflexively ‘organise’ their experience in such a way that they also generate personal coherence, identity, and meaning to their life history, and a communicable, socially viable lifeworld perspective for guiding their actions.” Gert Biester and Michael Tedder, pp. 132-149.

<sup>25</sup> Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham, *A Post Capitalist Politics*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

it). They analyse Bill Phillip's Monetary National Income Analogue Computer, suggesting that it presents capitalism as an all-encompassing perpetual motion machine with economic relations predefined and people primarily positioned as consumers and critique the pyramid-like hierarchy of the representation of capitalism in the Industrial Worker which assigns class-based roles, with relations generalizable citizens as having little or no agency.

#### 4.1 MONIAC, Bill Philips

#### 4.2 Pyramid of Capitalism, Industrial Worker

In their books, articles and publications produced with communities, Gibson-Graham put forward a number of alternative representations of economy, each taking a different purpose, intended to create agency in a particular circumstance. Perhaps the most powerful of these representations is an iceberg that shows 'wage labour' and 'the market' floating above the waterline, the visible part of the economy, yet shown as only a fraction of what constitutes the ways in which we sustain ourselves and how society is reproduced. Below the waterline sit many other forms of economy such as childbirth, photosynthesis, barter, theft, fair trade, scavenging, each creating different relations, transactions, labour and enterprise. The aim is to trouble the notion that capitalism is a comprehensive, inevitable system. It is important because it changes the way we understand the value of what we do, and what is possible.

#### 4.3 JK Gibson Graham

In putting forward the idea of Diverse Economies, they work to make visible the many non-capitalist ways of doing:

“Over the past 20 years, feminist analysts have demonstrated that non-market transactions and unpaid household work (both by definition, non-capitalist) constitute 30–50% of economic activity in both rich and poor countries. [...] Such quantitative representations exposed the discursive violence entailed in speaking of ‘capitalist’ economies, and lent credibility to projects of representing economy differently.”<sup>26</sup>

They are arguing here that in narratives that subsume everything to being subject to the capitalist economy we are suppressing and obscuring many people’s activities, particularly those who are already marginalised, and that this is disempowering. **Agency is affected by the way in which things are represented and therefore we need to be more careful about what we ‘make real’.**

In the context of Portland Works, tenants engage in many different kinds of economy on a day-to-day basis. These include being self-employed, selling commodities as part of the international market, lending, giving gifts, engaging in acts of care, repairing, taking part in cooperatives, holding free events for community benefit, passing on skills and teaching, receiving grants, scavenging, reuse and recycling, volunteering, open source sharing, not for profit, wage and collective ownership.<sup>27, 28</sup> Each requires different kinds

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Scavenging, reuse and recycling of materials found on site is intrinsic to the culture of making for the majority of tenants, following a tradition of minimizing waste in the metal trades, and the DIY culture in the arts and music.

<sup>28</sup> For example knifemaker Stuart Mitchell made 100 Centenary Knives to promote Portland Works, and charged only for the materials in order to raise money for the Campaign.

of contribution and benefit, and to a greater or lesser extent the choice to participate. Some activities are part of a number of different kinds of economy, and people's motivations are equally diverse.

A number of Marxist economists, philosophers, and activists are drawing attention to the effect that concealing these instances of doing that are outside of the capitalist system have. In his essay 'Design as Distributed Agency', Tom Holert suggests that paying attention to things outside of dominant discourses may be a way to bring about new possibilities and relations:

“A dominant trend in leftist quarters of the social sciences in the past decade(s) tends to understand their critical research as imposed and ordained by the stark realities of capitalism while concealing their performativity of their critique from itself [...] to enable oneself as a researcher to imagine other realities, avoid deterministic theorizing and bring the difference and diversity of social and economic worlds and practices to light could become the first stage to actually change reality.”<sup>29</sup>

Holert suggests that this 'realism' in fact narrows down the possibilities for action, by simplifying and stabilising the world under all-encompassing theories. These theories ignore the moments of resistance, and those who are acting otherwise, instances that could serve as openings for change. In challenging the idea of the dominance of the capitalistic model we can rethink the economies we engage in as *diverse* with multiple opportunities for ethical decision-making.

These arguments draw on ideas of Autonomist Marxism, which understands capital as a form of relation, in which the worker is an active part. If, drawing on feminist and Marxist critiques, we define work as “the social processes of shaping and transforming the material and social worlds, creating people as social beings as they create value,” we need to think of economies, “[...] not [as] abstract entities where money flows as numbers separate from the 'real world', but are instead interrelationships between materials, relations and concepts that govern production, exchange, transactions and distribution.”<sup>30,31, 32</sup> What follows from this position is the assertion that it is **within our**

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<sup>29</sup> Tom Holert, 'Hidden Labour and The Delight of Otherness: Design and Post Capitalist Politics', *E-Flux*, 17 (2010) p. 18-21.

<sup>30</sup> Marx argues that the movement from an economy based on use-value, to one based on exchange value had a fundamental effect on the kinds of associations we have, because it was possible to hold onto to money, and therefore this creates unequal relations. Karl Marx.

**power to stop creating capitalism and to make other ways of being together instead.** These ways of resisting are points of departure for non-capitalist or post-capitalist ways of being. This critique forms an important way of reformulating the ground for action, suggesting that in fact we begin from a point of strength if we can rethink the way that we understand our lives.

**Economic agencies of commoning might be understood then as the ability to make ethical choices about how resources are valued, allocated and reproduced.**

Commoning seeks to produce new subjectivities and find new ways of being with one another that are not mediated by capital. It is tied to the need to resist and continue to struggle against dispossession. The processes of commoning therefore will frequently require the capture of land and assets and setting up legal structures that will prevent future commodification. Although, for example in the case of Portland Works, (the purchase of land or a building may be a one-off occurrence), financial resources will be required for maintenance and development in order to meet changing needs and take care of what is shared. Economic agency therefore has a pragmatic component, entailing knowledge and production of legal entities, not-for-profit enterprise, management strategies, funding opportunities and other ways of securing resources that will support its sustainability.

Economic agency can be achieved through sharing things with one another. In increasing the range and number of people who have access to material and immaterial goods that are produced, and natural resources that are available, their potential is also increased. This is because different people might have different ideas and understandings of their value and the possibility is opened for many others to be active and creative. The implication for Portland Works is that it is through sharing, that innovation and creativity become more likely. **Economic agencies can be developed through the very process of holding resources in common and working collaboratively with others to share ideas, tools and know-how.**

However, there are important questions around how decisions are made on the limits (if they are set at all), or the priorities as to how resources are shared, and the ways in which this is done. Forms of commons that are replicable are often made stronger through sharing, but for those that are finite, or require maintenance for their continuation, the question is often more complex and entwined with conceptions of power. Although

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31 Catharine Mackinnon, 'Feminism Marxism, Method and The State: An Agenda for Theory in *Signs*', *Journal of Women and Culture and Society*, 7 (1982) pp. 515-544.

32 Anna Holder and Julia Udall, p. 65.

historically (spatial boundaries of) commons should not be fenced, **commoning implies care and responsibility, and therefore (different kinds of) boundaries are often necessary to protect what is shared or to do so in ways that are agreed, even if they are social rather than physical.**

Setting boundaries, or formulating ways of sharing that will promote the resilience and sustainability of the commons is a means of creating and exerting economic agency. In setting priorities and creating boundaries we must always be wary of creating another form of privatised wealth shared between a limited and homogenous set of people in ways that are fixed and predetermined. Economic agencies of commoning require the continual questioning and renegotiating of these boundaries and processes. Without the corresponding processes of politics and democracy, existing unequal relations can be reinforced or extended.

**If we conceptualise the commoners as ‘agents acting mutually’, we must ask: how do the processes of reformulating individual needs as collective needs take place?**

This is especially important in groups that are radically unequal, very diverse or which are driven by differing needs, interests and understandings, where power will play an active part in negotiations, but also in any process that seeks to question the status quo and create change. Economic agency is tied to the need to sustain ourselves, therefore how can we ensure the continuation of the commons as the way in which this occurs?

Institutions of commoning must define subjects of action and the boundaries of the group in which the action takes place.

## Social agencies and acting mutuality

In the context of commoning, social agencies enable the gathering of social groups in ways that enable them to develop shared values, formulate goals, act together and undergo subjective change. The social must always be considered in relation to the political, and this can be understood as the assembling of claims, making them public and democratically considered in ways that are just and equitable. As geographer Kurt Iveson points out, this work of making relations requires a close understanding of the situation, what might encourage people to work together and where points of commonality might be found:<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Kurt Iveson, ‘Social or Spatial Justice? Marcuse and Soja on the Right to the City’, *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 15.2 (2011).

**“Commonalities and alliances...are not out there waiting to be found. They do not pre-exist political labour, but rather they need to be made.** To be sure, this work of making alliances includes the difficult work of selecting, developing and/or refining a conceptual basis for solidarity that works in a given space and time.”<sup>34</sup>

Community cannot be understood to precede efforts to gather people together or make a forum in which concerns can be heard. The process of assembling people and being heard is social and political work that requires labour, tools and care. We cannot expect networks and relationships to be pre-existing because of proximity, nor can we assume the ability to act with others to create change to reside within a community.

Yet, how to avoid potentially restrictive notions of community that are reactionary, or conservative, or elitist forms of togetherness? The notion of a group having a boundary should not imply a homogenous group, one that is closed to new people or ideas, or the requirement for consensus making where differences are excluded from the outset. **Achieving this is not unproblematic; groups that are diverse tend to mean and interpret ideas, words and actions differently. They have varied notions and measures of success.** This makes coming together to act hard work. I argue here that it is only through social bonds that understandings can be developed across these differences, and thus undergo subjective transformations relationally. As De Angelis and Stavrides argue in their article, ‘On the Commons’:

“With the prospect of claiming space as a form of commons, we have to oppose the idea that each community exists as a spatially defined entity in favour of the idea of a network of communicating and negotiating social spaces that are not defined in terms of a fixed identity [...]”<sup>35</sup>

In the production of a commons there is always a community, but it is not always defined by proximity, and cannot be taken for granted. Part of the work of producing a common is to gather those who have a claim or interest, and to support the development of relationships between what is often a heterogeneous grouping.

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<sup>34</sup> Kurt Iveson, pp. 250-259. (My emphasis)

<sup>35</sup> An Architektur, ‘On The Commons: A Public Interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides’, E Flux, 17 (2010).

In thinking about the mutuality of the commons it is important not to restrict our understanding of agency as being only a property of humans. Commons are complex ecologies of human and non-human. **A conceptualisation of agency that takes account of non-humans does not deny intentionality but sees it as less decisive of outcomes.** In her book ‘Vibrant Matter’, Political Scientist Jane Bennett says the consideration of the non-human should lead to an understanding of agency where:

“...There is not so much a doer (an agent) behind the deed as a doing and an effecting by a human non-human assemblage [...] causality is more emergent than efficient, more fractal than linear. Instead of an effect obedient to a determinant, one finds circuits in which effect and cause alternate position and rebound on each other.”<sup>36</sup>

**Agency, when taking account of non-humans is a distributive notion where the power of a body to affect others always goes hand in hand with a capability to be affected.**

This is a much more contingent and collaborative notion of agency that emphasises the production of ethical relations rather than moral intentionality. Drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt, Jane Bennett contends that rather than intentions being a ‘cause’ in its strictest sense as “a singular, stable and masterful initiator of effects”, that instead we might consider intentions as origin, understood as, “a complex, mobile, and heteronomous enjoiner of forces.”<sup>37</sup> We can understand agency as productive, and responsive.

In understanding human agency and mutually, it is useful to draw on Anthony Giddens work ‘The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration’, and ‘Social Theory and Modern Sociology’. Giddens defines agency as a ‘capability of acting otherwise’, where efficacy is the ability to make something new appear or occur.<sup>38</sup> Agency in this conception is the active engagement of individuals with aspects of their context characterised by particular configurations of routine, purpose and judgment. He argues that there are not individuals who ‘have’ experiences, but subjects who are constituted through their experiences.

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<sup>36</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (A John Hope Centre Duke University Press Book, 2010). p. 31.

<sup>37</sup> Jane Bennett, p.33.

<sup>38</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*. (John Wiley and Sons, 2013) p. 216.

In 'Beyond Discourse: Notes on Spatial Agency', Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till point out that in Anthony Giddens' conception of agency, mutuality is vital, and it is understood as comprising of both discursive and practical elements:

“In contrast to what Giddens calls ‘discursive consciousness’ in which matters are explicit and explainable, [...] **‘mutual knowledge’ is practical in character.** [However...] the discursive and the practical are by no means mutually exclusive: ‘the line between discursive and practical consciousness is fluctuating and permeable’, [Giddens] argues, suggesting that each draws on the other in the act of agency. [...] The discursive realm allows the development of knowledge away from the immediate demands of the everyday; mutual knowledge is about the practical development of knowledge within the everyday.”<sup>39</sup>

There is a continual process of doing and reflecting that allows for change. Mutual knowledge is founded in exchange, in negotiation, out of hunch. In order for it to flourish, there must be the ground in which open exchanges are possible. **Agencies of commoning are developed through everyday activities carried out with others, but also in relation to discursive knowledge developed personally by individuals and through communication between people.** This suggests that there is a need to be together in the same physical space, whilst also creating the space for analytical reflection.

Mutuality is not however simply a feature of agency in processes of commoning. In her paper 'Neoliberal Agency' Ilana Gershon argues that the practice of forming alliances is also a strong feature of a neoliberal understanding of agency.<sup>40</sup> She proposes that in liberal ideology agency is understood as individual choice and in neoliberal ideology agency is understood to be corporate; there is a shift from owning oneself as if you were property to owning oneself as if you were a business. In the latter, **agents are responsible for their own futures** (positive or negative), which are shaped through their own decision-making and their ability to form (personally) beneficial relationships with others.

A neoliberal understanding of agency considers that the people who do best are those agents who:

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39 Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*, (London: Routledge, 2011) p. 3.

40 Ilana Gershon, *Neo Liberal Agency in Current Anthropology*, (University of Chicago Press, 2011).

“[...] Reflexively and flexibly manage themselves, as one owns and manages a business, attending to one’s own qualities and traits as owned and ever improvable assets...the reflexive aspect of **the neoliberal self exists before relationships and contexts and actively decides how he or she will connect to other people, institutions, and contexts...** The freedom that neoliberalism provides is to be an autonomous agent negotiating for goods and services in a context where every other agent should ideally be also acting like a business partner and competition.”<sup>41</sup>

**This is not a responsive approach with agents undergoing change in relation to others, but one in which success is measured by not compromising pre-formed intentions and aims. To be altered is a loss, whereas to remain unchanged is to be successful.**

In this neoliberal perspective alliances are still formed, but the relationship with others is competitive. Therefore, to maintain these kinds of relationships external regulation is required to maintain their stability:

“Instead of equating freedom with choice, it might be more apt to say that neoliberalism equates freedom with the ability to act on one’s own calculations. Freedom of this kind is inevitably unstable, especially since, in capitalism, calculating to one’s advantage is all too frequently also calculating to someone else’s disadvantage. **Neoliberal agents require external forms of regulation to shape the perilous relationships they are forming with each other.**”<sup>42</sup>

Gershon refers here to *external* regulating bodies, laws, and institutions with the ability to impose sanctions. Agency here is akin to that of Hardin’s ‘rational herdsman’, seeing to maximize individual profits, and requiring regulation in order to prevent the tragedy of the commons and to maintain long term relationships and sustenance of shared resources.

**Social agency in commoning emphasizes the process of finding out and deciding together how best to meet the needs of an evolving group in the future, as a negotiated, rather than externally regulated, process.**<sup>43</sup> However, although it is not

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41 Ibid., p. 542.

42 Ibid., p. 539 (my emphasis).

43 Portland Works is a place where many tenants have worked for many years, if not decades, and during this time this

externally regulated, it is self-regulated. It should not be without any structure or process for organising democratic decision-making and communication. In her influential essay, 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness' feminist activist and political scientist, Jo Freeman argues for the need for formal and explicit structure for action groups, in order to support greater transparency and participation in decision-making, and for people new to the group to be able to actively contribute.<sup>44</sup> She contends that over time any group does structure itself, even if these are only informal structures, and often this is through bonds of friendship. As Freeman points out, the members of a friendship group will also relate more to each other in a meeting situation much more than they do with others:

“They listen more attentively, and interrupt less; they repeat each other's points and give in amiably; they tend to ignore or grapple with the "outs" whose approval is not necessary for making a decision.”<sup>45</sup>

If the structure of the group is only informal, and just a few people know the rules of how things get done, these people can become an elite. As Freeman goes on to say, they are operating without direct responsibility to the wider group, of which they are a part:

“These friendship groups function as networks of communication outside any regular channels for such communication that may have been set up by a group. If no channels are set up, they function as the only networks of communication. Because people are friends, because they usually share the same values and orientations, because they talk to each other socially and consult with each other when common decisions have to be made, the people involved in these networks have more power in the group than those who don't.”<sup>46</sup>

As these power structures are not explicit and have emerged in through personal connections, it is very difficult for those outside of these networks to confront the power structures within the group.

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mutuality has been established to some degree. I would argue that this forms a good point to begin from, and suggests the ability of the tenants to act together. In the context of the businesses at Portland Works there is no external regulation of relationships, and although alliances are formed in order to support one another's businesses, they are also defined by care and friendships. During the period of my involvement in the campaign to save the Works it became clear that this mutuality existed in part and at times intensely, through friendships and family bonds. However, there was a need and opportunity to extend and develop it. A critical question observed alongside this was: how could non-tenants become part of these social situations? Whilst tenants share a building and occupations, others in the campaign do not have the same opportunities as part of their everyday lives.

44 Jo Freeman, *The Empowerment Manual: A Guide for Collaborative Groups*, (New Society Publishers, 2013). Written in the context of the valorisation of and ubiquity of structureless groups as places for consciousness-raising in feminism

45 Ibid., p. 81.

46 Ibid. p. 82.

## Democratic and political agencies

It is important, for reasons of democracy and inclusivity, that there is some kind of formalised space or a framework where different views and people can come together and be heard and carry out research and action together. Peter Marcuse, a theorist of urban planning, sets out definitions made during the World Social Forum of different kinds of social organization that emerge during social movements:

“A forum (where sympathetic groups around varying issues come together to exchange experiences and debate) ... a coalition (a temporary coming together around specific temporally and spatially limited issues), ... an alliance (a more permanent coalition), ... a movement (less organized, less clear in its ultimate goals but very clear in its solidarity and concerned with multiple issues), an assembly (a single, or many single, coming-togethers of multiple groups for varying levels of common thinking, sharing, action).”<sup>47</sup>

Marcuse articulates here that groups come together for many different reasons and with different forms and bonds of relation.<sup>48</sup> One of the crucial aspects of such groupings is collectively formulating claims and being heard publically.

Raising concerns publically is often a process of making political those things that were previously understood as social or personal. Philosopher Jacques Rancière argues that concerns need staging and this is not just a matter of communication and representation but also the negotiation of what constitutes the political:

“Political action consists in showing as political what was viewed as ‘social’, ‘economic’ or ‘domestic’. It consists in blurring the boundaries... It should be clear therefore that there is politics when there is a disagreement about what is politics, when the boundary separating the political from the social or the public from the domestic is put into question.”<sup>49</sup>

Often the first kinds of agency that are required are these political agencies that enable

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<sup>47</sup> Peter Marcuse, ‘From Critical Urban Theory to the Right to the City’, *City*, 13.2-3 (2009).

<sup>48</sup> In the case of Portland Works many of these different forms of organization have been utilized during the course of the project, as the situation, group and concerns changed, as I discuss in Chapter 7.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp, *Reading Rancière: Critical Dissensus*, (Bloomsbury, 2011) p. 3.

people to set out what matters and to whom.

The process of making claims is a heterogeneous one. Formulating them into a collective way forward should not seek to smooth over differences, but instead to form something the challenges and changes those who take part. In her paper 'How to make a community as well as the space for it'; architect and activist Doina Petrescu suggests that the process of making claims to a place is the beginning of this process, and then comes the process of negotiating the different interests in such a way as to be able to act together:

“[...] Sometimes these claims are modest and informal, but what is important is how to transform them into a brief, a challenge, and sometimes a proposal that will give room to the multiplicity of desires and needs of diverse sets of users.”<sup>50</sup>

Petrescu goes on to say that if these individual desires can then be articulated in such a way as to constitute common interests, participatory practices that actively encourage the formation of diverse groups have the potential to be transformative:

“Driven by desire, participatory design is a 'collective bricolage' in which individuals...are able to interrogate the heterogeneity of a situation, to acknowledge their own position and then go beyond it, to open it up to new meanings, new possibilities, to 'collage their own collage onto other collages,' in order to discover a common project.”<sup>51</sup>

In this conception of the processes of coming together around a concern, the production of a new and common subjectivity is an end in itself.

In recent years the Participatory Turn in planning, urbanism and architecture has “advocated participation as a radical form of direct democracy”, and as a way of negotiating the development of briefs and visions for action.<sup>52</sup> Participatory practices are incredibly varied and each rests on different political theories with different strategies and ethics as regards deliberation, will formation and decision-making.<sup>53</sup> Although **dissensus**

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50 Doina Petrescu, 'How to make a community as well as the space for it', *Re-public: Reimagining Democracy*, (2007), <[www.re-public.gr/en/?p=60](http://www.re-public.gr/en/?p=60) and [seminaire.samizdat.net/IMG/pdf/Doina\\_Petrescu\\_-2.pdf](http://seminaire.samizdat.net/IMG/pdf/Doina_Petrescu_-2.pdf) p2> [accessed August 14th 2015].

51 Ibid., p. 5.

52 Maroš Krivý and Tahl Kaminer, 'The Participatory Turn in Urbanism', *Footprint*, 13 (2013) p. 1.

53 Ibid., p. 3.

**and disagreement** were seen as crucial drivers of change in radical participatory practices of the 1960s, more recent approaches to participation found in planning and urban policy rest on the belief that universal consensus is both desirable, and achievable. This shift is visible at a number of levels, from the formation of policy to decisions at the scale of a neighbourhood or individual site.

These approaches are related to the ideas of **deliberative democracy**, most notably, political philosophers Jürgen Habermas and John Dryzek.<sup>54, 55</sup> Their contention is that rational deliberation is central to any democratic process, and ‘impartial’ outcomes can be formed where all interests are met equally. This is apparently achieved through the creation of a space where participants can enter equally into debate. There are different approaches to consensus building, the conflictual and non-conflictual models. In the conflictual model differences are sought out and consensus is supposedly achieved through the force of the better argument. In non-conflictual processes there should be the explicit exclusion of initial differences from the discussion. In a consensus-based approach there is the acknowledgement of power, but it is seen as a negative, distorting influence. I wish to explore how such approaches to participation might support or restrict agencies of commoning.

In their essay, ‘Re-inventing public participation: planning in the age of consensus’, Richardson and Connolly are highly critical of the consensus forming approach.<sup>56</sup> They suggest that it casts power as a negative and distorting force and therefore relies on the possibility of the neutralisation of power and the creation of an idealised space for debate that would allow each participant to enter equally and be heard in a way where the most rational argument prevails. Drawing on Michael Foucault’s conception of power as an everyday, socialised and embodied phenomenon that does not reside in an individual but in the relations between things and people, Richardson and Connolly argue that power cannot be made to disappear. They suggest this is not least because the consensus-making model is blind to power outside of communication. They consider that these

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54 Jürgen Habermas, ‘The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory’, (MIT, 2000).

55 John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations*, (Oxford University Press, 2000).

56 Stephen Connolly and Tim Richardson, ‘Reinventing public participation: planning in the age of consensus’, in eds. Peter Blundell-Jones, Doina Petrescu and Jeremy Till, *Architecture and Participation*, (Routledge: London, 2005) pp. 77-104.

communicative perspectives are not explicit about their partiality and therefore have implications for creating agency and addressing structural inequalities.

If we understand power as relational and productive (both of change and of social conformity), a good strategy for changing the dynamics within a participatory process can be to invite new people, to bring new objects and concerns. However, Richardson and Connelly contend that a consensus-making approach necessitates the exclusion of people, issues, or outcomes. Those who initiate such processes will have limited perspective and therefore be blind to certain groups or individuals who may have a claim to involvement. The exclusion of people often occurs because communities do not exist in a fixed state awaiting outreach and cannot be taken for granted as they are in fact, 'flexible, contested and precariously structured'.<sup>57</sup> Even if initiators or facilitators are aware of who should have a say, there may not be the resources or skills required to bring all the relevant parties into the process. The topics that can be raised in such processes are inevitably defined by the capacities of the group, its access to resources, and the willingness of those initiating the project to genuinely be open to a variety of outcomes. If issues or topics are explicitly excluded because they are deemed to risk disagreement, the problems that are suppressed may re-emerge later, and those that are more contentious are silenced, which can further undermine or marginalise groups and individuals.

I would suggest that self-exclusion from a process should not be attributed to disinterest or apathy, but is sometimes an active and informed decision, made through weighing up the perceived benefits of participation. If the fairness of process is measured simply in terms of communication, this becomes a problem because absence either does not register, or it remains undifferentiated. The choice to withdraw, or not to engage in the first place, may be due to disagreement with the initial premise, a lack of confidence with the locations or methods of the research, or indifference borne of not feeling that the process is addressing their most pressing concerns. Saying no may also be a 'positive capability', an expression dissatisfaction, or to express a desire for something different.<sup>58</sup> It is possible to transform a situation by refusing to fit within existing structures and patterns of social relations.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>58</sup> Kim Trogal and Sam Vardy, 'Resistance and Activist Research: A Workshop with Brian Holmes and Anne Querrien', *Field*, 3 (2009), p. 53. Architect Sam Vardy suggests that the act of saying 'no' could actually be seen as a positive capability rather than something which is a failure; "There is a...noticeable tendency to identify those practices that challenge accepted patterns of behaviour as problematic or abnormal. This agency of people to transcend the formative context, the act of transgression as an expansion of desire, Robert Unger calls negative capability... So you are refusing something, but making something at the same time... This idea is connected to that of resistance in that, if people feel that they can make that change, to their context, then that is what is important."

Richardson and Connelly state that the exclusion of any outcomes that might prove controversial is central to consensus-building in participatory processes. This often leads to the production of bland or generalised aims and statements of approach that can be agreed by all, but do not necessarily inspire or enthuse people. Richardson and Connelly contend that at the root of such approaches is an aversion to risk:

“Social change carries with it risks of creating dissensus and instability - risks which disappear with the construction of consensus as the norm, from which the dissensus is a correctable deviation.”<sup>59</sup>

If politics can be understood as an open process by which “dominant forms of living are questioned and potentially transformed.”<sup>60</sup> Consensus building appears to be antithetical to meaningful social change. I would argue, therefore, that it is more difficult to undergo transformative learning in a consensus-making process, which may require conflict or explicit differences.

Political theorists concerned with ideas of radical democracy, such as Chantal Mouffe, critique the idea of consensus as a desirable process, and seek to address some of the concerns just discussed. In developing the notion of agonistic pluralism, Mouffe argues against hierarchical systems and suggests that we need to fight against oppression. Democracy’s function is to make such hegemonic conditions visible and to challenge such power relations by allowing for dissensus and disagreement. Mouffe argues that this is achieved in part through:

“[...] Recognising the hegemonic nature of every kind of social order and the fact that every society is the product of a series of social practices whose aim is to establish order in the context of contingency.”<sup>61</sup>

In doing so we are relinquishing claims to finality and acknowledging there will always be struggle and dissent. In this approach to prioritising and decision-making compromise is possible, but this is always temporary.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>60</sup> Stavros Stavrides, ‘On Urban Commoning’, *Make\_Shift City: Re-Negotiating The Urban Commons*, ed. by Francesca Ferguson and Projects Urban Drift, (Jovis: Berlin, 2014), pp. 83-90.

<sup>61</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *Critique as Counter-Hegemonic Intervention*, (Austria, European Institute For Progressive Cultural Policies, 2008) <<http://eipcp.net/transversal/0808/mouffe/en>> [accessed August 31st 2015].

Mouffe's argument in developing these ideas is that there is a depoliticisation process going on in mainstream political discourse, whereby politics is being replaced by morality, which is unassailable:

“This displacement of politics by morality means that there is now no properly ‘agonistic’ debate in the democratic political public sphere about possible alternatives to the existing hegemonic order; as a consequence, this sphere has been seriously weakened.”<sup>62</sup>

Mouffe suggests that when we say that our adversaries are just ‘morally wrong’ and refuse to engage with them politically, we also fail to engage with the issues that they are raising and that should be part of our political realm. We are actively marginalising groups and excluding them and their concerns. Therefore, “...what is important is that conflict does not take the form of ‘antagonism’ (struggle between enemies) but of ‘agonism’ (struggle between adversaries). The aim of democratic politics is to transform potential antagonism into agonism.”<sup>63</sup> By engaging in democratic processes we are creating a space for disputes that respects differences and sees them as potentially productive.

Making claims is crucial part of the agonistic process, and this can be about articulating things that may previously have been considered to be social or personal as political concerns. Part of the work of an agonistic process is to keep practices, institutions, meanings, and values open to be troubled and challenged. However, this is not simply about an opening up, there is always the need to create an alternative, because radicalising is not just about destabilising the existing order but also taking a stance about values, meanings and visions. **Agency in relation to the notion of hegemony requires us to be critically questioning what *is*, and at the same time to be propositional. It implies learning.** And perhaps, un-learning. And certainly, doing otherwise. The ability to question assumptions and those things that seem immovable requires an approach that involves creativity and imagination as well as critical analysis.

## Pedagogical (learning) agencies

Learning in processes of commoning is critical for transformation. Socio-pedagogical processes are therefore an essential aspect of the production and reproduction of a commons. In his paper ‘From Critical Urban Theory to the Right to the City’ lawyer,

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<sup>62</sup> James Martin, Chantal Mouffe: Hegemony, Radical Democracy, and the Political (London: Routledge :2013) p.181.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

Planner and urban theorist Peter Marcuse, writing about people's ability to shape their cities, argues that in order to create change, criticality can be understood as also having a creative dimension. He states, when defining this:

“‘Critical’ (is) shorthand for an evaluative attitude towards reality, a questioning rather than an acceptance of the world as it is, a taking apart and examining and attempting to understand the world. It leads to a position **not only necessarily critical in the sense of negative criticism, but also critically exposing the positive and the possibilities of change**, implying positions on what is wrong and needing change, but also on what is desirable and needs to be built on and fostered.”<sup>64</sup>

Marcuse speaks of an approach that enables politicised oppositional responses to the way our cities are, yet always considers that cities are not fixed and could always be otherwise.

To move forward, to have agency, we need to challenge our assumptions and images of the world and imagine otherwise. In striving for a better world he reminds us however that:

“What all but the most old-fashioned utopian proposals also have in common is a rejection of the idea that the most desirable future can be spelled out, designed, defined, now, in advance, except in the broadest principles. Only in the experience of getting there, in the democratic decisions that accompany the process, can a better future be formed.”<sup>65</sup>

This is in part because there should be a greater range of voices and experiences involved who will implement this future, and because it is only in the richness and complexity of the world as experienced that the true range of possibilities are available.

It is important to note that there needs to be a mutual recognition of learning as central and that this recognition is not something that can be taken for granted. Often those who participate in social action can assume they know what it is that they wish to do and how it is they should go about doing it. Learning can be perceived as either as unnecessary, or as ‘risky’, because it implies trying something new and stepping out of

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64 Jacqueline Leavitt, ‘What We Can Learn from Peter Marcuse: “Think Critically, Act Critically!”’, *Progressive Planning: The Magazine of Planners*, 182 (2010) p. 12. (My emphasis). <[www.plannersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/.../2010\\_182\\_winter.pdf](http://www.plannersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/.../2010_182_winter.pdf)> [accessed Aug 19th 2015].

65 Peter Marcuse, p. 10.

established patterns and relationships, or challenging dearly held, and hard fought beliefs.<sup>66</sup> In order to encourage a willingness to learn, people need to feel able to take a risk, and that it is worthwhile in relation to their goals. Risk is rarely equally perceived or distributed, and some are more used to trying new approaches and setting up procedures that facilitate learning experiences than others. Some participants will feel that admitting that they do not know is a sign of weakness, or lack of decisiveness at a time when they should be taking control. In the context of Portland Works those solutions that were first to hand did not answer the question of how to create a sustainable, just and equitable future and therefore it was essential to collectively assert that *we did not know* and needed to find out together. Although difficult to achieve, the moment of doing so could be understood as productive of agency.

If the primary challenge then is *learning why you need to learn*, how do such realisations occur? Part of this is noticing those things that restrain us, some of which we may have internalised in our understanding of how the world is. To achieve freedom is to be able to speculate on how the world could be. Educator and philosopher Paulo Freire speaks about the importance of “education as the practice of freedom”.<sup>67</sup> In his ideas of radical pedagogy he emphasises praxis as a route to liberation, where critical theories and concepts grow concurrently with practices and actions, in order to transform reality.<sup>68</sup> He argues that if you do not engage critically with the world, you are supporting those forces that oppress you and others. You liberate yourself through developing a critical consciousness, and emancipation is something that is communal rather than individual.

Proponents of radical pedagogy argue that learning should always be about how to live freely as well as creating knowledge. If we understand mutuality in terms of agency as the interrelationship between practical and discursive knowledge, shared experiences form a central part of this. In ‘Experience and Education’, pragmatist philosopher John Dewey conceives of freedom as something that is practiced and achieved with others by collectively projecting into the future and imagining alternatives that offer possibilities of

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66 Few involved with community action will not have experienced those who turn up at every meeting no matter what the cause and say the same things that they have said elsewhere.

67 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition*, (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000) p. 81.

68 Freire’s ideas of radical pedagogy were incredibly influential in the development of Participatory Action Research One of the central tenants of participatory research is that everyone involved should be part of developing the questions to be investigated, the approach to solving the problems and also implementing any strategies for change. However, PAR grew principally within the teaching profession where there was a well-defined community who were familiar with similar methodologies and experiences, and working within the same profession. In situations where groups are radically diverse, it becomes much more difficult and in order to form a consensus often there is an exclusion of issues through focusing on those concerns where agreement is probable or more likely.

mutual benefit.<sup>69</sup> Dewey is critical of methods of teaching that do not evolve and incorporate experiential learning. He argues that it is not any kind of experience that serves this function however:

“[...] If an experience arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future, continuity works in a very different way. Every experience is a moving force.”<sup>70</sup>

Learning then is crucial to driving us forward, and motivating us at times of struggle and difficulty. Dewey clarifies what kinds of experiences are opportunities for learning:

"Experience in its vital form is experimental, an effort to change the given; it is characterized by projection, by reaching forward into the unknown; connection with the future is its salient trait."<sup>71</sup>

Through trying things together that push the boundaries of what we know, we can also keep the passion for why we take part in the first place. In the case of Portland Works it is these experimental moments in which we engage that keep the process alive.

Learning in commoning can be as simple as developing the practical knowledge and skills required to carry out certain tasks. In the context of commons this can often be through a process of mutual exchange. In ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ Freire challenges a model of learning that defines the student as an empty vessel, which can be filled with knowledge given by an expert. Knowledge is instead built in collaboration, changing each who takes part and it is through this mutual process that freedom can be striven for and transformation achieved. The teacher should not and cannot claim absolute knowledge and authority, because knowledge should always be reformulated in relation to the emerging and changing situation and those with whom it is being developed. Education should not be a way of perpetuating existing sanctioned and established ideas, but in creating new ones in relation with the world and other people. This is a politicized understanding of education.

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<sup>69</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, (Simon and Schuster, 2007).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>71</sup> John Dewey, *The essential Dewey: pragmatism, education, democracy*, ed. by Larry Hickman and Thomas Alexander, (Indiana University Press: 1998) p. 46.

Those involved in the processes of learning must generate their own subjects and objects of study that are important to their own struggles and concerns. Freire conceptualises this as ‘problem posing’, which enables students and teachers to come together to question what should be known, how subjects are formulated, and what the boundaries and relations between subjects might be. For Freire:

“In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation.”<sup>72</sup>

You are an agent taking part in this transformation and at the same time being changed by it.

As commoning implies diverse groups, learning should include getting to know one another. This can be a process of learning the different meanings, values and experiences that each brings to a situation. Critically, this aspect of learning should also be understood in terms of how those involved in the creation and reproduction of a particular common operate as a group as reflexive process. In struggles to safeguard resources, groups can have a tendency to think about the pragmatic learning that is associated with taking their next steps to achieve their ultimate goal, but do not look to the ways in which they are getting there. This has implications in terms of equitability and justice. Self-reflection, either as an individual or as part of a group, can be hard and the learning can be, at times painful, yet they are crucial to emancipatory and critical processes. This kind of learning often requires a formalised space and set of structures to ensure that it is conducted in a rigorously self-critical manner.

There are many different forms of learning that are necessary for the processes of commoning. Freire tells us that, “Knowledge only emerges through invention and reinvention, through the restless impatient, continuing, hopeful, inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other”<sup>73</sup> To understand learning and pedagogical agencies in relation to commoning we must understand it as anticipative, productive, exploratory and above all collaborative.

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<sup>72</sup> Paulo Freire, p. 84.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

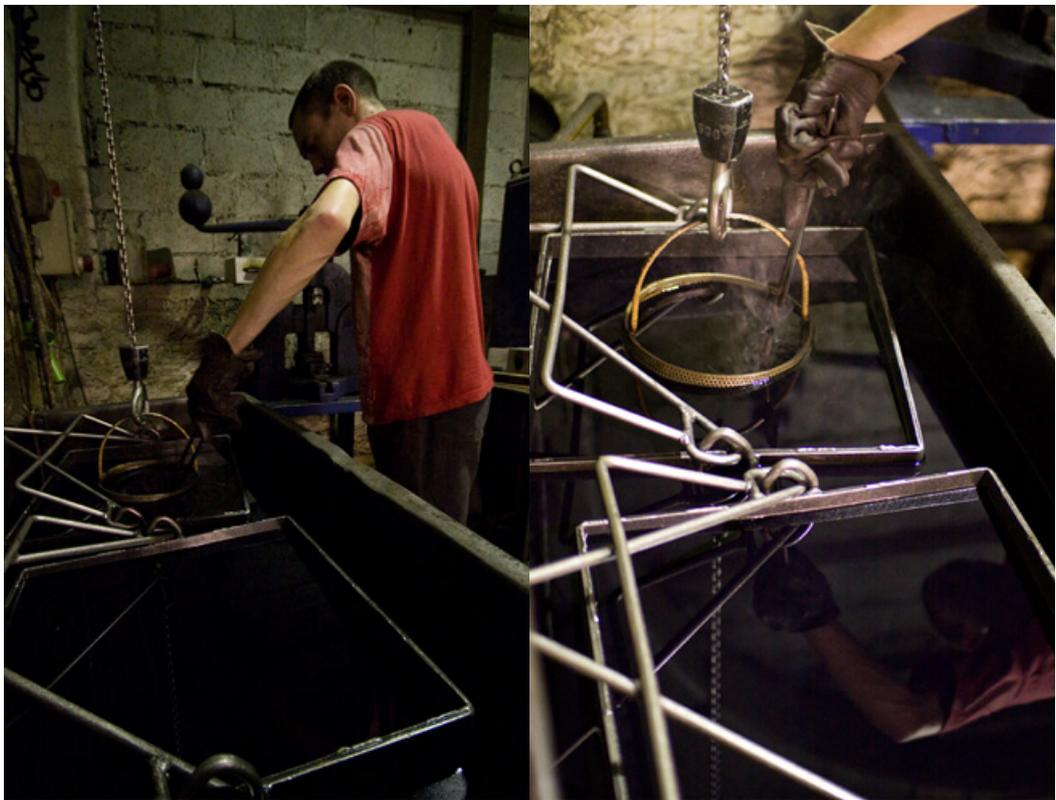
## Tools for creating agencies of commoning

This chapter began by posing the question of why agency mattered to commoning at Portland Works. Agency comes from being able to draw on established practices, evaluate in the contingent moment and project into the future. This is a continual struggle, with economic, social, political, democratic and pedagogical aspects. We can understand this at Portland Works where our needs can be understood as comprising of social, political, economic, pedagogical and democratic needs. Social agencies enable us to form diverse groups and develop meanings and values with one another. Economic agencies allow us to rethink the economy and share non-commodified resources in ways that are just and equitable. Political agencies enable us to make public those concerns that have previously assumed as facts, or as personal issues. Democratic and pedagogical agencies allow us to negotiate and learn together to develop the future of the commons in ways that are just, equitable and respond to our mutual desires. These forms of agency are often intertwined, produced by many hands and through the use of many tools. How can we understand these practices, and what kinds of tools are required for their production?

## Chapter 5

# Tools to create agency

The notion of tools has become incredibly important for me, growing from watching the tenants of Portland Works carry out their practices of making, and seeing that each time, rather than being merely repetitive, they learn through the feedback from their tools; through the response of the materials, through understanding and testing what a tool can do. **Working in this ‘engaged’ way embodies so much: motivations, know-how, and the desire to find out through doing, and express ideas and care through actions. Rather than being static and predetermining the boundaries of the task, they are improvising with and modifying tools to extend their usefulness and to meet their growing understanding of the knife they want to make, or the motor that requires repair.** Through the wearing of a handle or the blunting of a blade, or a stain marking repeated contact, tools retain the imprint of the practices and the people that handle them.



5.1, 5.2 Quenching at Wigfull Tools, Photo: Helen Munro



5.3 Mark Jackson of Squarepegs, Photo: Eric Winnert



5.4 Andy Cole, Owner of Wigfull Tools, Photo: Martin Pick



5.5 Mary Sewell Paints, Photo: Eric Winnert



5.6 Wigfull Tools, Photo: Martin Pick



5.7 Mick Shaw, Engraver, Photo: Ian Spooner



5.8 Alison Douglas and Claire Hughes, Photo: Eric Winnert

Tools are everyday objects at Portland Works. They are tied to what people make, how they make a living, what they care about, their skills. They are physical things. Often they have been passed on from others- those who have taught people their trades: parents, friends, from master to apprentice. This is something that is particular to the Little Mesters, “Industries of a few people, creating local networks with new kinds of tools, maybe linking with larger networks...” an approach to work where each person is highly specialised, but collaboration makes him or her flexible and responsive to evolving needs.<sup>1</sup> **New tools are made or chosen with care, and an understanding of the process of making, because old ones are something that has taken years to learn, and new ones must do more than offer efficiency, but rather they should create new possibilities. Tools to the untrained eye may not look much different, but in the trained hand have different capacities and relations with the material upon which they are set to work.** Tools mediate relationships between person and material in different ways. When tenants tell you about their tools, what they do and why they have them, who lends which tools to who at the Works, they become a way to understand how things are made.

The recently deceased Ken Hawley, a Tool Salesman from Sheffield, created an internationally important tool collection in the city.<sup>2</sup> Through studying these tools he began to understand more about the ways the craftsmen had of working. His obituary in The Guardian newspaper said:

“He pursued knowledge with an extraordinary meticulousness, worrying away at puzzles that most other people would not even have noticed; how, for instance, could someone making handles for knives bore a hole that went exactly down the centre of the handle and came out at the other end also exactly in the centre? To answer that, he looked at a film of the operation again and again until he noticed that in repeatedly offering up the handle to the rotating drill bit and clearing out the drilled material, the operator each time rotated the handle a fraction of a revolution, ensuring that the drill continued its central path. This almost trivial-sounding piece of research perfectly brings together Ken's extraordinary persistence, his attention to detail and his fascination with how the

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1 Christopher Frayling, *On Craftsmanship: towards a new Bauhaus*, (Oberon Books 2012) p. 82. Frayling cites the workers in Middle Italy as also following a similar pattern of work.

2 Hawley Tool collection is held at Kelham Island Museum, Sheffield. Hawley Tool Museum, <<http://www.hawleytoolcollection.com>> [accessed August 19<sup>th</sup> 2015].

craftsmen learned on the job what was necessary for the high-class work that made Sheffield cutlers and tool-makers famous.”<sup>3</sup>

There is a lesson to be drawn here. **Through paying such close attention and the same kind of respect to the tools we are designing, making and using at Portland Works I hope to understand more about what it is we are doing and how.** I also wish to extend this process to understand how the tools can evolve through iterations and rethinking to be better suited to our collective needs and desires.

I understand the making of the commons to be a collaborative process, which depends upon the ideas, understandings and actions of a diverse assembly of people. It is at once about resisting, critiquing, and proposing otherwise. **By developing a practiced notion of tools, I hope to develop a greater understanding of how the tools we are making create (or prevent) particular forms of individual or collective agency and might therefore be ‘tools for Commoning’.** I consider these collaborative ‘Commoning’ processes to be of negotiating and making concerns public, bringing together people and developing values together, acquiring and allocating resources, and learning, and proposing new ways of doing things. I therefore want to understand what tools we have used to do these things.

In order to conceptualise the notion of ‘tools’ in relation to commons and Commoning, I begin this chapter by examining tools as they are found at Portland Works, in the hands of the crafts person. In doing so I introduce the idea of ‘making as a form of thinking’, tools as giving feedback and the skilled modification of a tool as a ‘curiosities instrument’ used in practiced relation with the world. I state that tools are mediators, and they are always designed.<sup>4,5</sup> I then explore the process of design as something iterative, and productive of distributed agencies.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Simon Barley, ‘Ken Hawley Obituary’, *The Guardian*, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Tim Ingold, *Anthropology Archaeology Art and Architecture* (Routledge, 2013); Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*, (Penguin, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Richard Sennett, p. 200.

<sup>6</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social-An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, (Oxford University Press, 2005).p. 316; Jonathan Hill, *Actions of architecture: architects and creative users* (Routledge, 2003); Tom Holert, *Distributed agency, design's potentiality*, (Bedford Press, 2011).

## The Craftsperson's Tools

Tools are always handled and the skilled handling of tools is craftsmanship. Tools at Portland Works sit within a context of craftsmanship. The notion of craftsmanship has seen renewed interest in the UK in recent years in the context of a proliferation of online craft businesses, exhibitions, and television programmes telling the story of our 'Heritage Heroes'.<sup>7</sup> The calls to 'make do and mend' come variously from those critical of a throwaway culture because of ecological concerns or driven by ideas of self-reliance and austerity, or a muddled combination of these ideas. Television coverage recalls a time when Britain made things, and portrays well-connected artisans working away in a rural idyll, producing luxury products for the discerning few, or by imploring us to produce 'Handmade Homes'. Community centres pin up flyers on their noticeboards advertising workshops and craft circles, and cocktail bars and cafes offer nights where you can 'Stitch and Bitch'.<sup>8</sup>

Yet from understanding the practices at Portland Works I wish to challenge the view of craft where it is used pejoratively to imply something that is conservative, and which does not include an intellectual element. In his short collection of essays, 'On Craftsmanship' Christopher Frayling is critical of the split made between craftsmanship and art, and with it the creation of a hierarchy, where formal knowledge has gained greater status than tacit knowledge. He argues that although there are distinctions between knowledge and know-how, not only in terms of what they are but also how they can be shared and developed, **it is an oft-repeated but false distinction between 'one man who is always thinking and another who is always working'**; the craftsperson must combine both.<sup>9</sup>

Frayling reminds us that craft, through the eyes of sociologist, economist, countryman, scientist, literary critic and trade unionist has an often radically different connotation and political implications; as skilled manual labour, aristocracy of labour, a stage in economic development preceding capitalism, as traditional rural pursuit, part of the anti-establishment defence of labour, as anti-modernism, as decorative arts, local heritage or USP stimulus to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century regional economy. The diversity of the group of tenants

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<sup>7</sup> *BBC Heritage Heroes*, dir. by Ali McBride, February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00ntkz8>> [accessed August 30<sup>th</sup> 2015].

<sup>8</sup> For example event at Bungalows and Bears, Sheffield, June 2010 and coffee shop Eten in the city Eten Sheffield <<http://www.eten-sheffield.co.uk/stitch-bitch/>> [accessed August 30<sup>th</sup> 2015].

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Frayling, p. 99.

and people involved with the Portland Works project means that in this case, many of these different interpretations sit side by side and are deployed.

I introduce craftsmanship here as it is integral to the working day of many of those who are central to the Portland Works process, and for whom this renewed attention, in its varied forms, has direct bearing. I use it in this thesis as a way of understanding a practiced relation with the world, and to examine our process of Commoning. I propose that it is part of our situation in producing an urban common, and the practices of craftsmanship have tangible effects of the ways in which we have made our ‘Commoning tools’ and offer lessons for their further refinement. I discuss it primarily through the historical and philosophical explorations of Christopher Frayling in his recent work *On Craftsmanship*, Anthropologist Tim Ingold’s work on ‘Thinking through making’ and Richard Sennett’s influential book, *The Craftsman*, and a collection of essays that accompany the catalogue for the recent V&A Exhibition, ‘The Power of Making’ curated by Daniel Charny.<sup>10 11 12 13</sup> I understand craftsmanship as a certain way of learning, and interaction between tools, materials and people and a sense of connectedness to what has gone before.

Craftsmanship can be understood to combine both mental and physical labour. In his philosophical and historical account, Richard Sennet considers craftsmanship to be **the desire to produce work of high quality, and the skill to deliver it**. This characterisation expresses the kind of mental commitment needed to achieve this goal of ‘good work’, and the training of body and eye to make it happen. Sennet draws insights from activities as diverse as being a computer programmer, a parent, a jazz musician, or a doctor, as well as those activities which may be more readily associated with craftsmanship such as glass blowing, tool making and stone carving. Sennett’s expanded definition draws on enlightenment ideas to make the ethical stance that everyone has the potential to do good work of some kind. He argues that in doing so we gain both pleasure and liberation.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Tim Ingold.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Sennett.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Charny, ‘The Power of Making: The Importance of Being Skilled’, (V&A Publishing, 2011); and see Victoria & Albert Museum, ‘The Power of Making’, <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/p/powerofmaking/>> [accessed August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015]; also Victoria & Albert Museum, ‘Power of Making’, Press release September 6<sup>th</sup> 2011, <[http://www.vam.ac.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/178663/Power\\_of\\_Making\\_-\\_Press\\_Release.pdf](http://www.vam.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/178663/Power_of_Making_-_Press_Release.pdf)> [accessed August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015].

## Making as a form of thinking

One of Sennett's important assertions in *The Craftsman* is that **making is a form of thinking**, and although not a new idea, his exploration, by focussing on the **practices of craftsmanship, this enables a more politicised reading of the notion**. 'Making' and the kinds of knowledges we might associate with it are not abstract properties, disconnected from the materials, relations, emotions and spaces of making, but part of wider socio-economic relations, and always changing over time. Craftsmanship or making is a form of thinking that combines formal and tacit knowledges. As the craftsman becomes more experienced, intuition can come into play:

“In the higher stages of skill, there is a constant interplay between tacit knowledge and self-conscious awareness, **the tacit knowledge serving as an anchor and the explicit awareness serving as critique and corrective**. Craft quality emerges from this higher stage, in judgements made on tacit habits and suppositions.”<sup>14</sup>

Here, learning is a quality that emerges through doing, unfolding between the body, the mind, the tool and the material.

Forms are produced in such a process, but this is always in relation and response, rather than as predetermined or imposed. Anthropologist Tim Ingold says it is important to distinguish between thinking through making and making through thinking. In asserting this he critiques the notion of hylomorphism, where a form emerges through an idea being projected on a material, and an idea or theory leads and is applied- this is making through thinking.<sup>15</sup> In this conception of making or craftsmanship creativity is in the idea and traditional craft is not creative unless it produces something novel. Instead Ingold argues we need to conceptualise craftsmanship as thinking through making with things generated in the “...binding together of material flows and sensory awareness...”<sup>16</sup> **In working in such a way on a day-to-day basis those tenants of Portland Works have developed responsive ways of working, that stand them in good stead for engaging in the production of the commons. It is in improvisation and process of**

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Sennett, p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> Tim Ingold, 'Thinking through Making', October 31<sup>st</sup> 2013, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ygne72-4zyo>> [accessed August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015].

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

**finding ones way that the creative process can be found and knowledge is produced.**

This conceptualisation of the process of making is important in understanding how tools and materials are selected, and things are made. Improvisation suggests the creativity of working with what is available, and to hand in a way that is frugal and tied to the possibilities of a place. Learning in craftsmanship is defined by the specificity of the context in terms of physical skill and qualities of what the craftsperson is working with, but also drawing on an understanding and abilities gained over time, and the possibility to project into the future for what might come forth. In his analysis Richard Sennett argues that the possibility for improvisation or doing differently is often tied to incompleteness, and a holding back. He likens this to a fuzzy logic programme, which through deliberate delay enables the representation of partial knowledge, and therefore more sophisticated processes, either because of improved accuracy, or being able to take on board different kinds of data. This happens by delaying from resolving one set of problems until it works in another realm, searching for useful inputs, and holding in its memory a huge number of provisional solutions. Fuzzy logic enables different packets of data to be considered in relation to one another, because one process does not create a Yes/No binary answer.<sup>17</sup>

Taking forward this idea of fuzzy logic into the processes of Commoning can be understood in terms of an ethics of the commons. Goals should not be decided in advance, in relation to pre-existing visions of the world, but instead they should be created through the processes of engaging with others and the world. Always understanding and representing what is happening as incomplete can be a way of opening up to new people, ideas and ways of doing. In the context of co-production 'holding off' from making a final decision could serve as a gap or space to enable others to take part, bringing in knowledges that may not have been considered to be relevant before. It allows for experimentation and multiplicity.

Tacit and embodied knowledges are important to the commons because although formal knowledge might tell us the properties of materials as 'hard facts', tacit knowledge tells us about qualities, understood as relational, changing and experienced. Tacit knowledge is like a language or way of being in the world. Knowledges in craftsmanship are slowly evolved, and this requires a willingness to repeat, and refine actions and understandings, and of course our bodies are central to this. To draw parallels between learning in craftsmanship and learning in the commons is a challenge for the commoners- the

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Sennett, p. 242.

processes are slow and require commitment over a long time, and a willingness to be there in the moment in an engaged and committed way.

If the use and production of tools for Commoning are considered to involve bodies in such a way that is crucial to their constitution, it is useful to draw on ideas of embodiment, as developed by feminist Judith Butler. In ‘Bodies that Matter’, she argues that all new knowledge production affects and modifies the bodies and subjectivities of those who have participated in its production. They are also developed in relation to the agency of the body, and what it is possible for it to do.<sup>18</sup> **Changing of subjectivities is not just an intellectual process, but also something that is physical and emotional.** In ‘The Body of the Artisan’, Pamela Smith draws on these ideas and points out that skill in craft is always about repetition and is always related to the past gestures, and relations with others who are proficient, “Imitation as a learned bodily habit that became a cognitive practice and finally led to knowledge and the production of effects.”<sup>19</sup> For her the person learning a craft must ‘do’ before they ‘comprehend’, trusting that by slowly refining their movements, their appreciation and understanding develops through this process, eventually enabling them to move beyond mimicry, to the ability to improvise and experiment. This kind of learning takes time, and close understanding; it is about training the body and eye, and a commitment to the discipline required.

Tools for Commoning must work with Knowledge Commons, and it is important to consider how they produce knowledge between body and tool, and how they might enable tacit knowledges to be shared between commoners.<sup>20 21</sup> One set of hands is not interchangeable with others because the understanding they possess through touch is not something which can be understood through written instructions, but rather through telling and doing at the same time, and refinement over a long period. It can be intergenerational, between friends, within a certain geographic area, a guild or network of expertise. Sennet argues that it can also happen through imprints in materials themselves.<sup>22</sup> A detail of a building or the marks of a chisel become something by which

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18 Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter*, (Routledge, 2003).

19 Pamela Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution*, (University of Chicago Press, 2004) p. 98.

20 Charlotte Hess and Elinor Ostrom. ‘A Framework for Analysing the Knowledge Commons’, in *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons: from Theory to Practice*, ed. by Charlotte Hess and Elinor Ostrom (MIT Press, 2005).

21 Thanks to Kim Trogal for making this connection.

22 Richard Sennett, p. 70. He cites the development of Salisbury Cathedral as an exemplar of this process, “...The gestures with which the building began evolved in principles and were collectively managed over three generations. Each event in building practice became absorbed in the fabric of instructing and regulating the next generation.” In this case, knowing how to look and understand what you are seeing is part of the skill.

to train your hand. The design develops slowly, because of collective effort, joining skill and community; learning comes from doing things together repeatedly. The slowness that these processes insist upon may be considered a good strategy in resisting the capitalistic pressures for efficiency, you do this for reasons of pleasure, care, and to learn with others. However this must be understood as a privileged position that not all can currently share because they have little or no ‘spare time’.

The idea of repetition is closely tied to the notion of a practice, and theories of practices, as explored by Foucault, Bourdieu, Giddens and others.<sup>23, 24, 25</sup> In Bourdieu’s conception, the objects of knowledge are constructed through an active engagement and ‘practical relation to the world’.<sup>26</sup> Human activity and knowledge is intertwined in order to develop ways of working, reasons for acting, and particular ‘know-how’, which relate to interacting with people, objects, and spaces. Drawing on these ideas, Sociologist Andreas Reckwitz defines a practice as, “[...] Forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge...whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and **specific interconnectedness** of these elements, and which cannot be reduced to any one of these single elements... An individual is a carrier of a practice [...] and a certain routinized ways of understanding, knowing how and desiring... **a practice is thus a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood.**”<sup>27</sup> If we take forward this understanding, people are carriers of practices, but as a particular constellation of their different experiences, desires and understandings. Therefore a tool in different hands is a different tool. **Craftsmanship involves the head, heart and hand.**

## Tools that give feedback

If we understand craftsmanship as being of head, heart and hand, then repeated practice in craftsmanship does not imply blind repetition. In understanding the rules (often tacit, and passed on from others), there also should be an ability to know when and how to deviate from them. The craftsperson must be open to experimentation, creativity and

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23 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, (London: Harvester Press, 1980).

24 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge University Press, 1977).

25 Anthony Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*, (John Wiley and Sons, 2013).

26 Pierre Bourdieu, p. 96.

27 Andreas Reckwitz, ‘Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Theorizing’, *European Journal of Social Theorizing*, 5 (2002), p. 249 (my emphasis).

play, yet, however experimental and open-ended, they are also responding to the capacities and possibilities of specific materials, tools, and skills.<sup>28</sup> In the hands of someone sensitive to the moments of resistance in a certain material, and what this might mean, it is possible then to advance the form of an object. This is not imposed from an abstract form held in the mind, but found through the evolving interrelationships between material, body and emerging idea. These sensitivities are relational, and could pick up on mood, qualities, or ideas. We must pay attention to our relation with others, both human and non-human.

How then do we develop these sensitivities? In ‘Thinking Fast Thinking Slow’, Daniel Kahneman discusses a dual-process theory of cognition, suggesting we have both rational and intuitive processes that influence what we do and how we do it. His argument is that our rational and conscious brain enables us to make some decisions, but many are also made by our subconscious intuitive side, which is related to practices that are deeply embedded.<sup>29</sup> In this Kahneman draws on journalist Malcolm Gladwell’s assertion that it takes “10,000 ‘appropriately guided hours’” to become an expert. Kahneman argues that this figure is far from absolute because it is dependent on the person’s ability to get feedback from the process.<sup>30</sup> In his comparison of a radiologist to an anaesthetist, Kahneman argues that not all feedback is the same; the anaesthetist can immediately see whether they have given enough of a dose and hear from the patient if they feel exceptionally groggy or ill afterwards, whereas for a radiologist the affects of their treatment are much less easily monitored.

**Tools then should enable feedback, whether though allowing us to feel resistance of a material, telling us we do not yet have the ability to use them properly, or that our tool is not the right one for the job. In thinking about tools to create agency we need to understand the effectiveness and capacities of a tool. Tools that give feedback will allow a reflexive process to be established.** Tools for Commoning should allow us to understand if we are working in ways that are just, equitable and sustainable. In understanding those things we use as tools for Commoning we draw attention to it as a mediator of relationships that both have affects and are affected by the

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28 Sennet likens this to improvisation in Jazz. He says that for a musician aware of what their fellow musicians might play next in a bebop performance they can improvise and develop the possibilities for the form. Sennett, p. 236.

29 Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011) p. 416.

30 Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers the Story of Success* (Little Brown and Company, 2008) p. 40. Gladwell has quoted that it takes 10,000 hours (of practice) to become and expert in any field. Alexandre Enkerli, retired ethnographer, perfectly captures the history and relevance of this argument in his blog: Alexandre Enkerli, *Quest for expertise*, (Disparate: A blog on disparate subjects. Un blog disparate bilingue, December 2008) <<https://enkerli.wordpress.com/2008/12/23/expertise-quest>> [accessed August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015].

way in which they are used. Some tools are better than others in terms of offering feedback. Achieving this relies not only on the tool itself, but the sensitivity with which it is handled. To receive feedback you must use tools with skill, defined by Christopher Frayling as "...dexterity, judgment, and care."<sup>31</sup> Unlike a fully mechanised process, to produce something with a tool there is also always a body and a mind with an intention to do something, and a perception of its performance.

## Tools used with skill, and made through use

To receive feedback, and to learn from this we must be creative with our tools, and challenge what they can do. Richard Sennet cites the example of Sir Christopher Wren, who realised that the telescope was not yet good enough as a tool, because the glass produced a curve distortion of the image. Wren therefore took the slide from the telescope and corrected the image through drawing, "Here 'repair' produced a new kind of image, combining science and art rather than employing a mathematical formula. The pen became a corrective tool to deal with the defects in the glass."<sup>32</sup> Sennet suggests that a number of things are happening in this example: Wren is willing to reformat what is produced by the tool, and is doing so by bringing together two previously separate domains (in this case art and science) together. He then applies his explicit understanding of the curve of the glass of the telescope, and tacit understanding of the effect of the angle of the curve on the image and finally he uses particular skills and practices of drawing to carry out the modification to the slide. This is a creative, skilled use of the tool, that engages in what it produces beyond the frame of the tool; in Sennett's words a tool, in the hands of the right craftsman, can become a "curiosities instrument."<sup>33</sup> **It is the skilled use that extends the possibilities of the tool, and through the modifications in use, the tool will evolve, and the knowledge that has been developed can be shared.**

A tool becomes a tool only through its use. Its qualities and utility are always in relation to the skill of the person handling it. How do we understand then the value of this skill accrued over time? In *Das Kapital*, Karl Marx states that the value of a tool is created through the labour process. Without a skilled handling, its value is that of scrap. Therefore labour power contains a moral and historical element in terms of what is

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<sup>31</sup> Christopher Frayling, p. 96.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Sennett, p. 201.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Sennett, p, 200.

deemed necessary at that point in time.<sup>34</sup> Not only do tools embody the work of others in their production process, they require skilled operation. At the time Marx was writing, capitalists had argued that the workers were gaining benefit from the tools that the industrialists were providing through their investment, but Marx pointed out that in fact industrialists were making money from the skill with which the labourers used the tools and without this the tool would have no value.

In Marx's view the Industrial Revolution was defined by hand tools being replaced by machines and then eventually machines making machines. With this process came the radical transformation of social relations, objectively embodied in a new labour process, "Along with the tool, the skill of the worker in handling it passes over to the machine. The capabilities of the tool are emancipated from the restraints inseparable from labour power."<sup>35</sup> The labourer's work on a machine therefore could be designated as unskilled and those operating them become interchangeable, with their particular skill no longer being necessary to the production process. **To take account of the tools which we use in the process of Commoning is to valorise the work of those who made them and use them.**

## Tools as practiced relation between a person and a thing

Tools in craftsmanship can be understood as a practiced relation between a person and a thing. I move here from tools as objects found in a workshop to tools as an organisational device. At first this feels like a metaphor, but in fact it is real.<sup>36</sup> In *Tools for Conviviality*, philosopher Ivan Illich argues that tools are intrinsic to social relationships because they mediate our relationships with one another and the world. In arguing this he broadens out the category of tool to include not only "drills, pots, syringes, brooms, building elements, or motors, and not just large machines like cars or power stations...[but also]...productive institutions such as factories that produce tangible commodities like corn flakes or electric current, and productive systems for intangible commodities such as those which produce 'education,' 'health,' 'knowledge,' or 'decisions.'<sup>37</sup> He invites us to consider how we have designed our tools and institutions and what an institution does, and how it increases or decreases our sense of agency. **We**

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34 Karl Marx, *Capital Vol 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin 1992) p. 542.

35 Karl Marx, p. 545.

36 Many thanks to Derek Morton for pointing this out to me.

37 Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, (New York Harper and Row, 1973) p. 20.

**need tools that liberate us and enable autonomous creative action. Portland Works emerging as an urban common, is not only made by tools, but as an institution of Commoning can also be understood as a tool itself. Not only should it enable collective action and an alternative to capitalist ways of ordering things, but it should also increase our sense of agency and support desires and needs that have previously not been possible.**

Being skilled in the use of our tools enables us to act, and being deskilled means that the tool or institution acts on us and our agency is decreased, or at least our actions are increasingly defined by the limits of the tool rather than our own needs or desires. Illich suggests that we are progressively becoming deskilled and separated from our tools, and we do not have the tools we need to make the kinds of society we desire. **The tools we make and choose to use show the desires, needs and capacities of a time, leaving traces of purpose and experiment and the kinds of relations made through them.**<sup>38</sup>

**A collection of tools can be understood to be an ever-evolving record of those labours and the learning that required their production.** This makes them a good thing to study in order to understand the activities of Commoning.

Illich names those tools that enable us to learn and create a world that is drawn from our own understandings and meanings as ‘Tools for Conviviality’:

“Tools foster conviviality to the extent to which they can be easily used, by anybody, as often or as seldom as desired, for the accomplishment of a purpose chosen by the user. **The use of such tools by one person does not restrain another from using them equally...they allow the user to express his (or her) meaning in action.**”<sup>39</sup>

So in trying to make tools to produce Agencies of Commoning we must make them with and make them available to many people. The strength of a diverse group lies in its many different tools and skills and aptitudes for using tools.

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<sup>38</sup> As Jane Bennett explains, “Bernard Stiegler does just this in his study of how tool-use engendered a being with an inside, with that is, a psychological landscape of interiority. Stiegler contends that conscious reflection in (proto) humans first emerged with the use of stone tools because the materiality of the tool acted as an external marker of a past need, as an “archive” of its function.” Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2009) p. 31.

<sup>39</sup> Ivan Illich, p. 20 (my emphasis).

We also need to acknowledge that the ways in which they will be used will differ on each occasion. By valuing and increasing this diversity you increase the tools at hand. One ambitious attempt to democratise access to a vast range of tools with a view to enabling new ways of living was the US publication, *The Whole Earth Catalogue: Access to Tools*. It was first published in 1968 and continuing into the late 1990s, now working as a website with archive.<sup>40</sup> The editor Stewart Brand and its many contributors, (who included industrial designers, mathematicians, and scientists), were interested in how people could be enabled to live self-sufficiently and in greater harmony with the planet. Their criteria for the selection of tools enabled a broad range of things to be included (from computers and synthesizers to water purifiers, chain saws, maps and tents), whilst still maintaining a particular ethos and approach.

These criteria for a tool to be part of the *Whole Earth Catalogue* were that they should be, “Useful as a tool; Relevant to independent education; High quality or low cost; Not already common knowledge; Easily available by mail.”<sup>41</sup> Carefully selected and curated, their aim was to equip people with the tools to change the world and themselves, with the catalogue functioning as an “evaluation and activation device.”<sup>42</sup> Once part of the magazine tools were then categorised under sections, which in the first edition were; Understanding Whole Systems, Shelter and Land Use, Industry and Craft, Communications, Community, Nomadics and Learning, which set out a way of understanding the human relationship with the planet. The tools were understood as operating in relation to one another- extending or changing what could be achieved through the invention of something new. Importantly, the editor, contributors and users could share their experiences of using the tools and their knowledge would help evolve the categories and descriptions of the tools and what might be possible.

Making a new tool can change the other tools that we possess. In understanding tools for creating Agencies of Commoning this means that a new tool may then transform all of those that we already have. For example, the asset lock on the building when we purchased it transformed Portland Works as a tool, but also less obvious examples such as the John Street Triangle Audit of businesses, which went from being a tool of resistance, used to oppose the Planning Application, as one which could enable us to link local businesses together. The editor of the *Whole Earth Catalogue* in 2000, Kevin Kelly

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40 Stewart Brand launched The Whole Earth Catalog in 1968. See Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, The Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*, (University of Chicago Press, 2008). Also The Whole Earth Catalog <<http://www.wholeearth.com/index.php>> [accessed August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015].

41 The latter could be substituted for internet: the catalogue could be considered to be a forerunner of a well curated webpage with links.

42 Stewart Brand ed., *The Next Whole Earth Catalog Paperback: Access to Tools* (POINT/Random House, 1980).

argues that the most revolutionary tools are those that expand the choices inherent in other tools, "...Because tools open up options, they remake us. A really fantastic atlas of the world is literally a new world... There are many ways to change the world, but I think the most direct way, the way being pioneered by artists, hackers, and scientists, third-culture citizens, is to adopt new tools."<sup>43</sup> The relationship he describes with tools is one in which the addition of a new tool alters the relationship between us and the other tools and what we consider to be possible. For example, the invention of the camera did not only make it possible to produce photographs, but also changed drawing and painting henceforth. In this way tools can be linked with emancipation and transformation.

Tools that create agency are those that can be openly shared. Just as the immaterial commons, these kinds of tools are not lessened through being borrowed and utilised by others. Yet, if we take forward the notion of craftsmanship we can understand that to use them well, and to share them is not just a matter of free access; skilled use requires learning. As with the establishment of anything shared in common it is through social relationships that this is mediated. If these skills are learnt through developing social relationships with others, and this is part of how the value of what is produced is derived, what is the context in which these relationships are developed and tools shared? If we return again to notions of craftsmanship, the traditional site of this is the workshop. This is worth exploring because the workshop implies certain kinds of pedagogical relations and certain kinds of mutuality.

## Tools and the workshop

The workshop is distinctive because it brings together a certain community of people that work there together, makes a certain set of tools accessible, and enables a certain spatial arrangement deemed to be optimal for production. Through the workers' organisation of the space and their selection of tools, certain ways of working and making are facilitated. Tools in the workshop are 'at hand' offering up the possibility for use. The workshop and the tools within it operate to mediate relationships, restricting or opening up potentials. As a site of learning the workshop has its own rules, and relations that must be negotiated, this kind of learning consists of more than just be taught the facts, rules and principles. Apprenticeships were hard won. Traditionally the workshop is hierarchical, but status is generally conferred by the ability to do something well. **What is**

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<sup>43</sup> Kevin Kelly ed., *Whole Earth Catalog*, (2000) p. 4. <<http://kk.org/mt-files/books-mt/WE2000tools.pdf>> [accessed August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015].

being learnt in these contexts is more than can be written as a set of instructions; it is a way of being (and being together) that must evolve through time.



5.8 Squarepegs Workshop, Ian Spooner

The workshop provides an opportunity to do things together, chat, ‘have a cuppa’, tinker, observe the stance as a machine is being used, or an attitude towards a process; there are social rituals, spatial organisations and controlled experimentation. This is a context where questions can be asked of one another. Christopher Frayling suggests that these kinds of networks be they defined formally as guilds, or less formally through friendships, or through acquaintances, creates ‘invisible colleges’. This is a phrase originating during the Commonwealth period and signifying:

“...A social circle which is distinguished between the greater density of relations between its members than between members and non-members...the social location of distinctive sets of technical and cognitive norms.”<sup>44</sup>

This implies looseness and the potential for differences within the group; it is rather an intentional community brought together through certain objects, practices and ideas. It

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<sup>44</sup> Christopher Frayling, pp. 26-27.

does not imply relations that seek to define in entirety, or fully regulate or homogenise. This could be a good way to understand the commons: as a social grouping with permeable and fluid boundaries that does not preclude multiple identities and relationships with those ‘outside’ of a particular group. In the case of Portland Works this is a process that occurred around the campaign and the site- people became connected with it and with each other in multiple ways.

## Trans-local networks and sharing tools

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century there are new forms of workshop, aligned with different forms of community and social organisation. In her essay ‘Social Making’ featured as part of the V&A exhibition catalogue “The Power of Making”, art activist Ele Carpenter defines the communities around Makers Spaces, Fab Labs and Hack Spaces as part of a wider social movement that is working to resist, “the multiple crises of ‘de-skilling’, proprietary licensing, and outsourced production [suggesting that...] underpinning this movement is the notion of the commons.”<sup>45</sup> In order for these spaces to function, sharing is a prerequisite. These concerns Carpenter raises tie closely to the pursuit of profit within the capitalistic system. Through new production processes and tools skills are devalued, and costs driven down leading to work being carried out in places where lower wages can be paid. The impact is not only a loss of skills that are important for innovation, but the pleasure of doing a job well and finding out through doing, as discussed at length by Richard Sennet in *The Craftsman*.

Although workshops in previous centuries could include those who have travelled to take part, they always implied and relied upon physical presence. Now presence can be virtual and trans-local. To look at how this has evolved is useful in enabling us to understand how tools might be shared and institutions produced. One manifestation of these is the Fab Lab, which was developed at The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) as a global, knowledge-sharing community, creating a workshop equipped with cutting edges tools, as a place of co-production that is not geographically defined.<sup>46</sup> It lays claim to being an institution and a tool of the commons.

The Fab Lab Charter sets out that all Labs in the network should be able to share designs and knowledge, collaborating across international borders, sharing common tools and

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<sup>45</sup> Ele Carpenter, ‘Social Making’, *The Power of Making. Exhibition Catalogue*, ed. by Daniel Charny (V&A: London 2011) pp. 49-51.

<sup>46</sup> *Fab Lab Of Makers and Inventions*, Ed. by Corinne Büching and Julia Walter-Herrman (Transcript Verlag, 2014).

processes.<sup>47</sup> Aspects such as bartering for time can help establish social relationships, and work to resist the market economy determining how resources are used or access is provided. Sharing of ideas occurs through video links, computer files, and annual events held at MIT, and through specific challenges, projects and workshops held between parts of the network. The specified aim is increased access to tools. The MIT website states that:

“Public access to the Fab Lab is essential. A Fab Lab is about democratizing access to the tools for personal expression and invention. So a Fab Lab must be open to the public for free or in-kind service/barter at least part of the time each week, that’s essential. Fab Labs support and subscribe to the Fab Lab Charter.”<sup>48</sup>

The Fab Lab movement has exploded over the past 5 years, and now there are over 500 Fab Labs listed worldwide.<sup>49</sup> These systems of replicability and communication enable strong trans-local-networks, which are crucial when it comes to the question of scaling the commons.

This level of coordination across such a vast network in this case relies on top-down control. The stated motivation is that ideas can be replicated in many different global contexts and therefore extended, as open-source development, leading to innovation. However, despite their declaration of ‘low start-up costs, low material costs’: capital equipment \$25,000 (£15,850)-\$65k (£41,200) and \$15,000 (£9,000)-\$40,000 (£25,370) in consumables may be relatively low for an institution like MIT, but is prohibitively high for many groups and organisations, even in rich countries like England.<sup>50</sup> Although the association with MIT brings with it many benefits, MIT is a private institution that greatly benefits from the knowledge that is built which contributes to their public identity and brand.

The interest in, and insistence on replicability has the disadvantage of predetermining the tools and approaches used, disconnecting them from their local context. Change seems to be driven only from the centre, rather than opening up the possibility for

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47 The Fab Lab Charter, (MIT), < <http://fab.cba.mit.edu/about/charter> > [accessed August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015].

48 FabFoundation, *Who/What qualifies as a Fab Lab?*, (2015), <<http://www.fabfoundation.org/fab-labs/fab-lab-criteria/>> [accessed 24<sup>th</sup> August 2015].

49 FabFoundation, *Fab Labs around the world*, (2015), <<http://www.fabfoundation.org/fab-labs/>> [accessed August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015].

50 Fabfoundation, *Setting up a Fab Lab*, (2015), <<http://www.fabfoundation.org/fab-labs/setting-up-a-fab-lab/>> [accessed August 4<sup>th</sup> 2015].

reconfiguration to be driven by innovation and needs in those Fab Labs that could be understood to be on the periphery. **In understanding the way we set up access to the tools for Commoning we need to be really critical in terms of how we think about what kind of organisational and governance system is genuinely open to a diverse range of people, both to access tools and resources.**

Some hints about this might be gained from the hacker and maker movements. The aim is to make ethical and non-capitalist choices possible. Tools in this context are often in themselves a means of sharing resources, such as the Creative Commons License which sets out the way in which things can be shared, but also work as protections in order to secure the resources future reproduction and prevent their capitalisation.<sup>51</sup> This is of particular importance in the context of high-tech products that are often sold for large profits, and aggressively protected by multinational companies willing to engage in extensive litigation. In producing such tools their makers seek to question who has access to tools and resources in society, and whether these tools can be taken apart and reconfigured to meet other needs and desires than those prescribed by multinational profit-driven technology companies. Therefore we can understand that the kind of tools that give agency must be closely aligned to the type of commons resource that is being shared.

The DIY ethos of these movements such as makers spaces and hack spaces seek to problematize the impact of ‘enclosure’ on creativity, innovation and quality of life arguing that it is only through the free sharing of ideas and tools that we can realize their potential. The Peer-to-Peer (P2P) movement is related to this; participants are networked in a way that gives them equal privilege and responsibility, both in terms of determining the goal and achieving it together. Grown from computer programme design, it expresses the desire to collaborate on shared problem finding and solving. In his book on the development of Linux *The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age* proponent Pekka Himanen sets out the importance of the ‘hacker ethics’ of information sharing, peer learning, and cooperation **to attend to shared problems or concerns for the greater good.**<sup>52</sup> A strong component of a maker space is the idea of tinkering and

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51 Tools for sharing and developing commons comprising of natural resources, community resources, or the offering of skills or time include give-get, Local Exchange Trading Schemes, and time banks. Ways of distributing and developing common resources that involve as cultural and intellectual ‘products’ include Creative Commons, GNU, or Konomark, which all show a willingness to share with others, with a range of different limitations possible. The question of property law is also related to this immaterial production patents and copyrights are property laws designed for material property, which was designed for easily privatisable objects, which are subject to the laws of scarcity. They do not work well within the world of ideas and immaterial and indefinitely reproducible work which becomes more powerful through being reproducible.

52 Pekka Himanen, *The Hacker Ethic And the Spirit of the Information Age*, (Random, 2001).

exploring, taking forward participatory ways of learning, stressing processes and relationships above the outcomes. The organisational system of the hacker movement is often much looser, **and the tools themselves are often designed and made as part of the process. They are often developed in answer to particular skills and interests of the group, and could be seen as representative of the particular network and place.**

The Hacker and P2P movements understand the political, pedagogical and social importance of creating their own tools. Through doing so we can rethink the ways in which we relate to one another and what we do. A good example of such is the P2P Foundation, which aims to “be a pluralist network to document, research, and promote peer to peer alternatives.”<sup>53</sup> In doing so they seek to develop commons cultural and immaterial commons, leading to greater innovation and more democratic access. They also seek to question the ways in which finite natural commons are used and distributed.

In learning from these movements we can understand that it is not enough to provide a set of tools and offer them for people to use. It is also crucial to enable people to make their own tools and decide which are important. I would argue they are engaging in the process of design, not just at the point of an object, but also in terms of the kinds of relations that we share. **‘Tools’ then are always *designed*, whether consciously prior to their use, or through the process of making and using them, or both.** But what then do we understand by the word design? How do different approaches to design impact on the kind of tools we have?

## Designing tools, designing a brief

Design can be understood as the process of imagining or creating something to meet a set of requirements within particular constraints. The finding of these requirements and the constraints is an essential and inter-subjective part of the process. How the problem is framed, who and what is taken into account, and how they relate and are understood are of crucial importance. This is brief making. Whether this is something that is explicitly defined on a piece of paper prior to any action, or emerges through making or conversation, the manner in which it is produced is absolutely crucial from the point of view of seeking justice and social change. It sets out what to take into account, and what to work from and with. Design questions are primarily ‘how’ questions rather than ‘why’

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<sup>53</sup> See P2P Foundation Wiki, which is a knowledge commons. P2P Foundation (2015), <[http://p2pfoundation.net/Main\\_Page](http://p2pfoundation.net/Main_Page)> [access date August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015].

questions, and this requires not only an intellectual understanding, but also the skill and care to make it possible. A brief sets out not only what is ultimately made, but also how it is made, which requires either a good understanding of how this works, or collaboration with those who will produce it.

How then is a brief formed? Design is often considered to be a visual or aesthetic competency, and although these skills can be important to making and communicating, when we consider the brief as origin we can see the need for other proficiencies. In each case the origin, the starting point or points of the design process must be formulated in a way in which a design can proceed from, as a ‘how’ question. The designers, (and too commoners who design) must set out what way or manner, and by what means the design might emerge, understanding capacities or possibilities. It is therefore a cross-disciplinary skill, and at each point in the formulation of these relations there is an opportunity to question, or to propose otherwise.<sup>54</sup>

One strategy for brief development that seems particularly appropriate to the commons, is participatory design, which, following educator and philosopher Paolo Friere’s notions of critical pedagogy and ideas of transformative agency can be understood as a socio-pedagogical process. **A transformative agency recognises that it both creates and responds to shifting conditions and allows for the possibility of purposeful change.** To design with multiple others means to negotiate, to find points of agreement, relationships, capacities, concerns, and desires. Design Researcher Nigel Cross suggests that a designer works with, “Ingenuity, empathy and appropriateness.”<sup>55</sup> Good design understands its context as productive of relationships and potentialities. This is about both hard-learned skill and critical reflection. For those who are not practiced in ‘design-thinking’ approaches however, the openness and complexity can feel too risky or unfocused, or a rather circuitous way to reach a specified goal. To work in such a way as a group of commoners may not come naturally or easily.

Design processes may be unfamiliar, and they may also require the articulation of differences. In *Design in and Against the Neoliberal City*, Architect Jesko Fezer draws on the

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54 This cross-disciplinarity might be another difference we can find between craft and design. To become a craftsperson requires the discipline and time to be invested in order to get very good at one particular thing, whereas the designer must be able to move across subjects, objects, scales and materials. Thanks to Maker and Artist Linda Brothwell (Linda Brothwell, <<http://www.lindabrothwell.com/>> [accessed 24<sup>th</sup> August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015].) for reminding me of this. In a moment of theorising being caught up with the aesthetics and rather romantic ideas of craftsmanship I had for a while lost one of the most crucial aspects of it; being the time invested and self-discipline required; a commitment which can mean that the craftsman must be focused rather than increase the breadth of learning. The designer, I think, may be more of the ‘jack of all trades, master of none’ kind of figure. There are of course notable exceptions, and often through the ability to look deeply into one way of doing things a profound understanding of the making processes (emotional physical, social etc.) may produce the ability to move across boundaries and try new things.

55 Nigel Cross, ‘From a design science to a design discipline: Understanding designerly ways of knowing and thinking’, *Design research now*, (2007) pp. 41-54.

ideas of Gui Bonsiepe and Chantal Mouffe to advocate for **the brief as articulation of conflicts. This articulation in itself is a design task.** In writing the brief the designer works with others to reveal the city as contested and made up of multiple interests.

“To name and articulate such conflicts and their intentional transformation is to act on the assumption that design has a social relation that aims less at the solution of problems than the critical handling and thematisation of social relations and disavowals. In such a practice, the discipline’s professional actors—just as amateurs responsible for the informal and ‘illegitimate’ practices of design—regard the urban space as a place for discussion and make their contribution to the debate and negotiation of political issues. If designers start to connect their efforts to the worldwide ‘Right to the City’ movement, the project of accommodating conflicts by design will refer to tangible and specific social and spatial situations, to become more than a rhetorical gesture.”<sup>56</sup>

Tools designed to produce Agencies of Commoning should in some way work to articulate conflicts, and what is contested about the city. In doing so the aim is not problem ‘solving’, focusing on what is visible in such a way as to muffle any dissent and maintain the status quo. It is to seek radical structural transformation of the city.

## Design as iterative, practical evaluative and projective

How then can design, and the designing of tools operate to achieve agency? If we take forward Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische’s definition of agency as “...informed by the past (in its “iterational” or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a “projective” capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a “and temporally embedded, practical-evaluative” capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment)” then design seems a good strategy for achieving it. Firstly, we can understand the design process is an iterative one.<sup>57</sup> In his 2008 conference paper “A Cautious Prometheus, A Few Steps Toward a Philosophy of Design” Philosopher Bruno Latour states that: “Design is never foundational...it is never a process that begins from scratch; to design is always to redesign. There is always something that exists first, as a given, as an issue, as a

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56 Jesko Fezer, *Civic City Cahier 6: Design in and Against the Neoliberal City*, (Bedford Press, 2013).

57 Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, p. 964.

problem.”<sup>58</sup> This starting point or multiple starting points could be a previous design, an experience, or question or it could arise in process from a problem, or an opportunity. In turn the designer analyses, speculates, tests, and then redefines the problem and beginning the process again.

‘Solutions’ are also starting points for new paths and explorations. The non-linearity of this process allows the unexpected effects of interrelations to be taken into account. The maintenance of openness and ambiguity is an important strategy for designers because there are always complex interdependencies, contingencies and changing needs.

Design is also practical-evaluative. It can, as architect Jonathan Hill argues simultaneously be defined as ‘problem solving’, ‘provisionality’ and the ‘production of a commodity.’<sup>59</sup> The idea of ‘problem solving’ defines a process with clear boundaries, starting with a problem-based brief, and then the development of an answer that is a solution to this; the outcome is tangible, resulting in an object-commodity. The process of design is about setting clearly defined limits and aims to enable the designer to reach a certain outcome related to the contingent moment. ‘Provisionality’ indicates drawing out, an exploration, and each answer being a contingent one of many. A design solution that is always dependent on how, where, when and by whom the questions are posed and are likely to change as we learn more.

Design is also necessarily future thinking. Design can be consciously entered into as a formalised process, or it can be done in response to an emergent problem. In either case, the future must be treated as real. You are making something that will be an active part of a future world. To understand what it is you design you must also bring that future world to life. In the context of a formalised process design often brings with it certain tools to enable this future to be imagined, analysed and shaped with others. Visual tools, such as drawings, maps, photographs, and diagrams enable analytical and propositional work to happen simultaneously. The designer must work across scales, and between the conceptual, the material, and the spatial.

Design is an approach to thinking and doing that can allow for the engagement with a shifting context as Renata Tyszczyk argues, ‘Design is particularly syncretic: it has the

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58 Bruno Latour, *A Cautious Prometheus? A Few Steps Towards a Philosophy of Design (with special attention to Peter Sloterdijk)*, *Proceedings of the 2008 Annual International conference of the Design History Society* (Universal Publishers, 2008) pp. 2-10.

59 Jonathan Hill, ‘Design Research: the First 500 Years’, in Murray Fraser, ed., *Design Research in Architecture*, (London: Ashgate, 2013), p13

capacity to hold together divergent acts.<sup>60</sup> This process is both a creative and communicative one and the designer develops representational skills to meet it. Many design tools utilise abstraction as a way of dealing with complexity and in order to enable the layering of many different kinds of information together in order to propose new relationships, and reveal existing ones that may have been hidden. It is in the possibility of doing otherwise, and of transforming existing structures and relationships that design has its radical potential.

## Design as distributed agency

Design works to transform through the process of assembly. Design is of particular interest in relation to the commons because it can be considered to have distributed agency, bringing together the human and non-human in complex and heterogeneous networks of action. In his recent contribution to the Civic City Cahier series, “Distributed Agency, Designs Potentiality” Art Historian Tom Holert argues that:

“Despite numerous attempts to wrest it from its basic heteronomy, e.g. by proposing the autonomy of the good form, the objects and subjects, the materials and performances of design have always been operating within larger economic, technological and cultural networks. Conceiving design in terms of such complex interdependencies, of intermateriality, and intersubjectivity, of designer-client, user-object, human-machine interfaces etc. could lead to the recognition of design’s distributed agency, as a transsubjective, interdisciplinary and ultimately diverse endeavour.”<sup>61</sup>

If the process of design is one of assembly, in designing a tool you activate such a process, by mobilising objects, networks, concepts, and relations.

At each point of engagement come resistances, responses, new connections, opportunities and the need for adjustments, and at each point it is possible to learn. This is a narration of design that resists single author heroically imposing an abstract form on passive matter, (as with the notion of hylomorphism, discussed earlier). In the design process because of the complexity of networks that are assembled there are always resistances, and transformations. As argued by educator and architect Jeremy Till in

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<sup>60</sup> Renata Tyszczyk and Julia Udall, *Doing Narrative Analysis: Design methods*, (Unpublished seminar, 2015).

<sup>61</sup> Tom Holert, *Distributed Agency Design’s Potentiality* (Bedford Press, 2011) p. 25.

Architecture Depends, design is contingent; it is always in relation to other things out of the designers' control:

“...Contingency is a pivotal feature...of contemporary life and with it architecture...and needs to be taken into account rather than avoided as a potential threat... (it)... situates us in the real world, providing opportunities for transformative change whilst avoiding the siren calls of ideals.”<sup>62</sup>

These contingencies include immediate things such as the processes associated with making or manufacture, the qualities of materials themselves, the way the maker understands these qualities. **Design methods are thus a way of approaching the context as productive of relationships and potentialities.** To acknowledge the contingent nature of design we are also resisting an idealised and potentially reactionary view of the world that suppresses those things that do not fit.

### Design as activism, as modification, as creative use, as misuse

Designing tools for Commoning looks to be a useful strategy in order to achieve distributed agency and to try to create change. Design then can be activism, but as Ann Thorpe warns we must be careful of adopting the position that ‘all design is activism’, stressing that this is potentially depoliticising, “...Some people argue that if activism is simply of form of action intended to create change, then all design is activism. Randolph Hester, at UC Berkeley, makes this argument adding, ‘there is no such thing as passive design’ (but) Hester also asks, “Activism for whom?” In many cases professional activism...is on behalf of well-financed, powerful entities, typically businesses or financially secure individuals, who are striving to preserve or extend their power base...A good deal of the rest of professional activism is, we could argue, set in place to defend against ‘transformation’, by taking actions that preserve the status quo. Ironically we act to produce change that averts transformative change.” In such cases we assemble networks that support those already with power and do not challenge those exclusions and limits that others are subject to.

Often the impact of a design, and what it makes possible is tied to how design briefs are produced. In Langdon Winner’s article, “*Do Artefacts Have Politics?*” he argued that designs for low bridges in New York were produced for the purpose of excluding public buses from parkways that led to beach areas, since the buses could not fit under the bridges and

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<sup>62</sup> Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends*, (MIT Press, 2009) p. 61.

typically carried less well-off, ethnic and racial minorities.<sup>63</sup> Winner suggested that **artefacts have politics, because their impact is not felt equally across a population, and they change the ways in which we are able to relate to one another.** Whether the exclusion of poorer and minority residents was a deliberate strategy or an omission in the development of the brief and the needs of a more diverse group of people, it had tangible effects.<sup>64</sup>

Design is also potentially problematic when we understand it in relation to the commons and non-commodified resources. If we take forward the notion of design as distributed agency it is important to examine the commercial networks of which it is a part. In ‘Design and Democracy’, Industrial Designer Gui Bonsiepe, argues that design has often rested on a paradigm of market driven development. He opposes the idea that design should be primarily seen as a way to style products for maximum profit and market distribution and instead proposes that it should attend to social problems and needs:

“In the end the collectivization or ‘socialisation’ of the design process itself should enable a rational and interdisciplinary design that is closely orientated to the details and capacities of the production sphere and the needs of the people.”<sup>65</sup>

Bonsiepe considers design as act of modification to be a political act. Through his work to modify and extend existing objects he sought to respond to socio-political issues and concerns, in ways that originated in local concerns and possibilities. By drawing on what is at hand and within reach of the people, there is empowerment: an appropriateness to need and a questioning of the way the world is through the production of something different.

Design should not just be understood as the preserve of someone sat at a desk engaging in formal processes however. As we learn from Sennett’s description of the creative use

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63 Langdon Winner, *Do artefacts have politics?* (Daedalus, 1980) pp. 121-136.

64 A number of designers have sought to re-politicise design, bringing its critical capacities to the forefront. In 1964 the Designer Ken Garland set out the ‘First Things First manifesto’ (Ken Garland, *First Things First Manifesto*, (Goodwin Press, 2014)) in which he and 400 graphic designers argued against the primary use of their skills as a way to sell unnecessary products and to instead focus on communication in ways that would contribute to society. The manifesto was updated and republished in 2000 (Adbusters, *First Things First 2000*, (Adbusters, 1999)). Parallel projects such as the ‘Designer’s Accord’ (Designers Accord, 2008, <[http://www.designersaccord.org/progress\\_report/0208/](http://www.designersaccord.org/progress_report/0208/)> [accessed August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015]) also set out a desire to consider ethical questions, such as sustainability and other social responsibilities. The Designers Accord is both a charter to which design practices and institutions can sign up to, and a series of events, workshops and conferences to further the debate.

65 Gui Bonsiepe, ‘Design and Democracy’, *Design Issues*, 22 (2006) p. 31.

of tools in craft, design happens also in use. This can be a critical, subversive or a radical reimagining of what is, as Jonathan Hill reminds us in ‘The Use of Architects’, “With a role equal in the formulation of architecture to that of the architect, the creative user either creates a new space or gives an existing one new meanings and uses contrary to established behaviour.”<sup>66</sup> This can be playful, deliberately subversive, driven by misunderstandings or different interpretations of the affordances of a building, space or object. Tools designed to create Agencies of Commoning could be modified, subverted or creatively extended versions of those that are already at hand. In critically reinterpreting the everyday, what is achieved with the tool can have greater resonance.

Art Historian Tom Holert argues that rather than lamenting designs’ entwinement with capital and capitalist production processes we should instead look at design as a generator of possibilities, within which a number of human and non-human actors have agency. Holert gives an account of a bumper designed for a car park, which has sharp edges. The person installing this design uses their ‘on the spot’ knowledge of the design problem, their skills and the tools they have to hand to round of the edges of the design in situ in order to ensure that cars are not scratched by the design. Holert sees this as an important act:

“The labours of modifying and repairing the work of others is certainly not ground-breaking in terms of anti-capitalist struggle... **However, the physical skills, the attitude of care and circumspection, the inscription of a hand that performs ‘responsible gestures’ and so forth, all engender a shared authorship.**”<sup>67</sup>

Although similar to Wren’s modification of the lens as described by Richard Sennet, it differs because of the position of the modifier and that of the designer.<sup>68</sup> Holert insists that this kind of modification approach can be an important part of a post-capitalist strategy, because the work is done not for profit, but for the sake of doing something well, and for concern and care for others.

In considering the tools for Commoning at Portland Works this final example seems apt. Tools should be made because of a skilled, in the sense of ‘dexterity, judgement and care’

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<sup>66</sup> Jonathan Hill, ‘The Use of Architects’, *Urban Studies*, 38.3 (2001) pp. 351-365.

<sup>67</sup> Tom Holert, p. 36.

<sup>68</sup> Richard Sennet, p. 201.

and awareness of a need.<sup>69</sup> This could be a social need, an economic need or a political, democratic or pedagogical one. What matters is the engaged and relational nature of the process of design and craft that is both critical and hopeful.

## Tools to create agencies

This chapter sets out how tools work to create agency. Tools become tools through their use; there is always a doer and a doing. To make and use a tool we express a wish to attend to a desire, need or concern; this may be tacit and it might not imply a predefined end goal. Tools enable precise and useful knowledges to be built and shared; they mediate relationships and work to assemble networks through their design and use. Some tools enable feedback, particularly when used with skill. Tools perform differently in different people's hands; to use a tool implies practices, know-how and particular motivations. There is a tension between the notions of craftsmanship and of making tools open to many people, however it is through the creating of a space for mutual learning that this conflict becomes an opportunity. To use a tool effectively you must engage head, heart and hand. At Portland Works tools are something that are made and chosen with care. They are lent to others and used with skill and creativity. To think of the things we design to save Portland Works from speculative redevelopment as tools we can understand this as another collaborative making process where many makers each take a part.

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<sup>69</sup> Ronald Larsen, *A Potter's Companion: Imagination Originality and Craft*, (Inner Traditions Bear and Co, 1992).

## Chapter 6

# Mapping Tools and Agencies at Portland Works

### Understanding mapping as a tool

One of the most important tools to enable me to write my thesis research is mapping. Mapping in my thesis is a meta-tool; it is a tool that enables the collaborative examination of other tools. It enables a visual, layered and abstracted investigation of people's accounts of the production of an urban common at Portland Works. In order to understand the tools and agencies of commoning, I have engaged in this process of mapping both for myself and with nine others involved in the project. Each map sets out an individual account of the project within the limits and possibilities of the map as tool. This chapter reflects on and theorises this process in order to set out what I think is particular about how mapping works to create agency in this circumstance. In subsequent chapters I will draw out and analyse the content of the maps, along with a narration of my experiences. Here I explore what can be understood about mapping as a tool and how it works to create agency in relation to Portland Works as Urban Commons.

Maps are commonly associated with the scaled drawing of geographical features: that is cartography.<sup>1</sup> Mapping has conventionally been understood as something drawn on paper to visualise what cannot be seen. Increasingly it is digital and interactive, and these

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<sup>1</sup> I use the word 'mapping' rather than 'cartography' for a number of reasons, but these include emphasising the experimental and exploratory nature of what I am doing with others. In her thesis 'Diasporic urbanism: concepts, agencies & 'mapping otherwise', Nishat Awan suggest that choosing the word 'mapping' over 'cartography' [enables] a break from the professionalised world of cartographers and to valorise instead the amateur knowledge of the non-professional specialist. This reveals a different ethics of mapping, one that neither takes the position of the powerful and the elite nor an explicitly oppositional stance, preferring instead a mode of sharing and reciprocity where the politics of representation allows others to be included in the mapping process." Nishat Awan, *Diasporic urbanism: concepts, agencies & 'mapping otherwise'*, unpublished doctoral thesis, (University of Sheffield, 2011) p. 205.

forms permeate all aspects of everyday life. Maps can include any kind of graphic representation of data, including cultural patterns, economic relations, or political territories, crucially, where **spatial relationships are made**. It is these spatial relationships that differentiate a map from a diagram. Mapping is visual and there are certain tropes that are associated with it. It is the recognisability of such tropes that enables a map to be understood as such, “Mapping works because it is a set of practices have been learnt by people, and because maps are the product of technicity (made by tools) and they possess technicity (they are a tool in themselves)”.<sup>2</sup> We recognise how the map works because we have learnt the norms associated with a particular type of map, be it a road map, a site survey, or a geological map. We are literate.

**A map can be useful for finding your way with others.** It is an abstraction and it is these very qualities that enable its utility. These sets of norms have evolved because of how the map will be used and what story it is to tell, whether to set out locations and extent of natural resources or potential sites for settlement, or to define boundaries of property or the territory ruled by a particular government. The ways in which these abstractions are made also set the terms of engagement. In their investigations into the role of maps in domination and subjugation, feminist and postcolonial scholars have argued that in order to understand maps, we must always consider the question of power in their production; the decisions made about what they show, how they represent it, and what they exclude. In making these choices our maps are always translating information, shaped by field of power relation in which they are operating. Mapping is always a process of **revealing, connecting and omitting information**, and choices are made about scale, legend, emphasis, frame, graphics and relationships. To collaborate in making a map is to foreground and negotiate such choices.

Cartography is a process of normalisation of one view. In his paper, ‘Deconstructing the Map’, John Harley draws on the work of Roland Barthes, to suggest that cartography involves appropriation, discipline and control of the territory that is mapped:<sup>3</sup>

“Power comes from the map and it traverses the way maps are made. The key to this internal power is thus cartographic process. By this I mean the way maps are compiled and the categories of information selected; the way they are generalized, a set of rules for the abstraction of the landscape; the way the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 586.

<sup>3</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers, (London: Paladin, 1973) p. 110. Quoted in Ibid, p. 7: ‘With Barthes we could say they “presuppose a signifying consciousness” that it is our business to uncover’).

elements in the landscape are formed into hierarchies; and the way various rhetorical styles that also reproduce power are employed to represent the landscape.”<sup>4</sup>

In this social constructionist analysis there is a shift away from understanding maps as rational ‘value free’ communication devices to maps as practices of power-knowledge in their exclusions, and abstractions. According to Harley, the ‘technical processes’ bring with them **certain values, ways of seeing, and ways of categorising**.<sup>5</sup> We therefore should pay attention to whom that it is making the map, for what purpose and within which frames of reference.

Mapping takes on an important role in relation to asserting rights of property and ownership. Maps are often made for the owner of land or prospective developer, operating within codes such as planning legislation, property rights and urban design policies that set out what they must show and how. Historically they have been used in battle and war to control territories. Commercially they are used to delineate ownership of resources. The context of how they are used and by whom is also incredibly important; maps are often part of legal and financial processes to set out boundaries, use, and claim ownership.<sup>6</sup> These processes of bounding have grown hand in hand with practices of mapping informing and defining each other. Many maps were created specifically because of Parliamentary Enclosure Acts to delineate ownership, and laying down the public, common or private status of land. These maps were published to legally formalise decisions about enclosure. They were the first systematic survey of most of the land in England and Wales. As a tool it was produced for one particular purpose, but its future modifications and uses significantly extend and transform what it can do.

## Mapping in architecture

As a researcher who has also worked in both in architectural practice and teaching, I frequently make maps, and in doing so I am operating within these professional

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4 John B Harley, Deconstructing the Map Cartographica, *The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualisation*, 26.2 (1989) p. 11.

5 Ibid., p. 3. Harley explains: The history of these technical rules has been extensively written about in the history of cartography, though not in terms of their social implications nor in Foucault's sense of discourse: see, for example, the later chapters of G. R. Crone, *Maps and Their Makers: An Introduction to the History of Cartography*, (1st ed., 1953, 5th ed. Folkestone, Kent: Dawson; Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1978).

6 Maps and surveys in the case of Portland Works were an incredible important tool used by the landlord to make a Planning Application for Change of Use, their content and conventions creating an argument for the closure of the building and its conversion into residential accommodation. Our counter-maps and surveys were an important tool to make the case for its retention as a place of making.

languages and technical processes. In their writing about the normative site survey in architectural practice, Carolyn Butterworth and Sam Vardy argue we can become restricted by these conventions:

“The site survey abstracts the site so successfully that...**for the architect, this representation of the physical reality of the site becomes the site for the purposes of the design**...the site survey becomes a place to nestle, to settle securely, safe in the knowledge that the site survey is ‘true’... The process does not acknowledge the abstracted nature of the information that it produces nor does it recognise the absence of other information that it has not gathered...we reach the paradoxical situation where the map is indeed the territory; the site survey has become the site.”<sup>7</sup>

The survey becomes a central element of the brief. Their analysis, which draws on Baudrillard’s argument that **a territory comes into being through the bounding processes of map-making**, suggests that the kind of survey we make not only defines how we understand or see a territory, but also the way we design and build and live in a place or space.<sup>8</sup>

In a professional context there is often a tendency to assert that a survey or map is comprehensive. This is problematic however; **there are always omissions, limitations and deliberate exclusions** associated with the professional procedures (and in fact any map making). A conventional site survey fixes a site in time, with few opportunities for additions, amendments or deductions. Usually one or two people make the survey, and in doing so they are following long-standing conventions of what they look for and how they represent it. In arguing for a more ‘creative survey’, Butterworth and Vardy not only remind us that a map organises or coheres information, but also the importance of taking absences into account.<sup>9</sup> Through expanding how we survey or map a site, to include things outside of the normative survey we are potentially able to critique the assumptions that are bound together with them, whilst also proposing alternatives.

How then might we map more critically? In their book *‘Spatial Agency’*, which engages with ideas of spatial justice, Awan, Schneider and Till suggest a ‘critical cartography’ and

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<sup>7</sup> Carolyn Butterworth and Sam Vardy, ‘Site Seeing: Constructing the ‘Creative Survey’, *Field Journal*, 2 (2008) p. 127. (my emphasis)

<sup>8</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 166-184.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127

‘counter-mapping’. The strategy of ‘making visible’ is one important capacity of mapping that spatial practitioners can employ to draw attention to and thus question ‘hidden’ forces in the production of space:

“As long as the power of the structures remains largely invisible and therefore untouched, ...[the task is]...to research, record, visualise and analyse the links and relationships between different nodes and actors, using maps, diagrams, drawings, talks and tours in order to explicate and often simplify otherwise impenetrable information and datasets.”<sup>10</sup>

This is about understanding mapping as a democratic tool, in order to open up what is scrutinised and to make relations open to analysis. Maps here are grouped with other tools, such as walks, or drawings, that could also be considered to be processes of making spatial or data relationships, and which enable collaborative understandings to develop. They offer the potential for a retelling of the world in a way that questions dominant narratives and orderings. Maps can be used with the intent of **bringing together conceptual, political, experiential, material and imaginary and into the single space of the map**, working to open up new possibilities through their associated processes of gathering, relating, and revising.

A modernist understanding of maps suggests that we could possess the ‘truth’ through them if we understand the ideology inherent in their representation. However through notions of performativity and post-representational theories it is argued **that maps are not just representations; they actively do things, creating and mediating relationships**. These ideas have their origin in the work of feminist theorist Judith Butler, taking forward Foucault’s conception of power-knowledge.<sup>11</sup> In developing her ideas around subjectivity and identity, Butler argues that **gestures and speech acts are seen not representations of an inner identity, but as constituent of identity**.<sup>12</sup> It is through their performance that identity is made, and this is always developing and changing in relation to the world around.

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<sup>10</sup> Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, p. 76.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*

<sup>12</sup> Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, (Psychology Press, 2004) pp. 168, 172.

## Performative mapping

A number of cultural geographers, architects and critical theorists have taken these ideas of performativity on in understanding mapping. In ‘Mapping Controversies in Architecture’, anthropologist Albena Yaneva states that:

“Maps are not just representational tools; map-making and mappings perform [...] they produce subjects, shape bodies and constitute identities. This way of thinking about maps emphasizes the unremitting materiality of a world where there are no pre-existing objects and fixed identities.”<sup>13</sup>

In making a map we are not just recording what is, we are making it. In understanding this it brings the question sharply into focus: **Why do I wish to make these maps of this project at this time and what is it I seek to collaboratively make?** I do so to learn what others wish to say about the project, to produce a series of accounts. I also wish to record and acknowledge the work carried out by many people over time. Mapping here is a political and ethical project. Yet, I do not know in advance of making the maps what I will find.

The world that we make through mapping is not something that exists in our head prior to starting to map, it is through this process that the world emerges. In his paper ‘The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention’ landscape architect James Corner sees the art of mapping as exploration, and proposes that the productive and speculative potential for maps is to help us discover and make new worlds.<sup>14</sup> The map draws attention to and gathers a particular set of things, pulling them out of the continuity with other things and drawing a boundary that coheres them within the space of the map. Corner understands Deleuze and Guattari’s imperative to “make a map not a tracing” as Deleuze and Guattari state, **stressing the cartographer’s role as agent.**<sup>15 16</sup> Mapping has the capacity to reformulate what is, whereas tracings only delineate existing lines but reveal or produce nothing new:

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13 Albena Yaneva *Mapping Controversies in Architecture*: (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 28 Jun 2013) p. 89.

14 James Corner, *The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention*, ed. by Denis Cosgrove (Reaktion Books, 1999).

15 *Ibid.*, p. 214.

16 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Continuum: London, 2004) p. 13.

“...The map always precedes the territory in that space only becomes territory in the acts of bounding and making visible, which are primary functions of mapping.”<sup>17</sup>

As was the case in the mapping of the Commons and Enclosures, maps enact. We need to be careful with the maps that we make. **We should understand the mapping process not as documentation of what is known, but as something that is productive of relationships and ruptures.** In this productivity it has the capacity to enable us to critique what is and make other possibilities. Mapping is powerful and can potentially be emancipatory.

## Mapping as a tool for research

**To understand mapping as a tool for research, we need to use it.** In my thesis mapmaking with others occurred in two ways. The first being the evolving process of mapping with fellow mapmakers to create the ten maps of tools detailed in this chapter. The second a workshop convened with other PhD candidates who were using maps in their research.<sup>18</sup> The latter provided a space where we could draw, and analyse our approach through conversation and revising our drawings ‘in the moment’, trying out ways of drawing and questioning the relationship between mapping and research.

Initially, our conversations sought to investigate why mapping was an important approach for us as having worked in architectural practice and education, and we associated this with design:

“Whilst design work can be part of a rigorous and systematic process, there is acceptance of intuition, and of applying overarching ideas or approaches from previous projects or precedents based on a ‘try and see what fits’ heuristic. This is not necessarily linear and frequently makes space for loops, iterations and overarching processes.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> James Corner, p. 222.

<sup>18</sup> This was carried out with Anna Holder and Carl Fraser.

<sup>19</sup> Lines of Flight, *Sheffield Mapping*, (2013), <<https://linesofflight.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/sheffield-mapping-iii-1.pdf>> [accessed August 24th 2015].

Our training and practice as designers makes this trial and error process an instinctive way of working. Designer and academic Jill Franz points out this heuristic approach is one that is particularly appropriate to problems that are complex or ill-defined, because both the nature of the problem and the potential solutions are evolved together.<sup>20</sup> Although ‘proofs’ are not usually achieved through this kind of methodology, it is a way of finding solutions.

## Co-produced and participatory mapping

Tied closely to my ethical approach are notions of co-production, which require questions as well as their solutions to be found with those with whom you are researching. Mapping then seems to be a good fit, enabling this openness and incompleteness. It can facilitate the researcher letting go of control, through not predetermining what should be taken into account. In ‘How Maps Work: Representation, Visualization and Design’, Geographer Alan MacEachren organises maps in terms of why they are being made. He considers these to be ‘for yourself’, ‘for dissemination’, or as ‘participatory devices’.<sup>21</sup> This categorisation brings to the foreground different kinds of qualities such as **whether they offer the possibility for interaction, whether they present already known information or seek to map new knowledges in their making, and whether they conform to existing norms of data presentation.** For example their legibility to a broad audience or complexity may limit or extend who can be part of the mapping processes, and what kinds of things are part of the map. MacEachren draws attention to how the map can be made and used, and how open they are to being understood, modified or challenged.

Maps can convene and facilitate; yet this is not a neutral role. In her thesis ‘*Diasporic Urbanism: Concepts, agencies and 'mapping otherwise'*” Nishat Awan develops the notion of the participatory map as being something that creates a particular relationship around it, taking forward Latour’s term ‘mediator’, here maps are:

“[...] An excuse to bring people together who would not normally meet, by acting as ‘prompts’ for conversations or as catalysts for action. The mediation they enable can be between people or places, and it can also be between the real and the imaginary, between fact and fiction. **The aim is not to disseminate**

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<sup>20</sup> Jill M Franz, ‘A Critical Framework for Methodological Research in Architecture’, *Design Studies*, 15. 4 (1994) pp. 433-447.

<sup>21</sup> Alan MacEachren, *How Maps Work: Representation, Visualisation and Design* (Guilford Press, 1995) p. 6.

**information, but rather invite people to speculate together; their function is a place of gathering and conversation.”<sup>22</sup>**

Mapping in this way brings the concerns and the particular space together, publically and potentially provocatively. It privileges use and collective experience but does not necessarily centre on the physical, objective or extensive aspects of space, potentially creating moments of community or interaction.

## Situated mapping

I hope that through the level of detail offered by these maps of Portland Works, they can become something from which people can draw their own readings and find their own paths. The tools documented in the maps are not static:

**“Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and his authorship of 'objective' knowledge [...] The world neither speaks itself nor disappears in favour of a master decoder. The codes of the world are not still, waiting only to be read.”<sup>23</sup>**

Here Haraway argues we must come to terms with the agency of the ‘objects’, and understand the world as active, rather than fixed and passive. The map as tool could in Haraway’s terms be considered an instrument of vision, enabling looking differently:

**“Vision requires instruments of vision; an optics is a politics of positioning. Instruments of vision mediate standpoints; there is no immediate vision from the standpoints of the subjugated. Identity, including self-identity does not produce science; critical positioning does, that is, objectivity.”<sup>24</sup>**

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<sup>22</sup> Nishat Awan (Ibid.) and Nishat Awan *Diasporic Agencies: Mapping the City Otherwise*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015 (forthcoming)).

<sup>23</sup> Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies*, 14.3 (1988) pp. 592-593.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 586.

Mapping together produces a series of accounts, and the process of mapping, and understanding the map as a meta-tool, which enables us to have a critical position in relation to what we do.

## Mapping as and with narrative

How can we understand what these maps we have made together tell us? How can they be used as a tool for creating agency? I would argue that it is not only in their production that people bring their skills, but also in their use. In their article, “Rethinking Maps” (Kitchin and Dodge) Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge suggest that we can have an ontic or an ontogenetic understanding of maps. In an ontic understanding of maps, cartography is relegated to the technical realm, where the driving question is how can it get better at representing a knowable ‘reality’. They contend that in an ontic understanding, maps are:

“Spatial representations that say something about spatial relations in the world. They may be seen as diverse, rhetorical, relational, multivocal and having effects in the world, but is none the less a stable product- a map [...] For us maps have no ontological security, they are ontogenetic in nature. Maps are of the moment, **brought into being through practices** (embodied, social, technical), always remade every time they are engaged with; mapping is a process of constant reterritorialisation. As such, maps are transitory and fleeting, being contingent, relational and context dependent.”<sup>25</sup>

In making their argument that maps are always remade in their use, maps are always both artefact, as emergent thing-in-the-world, and practice. Parallels could be drawn to musical score where each performance is different.

The skill of the cartographer then is part of the map, as are those skills of the map-reader. Without the practices of skilled reading, a map it would just be a set of points, lines and colours, coloured ink on a page. The map is made to allow social tasks to be fulfilled, and it is changed through this context:

“A map is never a map with ontological security assumed, it is brought into the world and made to do work through practise such as recognising, interpreting,

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Dodge, Rob Kitchin, Chris Perkins *Rethinking Maps* The Map Reader: Theories of Mapping Practice and Cartographic Representation (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons: 2011) p. 109 (my emphasis).

translating, communicating and so on. It does not re-present the world or make the world (by shaping how we think about the world), it is **a co-constitutive production between inscription, individual and world**; a production that is constantly in motion, always seeking to appear ontologically secure.<sup>26</sup>

In the reading of a map you bring with it you knowledge, skills and experience, and make it into what it is, in relation to the world. This is important if maps are either to be made with others, or for communicating or sharing ideas with others.

What is it that allows someone to think of what we are making together as a map? Is it features that we expect to see such as a legend, or axis, or scale? Or is it its utility for finding our way across a territory? These are questions and answers that emerge through the making of the map. The map can work between concepts and physical spaces, memories and objects. For example, by looking between a map and a street, you place yourself within both the map and the street and this moving between changes both. In mapping a project, you start to assemble together an idea of what is part of the project, and how it relates, and what features are the most significant. You are however, always moving between the map as it emerges and your recollection and analysis of ‘the project’ at that point in time. In making a map the map and the project change.

We must always understand our maps as being a visible part of something much larger, and more fluid. In her essay *Mappa Mundi*, Architect Renata Tyszczyk asks:

“Why have maps become static? Maps have gradually become disassociated from events, wanderings, journeys, and stories- their *raison d'être*... by eliminating these movements, maps freeze space and time... they allow us to think that the world doesn’t change so fast, that it is stable, dependable.”<sup>27</sup>

During the enlightenment, maps were transformed from spatial stories to being rational, with a universal ‘objective’ system of measuring. They became assertions of a knowable and conquerable world. In thinking of maps as static we are attempting to take control of the world, by setting out a single viewpoint and therefore are also closing down possibilities for others and ourselves. Tyszczyk calls for an acknowledgment of maps as

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>27</sup> Renata Tyszczyk, ‘Mappa Mundi’, in ed. by Renata Tyszczyk, Joe Smith, Nigel Clark and Melissa Butcher, *ATLAS: Geography, Architecture and Change in an Interdependent World* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2012) p. 11.

being something that can always be remade, and left as being open, and as being associated with a world that is constantly shifting.<sup>28</sup>

The making of maps can be thought of as the making of a certain kind of space, which is constantly revised, in production and utilization. The subject of the map then is an ideological question and cartography tends to be concerned with technical ones. We must consider both as processual and emerging in relation with the world and ourselves. Maps help us rethink the boundaries of the field of action. The maps function as archive, which can be added to and reinterpreted; they are unfinished both in drawing and reading. They present and valorise the time, energy and understandings given by these ten mapmakers and to communicate this to others.

## Mapping and Actor Network Theory

In making maps of tools and agencies of commoning at Portland Works my approach draws on Actor Network Theory (ANT). Actor Network Theory as developed by Science and Technology Studies theorists such as Bruno Latour, John Law and Michael Callon, and Assemblage Theory, as developed by Gilles Deleuze and Manuel De Landa argue for the agency of non-humans. These ideas, drawn from the natural sciences, conceptualise matter not something inert upon which humans impose form through transcendental force, but instead as something with immanence- matter is in itself capable of generating form. These theorists would argue that we do not create the world with our classifications and our signifiers, but instead matter is heterogeneous and is capable of self-organisation. This is morphogenesis. This way of thinking takes the human out of the centre of the narrative and fills the world with many different things that behave in many different ways.

In 'Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory' Latour is critical of much sociology, which he perceives as restricting itself to a limited number of 'social forces' that are supposed to be present 'behind' all things. He argues:

“While other sciences keeping adding causes to phenomena, sociology may be the only one whose ‘causes’ risk having the strange effect of making the phenomena they are supposed to explain vanish altogether.”<sup>29</sup>

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28 Renata Tyszczyk, *Mappa Mundi*, (Initiative and Institution, 2008), <<http://www.initiativeandinstitution.net/wp-content/uploads/2008/03/mappa-pc-ii.pdf>> [accessed August 22nd 2015] p. 1.

29 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the social: An Introduction to actor-network theory*, (Oxford University Press: USA, 2005) p. 100.

In an ANT conception, human and non-human things, which are social connectors, fall in to two types; **intermediaries that connect us without changing the relationship, and mediators where the outcomes cannot be predicted and transformation occurs.**<sup>30</sup> Bruno Latour says ANT is ‘a sociology of translation’ and that social scientists treat too much of the world as if it is an intermediary and just transports information without changing it:

“It is not enough for sociologists to recognise that a group is made, ‘reproduced’ through many means and expressed through many tools.... The real difference between the two schools of thought becomes visible when the ‘means’ or tools’ used in ‘construction’ are treated as mediators and not as mere intermediaries.”<sup>31</sup>

Here we are asked us to bring the ‘things’ and ‘matter’ of our world to the forefront **as tools that actively change the kinds of relationships we have, with each other and the world around us.** In asking us to attribute different kinds of agency to the non-human, it is requiring us to pay closer attention to their particularity, rather than describing things as an interchangeable background or containers. **In the case of mapping Portland Works with others, this allows me to draw on their particular understanding and relationships with the building, the objects that are assembled, and to valorise their understanding of how these things mediate their relationships and possibilities for action.**

This has implications in terms of what was to be mapped and the way in which scale and relationships are understood. In ANT we should map relations that are simultaneously material and conceptual, and we should assume that most relations are comprised of both. For instance, the interactions in a university involve students, lecturers, their ideas, and technologies such as tables, chairs, software and computers and together these form a single network; a university is both a network and an actor that, in certain cases acts in its own right as one entity. In ANT, we do not understand things in terms of micro and macro or local and global because if we cannot draw a connection between how something is mediating a situation it does not offer any framework for explanation. ANT therefore is a useful approach to understand ‘how’ relationships and networks are formed

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<sup>30</sup> John Law, *Actor Network Theory and Material Semiotics*, (Heterogeneities, 2007) <<http://heterogeneities.net/publications/Law2007ANTandMaterialSemiotics.pdf>> [accessed August 22nd 2015]. The major difference from theories of social constructionism is that each of these human and non-human things, ‘actors’ mediate relations because of their particularity “To translate is to make two words equivalent. But since no two words are equivalent, translation implies betrayal. So translation is about making equivalent and about shifting.” Ibid., p. 5.)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

rather than ‘why’ as with other types of social science research.<sup>32</sup>

ANT critiques the idea that the local is concrete and the global is abstract and instead defines the conceptual and physical as part of the same network. In practical terms we might simplify what is happening by giving it a label like ‘global capitalism’, but if carrying out an ANT analysis, we should not take into account forces like ‘global capitalism’ unless it is possible to map how this acts in a particular situation, because otherwise it is supposed to be affecting all actors equally:

“Macro no longer describes a *wider* or a *larger* site in which the micro would be embedded...but some other equally local, equally micro place which is connected to many others through some medium transporting specific types of traces.”<sup>33</sup>

This understanding of scale draws on Michael Foucault conceptualisation of power which is employed and exercised through a netlike organization where actors are always simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power, through their constitution.<sup>34 35</sup> As things are not seen as invisible, macro or detached ‘social forces’, the aim of such an approach is to enable us to take responsibility for the kinds of organisations, and architectures we create; we are agents structuring networks. The ANT premise that there are many heterogeneous things gives the potential to configure new relationships around these particularities and means that we are not passively subject to a few overwhelming social forces that will always remain the same.

Networks in ANT are always made up of many different actors, things and concepts, human and non-human, **which come together in strategic and productive ways**. We must attend to specific, located material practice, which in their heterogeneity hold the possibility of resisting or responding differently. An important term in ANT is ‘radical symmetry’, which involves viewing the power of humans and non-humans as equally uncertain, ambiguous and disputable.<sup>36</sup> This approach challenges the idea that we are

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32 Brian Lawson suggests that ‘how’ questions are design questions. Brian Lawson, *How Designers Think: The Design Process Demystified* (Architectural Press, 2006) p54

33 Bruno Latour, p. 176.

34 Ibid., Michel Foucault, p. 98. See also Michel Foucault’s View on Power Relations

35 Power is acting through relations and in tangible and traceable ways and can be resisted in multiple ways at the points at which they manifest themselves. It is through these multiple resistances that we can achieve change in the network or system

36 Michael Callon, John Law and Arie Rip, *Mapping the Dynamics of Science and Technology: Sociology of Science in the Real World: Sociology of Science in the Real World*, (Macmillan, 1986) p.3.

within systems where relations are generalizable, and asks us to pay attention to how something bears on us and shifts its meaning, rather than assume what and, crucially *how* something is acting in a situation:

“By putting aside the practical means, that is the mediators, through which inertia, durability, asymmetry extension, domination is produced and by conflating all those different means with the powerless power of social inertia, sociologists, when they are not careful in their use of social explanations, are the ones who hide the real causes of social inequalities.”<sup>37</sup>

What does this mean in terms of how we map, and the kinds of things that we might map at Portland Works?

A good example might be the 130-year-old drop hammer upon which Andy Cole forges his tools in the centre of Portland Works. Its limits in terms of speed of production could too easily define it solely as a symptom of ‘global capitalism’, something imminently redundant, subject to power, but interchangeable with other things at Portland Works such as the artists’ workshop, the price of silver, or the motor rewinder’s business. An ANT theorist would argue that rather than explain everything that happens in terms of a limited amount of social causes, that we should start with the many different things within the world and try to understand how they create and mediate very particular social relations.

We can start to map tenant Andrew Cole’s drop hammer with particular relations. We could start with its massiveness. Because of its size, and because of the noise it creates (which requires hammer rights), Andy Cole could not relocate his business if Portland Works was to close- and this (and to a lesser extent along with other businesses that had similarly immobile equipment) became a central argument for the campaign.<sup>38</sup> Its symbolism as a machine of Sheffield’s industrial history, contributed to its agency. This was important because if it had just been the desire of tenants to stay in a building they loved, rather than a threat to the continuation of their business we may not have been so

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37 Bruno Latour, p. 85. See also: Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, ‘Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy’, *Atmospheres of Democracy*: (Exhibition at ZKM, Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, 2005). Latour seeks to address some of the criticisms of ANT around power and essentialism, Latour acknowledges that these accounts of actors are (necessarily) limited, and suggests that these exclusions or occasions where matters of concern are considered to be matters of fact can be damaging to the collective and come back to haunt it at a time in the future. This opening up to me seems potentially empowering. Power in this conception is not pre-existing but rather it is continually produced and reproduced through these many things, which act in particular ways transforming relationships.

38 Hammer rights are a special licenses granted under planning law to certain buildings in the city that allow them to make noise 24 hours a day.

affective. Secondly, we can look to the working affordances in relation to the particular skills of Andy Cole, and this as continuity with practices that provided a point for education at the Works. We can look to the hammer's role as the first 'drum' in the Sensoria' drumming performance held at Portland Works, its location in the forge at the heart of the courtyard put Andy Cole at the centre of Portland Works, and also determined certain aspects of how the refurbishment must be defined. Each of these aspects creates around it particular kinds of relations and possibilities. In this conception, there is no such thing as a totally social relation or agent; everything is part of human/non-human networks with both human and non-human acting.

We could understand the Centenary Knife made by Stuart Mitchell. Produced to celebrate the centenary of the first production of stainless steel cutlery and to raise campaign funds, the knife was made from Stainless Steel in Stuart's workshop at Portland Works.<sup>39</sup> This knife encompasses his particular skills passed down over generations and refined in relation to his many clients. It relied on his relationships with Tata Steel that encouraged them to donate the specialist steel for its production. The fact that his workshop was in the building where stainless steel was first made into cutlery gave it legitimacy as an object to be sold in the centenary celebrations, and knife 001 to be exhibited at the Cutlers Hall and knife 100 at the Millennium Galleries. In mapping this knife we can see its production as productive of certain relationships, and requiring and producing certain agencies. The making of the knife connects people, materials, skills, and ideas. To produce a celebratory mug would do so in entirely different- and probably less useful ways. This is not just about the desirability of the object and the funds it helps to raise, but also about its ability to assemble a particular network. This close mapping is incredibly useful in trying to understand *how* an Urban Commons is made and the tools that people use.

How do these ideas relate to the making of the sustainability of the institutions of the commons? In *Reassembling the Social*, Latour proposes these performative social groupings need constant upkeep in order to exist, "If you don't have the festival now or print the newspaper today, you simply lose the grouping".<sup>40</sup> These things are social connectors, and each connects us in particular ways- our relationships are different if we are connected through a community newspaper than if we come together a festival. In thinking about commoning at Portland Works this implies that the social relations must be continually be maintained and not taken for granted. By making the knife Stuart opens

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39 Richard Dennison, *100 year Stainless: Centenary Knives*, (Day Steel, 2013), <<http://www.daysteel.co.uk/blog/stainless-steel-knife-blanks>> [accessed August 22nd 2015].

40 Bruno Latour, p. 37.

up some new relationships, and remakes others. STS scholar John Law argues that some ‘materials’ or ‘things’ are more durable than others, so allow for social relations to be maintained for longer and therefore a good ordering strategy to produce a relatively stable network is to, “...embody a set of relations in durable materials.”<sup>41</sup> **Durability in this sense should be understood as being derived from flexibility, repetition, strength, or appropriateness to a *situation*, rather than being fixed or certain.** Durable ‘materials’ are always part of a relational network and as the configuration of a network changes, so too do the effects at that point in the network.

These durable materials might offer us a way of developing and sustaining the commons. If so, how might we conceptualise them? Within the context of Portland Works it seems appropriate to think of them as tools. Tools allow us to do things; they express opportunities and risks. But might also act in ways that we do not predict or do not intend. In naming these things we make together as tools, I am attempting to encourage an ‘us’: the diverse community of Portland Works, to examine the ways in which we are doing things; making relations, assessing priorities, and carrying out our actions. Tools are a concept that I have used to navigate through the thesis and the countless ‘important things’ with others. The lens of ‘tools’ enables us to talk, map and write together about our concerns and this activist research that has involved many thousands of hours of commitment from hundreds of people. The naming of the things we design and do together to achieve our aims, as ‘tools’ is a way to draw attention to *how* we are doing what we are doing. I see this reflexivity as an important ethical contribution my research can make to the project.

Critics of ANT claim that in deciding the agencies that should be attributed to an object or artefact, an ANT account is describing them without considering pre-existing structures such as power and therefore it is depoliticizing. In their 2008 paper ‘Is Actor Network Theory Critique?’<sup>42</sup> Whittle and Spicer suggest that, “ANT is underpinned by ontological realism, epistemological positivism and political conservatism”<sup>43</sup>. They consider that the act of assigning agencies to objects and artefact relies on attributing essential characteristics to them. They ask, “Who decides what the content or affordances of a particular technology are? Why does one version come to dominate over others? How are users ‘configured’ to accept (or otherwise) the preferred reading...?”<sup>44</sup>

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41 John Law, p. 387.

42 Andrea Whittle and Andre Spicer, ‘Is Actor Network Theory Critique? Organisation Theory’, *Organization Studies*, 29.4 (2008).

43 Ibid., p. 612.

44 Ibid., p. 614-615.

They say, “By reducing organizations to the effects of the essential properties of the non-human world, ANT hinders our ability to examine the stabilization of an organization as a *constructed achievement*...”<sup>45</sup> What implications does this critique have for how we map and its legitimacy in understanding the tools and agencies of Portland Works as Urban Commons?

In order to answer the critique of ANT as being universalising and not paying enough attention to power, **part of the mapping process should enable you to find *controversies* about how something is acting in a situation.** I argue that these tools and agencies that we map are not defined by one person’s subjective viewpoint and through the 10 map-accounts we set up controversies about what these tools are. Each account allows for different perspectives on the affordances and agencies produced by each of the tools because of the mapmaker’s situation and unique position. Drawing on Donna Haraway’s notion of ‘situated knowledges’<sup>46</sup> I would argue that I am not claiming that the affordances of these tools are objective facts in the sense of being indisputable, or unified. Objects (or the tools of Portland Works) here are **historically contingent actual entities, not instances of ideal forms that become immobile ‘facts’.** By mapping the project with others we have an opportunity to *formulate* these controversies, and to see the tools we produce in a more complex way. Latour suggests that sociologists account for too much of the world as ‘matters of fact’, and doing so is a way of preventing them being examined and questioned.<sup>47</sup> By considering far more of it, such as the identities and boundaries of groups, the types of agency or who is acting, controvertible ‘matters of concern’ we open it up to questioning and make possible its reconfiguration.

## Mapping Tools and Agencies at Portland Works

### Setting out the legend of the map

Developing a series of maps with others was an iterative process, and in order to understand which dimensions changed, and how I take forward James Corner’s definition, which suggests that maps consist of ‘fields’, ‘extracts’ and ‘plottings’.<sup>48</sup> This is

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45 Ibid., p. 612.

46 Donna Haraway, pp. 592-593.

47 Matter, in Bruno Latour’s terminology, is a “highly politicised interpretation of causality”. As Judith Butler understands it “...not as a site or surface, but as a process of materialisation that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity or and surface.” Judith Butler. *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*, (Taylor & Francis, 2011) p. 76.

48 James Corner, pp. 229-231.

useful approach in order to explore the interplay between the constituent parts of what it is we are mapping together. The field comprises of the frame, orientation, units, scale, and graphics and sets the ground for the map. The extracts are objects and other deterritorialized data, which is then placed in the field. Corner considers this as deterritorialized in the sense that these objects are always pulled out from their original seamlessness with other things. It is this process of abstraction that is productive of relationships and allows them to be scrutinized. Finally, ‘plotting’, which entails the ‘strategic and imaginative drawing out of new and latent relationships between extracts’ in the field, where processes of relating, indexing and naming are crucial. There is a relation between structure of the map set out by the conventions and legend as set out in this instance and the plottings, which could be understood as situation and event.

This process of plotting is one of finding out. Kitchin and Dodge propose that:

“The map emerges through a series of iterative and citational practices- of employing certain techniques that build on or cite previous plottings or...other spatial representations, or standardised forms of representations. This process is choreographed to a certain degree, shaped by...conventions, standards, rules, techniques, philosophy, and so on, but it is not determined and essential... the map is contingent and relational in its production in the decisions made by [the map maker]... the construction is enacted through affective, reflexive habitual practices...”<sup>49</sup>

Rather like a performance of a piece of music, there are origins and a language, but each performance is different depending on the musician, the instrument, the place of performance, and hundreds of other variables. It is interdependent with the physical material world.

## Mapping as material practice of assembling

Mapping with others suggests a number of things: a piece of paper or a computer screen and programme, a table, chairs, a conversation. In the case of my mapping process at Portland Works, I often brought soup, or cake and tea (this food based modification/extension of the mapping process aiming to make it more convivial and expressed genuine friendship). Mapping requires a certain amount of space, and their complexity a certain ceremony to be associated with their making, from laying out the

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<sup>49</sup> Kitchin and Dodge, p. 111.

paper, the pens to making initial marks. Like a workshop or studio it implies certain kinds of social relation. Unlike an interview, even if recorded, the map remains in the space as a physical object that is developing and changing over time. Things have been brought forth onto the map, and relationships have been proposed and amended. **Unlike an interview, the conversation in a process of collaboratively mapping includes questions of both form and content, and is one where the editing and categorising happens together in the process.** If the map appears 'incomplete' questioning and challenging how it emerges is a more straightforward procedure.

Participatory mapping then, is a process of assembling with others. This could include objects, spaces, memories, concepts or a complex mixture of these and other things. The language of maps makes it possible to 'show' the distinctions between these things, in the moment of making the map, therefore making the heterogeneity immediately visible to those taking part in making the map. In 'Reassembling the Social' (Latour 2005) Bruno Latour says in mapping assemblages we should remember that no interaction is isotopic, synchronic, synoptic, or homogeneous.<sup>50</sup> By this he means that we must pay attention to the fact that what is acting is always coming from many other places and times and will be acting and visible at different times, with a number of different kinds of agency at play. In taking this into account there is the potential for much complexity. The task for the researcher is to find out what actors say themselves about these things, rather than the researcher imposing their own understanding of this.

Through the writing of my thesis and the reading and other research I am carrying out, (case studies, talking to peers, sharing ideas through teaching, academic presentations and other means), I have the opportunity to reflect. Others involved in the project have not had this similar *formal* kind of space 'outside' of the project to consider what we are doing, how and why particularly around their own roles and relationships and passions. I undertake the process of mapping in part to attend to this absence and make a shared space. **In mapping with others I seek to stake our claim to be heard and to make a better account, which is critical, communicative, reflective and productive.** Whilst a huge part of my learning is done through working with others to achieve our shared goal of 'saving Portland Works', the mapping provides an important shared space for reflection on the project, and a lens to understand it through.

Mapping then has three main roles within my thesis: **firstly, as a tool which creates a space and way of reflecting together, secondly as productive of data for analysis,**

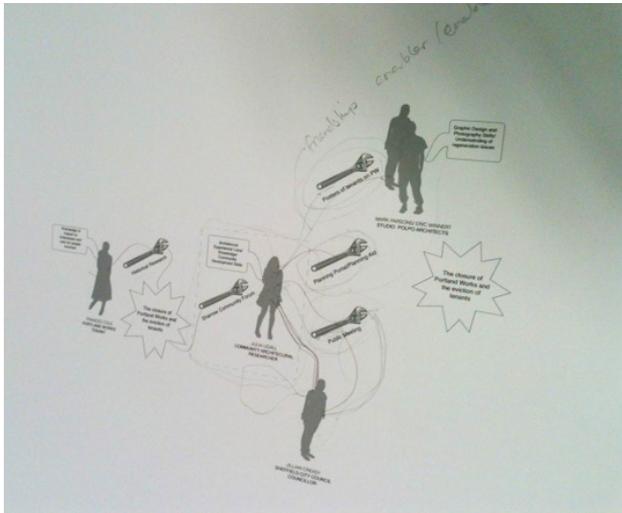
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<sup>50</sup> Bruno Latour, pp. 200-202.

**and finally as an archive and communication tool for the labours of head, heart and hand that have made the project.**

### Making map number 1: Julia Udall

Mapping was chosen as a tool to enable me to examine the tools and agencies of Portland Works and how they led to its transformation into Urban Commons. In my initial conception I wished to map (1) **the tool**, (2) **the labours** that helped to make it, (3) **who** had made it, and (4) which **controversies** had led to its development. My thinking, in naming the labours and the people was a wish to take account for the care, energy and desires of those who had participated in the project, and to make a public record of this. In order to understand how we might make this map, I tried to draw my own map of my account, shown below. In this map my initial emphasis was on the ‘deterritorialized data’; this was **the tools** we made together, **the concerns** that had driven us, **the people**, and **their work**. I plotted the relationships between the tools as agencies. At this point the field was vague and not spatialised, being a dimensionless vacuum of ‘the project’, (and therefore this was not yet a map).<sup>51</sup>



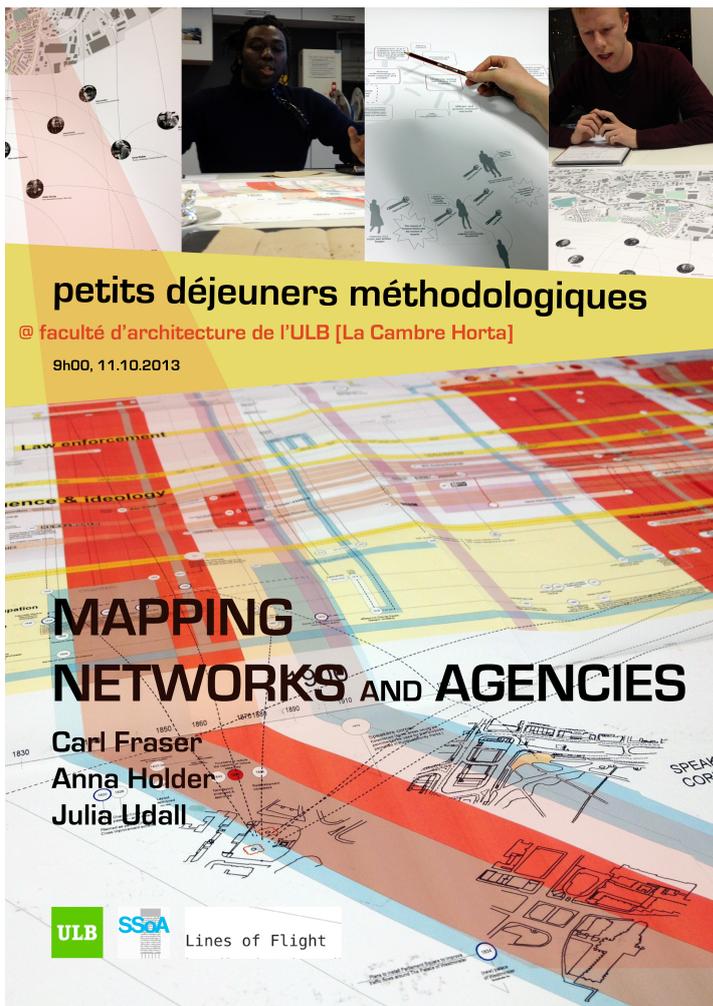
6.1 First attempt at map, Julia Udall

In making my first map I had the realisation that tools were rarely solely ‘economic tools’ or ‘social tools’, but instead, a tool such as a performance could be productive of multiple agencies and different times a particular tool had different capacities and affordances. I was aware that the agencies of a tool would become even more profuse when I engaged other participants in the mapping process because of the narrator’s relationship to that

<sup>51</sup> James Corner, p. 231.

tool, conceptual understanding or interests, or simply in terms of recollection, would be different from mine. A tool could also have capacities beyond what it was intended by its user, either because of the skill with which it was used, because when it was brought into relation with other tools its capacities were altered, or because a tool was used 'instinctively' without a particular intention.

My learning was driven by the process of map-making, and could be understood as thinking-through-making. This learning process had elements that were tacit, such as the type of lines that I drew, or the scale or space between elements. Some of the explicit learning happened through my analysis in the moment. Some happened once the map was complete in dialogue with others and through further exploration and reformulation. This post mapping reflection happened in part through a workshop that I convened with fellow architectural PhD researchers, (which became the first of a series of three held in Sheffield and Brussels). This enabled a critique of the tools operation in terms of clarity of communication, and usefulness in relation to my thesis questions.



6.2 Mapping Networks and Agencies Poster Anna Holder

**The process and willingness to leave aspects of the maps open in their evolution was crucial, because my aim was to evolve them with others and to use them to explore and reconsider what it was we were looking at and for.** It allowed for improvisation with others, as Albena Yaneva writes, “That is exactly what mapping is meant to be: a tool that enables us to remain in the process, in the *durée* [...]”.<sup>52</sup> Openness should not just be there in my understanding. It needed to be clear to participants that there were gaps and uncertainties which they could help shape. How then is openness created in a map? In a visual tool one approach is to leave blank white space in the page. This can be further supported by the use of more tentative lines, a willingness to redraw and revise, and having enough space to change the scale of the axis according to the understanding of the participant.

### Mapping with others- setting the ground

The person with whom I worked selected the place in which we carried out the mapping. This was important for their convenience, comfort and confidence. The only proviso was that the venue was large enough to accommodate the paper. The locations chosen by the participants varied from workshop benches in Portland Works, to café tables, my home, and the floor of an academics office in Sheffield University. Many who took part expressed their concern that they would not know what to say, or did not feel familiar with mapping. In order to ease the process I therefore produced a series of stickers, which held spaces for certain information so they could be added and then relationship plotted between them quickly enough to maintain a conversation. These things were limits that I was setting on the process to focus tool use. I considered that for the majority of participants mapping would be unfamiliar and their natural inclination would be to express their ideas verbally rather than spatially and relationally. These rules that I imposed were there to limit the number of words that could be recorded and force participants to plot spatial relationships between the tools that they spoke about.

A crucial question to the facility of mapping as a tool was what must be held in the head of the mapmakers in order to work together in making the map. Mapping for me was a way of focusing our conversation onto tools and agencies. In order to begin to make these maps with others I needed to define tools, concerns, agencies and labours in such a way so that each participant could understand these concepts in relation to the situation at Portland Works. The definitions must be simple enough to understand quickly, yet

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<sup>52</sup> Albena Yaneva, *Mapping controversies in Architecture*, (Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2012) p. 90.

open enough to allow them to be meaningful to each person. This was a useful restriction for me, forcing me to question and refine my understanding, and to make decisions more rapidly than I might if I was interviewing and could talk through these concepts more loosely.

## Collaborative Mapping 1: Derek Morton

I set out my definitions in the participant information, and also in my short introduction before we began to map. In the first session, in the first few words of my introduction I pulled up short and began again. I realised that I had been far too complex in terms of what would be possible to discuss; it was not just a requirement for those I was working with to understand these terms, but I was asking them to conceptualise the project and what we did in these terms ‘on the spot’. This was something that it had taken me time to understand and formulate, and was near impossible for people who were not reading the same texts, or having similar processes of reflection. These limits were productive. I altered my questions to ask ‘what were the tools’, and then to speak a bit about them, ‘what kinds of agencies were produced’. I could then start to categorise this as we spoke in terms of labours and controversies. This required the first participant, Derek Morton to understand the definitions of different kinds of agency, (which I ended up writing on a bit of paper and Derek kept referring back to as we talked) and an understanding of tools, which seemed much easier to grasp.

## The next 8: Alan, Nicola, Stephen, Cristina, Colin, Stuart, Mark, Nuala

Some participants resisted mapping as a tool, falling into general conversation and not wishing to draw things onto the paper. Others, particularly those in academia, were more familiar with the tool and the theory that prompted the approach. Some found the focus on tools rather than people very difficult, and it was only because of the limitations of the stickers and paper, and my insistence that they worked to discuss these things. Through seeing our conversation drawn in front of us as they talked with me, they could understand what I was taking note of, and how, which would be usually concealed if it was just recorded on a Dictaphone or in a notebook clutched to my chest. This gave a chance during the mapping to analyse together in the moment, and to correct either how they had expressed something or how I had interpreted and edited it to a short statement that could fit on the map.



6.3 Mapping with Nikky Wilson Julia Udall

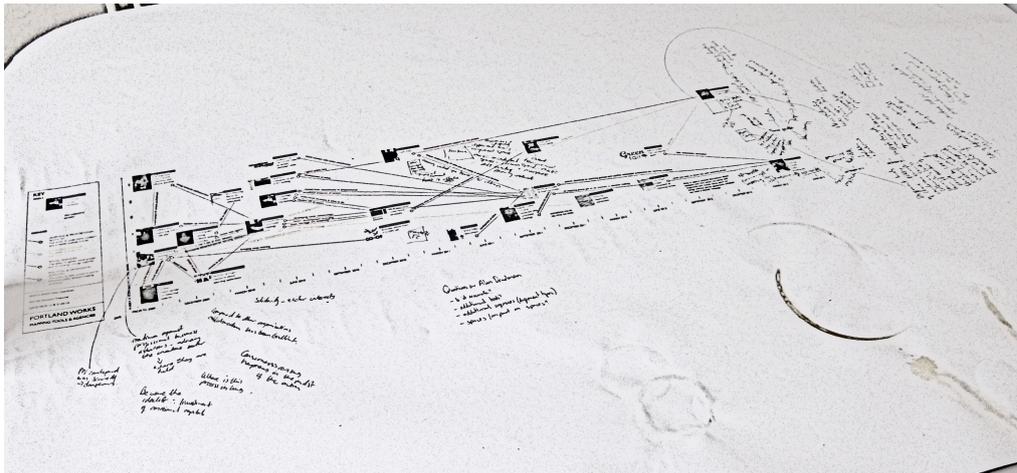
Very few found they could tell the story in a linear manner, and often made a statement, then sought to check and correct it, reorganising what had happened. This process made me realise that the notion of cause and effect is often blurred in our minds, and we constantly reassess and reconstitute what happens and why, and how it is linked together. These inconsistencies may not have been so obvious had we not been drawing them out in front of ourselves. Some were concerned that they had not said enough, said too much, or focused on the negative aspects of the project and the drops in agency that we experienced. Part of my work was to reassure them and explain that the differences between the maps were part of what was useful.<sup>53</sup>

The next few months was taken up by developing the first round of interviews. In order to be led by the people I was working with rather than my own prior conception of what we should include, I found I began to leave 'gaps' in the stickers where people had not answered that part of the questions. At this point I felt I would go back and fill in this data later in a follow up session. During this process I 'drew up' my first map to take along to a seminar, so that it could be formatted at a small size and draw out the information that I wished to talk about with others in relation to the theory I had been

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<sup>53</sup> Although people seemed to be honest about the project, they were also aware that this information would be shared and recognisable and so they had a responsibility to others with whom they were working. Very often people would speak about their pride in work that others had done. At the end of each session, the final feeling seemed to be one of satisfaction and surprise at how much we had done together, and how much was involved in the process.

reading and my evolving definition of tools. Due to the gaps I cut down what was presented to being what was present in every case and I found that in each of the accounts were always tools and agencies. In working with this new map I realised that this stood alone well, and was in fact the capacity of this mapping methodology- to try to map more was ineffective both in terms of the conversation and in terms of trying to 'read' the map.



6.4 Map Version 2 Julia Udall

## Drawing-up and 'taking back' the maps

The process of mapping began to make clear which aspects of our conversations could be explored through mapping and which were things that were better explored through writing or other kinds of visual representation, or were not relevant to my thesis questions. This then fed back into my on going mapping process, which became much simpler and more focused. I noted that was that it was not easy for everyone to speak about things chronologically or, to necessarily remember when it was that certain tools were produced or used.<sup>54</sup> There was a process of going back and forth and as I produced more maps, one of cross-referencing other peoples maps to refine the data. By reducing the kinds of data that I was looking for to tools and agencies, I was able to focus more on plotting the relationships between them.<sup>55</sup> Agency in each map was described as a line

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54 For example I had initially conceived of the project being in three clear phases of opposition, proposing alternatives and making them happen and these to become segments of the map; the first collaborative mapping made it clear that this wasn't what happened and there were overlaps between these phases or they were disputed in terms of when they began.

55 Further evolutions of the maps largely attended to questions about the 'field' and my approach to this was experimenting by design, and seeing what it produces. This included trying to understand what the y-axis should represent, and the graphic representation of the tools, adding duration for some of the key activities, and questions of scale. This process drew on an iterative back and forth between what people had been telling me about tools and agencies at Portland Works (and what these maps could help them to understand about the project), concepts, my limited graphical skills, questions of clarity and aesthetics, the constraints of the PhD

linking together two tools, or leading off, showing as yet undetermined potentials.<sup>56</sup>

Due to the complexity of what we mapped collaboratively I took our hand drawn map and through the use of digital programs developed ways of representing what was shared. Although this meant that I had to some extent edited and revised the maps, the complexity made this a skilled process, and I saw it rather as a skilled contribution that I could make, that enabled a different understanding rather than an attempt to control what it was that was said in each case. I was offering a view that might not be visible through conversation alone. I ‘took back’ these maps once I had ‘drawn them up’ to each co-researcher and talked through how they had evolved since our initial conversation, checking that this new framing was still one that made sense for them, and inviting them to add, modify or remove aspects of the maps. I also asked a series of follow up questions to attend to gaps produced by this reordering, or questions that had been raised by others whilst mapping which were particularly powerful.<sup>57</sup> The maps here have been made in conversation.

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format, time constraints, and being legible for those with whom I was working. I considered this to be a design process, which attended to material, abstract and pragmatic concerns.

56 A question arose about whether agencies should have strengths to rate their importance, but this was rejected because it was considered to be misleading as their importance might change through time, and this would be nearly impossible to map with pen and paper due to its complexity. “The line constitutes an abstract and complex enough metaphor to map the entire social field in terms of affects, politics, desire, power” Doina Petrescu, ‘The Indeterminate Mapping of The Common’, *Field*, 1 (2007) p. 90.

57 A particular example of this was Steve Connolly’s question around drops in agency. This became a follow up question, and incredibly useful in terms of understanding tools that were not working effectively.



## An account of the maps

The maps have a very particular set of characteristics as a tool, and I consider that (with reference to the Tools Glossary), they can be read together or as ten stand-alone accounts of the tools and agencies of Portland Works as emerging Urban Common. To translate them into written form necessarily alters them, and they should be considered in their own right as a tool, that does not need to be explained to be of use.

In Chapter 7 I give a curated written account through these 10 maps, which in part tells my story, but also draws on my learning through the process of mapping and the perspectives that the nine other participants shared with me. I also wish to end this chapter by drawing out some more general observations and lessons afforded by this tool.

I had initially conceived the collaborative mapping would lead to defining a dozen or so essential ‘core tools’ that occurred in every account. These would become those that I analysed in later chapters. However, despite being instructed to name only those tools that were most important to them, between the ten participants we named over 170 tools. Through looking at the emerging maps and seeing the range of tools people accounted for in relation to my own experience and viewpoint I realised that an emphasis on ‘core tools’ was problematic.<sup>58</sup> One mapmaker would account for a process as requiring one or two tools, whilst others would account for four or five. Things that may have been perceived as easy or already possible to some might have in fact required significant work to change the conditions for action. Although a framework of core tools did occur in each account, (such as the Steering Group meetings, the Business Plans, and the Knowledge Transfer Workshop) it was the vast number and diversity that created a picture of how agencies of commoning were produced.

The process of mapping, and its visual qualities made visible the diverse and creative character of what we were doing. It was those tools on the margins of the map that were

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<sup>58</sup> For example, there was much debate about the importance of meetings as the key indicator of contribution to the Portland Works project. At the same time as making this mapping analysis, (rather heated) conversations were happening within the project about the importance of attending regular meetings (minimum expectation of directors was once a fortnight for two to three hours). Those concerned about absences of directors argued that for the sake of risk management all directors must attend, as it was here that we monitored aspects such as the finances and made decisions about strategy. My personal view, which some others shared, was that too much emphasis was given to meetings and that for some people other tools, such as informal conversations, Open Days, and student projects were used to shape the project, and contribute to it, and they should still be allowed to hold a directors role if this was the case. A vote was taken as to whether directors should be struck off the board for regular non-attendance at Steering Groups, which resulted in two in favour and nine against. An informal commitment to attend meetings more frequently was still made.

often the drivers of why people were getting involved in the project. These marginal tools often represented personal interests, skills and approaches, creating different ways of knowing, doing and being in common. They showed what people ‘pulled into’ their accounts. The diversity of tools set down by each participant enabled other ways of doing, thinking, gathering and being that were incredible important. Although these may be considered ‘minor tools’ that were invisible to many people who were not directly involved with them, they were crucial to the shaping of what we did and what ‘the project’ is and was, and could be.

Each narration of the project set different boundaries in terms of what was considered to either inform or shape what we did.<sup>1</sup> Donna Haraway argues that we need to understand boundaries as changing and contestable:

“...Boundaries materialize in social interaction. Boundaries are drawn by mapping practices; ‘objects’ do not pre-exist as such. Objects are boundary projects. But boundaries shift from within; boundaries are very tricky. What boundaries provisionally contain remains generative, productive of meanings and bodies. Siting (sighting) boundaries is a risky practice.”<sup>2</sup>

The boundaries in the case of these maps are made through peoples understanding, knowledge and claims. The picture that emerges from these ten maps is layered and dynamic ‘project’ where there are points of commonality and mutuality, and different edges and boundaries according to each account.

**The breadth of tools had helped to redefine the boundaries for action around Portland Works, creating fields of possible action. The maps show the relationships between tools as rhizomatic in structure, looping back and forth rather than forming a central linear core of activity from which all of the other tools grew.** My role in making these maps is to take responsibility for contesting and remaking the boundaries of what matters to people and what we- both them and me, wished to take into account. In co-producing these maps I feel equipped to tell a more nuanced and multi-faceted story of Portland Works as Urban Commons.

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<sup>1</sup> Through the process of mapping and extracting all the tools as defined by the mapmakers, a series of categories of tools emerged. These are: Meetings or Workshops; Groups or Roles; Showing & Telling Together; Doing Things Together; Structures, Processes and Rules; Objects and Spaces; Written and Drawn; Funds, Loans or Finance. Adding these categories was a task carried out after map-making, in order to facilitate comparing and contrasting across tools and further analysis. The proposed categories were shared with all of the mapmakers for feedback.

<sup>2</sup> Donna Haraway, p. 595.

## Chapter 7

# Tools for distributed Agencies of Commoning at Portland Works

The story of Tools is the story of Portland Works; how hundreds of people came together at Portland Works to safeguard the future of making, and to support the development of business, education and culture. Ten of those involved in Portland Works took part in a collaborative mapping process, together recording over 170 Tools of Commoning.<sup>1</sup> The breadth and diversity of tools tell of the massive mutual undertaking of those engaging in a diverse and creative socio-pedagogical process, leading to the transformation of a small part of the city, and of those who have taken part in its remaking. They tell the story of the distributed nature of Agencies of Commoning at Portland Works. The narrating of this enables a critical exploration of the tools required for communities to come together to safeguard their assets in ways that are equitable, just, sustainable and in solidarity with those holding similar concerns.

This account is primarily from my perspective. I see its role as enabling me to support, critique, challenge, extend, and, at times, valorise our actions. Therefore the tools that I have chosen here include examples of tools that have been forgotten or left unconsidered, tools that have been modified, and tools that have been particularly useful in achieving our aims. In their selection I also wish to demonstrate the range of activities that have been considered to be part of the Portland Works project, and to acknowledge the literally hundreds of people who have freely given their time and efforts, and the range of ways in which tools have been designed, made and handled. What follows then is a story of Portland Works, told through about 36 tools (around 20% of those mapped), written about in chronological order. These tools include audits, events, exhibitions, legal entities, media appearances, meetings, performances, protests, and workshops; they each have different rhythms, contributors and qualities, some made in use, some by design. In choosing only these few I realise that many other stories could be told, and there are

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix; Julia Udall, Tools Glossary, 2015

inevitably omissions. By drawing on our collaborative mapping I supplement this first person account, bringing in other voices and claims give a more nuanced, and collective view. The maps can also be read on their own to provide other accounts that stand in their own right.

## The affordances of our Tools

In analysing these Tools I examine how we work to integrate and politicise social development and personal subjective change. Taking forward an understanding of agency that considers it as iterative, practical evaluative and projective, I seek to examine the tools' affordances in this respect. If we understand Agencies of Commoning as being economic, social, political, democratic and pedagogical, there are some key questions as regards the capacities of our tools. When thinking about social agencies, we can ask: How do these tools help to gather together and transform social groups, either through increasing diversity, or in working to renegotiate desires and create shared values and understandings? Do they challenge the boundaries of the commons and support the development of networks of solidarity? In understanding political agencies we can ask of our tools: do they bring something previously understood as personal or economic into the public realm as a political matter? Do they enable the questioning of something that was previously understood as a matter of fact? Do they make visible differences in agonistic ways in order to allow for transformation? These questions relate to the nature of the group, relations between commoners and how they make their claims to the commons.

Commons can be understood as non-commodified resources and as institutions. In the case of economic agencies therefore we can try to understand if our tools change our understanding of economies and value, and broaden our ability to make ethical choices. We can ask: do they enable access to previously unavailable or commodified resources and prevent their co-option or enclosure? In the case of democratic agencies, do our tools make clear how decisions are made and offer opportunities for people to take part? Do they enable self-management in ways that are democratic, just and equitable? Finally, in the case of pedagogical agencies, do our tools facilitate peer learning, and give practical and appropriate knowledge to attend to a particular issue or concern? Do they enable people to formulate their own questions and objects of research? Do they enable us to imagine otherwise, allowing for experiments and new experiences with others? These questions are a challenge that requires reflexivity and close engagement.

My account here is not solely drawn from the mapping that I have carried out with others, nor does it attempt to explain or narrate every aspect of the incredibly detailed maps.<sup>2</sup> My research process has been always entwined with doing and being with others and it is important to work from this rich experience as well as the focused tool of mapping. Mapping is a lens to see the project through and to enable the introduction of other voices and reflections, but it does not demarcate everything that I choose to discuss here in understanding our tools for creating Agencies of Commoning. The chronological telling of the story is important, because no tool is foundational and it always comes about because of the productivity or otherwise of those tools before it. Yet this is not just understood as a linear relationship: tools we made later often opened up new affordances in earlier tools and in doing so new agencies were produced, acting from different times and places.

Narrating it in such a way is also important in terms of understanding how my theoretical understanding and actions grew together, and how I began to understand the project as an emerging Urban Common.

The tools accounted for here were, for the most part, not explicitly designed as ‘tools for commoning’. Rather, in addressing the gaps, inadequacies, and concealments of people, ideas and understandings that we perceived in using existing tools, we began to question what mattered and to whom, bringing new and common meanings, issues and interests to the fore. Often these struggles began by calling attention to concerns that have previously been accepted as matters of fact and in making them disputable. As we began to expand what these ‘matters’ were, so we generated challenges in terms of negotiating and maintaining relationships within a heterogeneous group, and opportunities for learning and thinking in new ways.

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 1: Mapping Tools and Agencies at Portland Works

## Tool: Planning Application for Change of Use

**TOOL: Planning Application**

A Planning Application for Change of Use was submitted in 2008, with a revised application submitted in Autumn 2009. The Application was withdrawn following recommendations from the Planning Officers for its refusal at the upcoming Planning Board.

**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

Some tenants very worried they may lose their businesses, puts considerable stress on them

**RELATED TOOLS:** Objections to the Planning Application, Planning Guidance.

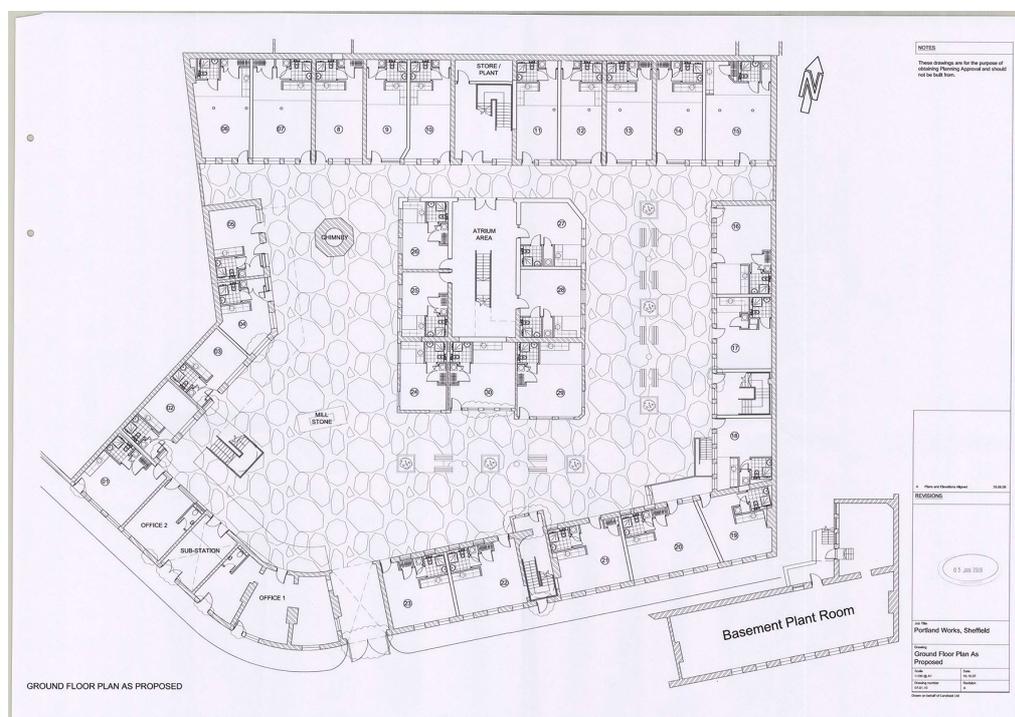
130

In 2008 the Landlord of Portland Works submitted his Planning Application for Change of Use to convert the Grade II\* building into 77 apartments and a small amount of office accommodation at ground floor level.<sup>3</sup> The application presented an immediate threat for the current tenants, who faced being evicted. If permission was granted the landlord would have the right to evict them- something that he would not otherwise be able to do, as some had been there for over 40 years, and few had tenancy agreements setting out the duration of their tenancy. With Planning Permission for housing the value of Portland Works would substantially increase as residential accommodation achieves a much higher price than industrial uses. This increase in value would prohibit industrial uses in the future.

The proposals were for significant changes to the fabric of the building, including the subdivision of workshops, the demolition of an entire block within the courtyard and the creation of a new steel framed block of office space. Residential use at this density would require the installation of over 70 bathrooms and kitchens, and heating systems that necessitated significant pipework, fixtures, and fittings. As no historic fixtures or fittings (such as cranes, forges, or benches) were shown either on ‘existing’ or ‘proposed’

<sup>3</sup> Sheffield City Council, ‘Planning Portal ref: 08/01850/FUL’.

drawings, it was assumed they would be removed. Many of the apartments were very small, and access through staircases and corridors required further subdivisions. This new use would significantly alter the organisation of the building, making its original use less legible, and potentially compromising its historical interest.



7.2 Planning Application for Change of Use, Landtask

In the case of a listed building, a Change of Use applicant must first prove that the existing use is ‘no longer viable’.<sup>4</sup> In requiring this, the Planning Process is foregrounding the question of economy and sustainability. In order to make this case the landlord submitted a series of photographs showing the Works without any people or business activity featured. In addition they submitted plans of the building without any fixtures or fittings shown and with no indication of current tenants or uses. The Change of Use Planning Application drawings were accompanied by a Sustainability Statement, which argued that the current businesses were no longer economically viable:

“Currently Portland Works has a variety of small-scale industrial type users which appear to be unsustainable and occupancy has been falling over the past few years with the increasing competition from the Far East. The uses are also incompatible with the maintenance and restoration of the buildings and the

<sup>4</sup> “Many historic buildings have well-established and appropriate uses. Occasionally though, some change is required to ensure a structure’s future care, repair and protection. Creative adaptation can contribute positively to a building’s history; equally, inappropriate re-use can fundamentally detract from its special interest.” Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), ‘Report 2002’, (Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, 2009)

resulting rental incomes do not sustain this... The new commercial space will provide active frontage at ground floor level and give the opportunity for relocation of the more viable existing users.”<sup>5</sup>

This was submitted as a true and accurate record of the situation at Portland Works. In submitting his application for Change of Use the landlord put forward one narrative about the economy of Sheffield and its regeneration; in this story manufacturing was in permanent decline on the city, small workshops and studios were no longer in demand and without permission to convert them into flats, this listed building would fall into disrepair. This representation asserted that it was the building fabric that was of importance to the city in this case.

Many who lived and worked in Portland Works or Sharrow had a different view of this area. It was home to the largest concentration of music studios in the north of England. There was also a number of small manufacturing businesses, whose aim was not necessarily to expand and become manager of a larger business, but instead to work making things of high quality, for clients that they knew well.<sup>6</sup> There was concern expressed that if housing were permitted in this area there would be a substantial increase in and value and an associated rise in rental prices beyond that which could be afforded by industrial and business tenants.

In addition to the direct impact on Portland Works in terms of displacement and closure of going concerns, a successful Change of Use Planning Application would have far reaching implications for other businesses in the neighbourhood. Due to the noise regulations imposed when residential accommodation is built many of the surrounding businesses would be under threat. This would particularly affect those in the music industry and manufacturers, who without extensive and expensive modifications to the buildings (such as extra insulation, double-glazing), which few could afford, could be

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<sup>5</sup> See Sheffield City Council

<sup>6</sup> As the Unpublished 2012 Sheffield Metal Trades Audit (Sheffield City Council, 2012), carried out by Sara Unwin of Galvanise shows, many of those working in the metalwork trades in the city were still small businesses, self-employed, or even sole traders, and did not have the capacity to train anyone with their specialist skills. Others were within five to ten years of retiring, and when they did so they suggested they would close their companies. For some however, in the context of a renewed interest in making and craftsmanship, (Charny) their business model was evolving, so rather than selling in bulk to companies who would then sell on their goods, they had begun to sell online, directly to clients. The impact of this was that their products were changing and evolving too to meet these new markets. Others were working at the cutting edge of R&D for multinational corporations, yet still using traditional methods, tools and workshops. However, even those who had relatively consistent and well-paid workloads relied on affordable rents because their margins were tight, and cash flow restricted.

considered to be a nuisance to those now living in the area.<sup>7</sup> As priority is given to the needs of residential tenants over manufacturing or the creative industries, even with such retrofit remedies, there could still be complaints upheld forcing further restrictions on their activities. These could include imposed changes to delivery patterns and working practices, or ultimately demanding their operations cease.

Those who gain from a development do not necessarily pay for the costs to others incurred through it. Although devices associated with the Planning process could be considered as intending to address these externalities, (such as Community Infrastructure Levy, which seeks investment in the site from the developer) they tend not to directly benefit those who have lost out.<sup>8</sup> The value that the tenants have built up at Portland Works, through their investment in the building, through their social relations, through being there to help one another through sharing machinery or fixing things for one another that have been built up through time, its loss is not counted within the logic of the market system. It is through the insistence of accounting for such costs through the practices of the commons, that we may be able to change these relations.

All the available workshops in the building were occupied at the time, with 30 businesses, together paying £55,000 in rent annually. The building could be more densely occupied and some areas were out of use, but this was due to the condition of the building, access and fire safety, all of which were the responsibility of the landlord. The existing businesses were industrial and cultural uses, for which the proposed commercial accommodation was offices, would have been unsuitable. In addition the availability of accommodation in adjacent buildings would be put at risk because of the noise regulations associated with Portland Works becoming a largely residential building.

It is common practice for developers to leave buildings standing empty for many years once they have emptied out existing tenants whilst they wait for the market to reach the best point (for example a building on a site opposite has stood empty for 10 years with residential planning permission, interrupted only by the breaking of ground so that planning permission could be renewed and the site sold on). As this application had been made post ‘financial crisis’, on a tertiary site, at a time when developers were finding it difficult to access finance, it was likely that this would be the case in this instance. However, despite the detrimental effect such a delay would pose the council or the

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<sup>7</sup> Because of the Conservation Area status and many of these buildings in the John Street Triangle being listed in their own right, any alterations such as double glazing would have had to be made to a particularly high standard, along with making planning and listed building applications.

<sup>8</sup> See Department for Communities and Local Government, *Community Infrastructure Levy: An overview*, (DCLG Publications, 2011).

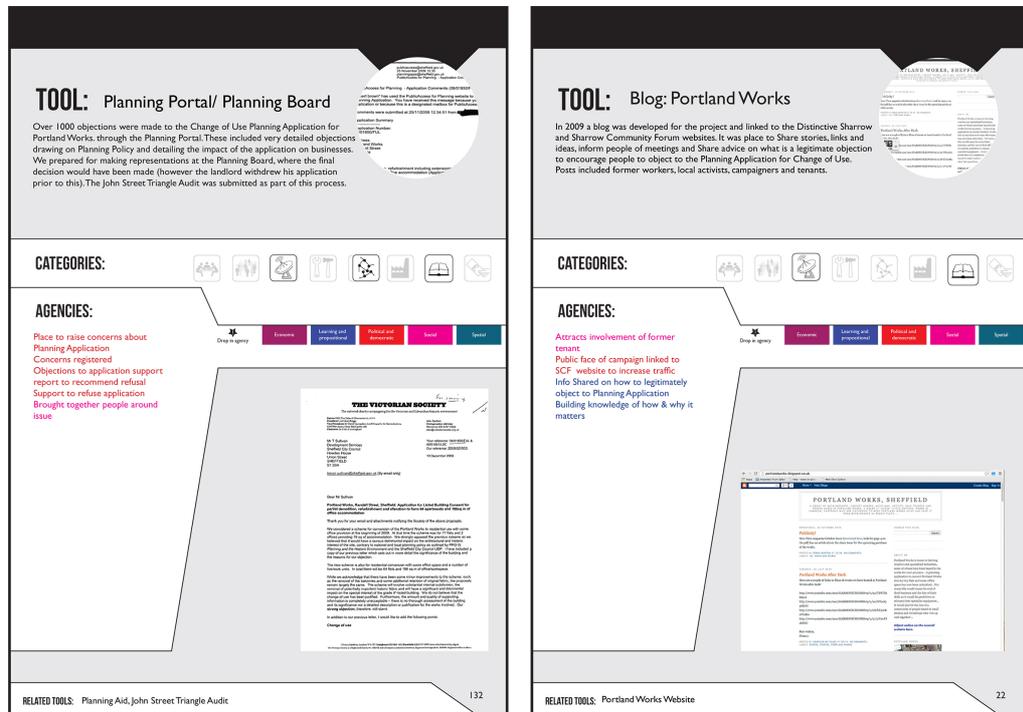
planning process required no account of this.

Statements accompanying the Landlord's application asserted that the proposals would make a positive contribution to the neighbourhood, regenerating an area currently making little contribution to the city. This assertion was predicated on increasing the numbers of residents in this area, and the proposed investment in the fabric of the building. It assumed the newly developed building being fully occupied and well maintained and took no account of the displacement and closure of the existing businesses. Those for whom the change of use would have most impact, the tenants of the building, had to be rendered invisible and silent. The costs to businesses and to the neighbourhood of Sharrow and more broadly, Sheffield were concealed. **In order to make a successful Planning Application Portland Works had to be represented as an empty abstract commodity with no uses visible.**

As a tool it may be tempting to define the Planning Application for Change of Use solely in terms of its negative capacities, and the drop in agency that it certainly caused for some tenants, who were devastated at its potential closure, which was a real threat to their livelihoods. However, in its making, it encouraged those who may not have previously been engaged in questions of the future of the city to become aware of the injustices of property speculation in terms of their business and led to them assenting their belief that their iterative use over generations should entitle them have some claim over its future. In response to the Planning Application, tenants were prompted to extend their social group in order to get the support required, and to learn in practical terms what they needed to do to fight it. In forming these relationships they began to mobilise a collective identity as being 'tenants at Portland Works'. The Planning Application could be considered to be the event that triggered the gathering of people around Portland Works. It did not however do the social and political work of describing who should or does care, what it is possible to say and how, and where they can speak.

## Tool: The Planning Portal, the Planning Board

## Tool: Portland Works Blog



The successful defeat of the Planning Application through the statutory processes was essential for the tenants, whose only other option to prevent eviction was for the landlord to withdraw the application. The landlord had made it clear that if he were successful in obtaining permission for Change of Use he would close the Works and proceed with the redevelopment. In order to understand the planning portal and planning board as tools we should consider who is invited to speak, what kinds of things can be said, and what outcomes are possible.

In the case of the Grade II\* listed Portland Works, there are two main points of intervention by ‘the public’ in relation to the Planning Application: initially by making representations in relation to conservation and planning policy through the planning portal or directly to the Planning Officer, and then later, at a Planning Board.<sup>9</sup> The planning process requires applicants to notify the tenants and their neighbours of their proposals and once a notification is served, there is a window of 21 days for the public to object, make a neutral statement, or write in favour of the application. This notification is in the form of public notices in newspapers and on the street and by letter to tenants and neighbours. In this letter they are invited to view the full Planning Application online or

<sup>9</sup> For more on this see Julia Udall and Anna Holder.

at the council offices. In order to be taken into account representations must be considered 'material considerations' under Planning Law.

The representations that are made by the members of the public influence the report that the Planning Officer makes to the Planning Board. The Planning Board is the place where the final decision on applications of sufficient scale or public interest are made and through making objections or statements of support in the consultation period. Planning Boards, conducted in the Council Chamber in the Town Hall, have clearly defined roles for participants, including rules of conduct regarding who can speak and when, and what type of evidence may be allowed to influence proceedings. A representative of a community can speak for up to five minutes and objections can be made prior to this as individuals or organisations, in line with the material considerations set out in planning policy. If applicants consider that the decision is not justified within Planning Law they can appeal; if the appeal is successful the council must pay costs. There is no compulsion for members of the public to take part in either part of the process.

I contend these statutory tools are limited in terms of their capacities. The success of this tool, if judged within its own terms, relies first on the information being shared effectively, and those who receive it understanding its implications for them and being able to respond within the prescribed rules. It is difficult for the Planning Officers to get feedback on its efficacy, because if there is a lack of response from those affected you cannot determine whether someone has not received the notice, is unsure how to respond or whether the lack of participation is tacit agreement or disinterest. Notifications of a Planning Application may be missed or ignored if these are communications that are unfamiliar to the potential recipients, or they do not feel confident of speaking within this forum.

As I got to know the tenants of Portland Works better, many recounted to me they had not been informed by post of their landlord's application for Change of Use; whether they had missed it, not gathered its implication or indeed whether the notification had not arrived at all in some cases was not clear. Not all tenants had clearly marked letterboxes, and often mail was left in a pile in an open archway. In the Planning Application the landlord had given the impression of a derelict and nearly empty building so there was also good reason to suspect that not all the tenants had been listed in his application and therefore were not notified by the Planning Department.



7.5 Portland Works Letterboxes, Julia Udall

To use the Planning Portal and Planning Board successfully as a tool, concerned parties must then respond in ways that are considered to be ‘material considerations’. The statutory processes of ‘objecting’ allows for many voices to be heard, but within very closely prescribed limits. Those notified of a Planning Application may not be confident in terms of accessing the application, or ‘reading’ the plans, sections and elevations in relation to their potential impact on their neighbourhood or business. Planning policy documents, though publicly available, are long, and characterised by large numbers of clauses and dense text. In order to respond in a way that will be valid, a good knowledge of planning and listed building policies are required. Although statements that form part of the application should be in plain English, without being familiar with the policy it is difficult for members of the public to ascertain what might be missing, or inaccurate, or in contravention of statutory requirements.<sup>10 11</sup>

Material Considerations are primarily focused on the physical impact of a scheme; they

<sup>10</sup> In the case of the Portland Works application it was validated with some items missing, such as the Archaeological Report.

<sup>11</sup> The Planning Officer should take this role, but they may not have the knowledge of the site to allow this, or their time may be limited in terms of checking such applications.

include issues relation to parking, access, visual amenity, privacy and loss of light, and any particular local planning policy that has been drawn up specifically relating to a particular site. Objections often need to state pragmatic or technical objections in order to fall within the remit of the planning process. Although such pragmatic complaints can form a useful point of leverage, objecting on these grounds can make complainants seem trivial and mean that the issues that are of most concern do not have a public forum. For example in this case the potential for a tenant to lose their business was not a material consideration, whereas subdividing a listed building was.<sup>12</sup> Things that cannot be taken into account in Planning processes tend to be social things; those concerns relating to personal or moral views, disputes between neighbours, the applicants motives, competition or the number of objections. This can lead to frustration for those who wish to object might consider that such things should be considered legitimate issues because of the impact upon their lives.

For those who might be affected by this application the planning process operates in the negative. It is characterised by the need to make conservative statements about why change shouldn't happen, naming what will be lost, what must be stopped and what problems will be caused by a new development. For the applicant there is the potential to propose what they wish to do. The developer represents his (or her) own interest. It is likely that the applicant has been in discussions for some period prior to the publication of the application with the Planning Officer, who will be advising them on how to make a successful application. The nature and content of these discussions are not publicly available. However, for those who submit objections via the Planning Portal or make representations at the Planning Board, there is no opportunity for feedback. It is only once all of the representations are submitted that the Planning Officer makes their report and sets out their decision. It is possible that even if one or more of the objections is upheld, it will not prevent the proposed development from going ahead, but rather a condition to be fulfilled by the applicant will be imposed on the scheme.<sup>13</sup>

It was clear that we needed to extend the capacities of this tool. Shortly after the landlords' submission of the Change of Use application, I used means afforded to me

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12 This was something we aimed to change through lobbying to change the planning guidance for this area so as to favour supporting business

13 Conditions could include things such as stipulating the materials the work has to be made from, the height of the development, or in the case of a business that it can only operate between certain hours in order to control traffic and noise. With a Listed Building it is likely there will be a large number of conditions associated with the development to preserve the character of the heritage site.

through my post at the local community forum to raise this concern, including setting up a blog linked to the forum website, contacting the local councillors and publishing an article in *Sharrow Today* (which was at the time delivered for free by the forum to 7,000 local households).<sup>14</sup> The campaign blog included a post outlining what were ‘Materials Considerations’ and also provided guidance on which of these I thought were of particular relevance in this case.<sup>15</sup> The aim was to make the tool more accessible to non-professionals. Tenants shared information about the Planning Application on message boards, forums and websites associated with their working life, drawing on what were extensive and diverse networks, in manufacturing, knife making, arts, music and culture. They drew on the information I had shared regarding what made a valid objection. This led to a greater number of comments being submitted, and those that were related to material considerations.

Despite guidance on what ‘counted’ however, people still frequently submitted statements that included comments that were not material considerations and instead expressed their wider feelings about the impact on the kind of city they are living, and their lives and businesses. It was possible to read these comments online and although they could not bear on the planning officers’ decision-making, the portal served as a virtual, although limited, social space where those concerned with the campaign could see what was being expressed. The support and care expressed for the businesses at the Works boosted the morale of the tenants and wider campaign team. Although the Planning Officer was not allowed to take these non-material comments into account, they gave the elected representatives (Councillors and the MP) a clear indication of the public feeling. The ‘misuse’ of this tool became in one sense an effective political strategy.

What had become clear through the process of objecting online was that although it is possible to read other comments online through the planning portal, and this did have a minor social and political dimension, the statements were often no more than 50 words, and there was no real space for discussion, learning or debate amongst those concerned. The process of making objections to a Planning Application is fundamentally not a social one. Whilst this is not crucial to the process of objecting, it becomes much more important when representatives have to be selected to speak at the Planning Board. The

<sup>14</sup> *Sharrow Today* is now an online only publication. The archives are available here *Sharrow Community Forum, Sharrow Today* <<http://sharrowcf.org.uk/sharrow-today/>> [access date August 24th 2015].

<sup>15</sup> In addition to what I understood from working in an architectural office for six years, I had attended a Planning Aid session in Leeds, as part of my role at *Sharrow Community Forum*, and on a voluntary basis officers gave support in understand potential points on leverage. For my blog see Julia Udall, ‘Material Considerations for Planning’, *Portland Works* (2009) <<http://portlandworks.blogspot.co.uk/2009/03/material-considerations-for-planning.html>> [access date: May 2013].

Planning Board requires one or two individuals make representations for what is often a heterogeneous group of people who live or work in a place.

To understand why this matters it is important to recognize that sharing the common property of 'being tenants at Portland Works' does not guarantee that understanding and desires relating to a particular issue are unified and can be represented by a single person. The need to create a supposed community coherence can be traced back the pragmatics of working within a constrained timeframe and set of resources that are determined by existing frameworks. These could include consultation periods for an application, or the spatial boundaries set out through planning policy or political ward. The procedures associated with the Planning Board rest on an idealised notion of a participatory process, in which representatives can be known in advance and assembled to speak for others in such a way as to lead to a rational and fair decision. A public process without a social dimension assumes that the community represented either already has strong social bonds or holds a single identity and set of needs.

It is important to understand the submission of a Planning Application as a moment that can be productive of or at least a catalyst to social and political activities. It might be argued that Planning tools are not intended to be social or political (and at the point of their implementation are largely technical), however, the potential displacement of a population and the kinds of space that are produced in a city are certainly both. If our aim is to fight for just, equitable and sustainable cities, this is a process that necessarily involves multiple voices. The need to gather popular support for the opposition to the Planning Application and the early recognition that the issue was one that went much further than a single building and a handful of businesses for me raised these initial questions: Who are the community or communities of Portland Works and in light of their potential displacement, how do they stake their claim to be heard publicly in considerations of its future? How then can the diverse group who have laid claim to this place come together to continue to participate in its future? What kinds of things need to be taken into account?

## Tool: Public Meetings

## Tool: Door-to-Door Petition

**TOOL: Public Meetings**

At the beginning of the campaign a series of Public Meetings were held at sites throughout the John Street Triangle. Organised by a representative of Shore Community Forum and Green Councillor Jillian Creasy they brought together tenants and others interested in the campaign. The current landlord attended the second public meeting.



**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

- Public face
- Link to object
- Business tenants attract council attention
- Tenant sets agenda
- Publicised concern
- Positive response to issues
- Volunteer support
- Drawing people in
- Draw together supporters
- Drawing people in to the project
- Develop campaign group
- Feeling people care gives motivation to push forward
- Understanding tenants better
- Better understand issues



**RELATED TOOLS:** Door to door petitions, Committee Meetings

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**TOOL: Petition (door to door)**

Green Councillor Jillian Creasy initiated a door-to-door petition against the Change of Use Planning Application for Portland Works in the local area. Her experience as a councillor meant that she could inform people about legitimate reason to object. She also used it as an opportunity to invite them to initial Public Meetings.



**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

- Local people attend public meeting
- Political understanding of planning process



**RELATED TOOLS:** Public Meetings.

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In order to raise awareness of the Planning Application within the surrounding neighbourhood, local Green Councillor Jillian Creasy went door-to-door with a petition. Portland Works tenant Frances Cole spoke to those she knew at the Works and I contacted those who had expressed an interest in the campaign as a result of the blog and newspaper article. Together we set up a public meeting.<sup>16</sup> This meeting was primarily convened with a view to speaking with the tenants, but also brought together residential and business neighbours. Those invited to the initial public meetings were largely the community as defined by proximity; we did not at this stage make an effort to ensure that particular groups or people were invited. Jillian took note of the number of attendees and reported this back to colleagues at the Town Hall. As a tool, Public Meetings have traction with politicians, and numbers are a form of feedback.<sup>17</sup>

Talking together face-to-face enabled those attending to develop a shared understanding of why this was an important issue. By asking everyone to speak in turn, Jillian and I sought to prevent just a few voices dominating. The atmosphere was fairly tentative, and the meeting seemed to be populated by those unused to such gatherings. The tenants set

<sup>16</sup> As the public meetings continued throughout the year we managed to maintain cross party support, and a regular attendance of 30 or so people every fortnight.

<sup>17</sup> Thanks to Anna Holder for pointing this out to me.

the agenda for what mattered. At times, very emotional personal responses were given to the question of the impact of the Planning Application; these confidences were supportively received. The framing of this issue moved beyond just being an economic question, to being a social and a political one, discussing how people can sustain their livelihoods, what kinds of working lives they have, and why being part of this place was important to them. Tenants later spoke of how empowering it was to hear of interest and concern for their future from a wider public. The convening of the meeting created the first sense of a group who might act together politically.

One role Jillian and I took on at the meeting was to help to align people's experiences and concerns with the material considerations for objecting to the Planning process. This was a case of listening carefully and suggesting ways to object that might respond to individual's circumstances, and what they wanted to get across. These conversations were later continued through numerous site visits, chatting together in the workshops of the tenants. This engaged approach was important because not all tenants attended the meetings that followed or felt confident speaking at them. These subsequent conversations resulted in friendships and my being at Portland Works so frequently was also a visible commitment (personally and of Sharrow Community Forum as an organisation) to the project and site. In parallel I worked to make connections with economic policy development officers from Sheffield City Council, inviting them to site to meet with the tenants.

These tools publicised a number of issues and gathered people together for whom Portland Works was a concern. There was a committed group beginning to emerge that was willing to negotiate and act together to try to prevent its closure conversion into apartments. The group started to meet regularly, and in my role at Sharrow Community Forum I acted to coordinate this, taking minutes, arranging meetings and publicising events. I used the Distinctive Sharrow project to promote the campaign and invite people to contribute to its development in whichever way they felt was appropriate to their skills and interests.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The Distinctive Sharrow Toolkit is available on the Sharrow Community Forum website. Sharrow Community Forum, *Distinctive Sharrow Toolkit* <[http://sharrowcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/.../distinctive\\_sharrow\\_toolkit.pdf](http://sharrowcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/.../distinctive_sharrow_toolkit.pdf)> [access date June 2014].

## Tool: Posters of Tenants

**TOOL: Posters of Tenants**

Photographer Eric Winnert and Architect Mark Parsons of Studio Polpo designed a series of posters featuring tenants at Portland Works. Tenant Mark Jackson made a series of boards so the posters could be put on the outside of the building. A representative from Sharrow Community Forum worked with Eric Winnert to print 1000 black and white copies on yellow paper and post them up on sites through the District Centre in the Sharrow neighbourhood.

**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

- Linking people, place and use
- Making activities inside visible outside
- 200 posters in district centre
- publicities campaign
- Tenants as representatives
- Developing public profile

**RELATED TOOLS:** Open Access Photography Library, Studio Polpo, Sharrow Community Forum

In response to this call to become part of the emerging campaign, Mark Parsons of Studio Polpo and Eric Winnert of Regeneration Gallery designed a series of posters of Portland Works tenants.<sup>19</sup> They featured photographs of 10 tenants across the arts, music and manufacturing sectors, in their workshops and studios surrounded by their tools and the things that they made or repaired. The breadth of skills and the diversity of making that could be found on site were represented in the design. The process of photographing the tenants became an informal opportunity for Mark and Eric to start conversation about the Planning Application, and for this to be discussed in the wider context of regeneration in the city, which they both knew much about. That they took care in what they produced, and showed skill in it's making, leading to them being respected and welcomed by the tenants of Portland Works.

Each poster named the tenant along with their photograph, and in doing so they were shown to be representatives of the site. Visitors and supporters who joined the campaign felt a more personal connection to the place as a result. The posters did not mention the Planning Application, but instead gave a website address for the campaign. This focus on

<sup>19</sup> The Regeneration Gallery is an arts organisation dedicated to the production of artistic activity about Sheffield's City Centre regeneration. Its aim is to give the residents of Sheffield a coherent, creative and exciting voice about what is happening to their city, their home and their life. The Regeneration Gallery <<http://www.regenerationgallery.lowtech.org/>> [access date: 25<sup>th</sup> August 2015].

the skills and potential of the site was crucial to setting a new agenda, and operating in a more positive way than the framing of the planning process allowed. What the tenants did was given visual presence, and valorised as being of greater importance than ownership of the building. The design could be understood as being made with dexterity, (in the sense of the technical aspects of good visual design and photography); judgment, (in terms of understanding the potential impact of creating a poster in a public location, naming individual tenants, and showing their workshops); and care- (it is through talking with and making good relationships that they could happen at all, and that the photos are so good).

The posters were developed in black and white and could be printed very cheaply yet strikingly onto yellow paper at A3 and A4 using a photocopier at the local community forum. Their distribution responded to networks that Eric, Mark and I had already established and sites that I knew to be significant from my years at the community forum. Over two hundred posters were distributed in as many shops, restaurants and takeaways as would allow them along the London Road district centre and other community locations.<sup>20</sup> The aim was to raise awareness of Portland Works amongst as broad a demographic as possible. The locations on London Road were key to this, as it was the place where the diverse communities of this neighbourhood came together.

Due to the poor condition of the fabric and because the courtyard layout concealed the activity from the street, many people living or working in close proximity were unaware of the richness of activity that was on their doorstep. In order to address this Mark Jackson, a metalworker tenant at the Works made a series of boards fixed onto windows of his workshop on the main Randall Street elevation of Portland Works so that the posters could be featured in very large format.<sup>21</sup> In doing so he extended the operation of this tool, bringing together the site and its use. Displaying the posters on the side of the building alerted passers-by as to what was there, and people remarked to me that they have previously thought the building derelict, and were surprised at what was there.

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<sup>20</sup> These included Sure Start, Ship-Shape, Sharrow Community Forum and an exhibition at 'Access Space', held in early May 2010. Access Space <<http://access-space.org/>> [access date August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015].

<sup>21</sup> Mark Parsons accessed the university print unit for the large-scale versions of the poster. These posters were printed onto hardwearing paper suitable for fly posting in this location, paid for by Mark Parsons' social enterprise architecture company Studio Polpo.

## Tool: Committee Meetings & Task and Finish Groups

### TOOL: Committee Meetings

When the campaign became established as a regular group of people Committee Meetings were held at Sharrow Community Forum. They initially had a loose structure and regularly attracted between 20 and 30 people every fortnight. This group established the concerns and interest of the group and was the place where tactics to oppose the Planning Application were developed.



**CATEGORIES:**



**AGENCIES:**

- Development of briefs for tasks and research
- Sharing info with tenants
- Developing approach
- Confidence that it can be proactive- not just about opposing planning
- Tenants sharing their knowledge with others
- Can see what needs doing
- Skills brought in
- Medical & climbing netWorks
- Particular skills harnessed
- Harness skills and resources
- Building core group
- Getting to know each other
- Developing social relationships
- Open to all
- Music, heritage, art, university netWorks
- Bringing together disparate groups of people
- Tenants spokespersons emerging
- Confidence that it would keep momentum
- Sharing risks and responsibilities
- Tenants being heard/ hearing
- Place to take on role as tenant rep
- Not hierarchical, no preconceptions about who is 'qualified' to speak/act
- Legitimacy to act as organisation
- Organises resources
- Pragmatic rather than strategic
- Some tenants mildly destructive about project
- Few people attending Steering Group meetings, all capacity taken by selling
- Share, and concern about sale price and
- Share sales leads to general gloom!



**RELATED TOOLS:** Steering Group Meetings, Public Meetings, Chairs Role, Distinctive Sharrow, Sharrow Community Forum.

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Over the four years from the developer's submission of his initial Planning Application for change of use in 2009 to the purchase of Portland Works by shareholders in 2013, regular meetings were held at locations across the Sharrow neighbourhood. These meetings were crucial to the development of the organisation and evolved over the period as the organisation changed both in terms of what we were trying to achieve and its legal and formal status. At each stage, how decisions were made and the status of those decisions altered. In the first instance they were known as Committee Meetings. Initially held fortnightly at Sharrow Community Forum, the first Committee Meetings regularly attracted 15-30 people and became the public face of the campaign, and the place in which we shared risks and responsibilities. Attendees included tenants, the constituency MP, local councillors, activists, artists, architects and community development workers, along with residents from the Sharrow neighbourhood.

Many who took part in the meetings had good networks and worked towards developing the profile of the Portland Works campaign. However participants did not claim expertise in the current situation and the atmosphere was very much one of finding our way together, and getting to know one another. Many were there because they were either associated with the metal trades or interested in supporting local businesses. People often joined as they were invited by those already involved, had seen articles in

the press, had visited Galvanise or had connections to the Forum.<sup>22</sup> It was within these meetings that briefs for task and finish groups and later Working Groups were produced. These were the meetings that attracted many people, whether they joined in for a few weeks or ended up participating over a number of years.

The meetings were widely advertised and remained open to anyone who wished to attend, and after a few months a core group was established who publicly declared their interests, and negotiated together to decide the direction of and carry out tasks for the campaign. The structure of meetings was often quite loose, and although perhaps not the most efficient, (meetings regularly lasted over two hours) was reported as being friendly and welcoming, enabling a broad range of issues to be raised, and a number of perspectives to be introduced. It was because people felt that they had a useful contribution to make that such a large number of people attended regularly, and this has been cited during the mapping process as being at least in part down to the open format. The openness of these meetings was something that was regularly discussed as a group and drew on the considerable community development experience of some of the members. During the mapping process associated with this thesis campaigners stated that tenants spokespeople began to emerge, and tenants spoke of 'being heard and hearing' about what was going on in the campaign. Many felt legitimacy to act as a group was established and the collective confidence that the campaign would continue.

In the first few months between eight and ten tenants regularly attended meetings, however we were aware there were many tenants who attended infrequently or not at all.<sup>23</sup> Reasons cited included the time, the location (in the first year there was no where suitable at Portland Works), and for the artists a clash with a pre-existing commitment to another board meeting.<sup>24</sup> For many of the tenants, particularly those involved in wood and metalwork, meetings had not been part of their working lives, and some spoke of lacking confidence within this setting. During conversations at the time and later in the

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<sup>22</sup> At this time, the then chair Derek Morton set up a website with the address [www.portlandworks.com](http://www.portlandworks.com), which was effective in a Google search continues to be in use. He began to upload information about the campaign and kept it very regularly updated. This had a crucial role in sharing information about the campaign, and also giving the campaign an outward identity. Portland Works email addresses were associated with this, and those who had one could be seen as a representative of the campaign. Those we met, who attended Galvanise or meetings could be directed to this site to keep up to date with updates on the campaign and meetings.

<sup>23</sup> This is a not insignificant number- during the campaign to save the neighbouring building Stag Works; the lack of tenant involvement was cited as something that had a negative impact on its success.

<sup>24</sup> At the time there was not a space available to hold such a large number of people, and it was not possible for many of those who were most active to attend during the day due to their work commitments. In order to attend to these concerns, some smaller meetings, and particularly those that were considered to be the most relevant to tenants, were held at lunchtime at Portland Works. Other days were tried for the Committee Meetings, but in the end a day selected which attracted the most active participants.

mapping sessions a few told me that the reason they attended was because the issues were so important and they felt that they had something to contribute, but that they often found it difficult to speak up at the meeting. This was most pronounced during the periods where new members joined us, or attendees were more varied. One tenant spoke of deliberately arriving late so as to not have to introduce themselves to the group, despite being widely perceived as having significant authority, and being respected and well liked.

In naming this meeting as the ‘Portland Works Committee’ we made claim to being representatives for the Works. For me our declaration raised the question of who was absent from these meetings. This prompted me to visit the Works at least once a week to go and talk with as many tenants as I could find, in their workshops.<sup>25</sup> My aim was to share the committee discussions informally and find out the views of those tenants who had not taken part, but in the process I felt that I began to be welcomed onto site and to make friends with those who I met, who were open and invited me into their place of work, often when they were busy. This time spent on site enabled me to build up trust and feel more confident in the decisions that we made as a committee. I felt that the tenants were assured that I was committed to the project, and willing to learn from them. Those tenants who attended meetings also took on a mediating role, each talking to those other tenants they knew best. This was also a procedure that the chair, Derek Morton took on. The flexibility of my work schedule and that Derek had retired enabled us to do this. It was not possible for the majority.

Many of those involved in the meetings challenged and extended how it worked as a tool. One tenant regularly gave me a lift home from meetings, and I considered this in part being so they could talk to me about ‘what was really going on and being said at the Works’ as we both looked at the road rather than one another. By making their car the place for our conversations I was their guest and to some degree things were more on their terms. They saw this as a way to tell me the inside story of the day-to-day conversations at the Works which they had initiated or been party to.

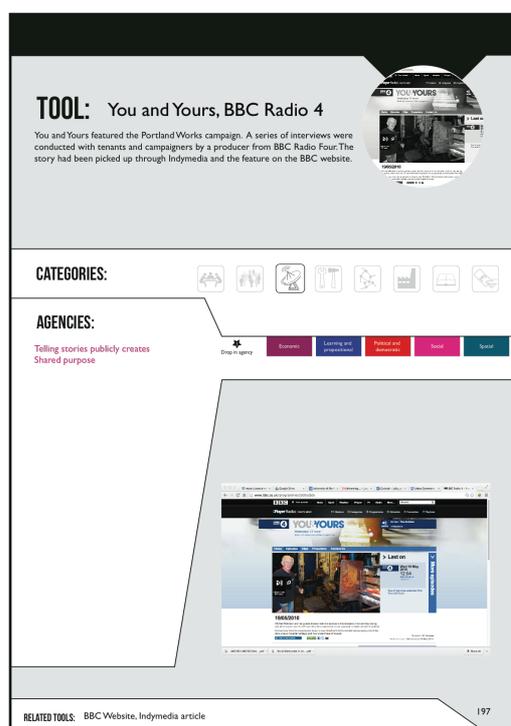
I felt their expectation was that I would try to take this on board and present these issues at Committee Meetings. A vital aspect of learning in such a situation is predicated on having the trust to be able to ask others, or tell them that a certain approach does not work for you, whether directly or indirectly. It was possible due to friendship and mutual respect, yet this was still a challenge for me, because I felt I should do so in a way that

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<sup>25</sup> This was something that was also done by the chair, Derek Morton when he joined the campaign.

would preserve their confidences whilst raising their concerns. I felt an obligation to try to state them as I heard them, which was occasionally difficult as they may have been conflicting or different to my own perspective, and I was aware that I could misinterpret or present only those things that chimed with my opinions. However this process gave me the opportunity to reflect on how the meetings functioned, and in doing so I learnt about its operation, and was being changed as a person.

## Tool: You and Yours, BBC Radio 4 <sup>26</sup>



As a result of letters to the press, press releases and coverage on the BBC website, the Yorkshire Post and Look North, the campaign group and tenants were invited to be on 'You and Yours' on Radio 4.<sup>27</sup> We were interviewed in an informal manner about the campaign as we walked together around the site visiting workshops and meeting tenants. The programme included demonstrations from the tenants of their work and

<sup>26</sup> We later found out that the Landlord had been 'door-stepped' by BBC journalists at 8am, either from the website or Radio 4. This was something that he was very unhappy about and may have contributed in part to his later willingness to sell the building.

<sup>27</sup> The success of this feature led to knife maker Stuart Mitchell and toolmaker Andrew Cole being invited to make two television programmes for primetime TV; on BBC 2 'Heritage Heroes' (BBC 2) and on ITV 'Ade in Britain' (ITV 1) They were both filmed in the workshops of the tenants and both spoke about the campaign to save the building from closure. When each of these programmes aired the campaign attracted new volunteers and shareholders and saw an increase in donations. The programmes put the tenants back in the centre of the narrative about the building.

conversation about their businesses. For most campaigners and tenants it was the first occasion we had been asked to speak so publicly about what we were doing. We were recorded as we walked around the site, responding to questions without knowing what they would be in advance. This meant that we had to listen carefully to one another, and add our layer and perspective to the narrative.

The processes of listening to one another speak publicly about the Campaign and the Works enabled a sense of group identity to emerge. The need for a coherent narrative meant that we had to think about how our different concerns could be formulated as shared ones. Most of the conversation to this point had been held privately within the group and a single representative had carried out any interviews or contact with the press. The telling of the story by tenants and campaign group members as a group to someone outside of the project, who was very good at asking questions and curating relationships between the stories, mirrored back to us a nuanced understanding of the many histories and motivations for involvement.

The national listenership of Radio 4's 'You and Yours' meant we had to formulate our story in ways that appealed to a broader group of people, outside of the city of Sheffield. I tried to speak about the loss of this kind of space within cities more broadly, but my thinking was nascent and I was unpractised and not particularly skilled in this kind of presentation and I found it difficult to formulate clearly. As with any media, the journalist and this had already determined the focus and breadth required a certain kind of skill to be able to say what you want in spite of this. I made the final cut (just), but was in admiration of others, particularly Derek Morton, Andrew Cole and Stuart Mitchell who were more eloquent and direct in their contributions. Derek's skill was driven in part from his many years as a teacher in a secondary school. The feedback from this tool came both in how long our 'bits' were featured in the final show, and also the increased interest in the campaign that we revived as a result of the programme being aired. Hearing ourselves on national radio felt an exciting achievement, and created stronger bonds within the group

## Tool: Castle Market Exhibition by Pictures of Sheffield Old and New<sup>28</sup>

**TOOL: Castle Market Exhibition**

In 2009 Pictures of Sheffield Old and New, most notably Hedley Bishop, and Brian and Lillian Hatch, rented a stall at Castle Market and put together an exhibition of photographs of Portland Works. They invited others to add to the exhibition, layering their own views of the building and bringing their own stories. In addition they printed T-shirts, business cards for the businesses and put together a petition against the Change of Use Planning Application. The event attracted considerable attention and support from people who had been involved in the metalwork industries and also the mayor, and local politicians. This also drew in a number of photographers to the campaign who documented our events and activities- many giving PW free access to their images for campaign use.

**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

- Promote PW businesses
- Very visible, attracts local politicians' attention
- Reaching people who worked in metalwork industry

**RELATED TOOLS:** Bank Street Arts Exhibition, Photographs of PW, Objections to Planning Application, Features in Political Press

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During this time Headley Bishop, Jim Lambert and Lillian and Brian Hatch of the Sheffield photography group “Pictures of Sheffield Old and New” heard of the potential closure of Portland Works and in response started to take photos of the buildings and the tenants. They then chose to exhibit the photographs at Castle Market in the city centre. They hired a stall to display their photographs, and extending an open invitation to their members and anyone visiting the market to add their own images to the display of Portland Works. In addition to the exhibition, the hosts made and distributed business cards for the Portland Works businesses, made T-Shirts with photos and slogans and made a petition against the Planning Application.

The group that organised the exhibition was relatively new at the time, and formed because of an interest in photography and the life of the city. Although not explicitly political, its socially engaged character allowed for a close understanding of the situation. They were driven by an awareness of the need for a more public conversation about the future of these metalwork businesses. In raising these concerns the venue was well

<sup>28</sup> Castle Market has subsequently (and controversially) been demolished by the council and replaced by a much smaller market, further from key bus routes from the north of the city. Many stallholders could not obtain a stall in the new site.

chosen. It was a prominent location in the city, and frequented by working class people who were likely to have connections to the metal trades, either through their own working lives or those of friends and relatives. The organisers' choice of a market as a venue was incredibly important, as it was part of people's everyday lives and commitments, with no thresholds to cross. The particular characteristics of a stall were familiar and created certain kinds of relations, people felt able to browse and chat to the stallholders who were convening the exhibition in ways that something held in a gallery might not afford. The stall attracted a large number of people, including other photographers who contributed to the images on display, working people, tenants, the mayor, the Master Cutler and the constituency MP.

The collection of images on display went back a number of years, and included both professional and amateur photographers' contributions.<sup>29</sup> The objects, tools, work, conditions, architecture, and people of Portland Works were made visible. The contributors brought their skill and care to their depictions, and the gift of their time and energy. The exhibition was constantly changing, with new images being added and different people participating. This open spirit, where all the images were exhibited as having of equal interest, added bricolage like to the walls of the market stall opened up how Portland Works was to be interpreted and claimed, drawn from the photographers own creativity and particular viewpoint. There was not a single view that took precedence; there was always a sense it was incomplete and a new perspective could be added. I would argue that their creation of this tool was powerful because it did not rely on familiar images and identities, but instead opened up a space for these things to be questioned and reformulated.

Many of those who participated in the production of the exhibition had connections to the metal trades. Informal conversations about the campaign happened at the stall and these often included tenants from Portland Works who visited the exhibition on a number of occasions. The photographs provoked conversations about personal experiences, and what Portland Works significance was within the city. The images from the past and present were a tool to enable discussion about the future. Through convening the exhibition the organisers were challenging the idea that the right to claim a place in the city, or to speak about it should be for those who care about it, rather than just the privilege of ownership or occupancy.

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<sup>29</sup> Notably from professional Jack Wrigley – known as 'The Camera Man', who submitted images he had taken over 40 years previously, also Herbert Housley, who had first started working at Portland Works in 1939 when he was 15 years old.

The photographs in the exhibition were also shared through Facebook to the Pictures of Sheffield Old and New group, which at the time had around 1,500 members, (It now boasts over 23,000) and cite this exhibition as important in their societies' development.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Many of the photographers who took part then offered their work to us to use freely for the benefit of the campaign, and continued to have a relationship with Portland Works, attending events and visiting to continue their documentary of the site.<sup>32</sup> This set a precedent for sharing, almost as an informal version of the Creative Commons licenses, with the majority of photographers granted us use of their images for educational and campaign uses. This was a practice passed on between a large and fairly disparate group of people who may have only had tangential involvement in the wider Portland Works campaign project. This generosity became an incredibly important part of a number of future actions and used in many other tools we produced throughout the following five years, with their images used in subsequent Business Plans, on our website, on marketing materials, in teaching, as part of funding bids and in this thesis. The continued generosity of those photographers could be understood as feedback the success of the tool.<sup>33</sup>

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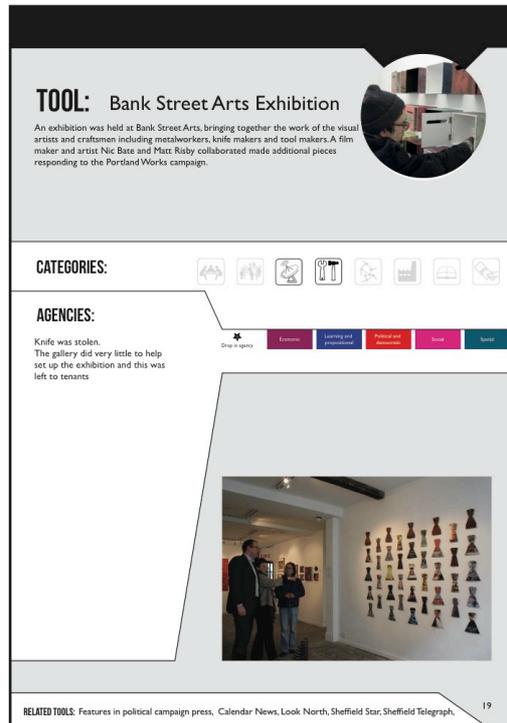
30 "As Sheffield goes through many changes (some good, some bad!) I thought it would be good to create a group that shares pictures of Sheffield and its people. We look forward to viewing your pictures and hearing about your experiences and memories of Sheffield." Hedley Bishop, 'Pictures of Sheffield Old and New' (2008) <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/picturesofsheffildoldandnew/?fref=ts>> [accessed October 16<sup>th</sup> 2014].

31 The membership has rapidly expanded through their mixture of an open group and public exhibitions of work about the city, and when this chapter was first drafted it had 17,186 members, many of whom regularly contribute their photography work. Now in July 2015, there are 23,634 members.

32 The photographs were however the main and often only point of contact between those who visited this stall or took part in the exhibition. At this stage in the campaign we were not organised enough to take full advantage of the potential it offered for extending the group of people actively involved and this meant we lost an opportunity to maintain connections with working people in the north of the city.

33 It is worth noting that Pictures of Sheffield Old and New grew rapidly (see note 30) as a result of this exhibition, and could be understood as successful for building their social group and resources held in common.

## Tool: Bank Street Arts Exhibition



An exhibition held by invitation at Bank Street Arts, brought together metalwork and artists tenants to co-design, produce and curate their work at a gallery in Sheffield City Centre.<sup>34</sup> It was held during the Local Council Elections and was attended by the then constituency MP Paul Scriven, whose visit received regional television news coverage, creating another public space for discussion about the campaign. This was the first time the tenants had produced work together, and it allowed them to understand more about each other's working processes and motivations, their skills and the tools and materials that they used. One exhibit brought together materials and work of two tenants, a visual artist and toolmaker, others included work about the campaign to save Portland Works, and others were examples of the kinds of things that were produced for sale in the building.

Setting up and curating the exhibition provoked conversations and challenges around what was to be exhibited and how, with the artists being experienced and able to offer peer support and advise tenants with metalwork businesses. Practices of self-

<sup>34</sup> Through Cristina Cerulli at Studio Polpo I had contact with John Clark, the Owner and Director of this space and he was working to develop an alternative to the Arts Council Funded 'Art Sheffield'. He was therefore looking for content that he could put on cheaply or for free, and particularly that engaged in the idea of communal actions, and unpaid labour. Portland Works fulfilled this criterion, because these kinds of small-scale industry had received little or no governmental support in the city. Bank Street Arts <<http://bankstreetarts.com/>> [accessed August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015].

management and collaboration were established. The tenants engaged in physical, emotional and intellectual activities with one another and although there were challenges associated with the process, friendships were formed and strengthened.<sup>35</sup> As a result of this process tenants expressed an interest in learning skills from one another, including welding and forging. As the point of relation was through skills, there was discussion about innovation through collaboration between makers.

### Tool: Table of Management and Ownership

### Tool: Fast-Track Knowledge Transfer Funding

**TOOL:** Table of management & ownership

This table was produced by Julia Udall in 2009 due to a concern that the organisation was making decisions about funders or potential buyers of the building without fully understanding the impact this might have on the tenants and the nature of the space.

**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

- Developing brief/ asking questions
- Tenants at centre of project
- Politicising solutions

Drop a agency: Economic Learning and professionalisation Political and organisational Social Spatial

**RELATED TOOLS:** Knowledge Transfer Funding, Knowledge Transfer Workshop

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**TOOL:** Knowledge Transfer Funding

The Fast Track Knowledge Transfer funding paid for the redevelopment of the Portland Works website, the making of the Quicksand Films short documentary about the KT and the campaign, the development of ten Case Studies of similar projects. It also funded the KT Workshop and the production of the Re-imagining Portland Works book. This involved a considerable amount of volunteer work to match the funding.

**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

- Becoming publicly propositional, not just oppositional
- Development of briefs enabled negotiation of priorities
- Development and negotiation of priorities
- Funding to carry out Case Studies, Workshop, website, film
- Funding for co-ops
- Funding for website
- Harnessing money
- Skills

Drop a agency: Economic Learning and professionalisation Political and organisational Social Spatial

**RELATED TOOLS:** KT Workshop, Re-Imagining Portland Works book

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Portland Works was in a poor state of repair with the landlord having carried out very little maintenance or repair work over the decade that he had owned it; he was also threatening to increase rents substantially. The roofs were leaking, many with visible holes, a wall bowed, and at two points columns were dangerously compromised. Relatively early in the campaign we realised and discussed at Committee Meetings that unless the building was purchased from the landlord, he could continue to refuse to invest in any repairs, leading to the building becoming uninhabitable. From the landlord's

<sup>35</sup> An expensive knife was stolen, there was lack of support from the gallery in putting the exhibition together due to limited resources, and there was a very short time span.

perspective the demolition of the building would enable him to build more densely and cheaply on the site. We started to explore options for purchase, including attracting a ‘benevolent benefactor’ to purchase the building, and the option of using a Building Preservation Trust, (this would give us charitable status to raise funds through loans and grants for the purchase of the building, but bring no money in itself).<sup>36</sup>

At the time our chair Derek Morton was working hard to approach various people and push this forward. A contact at the Association of Building Preservation Trusts (ABPT) visited Portland Works and suggested this could be a model that we adopted. The representative of the ABPT stressed that it had only previously been used for vacant buildings and as a model was used primarily to conserve and improve the fabric of a building. I was very concerned at the time that Derek was moving rapidly forward with a plan, without us fully understanding the implications of the decisions and without the participation of tenants and other campaigners. He felt I was unnecessarily complicating the problem and slowing things down when in fact we had a positive opportunity and needed to keep the momentum. This was a difficult time for our relationship with one another as we both felt very passionately about the project and it resulted in arguments about how we would move forward.

In an attempt to communicate my concerns to him and the wider committee, and to understand the issues myself, I produced a table of ‘management and ownership’ setting out the options that we had discussed and their impact in terms of the things that I felt were important to take into account based on my experiences so far. I had little or no working experience of governance or management, but I had spent a lot of time reflecting on how Portland Works ‘worked’ and what we wanted to achieve together. The concerns I cited in my table of management and ownership that was to be shared at the next Committee Meeting were:

- Who would own the building?
- Who would manage it?
- Would there be control on rent rises/ was affordability assured?
- What would the model for refurbishment be?
- How would we set priorities, and make decisions, particularly around heritage?
- What access to funding would the proposed model allow?
- Would we be eligible for English Heritage Grants?

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<sup>36</sup> See the Association of Building Preservation Trusts. Association of Building Preservation Trusts <<http://www.ukapt.org.uk/>> [Accessed August 24th 2015].

- Would the model allow us to have charitable status?
- What lengths of tenancies might be available within the model?
- Was it likely/ possible that the mix of tenants would be retained?
- Could education and cultural events could happen on site?
- Were there other important things to note with each model?

My understanding was fairly limited; the notes I made were based on basic research, discussing the issues with people at Sheffield University and Sharrow Community Forum and a lot of guesswork. The aim was to raise awareness that there were things that we might not yet fully understand and would require further investigation. It was a brief, a set of questions rather than answers.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the difficulties that raising these questions had in terms of social relations within the group, I felt I must pursue this because we really required rigorous and in depth research into these questions.<sup>38</sup> Many aspects of day-to-day life at Portland Works had developed largely because the landlord did very little in terms of management, and there was little concern for the Health and Safety of the tenants. There was no strategy in terms of recruiting new tenants, and little strategic overview about tenancy agreements, rental rates, or use of the building. Different models we were considering would lead to the implementation of very different priorities, responsibilities and restrictions. I wanted to challenge the assumption that such things as affordable rents, and the mix of tenants would continue to exist purely because we wanted them to. I was concerned that the changes we were proposing could inadvertently lead to their being lost. Any new ownership would inevitably bring with it new responsibilities around Health and Safety and likely greater restrictions upon what tenants do to the building and do in the building. I argued that the model of management and ownership that was chosen would determine and disrupt a lot of these things that were currently taken for granted.

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<sup>37</sup> This was an uncomfortable and fraught series of events but I felt passionately and so persisted in raising these issues. I had also invested a lot of time and thought into this process.

<sup>38</sup> The table was formatted to fit an A4 piece of paper and so it could be easily printed and distributed. It was printed out by the Chair of the committee and taken to Portland Works, where he asked tenants to read it, under his supervision and vote on their preference for a way forward. This allowed for no discussion of the issues, or space for me to talk about how and why I had produced it. I felt that the Chair saw my listing of 5 different models for the future of Portland Works as a challenge to his authority and leadership, which was potentially undermining and might jeopardise what he was trying to do. He felt that he had made a decision about an approach that was viable, and the organisation should stand behind him, and that ultimately because he had the responsibility he should have the authority. He wished to use it to shore up his position and opinion, and deliberately chose to go without me, excluding me from the conversations. Two of the tenants called me as this was happening, with questions, concerned that I should be part of the conversation and these were issues that deserved fuller discussion before they were set aside. They mediated the situation, suggesting that we needed to have a fuller discussion as a group before making any decisions. This whole situation was very uncomfortable and emotionally difficult for everyone involved because it was the first point of serious conflict and became (for a very brief time) quite personal.

I was also worried that although we all felt as if we were coming from the same perspective, there were probably a lot of assumptions each of us were making, either about things we had not explicitly spoken about, from differences in our individual interpretations or because people had held back from saying because they had not wanted to cause offence. Meetings and conversations had been very amicable, but if we were to work together what really mattered to us had to be made explicit and their implications in relation to one another explored. Some conflict, within a forum of mutual respect and recognition, could enable us to learn and genuinely reformulate our individual understanding as shared. I felt very strongly that we all needed to learn together, and be rigorous in our understanding of the different options available and what the impact would be, in particular for the working lives of the tenants.

The Committee Meetings were not adequate as a tool in this instance because we did not have the time to discuss these things in enough depth, nor the knowledge and skills within the existing group to fully understand the implications of each of the models. Informal conversation also lacked the rigour required, and led to a fragmented and at times confused picture. We needed to bring tenants, campaigners and those with whom we might decide to collaborate with or could offer specialist advice, such as funders, stakeholders, and experts in community development, governance, and building management together in one space to work through the possibilities and ask difficult questions. In raising these issues I was raising the question of different forms of economy and their impact on day-to-day life at Portland Works.

I discussed my concerns with my colleague and friend Cristina Cerulli, who suggested that we apply to the University of Sheffield for a Fast Track Knowledge Transfer funding to carry out this research into possible models of ownership and management for Portland Works. As the Portland Works Committee was not yet a legal entity, we used Little Sheffield Development Trust, an organisation formed to support the music industry in the John Street area, as our partner. Cristina Cerulli was successful in her bid for just under £10,000.<sup>39</sup> Our proposal was to we facilitate an appraisal of different organisation types, business models, legal structures and management options.<sup>40</sup> The project would have a research phase where we produce a series of case studies, a workshop that brought all the stakeholders together and an outreach phase where we

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<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 7, part II

<sup>40</sup> In parallel to this others in the group were also carrying out research into modes and approaches we could take forward, including Colin Havard attending the conference at Cooperatives UK, and Steve Connolly and Nikky Wilson who visited the site of Community Share Issues.

published our process and findings. The collection of data for the case studies would also allow us to network with other similar projects and organisations.

We proposed to produce a resource pack that documented the options appraisal processes undertaken with the Portland Works tenants, and provide a concise and accessible guide for other groups undergoing similar processes. The Portland Works campaign had received considerable support to date, and we wanted this to be valued and recorded. It could then be used by others engaging in similar processes without such good social networks, support systems, or access to particular skills and resources. The published outputs, distributed under a Creative Commons license would include a short film about the campaign that could be used in publicity, and a professional redesign of the website, which would also become a place to share the resources and research.<sup>41</sup> The Creative Commons license could be understood as a way to preventing it from being used for commercial profit, and facilitating its open sharing by similar campaigns.

## Tool: Knowledge Transfer Workshop

**TOOL: Knowledge Transfer Workshop**

The Workshop brought together tenants, campaigners, and other stakeholders and advisors to understand more about the project, bring their ideas and to see how they might offer help in the future to the campaign. The Workshop was structured around four sessions. The first was a tour of Portland Works, the second looked at the different priorities held by our various stakeholders. The third looked at Case Studies. The final session of the day explored the potential management and ownership structures the project could adopt, and we began to develop a Business Plan, which would enable us to achieve our goals.

**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

- Aligns aims
- Moved from oppositional to propositional
- Research has practical application
- Gaps in post ownership strategy revealed
- Vision developed
- Feeling it was a good fit with Squarepeg (own business)
- Not following existing model, making own
- Understood structure & what to do
- Understand different methods of management and ownership
- Can see what needs doing
- Models of management & ownership
- Making key people aware of issues
- Organise resources
- Legitimacy to become IPS
- Model that allowed tenants to have a say, democratic
- Seeing that we want to move forward under a model
- Legitimacy to act as organisation
- Raise issue of respect on people
- Assertion we wanted to 'take the reins'
- Tenant central
- Tenant involvement
- Can't support landing
- Route to 'not be subject to whims of a property developer'
- Resources/ skills
- Emotional presence of tenants
- Ability to take an 'arms length' role

Current Chair does not attend Workshop

**RELATED TOOLS:** KT Funding, KT Workshop Write-Up, Re-Imagining Portland Works Book, Case Studies, IPS, Governance Structure, Coops Business Advice

41 *Re-Imagining Portland Works*, (Quicksand Films, 2001) <<https://vimeo.com/15000746>> [accessed August 31<sup>st</sup> 2015].

The Knowledge Transfer Workshop, held in June 2010, brought together tenants, campaigners and a number of stakeholders and advisors from organisations based in the region.<sup>42</sup> These included tenants, funding bodies, business development advisors, local activists, campaign members, our MP and local councillors, and local organisations concerned with communities and cities, such as the Civic Trust.<sup>43</sup> Our stated aim, which we introduced at the beginning of the day, was to share and build knowledge about the strategies, tools and tactics available to communities wishing to safeguard their assets. We asserted that by the end of the day we wanted to have a decision and clear strategy for moving forward, having debated the possibilities open to us and worked through what we collectively understood to be the tenants' priorities and the campaign groups emerging desires for the future. It was a place where the knowledge of those who were concerned with Portland Works could be brought into relation with our aims as they were emerging and the every day activities on site.

At the time there was no space at Portland Works that was suitable to host the event, but our selected venue was our neighbour Harland Works.<sup>44</sup> This gave us the opportunity to visit the workshops of Portland Works and the John Street Triangle Conservation area. The tour included a brief history of the area and the campaign, and demonstrations and talks by tenants.<sup>45</sup> This was an important start to the day, particularly for these who did not know this part of Sheffield well, or had not been to visit Portland Works.

The first session focused on understanding the way Portland Works operated, and what people's aspirations were for the future in terms of the business, social and cultural aims. Cristina and I organised each of the groups so that there was a mix of people from different sectors, institutions and roles in order to ensure that the conversation was broad and new things were being discussed rather than repeating conversations from Committee Meetings. We hoped that by including long term-members of the campaign and tenants in each group alongside people who were more peripheral or had never been to the site before, the conversations would be nuanced and rooted in the place, whilst enabling the questioning of assumptions the committee may have made.

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42 Space at the venue was restricted and this limited the number of people we could invite; we were oversubscribed for all of the sessions.

43 Representatives from Sheffield City Council Planning Department could not attend because the Planning Application to convert the works into flats was still current and it could be seen as a conflict of interest.

44 Harland Works was home to the company Cadence Works who would later employ Sharrow Community Forum director Colin Havard to develop the civic economy in the region. By using their workshop we formed a connection with them as an organization.

45 Including knife grinding by Stuart Mitchell of Stuart Mitchell Knives, tool making by Andy Cole of Wigfull Tools, a workshop tour of Squarepegs (patented coat hook manufacturer), and a welcome into the studios of Portland based artists, Mary Sewell, Clare Hughes and Nuala Price.

We used word and image cards to develop and communicate current and future aspects of Portland Works' culture.<sup>46</sup> Some detailed the priorities that the group had set itself at a committee meeting, *Maintaining affordable business space, Retaining the mixture of tenants, Understanding the site as a working place, with dirt, noise and risks, The potential for education and culture on the site, the project being 'Roots Up'*. A number of cards were developed from the discussions and conversations with tenants, and advisors. I tried to include things that had been raised that had been difficult to broach at meetings, or that I had learnt from people who had not attended meetings, or I had discovered through spending time on site such as 'sub-letting', 'rent controls', 'short-term tenancies', 'sharing tools', 'public access', 'high-quality refurbishment', 'high end office space', 'heritage centre'.<sup>47</sup> I also included things that I knew were controversial and their discussion had either been postponed or avoided entirely. Through including these social and personal things and the stories people had told, I hoped to encourage other such things that may have been perceived as being irrelevant to be introduced into the space where our concerns were publicly heard and could be brought into relation with financial and legal matters.

We discussed each of the cards in relation to the questions: *What are the crucial cultural aspects to Portland Works that currently makes it a success? What elements are crucial to the future vision for the works? What elements of this vision are less important / potentially a compromise may be struck? Is there a shared vision for the future of the Works? Do all the stakeholders have to share the vision for it to move forward?* We asked each group to sort the cards following categories on a board: Essential /Desirable /Neutral /Undesirable /Irrelevant. If members of the group disagreed about the placement of a card they could copy it onto blank card and place it in two (or more) categories. The cards were a way of raising controversial issues and bringing them in relation to the model that we were formulating.

The continuity between what we had done previously and this workshop was crucial. In this case I tried to structure the workshop in such a way as to build on conversations that we had already begun, so that this was more of an opportunity to make these discussions public, with new people and concerns supplementing them. There is sometimes an inclination to start from scratch in workshops, but this misses out on valuable work, and

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46 For a detailed write up with images of the cards see the Portland Works website, Julia Udall, *Knowledge Transfer Workshop* (Sheffield, Portland Works: 2010) <<http://www.portlandworks.co.uk/research/reimagining-portland-works-the-book>> [Accessed August 31<sup>st</sup> 2015].

47 In the feedback Local Councillor Jillian Creasy commented that, "The workshops were great- having ideas from previous discussions meant we were not reinventing the wheel and could get on with prioritising."

undermines things that people have valued in the project to date. Having to start from the beginning again can lead to fatigue, frustration and wasted energies. The combination of people who had been discussing these issues for some time with those who were new to the concerns seemed to be a productive one.

The cards had only a few words on each so were open to interpretation, and these interpretations were discussed first amongst small groups and then amongst a wider group. Some aspects of the task, particularly those cards that just had images on them were rejected by each of the groups, who explained that they could not ‘read’ them. I felt that this modification of the tool by the participants meant they were using it in the way that they found useful, rather than just doing as instructed. We carried out the analysis together in the session itself in order to decide what the significance of each of these presentations was. This was to be clear that the record reflected the views expressed of those in attendance and in writing it up I was not simply setting down my personal opinions and interests.

We shared a good lunch together in the room where we had held the workshop and the courtyard outside. This allowed for informal conversation and reflection upon the previous session. An hour and a half was given to this part of the day, because we did not wish to take control of every aspect of conversation, and also understood that there was a lot to digest. The opportunity for people to get to know one another was also important, as it was likely that at least some of these people who were new to the project would be going on to work with us in our next steps. As conveners we did not hold all of the answers, and it was through conversation that new relationships and possibilities might be found.

The afternoon began with presentations by researchers on a number of Case Studies.<sup>48</sup> Sarah Hollingworth from 00:// architects, Simon Parris from The University of Sheffield School of Management, Charlotte Morgan of Bloc Projects and Sheffield Civic Trust and I took part. We sought to give an insight into how other people have approached similar scenarios, the difficulties they have encountered and the opportunities that they might present. We chose the Case Studies because they use a range of models of management, ownership and funding or have an interesting vision and therefore potentially offer inspiring ideas for Portland. The participants split into small groups to discuss the

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<sup>48</sup> Bank Street Arts, Sheffield, Stag Works, Sheffield, Coexist/ Hamilton House, Bristol, The Riverside, Sheffield, S1 Artspace, Sheffield, The Woodmill, London, Orgreave Advanced Manufacturing Park, South Yorkshire, High Green Development Trust, Sheffield, Butcher Works, Sheffield, The Hub, London. Christina Cerulli and Julia Udall eds., *Taking Control: Case Studies of Collectively Conceived and Produced Community Facilities*, (Sheffield: Antenna Press, 2012).

opportunities, ideas and lessons to be taken from the case studies. Each group chose one or two that were of particular interest to them. Cristina and I ensured that there was someone that was very familiar with that case within each group. Our aim was that each group would feedback the key things they drew from the case study that they felt are important for the Portland Works process.

This session was less successful, with a few people commenting they did not understand why these cases might be pertinent to our process at Portland Works. I considered that this was because we had not clearly briefed those presenting the case studies in terms of what they should draw out, so it became more difficult to compare and contrast the models across each of the cases. This was due to a short time span to carry out the project work and the frugal resources we had to do this aspect of the project. It was something that we attended to in the publication of the case studies a month after the workshop in response to this issue, ensuring that the content and graphic design meant that they could be easily cross-referenced, and there was the same information in each case.<sup>49</sup> Through carrying out the research, those who had taken part in the work had developed a clearer understanding of why these may be relevant and had more time to reflect on each of the nine cases. The large amount of information we were putting forward in this session was a lot for people to take in and hold in their minds in a way that could be useful in the discussion that followed.

The final session of the day focused on understanding models of management, ownership and governance. Dave Thornett of Sheffield Community Enterprise Development Unit (SCEDU) presented a number of models, explaining how they were structured in relation to the discussions we held earlier in the day, which he had also participated in. We then split into small groups to map and analyse the models he presented in the following terms: Benefits, Disadvantages, Ethical Approach, Must Haves, and Deal Breakers. Dave Thornett facilitated this process, asking us to address the following important questions we needed to consider when analysing these models:

- Who owns the building?
- Who has the risk?
- Who manages the building?
- Who else is involved as a stakeholder in the project and what benefits do they

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. (Jordan Jay Lloyd carried out the design work.)

bring?

- Would a share issue be possible/necessary?
- Which funds would we be eligible for?
- What capacity is there to refurbish the building within this model?
- What control is there over rents and tenants?
- What are the social benefits?
- How closely does it fit with the initial vision?

These questions were a more refined and knowledgeable version of those that I had posed earlier in the table of management and ownership. Each small discussion group then presented back their discussion to the room with the aim of choosing a preferred model that would enable us to achieve our stated priorities. During the workshop those attending communicated their desires and fears for the project and their understanding of the opportunities and strategies that were available. Options that were brought forward included applying for large-scale European funding, working with the existing landlord, forming a collective of campaigners and tenants to buy the building, working with a specialist heritage private landlord and a tenants buy-out.<sup>50</sup>

This led to a detailed discussion of the options open to us: what mattered and the risks that were associated with the options presented. People stated that they felt they now understood these models of governance and ownership in relation to our particular context. Our conclusions were formally agreed and noted down for the record, (which I subsequently wrote up and shared on the Portland Works website). We took the set of statements that had been developed over the last year by the committee and analysed them in terms of the available models, making a public commitment to agreeing they were the right for the organisation.

The first agreed statement was:

**We should have the ability to ensure rents maintained within ‘affordable’ margins**

The question of affordability was tied to the strategy for refurbishment. We realised that if we could go for a structure that allowed us to issue shares in the organisation we could hopefully raise enough money to buy the building and carry out major work.<sup>51</sup> Unless

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<sup>50</sup> The workshop included representatives from the European Regional Development Fund, who were encouraging us to make a bid focusing on digital development. European Regional Development Fund <[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/funding/erdf/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/erdf/)> [accessed August 24th 2015].

<sup>51</sup> We discussed the possibility of raising extra rental income by creating a “Made in Portland Works” brand, which we could market collectively, and use to maintain or refurbish the building.

significant share money or grant funding could be obtained, the extensive work required would need to be reflected in rental increases. Some grant funding would require us to have charitable status. We were also aware that the building was a not very efficiently used and minor repair and modification should enable us to bring areas back into use, increasing rental revenue without drastically increasing tenants' rents. Reorganising some of the units and reducing space used for storage could also allow us to increase density and bring new and vibrant businesses to the building without either increasing rents or threatening existing businesses.

Some pointed out that there were threats associated with us succeeding in refurbishing the building, relating to the potential for increase in demand and subsequent gentrification. This concern led to a preferment of the IPS form because it allowed us to place an 'Asset Lock' on the building, which meant that it could not be sold on for profit, but would have to be sold to another organisation with similar community benefit aims. If we secured the purchase and implemented the Asset Lock, this was a crucial step in safeguarding against gentrification, as no one could speculate on this land and building. The implications of this would be that it would be much easier to prioritise maintaining affordable rents.

The second statement was:

**We wished to maintain the mix of tenants, from arts, music, metalwork and other small industry**

It was recognised that we would require control over the length of tenancies and the ability to sub-let spaces. Metalworkers often required the security of a longer tenancy as they were likely to have large initial costs of installing machinery and artists and musicians are often require short-term informal lets, or sub-lets to operate as effectively a collective. It was agreed that through considering the offer of the John Street Triangle as a whole, this area could purposely be developed as a start-up area for the creative industries in Sheffield and our position would be stronger and the business more sustainable. In order to support this we would need to ensure the Sheffield Development Framework designated the area as Business and Fringe Industry, rather than Business and Residential as was currently proposed.<sup>52</sup>

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52 In the Sheffield Development Plan Core Strategy 2009 (Sheffield City Council, *Sheffield Development Plan Core Strategy 2009*, (2009) < [http://sheffield-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal/sdfcs/core\\_strategy/core\\_strategy?pointId=604810](http://sheffield-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal/sdfcs/core_strategy/core_strategy?pointId=604810)> [accessed August 26<sup>th</sup> 2015]) the John Street Triangle was designated as an "Area of Transition", which was to become an area of PB3

The third statement was:

**We acknowledged that Portland Works is a place of dirt, noise and risk**

Due to the type of businesses based at the Works, the site would be dirty, noisy, and busy with forklift trucks, furnaces, chemicals and other risks. We acknowledged and noted that currently the building and some of the working practices probably did not meet Health and Safety requirements and whoever purchased the building would take on responsibility for these things, which for years had gone unnoticed. They would likely require both significant cost and a culture change, and implementing regulations may influence the character of the place. We must approach the management of the building in such a way as to work with tenants in this transition.

The fourth statement was:

**Portland Works will be developed for the benefit of the community, including education, culture and business**

Portland Works is already part of the annual ‘Galvanised’ and ‘Open-Up Art’ festivals and it was felt that holding Open Days could be a good way to share culture and education. If we applied for funding from the Heritage Lottery to support such an event we could establish a track record that would allow us to apply for much larger sums to enable the building’s refurbishment. It was suggested that Portland Works should not be understood as a museum or heritage centre as it would require expensive infrastructure, probably would not attract enough visitors to be viable and would interrupt the working life of the building. To have public access we would require car parking, a cafe, and a large portion of the space dedicated to displays. Unless we could achieve income equivalent to the rental income this would be losing money and therefore require grant funding to sustain it. This was against our desires to be self-sustaining.

The final statement was:

**The Portland Works project should be ‘Roots Up’**

The day had reaffirmed the project as being ‘Roots Up’. An Industrial and Provident Society Model was seen as the most appropriate to support this because could have any number of shareholders in the organisation. These shareholders would elect Directors to manage the company, and have a role in steering its future direction. We felt that being financed by a large number of people gave us strength because they would all have a

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Business and Housing classed which placed emphasis on Student Housing, and classed warehouses and industry as “unacceptable” (Ibid.). In making this change, Sheffield City Council Planning department argued that, “The proposed emphasis on housing follows the pattern that has already started, of residential developments replacing traditional industry and warehousing.” (Ibid.).

stake and contribute to the project in numerous ways, bringing their particular skills and capacities. This option allowed the tenants to have influence on the decision making for the priorities for the Works and also brought new investors in that would give time and expertise as well as financial support. It was agreed that although the tenants should have influence they should not have overall control of Portland Works as there may be a conflict of interest between tenants and the management and this should be written into the company rules. This decision had been driven by one of the case studies; ‘High Green Development Trust’ where rental income was not enough to cover costs because tenants continued to vote for rent freezes.<sup>53</sup>

We officially agreed that we would pursue the option of forming an **Industrial and Provident Society, for the benefit of the community (BenCom)**.<sup>54</sup> Because we were for the ‘benefit of the community’ this meant we had obligations beyond our own members. The Industrial and Provident Society states a one-member one-vote rule. The Rules of our IPS had to be agreed both by the Portland Works Committee and the Financial Services Authority.

Everyone in the room agreed most decisions and statements together. Those new or more peripheral to the campaign group and to the project, such as funders and politicians, often offered thoughts during the discussion and group feedback, but stepped back from the final decision-making. Some decisions were considered to affect the tenants more than others in the group and in these cases the tenants were deferred to. This process of deciding whose views should take precedence in a particular context happened without much discussion and was based on mutual recognition of what was at stake for each group. For example the tenants expressed that they were willing for the organisation to take on a certain amount of risk, in the form of loans to partially fund the project. It was recognised that for them the risk was much greater as it was their businesses at stake and therefore ultimately it was their decision to make.

The success of this day had been driven by building on the previous work, but in doing so trying to understand the potential differences and contradictions in the various claims that had been made and desires that had been expressed. Gaps in previous plans that had

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53 Cristina Cerulli and Julia Udall

54 An Industrial and Provident society is a long-standing form of Mutual Society. In ‘BenCom’ form it implies benefits for people beyond membership and for the wider community. It must declare how it will provide such benefits and be registered with the Financial Services Authority. See Financial Service Authority. Financial Service Authority, *Industrial and Provident Societies* <[http://www.fsa.gov.uk/doing/small\\_firms/msr/societies](http://www.fsa.gov.uk/doing/small_firms/msr/societies)> [accessed August 24th 2015].

been discussed at Steering Group meetings were made visible. Tenants expressed a feeling that the model we all agreed on seemed to be a good fit with their own ethical and business approaches. There was a sense we were building our own particular approach rather than straining to fit an existing one, and a clear statement about moving into a productive and propositional phases of the campaign.

In convening this workshop we had set out an obligation to make a decision about the route we would take and the next steps that this would require. The next steps for us were clearly articulated: **we were an organisation that was going to buy a building!** We had the skills in the room to help us define what these steps were, and negotiate a clear set of priorities. We must write a Business Plan, develop legal structures, and begin to work to attract shareholders that would provide both financial resources and people willing to participate in the future of Portland Works. The Planning Application was still in motion, but in the publicly stated and comprehensive decisions about the future a ‘common project’ emerged.

### Tool: Steering Group & Working Groups

#### TOOL: Steering Group Meetings

The Steering Group meetings became the primary decision-making place for the Industrial and Provident Society. They comprise of Directors, who have legal responsibility for the company and people who had previously been part of the Committee Meetings, some of whom were Shareholders and others who were not. The Steering Group meets once a month, held either at Sharrow Community Forum or the grinding Room, then later the Photographic Workshop at Portland Works.



**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

**Proactive not reactive**

Structure is in place, but the skills aren't there to stop Steering Group focusing on minutes

Involvement either needs to be all or nothing (6 hours+/week). Need structure that permits other ways to get involved.

Some people find it quite a patronising environment/ difficult to speak out/ be listened to

What are we going to do to make it happen?

Not smooth running yet in terms of our relationships and organisation, and needs renegotiation for hard work

Looseness of meetings means we don't always make decisions that we need to, or use volunteers to get jobs done

Very useful to have to ask Steering Group about each decision in the purchase process when just wanted trust and to get on with it

Steering Group meetings have not been quorate due to lack of attendance from Directors and this adds pressure to an already stretched Chair and treasurer.

Disagreements about how this should be solved and lead to J's resignation as Director.

Steering Group meetings have not been quorate due to lack of attendance from Directors and this adds pressure to an already stretched Chair and treasurer.

Disagreements about how this should be resolved and lead to J's resignation as Director.

**RELATED TOOLS:** Committee Meetings, Governance Structure, Chairs Role.

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Through the ‘Knowledge Transfer’ process a decision was made to establish and Industrial and Provident Society with a view to attracting a large number of shareholders to support the purchase and running of Portland Works. This led to a much more structured and defined series of activities for the group. This would be a significant change for us in terms of how we approached and organised what we were doing, as our

goals and relationships were necessarily to become more complex and formalised. There was a need to develop the financial, legal and governance aspects, including registering at The Financial Services Authority and to begin to develop a Business Plan.

Portland Works as an organisation had up until this point been a fairly informal organisation, and in the early stages of the campaign this was successful in terms of drawing new people in. The Committee Meetings had an open enough format to allow for speculation and challenge about what we were doing and how, and allow many voices to be heard. As the campaign moved forward we began to realise that we wanted to and indeed had to be proactive and more focused in order to secure the future of Portland Works. The nature of the tasks and decision-making became more complex, and the tasks more specific. A small group of participants felt that they were taking on the majority of tasks, and there was no responsibility for those voicing an opinion to take on work.

As we were taking on greater responsibility we felt the obligation to ensure we were operating in ways that were democratic, and productive and concerns were expressed about some of the decision-making. This was often happening ‘outside’ of meetings, both because the questions were often complex and took much longer to work through than a meeting allowed for, because not all tenants attended the meetings, and because not everyone said everything they wanted to in this forum. The friendships between those who were most involved in the campaign were a big part of how this processes operated. Although this is not necessarily negative, and was probably inevitable, it excluded people from the decisions being made, and some committee members realised it could lead to the loss of contributions from those who do not take part. It could also be considered to be undemocratic, as it was not clear to all participants how and why decisions were made. The structure of the meetings therefore became a point of debate. We needed to reflect upon how we could be productive and democratic, and crucially distribute the work more equally amongst participants.

As new people joined the group it became clear that the ‘original members’, who had taken part in social activities together had closer bonds and spoke with one another much more frequently. For us, the Portland Works project came before any others that we were involved in, and if we met with people in the city, we would do so as representatives of Portland Works, rather than with any other affiliation. As a small group we had developed a shared idea of what mattered and this was not always clear or

of interest to those who joined the group later. Although this informality in some senses benefitted me, as I was one of the best connected to all of those involved, I too was concerned. I considered that if those ‘doing the work’ did not feel an active part of the decision-making they would be less likely to want to continue to be involved and this would threaten our long-term sustainability. I realised too that we could easily be perceived as a closed group, and therefore it would be harder to attract those who had different skills to take part, and would limit the possibilities for action. In a situation where we had access to few financial resources, these bonds of solidarity with others were even more important.

We restructured the organisation so we retained the Committee Meetings (which became known as Steering Group meetings), and created a number of Working Groups. We still valued the informality and friendships, and meals were held after the meetings and this became an occasion for learning from one another, and to form stronger friendships rather than to discuss agenda items and make decisions. The Working Group format allowed members to gather around particular issues- such as Management, Marketing, Building, and Finance, Legal and Governance. Smaller groups enabled those working on a task to get to know one another better and feel responsible for one another, and also gave time for issues to be debated in greater depth, and tasks allocated more broadly. This recalled the earlier days of the organisation. The aim was to create a structure that allowed for individuals to pursue their interests and work to their strengths whilst allowing us as an organisation to be systematic enough to achieve our goals. This supported different kinds of contribution and commitment to the project, for example someone could take part to achieve a particular task and might do a lot of work over a short period, or they may advise over a longer duration, but only commit a few hours each month. It also allowed campaigners and tenants to invite new people along to bring particular skills that were required as a one-off task.

The meetings in their various forms enabled the most feedback of any tool; if lots of people did not turn-up to the meetings it meant that they probably were not working effectively. If people were not contributing much despite attending, again it was likely the format or what we were doing was ineffective or should be reviewed. If we were not achieving the goals that we set ourselves for the meeting we needed to change the way in which it was run. It was the tool that we used most often over the years and its repetition enabled participants to become skilled in its use. Some members of the committee were already skilled in how they conducted meetings, yet making the format evolve to meet our particular needs in this instance took collective discussion and reflection. There was a

strong recognition of their provisionality as a tool, with this awareness driven particularly by a few committee members who were particularly skilled in its use. The feedback in this instance was not easy however, being emotive and sometimes conflictual.

## Tool: Little Sheffield Development Trust (LSDT)

The infographic is titled 'TOOL: Little Sheffield Development Trust'. It features a circular inset image of a person in a courtyard. Below the title, a paragraph explains that LSDT was formed to support music and arts, particularly around Stag Works, Portland Works, and the John Street Triangle. It notes that directors were involved in cultural production and had a history of activism, with strong links to Sharrow Community Forum.

**CATEGORIES:** A row of icons representing various categories: a person, a group of people, a building, a recycling symbol, a bar chart, a document, and a hand holding a pencil.

**AGENCIES:** A list of agencies and their roles, accompanied by a horizontal bar with colored segments: 'Directors to see fruits of their labours partner organisation that gives us track record and enables us to form IPS', 'Finance to form IPS', 'Funding for development of constitution', 'Developing ethos/horizontal learning relationships', and 'Stag & PW friendships'. A small star icon is next to the first agency.

**RELATED TOOLS:** Sharrow Community Forum

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Little Sheffield Development Trust (LSDT) had been formed with the aim of purchasing Stag Works, (a similar building adjacent to Portland Works) and developing it as a live music venue. Although LSDT were unsuccessful in obtaining funding, the organisation carried out a number of useful pieces of work. This included a basic Conditional Survey of Stag Works and Portland Works carried out in 2005, which, although somewhat out of date provided useful information for our Business Plan. As an established organisation LSDT enabled us to claim a track record for funding bids and it was the partner organisation for the Knowledge Transfer bid. They had good local networks and had established practises of mutual support, through their involvement in cultural events such as Sharrow Festival.<sup>55</sup>

The Directors of LSDT were keen to see the community purchase of Portland Works as

<sup>55</sup> Sharrow Festival, < <http://www.sharrowfestival.btck.co.uk/> > [accessed August 25<sup>th</sup> 2015].

they felt it chimed with their aims and could be a catalyst for the future community purchase of Stag Works. At the very least this would counteract gentrification pressures. It would also stop the threat of noise regulations associated with Portland Works being in residential use that would ultimately lead to the closure of workshops and studios in Stag Works and other similar buildings in the area. A strong Portland Works would contribute to the sustainability of the arts and music in the neighbourhood. The Directors of LSDT therefore offered to fund the constitution of Portland Works as an Industrial and Provident Society, and any costs associated with the development of the constitution and registration with the Financial Services Authority.<sup>56</sup> These contributions were essential in the establishment of the organisation, and gave continuity to the hard work of those involved in the LSDT, and strengthened the relationships between the tenants of the two buildings. It facilitated the development of horizontally structured learning partnerships between the two organisations.

In the context of extensive cuts to public services and grant funding, collaboration seems to be a productive approach. Many small funding opportunities set up competition between organisations that have similar values and aims, and involve time intensive processes whether or not an organisation is ultimately successful in obtaining relatively small sums of money. The winners of such funds are often those who have the capacity and experience in making bids, rather than those necessarily most in need. In deciding to support Portland Works the Directors of LSDT had made an ethical decision about their remaining resources. Although this did not directly meet their initial aims, through solidarity with other organisations and by reformulating individual desires as collective ones, it is possible to work together in a way that sees desires as something to be achieved over time, part of a wider collective process. The use of this tool could be understood as iterative, drawing on the work carried out over the last five years by the organisation, practical evaluative in the sense of understanding how their funds could be use most effectively in the moment, and projective, in that there was an understanding that this would support the future aims of LSDT even if they were not directly addressed in the moment.

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<sup>56</sup> They also funded a celebratory meal for the committee, which was a very enjoyable day and contributed to the development of friendships.

## Tool: The Noticeboard

## Tool: The Portland Works Letterbox

## Tool: Repairs to the Step

**TOOL: Noticeboard**

A noticeboard was designed and made by a cabinetmaker tenant and put up in the archway of Portland Works. The campaign and the Steering Group use this as a point of contact with tenants. Tenants use it to share information amongst themselves and with clients and visitors.

**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:** Sharing info to tenants

**RELATED TOOLS:** Steering Group meetings, Open Days, repairs to steps, letter box 116



**TOOL: Letter boxes**

Tenant engraver Mick Shaw produced a hand engraved letter box for the Portland Works committee. This enabled us to receive mail at a Portland Works address.

**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:** 'PW IPS' postal address  
Makers skills made visible  
Care for project shown

**RELATED TOOLS:** Repairs to Steps, Jerwood Artists Residency 98



**TOOL: Repairs to steps**

In anticipation of the Open Days and the Open Up events that would be held in the artists' studios in the first floor, toolmaker Andrew Cole repaired the steps so that the public could safely access their studios.

**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:** Safe access to artists space

**RELATED TOOLS:** Jerwood Artists Residency, Letter box, Notice board, Open Days, Open Up Art Festival 148



As we developed an ambition to purchase Portland Works, it felt worthwhile to start to think about how we might repair and alter the building to respond to our needs. There

was an increasing sense that we could start to think about the future together. Prior to ownership, investing in the building to any serious degree seemed wasteful and something that would only benefit the landlord and no funders would offer us any money to spend on the building prior to us owning it. With a prospective purchase we began to think about small things that we might do that would be low cost and have a large impact, without increasing the purchase price. At the Building Working Group a question was posed- if there could be one immediate change to the building, what would it be? The idea of a noticeboard was put forward as a place to keep all the tenants informed of the campaign development, and share activities and events. Despite efforts from those tenants who did attend meetings, and campaigners who could visit the site during the day, there were still issues with communication about meetings, decisions and events we would hold. The following week, a noticeboard made by the cabinet-maker, Paul Hopprich had appeared. This noticeboard was a tool that transformed the archway of the building into a space where ideas could be shared, altering the ways in which tenants and campaigners could relate to one another. Clippings from newspapers, flyers and information about businesses began to be shared.

A second modification to the building came in the form of a hand engraved Post-box, for the “Portland Works Committee’ made by tenant Mick Shaw. This enabled us to have an official address and receive mail at the site, which was important for our constitution as a company. The post box was made with care and skill, as a gift to the campaign, modifying what was already there in such a way as to fit with the context. I understood it as an invitation to set down on the site, and acceptance of the campaign group and project by the tenants. The then Landlord had not given permission for this addition, but neither did he seek to have it removed; the tenants felt it was in their gift to offer us this address. This was an important moment for the campaign group, because we had a physical presence on site, and a registered address for the company. Those interested in the campaign could write to us, and prospective shareholders could send us cheques. A third modification came in the form of a repair, a gift from one tenant to another. The artists were hoping to invite people into their studios as part of the Open Days and Open Up Sheffield.<sup>57</sup> The metal staircase that leads up to their studios was broken, and dangerous. Toolmaker Andy Cole repaired the step, and secured the banister.

This work could be seen as iterative in the sense of drawing on Andy Cole’s skills, practical evaluative in the sense of him seeing a problem and fixing it, and projective as he was anticipating the future. These tools were pragmatic and direct, but they could also

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<sup>57</sup> Open Up is an annual festival at sites across the city where artists opened their studios to the public.

be understood as stepped changes to a different future for the building. These repairs and additions not only showed friendship between the tenants, but also a desire to change Portland Works so that it was safe for the tenants. It also enabled the building to be opened to the public. The craftsmanship involved the tenants skills, motivation, and know-how, care, access to materials and tools. They were very particular to this place and the people that were here, and showed care for one another, and for the place that we shared. They demonstrated a close understanding of the needs of the campaign, and were projective, offering support for an alternative future. In acting as a commoner we take into account our impact on others because it effects what we hold in common. These actions were productive of the kind of relations that we, as a campaign group wished to have with one another and with the building and could be understood as building on certain kinds of practice at Portland Works.

## Tool: Open Days

### TOOL: Open Days

Portland Works has held a number of Open Days, which have attracted thousands of guests to the Works over the last four years. As Portland Works is a working building it is not possible to grant public access at all times, however the Open Days provide an opportunity for visitors to attend Workshops and see demonstrations provided by the tenants at the Works.



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**CATEGORIES:**



**AGENCIES:**

Public face  
 Chance to assert importance.  
 Tenants who experienced eviction can say would be lost  
 Comfortable place for tenants to talk  
 Enabling connections with 'the public'  
 Raised profile in the city  
 Platform to raise concerns  
 Makers skills and methods Shared  
 Understanding possibilities for PW to connect people  
 Deeper understanding of what you are trying to protect /develop  
 Giving the campaign a human face  
 Gathering people who will be committed to the project  
 Feeling responsible for one another  
 Different people attending different events  
 Development of community feeling  
 New volunteers  
 Conversations about values & aims  
 Getting people to buy in to Share issue  
 Funder visited  
 PW as venue for public events



Drop in agency

Business
Training and employment
Public and community
Social
Space

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**RELATED TOOLS:** Galvanise Festival, Small Funding Birds, High Vis Jackets, Share Issue I & II

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At the Knowledge Transfer Workshop it was proposed that we could run our own Open Days at Portland Works at weekends throughout the year involving the many different kinds of businesses. This had come in part from some of the tenants' participation in the

annual Galvanise and Open Up Festivals for the arts and metalwork in the city.<sup>58 59</sup> The tenants felt it gave them an opportunity to contribute something to the city, sharing their skills and stories, and a public platform for the campaign. These events had enabled us to test these activities with little risk, with other organisations taking on the coordination and publicity. Galvanise had been particularly successful in terms of recruiting people to the campaign.

Our development conversations considered the need to balance Portland Works' primary function as a place of work with a desire for public access to support the sharing of culture, and educational opportunities. Through inviting people into the workshops and studios we could make it clear that Portland Works played an important part of the skilled economy of Sheffield. It was also a good way to develop an understanding of what our programme of Culture, Heritage and Education might look like. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), which distributes lottery profits to support heritage in the UK seemed to be a potential place to look for support in our endeavours.<sup>60</sup> If we applied for funding through the HLF, we could build a relationship with them, with small grants giving us the opportunity to build a financial track record, and for the HLF to learn about Portland Works and our ambitions.

Hosting the Open Days presented us a number of initial challenges, particularly around insurance and Health and Safety, and relatedly how public Portland Works could or should be.<sup>61</sup> Campaigner Nikky Wilson made a funding bid to pay for public liability insurance, and this established Portland Works as somewhere we could open up to the public for events and visits. Other tools that supported the Open Days included 'Clean Up Days' prior to the events, the establishment of a volunteer policy and register, the development of display boards, flyers, banners, and publicity materials, articles in the press, and a guide produced by a history MA placement student.<sup>62</sup>

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58 The Director of Galvanize Festival, Sara Unwin went on to become a director of Portland Works, 2012-2013 and tenants continued to participate in the festival.

59 Tenant Nuala Price was on the board for this event, and the artists continued to participate over the years.

60 The Heritage Lottery Fund <<http://www.hlf.org.uk/>> [accessed August 25th 2015].

61 We informed the landlord of our intentions, who did not object to the event being held. In order to open Portland Works to the public we required public liability insurance, a health and safety review of the site, and support from a number of volunteers to marshal the event. Campaigner Nikky Wilson secured a small amount of funding from Sheffield City Council to pay for the insurance.

62 Once the Open Days had been established for some time we also began selling products at events to raise additional income for tenants and the campaign. This included a centenary knife designed and made by Stuart Mitchell and a short history publication produced by Anna DeLange, published by Portland Works and accessible through the website. Portland Works <http://www.portlandworks.co.uk/shop/> Access Date: 24<sup>th</sup> August 2015

The Open Days were held a few times each year and on each occasion we held a series of tours of Portland Works where visitors visited 8 or so workshops, and had a demonstration at each place by the tenants. We found on each occasion our tours would be fully booked, usually welcoming over 150 people. Attendees spoke of how much they had enjoyed themselves; many subsequently joined the campaign as a volunteer at subsequent events or as part of one of the Working Groups. Funders who attended spoke of being impressed by our aims and approach. After each event a review of the day was conducted, from the perspective of the visitors, tenants and the volunteers. Usually the events were followed by a group meal with many of the volunteers, and although hard work, these days brought us all much closer, giving the events a festive feel. It was through events such as these that that word spread about the campaign more widely in the city, because those who attended shared their experiences with others.

The Open Days allowed the campaign group to collectively develop a closer understanding of the tenants working patterns and needs, feeding in to the development of our plan for the future. We found that anyone who visited Portland Works became passionate about the place and the people, and was keen to give their time and energy. It became a threshold tool, where a diverse range of people could join in, having a clearer idea of the project, and what was involved, with the building and the tenants at the centre. Through hosting these events we were also testing our role and contributions to the city through creating experiences and approaches that would feed into our Business Plan. Campaigners, tenants and visitors felt that these events gave the campaign a human face, developed strong social relationships and attracted new people to be involved. In presenting ourselves to the public we consolidated our statements about vision and aims, and developed a deeper understanding of the place we were trying to protect and support.

The Open Days became a regular practice at the works and we increased our capacities and established modes of self-management as a result. Over the years that we hosted them there were periods of resentment, or drops in willingness to host as putting on the events took a lot of effort, and began to feel that the Steering Group assumed their contributions. This led to questioning what financial profit was gained through such activities, and so charges for some of the demonstrations by tenants were implemented in order to make the work worthwhile.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> At the time I did not agree with the charges, as I felt that the sessions were worthwhile in terms of our visibility in the city, and this might prevent people on tight budgets attending. However, as I had just had a baby and was not

One of the tools that came out of this process of evaluation was the John Street Triangle festival, where we acted as the catalyst for a neighbourhood wide festival designed to promote and bring together small businesses in the area. In initiating this festival we signalled the desire to take on a leadership role, but that we wanted to initiate collaborative rather than competitive practices amongst traders. The tenants and campaigners had perhaps unconsciously asserted a right to Portland Works through holding Open Days and events, in not even considering that we should first seek permission from the landlord.<sup>64</sup>

### Tool: The Business' Plan I

**TOOL: Business Plan I**

The first Business Plan was developed for the constitution of the IPS and the launch of the Share sale. It was written collaboratively between a number of Directors, tenants and an advisor from Sharrow Community Forum who met over a number of evenings and weekends in spring 2010. Advice and support was given by Co-Ops UK and Dave Thornett, who had given advice on models of management and ownership at the KT Workshop. It was distributed as a paper version at the Share launch and subsequently online through the PW website.

**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

- Ability to issue Shares
- Setting out approach
- Ability to issue Shares
- Developing viable plan
- Development of structure of organisation
- Organic model enables possibility for change

Big hole in Business Plan in terms of 'how' we do it.

**RELATED TOOLS:** Share Issue I, IPS and Asset Lock, Budget Review, Task and Finish Groups

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In order to establish an Industrial and Provident Society we must write a feasible Business Plan. Due to limits on time, resources and capacities of our volunteer group, we

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volunteering at weekends and offering to help with their organisation, I did not feel that I could assert this.

<sup>64</sup> These assertions of right to use were time-limited in their effect because they would not counter the Planning Application for Change of Use. Whilst we were beginning to be proactive in terms of our Business Planning and formation as a company, the Planning Application was still underway, and still posed a considerable threat to the future of Portland Works and the surrounding neighbourhood as a place of work. If the landlord was successful it would be highly unlikely he would be willing to sell Portland Works to us, preferring instead to either convert the Works as a residential development himself, or to sell it onto another residential property developer for an inflated price. Even if he was willing to sell to us, the price associated with the residential permission would likely be well above what we could afford as an organisation, or what supports would deem reasonable. We knew we had to work hard to get the Change of Use application dismissed by Sheffield City Council. This was a situation where I hoped to usefully bring my experiences working in an architecture office submitting successful Planning Applications to bear.

decided to set up a Task and Finish group to write it, which could draw together a broad range of skills and views. Some professional advisors were worried that this was not the most efficient approach, and would lead to a fragmented output. In developing the Business Plan in such a collaborative and open manner, we were seeking to operate in the same way we envisaged Portland Works being run in the future, drawing on skills and advice and negotiating what mattered. We began the process using a template from Co-Ops UK, but the format soon evolved to ensure that we could communicate those things we deemed important for potential investors to know.

The Business Plan was written over the course of a few weeks and we edited versions in file sharing application Dropbox, and reviewed it together around a kitchen table.<sup>65</sup> The skills of the group were broad, and Jon Clarke of Humberside Cooperatives Development Agency offered four days of work pro bono, to support the development of the legal and constitutional aspects of the organisation.<sup>66</sup> We had additional informal support from our networks to attend to specific questions and concerns.<sup>67</sup> We learnt from one another, and developed skills and understanding as a result, formulating our own questions and topics of research to shape what was included. This was an efficient and enabled that group to discuss aspects in depth, and become familiar with the plan. We established good working relationships and were confident that this could be a useful approach for carrying out work in the future.

The Business Plan set out our aims and objectives, our structure and ethos, and our financial plan. Through our Meetings, the KT Workshop, and informal discussion we had a clear notion of the ethos, aims and objectives for the society.<sup>68</sup> A rigorous financial plan was particularly difficult to write at this point as the Planning Application for Change of Use still remained undecided, and we had not achieved agreement on a price for the purchase of the building, (or indeed confirmation that the landlord would sell it to

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65 Our group comprised of Colin Havard, director of Sharrow Community Forum, Stephen Connolly a Senior Lecturer at Sheffield University who specialises in governance, Nikky Wilson, who works in community development, Alan Deadman a music promoter with extensive community development and events organising experiences, Derek Morton, who had taught Design and Technology in secondary schools for 20 years and me

66 With an agreement that if it took longer we could pay his fee from monies that we raised through the Share Issue. In working in such a way he was showing great faith in our project as we would have to return all money if we did not succeed in purchasing the building. See Humberside Co-operative Development Agency. <<http://www.humbersidecda.info/>> [accessed August 24th 2015].

67 For example our relationship with Sharrow Community Forum and Little Sheffield Development Trust meant we could draw on their considerable experience and knowledge.

68 Through our Open Days, events such as Galvanize, Sensoria and Pecha Kucha, the various exhibitions we had tested our capacity to organise, promote and carry out such activities and the suitability of the building to do so.

us). At this point in time the Landlord was still pursuing the Change of Use Planning Application and the offered £750,000 price tag reflected a building with permission for residential accommodation.<sup>69</sup> We had to take this offer as our target for fund raising. Committee members Steve Connelly and Nicky Wilson researched other Community Share Issues, and knew that ‘Fordhall Farm’ had raised £850,000, from over 8,000 shareholders, however the majority of share issues raised much less than this and had many fewer people involved.<sup>70</sup> We set ourselves a target to raise £500,000, and based the financial forecasts on this, although a Plan B and C was also put forward in case we did not receive what we required. We hoped to cover the shortfall through loans and grants.

We made the decision to set the maximum limit for the purchase of shares at £20,000 and the minimum at £100 for non-tenants and £40 for tenants. New tenants would be obliged to buy at least the minimum holding, but existing tenants were welcome to make the choice about investing. Directors of the organisation would be elected by the member shareholders, and must also have a shareholding. In choosing the IPS format, we had agreed upon a one shareholder, one vote policy, so greater financial investment did not buy greater influence. This was because the group agreed that financial contribution did not necessarily define the shareholders ability to contribute to the project, or mean that they cared the most, or were best placed to understand the company’s future direction. It was an ethical position tied to our experiences to date.

Our chair Derek Morton had been active in developing a relationship with the Architectural Heritage Fund who were interested in our project and were considering loaning us £200,000 towards the purchase of the building.<sup>71</sup> Key Fund, who had an affiliation with the AHF, suggested that they would consider purchasing £20,000 worth of shares and loan us an additional £20,000, although at fairly high rates of interest.<sup>72</sup> These early commitments to the project were incredibly useful in putting together a viable and convincing financial plan, and to encourage others to invest in the company. These organisations worked to publicise our project once they had committed to their investments, featuring Portland Works in brochures and mail outs to supporters. The other open question in terms of setting out a coherent financial plan was how much we

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<sup>69</sup> The landlord publicly declared his doubt in our ability to raise the funds to purchase the building. This was probably a pre-emptive start of the purchase price negotiation process in which he was very experienced.

<sup>70</sup> See Big Potential, *Fordhall Farm issue community shares to save themselves from closure* <<http://www.bigpotential.org.uk/resource/fordhall-farm-issue-community-shares-save-themselves-closure>> [accessed August 25th 2015].

<sup>71</sup> The Architectural Heritage Fund helps voluntary and community groups to repair and regenerate historic buildings, with grants, loans, advice and publications. Architectural Heritage Fund <<http://www.ahfund.org.uk/>> [accessed August 24th 2015].

<sup>72</sup> The Key Fund is a community fund to support the initiation of community projects. The Key Fund <<http://thekeyfund.co.uk/>> [accessed August 24th 2015].

might have to spend on making the building safe and wind and watertight. We had commissioned a Conditional Survey, and the positive outcome of this was that there were no major structural issues. The entrance archway needed a repair quite urgently and there was a pillar that was unsound in one of the rear workshops. The roofs were leaking in many places, and water ingress at the wall to the rear of the artist's studio had led to the bowing of the external wall. It was felt that unless we started to make repairs to the roof the structure would likely deteriorate rapidly. We had broad costs for what the architect had deemed 'essential' and urgent, and a set of costs for what we should do in the next two and five years.

The cost of carrying out even the most urgent aspects of the work was beyond what we could hope to raise through loans and share issue, so it was clear that we would always have to prioritise. The work was further complicated by the fact that the majority of tenants could not afford to close their businesses whilst work was being carried out, so we would have to either operate a phased approach and relocate them within the building, or plan to allow builders carry out work around them. Without detailed architectural proposals, and programme development it was hard to estimate the additional cost implications of such approaches.

The publication of our Business Plan would allow us to issue Shares. It also made a clear statement about who we were as an organisation. Our public declaration of our intention to keep the place making things, and to keep rents low, showed that other ways of producing cities were possible, and articulated a desire that many people shared to protect community assets. The Plan was loose enough to allow for the possibility of change, and organic growth. It did not tie us to certain outputs but rather set out an approach and set of values. Feedback for this tool came from the large number of people who chose to invest in shares, and that some chose to invest significant sums.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> For example Hugh Facey, Director of Gripple, which is a hugely successful employer owned Sheffield Company, who invested the maximum £20,000. Gripple Limited <<http://www.gripple.com/gb/en/>> [accessed August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015].

## Tool: John Street Audit

## Tool: Inside the Triangle Festival

**TOOL: John Street Triangle Business Audit**

An Architecture and Engineering Dual Student developed an audit of all of the businesses in the John Street Triangle (that she could access). She carried out detailed interviews with each finding out what they did, how many people they employed, whom they traded with and what their needs were. She classified them by trade and mapped the buildings. This voluntary work was hosted by Sharrow Community Forum. The report was shared on the Portland Works website.

**CATEGORIES:** [Icons for various business types]

**AGENCIES:** Develop understanding of wider business and physical context. Context of businesses helped make planning argument for refusal of application and change of designation for the area from housing and office to mixed use.

**RELATED TOOLS:** Planning Application, Objections to Planning Application, Metalwork Audit, Makers Lab, Sharrow Community Forum, Portland Works Website

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**TOOL: Inside the Triangle Festival**

The Inside the Triangle Festival brought together makers from all around the John Street Triangle Conservation area to show their work and Open Up their Workshops and studios to the public. Portland Works hosted performances from bands that rehearsed or recorded within the building and a ten track CD of their music was sold at the event. Stag Works and Harland Works held drumming Workshops, photographic shoots, and activities and games for children. Architecture students created signage and a programme and map of the area was produced including advertising for local independent businesses. The Steelmaker Portland Works Thornbridge beer was launched at the event.

**CATEGORIES:** [Icons for various business types]

**AGENCIES:** Local businesses gets to know each other better. Development of Shared ethos. Outward facing/ local relationships developed. PIV taking role as mediator, facilitator. Festival development.

Taken on too much and let people down in terms of developing Festival. We do not have graphics support.

**RELATED TOOLS:** Stage, marquee and lighting; Steelmaker beer; John Street Audit

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We had agreed at the Knowledge Transfer Workshop that we needed to make a clear case that the Planning Designation of the John Street Triangle should be Business and Fringe Industry rather than become Business and Housing, as initially recommended by the Planning Officer.<sup>74</sup> This change in designation would support our purchase of the building and our aim to retain a mix of businesses. I considered that we needed to evidence the large number of thriving businesses, which operated successfully from the John Street Triangle as an interdependent and mutually supportive network. This could enable us to make the case that the industry within the John Street Triangle was key to any economic strategy based on the success of SMEs and the heritage and cultural sectors.

Over the summer of 2010, Architecture and Engineering student Caroline Jackson volunteered for Sharrow Community Forum. The brief I set for her was to make an audit of the John Street Triangle Conservation Area. She interviewed each of the businesses, asking if they owned the building, how many people they employed, which other

<sup>74</sup> In the Sheffield Development Plan Core Strategy 2009 (Sheffield City Council), the John Street Triangle was designated as an “Area of Transition”, which was to become an area of PB3 Business and Housing<sup>74</sup>, classed which placed emphasis on Student Housing, and classed warehouses and industry as “unacceptable” (Ibid.). In making this change, Sheffield City Council Planning department argued that, “The proposed emphasis on housing follows the pattern that has already started, of residential developments replacing traditional industry and warehousing” (Ibid.).

Sheffield businesses they worked with, what they produced, where they obtained materials from, and where sold their goods. Most manufacturing businesses were happy to talk to her. It was difficult to document the true extent of the musical activities in the area as many musicians sub-let space, or took on units that were designated as storage so the landlords could pay lower rates.<sup>75</sup> The musicians were happy to speak informally, but did not want to be officially recorded as they felt that it might jeopardise their studio space.

This was social and political work. In each case Caroline spent time at the business and told them about the aims of the Portland Works campaign. She worked to connect people together through the conversations and by making their concerns and the impact on their lives publicly visible. We were making a case that what was being dismissed as small or micro-scale was actually part of a much larger and interconnected web of activity that spread throughout the neighbourhood and city. Links existed between businesses in the John Street Triangle, but also throughout Sheffield. If certain businesses closed, the resilience of this network could significantly diminish. Although the skills and businesses here were small-scale, nurturing them could enable new businesses to flourish.

Once all the data had been collected as accurately and in as much detail as possible, Caroline Jackson produced a report, which mapped each of the businesses by trade, and also included all of the survey data. Its format meant it could be easily printed and shared as a physical object to be passed on and also it could be shared digitally. In some respects this report was making the argument within the terms of these businesses contribution to the market economy. It also had a critical function; in offering a more nuanced and detailed look at the situation it questioned the values and assumptions of regeneration policies. Through this research it became clear that the precarity of many of these businesses rested on the question of ownership and tenancies.

We submitted the completed Audit to the Forward and Area Planning Officer for this area, Laurie Platt, and the Director of Economy, Skills and Enterprise, Edward Highfield. Sheffield City Council did not have the manpower to carry out this research in response to a single Planning Application, and it may have been likely that businesses would not have wanted to share such information with council representatives. The following year, the Forward Planning Officer, Laurie Platt wrote to us to say on the back of this

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<sup>75</sup> Their omission from the report was exacerbated by the fact that Caroline worked at a pub in the evenings and therefore could only visit during the day rather than the evenings.

thorough report he could change the Planning Designation for the John Street Triangle. This was an absolutely critical victory for the campaign, because it prevented the large rise in value for the properties in the area which would have almost certainly occurred had residential uses been permitted. This research contributed to the production of a report by the Planning Officers that recommended the landlords' Planning Application be refused. This led to him withdrawing it in November 2011; a few days before the Application was due to go to Planning Board.<sup>76</sup> This was useful feedback in terms of understanding the effectiveness of this close and careful research as a way to create change in the city.

The care and attention Caroline Jackson applied to developing this tool was a significant factor in its utility. Without working hard to build relationships, and her attention to the detail of how these businesses worked, she would not have produced such an effective report. Her skills as an architecture student enabled her to present the information clearly and engagingly. Her work to build links out from Portland Works to other businesses and creative actors in Sheffield is crucial to the project of commoning. It enables the expression of solidarity with others who are struggling to keep working from day-to-day, and to make space for their activities within the city. Through collaboration rather than competition each part of the network can be strengthened and made more resilient.

The making of this tool contributed in part to a desire to run the 'Inside the Triangle' festival. This would be an extension of the Open Days, where businesses would open up to the public. Portland Works would also host live music and launch 'The Sound of Portland Works' CD featuring bands who rehearsed, or had studios in the building.<sup>77</sup> The aim was to help people working in the neighbourhood get to know one another, and support future collaborations. Through publicity in the local press we also hoped to bring people from across Sheffield into the area to make public the activities that happened.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> The landlord withdrew the Application rather than see it be refused. This was for two reasons, the first being if he withdrew it he could reapply with a slightly modified application in the future without paying an additional fee, and also because if it had been refused this would have set a Planning Precedent for the site. Once an application has been refused, this decision is taken into account in future applications and it is much harder to achieve a favourable decision on a similar application (such as change of use from business to residential). In effect if he had gone to the Planning Board and lost, this would have made residential use on this site very unlikely. In withdrawing it, he still had a negotiating card to play that he could still pursue his original plans.

<sup>77</sup> This CD was produced by Alan Deadman, and was sold for £5 per CD with profits going towards funding the event. Director John Clarke had organised for Thornbridge Brewery to provide Portland Works Summer Ale for free for the event, with funds raised going towards the campaign.

<sup>78</sup> Publicity included articles in the Sheffield Telegraph. 'Chance to take a crafty look inside the "Triangle"', *Sheffield Telegraph*, published online Friday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2013 <<http://www.sheffieldtelegraph.co.uk/news/business/chance-to-take-a-crafty-look-inside-the-triangle-1-5678282>> [accessed August 25<sup>th</sup> 2015].

Portland Works funded the publicity for the event, which included a programme and map of the area, promoting the businesses and organisations that would take part. Many small businesses in Sharrow paid for additional adverts in the programme and these funds went towards running the event. These aspects of the tool promoted cultural, arts and manufacturing businesses throughout Sheffield, bringing new people to the area. There was a development of self-management amongst the various people and organisations that took part, with Portland Works acting to initiate and coordinate where required. In doing so tenants and campaigners drew on ways of working that had been established over the last few years and invited others to share common resources.

## Tool: Sensoria Festival

## Tool: Pecha Kucha, Sheffield Firsts

**TOOL: Sensoria Festival**

Sensoria is a Sheffield based national Festival of film and music, that fosters risk taking and innovation. As part of the Festival in 2012 a massive drumming performance took place in the courtyard and on the roof of Portland Works. Drummers brought a range of drums to the Works of all different sizes and styles and also drummed on the building and found objects and machinery. The event was kicked off by Tenant toolmaker Andy Cole 'drumming' using his drop-hammer. Many people attended the event.



**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

- Raised profile in the city
- Different people attending different events
- Development of community feeling
- drawn into creative family network
- Reach new people
- Courtyards different, unifies space
- Enabling connections with 'the public'
- Developing public profile
- Publicise concerns
- Getting people to buy in to Share issue



**RELATED TOOLS:** Pecha Kucha, Share Launch

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**TOOL: Pecha Kucha: Sheffield Firsts**

Pecha Kucha is an event where speakers have twenty slides and 20 seconds per slide to talk about them. Portland Works hosted an event called Sheffield Firsts that featured people involved in parkour and others. Portland tenant Stuart Mitchell gave a talk about his knife making business. There are strong publicity networks associated with the event and there was a very large audience, including people who had not attended Portland Works before.



**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

- Getting people to buy in to Share issue
- Different people attending different events
- Development of community feeling
- Developing public profile
- Enabling connections with 'the public'

Feeling over stretched with commitments to the project and cannot attend social events, which separates me from group



**RELATED TOOLS:** Sensoria, Inside the Triangle

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As we were preparing for our Share Issue launch, and finalising our Business Plan we were approached by the organisers of Sensoria Festival to hold an event as part of the city-wide programme. The contact for this had been established through Sara Unwin, the director of Galvanise Festival, who by this stage knew many of the tenants well. A programme was published and distributed widely that promoted the event thus:

“Many Sheffield musicians have referenced the industrial sounds and sights of Sheffield as a major influence on their work, and the rhythmic sounds of the steelworks are like the heart and arteries of the city. Sensoria and Galvanize are co-presenting this unique event that will bring drummers and percussionists from various Sheffield bands together for a performance full of bombast, set against an industrial backdrop – the sound of a forge hammer will kick off proceedings. This event will be a fundraiser for the Save Portland Works campaign.”<sup>79</sup>

A representative of Portland Works Committee was able to make a public speech from the roof sharing our intention to become an Industrial and Provident society and purchase the building. The organisation of the space for this event showed it was easy to create a focal point where the majority of the crowd could assemble, whilst having secondary spaces for serving drinks, and gathering for informal conversations.

The drummers played the building – the steps, the handrails, the gas canisters and the tools. The organisers requested that tenant Andy Cole of Wigfull Tools played his forge drop hammer to start the event, which required particularly skilful handling. Everyone danced. The building played a crucial mediating role in the event, it created a certain kind of atmosphere and the event proposed a different way of inhabiting the space than was common in its working life. It was understood that we had become part of the creative family of Sheffield, a network that was well established through formal activities such as the cultural consortium, and informal friendships. Portland Works had taken on a new role in the life of the city.

Soon after the Sensoria event we were approached by Pecha Kucha to hold an event in the courtyard “Sheffield Firsts”.<sup>80</sup> Knife maker Stuart Mitchell was invited to speak about his and his parent’s knife making business and Portland Works being the first place stainless steel cutlery was ever manufactured. The event had a diverse range of speakers and performers, including practitioners of parkour, who utilised the building for their acrobatics. The capacities of the building were again challenged, becoming a place of performance and experiment. This event brought a diverse group of people to the building, many of who had not visited before; it was an opportunity to encourage people to join in the campaign. These events were often organised and attended by those with very good social connections in the city, who spread the word about our aims, raising

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<sup>79</sup> Sensoria is a film and music festival in venues across Sheffield. Sensoria <<http://2011.sensoria.org.uk/>> [accessed August 24th 2015].

<sup>80</sup> Pecha Kucha invites speakers and performers to show 20 images and speak on each of them for 20 seconds, on a theme decided for each event. Pecha Kucha <<http://www.pechakucha.org/cities/sheffield>> [accessed August 27th 2015].

public awareness of what we were doing.

Sensoria and Pecha Kucha carried out the entire organisation of these events including obtaining insurance, marshalling and promotions. Being a partner enabled the Portland Works campaign group to learn from their experience and to test something without too much investment or risk on our part. Through these events we began to recognise that Portland Works was an incredibly good venue. The success of the event led to the decision to launch our Share Issue at Portland Works, and established a practice of holding cultural events and performances on site. We found that when people visited they understood the campaign and our aims in a way that they did not otherwise. Without the stated pragmatic aim of raising funds, there may have been some Committee Members who were reluctant to host such an event, yet because of these qualities people were encouraged to take on something new. It challenged our understanding of what Portland Works is and could be.

Tool: Share Offer Document (S.O.D)  
 Tool: Publicity

**TOOL: Share Offer Document (S.O.D)**

The Share Offer Document was a two-sided A4 document which set out the Share offer, the aims of the society and why people should invest. It was developed over a number of meetings, and its production caused much debate and some disagreement. Eleven Design produced the Graphic Design pro bono, negotiated as part of the Knowledge Transfer project, where they were employed to do graphics work including the production of the Re-Imagining Portland Works book. It featured portraits of tenants produced by Eric Winnert for the Portland Works Posters.

**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

- Ability to issue Shares
- Structure for decisions & accountability
- Negotiating what is important
- Understanding our aims, aspirations & ethics

**RELATED TOOLS:** Share Issue I, Marketing materials, Re-Imagining Portland Works book, Share Launch, Open Access Photography Library, Portland Works Posters

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**TOOL: Flyers & Marketing Materials**

Designed by Jordan Jay Lloyd there were 1000 copies of the first series of flyers produced, of four different designs, in order to publicise the 'arts education', 'music making', 'heritage crafts' and 'community action' at Portland Works. The aim was to ensure that the diversity of the tenants and aims were made public. Campaigners distributed the flyers in venues throughout Sheffield including cinemas, shops, community centres, takeaways, galleries and cafes. The designs were funded through the Knowledge Transfer.

**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

- Making PW concerns visible
- Raising profile in the city
- Professional public face
- Diversity of PW made central & public
- Support for Share issue
- Share sales

**RELATED TOOLS:** Knowledge Transfer Funding, Share Issue I

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In order to promote our Share Issue, we had to produce both publicity materials and a Share Offer Document. The Knowledge Transfer money funded these two items, and it was through this process that we secured contacts with graphic designers for reduced rates. The process of designing these materials was a laborious one, which spread over a number of meetings. Some members of the committee felt the time spent had been done so unduly, but others spoke afterwards of how important these negotiations were to our organisational priorities and our emerging public identity. The Share Offer Document had space for only 150 words and a small number of images. Due to these tight restrictions made agreement about its content particularly difficult, earning the name the 'SOD'. The limitations and intensity of the design of the document led to greater conflict than had perhaps been experienced before in these meetings, but this became a situation where learning happened and people spoke passionately about what they felt strongly about a certain approach.

Initially it was suggested that we should focus on the Heritage Crafts in promoting Portland Works, which had gained us a lot of media attention, and was a clear narrative that could be 'sold' to the city. Those interested in heritage aspects of the project were often well organised, had previous involvement in volunteering and organising and the majority were relatively well off. I was concerned at the time that defining the identity of the community at Portland Works solely through its heritage value was potentially problematic as it was an oversimplification of a complex place and could lead to the exclusion of number of tenants from the conversation, and dissuade those potential investors and supporters who were more interested in the business or community aspects of the project. By focussing purely on the heritage aspects we became in competition with other heritage projects and organisations. Another concern was that it could be perceived to be an identity that is in 'inevitable decline' or as being minor and disconnected from the economic and business life of the city. Desires to maintain this 'heritage crafts' community could then be portrayed as nostalgic, rather than about social justice or equity, and this may determine the ways in which they are addressed and the ability of those considered to be 'within' the heritage crafts community to mobilise relations with others.

The final document emphasised the diversity of the site, and all tenants felt happy to be called 'makers', which was an inclusive term that presented an identity that was tied to production. The conversation had enabled us to further clarify our aims, aspirations and ethics. Crucially its publication allowed us to issue shares. The feedback for this tool could be understood to be the willingness of tenants and campaigners to be identified by

it, and our ability to sell shares and attract investment and support.<sup>81</sup> Few people mentioned this as an important tool, but I would suggest this was because the learning we made through it was internalised and became part of our collective identity.

Tool: Live Project I

Tool: Inhabited Plans

Tool: 1:200 Scale Model

Tool: Skills Audit

**TOOL: Live Project I**

The Live Projects are a six-week design project carried out by 5th and 6th Year Architectural Masters Students and Architectural design Students. During this period they carry out a 'real project' for a 'real client' and they evolve their brief with the client. During the first Portland Works Live Project, mentored by Cristina Caroli, students had an office on site in the grinding shop at Portland Works. This gave them opportunities to spend a lot of time with the tenants at Portland Works. The Building Group was the client for the project.

**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

Keeping people involved  
Students time & skills  
Showed the value of the students to the project

Many people were sceptical about student projects, and although the Live Project was generally welcomed and their work progressed, few trying to take this wealth of information forward.

**RELATED TOOLS:** Live Project II, Scale Model of Portland Works, Inhabited Plans, Skills Audit, History MA placement, Building Working Group 100

**TOOL: Inhabited Plans**

As part of the first Live Project students were asked to edit and develop the floor plans of the building, including showing machinery, fixtures and fittings and ensuring measurements were accurate. In addition they developed a plan of the courtyard that showed use during an average day, including sites where jet washing occurred, parking, painting and other business related uses.

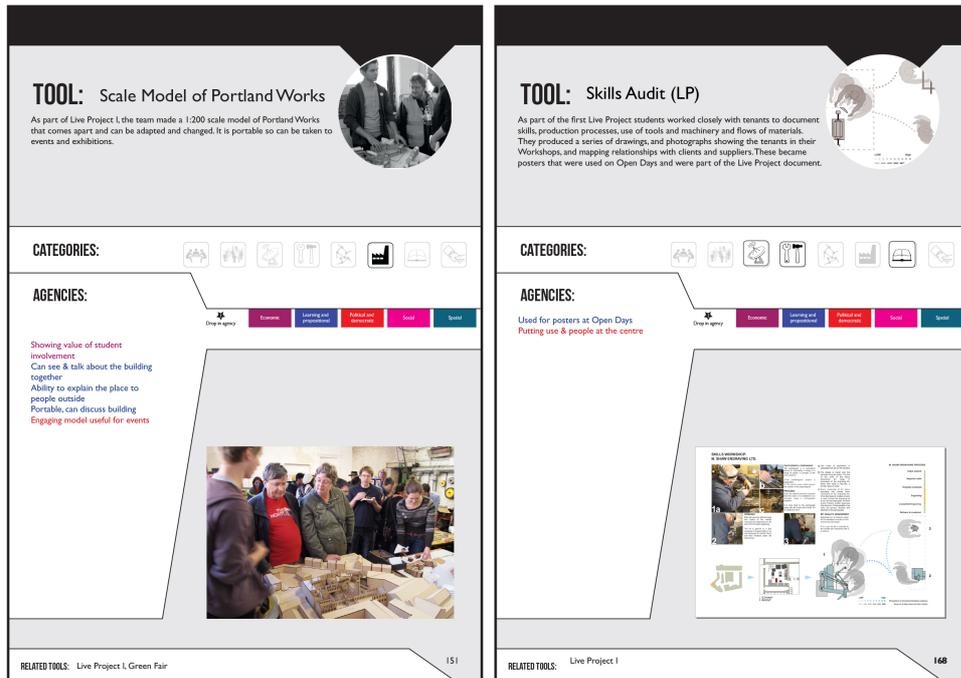
**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

Putting use & people at the centre  
Making argument for skills  
Understanding what people do

**RELATED TOOLS:** Building manager role, rent review, Planning Application, objections to Planning Application 80

81 The skills of the tenants continued to be the most important factor in selling shares, either through those who visited the Open Days, or those that saw them in the press and television. In 2010 tenant Stuart Mitchell, the knife maker was approached by the production company of the BBC 2 prime time series *Heritage Heroes* (BBC 2), and invited to feature on the show, along with Toolmaker Andrew Cole. The tenants earlier media coverage on the BBC, such as the BBC website ('Saving Portland Works in Sheffield', *BBC News*, April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2010 <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/sheffield/hi/people\\_and\\_places/newsid\\_8635000/8635300.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/sheffield/hi/people_and_places/newsid_8635000/8635300.stm)> [accessed August 25<sup>th</sup> 015]); Radio Four (*You and yours*, BBC Radio 4, May 19<sup>th</sup> 2010) and local new programme Look North (*Look North (Yorkshire)*, BBC 1, March 26<sup>th</sup> 2010) combined with information that was found on the Portland Works website encouraged the producers to get in contact. Filmed in 2011, the programme led to a large spike of £15,000 in share sales the weeks.



During this time much of the focus and discussion were about raising shares and negotiating the purchase, much of what we spoke about was pragmatic and about the present situation. We needed to broaden our discussions, think about the future and have the capacity to conduct particular research. Collaborative student projects with Sheffield University seemed one way of doing this.<sup>82</sup> One of the first of these was a Live Project, which would bring a dozen Masters students full-time for six weeks into Portland Works to carry out research and actions.<sup>83</sup> The Steering Group offered Wigfull Tools' forge as a student project office for the duration of the project, which enabled the students to work on site and get to know tenants and the building well. They were invited to join in meetings and had the opportunity to try out some of the manufacturing processes with guidance from the makers.

In developing the brief for the project there is a need to balance the 'usefulness' for the community partner whilst retaining academic value for students, together setting out with something that the particular group of students has the capacities, skills and motivation

<sup>82</sup> Portland Works has hosted three 'Live Projects' as a client, and has worked with the School of English, History, Journalism, Town and Regional Planning, Architecture, Urban Design and Conservation.

<sup>83</sup> Lecturer Cristina Cerulli, who obtained the Knowledge Transfer funding became the project mentor at the University of Sheffield School of Architecture (SSoA). Tutors at the SSoA have developed the program and a process of review and development during the twelve years that the programme has run at the school, making them a well-refined tool. Students give feedback on the process through a reflective essay and clients send feedback on the projects to the tutors. Through being on site the students developed a more nuanced understanding of the resources, capacities and potentials of themselves, and their client.

to carry out.<sup>84</sup> This is usually negotiated through an evolving brief, which is developed dialogue between the client or client's representative, the mentor and the student group. In this case, there was a decision to make a series of 'tools' that could be used to support the fight against the Planning Application for Change of Use, help support the development of regeneration proposals, and survey the makers and their machinery and tools on site that might enable future business development and collaboration. The tenants at Portland Works saw this as an opportunity to teach the students about an aspect of Sheffield's history and culture.

A useful point of leverage for the students to exploit with their tools was that in the case of a Listed Building, an applicant desiring Change of Use must first prove that the existing use is no longer viable:

“Many historic buildings have well-established and appropriate uses. Occasionally though, some change is required to ensure a structure's future care, repair and protection. Creative adaptation can contribute positively to a building's history; equally, inappropriate re-use can fundamentally detract from its special interest.”<sup>85</sup>

The Grade II\* listing stated that the architectural significance of Portland Works is linked to the legibility of small-scale, historical metalwork processes, and through its industrial fixtures and fittings.<sup>86</sup> I considered that an argument could be made that the developer's proposals, (which were for significant subdivision, removal of historic fixtures, and enclosure of features), were detrimental to the historic character. However, as the drawings that the Landlord submitted had shown existing rooms as bare, it was difficult

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84 For more about this process see 'Building knowledge outside of the academy'. Julia Udall, David Forrest and Katie Stewart, 'Locating and building knowledges outside of the academy: approaches to engaged teaching at the University of Sheffield', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 20.2 (2015) pp. 158-170.

85 Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

86 English Heritage set out the importance of Portland Works thus, "Portland Works is a large integrated cutlery works built in the 1870s. The complex is an extremely good and complete example of a large purpose-built integrated cutlery works dating largely from a single 1870s building phase with a well-designed layout for this building type. The works was mechanised, with evidence for a steam engine, but there are also unpowered workshop ranges, illustrating the fact that Sheffield based its reputation upon the supremacy of traditional methods; it was said in 1879 that 'the highest excellence can be attained only by the employment of intelligent hand labour' Portland Works is an important survival which demonstrates the layout of such a complex, highlights the limited use of power in the cutlery manufacturing process, and retains both hand forges and steam grinding rooms, extremely rare survivals of building types related to specific processes, with probably fewer than five sites in Sheffield now retaining evidence of both. These characteristics, together with the degree of completeness of survival make this site of particular importance and justify its upgrading to Grade II\*." (English Heritage)

for the Planning Officer to take these fixtures and features into account.<sup>87</sup> We needed to show what was architecturally important about the building.

Students updated existing plans drawing on the knowledge of the tenants and their skills and experience in surveying a building. They spent significant time in the workshops learning how each maker used their tools, machinery and space. This detail in this work would not only be of use to make an argument against the Change of Use proposal, but also in supporting the development plans; as an organisation we learnt how tenants used the building and could be altered and what needed to be retained. In linking the architecture and its use the students were showing that economy and the fabric of the building were interconnected. The students also produced a laser cut 1:200 model of the building that could be taken to pieces, and used to discuss future plans with tenants, builders and volunteers.<sup>88</sup>

To work with students became an established practice, and although at times tenants felt it was asking too much of them and their time, it gave an emphasis to learning, experimentation, and collaboration. It led to the establishment of good networks with the university and shareholders amongst the staff and students.

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<sup>87</sup> I was aware that a statutory consultee, English Heritage had written in favour of the Application for Change of Use, as they saw it as the only viable way to ensure investment in the fabric of the building. Therefore we also needed to demonstrate that it was viable for us as an emerging organisation to look after the building in accordance with its architectural significance. Part of the argument for this was that Portland Works IPS (BenCom) could attract grant funding to which a private landlord would not be entitled. We therefore needed to set out our approach to this.

<sup>88</sup> When they were commissioned to develop phased proposals for the refurbishment of the site, architects Studio Polpo used these drawings and scale model in developing their plans for the building and have conversations with tenants about the plans. The scale model of the building was also displayed at Open Days and events and taken to talks about the project whilst we were working to attract shareholders for the project.



A crucial part of the development of the Business Plan was obtaining a valuation of the building. The landlord had initially asked us for £750,000 for the building whilst it was possible for him to achieve planning permission, but since the Planning Application had been withdrawn in April 2011, we felt that we were in a much better position to negotiate. Although we had published this initial offer in the Business Plan we still needed a more accurate figure to enable realistic future planning. This would enable us to set a goal for our fundraising, and negotiate with the Landlord and the bank and other potential lenders. Once we had a well-founded figure we could also forward plan for aspects such as refurbishment, maintenance and employing a building manger. The valuation was funded through an interest free loan from Sharrow Community Forum. The Surveyor that was selected did a considerable amount of work for the current Portland Works landlord.

The Surveyor told us that he estimated the value of the Works to be £450,000, based on a 10 x gross rental income multiplier. I was concerned this seemed very high, as the Conditional Survey estimated the cost of Urgent Work to the building to be around £800,000. His estimate of the value would be zero if he took the extent of the work required into account; however because we had put together such a strong plan for the redevelopment of the site, he argued that it was viable as a going concern. This gave me two concerns; the first was that this valuation seemed incredibly high, and although perhaps achievable, would reduce the money that we had to spend on repairs. The second was that the landlord would make profit from our hard work. The value that had been built up through these social relations, networks and mutual support as something done in common not only became commodified, but actually worked against us, requiring more free work on our behalf to pay for this increase in cost.

It was considered by the group that the best approach to negotiating the price with the landlord was to have a single representative for Portland Works and this responsibility fell to our chair, Derek Morton. The advice he received at the time from a supporter who had worked in estates and property for a very large company was to accept this offer. Although I expressed my concerns, I could see that the strain on our chair as an individual during this time was immense, and I was not confident enough in my own opinion to insist on pursuing a lower purchase price.<sup>89</sup> The current landlord was threatening to pull out of the deal entirely and argued that this process was putting considerable personal strain on him and that he was losing money in this offer. I was not convinced and we had information at the time to show that the property had been sold

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<sup>89</sup> Subsequent to the sale we were told that the building had been overvalued by at least £50,000. The use of a ten-times multiplier is appropriate for prime residential rather than tertiary industrial uses.

between related companies to increase the price, but I was uncertain of how to approach such a situation. My usual strategy would be to invite new people to the project who had experience of negotiating such deals, and began to speak to people who may be able to support us. However, after some discussion with others in the group I realised that this would place even greater pressure onto our Chair, and undermine his confidence. We were finding our way through processes that were new to us all, placing trust in one another and standing together and supporting decisions was critical to this.

In the purchasing of the Works in early 2013 a legal clause known as an 'Asset Lock' was implemented. This prevents the building being sold for private profit. If the Industrial and Provident Society (BenCom) became no longer viable, the assets must be transferred to another organisation with a similar stated community benefit purpose. There is no profit making ability on resale of the land, and therefore this was crucial in terms of preventing further value that we created together becoming part of the market again. This addressed one of the primary concerns, which was that through working to make this a desirable place to work, we would ourselves contribute to the gentrification of the area, and end up destroying what we sought to protect. Combined with the change of planning designation to ensure it remained an area of light industry, the Asset Lock seemed the best possible way to make our desire to retain this as a place of work sustainable within the system of property.

The purchase was paid for by share funds and a loan. This was due to us not meeting our full and very ambitious target for fundraising. The loan was charged at a rate of interest that depended on growth. This would require us either to increase our rental income or raise funds to cover this elsewhere. Despite market research showing we could, we did not want to significantly increase our rent, as keeping the accommodation affordable was central to the aims of the organisation. We would aim to increase our overall income this through improving the efficiency of the way in which the space was used, bringing out of use areas into use, and raising funding for this work to the building through grant applications. However, there is a fundamental contradiction between attempting to set up commons as a form of resistance to the property market and yet still having to engage in the privatised banking system. The alternative would be some system of credit union where growth was not required for such a loan. The size of the loan in the case of Portland Works provokes questions about the different scales at which resources need to be managed or networks of sharing need to be formed.

On the week of the purchase a few hundred Shareholders got together outside Portland Works and posed for a picture. This was used in the press coverage and became a powerful image, saying that together different kinds of place in the city could be made. This was a powerful political statement and at the same time, worked to form a group identity and sense of friendship between those who took part.

## Tool: Building Manager Role

### TOOL: Building Manager Role

Prior to the purchase of the building went through the role of Building Manager was created. This was the first paid role in the organisation and included the day-to-day management of the building. The role was given to a candidate who had extensive community and business development experience, rather than a candidate with a property management background. The Building Manager set up Officer in the Knife Maker's Workshop.



**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

- Being proactive about the Works
- Opportunities for informal conversations
- Being on site and around makes BM aware of issues
- Tenants being listened to and feeling that it will be actioned
- Regulation of Shared spaces
- Role with advocates/partners
- Role with tenants
- Action on repairs and maintenance
- Development of community space
- Reorganising building to bring new people in
- Back & forth with tenant - ensure good financial plan
- Developing financial plan with tenants
- Co-ordinating role

- Manager has no commercial building expertise
- Not decision making role
- Loose job description for manager who is very experienced raises issue of who leads
- FLAG want Building Group to develop cost plan in order to determine financial plan for the following year, and ensure purchase is viable, but BIC feel that they cannot accurately/meaningfully do so without more information. Leads to deadlock and arguments.



**RELATED TOOLS:** Volunteer Days, Building Work, Rent Reviews, Clean Up Days, Building Managers Office.

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Prior to the purchase of Portland Works the Steering Group decided by to employ a Building Manager. It was agreed that this role should be to help build and strengthen the community of tenants and help us build networks and relationships within the city. The manager would collect rents, oversee the day to day maintenance and running of the site and also be responsible for encouraging tenants to sign a tenancy agreement. We employed Colin Havard, former director of Sharrow Community Forum, who had many years of community development experience. The previous landlord had spent less than half a day a month on site, yet as an organisation we were proposing employing someone for at least 3 days a week, and so this was a significant investment. The motivation to extend he role was our financial sustainability and having happy tenants who took an active part in the organisation.

The Manager was to be based on site, sharing knife maker Stuart Mitchell's office. He was to attend key Working Group Meetings and all Steering Group meetings where he would report back to the organisation. A job description was written which set out responsibilities such as ensuring the implementation of strategic business objectives, directing and planning essential services, ensuring that activities on site met Health and Safety requirements, and the project management of small works on site. This was an ambitious set of tasks. As the only paid employee and one with considerable experience in the community development sector, many volunteers expected him to take on lots of additional day-to-day and event-based responsibilities. This included volunteer management and coordination of Open Days. These additional responsibilities came about in due to those fulfilling these roles stepping back from the project and that his presence on site enabled him to do this effectively.

In terms of ensuring the financial security of Portland Works the Building Manager carried out three main tasks. The first was to replace tenants who were using the Works as cheap storage space, or had not paid the rent for an extended period; this was done slowly and they were offered the opportunity to have less space and/or take time in paying arrears. The second was to attract new tenants who were keen to participate actively in the life of the building, and were working in manufacturing. The third was to review rents of existing tenants to bring them in line with one another, and, as our cash flow was tight, to ensure that rents were paid on time. These things were often controversial, and decisions about how we would pursue them were made through deliberation at Steering Group meetings, and the judgements of the Building Manager.

From his experience in managing Sharrow Community Forum, Colin understood the importance of talking with all of the tenants, building their trust and understanding how they worked. This was developed through formal rent reviews, and informal activities such as him sweeping up the courtyard, loading skips, or cleaning out drains. This care-taking of the site meant he was carrying out tasks that were not removed from the dirt and noise and disputes on the site, and showed a willingness to help make things work on a day-to-day basis.

As we took on legal responsibility for the building and became under closer scrutiny by the Fire Service, Insurers and Planning Officers, it became clear that we would need to make some changes to the manner in which the building had run. However, we were aware that this needed to be done with care, and be conscious of working patterns and

practices that had been established over time, by tenants who were experienced and competent in managing their day-to-day affairs. These were things to be negotiated through conversation and understanding the particular context rather than by setting out rules in advance. As Directors were legally and financially responsible for the building this took trust and confidence in one another and the proposed way forward. The Fire Officer, Conservation Officer and representative from English Heritage were all very supportive, and each recognised the nature of what we were trying to do and that currently funds for big changes were not currently available.

This was a successful role. Tenants expressed that they felt that their concerns were being addressed. Rental income met our projections and we had a waiting list of tenants. However, the formalisation and extension of this role also served to bring certain tensions to a head, as disputes, which had previously been grumbled about quietly, were voiced more openly. Colin began to be expected to mediate or resolve a broad range of concerns. In the first few months, a couple of tenants chose to leave, due to discussions on what was acceptable in shared spaces, and not wishing to take part in the organisation. He worked to reformulate tenants individual needs and desires as collective ones, and invited them to take part in events and meetings.

The Building Manager took responsibility for the day-to-day maintenance and repair work, as well as managing small building contracts. For a period that Steering Group decided to extend his role, although this was an unforeseen increase in outgoings; this was later reversed due to diminishing funds and a more risk averse Treasurer. It was discussed that it would be useful to split the responsibilities into two roles so that Colin could carry out more community and economic development work, and we could employ someone at a lower rate of pay to do maintenance and caretaking. We did not acquire such funding and this did not occur. The Business Education and Culture Working Group should have led this work, however it was poorly attended. I contributed little to its development due to work commitments, and others who were part of it were also over committed elsewhere. There was a constant tension between our ambitions and the capacity we had to achieve our aims.

## Tool: Away Day I

## Tool: Away Day II

**TOOL: Away Day I**

The first Away Day, held at Harland Works brought together supporters and Directors to discuss how we would action our Business Plan aims, where decisions should be made, and who would have the authority to make them. This was organised and facilitated by Studio Polpo and Sharrow Community Forum.



**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

Determine governance structure around Steering Group/Director group merge

Feel I have to take a lot of responsibility for developing strategic approach and participants are quite negative/ hard work rather than supportive. Lots of time to be put in.



**RELATED TOOLS:** Governance Structure

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**TOOL: Away Day II**

Developed to co-create a strategy for the organisation, the second Away Day was primarily for the Directors and Steering Group members. The concern was that we had lost track of our Business Plan aims and Working Groups were disjointed and confusion about responsibilities. In addition, decisions could be quite arbitrary, or activities pursued that did not fit with our core objectives. A Director and the Building Manager developed Workshop activities. A professional facilitator led the day to enable an outsider perspective and to ask difficult questions that may not have been considered by the Steering Group.



**CATEGORIES:**

**AGENCIES:**

Strategy developed for organisation

Approaches to developing structure discussed together

New people become part of group

Space for in depth conversation, strategic

Learn who is fulfilling which role

Operationalising & critiquing Business Plan collectively

Understanding of knowledge gaps

Ideas for new tools Shared (archive, photographs, history)

Consolidation and development



**RELATED TOOLS:** Timelines, Working Group Summaries, Business Plan I & II.

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The first Away Day had been an opportunity to come together to consider the governance of our organisation. We design a structure that would combine the Steering Group and Directors meetings so that many people could participate in the organisational decision-making. This was a difficult choice to make, as the Directors would have legal responsibility for the organisation, and others who had the right to attend would not. However it was felt that the strength of the organisation was in the range of people who were involved, and the proposed open format was the way to allow us to fully benefit from our shareholders and supporters involvement.

After the purchase of the building there was a drop in agency felt by many of the members of the organisation, because suddenly our goals were not as clear, united and focused. Although the process of raising shares had been long and onerous, and the purchase negotiations had caused stress, we all understood one another and our aims. The Share Issue and Purchase had been clear, shared goals that could accommodate many different ways of working in their achievement; upon the purchase of the building we began to perceive differences in our means and ends. We needed to come together to

discuss these governance issues, in a space that allowed us to focus on ourselves as an organisation, rather than the day-to-day concerns of running a building. In May 2013 I organised a second Away Day because I was concerned about the lack of a clear vision. This was manifested through the disconnection of our activities from our Business Plan, and no forward planning by Working Groups.

If we no longer felt that our 2011 Business Plan expressed our aims we could change it, but through conversation it became clear it was more a case of it being forgotten. At the same time, others had raised concerns that the various Working Groups were not communicating well with each other, and the priorities and timescales for work were out of kilter. There were tensions and hierarchies emerging between groups, in particular with clashes between Finance Legal and Governance (FLAG) and the Building Group around budgets, and decisions on priorities. We had previously agreed that major decisions should be made by the Steering Group based on reports from each of the Working Groups, and they could make lesser decisions. However the lack of good communication and confusion over purpose meant this was ineffectual. The impact was deterioration in our relationships, and an inability to progress with projects.

Prior to the Away Day I attended each of the Working Groups over the course of a fortnight and asked each group to set out the roles and responsibilities of the group, as they perceived them.<sup>90</sup> I also asked what they were working on at that point in time, and how they related to our Business Plan. I documented and circulated this information so that we could see the overlaps and gaps were in terms of perceived responsibilities and decision-making, and carrying out the Business Plan. We discussed my findings at the Away Day to resolve contradictions and agree ways of dealing with the concerns that had arisen. This included procedures for the Steering Group meetings and revised definitions of each Working Group.

As new members had joined the group they did not necessarily understand the history of the organisation. This meant that work was duplicated and there was a lack of understanding of some of the aspects that had enabled us to learn together and develop a shared ethos. At the same time I was concerned that those who were joining the group felt excluded because there were closer bonds between those who had been through big decisions and difficult moments together, and did not want the group to become one which excluded new people and could not change and develop in terms of its aims and

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<sup>90</sup> This work of attending groups meant I gave up consecutive evenings with my new baby over a fortnight, but I had learned how important it was that the tool was developed in a bottom up fashion, drawing on the experiences and concerns of those involved, and making it clear this was the case. I also felt that working in this way got people into the right frame of mind to engage in the conversations, as they had begun prior to the session.

approach. It seemed that some of our activities had become fairly arbitrary, based on what people fancied doing, rather than what we wished to achieve and particularly our responsibilities to tenants. Other issues included a lack of clear direction, a feeling of resistance from old members to new ideas, or work not being valued. These issues could lead to people leaving and, as we relied on volunteers, would be massively damaging to the organisation.

My response was to create a series of Timelines of the organisation in relation to each of the Business Plan aims. This visual and chronological approach was thought of as a way that people could easily engage with and see their place in. I invited small groups to take in turn each of the Business Plan aims, and add parts of the story of the campaign that I had omitted from the timelines and, crucially plan their future activities, in terms of those Working Groups in which they were a part. If proposed activities did not fit within these aims, we then discussed whether we should not carry them out, or whether we needed to change our aims. This also enabled those members who were new to the group to be able to build on successes of the organisation, or see possibilities in existing relationships or ways of working. The Timelines gave the organisation a past, present and future. What we did together could change over time, but we valorised past achievements in a way that demonstrated the values of the organisation. The Away Days supported our self-management and a collective approach to defining how we would achieve our Business Plan aims. We consolidated our past achievements and set out future aims and desires. The success of the event could be measured by the attendance and enthusiastic engagement with the day, and the new practices associated with meetings that were established.

## Chapter 8

# Conclusions: Commons, Tools and Agencies at Portland Works

### Overview of the study undertaken

This study addresses the following questions:

- In the context of gentrification and loss of affordable space for small-scale industry and making in UK cities, how can communities come together to safeguard these kinds of spaces in ways that are just, equitable and sustainable?
- What role could 'Urban Commons' have and what kinds of agencies are needed for Commoning?
- What kinds of tools are required to achieve Agencies of Commoning?

My research into tools and agencies of Commoning at Portland Works is carried out with many others. Through mapping, active participation and co-designing and making tools, I seek to make concerns visible, develop a better understanding, and contribute to actively transforming the situation. In doing so I engage in theories of gentrification, Urban Commons, and mutual agency.

The topic of gentrification is frequently considered in terms of residential accommodation and the displacement of working classes living in a city, or the impact of the provision of high-end leisure and retail on the diversity of a neighbourhood.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Few studies into gentrification investigate the impact of the market and regeneration and

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<sup>1</sup> Engels.

<sup>2</sup> Slater.

<sup>3</sup> Slater.  
<sup>3</sup> Marcuse.

<sup>4</sup> Anna Minton.

<sup>5</sup> Heidi Sohn, Stavros Kousoulas and Gerhard Bruyns

planning policies on the provision of diverse workspace for manufacturing and making. I consider that this will become an increasingly pressing concern due to additional pressure on places of work produced by demand for residential space and recent Planning and Regeneration policies.<sup>4</sup> It raises questions how these factors impact upon labour relations, the kind of work and workplace available, the possibilities for self-employment in manufacturing, the need to make certain levels of profit to sustain rent costs and the relationship between spaces of work and the rest of the city.

Investigations into Urban Commons focus predominantly on public spaces, sites of political protest, or spaces of leisure or domesticity.<sup>5, 6, 7</sup> In exploring Commons as a place of work, I seek to bring new questions and practices to the debate. Drawing on the problems associated with gentrification, and more broadly the impact of the neoliberal production of the city upon the sustainability of industrial and manufacturing space, I examine why it might be necessary to hold spaces of work in Common, and what an Urban Commons might be in such a context. I argue that it requires different kinds of struggle and offers a different basis for mutual action.

## Contribution to knowledge

My thesis makes an intellectual contribution to the academic literature through developing an articulated understanding of the Tools and Agencies required for Commoning in a community of makers faced with gentrification and displacement. In doing so I address questions of what tools are, how they produce agencies, and the kinds of tools and agencies that are required for Commoning at Portland Works. I argue that although ‘tools’ frequently occur in research into Commons and participatory spatial practices, in both activist and academic contexts there is little examination of what a tool is beyond that it is linked to action. I contend that a nuanced and shared understanding of the agencies required for commoning can be formed through actively participating in the co-design and co-production of a number of tools, including collaborative mapping.

An Urban Commons has its seeds in the distinct characteristics of a place and the people who are concerned with it and wish to nurture its establishment. Design is understood as having distributed agency, bringing together the human and non-human in the

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<sup>4</sup> Anna Minton.

<sup>5</sup> Heidi Sohn, Stavros Kousoulas and Gerhard Bruyns

<sup>6</sup> Stavrides, Stavros

<sup>7</sup> Marc Neelen and Ana Džokić.

production of change. Mutual activities as diverse as the careful repair of a post box, the demonstration of a manufacturing process, drumming on a calor gas canister, the production of a flyer, or the writing of a paper protesting against a building valuation, all contribute to the making and remaking of a very particular Commons. To understand these doings as co-designed tools is to pull them out of the background and to bring them into relation to one another as being formative of Portland Works as Urban Commons.

To have many tools to hand is to be able to define the terms of engagement and struggle for change on many fronts. To take account of their diversity is to acknowledge that an Urban Commons goes beyond any one person's conception of its boundaries. As we mapped the tools it became clear that we could not trace all of the agencies that these tools produced, even at the point of time we spoke. In showing the sheer number of tools and agencies produced, I wished to draw attention to the multiple possibilities that each affords, and the many things that people considered they had done to save Portland Works. Those tools that may have featured in only one or two accounts or been considered to be minor could have been important to achieving agency, in ways that were not perceived by the group. Through focusing on the notion of tools I have supported a more reflexive understanding of our actions that builds space to look at how we work as a collective, and a care for one another's contributions. This knowledge has been used to change the way in which we do things at Portland Works and is now entwined with the processes of Commoning.

### Limitations to this study

This thesis focuses on a single case, and therefore I do not draw comparisons across cases, or make generalized statements about Urban Commons; rather my conclusions relate to this particular context. The decision to focus on Portland Works this was made in response to the evolving project to enable me to engage in design research participate in depth in the situation.

Related to this decision is the question of balancing priorities due to being so intimately involved in the research. This was addressed in part through inviting critical friends and developing tools for supporting my research (such as talks, co-written papers, events, teaching projects). However, the kinds of knowledge and work required for my thesis did at times diverge from that required in achieving our goals at Portland Works. If I were to use a similar methodology again, I would keep a diary of the research and theory as it

developed through a blog, in order to make a space for reflections on the relationship between these two strands. This could also be an opportunity to bring in other voices as blog post authors as the project progressed and become another place for wider engagement in theory by those involved in the project.<sup>8</sup>

This thesis is concerned with *how* things did or did not happen. I therefore acknowledge there are limitations in relation to the question of *why* things did or did not happen. This focus was driven by design as being an important part of my methodology- design asks '*how?*' with a view to intervening and changing the situation and the desire to bring the non-human into play as an agent. This means that there is less discussion of opinions, disagreements and motivations of individual human actors.

Due to the emphasis on tools and their production, community is to an extent defined by presence and participation, whether this is direct or mediated for a time through the production of a tool. The 'community', as understood here, is the various and many people who have acted to safeguard Portland Works, because they care, and because they feel they can offer something to its future. In mapping I chose the ten people who were most involved at a particular point in time, in order to gather the fullest accounts of the tools and bring as much of the process to the fore as possible; this was necessary to address my questions. Some of the ten people I mapped with were less involved in the day-to-day activities; their commentary was less detailed, focusing more on why things happened rather than how. To include a greater number of people, would lead to the inclusion of a greater number of tools, agencies and drops in agencies, and may bring to the fore a greater number of controversies. However, I do not consider that it would fundamentally alter my conclusions.

In choosing to look at tools and those who produced them, to some degree I am focussing on those who have some degree of agency (they could partake in some form), or those for whom the tools we made enabled their achieving agency. I would argue however that in noting close to 200 tools, and by recording them I am discovering and valuing a range of contributions which otherwise might go unnoticed, or seen as background to more important 'core' debates and activities. In emphasising the diversity of tools that we produced I seek to valorise the diverse contributions, concerns and interests.

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<sup>8</sup> This is a process I am undertaking in my Post-Doctoral post, on AHRC Connected Communities project 'Stories of Change: Energy and Community, Past, Present and Future'. See, [www.storiesfutureworks.wordpress.com](http://www.storiesfutureworks.wordpress.com)

Through studying tools and their modification I delineate community not through mobilising familiar narratives or preconceived groups, but through an emphasis on what they are doing, and who is drawn into the project at a point in time. The community of Portland Works is defined by an active choice to take part, rather than an attribution from ‘outside’ through a perceived common property. I believe that suggesting that groups are marginal or vulnerable (and therefore need to be ‘included’ by the researcher) you can also fix and determine people’s capacities, concerns and potentialities, based on your own limited understanding or expectations. My experience is that we surprised one another with our capacities, and shared endeavours. The shift in emphasis from people to tools challenges familiar categories and opens up new ways of understanding what matters, and what is possible.

To define a community through the tools, and the relations that they produce, both in making and in use, I am also stating that community is always provisional. This is not a fixed group; it is formed and reformed through the co-production of tools that enable themselves and others to act. It is always in the making. A tool should not be considered to only act at a single moment in time with narrowly defined purpose; new agencies and affordances can be produced in different hands or in relation to new tools. The same tools that were mapped two years previously now operate to bring together a different community of Portland Works.

It should be noted that the focus on tools rather than people does not then imply carelessness or disinterest in this issue of who is not there. It is of crucial importance to note absences, exclusions and refusals, and to acknowledge that the ability and ease with which participation happens does not occur equally amongst those concerned with an issue. My attempts to address this disparity were through making new tools, and to always keep open the question of who was involved.

I am aware that as a group of people acting to save Portland Works through designing tools, some prioritised ensuring that a broad range of people engaged and were invited to take part more than others. There were points where the decision of the organisation was to prioritise financial security, or repairs to the building fabric, or Health and Safety on site over the heterogeneity of the group or recognising that people had been excluded from the processes and exploring ways to address this.<sup>9</sup> Our capacity as a group of

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<sup>9</sup> An example of a group that is underrepresented in this thesis and at Portland Works is those living Sharrow, in the neighbourhood in which Portland Works is based. This is largely because the links to this community have depleted over the years as those working on site no longer live close to it. My interest in this neighbourhood had been developed over a

volunteers, (most with full time jobs outside of the project, and considerable work to do in terms of selling shares and setting up and running the company) also limited what we did, and this in turn effected what I focused on.

Although part of the role of this research is to introduce critical questions, drawing on the notion of research militancy, it is also important to shift your understanding in relation to the research collective, and not only try to understand another point of view, but to realise that their actions shift the ground in which you are researching. To criticize others for prioritizing financial stability over inclusion without taking account of what they secured in doing so, and the space they made for other kinds of work would be disingenuous. This does not mean to side step such important questions, but rather to understand the process as a fluid one. In raising the question of inclusion, I also became aware that not every ambition or issue of concern I held or we discovered could or had to be addressed immediately or necessarily through or by our work at Portland Works.

In the context of gentrification and loss of affordable space for small-scale industry and making in UK cities, how can communities come together to safeguard these kinds of spaces in ways that are just, equitable and sustainable? What role could ‘Urban Commons’ have in such a process?

In this thesis I argue that the concept of the Urban Commons potentially offers a powerful way for small-scale making communities to safeguard their assets in ways that are just, equitable and sustainable. To do so requires a reframing of assets and an investigation into the strengths and qualities of Portland Works, and how these may involve aspects of mutuality.

I begin by examining the economic and regeneration policy context within which a landlord was prompted to make a Planning Application for Change of Use that if successful would end over 150 years of manufacturing at Portland Works. In response to the loss of much of the steel industry in Sheffield, national and local regeneration policies sought to encourage high-end private investment and an increase in residential, cultural

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number of years working there. The neighbourhood has a very ethnically diverse population, including a large Somali population, many of whom came to the city in the first place because of the metal trade. One tool with which I am currently hoping to address this is through initiating a project with the School of Education where placement students will work with Portland Works to develop primary curriculum and other education projects that can engage local people. If I conducted similar mapping in five years time, those who are most engaged may by then be people living close by.

and leisure uses in the City Centre, rather than to seek to retain manufacturing and support its future development. Previous studies frame the small-scale manufacturing in the city as being in inevitable decline, yet I argue that this is something that was exacerbated by policy, and potentially avoidable.

Local and national government policies led to an increase in rents and the demolition or Change of Use of many factories, workshops and studios. In doing so relationships and networks that make such businesses more resilient are damaged. Investment in culture was focused on the Cultural Industries Quarter and light industrial uses were considered to be incompatible and should be relocated to the outskirts on the city on industrial estates. Little attention was paid to the impact on those businesses and the wider networks of which they were a part. Those businesses that were deemed to fit often became dependant on limited and precariously funded subsidized space due too the inflation in rents. Portland Works, on the edge of the sites of investment, and just outside the ring road that demarks the city centre, missed out on such support for arts and music. Its industry and making was put under significant pressure from the increase of student housing in the neighbourhood, both in terms of prohibitive Planning Policies, and gentrification.

Sheffield is certainly not alone in experiencing pressure on affordable accommodation for small-scale light industrial and creative uses, and in comparison to cities that are under greater pressures for gentrification such as London, Manchester and Leeds, is by no means the worst. It provides a good case for investigation in relation to these concerns however, because of the way in which these industries grew in the city; as small-scale, fine-grained, and well networked. It is not a city that attracts large investment from outside, and to some degree this means that there is greater opportunity to develop a community driven response. Had there be more intense pressure on this development, either in terms of timescale or property value, it may not have been possible to engage in such a drawn out, careful and collaborative process.

The owner of Portland Works was a large developer who had support from organisations such as English Heritage, and was operating in a market where housing was in great demand, (which gave him strong arguments with Sheffield City Council as well as access to finance). Planning Law allowed for tenants to be evicted should he obtain permission for Change of Use from industrial to residential. For the tenants with seemingly few resources, this battle seemed a daunting one, and for many it was their first occasion to engage in such processes. In the case of Portland Works, opposing the Planning

Application began with the tenants, who knew the site and what was at stake better than anyone else, and as I argue had a number of resources and capacities that through the process of collaborative action, came to the forefront.

Through taking part and reflecting with others upon our activities at Portland Works, there are some important lessons to be drawn in terms of how a Commons is made and why in this case it became a convincing approach to the threat of gentrification. I argue that there are a number of long-established practices and circumstances, which when supported by certain approaches to community action and tool production, make self-organisation a promising way to achieve resilience in this instance. The context of this study is one of industry and manufacturing; the places in which people sustain their livelihoods; the potential for loss becomes a possible place for intervention. The Little Mesters and DIY art and music scene in the city were well-networked and often collaborative. Here work is intertwined with leisure, care and friendships, rather than something simply defined by the motive of profit.

Portland Works' urban context (of 19<sup>th</sup> century factories, and 20<sup>th</sup> century warehouses) meant that others with similar concerns and needs were in close proximity and share similar working lives. The architectural characteristics of the buildings in the John Street Triangle and neighbouring Cultural Industries Quarter allowed for many different makers to occupy and modify it to suit their changing needs. Due to lack of repairs by landlords, low incomes, the range of relevant skills and tools available, and in some cases political and cultural motivations, to 'Do It Yourself' is the norm, rather than the exception. Such an approach at Portland Works is to some degree pragmatic, yet, I would argue that the associated qualities improvisation, using what is to hand, and valuing the contributions of every person is a good basis for collective action and potentially establishing an urban common. When these self-organising principles are transferred to making tools for change, such a close understanding of the situation means that what you do can have greater resonance and produce more punctual interventions.

Community action must start from those who it affects the most. Commons are about engaging in concerns directly and politically, rather than being represented by others. This was not a campaign led by an individual with a preconceived idea of what should happen, but instead began with a number of people raising concerns. When beginning with few economic resources, the motivations, skills and abilities of those involved becomes even more important, and inviting new people in essential. Therefore, 'what

matters?’ should not just be defined by a small group of people. It should be opened up in order to bring new people and build new capacities. The strength of the Portland Works campaign in the early days was that people heard about or were invited into the campaign in many different contexts, for multiple reasons.

Not everyone enters into a participatory practice equally, however, as the group was new there were no strongly established hierarchies and to a greater degree than usual people were valued for what they contributed. To openly and collectively say: ‘we do not know’ and to express a willingness to find out together was perhaps the most important quality of the group that came together. For some this was a very difficult thing; to set aside authority meant being vulnerable, or being potentially perceived as weak. Without doing so, we would not have achieved such change, because we would not have actively involved so many people as creative participants. Through setting up a framework for peer learning, and embedding research firmly within the activities of the group through tools such as the Knowledge Transfer and Live Projects we opened up the question what might be possible. That many of those who took part were makers, teachers and activists and community development workers, contributed to the campaign group valuing learning.

Over the course of my involvement in Portland Works I have seen a number of practices and ‘ways of doing’ being established. We have developed shared understandings and goals. This is no small thing; although there were perhaps three or four long-standing friendships prior to the project commencing; for the most part the group of people did not know each other. To move from a position of opposition to one of proposition implies a willingness to take on a level of risk, and this means developing trust and shared values. The diversity of the group made some negotiations and decisions difficult, yet the desire to maintain Portland Works as a place of making for another 100 years, was a well voiced shared goal through which we could come together.<sup>10</sup>

The diversity of people (both tenants at Portland Works and those who became involved in the project) led to conversations about justice and equitability. The different desires, understandings and motivations meant that issues that were personal, economic or social were brought into the public realm and discussed politically. Our engagement in questions of equity and inclusion was not solely informal however, and certainly could not be considered to appear from nowhere. The possibilities for political and social

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<sup>10</sup> Succinctly and repeatedly expressed both in the media and at meetings and during Open Days by knife maker Stuart Mitchell, whose parents had a workshop on the site prior to him starting his business at the Works.

action had been embedded by the hard work of people over a number of years, through community development work, third sector organisations, festivals, and arts and cultural events. These were tools developed in this locale, with a close understanding of the situation and available resources.

These discussions about what matters in this context required much work and many tools to form the basis for solidarity and a place where many claims could be heard and considered. We needed to find a way of working across differences, and in articulating them revealed issues, tensions and possibilities for change. For many key players in the project their interests went beyond Portland Works, which they saw as being a catalyst for wider change. Safeguarding assets rarely finishes at the door of the place with which you are concerned. There are always interdependencies. It is important to give generously, not just to attend to your own immediate tasks and concerns. Often this is slow, intensive work. To spend precious time on such activities can seem risky. The results are often perceived as too uncertain and too slow, and those who benefit too defuse. Yet, less narrowly defined, more speculative tools that support those around you are likely to be crucial to long-term sustainability.

If we had not purchased Portland Works and applied an Asset Lock, we would not have dealt with the threats posed by speculative redevelopment. In this sense, bringing the resources into common ownership was absolutely crucial to safeguarding Portland Works. I would also argue that without the practices of Commoning, the gathering of a community, the public staking of claims and the democratic and learning processes that help to determine its future, it would also no longer be a place of making in the city. Through starting such an open and exploratory process we enabled other potentials and possibilities, and contributed to a more sustainable future. This approach to resilience is rooted in an understanding of durability through responsiveness, suppleness and iteration.

As an organisation we did not declare ourselves to be an Urban Common, nor did we extract commitments from those involved to fight against Capitalism. To do so would have excluded many who have taken on significant and useful roles within the project, and would have focused attention on what we should and should not be doing. We simply would not have got as far, as quickly as we did. Instead, I would suggest we found common purpose, created common resources, and found ways of doing that supported our desires and understandings of the possibilities that Portland Works offered. Urban

Commons are woven into the fabric of the city, and in their production they enable people to take part in the political, social and democratic life of the city.

### What kinds of agencies are needed for Commoning?

My conceptualisation of the agencies needed for Commoning is drawn in part from our activities to safeguard Portland Works; through the making of tools, and the process of design, knowledge was developed. We began by needing to stake our claim. We then needed to act together to define our shared goals. We needed people to give their time and energy, we needed money and we needed people to rethink the ways in which they thought about resources. In the face of the injustice of tenants potentially losing their businesses and feeling that they had little agency, to create a process that acknowledged peoples concerns' and made decision-making processes clear was crucial. In light of the scale of the challenges faced, learning was essential.

Our understanding of what we needed to do did not, for the most part, precede our mutual actions however, but instead was formed 'in the doing'. Iteratively bringing together the design of tools together with theories of Commoning allowed me, and us to conceptualise agencies as being social, political, democratic, economic and pedagogical, and to gain insights into how such terms could be understood in this context. Knowledge is produced through the interrelationship between our developing mutual understanding through acting together, and the process of abstracting and examining the tools that we made.

### Social and Political agencies at Portland Works

Tools for political agencies make space for different voices and gather and valorise the claims of those who are hidden or marginalised, to be heard publically. In doing so they challenge existing narratives and understandings. Yet, as we discovered in those times when people either stopped speaking at or attending meetings, those tools that offer important public space and political traction can also ossify into spaces for rehearsing existing positions and arguments, and become dominated by a small number of voices. Therefore political agency in commoning should not just about speaking and being heard, but is also about listening and understanding as a reciprocal relationship. At Portland Works we found that those tools that were offered and are familiar to political action, such as public meetings, or petitions, needed to be extended or modified to have a strong social aspect.

The social aspect of Commoning is not just about reaching a broad demographic and keeping them engaged. Tools to create social agencies contribute to the development of friendships, and forming new meanings and values together. To become part of the collective identity, to say ‘we’, is to have listened and understood these aims and values. Tools that bring together social and political agency allow struggle for change to come together with the development of values in ways that integrate personal and societal change. However, there is a constant tension in the interplay of the two. If tools prioritize the social in order to be inclusive, develop bonds and open up discussion, this can lead to a lack of focus or of difficulty in setting priorities and therefore risk the ability of the group to take action and fight for meaningful change. Conversely, tools that support the explicit and passionate exploration of political differences can jeopardize relationships and come at the cost of being able to work together.

To balance such competing concerns requires the sensitive adjustment of such tools. We found that a single individual did not necessarily have the skill, capacity or understanding to attend to take on every aspect of this, but that when many people made adjustments and contributions we could continually rebalance the competing demands. Examples of the co-design of meetings as a tool included regularly asking people why they attended or no longer attended, bringing props along which introduced yet depersonalized controversies, changing times and locations to better suit tenants, or engaged in simple acts of care for the group such as making tea, or giving lifts late at night. Whilst a one person may have introduced a modification to these social and political tools, they often quickly became shared practices in their repeated use. Each of us had a different understanding of how a tool could create agency and through each instance of feedback, and each tweak it became a more sophisticated tool, and we gained greater insight into what agency meant in this instance.

Feminist scholars would argue that political agency is often achieved through showing something that has been understood as social, personal or minor as being political and interconnected with other issues. In the case of Portland Works one of the key challenges was to articulate the impact of the Change of Use Planning Application as being beyond just a handful of micro businesses. This is often about making tacit knowledge explicit, or ensuring knowledge that was not valued was taken into account. To say ‘I experience this too, but I see it like this’ is to form networks of solidarity that in their production recognise the common impact of external forces, but also open, challenge and

reconstitute what the matter might be through their differences. This does not have to be expressed verbally, and often in the case of Portland Works this happened through creative endeavour.

Portland Works, its workshops, tools, materials, courtyard and fittings and fixtures, its sounds, its smells, are important agents in terms of the production of social relationships and political concerns. In a sense the most important political (and economic) aspect was to say that this space of Portland Works, is not an interchangeable commodity, but is in fact something that connects and makes the city in a particular way. In tenants sharing their working practices, in the use of the tools, materials and spaces of the Works those who visit learn about what Portland Works is and can be. Through the stories and practices of the tenants' different understandings of the city are produced. Organising and holding such events forged closer relationships between the team and those that visited often became volunteers, or commoners. A repeated refrain was that once somebody visits they 'understand'. Those tools that used the building could be understood to be 'threshold tools', because they set out what it was that you were taking part in.

## Economic and Democratic agencies at Portland Works

Economic agency in relation to the commons is about the production and equitable allocation of non-commodified resources, and their on-going care. This involves rethinking economy outside of the definitions imposed by capitalism- including questioning how we understand resources, value and risk. Economic agency was perhaps one of the most difficult aspects to negotiate at Portland Works because people's understanding of these factors (particularly expertise and risk) was for the most part mediated through mainstream market driven conceptualisations, banks, and the requirements of charities and funders. Much of what we necessarily did, including taking out loans, was entwined with this system.

In raising money through a community share issue, buying Portland Works and applying the Asset Lock we collectively acknowledged the need to take Portland Works out of the speculative property market. Therefore these tools not only radically changed the situation in which we were operating, but shifted what seemed possible and gave confidence that we could begin to make our own financial choices. For some people this was also a shift in how they understood ownership of the city; both in terms of how the market restricted or prevented the production of certain kinds of space *and* that it was

possible to develop viable and potentially even more sustainable alternatives to the speculative property market.

The devices that prevent speculation on the building and land, and enable collective ownership and mutual responsibility to be set in law, also have a political and democratic dimension. Through these tools we made a public declaration of an ethical approach, and enabled people to 'take part' in a more equitable way. The implementation of these tools was only made possible because a large number of people were willing to take their part in an alternative to the market system that puts social goods as being at least as important as economic benefit. In using these tools we hoped to inspire others and show it was possible. The securing of non-commodified resources is not just a one off occurrence—tools such as the Business Plan, the Share Issue, and the Asset Lock ensure that we would continue to hold Portland Works in common, without being subject to market pressures.

Tools such as the Table of Management and Ownership and the Knowledge Transfer Partnership enabled an exploration of financial, governance and management models in relation to the everyday activities, needs and desires of the tenants at Portland Works. These were tools that enabled risk, investment and opportunity to be explored in social and cultural terms as well as financial. The Table of Management and Ownership was 'misused' as a tool and therefore failed in many ways, but in doing so produced very clear feedback and led to the development of the Knowledge Transfer Partnership. The latter was a successful tool enabled collective decision-making, and the bringing together of the structural with the everyday.

Some important tools for economic agency are those which helped us to understand how much was already held and produced in common at Portland Works, and what the impact of their enclosure and commodification could have in the future. For me the notion of Diverse Economies became critical to representing things differently. This new awareness became a good starting point for moving from opposition to proposition, because to start to take account of the many different forms of economy and ethical decisions that were already being made showed that in some respects we started from a position of abundance and strength.

It became clear that as we relied on volunteer time not financial resources we needed to develop tools that enabled people to contribute resources usefully to the project, in ways

that supported the Business Plan aims and supported our ability to secure the future of the building and ensure the tenants could continue to operate their businesses. The Working Groups improved productivity and reflection. They also allowed for more in depth research, and discussion by those with a particular interest, motivation and/or skills. Yet, they also presented a problem; we had aims and responsibilities and so could not be led purely by what people felt they wanted to do. Rather we had to negotiate a balance between responding to the desires, skills and capacities that would keep people motivated and engaged, and our project aims, and our social, legal and financial responsibilities.

In response to the dilemma of balancing responsibilities and a range of desires the Timelines from the Away Day showed the organisation to have a history, a present and a future that was made of many tools and aligning them with the aims of the Business Plan. To add to them you could bring your own concerns, but could understand this in relation to previous decisions and work and future aims and needs. In making this tool we can understand economic agency not just as meeting the pragmatic requirements of the business, but as also fulfilling many needs of those people who offered to give their time. To contribute was to always take into account others, as well as to influence a new future. This helped us to rethink what economic agency was.

Economic agency goes beyond access to money. However the financial aspect was an important one because we were engaging in the property market and with a building that needed significant repair work. Tools for economic agency included those that gave us access to grants, loans, donations and share capital, and particularly those that allowed the group to decide how we allocated it. Grant funding or donations that were not tied to specific outcomes, but rather awarded to us freely as an organisation to allocate according to our aims and priorities, took money from the public or market sector and brought it into the Commons.

To use funding tools we required people with fundraising skills, and support from organisations that enabled us to gain a financial track record. These are things that are out of reach to many community organisations. Our long-standing partner Little Sheffield Development Trust (LSDT) did not initially achieve its original goal of purchasing Portland Works neighbour 'Stag Works'. However, through its particular characteristics of being embedded in the neighbourhood, having a track record as an organisation and having funds that were open, it played an important financial role for Portland Works.

As a tool, those who had the right to ‘use it’ expanded their notion of economic success beyond the immediate aims it was originally designed to meet. In being directed towards Portland Works it allowed for the registration of the Industrial and Provident Society with the Financial Services Authority, was the partner for the Knowledge Transfer Grant and was a source of information, including an initial conditional survey. The importance of having such legally recognised vehicles in place to support nascent organisations became clear, and at the same time a public statement was made about the mutual responsibility and interdependency of the businesses in the area.

Tools were made to connect to other businesses, community groups, and cultural organisations, which may contribute to future economic agencies, and become a wider catalyst for change. Through the Case Studies, available through our website, started as a way for us to learn as an organisation, but also linked us to other struggles, showing alternative economic models. Tools such as the John Street Triangle Audit and the John Street Triangle Festival worked to connect Portland Works in a facilitating or initiating role. Although their use now has been to create social and pedagogical agencies, in the future their impact is likely to be economic.

There were a number of tools that attended to the question of how we mediated the financial relationship between the ‘inside’ of our organisation. Some reduced or negated the need for cash and allowed instead, the contribution of time. To hold something in common necessarily means to take on responsibility for its care and continuation; at Portland Works this was a role that some of the tenants (to a greater or lesser degree) were taking on because of years of neglect and underinvestment by the landlord. In the case of Portland Works the need for care was particularly pronounced because as a building its fabric was at risk. The building no longer being wind and water tight, and to parts of the building being unsafe and even dangerous.

In the case of the Cold Spots work Studio Polpo sought to create a tool that would allow for decision-making and engagement by the tenants and committee, for tenants and volunteers to carry out work and building materials could be donated, rather than relying solely on contractors and material suppliers. The Building Manager worked to coordinate a series of Volunteer Days led by retired builder Bill Grey with surveyor Chris Cooper, where a team of ten people worked to carry out renovation work to bring ‘Block A’ back into use. This was a block that had been used for storage and wild parties for some time,

into use as a new space for the artists and new tenants, increasing rental revenue without requiring significant financial investment.

The Cold Spots work set out a plan for what was required and, with support from the Building Manager gave the opportunity for people to usefully join to take care of the building, learn new skills and establish friendships. This approach was to develop a way to look after the building that drew on what was at hand. In doing so a number of different kinds of economy were understood and engaged with, such as the work of gifts, volunteer, self –employment, loans, DIY, and borrowing. Tools such as Procurement Policies favoured commissioning tenants and other self-employed local tradespeople where possible. Materials were sometimes donated, recycled or reused. To approach the work in such a way drew on the motivations, know how and resources that could be found close to hand.

Other questions about negotiating our relationship with the market and wage economy have been differed. One example being that internally as an organisation we did not want to significantly increase rents- with the ‘outside’ where we were being charged high interest rates for loans that we must pay back and therefore must increase our revenue. For now we can continue to have very low rents, but there are divided opinions about whether we increase them in order to invest in other aspects of the project. I consider that this is a larger issue than making a pragmatic decision, and relates to how we as an organisation wish and can mediate this relationship, and more significantly, how Commons relate to the market.

One of the most important questions concerning the economics and democracy of the Urban Commons related to the fair allocation of our resources. These included whether we repaired the building, paid off loans, or invested money in future cultural and projects, and decisions about which units to refurbish first, of whether to focus on attracting new tenants in or taking care of existing tenants. We needed tools that helped us develop the governance of the organisation, and engage in how decisions were made, as well as the negotiation and setting of priorities. A shared ethical outlook, combined with the need to keep people involved and contributing to Portland Works meant it was important to make decision-making processes clear, and give people the ability to question our approach.

The question of decision-making came to the forefront in the production of our tools for governance- firstly, in defining the relationship between tenants and shareholders,

secondly in determining the relationship between directors and shareholders and non-shareholders, and finally in deciding what the relationship was between the various working groups, and the working groups and the Steering Group. These were recurring controversies, and the issues at stake differed according to the stage of our process, from opposition, to proposition to running Portland Works.

The Share Issue led to over 500 people having a direct stake in Portland Works future, as Commoners, this included a financial contribution to the organisation and in theory taking part in other ways too. Whether they contributed £50, or £20,000 each shareholder had one vote. Our choice of this structure was to value a variety of contributions to the project- financial, but also crucially in developing ideas, taking decisions and doing the work. When formalising our meeting structure we agreed that anyone (shareholder or not) could join the Steering Group and help make decisions, as this was an important way to gather resources and work in just and equitable ways.

Once we owned the building this open structure presented a dilemma because the Directors of the organisation have legal responsibility for the financial, safety and community benefit of the organisation. The unevenness of risk was addressed by making it possible for the Directors to make the final decision in particularly important cases, whilst retaining the meetings as accessible. Although there was dissensus about creating this hierarchy, in a sense this was a boundary that acknowledged that decisions did not bear equally on everyone involved. The openness remained and Directors having final vote has only happened on one occasion. In understanding the difference between neoliberal and commoning agencies that external regulation and structures have not been called upon is a positive sign.

To engage in democratic relations is to have a degree of reflexivity about how decisions are made. Tools for democratic agencies require the examination of the collective and how it operates. A tension exists between the need for transparent decision-making processes, the possibility of informality, and engagement through channels than meetings, and the relationship between the two. Although informality could be considered to be less transparent or subject to feedback, it also often relied on care and mutual respect and functioned as a way to address exclusions from the formal structure. Informal decisions were sometimes verbal, but often about doing things with other people and enabling greater inclusivity and different kinds of knowledge to bear. One way in which this was addressed was through the Building Manager taking a mediating

role, and speaking to people informally on site, and reporting back in ways that invited scrutiny. The role of more inclusive organisational learning was also critical to addressing these concerns.

## Pedagogical agencies at Portland Works

I used tools I developed as part of my teaching and research at the University of Sheffield to contribute to Portland Works, which meant that much of what I offered was related to learning- both in terms of particular knowledge and skills but also investigations into the collective. There was a conscious effort to create a framework where the many actions from a wide group of people could be understood as opportunities for mutual learning. Pedagogical agency was related to setting a ground of uncertainty where no one could claim to know what we had to do and therefore go unchanged or as a single authority, but rather had to take part in the processes of finding out. As one campaigner, Stephen Connelly, reminded us repeatedly, ‘none of us have ever bought a cutlery factory before’.

Participatory design and design research offers many tools for doing this collaboratively. The Knowledge Transfer, The Live Projects and student placements established a process of writing briefs, and setting up small projects that would feed into the Working Groups and the decision making of the collective. The students working on site both learnt from tenants and campaigners at Portland Works, and contributed things through teaching us and sharing research. These tools emphasise negotiating complex situations, with diverse actors. Through engaging with design as iterative, practical evaluative and projective, learning is about looking closely at what has gone before, understanding what is at hand and imaging what might be. The process of making a brief, or creating a tool encompassed each of these kinds of learning.

An important aspect of Commoning is reformulating individual desires as collective ones. This should not begin from a point of excluding differences, yet is closely related to developing bonds of care. Tools such as the various Meetings supported consensus making, and other tools such as the Share Offer Document and media appearances, made points of convergence and differences explicit, and were more agonistic. Through using both kinds of tools, the tension between the need to voice differences and form mutual understandings was addressed. Tools such as the Timelines and Away Days explicitly support the collaborative development of aims, allowing for many approaches and voices to become part of a coherent plan. This clarity and focus is important.

Turning to the notion of the craftsperson, mutual learning is something that happens gradually over time. Much learning was informal; and came from being and doing together. Tools such as Open Days, Volunteer Days, Pecha Kucha and Sensoria Festival brought together campaigners and tenants to work at Portland Works. We learnt about the rain, the cold, the ways in which individual tenants had set up their workshops and studios. Although such learning is 'small' it contributes to motivations and solidarity.

We felt the visitors' fascination in how Andy made a slate ripper or Stuart designed a blade. We felt the joy of crazy video projections and drumming in a courtyard that had always been a place of work. We learnt what would not quite fit, how much work it took. We learnt from one another how best to tell the history, how best to frame the campaign. We began to use each other's words, to pause at the same points of the building and invite people to look up to see the crane or walk into an unpromising corner to see a grinding wheel. These moments changed us.

The range of such tools is crucial to learning and democracy, because no one narrative or understanding comes to dominate, and there is the opportunity for many voices to help formulate the questions and objects of research. Sensoria and Pecha Kucha introduced new ideas, which encouraged an experimental shift in collective thinking, asking people to think of Portland Works otherwise.

Through organising events, practices of self-management were established that could support the governance of the organisation more widely. Each one became an occasion to learn from one another, from making of cakes, to organising a marketing campaign. This peer learning happened informally to an extent, and there have been additional tools developed to formalise some things that were considered to be of crucial importance to members. This included Directors Inductions, which were open to all and set out responsibilities and aims. Learning in this sense is about engaging creatively, speculating, and dreaming.

Pedagogical agencies must be entwined with every other kind of agency of Commoning. This is because Commoning is fundamentally about transformation and unless collective and personal learning take place, nothing really changes. You cannot make new equitable relationships without learning about one another, and shifting and making new values together. You cannot struggle for change without learning why change matters to others

as well as yourself. To gain economic agency in relation to Commoning you must shift your understanding of what economies, values and resources are. You cannot take democratic decisions without learning about how your collective operates. Each of these is a very different kind of learning, some concerned with skills, others with shifts in subjectivity, others with gaining practical knowledge, and some concerned with philosophy and ethics.

Our desire to extend our capacities as an organisation and the need to share the work puts greater emphasis on the need to progress mutually and to learn together, both formally and informally. The Directors Inductions included briefings on Health and Safety, financial information and organisational ethos, with each aspect being presented by a different Director. This collaborative way of doing had been established through the Business Plan development. In a situation where most people did this work after a full working week it was pragmatic as few people had time to have such in depth knowledge, but it also created more horizontal relations. Such peer learning also happened in sessions that focused on topics such as how to use Dropbox and the website, how to apply for small grants and the development of building techniques. Although one aspect of such an approach was to support Portland Works, the impact was transformative—each person that took part gained new skills and abilities.

What kinds of tools are required to achieve Agencies of Commoning?  
How have these tools helped us achieve agency at Portland Works?

In the context of Portland Works, tools that achieve Agencies of Commoning have evolved through the course of our mutual activities. In their design and making they create distributed agencies, and helped us to understand the kinds of agency we needed. Tools are considered as a way to understand our doings together that enable precise and useful knowledges to be built and shared. Through exploring the notion of craftsmanship I consider how tools are used at Portland Works, and how they are chosen and made, and the kind of thinking that occurs through making.<sup>11,12,13</sup> In doing so I take lessons about the dexterity, judgement, care and creativity that come with the skilled handling of a tool.<sup>14</sup>

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11 Richard Sennet.

12 Tim Ingold.

13 Christopher Frayling.

14 Ronald Larsen.

I argue that tools are always designed and in this process networks and associations are assembled in order to attend to a concern or desire. Drawing on the work of Tom Holert, Bruno Latour and Jesko Fezer I conceptualise design as something that is never foundational and is productive of distributed agencies. This is important in relation to designing tools for Commoning, because it is a process that assembles and opens up opportunities for ethical decision-making.<sup>15,16,17</sup> Chapter 7 analyses the production and use of a number of tools that form part of the story of the community purchase of Portland Works, and its subsequent operation for the benefit of the community and draws out a number of insights. If we examine the qualities of these tools, we can start to learn something about how and why they work to create agency. Each tool has particular and often multiple capabilities in terms of the networks that it creates and the way in which it mediates relationships.

Agency can be understood as iterative, practical evaluative and projective.<sup>18</sup> For a tool to create agency, it often draws on past practices and skills, takes advantage of what is to hand, and works to shift what the matter is. Many people contribute to how a tool is produced, and we encountered resistances and opportunities in this process. I would argue therefore that Tools for Commoning should be made or remade by those who will use them. They encompass many different kinds of knowledge, and allows for experimentation. To be used by commoners, that should be at hand in order to allow many people to share in their use, and to experiment with their capacities and affordances.

Each tool requires different skills and expertise, different understandings and work to produce. This means a tool brings many connections and relationships, and although used for a particular purpose can be understood as heterogeneous assembly that contains possibilities beyond a particular use. To design a tool for Commoning is to actively seek such richness, even if they are made to attend to a precise point of intervention. To develop a Tool for Commoning, is to pay attention to the feedback that each of these components offers: to be responsive, and to learn together through these every day activities.

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<sup>15</sup> Tom Holert.

<sup>16</sup> Bruno Latour.

<sup>17</sup> Jesko Fezer.

<sup>18</sup> Mustafa *Emirbayer* and Ann *Mische*, p. 964.

I would argue that some of the most important tools for creating Agencies of Commoning are those that establish a framework where these different parts can be understood as contributing to the whole in such a way that they are useful, and productive. In doing so you are valuing what people can and choose to contribute and what motivates them. Tools for commoning need to be acknowledged and valued. Many vital tools are almost forgotten even by us in our relatively short history of the project.

A tool is potentially a way to share knowledge. This means making clear our processes, our decisions, and working to support learning. To share a tool is also to share time, and to share an understanding. The value of a tool rests in knowing how, why and where to use it. Tools can enable experimentation and improvisation, but to Common also implies care, responsibility and engaged action. Therefore the most useful tools for Commoning give feedback, and in using them subjectivities change, not just as an intellectual process, but also as one that is also physical and emotional, bringing together the head, heart and hand.

Some tools **make the invisible visible**. Examples of these include the **Posters of Tenants, the Open Days, The John Street Triangle Business Audit, and the Inhabited Plans**. In doing so they either challenge an assumption, bring something that has previously been ignored or hidden into view, or connect things together in a way which changes the way in which they are understood. Those making the tool often wish to change values and understandings, and to politicise things that have previously been understood as personal, or economic. To be effective it is important to think about format and location, and who it is that you need to reach and challenge. Usually this kind of tool is initially made to take on a critical function. In its use however these tools can often draw attention to opportunities and capacities. The strength of such tools is that they do not attempt to pre-empt how they will be understood and taken forward, but instead, open up questions and invite multiple others to take on board what is shown into their own understanding of the world.

Tools such as the **Portland Works Blog, Interventions to the building, Little Sheffield Development Trust, the Purchase and associated Asset Lock** deal with **precise points of intervention that can either disrupt the existing system or open up points of change**. This is about a very close understanding of the situation, and judging how with the smallest action you can have the biggest effect. They often have clear and pragmatic aims, and are used by people with particular knowledge and skill,

acquired over time. They are often designed and made by one or two people acting in the moment.

Some tools work to **reformulate individual desires as collective ones**. Those discussed in this chapter include **Share Offer Document, the Steering Group Meetings, Pictures of Sheffield Old and New Exhibition at Castle Market, Business Plan, the Building Manager, the Away Day Timelines and the Knowledge Transfer Workshop**. In doing so it does not imply smoothing over differences, or everyone agreeing on the way forward, but instead engaging in negotiation with a diverse group of people. It is important in making this kind of tool to understand past activities, and why people bring certain meanings and values to a situation in order to consider how to move forward. In tools that attend to such issues clear democratic processes and peer learning are of particular importance. They generally require a large number of people to engage at the same time in the same place.

Some tools are about **pulling things forward, or transforming what the matter is**. In a situation where you are in opposition, or struggling for political change, a tool that allows you to change your position from pushing against something to one where you starting somewhere new can be incredibly powerful. Tools that work in such a way include **Sensoria and Pecha Kucha, the Table of Management and Ownership, the Live Projects, Radio 4 You and Yours, Bank Street Arts Exhibition, and perhaps the Planning Application for Change of Use** (in its making, it radically changed what was of concern). These can often be brought by people outside the current group concerned with the issue and take on a format not previously familiar. Frequently they engage with the conceptual, political, experiential, material and imaginary. These tools are often created in moments of intuition, led by whoever has energy and passion, and may not grow from the 'centre', or be driven by a negotiated process. They are experimental, but in taking risks there must always be care.

## Further research to create agencies of Commoning

Writing up my thesis has led to me stepping back from Portland Works for about a year, and in doing so I have developed a different perspective on our activities and tools. Portland Works is getting closer to being wind and water tight, (although roofs and windows still need replacement). There are number of new tenants, including Sheffield

Hackers and Makers, Loxley Gin, Now Then magazine/ Opus Independents, MAH Jewellery, Daniel Bros furniture makers and Pippa Elliot rug-maker who, along with more long standing tenants are contributing to a lively and varied life of the Works.<sup>19</sup>

As I write this conclusion, a document is being circulated that sets out the organisations aim to purchase another building in the John Street Triangle, Kenilworth Works, a building that is also home to maker tenants, also listed, and also in a poor state of repair. A funding bid has been put in place to renew and extend the John Street Triangle Audit with a view to extending our networks, collaborating and supporting small and microbusinesses. These activities represent a desire to extend what we are doing within the city. I am inspired by the work of other Commoners to explore the role that Portland Works might have in the city, and what other resources and shared spaces we can make through the practices and tools that we have established together. Others involved in Portland Works share this interest and we will work towards it over the next few years. We will require new tools, some modified and extended versions of those we have used before, some designed for a particular purpose, some will be brought by others.

I hope that the level of detail in the maps and the tools glossary serves as a useful and productive archive both for me and for others, and can be added to in future work. I have already noticed people involved referring to what they do as tools. In some ways Commoning at Portland Works has just begun, 7 years since the first Planning Application. Tools I wish to design include an artist's residency to design new products drawing on the skills and tools at Portland Works. Another is a module with the School of Education to develop creative ways for people to engage with the site for educational benefit. I begin to work with others to design these tools and intend to support this work through the understanding and craft I have gained in through this thesis.

## Further research

This thesis concentrates on a single case. There is scope to extend this study to explore the potential of commoning in communities of makers and places of work that are under threat in different social, economic and geographical contexts. Through engaging in the design and mapping of tools as developed in this thesis, I can compare and contrast how tools might develop in different situations, and draw lessons both from Portland Works that might be applied elsewhere, and in bringing back new tools to be tested, modified and extended at Portland Works. By foregrounding the notion of design and

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<sup>19</sup> See the Makers page of the Portland Works website

craftsmanship I would hope to connect in ways that are practical, attending to questions and concerns that we develop together. I see these investigations as potentially productive of networks of urban commons, and showing solidarity between concerns.

Working at and with Portland Works over the past seven years has been an incredibly important experience for me. It has been woven together with my activism, my teaching, my research, and my friendships. It has been an opportunity for learning, and it has helped me develop an understanding of how I wish to practice as an architect, as a design tutor, and as researcher. I have found people that I wish to work with, and tools that we can use. It feels like a beginning and one that resonates with such a number of people as to offer many opportunities for Commoning in the city.

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# University Research Ethics Application Form For Staff and Postgraduate Researchers

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This form has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee ('U-REC')

**Complete this form** if you are a member of staff or a postgraduate research student who plans to undertake a research project which will not involve the NHS but which will involve people participating in research either directly (e.g. interviews, questionnaires) and/or indirectly (e.g. people permitting access to data and/or tissue).

**or**

**Complete this form** if you plan to submit a 'generic' research ethics application (i.e. an application that will cover several sufficiently similar research projects). Information on the 'generic' route is at: [www.shef.ac.uk/researchoffice/gov\\_ethics\\_grp/ethics/er/ers.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/researchoffice/gov_ethics_grp/ethics/er/ers.html)

**Documents to enclose with this form, where appropriate:**

This form should be accompanied, where appropriate, by an Information Sheet/Covering Letter/Written Script which informs the prospective participants about the proposed research, and/or by a Consent Form.

Further guidance on how to apply is at:

[www.shef.ac.uk/researchoffice/gov\\_ethics\\_grp/ethics/form.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/researchoffice/gov_ethics_grp/ethics/form.html)

Guidance on the three ethics review procedures that together comprise the University's Ethics Review System (i.e. on the University's procedure, the NHS procedure, the Alternative procedure) is at:

[www.shef.ac.uk/researchoffice/gov\\_ethics\\_grp/ethics/er/ers.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/researchoffice/gov_ethics_grp/ethics/er/ers.html)

**Once you have completed this research ethics application form in full, and other documents where appropriate, check that your name, the title of your research project and the date is contained in the footer of each page and email it to the Ethics Administrator of your academic department. Please note that the original signed and dated version of 'Part B' of the application form should also be provided to the Ethics Administrator in hard copy.**

# University Research Ethics Application Form

## Cover Sheet

I confirm that in my judgment, due to the project's nature, the use of a method to inform prospective participants about the project (e.g. 'Information Sheet' / 'Covering Letter' / 'Pre-Written Script'):		
Is relevant:	Mark 1 Box	Is <u>not</u> relevant:
X		
(if relevant then this should be enclosed)		

I confirm that in my judgment, due to the project's nature, the use of a 'Consent Form':		
Is relevant:	Mark 1 Box	Is <u>not</u> relevant:
X		
(if relevant then this should be enclosed)		

Is this is a 'generic' application (i.e. does it cover more than one project that is sufficiently similar)?		
Yes:	Mark 1 Box	No:
		X

Date: 03/11/2011

Name of applicant: Julia Udall

Research project title: Tools to Create Agency in Contested Urban Spaces

# University Research Ethics Application Form

## Part A

**A1. Title of Research Project: Tools to Create Agency in Contested Urban Spaces**

**A2. Contact person** (normally the Principal Investigator, in the case of staff-led research projects, or the student in the case of supervised-postgraduate researcher projects):

Title: **Ms** First Name/Initials: **Julia** Last Name: **Udall**  
 Post: **Postgraduate Research Student** Department: **School of Architecture**  
 Email: **j.udall@sheffield.ac.uk** Telephone: **07967 221454**

**A2.1. Is this a postgraduate researcher project?** Yes

**If yes, please provide the Supervisor's contact details:**

Professor Doina Petrescu

Email [d.petrescu@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:d.petrescu@sheffield.ac.uk) Telephone: 0114 222 0379

**A2.2. Other key investigators/co-applicants** (within/outside University), where applicable:

Please list all (add more rows if necessary)

Title	Full Name	Post	Responsibility in project	Organisation	Department
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

**A3. Proposed Project Duration:**

Start date:  
October 2010

End date:  
March 2014

**A4. Mark 'X' in one or more of the following boxes if your research:**

<input type="checkbox"/>	involves testing a medicinal product *
<input type="checkbox"/>	involves investigating a medical device *
<input type="checkbox"/>	involves additional radiation above that required for clinical care *
<input type="checkbox"/>	involves taking new samples of human biological material (e.g. blood, tissue) *
<input type="checkbox"/>	involves children or young people aged under 18 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	involves using samples of human biological material collected before for another purpose
<input type="checkbox"/>	involves only identifiable personal data with no direct contact with participants
<input type="checkbox"/>	involves only anonymised or aggregated data
<input type="checkbox"/>	involves prisoners or others in custodial care (e.g. young offenders)
<input type="checkbox"/>	involves adults with mental incapacity or mental illness
<input type="checkbox"/>	has the primary aim of being educational (e.g. student research, a project necessary for a postgraduate degree or diploma, other than an MD or PhD)

\* If you have marked boxes marked \* then you also need to obtain confirmation that appropriate University insurance is in place. The procedure for doing so is entirely by email. Please send an email addressed to [insurance@shef.ac.uk](mailto:insurance@shef.ac.uk) and request a copy of the

'Clinical Trial Insurance Application Form'.

## University Research Ethics Application Form

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- A5. Briefly summarise the project's aims, objectives and methodology.**  
(this must be in language comprehensible to a lay person)

### Research Context

This doctoral research will explore what tools architects and others can use to help people to act to shape the spaces around them, potentially in ways which question the prevalent neoliberal values of the market (Till, 2011) as being the prime driver for the space that is produced. I propose that the tools and proficiencies of activist architectural research and spatial practices can be employed to create agency, enabling people to "engage in their spatial environments in ways previous unknown or unavailable to them." (Till et al., 2011, p32)

Many of the engagement and participatory practices currently employed in regeneration processes seek to build consensus, (Richardson and Connelly, 2005), or depoliticise, (Mouffe, 2005b), (Hoskyns, 2005), the production of space, with the effect of concealing certain claims, concerns and voices. This research will question whether it possible to create a democratic space where a multiplicity of political positions and contesting claims that bear on a particular urban space can be heard and recognised through the collaborative design and use of a series of tools. Drawing on the ideas of Bruno Latour in 'Reassembling the Social', I wish to develop an understanding of what concerns and networks are made durable through this process and how employing such tools might lead to the transformation of the way in which the contested urban space mediates relationships.

This research will operate from and with the Alternative Futures for Portland Works Campaign, a group actively concerned with transforming a contested urban space. I will draw on the ideas of the 'militant researcher' which combines a struggle for political change with social practices, which are meaning and value producing. I take a strong ethical position that research should be collaborative, with knowledge being built together, rather than constructed from the limited perspective of a privileged individual. In some research paradigms there is an association of methodological rigour with the absolute control over the research process by the academic; this misconception is often a barrier in recognising rigour within activist research. The commitment to collective and egalitarian knowledge production demands precisely the opposite; the letting go of control and engagement in a research process that is open, responsive and horizontal. Activist and militant research methods have the built in test of validity drawn from whether they are meaningful and work for the participants that helped to formulate the research goals; the aim is not just to operate in a critical way, but to initiate change through the process of researching.

As with Sennett's' description of the craftsman (Sennett, 2008), participants are 'engaged', building knowledges which employ both the head and the hand. This is particularly relevant in the context where a number of heritage craftspeople, artists and musicians are developing their making and practices in many ways, both explicit and tacit. These include motivation, forms of bodily and mental knowledge, know-how, teaching, and care. This research will value and respect these constantly evolving relational knowledges. Tools are important to me as a concept because of a number of reasons. They imply an active and propositional relationship which requires both head and hand. You can lend a tool and each time it is altered in a different person's hand, employed to do something (at least slightly) different, with differing skill and proficiencies. Tools can be improvised with, or modified to extend their usefulness and to meet the needs of the particular individual that is wielding them; they retain the imprint of the practices and tasks they are used for and the people that handle

them. Traditionally, they are associated with the notion of craftsmanship and the workshop; they are an appropriate concept to a situation where those leading the process are highly skilled makers.

## Aims and Objectives

The aims of this research are to contribute to an understanding of what (architectural) tools might be needed to:

- Enable Portland Works to become a democratic space where a multiplicity of political positions contesting claims and concerns that bear on it can be heard and recognised.
- Enable people to act to shape and transform Portland Works, particularly in ways previously unknown or unavailable to them.

Through employing these tools I will seek to find out;

- What shared knowledges and networks are built and controversies uncovered through the process of transforming a contested urban space?
- What concerns are made durable through this process and how might we be transforming the way in which contested urban space mediates relationships?

**The objectives of the research are to work collaboratively with and from The Alternative Futures for Portland Works Campaign to;**

- Collaboratively explore and map points of mediation and transformation, where relationship changed, networks were built and new concerns and political positions claimed during the campaign.
- Design, test and modify tools to engender agency to make these concerns and desires tangible and durable as part of the transformation of the contested urban space.

## Methodology

My methodology for this research is an activist one. In working form and with the Portland Works Buildings Working Group, which is working to transform a contested urban space, the research I carry out will aim to have the 'use value' of helping to create agency within the project. Researching in this way means that the group I am part of will help to determine the objectives and scope of our research in a way that is open, responsive and genuinely collaborative. As a group we will make our decisions through a consensus making process, discussing, negotiating and voting on key decisions. In this context this means that the tools we design to map and create agency should be determined through negotiation rather than by me at the outset. In order to achieve this, some activities will be speculative at the moment, but I am setting up a framework within which they will sit that will allow me to make decisions and a judgement about what is appropriate, useful and important to do.

My involvement in the Portland Works project has spanned three years and over this time I have contributed over 2,500 hours of volunteering time. It has become an important part of my life and I feel a responsibility to the group which I am working with. This has enabled me to develop a position where we trust and care for one another, allowing us to build knowledges, values and meanings that would not otherwise be available. This stems in part from being able to be open about points of difference and this will impact on how respect is defined in this context. To have a vigorous disagreement in this situation may actually be considered to be respectful because it indicates care and a willingness to share personal beliefs in an open way where they could be transformed by the process and others opinions. This is contrasted to research where personal opinions are kept separate for written reflections privately after the research has been conducted.

I envisage there may be gaps in what is recorded in order to respect people's privacy; in this type of project personal conversations or acts of kindness to one another may have an influence on how we decide to proceed, but it may not be appropriate to record all of this information. In cases such as

these I will record that the conversation or action occurred, but not provide detail of the content unless this is agreed by the participants. It is important that I respect people's privacy, but do not conceal the impact of these types of social contribution to the research process. This is something which is addressed by Colectivo Situaciones in their development of the term 'militant researcher'; the social is considered meaning and value producing and to remove these aspects from how a situation is understood is reductive and therefore potentially reactionary; they should therefore be valued as part of the research and indeed part of the process of transformation.

We will design and test a number of tools together, which at this initial stage, covered by this application for ethics approval, will be a series maps. These will contain the personal reflections, opinions and values of those participating will be identified within this as their situation, role and relationship to others are essential to understanding their standpoint. We will be looking at points of conflict and change and this might be controversial at times. I will ensure that all participants are well informed and consent to this prior to commencing the case study and are aware that they can withdraw from the research at any time. At a later stage, if we propose to design and test other tools, which may include events, interviews or other activities, I will make another separate application for ethics approval.

[See section A10 for further details of this two-stage process].

**A6. What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?**

The potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants is low; it is not greater than they would encounter in their normal lifestyles. The participants are self-selecting in terms of being involved in the wider Portland Works project and my research would not significantly increase the risks associated with this because the topics covered should not present potential for additional psychological harm or distress to which they would expect to encounter through their current involvement. However, I am aware that because there is the issue of care for the project and close relationships between participants and that there may be some controversial and personal aspects to the study, such as their ethical approach/ attitudes, and their values.

The questions we consider will not be 'easy' - and will aim to draw out points of conflict and change-matters that are potentially controversial and of concern to those involved. This is however justified by my research aims, recognising the fact that there are a range of different actors involve with different viewpoints and understandings and that I want to understand and create tools that enable change to happen. The potential for psychological harm or distress to participants will be minimised firstly through warning participants of the potential for harm from the discussion of these topics, secondly through stressing the participant's right not to answer questions and to withdraw from the research at any time. The trust and respect that we have built together as a group should enable people to be frank about their concerns and understand my motivations in carrying out this research.

Because I want to keep this process open and not pre-empt all we will talk about, and the tools we will design this means I cannot predict all of the ethical issues that might arise. I therefore may need to do a further application for a tool we propose or issues that are raised as we develop our methodology together. The range of instances that I might not yet know might include things such as financial information or might be controversies and personal conversations.

**A7. Does your research raise any issues of personal safety for you or other researchers involved in the project? (Especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises)**

**If yes, explain how these issues will be managed.**

The research raises issues of personal safety for the researcher in that they will be going off University premises to work with participants. These issues of safety will be addressed and managed with the following strategy, which is based on guidelines taken from the Social Research Association Code of Practice for the Safety of Social Researchers.

Planning stages:

- The applicant will consider the choice of interview site and wherever possible conduct interviews in a public place with other people present, such as a work place.
- The participants involved will, in the most part be known to me, in some cases for a number of years. This will significantly reduce the risk. For those potentially new participants that may join the groups as the research progresses all work will be carried out with other members of the group present.
- Interviews will be timetable to avoid meeting participants late in the evening and to avoid intensive spells of fieldwork so that the researcher can always be alert to risk and better able to handle incidents.

During fieldwork:

- The researcher will carry a mobile phone switched on and have a contact person to inform when they have finished the case study work.
- The researcher will carry enough money for both expected and unexpected expenses, including the use of taxis. However, it is anticipated that most research will be conducted within walking distance of the researcher's house in a place (Portland Works) that the researcher knows well.
- The researcher will be alert to the potential effects of the case study process on participants, and be ready to spot signs that the respondent is becoming upset or angry. If it seems sensible to do so the researcher will be prepared to end the discussion and leave.

(Social Research Association. Code of Practice for the Safety of Social Researchers. Available at: <http://www.the-sra.org.uk/guidelines.htm>, accessed: 02/11/2011)

## **A8. How will the potential participants in the project be:**

### **i. Identified?**

My major case study will working with and from the 'Buildings Working Group, which I have set up to focus this research as part of the wider 'Alternative Futures for Portland Works Campaign'. This group is looking specifically at how we transform this contested urban space; it is comprised of a range of actors that will form the main participants in this research. I envisage that the current membership will form the core of my study, although due to the nature of this type of project it is likely that some new members will join and others will leave over the proposed duration of my research.

### **ii. Approached and recruited**

I have informally discussed this research with the group, and they have informally expressed a willingness to participate. I will do this formally through a Buildings Working Group meeting, adding this item to the agenda and providing them with the relevant information via the participant information sheet before they are asked to formally commit to any involvement. Information exchange prior to recruitment will involve the applicant prompting the potential participant to ask for clarification or further information. It will be stressed that consent to participate is an ongoing process, that being recruited onto the project does not obligate the participant and that they may withdraw at any point.

## **A9. Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?**

YES  NO 

If informed consent or consent is not to be obtained please explain why. Further guidance is at: [www.shef.ac.uk/researchoffice/gov\\_ethics\\_grp/ethics/er/guidance.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/researchoffice/gov_ethics_grp/ethics/er/guidance.html)

**A9.1.** This question is only applicable if you are planning to obtain informed consent:  
**How do you plan to obtain informed consent? (i.e. the proposed process?):**

Informed consent will be obtained using the following consent process:

1. All participants, during the recruitment process will be given an information sheet both via email and printed copy, explaining the aim and purpose of the research and what taking part in the research will entail for them, as well as how their data will be used, stored and outputs be disseminated.
2. During the recruitment process, applicants will be provided with opportunities to discuss, question and clarify the information about the research project and their participation - this may be via email, telephone or face-to-face
3. Before the interview the researcher will recap the information sheet in person, verbally and with reference to printed copy of information sheet, allowing time in the interview schedule for further discussion of this with the participant as necessary.
4. The paper copy of the consent form will be given to the participant and talked through. It will also be discussed at this stage (before the case study commences) that consent is an ongoing process and that the participant is not obligated to remain part of the project and can withdraw at any time.
5. Two paper copies of the consent form will be signed before interview and a copy given to the participant.
6. At the stage during data analysis where write-ups of the case studies are distributed to participants for their comments, there will be a reminder that consent is an ongoing process.
7. The scope and aims of this research are to be determined collaboratively as an ongoing process, where these kinds of ethical questions are frequently discussed by the group as an important and central aspect of what and why we are researching, not as a separate strand. I hope this approach will ensure that participants are respected throughout and enable them to express any concerns they might have.

**A10. What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?**

#### **Approach to anonymity**

In developing the case study design I am aware of the likelihood of recognition in documenting and presenting accounts of the Portland Works Project. Even if the data was presented anonymously it may be recognized through description of the context because there is a wider network of people (including the Portland Works Committee and partners and stakeholders) who will know enough about the project to be likely to be able to identify participants from their responses. It is also likely that most of my research will be carried out in a group situation where participants are talking and negotiating together, so the process will be an open one. We are therefore likely to create maps and tools where the identity of the participants is open and will not be anonymised. I will therefore ensure all participants are aware of this when they agree to partake in the project.

In addition to the group mapping there may be situations, conversations and exchanges that occur on a one to one basis that do involve very personal information that participants may not want to be made public in such a way. However I am aware of the potentially crucial role they might play in understanding the situation I am working in. Therefore with this kind of information I will include it,

but present it in an anonymous form. This may involve editing the information in order to ensure that this is possible within a situation where participants know each other well. The participants will have the opportunity to edit this information to ensure they are happy with the form that it is included. I will also retain the full data on such occasions, for my own personal reference until the research is completed in a password protected case study folder.

### Management and storage of data

The majority of the data will be in hard copy format- often as a map or visual diagram. This will be stored in a locked drawer in the researcher's office. Electronic data will be kept in a password protected Case Study folder on the researcher's laptop and backed up on an external hard drive.

### Use of data

The maps, interviews, conversations and any other data we produce will be sent to participants for their comment prior to publication in any format including the student thesis. The research from this project will be shown at a variety of national and international conferences, and published both as a thesis at the University of Sheffield and as articles in peer-reviewed academic journals and industry journals. They may also be used with students for teaching purposes and for future research. I will ensure that participants are fully aware of this prior to giving consent.

**A11. Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?** (Indicate how much and on what basis this has been decided)

YES  NO

**A12. Will the research involve the production of recorded media such as audio and/or video recordings?**

YES  NO

**A12.1.** This question is only applicable if you are planning to produce recorded media:  
**How will you ensure that there is a clear agreement with participants as to how these recorded media may be stored, used and (if appropriate) destroyed?**

Audio recordings will be used to record data from interviews. The storage, use and destruction of audio recordings of participant interviews and meetings will be discussed via the participant information sheet and in person before interviews. A summary of the policy on managing this data will be recapped before participants are asked to sign the consent form sign.

All the audio-recorded material will be electronically stored on a password-protected computer and backed up on a hard disk during the process of transcribing interviews. After interviews have been transcribed the audio files will be deleted. Hard copies of interview and meeting transcripts used for analysis will be stored and kept by the researcher and the research supervisor.

# University Research Ethics Application Form

## Part B – The Signed Declaration

### → Title of Research Project: Tools to Create Agency in Contested Urban Spaces

I confirm my responsibility to deliver the research project in accordance with the University of Sheffield's policies and procedures, which include the University's 'Financial Regulations', 'Good Research Practice Standards' and the 'Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue' (Ethics Policy) and, where externally funded, with the terms and conditions of the research funder.

### In signing this research ethics application form I am also confirming that:

- The form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.
- The project will abide by the University's Ethics Policy.
- There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.
- Subject to the research being approved, I undertake to adhere to the project protocol without unagreed deviation and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter from the University ethics reviewers notifying me of this.
- I undertake to inform the ethics reviewers of significant changes to the protocol (by contacting my academic department's Ethics Administrator in the first instance).
- I am aware of my responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data, including the need to register when necessary with the appropriate Data Protection Officer (within the University the Data Protection Officer is based in CiCS).
- I understand that the project, including research records and data, may be subject to inspection for audit purposes, if required in future.
- I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this form will be held by those involved in the ethics review procedure (e.g. the Ethics Administrator and/or ethics reviewers) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.
- If this is an application for a 'generic' project all the individual projects that fit under the generic project are compatible with this application.
- I understand that this project cannot be submitted for ethics approval in more than one department, and that if I wish to appeal against the decision made, this must be done through the original department.

→ Name of the Principal Investigator (or the name of the Supervisor if this is a postgraduate researcher project):

Professor Doina Petrescu

→ If this is a postgraduate researcher project insert the student's name here:

Julia Udall

→ Signature of Principal Investigator (or the Supervisor):



→ Date: 03/11/2011

Email the completed application form and provide a signed, hard copy of 'Part B' to the Ethics Administrator (also enclose, if relevant, other documents).



# Participant Information

Tools to Create Agency in  
Contested Urban Spaces

## Intention:

The intention of this project is to better understand how **Portland Works can become a space that enables the practices, desires and values of the people that lay claim to it.** It will explore how we can oppose the narrow values of 'the market' and propose alternatives that respond to the matters that concern us. To do this we will **explore and develop new tools** and ways of working collaboratively that will **enable people to act to shape the future of Portland Works.**

## Research context and aims:

Portland Works, like many other buildings, plays a significant role in the city; **it changes the ways in which we are connected together and makes certain relationships and activities possible** and others difficult or less likely to happen.

The aim of this research is to explore what Portland Works 'does' and 'can do' in the way it connects people and allows for certain uses and practices. It will also explore how we might strengthen or alter these relationships to respond to our values and desires. In short, we will try to understand **how we can repair, refurbish and redesign Portland Works to enable the building to best meet the needs of the people for whom Portland Works 'matters'.**

This research is collaborative and the researcher will work with the Buildings Working Group to transform Portland Works through creating, understanding and modifying a series of tools. These may be tools that help us find out what is important to people at Portland Works, tools that help us understand the potential of spaces we are working with, or tools that connect us to others who might positively impact the project.

Tools form an important part of craftsmanship; working **with the head and the hand to do something with care and skill.** They can enable us to work collaboratively, perhaps in ways in which we haven't before. They can be modified as we understand the task better allowing us to build knowledge and ideas together.

The tools we design and use may be models, drawings, maps, surveys, reserach, skills sessions or events that will help us to:

- ✦ Understand participants' and different users' claims to Portland Works
- ✦ Share and build ideas, values and knowledge
- ✦ Transform our growing knowledge into changes to the building and the ways we might use it

## Project objectives:

- ✦ To collaboratively design a number of tools to build our ability to transform Portland Works
- ✦ To critically reflect on how 'agency' (the power or ability to make change) might be created, recognised and mapped.
- ✦ To contribute to an understanding of the impact of employing these tools in terms of what kinds of shared knowledges and networks we might build and what concerns might we uncover.
- ✦ To contribute to an understanding of how making these values and relationships sustainable may transform Portland Works.

## Why participate?

This research will have a direct use for those involved in Portland Works' Building Working Group. It will enable you to develop a unique insight into how buildings affect our lives and give us the tools to develop Portland Works in ways that we value.

In this kind of research you will take an active role, helping determine its scope and what our priorities should be. Being involved should enable you to bring your concerns and interests to the group to be investigated and used to help us define our next steps.

## What is involved?

### Stage 1: Buildings Group Meetings

- ✦ Participation at the BWG meetings between March 2012-December 2012; which will be audio-recorded.
- ✦ This will not involve any additional time beyond that already contributed to be part of the Building Working Group.
- ✦ I may ask questions or raise issues at these meetings that have emerged from the ongoing research project. I will reflect upon our progress and present this back to the group.

### Stage 2: Mapping Sessions

- ✦ Four two-hour 'research and mapping' sessions between July 2012 and September 2012.
- ✦ These sessions will be audio-recorded and the maps will be retained and copied as part of data for this research. All recorded data will be shared prior to publication.

✦ You will be asked to discuss and map the project so far to understand where, when and how important changes have occurred, such as new people becoming involved, important decisions being made, or shared values developed. This will be from your perspective and understanding of the project; it does not require knowledge of everything that has happened so far!

✦ You will be asked to consider the tools we and others have created so far to help us act to transform Portland Works. These might be exhibitions, events, surveys, projects, models, drawings or news paper reports.

### Stage 3: Developing Tools

✦ Stage 3 will be developed together through the decisions we take in June 2012.

✦ You will be asked to be involved in designing or modifying existing tools to allow us to transform Portland Works; these might be drawings, models, events, exhibitions or plans or something else we decide will be useful.

✦ As the outline of this element of the research is not yet determined, at this stage the researcher will formally ask you again for your consent to participate in this research.

## Your data:

It is likely that most of this research will be carried out together, in a group situation; the process will therefore be an open one. It may be possible to identify you through your comments and the maps we create. If at any point you wish something you have contributed to be anonymised or removed, please inform the researcher and they will do so.

The maps, interviews, conversations and any other data we produce will be sent to you as participants for your comment prior to publication in any format including the student thesis. The research from this project will be shown at a variety of national and international conferences, and published both as a thesis at the University of Sheffield and as articles in peer-reviewed academic journals and industry journals. They may also be used with students for teaching purposes and for future research. The researcher will ensure that participants are fully aware of this prior to giving consent.

## Consent:

If you take part in this study you will be asked to give written consent to indicate that you have been fully informed about the research. Consent is an ongoing process. Signing a form does not obligate you to participate in the study and you can withdraw at any time should you wish to.

## Contact information

If during participation in this research you have any questions, require further information, or want to make a complaint, please contact:

### Researcher:

**Julia Udall,**

Post-Graduate Researcher, University of Sheffield, School of Architecture, e: [j.udall@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:j.udall@sheffield.ac.uk) t: 07967221454

### Supervisor:

**Professor Doina Petrescu,**

Professor of Architecture, University of Sheffield, School of Architecture, e: [d.petrescu@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:d.petrescu@sheffield.ac.uk) t:(0114) 222 0379

This project has been ethically approved by the University of Sheffield, School of Architecture Ethical Review Procedure. If at any time you feel that your questions or complaints have not been handled to your satisfaction, please contact:

### Office of the registrar and secretary:

#### Registrar

University of Sheffield, Firth Court, Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TN. e: [registrar@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:registrar@sheffield.ac.uk) t:(0114) 2221100

#### Affiliation and funding:

“Tools to Create Agency in Contested Urban Spaces” is a doctoral research study undertaken and funded by the University of Sheffield.

# Participant Consent Form:

## Tools to Create Agency in Contested Urban Spaces

Name of Researcher: Julia Udall

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information booklet dated **December 2011**, explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline..
3. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research
4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant  
(or legal representative)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Lead Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

*Once this has been signed by all parties the participant will receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form and the participant information booklet A copy of the signed and dated consent form will also be placed in the project's main record which will be kept in a secure location.*

# Participant Consent Form:

## Tools to Create Agency in Contested Urban Spaces

Name of Researcher: Julia Udall

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information booklet dated **December 2011**, explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline..
3. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research
4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant  
(or legal representative)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Lead Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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