

***The Ecology of Cultural Space:***  
*Towards an Understanding of the Contemporary Artist-led Collective*

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## Abstract

The importance of friendship has been under-researched in relation to artistic discourse. This lack of research becomes particularly acute when considering ambiguous formations of collective artistic activity. My thesis draws upon friendship as a socio-cultural phenomenon in order to situate the artist-led collective both historically and within the contemporary art continuum. Tracing an historiography of the personal relationships which blurred the boundaries between art and politics, from the re-imagining of the medieval artisanal guild in the nineteenth century to the development of Futurism in the early twentieth century, I argue that the contemporary artist-led collective is haunted by these ‘collectivisms past’ and the spectre of autonomy.<sup>1</sup> Further, the contradictions located within the ideological notions of individualism, which pervade the neo-liberal capitalist hegemony, both deny collective agency and yet accept collective praxis in the guise of enterprise culture.<sup>2</sup> It is this contradictory character that frames my thesis and provides the context for understanding the complex role which friendship plays in the genesis of the contemporary artist-led collective.

In order to understand the implications of friendship as a vital component of the artist-led collective, I utilise Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) developed by Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery, as a conceptual framework. I employ in-depth case studies of the artist-led collective duo The Cool Couple and architecture collective Assemble, in order to explore how friendship informs artist-led collectives throughout their life cycles.<sup>3</sup> I question how and why these social bonds, which constitute relationships and thus shape the collectives, interrelate with a multiplicity of forces in their specific cultural ecology. These interrelations are further explored through a mapping study of artist-led collective activity in Leeds, UK. This study problematises the dualistic perspective of resistance and co-option between artist-led collectives and institutions. I argue that the evolution of the artist-led collective is implicitly interrelated with the institution and thus the binary opposition of resistance and co-option becomes a dialectical knot of ever-changing relationships. Finally, I situate myself in the research through an auto-ethnographic study of the artist-led collective The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe, of which I am a founding member. This case study enables an internal view of the social bonds which formed The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe and provides an insight that would otherwise be impossible from an external perspective.

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<sup>1</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, orig. ed. 1993 (London: Routledge Classics, 2006), and Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014).

<sup>2</sup>Gregory Sholette, *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (London: University of Minnesota press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup>Leslie A. Baxter and Barbara M. Montgomery, *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics* (London: The Guilford Press, 1996).

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Table, 1. EM Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory*, edn. 8, orig. 1991 (New York: McGraw-Hill companies Inc, 2012), pp.155-156.

## Exergue

1. 'Friendship is treated both as an association with other people and with ideas, a befriending of issues'.<sup>4</sup>
2. 'This tends to lend collective work a social rather than artistic character'.<sup>5</sup>

This double exergue attends to the relational dynamic knot which has, traced its way through the plethora of different cultural formations that have often been assigned to history as collectivism. This assignment is always given with a feeling of knowing but without articulation of exactly why this word 'collective', is being evoked. Indeed, its character is never attested, and the meaning is often obscured. It is a 'knotty' word which is about both the plural, and by association the singular; this is by definition a contradiction in terms. However, this contradiction is implicated in every instance that the word collective is evoked within artistic endeavor.

This double exergue impresses upon the reader that the social issues at stake are also artistic, and the bonds which we form are always traceable in the language we adopt. The language is only as such, between communicators and thus together the 'you' and the 'I' become 'we', a collective which is always active. Indeed, the reason for this exergue is to lay the foundations of the importance of friendship within the life cycle of the artist-led collective. This double exergue by Condorelli and Enwezor begins to articulate the interrelationship between the social character of artist-led collective discourse which I argue is vital in order to move towards an understanding of the contemporary artist-led collective.

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<sup>4</sup>Céline Condorelli, 'In Support: a theoretical and practical investigation into forms of display' *Thesis* (2014) (Centre for Research Architecture, Department of Visual Cultures Goldsmiths, University of London), p.15.

<sup>5</sup>Okwui Enwezor, 'The Production of Social Space as Artwork', *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p.223.

## **Introduction: Antanaclasis**

The following reflective text explores my relationship to the subject of my research. This text begins with the many ‘iterations’ and instances of artist-led collectives within my professional life. I will then begin to analyse these interrelations in order to conceptualise my own practice within the frame. This reflective cycle is just as important as the preceding double exergue because it foregrounds my own experience as a starting point to the research which informed this thesis. The reader will be able to ascertain a journey from my original conceptualisation of the artist-led collective which then shifted and changed as the research problematised these initial ideas. This journey is not finished with the completion of my thesis, as it is continually shaped by research and experience. Indeed, this antanaclasis will continue beyond my PhD, its trajectory forever shaped by the research which informed my thesis.

After I graduated from my undergraduate degree at Leeds College of Art I found myself in a predicament. As a student of Fine Art, I naturally wanted to ‘become’ a fully professional artist. However, to engage with my practice it was vital that I secure a studio/workspace. Working with a fellow graduate Calum Paterson, I contacted East Street Arts (ESA) to arrange to rent a studio in Leeds.<sup>6</sup> Working closely with Calum in a shared studio was my first meaningful confrontation with collaborative artistic practice outside of the academy. However, this was not a collective but a loosely connected collaboration born out of the necessity for a studio space in which to continue to develop my practice. This is an important difference because it is suggestive of the boundaries between collective action and collaborative practice.

I had previously come into contact with collectives during my time at Leeds College of Art. These were predominantly student-based activities/groups formed through prescribed modules and briefs. Involvement in ESA, an artist-led organisation, opened up access to a network of studio holders, practitioners and art administrators who became a saving grace from the feeling of freefall and anxiety after graduation.

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<sup>6</sup>East Street Arts, ‘Barkston House’ <<http://eaststreetarts.org.uk/studio/barkston-house/>> [accessed 06/12/2016].

The second iteration or reflection of artist collectives was approximately six months after I graduated. I was a studio holder co-inhabiting a space at ESA's Barkston House. I was in the position, which many practitioners may find familiar, of working a number of part-time jobs to fund my practice. The relationships and friendships I forged throughout my time at Art College turned out to be highly significant. I became a member of a newly formed collective entitled, *Fine Line Arts*. The collective was conceived by ex-students of Leeds College of Art and I received an invitation to exhibit in a show entitled, *ESTJ#01/INFP#*. Fine Line Arts exhibited at a terrace house in Burley, Leeds and positioned the show as interventional. The artwork, at times, blurred the lines between public and private- the home and the studio. The exhibition was self-curated, promoted, installed and created (the artwork by members of the group). While this concept appeared radical I quickly became aware of historical blueprints.<sup>7</sup>

The collective went on to develop and exhibit in venues throughout Leeds. A notable exhibition was at the Leeds Corn Exchange in the summer of 2013. The show was in conjunction with the Corn Exchange's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary [Fig.1]. By this time, we had started running educational workshops in drawing and had developed a Mission Statement,

Fine Line Arts (FLA) is a Leeds based Collective of Artists that exhibit our own work locally and provide opportunities for other Yorkshire Artists to exhibit alongside the Collective. The key values for FLA are the importance of Materiality [*sic*] and the reality of the Artist. The main aim of FLA is to create an [*sic*] opportunities [*sic*] for the modern "Working Artist" to exhibit work that identifies the individual purely as an artist rather than the everyday career they have chosen. Many Artists, young and old, find that they have to take on "real" jobs in order to progress in life rather than relying on the ideals of becoming widely recognised in the art world and general media. This, in turn, creates a struggle for the individual to continue producing artworks on a professional level and inevitably, practice ultimately becomes a hobby at best or dwindles away completely. Our intention is to restore the seemingly cracked relationship between creativity and the working Artist.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Rosalind, Davis and Annabel, Tilley, *What They Didn't Teach You in Art School: What you need to know to survive as an artist* (London: Octopus Publishing Group, 2016).

<sup>8</sup>In hindsight this mission statement was incredibly naïve in its use of language. Firstly, a distinction was made between 'working life' and 'artistic life'. I would argue this distinction cannot exist as they are both inseparable, a part of the nature of contemporary existence. The statement further suggests working as an artist is not a 'real job' by inadvertently referring to artistic practice as becoming a 'hobby'. This distinction between leisure and working life is blurred at best and many thousands of artists make a career out of their practice. Secondly, the statement identifies FLA with the 'Yorkshire brand', which is an idealist vision of life in a rural setting, something twee and slightly kitsch. The intent was for the collective to encourage local artists to join and develop their practice. However, all of these narratives within the statement contradict its intent and it becomes isolationist. Fine Line Arts, 'Mission Statement' eds. Elizabeth, Loren (2013) <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/497579340292500/files/>> [accessed 06/12/2016].

The development of this mission statement was a pivotal moment for the group because it was the first instance of self-identification with the word ‘collective’. This self-identification was intertwined with the development of a specific intent to, ‘provide opportunities for other Yorkshire Artists’ and with a broader socio-political aim to, ‘restore the seemingly cracked relationship between creativity and the working Artist’.<sup>9</sup> Although these intentions may have been naïve, they reveal an important factor in the formation of the artist-led collective. Collective action appeared to be predicated on a self-initiated mutual decision, between the members of FLA, to implement a socio-political ideology as a guiding set of aims to work towards together.

The exhibition at the Corn Exchange entitled, *Translated State: Essence of an Industry*, became a testing ground for a number of ventures. Firstly, we had expanded our drawing workshop thematic by offering it publicly and for the first time charged a small fee. Secondly, we enlisted the help of an ‘intern’, a first-year Fine Art student from Leeds College of Art. The internship was a chance to exhibit and help install/ manage the show for its duration. It was at this stage, I glimpsed the possibility of artist-led organisations operating successfully. Conversely, I also witnessed how group cohesion can almost immediately dissipate when a focused goal, such as an exhibition, reaches its zenith. Soon after Fine Line Arts disbanded, its members (myself included) venturing into different career paths.

The third iteration, akin to the second, developed through a network of peer to peer relationships and friendships. After the collapse of Fine Line Arts with the acute prospect of dropping out of the art world entirely, due to lack of engagement art, I decided to pursue a theoretical-led Master of Arts in Art Gallery and Museum Studies at the University of Leeds. My practice had become highly interdisciplinary, somewhere between the artistic, curatorial and a third aspect (unknown at the time). The curatorial element of my practice became my focus. I had gained a ‘taste’ for curating from exhibiting with Fine Line Arts and also through observing curatorial methodologies by exhibiting at the Brick Lane Gallery, Shoreditch, in London. This was the main force behind the choice of MA, as

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<sup>9</sup>Fine Line Arts, ‘Mission Statement’ eds. Elizabeth, Loren (2013)  
<<https://www.facebook.com/groups/497579340292500/files/>> [accessed 06/12/2016].

it presented an opportunity to develop my practice and to exponentially widen my overall knowledge base.

It was around this time that I started volunteering and subsequently working as a Gallery Assistant at Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP). I became educated in museum practice and the rules and regulations which govern the sector; care of collections, visitor experience, and curatorial integrity are paramount. However, I soon realised the freedom of working in an artist-led collective was almost the antithesis of working in a national/international institution.

During my time working at YSP, I built a number of important professional relationships. I worked alongside artists, thinkers, curators, musicians, and writers. I co-founded *The (Un)realised Project* with fellow YSP employees John Ledger and, later, D.S Jarvis. This collective started out as a series of documented dialogues and convened in bars, service stations, galleries, and museums. These dialogues were manifested through videos, drawings/writings and interventions. The central subject which emerged from these discussions was a reading or critique of ‘stuckness’ within society and culture.<sup>10</sup> The collective practice which developed from this thread attempted to explore this problematic through interventionist-esque performative artworks. The significance of this became clear through the context of my MA dissertation.<sup>11</sup> I suddenly had a trichromatic between artistic, curatorial and academic practice. This academic practice was the previously undiscovered element that I had been exploring through art writing and critical analysis.

The collective developed from this point onwards, with exhibitions at Espacio Gallery in London, Left Bank Leeds and The Bowery, Leeds. These exhibitions, writings, and videos have subsequently been collated into a WordPress Blog.<sup>12</sup> The collective has also changed its name, as its ‘unrealised’ nature has become realised. This is now, *The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe*.

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<sup>10</sup>Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007) and Ivor, Southwood, *Non-Stop Inertia* (Oxon: John Hunt Publishing (0-Books), 2011).

<sup>11</sup>John Wright, *Antinomies and Paradox: the Artist, the Institution and language* (Unpublished MA Dissertation, University of Leeds, 2014).

<sup>12</sup>The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe, ‘Home’ (2019)

<<https://wordpress.com/view/retrobarattheendofuniverse.wordpress.com>> [accessed 14/05/2019].

The fourth iteration developed around the same time as the third. This iteration was entitled, *The State of The Arts (TSOTA)*. Musician-philosopher Jack Simpson, CEO of TSOTA, and I had commenced a conversation through meetings and exhibition reviews which I had submitted to the fledgling project during my MA. The concept behind the online resource was that it would provide a hub to publish exhibition reviews, art writing and thoughts/ news on cultural events.<sup>13</sup> What I have subsequently realised was that the discussions with Simpson and my involvement with the project centred on the emergence of the artist-led sector within Leeds.

Although TSOTA is now focusing on multiple cities and regions, its initial purpose was to attempt to develop an overview of artist-led activity in Leeds. This organisation was completely different from the previous artist-led collectives that I had witnessed. It mirrored conventional magazine and publishing companies because it consisted of a highly organised structure of writers and editors. On the other hand, it was extremely democratic and was not-for-profit. TSOTA possessed a sense of idealism emanating from the passion of its contributors and not from economic need.

### ***Practice into Thesis and Thesis into Practice***

The word collective is therefore at the core of my practice. This realisation has only recently become clear through the decision to undertake a PhD. *Antanaclasis* is a rhetorical literary device in which the same word is repeated with differing meanings. The word is derived from the Greek meaning, ‘echo’ or ‘reflexion’.<sup>14</sup> The relationship I have to collectives and collectivism, as I have outlined above, acts akin to this literary device. Although, metaphorical in its usage throughout this text, there remains a complicated entanglement that has informed my career choices thus far.

My relationship with the proposed thesis reflects this complexity. At this stage, I want to make clear that when I state ‘my relationship’, I am referring both to my practice and to the abstract notion of my ‘self-identification’ as an artist-led researcher. This concept underpins this thesis because my interdisciplinary practice has already developed a form of research-led criteria that I apply to projects.

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<sup>13</sup>The State of The Arts, ‘about’ (2016) <<http://www.thestateofthearts.co.uk/>> [accessed 12/12/2016].

<sup>14</sup>Dictionary.com, ‘Antanaclasis’, <<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/antanaclasis>> [accessed 10/12/2016].



It is situated between the artistic, curatorial and academic fields and is essentially formed in dialogue and communication with others through collective actions. This thesis implements this form of dialogue as its methodological framework. I argue that dialogical enquiry is necessary in order to move towards an understanding of the contemporary artist-led collective precisely because collectives' are formed through internal-external dialogues.

As I have illustrated above, the development and interest in collectives and collectivism has emerged through the cultural environments which I have inhabited. Each iteration has illuminated different questions. This 'set of questions' has informed the initial starting place for my thesis and includes; what are artist collectives? How do they form? And why? What are the differences between collectives and institutions? I began to ask myself these questions during my time working with more traditional institutions, and I became conscious of other, perhaps deeper questions, regarding the language surrounding 'artist-led' activities whilst working with TSOTA. These include; is a physical site important to collectives? What are the boundaries between collectives and non-collectives? If there are boundaries, why do they exist? These questions expose further sub-questions including; why do we assign the word 'collective' to groups of artists? Is the nature of collectivism in the artist-led sector changing the nature of art practice? Having taken this journey to the thesis, I now needed to frame its aims and objectives.

### ***Introduction: shaping my aims and objectives***

The aim of this thesis is to move towards an understanding of the contemporary artist-led collective. On the face of it, this statement may seem simplistic, however, in order to move towards an understanding of the contemporary artist-led collective, I must first define what an artist-led collective is and trace out its territory. In order to explore a territory, I must understand its boundaries, and further, to understand its boundaries I need to comprehend how collectives interrelate within their specific cultural ecologies. Suddenly, the aim of this thesis was not a simple task but a complex web of interdependent multiplicities and power relations. I purposely evoke the imagery of a seething mass of tensions and contradictions, webbed together with intersections which are constantly in flux and

ever-changing, as a method of visualisation throughout this thesis. It is this complexity which warrants a conceptual framework in order to make sense of the potential vastness of this endeavor.

The argument which I form throughout this thesis attests to an often overlooked socio-cultural phenomenon within the expanded field of artistic research and art history, that of *friendship*.<sup>15</sup> This argument builds upon the work of curator-writer Céline Condorelli in order to explore the notion of friendship and its fundamental role in the formation and continued life cycle of the artist-led collective.<sup>16</sup> I argue that these friendships are in constant dialectical tension with internal-external factors that uniquely shape every artist-led collective, and thus to understand a collective their particular dialectical knot must be analysed. Further, this analysis questions the binary notions of artwork vs. social structures by arguing that to move towards a more nuanced understanding of the artist-led collective, these discursive notions cannot be separated or placed within a hierarchy. Instead, they must be seen as relationally interdependent and indivisible from each other.

The theory of friendship which I develop throughout this thesis is not based on the salacious elements of artists' lives. Instead, I take friendship as a lens to explore artist-led collectives both historically and in the contemporary. This theory of friendship is informed by decades of research developed by William Rawlins and others in the field of relational dialectics.<sup>17</sup> It must be noted that I am not creating a new theory of friendship but applying the relational dialectics of friendship to explore the artist-led collective.

*Chapter 1: The State of Play* contextualises the contemporary landscape through the theoretical lens of hauntology and heterotopia. I argue that the relationships which constitute the contemporary artist-led collective are intertwined with the development of hegemonic neo-liberal capitalism which has taken root since the post war era. Drawing on collectives that have evolved over the past fifty years, I

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<sup>15</sup>Céline Condorelli, 'In Support: a theoretical and practical investigation into forms of display' *Unpublished Thesis* (2014).

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>William Rawlins, *The Compass of Friendship: Narratives, Identities, and Dialogues* (London: Sage Publications, 2009).

trace the discursive threads which echo throughout their development and reveal their interdependencies with the conditions of capital and modernity.

These interdependencies are explored through a historical lens in *Chapter 2: (Un)histories of the contemporary artist-led collective*, where I trace an historiography of collectivism in order to argue that the contemporary artist-led collective is haunted by these discursive threads. I explore the complex relationships which formed the nineteenth-century re-imagining of the medieval guild and trace these social-bonds through the intersections between politics and art. I argue that these threads manifest in our shared neoliberal capitalism as lost futures, never able to fully actualise themselves and thus are simultaneously both present and absent.<sup>18</sup> In *Chapter 3: In-depth Case Study - Assemble*, I provide a detailed analysis of London based art and architecture collective Assemble. This analysis reveals the complex interrelations of class, cultural policy, and gentrification through the lens of the relationships and social drives that formed the collective. *Chapter 4: In-depth Case Study - The Cool Couple*, continues to explore how friendship interacts with socio-cultural and geo-political forces through a detailed case study of Milanese based collective duo The Cool Couple (TCC). This chapter addresses the artist-led collective in an international context, questioning the limits of collective practice. I argue that a recognition of the collective duo is vitally important to a further understanding of how and why collectives develop both in size and in scope.

*Chapter 5: The Ecology of Cultural Space: Mapping Artist-led Collectives* applies these arguments to a mapping study of artist-led collectives practicing in the Leeds city area. I argue that the complexities of space and place are constantly defining and re-defining the collectives which operate in the city and that both the urban environment and geo-political forces impact upon the artist-led culture within the city. This chapter questions the perception that artist-led collectives are opposed to the institution and I argue that a relational perspective is needed in order to deconstruct the myth of isolationism.

Finally, *Chapter 6: An Auto-ethnographic study of The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe*, shifts the dialogue onto an auto-ethnographic analysis of my own experience working within an artist-led

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<sup>18</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, orig. ed. 1993 (London: Routledge Classics, 2006), and Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014).

collective in order to understand the internal social-bonds at play which constitute an artist-led collective. In this analysis, I argue that these relationships are always changing and never remain in the status quo and are always affected by different internal-external forces.

It is at this juncture that I return to the title of my thesis *The Ecology of Cultural Space: Towards an Understanding of the Contemporary Artist-led Collective*, as it is important to clarify the meaning and subsequent usage of particular words and their concepts. The arguments situated throughout this thesis, bring into play the notion of an ecological approach to the questions investigated. Ecology was defined by Professor John Holden in the AHRC report, *The Ecology of Culture*.<sup>19</sup> Holden writes, ‘Seeing culture as an ecology is congruent with cultural value approaches that take into account a wide range of non-monetary values’.<sup>20</sup> Holden’s report examines the value of culture from multiple perspectives rather than reducing the complexities to an entirely economic value. Ecology as a conceptual framework must consider historical narratives, relationships within different social orders, physical locations, environmental/ethical issues, economic and political conditions. Through implementing this multi-perspective conceptual framework from different discursive fields of knowledge, for example, social sciences and social geography, this research analyses the contemporary artist-led collective from different perspectives and at different scales. I do not see ecology as evoking equilibrium or some form of harmonious utopia. On the contrary, I have utilised the term ecology throughout my research to evoke tension, contradiction, totality, and change.

Space is another highly contested term, the discourse of which weaves throughout almost all schools of thought. Doreen Massey proposed that space is alive, ‘instead of space being this flat surface it’s like a pincushion of a million stories’.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Michel Foucault began to think of space as having temporality, multiplicity and dynamics, ‘[w]e are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points

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<sup>19</sup>John Holden, ‘The Ecology of Culture’ (2015) (AHRC).

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid*, p.2.

<sup>21</sup>Doreen Massey, ‘Social Science Bites’, *YouTube* (2013) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Quj4tjbTPxw>> [accessed 30/08/2017].

and intersects with its own skein'.<sup>22</sup> Henri Lefebvre proposed the notion of space as a product of the social modes of production.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the social space produced (including the everyday 'lived space') creates a vehicle for thought and all the other forms of abstract space.<sup>24</sup> Lefebvre's concept suggested space is not neutral and that the space of society tends to develop hegemonic power dormancy.<sup>25</sup> However, a more nuanced understanding of space was formed by Massey in her impassioned publication *For Space*, in which she argued that space is, 'the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimacy of the tiny'.<sup>26</sup> Massey's propositions suggest that these interrelations reveal a multiplicity of trajectories which reveal the plurality of space.<sup>27</sup> Space is not some abstract concept of an entity/void to be filled with things that pre-exist everything else, it is to be understood as 'the simultaneity of stories-so-far', in other words, it is always being created by interrelations-between entities.<sup>28</sup> This is how space is conceptualised throughout my research and through this conception, space becomes inherently political. Indeed, the 'cultural space' which I am referring to in the title of this thesis is constituted by these interrelations within a multiplicity of the different spheres which may be identified or even self-identify as 'cultural'.

### ***Methodology and Conceptual Framework***

It is at this stage that I must now move on to discuss the conceptual framework and the core methodologies employed throughout my research. As I am a researcher, curator, artist and this is a research-based thesis it is of no great surprise that the central thematic of friendship would become apparent through the act of carrying out the fieldwork. Indeed, it became obvious to me, through the dialogue with Assemble and The Cool Couple, that friendship was integral to their existence.

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<sup>22</sup>Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, October, (1984), p.1.

<sup>23</sup>Henri Lefebvre, *The Social Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), p.26.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid*, pp.26-27.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>26</sup>Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), p.9.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid*, p.9.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid*.

Friendship's importance was also underpinned by my own experience of the power of social-bonds to ignite artistic investigation through working with friends in *The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe*.

I needed to find a theoretical base or discourse in order to understand what friendship was and why it was seemingly prevalent in the artist-led collective. This led me to adopt Relational Dialectic Theory (RDT) as a conceptual framework in order to understand the nuances of interpersonal relationships.<sup>29</sup> RDT was developed by social scientists Leslie A. Baxter and Barbara M. Montgomery in order to understand the often divergent and contradictory tendencies within relationships.<sup>30</sup> RDT is grounded in Russian born theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's writing on communication.<sup>31</sup> Baxter and Montgomery developed RDT from Bakhtin's conceptual argument which positioned communication as central to social existence, 'from the perspective of relational dialectics, social life exists in and through people's communicative practices'.<sup>32</sup> Crucially, the relational dialectical perspective, 'does not place at its theoretical centre the economic contradictions between the forces of production and consumption' which are traditionally associated with the Marxist dialectical theory.<sup>33</sup> Instead, RDT focuses on the complexities of contradictory forces within communication and the constant ever-changing nuances of dialogue between people, places and things.<sup>34</sup> One central concept within RDT is the role of Bakhtin's centrifugal and centripetal dialogic forces.<sup>35</sup> Baxter and Montgomery suggested that these forces describe the interplay between contradictions, 'conceived as complex, overlapping domains of centripetal or dominant forces juxtaposed with centrifugal or countervailing forces'.<sup>36</sup> RDT has a particularly rich history in the investigations and research on the social bonds of friendship. This is exemplified by the work of Professor of Interpersonal Communication, William. K. Rawlins, who argued that friendships are '[d]ialectically composed and culturally enacted as both marginal and moral, friendship can function as 'a double agency'; weaving in and out of larger social

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<sup>29</sup>Leslie A. Baxter and Barbara M. Montgomery, *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics* (London: The Guilford Press, 1996).

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed., by Michael Holquist, trans by, Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup>Montgomery and Baxter, *Dialectical Approaches to Studying Personal Relationships*, orig 1998 (London: Psychology Press Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), p.157.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p.157.

orders and fulfilling both individual and social services'.<sup>37</sup> Rawlins suggested this change over time reveals the flux and re-negotiation in friendships.<sup>38</sup> This re-negotiation is both internal, between each person, and externally facing, meaning that exteriority is, on a societal level, always culturally specific and is simultaneously an internalisation of how friendships are supposed to function in any given culture.<sup>39</sup> Rawlins suggested that this reveals the constant tensions and dialectical positions of the private and the public, the ideal and the real.<sup>40</sup> For Rawlins, this was a thread within the very architecture of the social fabric of communication within friendships and represented a strand of relational dialectics which he refers to as *contextual* dialectics.<sup>41</sup> Contextual dialectics derives 'from the place of friendships in Western culture', which logically correlates with Massey's conception of space as composed of the relationship between entities.<sup>42</sup> Simultaneously, Rawlins explored the role of *interactional* dialectics which proposes four interrelated positions that affect the flow of ongoing communication, 'the dialectic of freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependent'.<sup>43</sup> Next is the dialectic of 'affection and instrumentality' and finally, the interactional dialectics of, 'judgement and acceptance' and 'expressiveness and protectiveness'.<sup>44</sup> Rawlins's relational dialectical forces provide a theoretical base for the analysis within the case studies throughout this thesis.

The reasons for my decision to implement RDT as the conceptual framework for my research are implicitly linked to its propositions and assumptions. RDT is also incredibly flexible and does not enter into a strict form which may arbitrarily impact upon the subject matter at hand. I believe that communication is one of the fundamental tenants of the human social world and is vital in the formation and continued existence of artist-led collectives. I have formed this perspective from experience, literature, and fieldwork. Likewise, the essence of RDT is developed from this same guiding principle. There are several other forms of dialectic thought such as Marxist Dialectics and

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<sup>37</sup>William K. Rawlins, 'Cultural Double Agency and the Pursuit of Friendship', *Cultural Dynamics*, Vol. 2 (1) (1989), p.28.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid*, pp.28-40.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>40</sup>William K. Rawlins, 'Writing About Friendship Matters', *Dialectical Approaches to Studying Personal Relationships*, eds. By, Barbara M. Montgomery and Leslie A. Baxter (London: Psychology Press, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), p.72.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid*, p.72.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid*, p.72.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid*.

Hegelian Dialectics. However, as I have previously stated, RDT does not place the forces of production and consumption at its centre.<sup>45</sup> Further, RDT emphasises the multimodal aspects of divergent and opposing discourses which can exist in contradictory forms instead of the Hegalian emphasis on attempting to strive towards theory-antithesis- synthesis.<sup>46</sup> This correlates with my argument that artist-led collectives can only be understood in relation to the cultural ecology of social space and cannot be isolated and analysed as a singular phenomenon.

For the reader to understand my use of RDT, I will quote a highly illustrative table but useful visualisation of the overarching relational dialectics in play. This table was created by Professor EM Griffin, in the book, *A First Look at Communication Theory*.<sup>47</sup>

(Table, 1)

	<b>Internal Dialectic Relationship</b> (within the relationship)	<b>External Dialectic Relationship</b> (between couple and community)
<b>Integration-Separation</b>	Connection-Autonomy	Inclusion-Seclusion
<b>Stability-Change</b>	Certainty-Uncertainty	Conventionality-Uniqueness
<b>Expression-Nonexpression</b>	Openness-Closedness	Revelation-concealment

The table is based on Baxter and Montgomery’s findings for, as Griffin suggests, ‘Baxter and Montgomery’s research has focused on three overarching relational dialectics that affect almost every close relationship: integration–separation, stability–change, and expression–nonexpression’.<sup>48</sup> This table, and Baxter and Montgomery’s research, was based primarily on the analysis of couples or two people within dialectical communications. However, I will be expanding this to incorporate greater numbers at times.

<sup>45</sup>Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, Trans., by Rodney Livingstone (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1968), and, Alain Badiou, Joel Bellassen, Louis Mossot, *The Rational Kernel of the Hegelian Dialectic*, eds., by Tzuchien Tho ( Melbourne: Re.press, 2011).

<sup>46</sup>Montgomery and Baxter, *Dialectical Approaches to Studying Personal Relationships*, p.4.

<sup>47</sup>EM Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory*, edn. 8, orig. 1991 (New York: McGraw-Hill companies Inc, 2012), pp.155-156.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid*, p.155.



Finally, RDT provides a rich framework of conceptual propositions that I have implemented throughout my analysis. These propositions insist on dialogic methodologies that, in turn, complement the research methodologies. This insistence is intertwined in the fundamental aspects of dialectics which can only be conceived in communication with another.<sup>49</sup>

I implemented an interdisciplinary methodological approach to my research in order to capture a holistic perspective on artist-led collectives. This reflects my central argument that artist-led collectives can be understood through communication and thus a dialogic approach to methodology would be most appropriate.<sup>50</sup> Further, this interdisciplinary methodology reflects my own situation as a researcher, curator, and artist working in the hinterlands between different theoretical paradigms and bodies of knowledge. As a result, this methodological approach combined elements of historiography, dialogic learning, reflective accounts, critical geography, and auto-ethnography. These methodologies form each of the chapters in this thesis but often intersect with each other throughout the different case studies. In Chapter one I develop a critical analysis of the contemporary context in order to explore how and why the artist-led collective intersects with art, culture, politics, and society. In Chapter two I implement a form of historiographic writing which traces a specific discursive thread of collectivism and its intersection between people, art and society. Professor of Art History, Catherine M. Soussloff, argued that historiography, ‘mediates between individuals who existed in historical reality and texts that represent those individuals and that reality’.<sup>51</sup> This mediation is vital to understanding the complexities of the historical context of the contemporary artist-led collective. I construct a careful critical analysis of the texts written by individuals involved in various forms of collective activity. This historiography brings together an often fragmented narrative that is yet to be fully understood or recognised by a history of art.

Chapters three and four combine reflective accounts and dialogic learning specifically informed by the work of Sara Ahmed in her book *Living a Feminist Life* and Mikhail Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic*

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<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup>Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*.

<sup>51</sup>Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p.19.

*Imagination*.<sup>52</sup> I have focused on Ahmed's use of reflection through the form of vignettes as auto-ethnographic accounts.<sup>53</sup> Ahmed's subject matter, although important, is not of primary concern in my research. Instead, it is her writing style and form which I found solved the problem of voice between the reflective prose and the academic style.<sup>54</sup> I hope to assist the reader in their appreciation of the text through the clear delineation on the page of the different styles of writing.

Dialogical learning has primarily been implemented in pedagogical studies and was characterised by the educator and social activist Paulo Freire as 'dialogue is itself creative and re-creative'.<sup>55</sup> Freire saw the act of engaging in a dialogue with others as more creative than the act of solitary study or writing and that knowledge was something found in the both/and dialectic between communicators.<sup>56</sup> Bakhtin further explored this interconnection by suggesting that, 'the authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is dialogized heteroglossia, anonymous and social as language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accented as an individual utterance'.<sup>57</sup> For Bakhtin dialogue is interweaved with utterances that have gone before and have still yet to come, and meaning is shaped by this constant interplay.<sup>58</sup> Thus to move towards an understanding of something requires communication with another, and comprehension as such requires a degree of willingness to open up debate. Bakhtin and Freire argued that learning is a continuous process and this process has shaped my entire thesis and becomes particularly methodologically apparent in the two in-depth case studies with TCC and Assemble. This methodology informed the method which I implemented and combined with the reflective accounts of my 'on-site' experience with the collectives and a continuous online dialogue situated on the digital storytelling platform *Yarn Community*.<sup>59</sup> This combination of individual-collective perspectives

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<sup>52</sup>Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminists Life* (London: Duke University Press, 2017), and Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid*, p.41.

<sup>54</sup>Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminists Life*, p.61.

<sup>55</sup>Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education* (London: Bergin and Garvey, 1987), p.3.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>57</sup>Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, p.272.

<sup>58</sup>Utterances- are single elements of communication which form conversations. This does not have to be verbal speech and can even occur internally. Heteroglossia- The expression of multiple and often contradictory perspectives within a text or an artistic work.

<sup>59</sup>Yarn Community, 'Make, share and connect stories with things on the web', (2015) <<http://yarncommunity.com/>> [accessed 25/06/2019], (see chapter 2 for details).

shaped the direction of the research through the continued reflection in order to gain a more nuanced understanding rather than instigating a didactic approach.

Chapter five introduces a mapping study of the artist-led collectives practicing in Leeds. The study was undertaken over the duration of a year and specifically focused on the different spaces of appearance in which collectives purposefully enter the public realm. Although the study was initially formed through the collection of empirical data such as coordinates, type of event, names, etc. the analysis and body of the study were critical in its intentions. I employed a mixed methodology drawing on Massey's conception of a relational sense of place coupled with the concept of 'place imprinting'.<sup>60</sup> I developed a methodological framework that was both critical and relational in terms of the multiplicity of human and non-human activity.<sup>61</sup> Both these approaches expanded the analysis beyond simply the spatial element of place and began to elaborate on the socio-cultural and geopolitical connotations of artists coming together to act collectively within the specificity of place.

Finally, chapter six employs an auto-ethnographic study of my own practice with artist-led collective *The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe*. This is a reflexive chapter that constantly moves between the personal and the wider socio-cultural context in order to analyse the role of friendship within all aspects of the collective. Drawing on the auto-ethnographic work of Carolyn Ellis and Arthur. P. Bochner, I instigate a fragmented narrative from first-person accounts which were then analysed through the lens of relational dialectics.<sup>62</sup>

There is a question of ethics that I must address before moving on to the literature review. It played out through my choices of methodology and was manifested in the method of the research study which I implemented. The decision to work with TCC and Assemble in order to gain a deeper understanding of their internal social-bonds and thus how they practice through a dialogical methodology, immediately implicated myself in the research for obvious reasons. As a researcher

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<sup>60</sup> Robert Hollands and John Vail, 'Place Imprinting and the arts: A case of the Amber Collective', *Local Economy* (2015) Vol. 30, No.2, pp.173-190.

<sup>61</sup>Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), and Robert Hollands and John Vail, 'Place Imprinting and the arts: A case of the Amber Collective', *Local Economy* (2015).

<sup>62</sup>Carolyn Ellis and Arthur. P. Bochner, 'Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject', *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (California: Sage Publications, 2000).

embedded in this way, it was of ethical importance that I made everyone aware of my intentions and the purpose of my research. By being open and honest about my research, the members of the collectives could make up their own minds on what information they wanted to share. This situation was particularly pertinent to my fieldwork in Glasgow at The Baltic Street Adventure Playground, which was a project established with Assemble and the local community. I was officially a volunteer at The Playground for the duration of my research and thus I occupied a hybrid role of researcher-volunteer and as a result I was constantly engaging with not only the staff of the playground but also the parents, guardians, and children which came to the space. It was ethically important within this form of embedded research that I developed trust and maintained a relationship with the people involved in order to both function in my role as a volunteer and as a researcher. Sociologist Sharon Macdonald argued that ‘good’ ethical practice within embedded research should, ‘be self-reflexive’, as every embedded situation with different people in different contexts presents different negotiations.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, it is vital that embedded research has ‘commitment to pluralism- to finding ways to hear the many perspectives and not just stay within our own- it will inevitably create moral tensions’.<sup>64</sup> In essence, my work with The Playground was founded in my self-reflexive approach to opening communication with people in order to find out their views and perspectives. This could not be pre-determined within a top-heavy ethical structure as it was emergent and crucially unpredictable. In other words, my approach to working and communicating with every single person involved was different and would change throughout my stay at Baltic Street Adventure Playground. As Macdonald stated, ‘although, “not treating people as a means to an ends” seems right in many ways, surely all research does in effect treat people this way to some degree at least: they are part of the end of conducting a research project’.<sup>65</sup> It is clearly important that being upfront with people from the beginning manages expectations and gives context. Indeed, this point also worked in reverse as The

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<sup>63</sup>Sharon Macdonald, ‘Embedded Ethics and Research Integrity: A Response to ‘The Quest for Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research’ by David Carpenter’, *Finding Common Ground: Consensus in Research Ethics Across the Social Sciences*, eds by. Ron Iphofen (Bradford: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017), p.33.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.* p.34.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.* p.33.

Playground gained a volunteer through my research and further still, Assemble could be seen to further engage with external research.

Inevitably by employing self-reflection and autoethnography, particularly in my case study of *The Retro Bar at The End of the Universe*, my own perspectives and voice formed part of the output.

However, this was precisely what I had intended as the researcher cannot be entirely separated from what they are researching, and it was of high importance that as a member of the Collective, I was able to deliver my own internal perspectives of the social-bonds in play. Indeed, from a dialogical perspective communication and research can only occur with the interplay between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, thus my own influence was just as important as other perspectives and should not be seen as a negative position.<sup>66</sup> As Macdonald suggested, exciting research angles come out of the reflexive and changing relationships which the researcher has with their context, and in my case, undertaking this research was going to create potential contradictions, blurring of boundaries and possible tensions.<sup>67</sup>

This final point brings this thread to a close as my investigations into collectivism in contemporary art informed by my own experience of working within and with collectives. The methodologies and their ethical components are implicitly intertwined with my interdisciplinary position as a research-led curator and co-founder of The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe.

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<sup>66</sup>Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*.

<sup>67</sup>Sharon Macdonald, ‘Embedded Ethics and Research Integrity: A Response to ‘The Quest for Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research’ by David Carpenter’.

## Literature Review: Constructing the Canon

### *What is an artist-led collective?*

In order to begin this thesis in earnest, it is important to closely investigate the subject at hand. I have ascertained a set of assumptions through the literature in order to move towards a sense of the subject matter and where its boundaries may reside. These assumptions are questioned throughout this thesis and essentially form a starting place for the following chapters. They also form the thematic of this literature review. This literature review has been comprised of research from disparate sources as there is no direct body of literature or archive of the artist-led collective (appendix 1). What becomes apparent through this analysis of the literature on contemporary artist-led collectives, is a deficiency in academic engagement. Instead, many of the authors focus on highly specific and often obscure case studies that struggle to fully explain the complex interdependencies which constitute the artist-led collective. With this in mind, I will begin with the most simplistic of definitions which was offered up by The Tate's archive of art terms; '[a]rtists working within a collective are united by shared ideologies, aesthetics and, or, political beliefs'.<sup>68</sup> On the face of it, this definition seems to speak to some basic truism that groups of artists come together to work through shared beliefs. This definition is of course, simply part of a glossary of terms and cannot be seen as a body of in-depth research. Nevertheless, the Tate is an internationally recognised institution and thus carries with it a legitimisation of the content it produces.

### *Friendship*

The role of friendship with regard to artist-led collectives is greatly under-researched within the current literature. Curator, writer, and academic Céline Condorelli has conducted significant research into the role that friendship plays within artistic activity. Her thesis *In Support: a theoretical and practical investigation into forms of display* (2014) focused on a particular notion of support structures which pervade the arts,

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<sup>68</sup>The Tate, 'art terms' (2019) <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/collective>> [accessed 21/06/2019].

[t]his thesis develops an original notion of 'support' as a critical lens through which to investigate forms of display and the structures that sustain them; it is based on a multi-year art project consisting of ten exhibitions whose overall title is *Support Structure*. The notion of support is examined as the physical, economic, social, and political structures that are art's conditions of possibility.<sup>69</sup>

Condorelli argued that friendship is part of the wider set of support structures which have a particular action that goes beyond formalised institutional structures.<sup>70</sup> Condorelli addressed her definition of friendship in its creative role, 'I'd like here to address friendship as a specific model of relationship in the large question of how to live and work together – and autonomously – towards change, as a way to act in the world'.<sup>71</sup> This concept of friendship immediately connects with The Tate's definition, '[a]rtists working within a collective are united by shared ideologies, aesthetics and, or, political beliefs'.<sup>72</sup> It could be argued that these assumptions trace their way through the words and their significations in different configurations. Although Condorelli suggested friendship was the missing chapter in her thesis, she has gone on to explore its potentialities in the art world in a recent publication *The Company She Keeps* (2014).<sup>73</sup> However, Condorelli never fully applied friendship in all its complexity to artist-led collectives, and indeed there is work to be done on how and why friendship interacts with the other socio-cultural and geo-political forces at play. My thesis begins where Condorelli's finishes and attempts to critically and relationally trace friendship as an original conceptual framework through the dialectical knots of internal-external forces which pervade the artist-led collective. The originality of this research oscillates in how and why friendship relates to assumptions held about collectives such as institutional resistance, non-hierarchical structures and anti-capitalism. These assumptions are not always what they seem because they imply binaries which do not fully explain the complex social relations and friendships which form collectives.

Condorelli's research into the relationship between friendship and art is the most significant in the field and it is for this reason that I have included it within this review. What I have not included here

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<sup>69</sup>Céline Condorelli, 'In Support: a theoretical and practical investigation into forms of display' *Unpublished Thesis* (2014) (Centre for Research Architecture, Department of Visual Cultures Goldsmiths, University of London), p.2.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid*, p.294.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid*, p.294.

<sup>72</sup>The Tate, 'Art Terms'.

<sup>73</sup>Céline Condorelli, *The Company She Keeps* (London: Bookworks, 2014).

is the literature on friendship because I am making a very clear distinction.<sup>74</sup> This thesis is not an investigation into friendship, it is an exploration of artist-led collectives through the lens of friendship. This distinction is very important because it contextualises my research from the beginning. I am concerned with the question of how and why friendship interrelates to artist-led collectives as a phenomenon as opposed to researching friendship itself.

### ***Autonomy-Collectivity and the Ghost of Activism***

The forces of autonomy-collectivity and their interrelation with activism is essentially a double set of assumptions. However, they are interrelated to such a degree that it seemed arbitrary to separate them within this thesis. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette problematised this simplicity by attempting to establish a body of research on the subject which argued that the artist collective is positioned at a paradigmatic ‘crossroads’ between collectivisms before and after 1945, ‘think of the various party games and other group shenanigans of the futurists, Dadaists, and surrealists, not to mention the more earnest and properly political efforts to collectivize authorship undertaken by the productivists, muralists, and social realists’.<sup>75</sup> Sholette and Stimson argued that ‘Collectivism after modernism, thus, is understood as a pivot or turning point to several possible outcomes’.<sup>76</sup> This is the central argument within Sholette and Stimson’s work, comprised of a set of essays that attempt to trace the emergence of collectivism after the modernist vision. In the introduction, Sholette and Stimson set the scene and explain how historical and political movements from the post-war period to 9/11 have shaped the movement and changes in the role of artist collectives.<sup>77</sup> For Sholette and Stimson collectivism in contemporary art is seen through the lens of autonomy, or more precisely its ability to act and manipulate the forces of production in a saturated neoliberal capitalist society.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Sandra Bell and Simon Coleman, *The Anthropology of Friendship* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1999), and Thomas J. Brendt, ‘Friendship Quality and Social Development’, *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, Vol.11, No.1 (2002), and Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans by. George Collins (New York: Verso, 2005).

<sup>75</sup> Gregory Sholette and Blake Stimson, *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p.xi.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid*, p.xv.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid*, p.12.



This sense of autonomy can also be discerned in Nicola McCartney's publication *Death of the Artist Art World Dissidents and Their Alternative Identities*. McCartney questions whether 'collectivism is in itself a good thing, and asks whether it might also be seen as a form of social adaption or co-option by the neoliberal corporate structures of the museum'.<sup>79</sup> Akin to Sholette and Stimson, McCartney's argument revolves around the notion that collectives are attempting to either co-opt the central forces of capitalism in order to bring about a level of social change or directly challenge the dialectics of ever-increasing production-commodity, commodity-consumption, and production-consumption. McCartney's tracing of autonomy differs from Sholette and Stimson's in its overt suggestion that collectives may be simultaneously in co-option and resistance with the hegemonic forces of capital.<sup>80</sup> This complexity is epitomised by McCartney in Chapter 2 of the publication,

Collectivism can be seen as both critical of and an adaption to neoliberal institutions of authorship- the contemporary art group might sometimes appear to act in a similar way to larger corporations, museums and galleries by having shared spaces, designated roles, coherent branding and a manifesto.<sup>81</sup>

There is a discursive thread and set of presumptions that constitute these arguments which are located in the form of autonomy which is at stake. This autonomy in relation to artistic collaborative and collective practice is traced by curator-academic Claire Bishop in her work on participation.<sup>82</sup> Bishop argues that,

Collaborative creativity is therefore understood both to emerge from, and to produce, a more positive and non-hierarchical social model. The third issue involves a perceived crisis in community and collective responsibility. This concern has become more acute since the fall of Communism, although it takes its lead from a tradition of Marxist thought that indicts the alienating and isolating effects of capitalism.<sup>83</sup>

In *The Art Collective as Impurity: Art & the Public Sphere*, Kim Charnley connected the work of Sholette with the debate on autonomy from capitalist modes of production.<sup>84</sup> Charnley argued that

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<sup>79</sup>Nicola McCartney, *Death of the Artist Art World Dissidents and Their Alternative Identities* (London: I.B.Tauris & Co, 2018), p.21

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid*, p.59.

<sup>82</sup>Claire Bishop, *Participation*, (London: MIT Press, 2006).

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid*, p.12.

<sup>84</sup>Kim Charnley, 'The Art Collective as Impurity: Art & the Public Sphere' (2011) Vol.1 No.3, p.243.

‘resurgence of interest in the collective in recent art is due, in large part, to the importance of participatory strategies since the 1990s, the ‘social turn’ as it is sometimes known’.<sup>85</sup> Charnley draws upon Sholette, McCartney and Bishop’s notion that collectives are inherently attempting to ‘re-claim’ a sense of lost idealism from Marxist philosophy.<sup>86</sup> The failure of communism (in practice) only intensifies this connection because the collective, according to Charnley, occupies a space of the alternative. It is this political discourse coupled with the tensions between art and the social turn, with its tendency for garnering an activist mentality, which led Charnley to posit, ‘the art collective as a site of contradiction’.<sup>87</sup> Her study has a tendency to shift its emphasis away from ‘collectives’ in favour of investigating the problems within the relational and social art debate embodied in the discourse of the social turn in the history of art.<sup>88</sup> As a result, the language often slips when describing collectives and little or no attempt is made to distinguish the different types of collectives forming within culture, and further still, notions of autonomy are focused on external socio-economic and geopolitical forces without proper consideration of the internal consequences between the personal relationships which form the collectives in question.<sup>89</sup>

This problematic within the discussion of autonomy is epitomised in Jeffrey Swartz’s article, *After Midnight: Space-Run Artists: Cultural Activism in Contemporary Barcelona*.<sup>90</sup> Swartz stated that ‘The term “space-run artists” thus refers to 20 years of art collectives and artist projects conceived to take on Barcelona’s volatile urban reality, distinguished by aggressive city planning, the disfigurement of traditional neighbourhoods and the loss of industrial heritage.’<sup>91</sup> Swartz argued that, in Barcelona, artist collective 22a, amongst others, have taken up the mantle of the ‘activist model’ due because of funding issues but as a result of the very conditions of social and political tension in the transition from the 1992 Olympics onward.<sup>92</sup> What is tantalising yet unexplored within Swartz’s account is how

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<sup>85</sup>*Ibid*, p.243.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>87</sup>Kim Charnley, ‘The Art Collective as Impurity: Art & the Public Sphere’, p.268.

<sup>88</sup>Claire, Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso Books, 2012).

<sup>89</sup>Charnley et al, use the terminology: ‘group’, ‘community’, ‘collaboration’ as synonyms for collective.

<sup>90</sup>Jeffery Swartz, ‘After Midnight: Space-Run Artists: Cultural Activism in Contemporary Barcelona’, *Leonardo* (2010) Vol. 43, No.1.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid*, p.6.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid*.

this urban space (geography) is ‘leading’ the arts to a specific model of countermeasure. This concept is not fully extrapolated by Swartz ‘outside’ of the Barcelona art scene.

Similarly to Swartz, Jennifer Jolly’s investigation into the history and lineage of David Alfaro Siqueiros and Josep Renau’s ‘muralist’ movement in her book *Art of the Collective: David Alfaro Siqueiros, Josep Renau and Their Collaboration at the Mexican Electricians* focused on the relatively unexplored history of the ‘muralist art’ movement in Mexico led by David Alfaro Siqueiros from 1944-48.<sup>93</sup> Jolly focused on this group’s statement against fascism as they implemented murals at the Mexican Electricians’ Syndicate in Mexico City. The article traced Siqueiros’s exile which was due to an assassination attempt on Leon Trotsky and the completion of the project by fellow communist Josep Renau.<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, Jolly’s article shifts the focus away from the broad historical connotations to a more practical articulation through the lens of collective practice. This ‘gorilla’ action is a precursor to the action of contemporary artist-led collectives which Sholette *et al*, argued hark from specific aspects of activism from a communist discourse, ‘a model for the development of Muralism, [...] guided by communist ideology in its (changing) thematic orientation and production process’.<sup>95</sup> Jolly’s prose, akin to the majority of authors in this review, follows the political and ideological territory by analysing specific artworks whilst ignoring the social and ethical dynamics within the collectives themselves. Jolly’s account is successful in its tracing of trajectories on an international scale, however a close reading of how the Muralism was structured is never fully explained.

This relationship between activism and autonomy appears and re-appears through the literature. Sholette’s follow-on book *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* forwards the metaphorical notion of artistic or creative ‘dark matter’.<sup>96</sup> This dark matter is comprised of the legions of grassroots, failed artists, mid-low-level art administrators, activists, artist-led organisations and collectives which, according to Sholette, sustain the art world elite in something of a hierarchical

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<sup>93</sup>Jennifer, Jolly, ‘Art of the Collective: David Alfaro Siqueiros, Josep Renau and Their Collaboration at the Mexican Electricians’, *Syndicate Oxford Art Journal* (2008) Vol. 31, No. 1, pp.131-151.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup>Jennifer Jolly, p.131.

<sup>96</sup>Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

structure.<sup>97</sup> Sholette's argument is that the 'dark matter' is steadily becoming visible in the melee of late capitalism. Further still, Sholette suggested that certain organisations and individuals are choosing to work within the dark matter in order to leverage some institutional critique.<sup>98</sup>

This shift in collectivist art is loosely described by the website, *SocialArt.com*.<sup>99</sup> The site lists artist collectives in chronological order and states, '[t]he collective impulse has never died in American art and now it is surfacing again'.<sup>100</sup> It must be noted that this research is highly weighted toward American art history and research into its discourse within Europe and on a global scale is sparse. *Social Art.com*, is an online resource dedicated to outlining a brief investigation into, 'A Loose History of Art Collectives'.<sup>101</sup> The site begins with Fluxus in the 1960s positioning Almus Salcius and George Maciunas, as tentative founders of the movement.<sup>102</sup> The site then moves through the second half of the twentieth century, mentioning a few notable collectives from *Ant Farm* (1968 -78) to *Temporary Services* (a Chicago based collective established in 1999). Each of these collectives have a political intent and many of them have developed an actual artistic form of activism. However, this website is nothing more than an extended glossary of collectives akin to that of The Tate's 'Art Terms'. My interest in this site is their choice of what to include and what to discard and in doing so what is revealed.

Both Sholette and Stimson and *SocialArt.com* have described the movement of collectivism from a mainstream position to a counterculture modus operandi and then to a resurgence. It is this resurgence which Sholette began to question in his book, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*.<sup>103</sup> Akin to dark matter in physics, Sholette built a persuasive argument which posited that the vast majority of the art world is comprised of, 'makeshift, amateur, informal, unofficial, autonomous, activist, non-institutional, self-organized practices- all work made and circulated in the shadow of the

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<sup>97</sup>*Ibid*, pp.1-3.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid*, pp.19-22.

<sup>99</sup>Social Art.com, 'A Loose History of Art Collectives' <<http://socialart.com/ARTPAPERS/artCollectives.html>> [accessed 30/03/2017].

<sup>100</sup>Social Art.com, 'A Loose History of Art Collectives'.

<sup>101</sup>Social Art.com, 'Introduction'.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid*, (para.8 of 55).

<sup>103</sup>Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*.

formal art world'.<sup>104</sup> According to Sholette, this 'creative dark matter', sustains the 'visible' formal art world.<sup>105</sup> Sholette furthers the argument stating that artists and creatives are beginning to purposely operate in this shadowy landscape in order to gain a form of critical distance from the art markets and gallery systems.<sup>106</sup> There are tempting parallels to be drawn here between Swartz's assessment of the Barcelona organisations and collectives choosing to work in oppositional and liminal spaces to the mainstream in order to enact social and political change.<sup>107</sup>

This discursive thread is explored by curator, historian and activist Nina Felshin in her publication *But is it art? the spirit of art as activism*, an anthology that documents the rise of activist public art that attempts to engage social movement and change.<sup>108</sup> Felshin preceded the polemics of Sholette, Bishop, and Charnley with this work, published in 1995, and drew upon discussions of 'controversial artists' and activist groups such as; the Guerrilla Girls, Gran Fury, Group Material, Women's Action Coalition, and the Artist and Homeless Collaborative.<sup>109</sup> This work highlighted the later, overly contested, boundary between activism and art which persists to this day. Through a careful analysis of the loosely formed collective Group Material, Felshin deconstructed the boundaries between art and politics by posing the question, 'What does it mean "to question the entire culture we have taken for granted?"'.<sup>110</sup> Felshin suggested this was a shift that had taken place, it had become active in and of itself and had begun to pose the question directly to the instrumentality of the modernist establishment.<sup>111</sup>

### ***The Problematic of Authorship***

This problematic of autonomy is wrapped up in the assumption that collectives problematise the notion of authorship. If I return to Sholette and Stimson's suggestion that it is a form of autonomy in the Marxist sense which is in play,

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<sup>104</sup>*Ibid*, p.1.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid*, p.4.

<sup>107</sup>Jeffery Swartz, 'After Midnight: Space-Run Artists: Cultural Activism in Contemporary Barcelona'.

<sup>108</sup>Nina Felshin, *But is it art? The Spirit of Art as Activism* (Toronto: At Bay Press, 1995).

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid*, p.85.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid*, pp.84-90.

It is nothing other than this old dream of actually existing autonomy, of autonomy realized, of autonomy institutionalized, that haunts now with new vigor as a ghost from the past, but it does so not on the basis of the sheer strength of principle but instead by drawing its renewal and revitalization, by drawing replenishment of its lifeblood, from those strike forces of collectivization that are peculiar to our moment now.<sup>112</sup>

This concept of autonomy brings with it a dream of collectivisation and a force to remove the cult of the individual. Historian Grant Kester's often cited publication *The One and The Many*:

*Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*, critically positioned the role of collaboration and collectivisation within the contemporary art continuum.<sup>113</sup> Kester problematised authorship and questions how knowledge is constructed and disseminated through collaborative means.<sup>114</sup> Kester explored the work of artists and organisations such as; Thomas Hirschhorn, Superflex, and Park Fiction.<sup>115</sup> He argued that a shift has occurred from the artist as 'lone genius' creating artworks, to a liminal space which is to be viewed as a process of creating work in a collective and reciprocal way, often outside the traditional gallery space.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, Bishop observed this shift towards collective authorship,

advanced art of the last decade has seen a renewed affirmation of collectivity and a denigration of the individual, who becomes synonymous with the values of Cold War liberalism and its transformation into neoliberalism, that is, the economic practice of private property rights, free markets, and free trade.<sup>117</sup>

Although Bishop is sympathetic to this shift, she argued for the need to be critical of this new art, which she loosely terms *Participatory Art*.<sup>118</sup> Further, Bishop suggested this art can be re-appropriated within the capitalist system thus it cannot be seen as a totality and on a level and must be subjected to critique, just as the art which came before.<sup>119</sup> This debate is further problematised by McCartney who observed that, 'what I have learned is that collective practice alone is not in itself always a critique of

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<sup>112</sup>Sholette and Stimson, *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, p.4.

<sup>113</sup>Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Art in a Global Context* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011). For the social production of art see, Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (London: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup>Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso Books, 2012), p.12.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, pp.11-13.

authorship or the associated art market, but can be, as part of a more holistic approach, part of re-negotiating the borders of authorship in the contemporary art world'.<sup>120</sup>

This sense of a 're-negotiation' of authorship was eloquently illuminated in the essay introduction to *Come Together: The Rise of Cooperative Art and Design*, by historian, artist, and writer Francesco Spampinato.<sup>121</sup> Spampinato stated that '[t]he role of the author is undergoing a massive transformation process. Contrary to what Roland Barthes once famously wrote, the author is not dead, the idea of sole creator working alone has certainly lost credibility and appeal'.<sup>122</sup> As Spampinato suggested, the debate around authorship has a discourse in and of its own right and from Roland Barthes, to Michel Foucault the privileged position of which the author of a work has been imbued with has been questioned.<sup>123</sup> The problematic of the multi-author without claim plays out in the collective authorship which, as Spampinato suggested, remains a form of differed authorship which is often still attributed to an 'author(s)' by collective name. In the essay *The Production of Social Space as Artwork: Protocols of Community in the Work of Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes*, curator and critic Okwui Enwezor frames the debate in terms of modernist and postmodernist discourse by arguing that questions of authenticity of the artist as author are, 'symptomatic of a cyclical crisis in modernity about the status of art to its social context and the as more than an actor in the economic sphere'.<sup>124</sup> Akin to Kester and Bishop's arguments this uncertainty of art's 'status' is exacerbated by collective activity because it complicates the 'idealization of the artwork as the unique object of individual creativity'.<sup>125</sup> Enwezor suggests that this move towards the social blurs the

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<sup>120</sup>McCartney, p.60.

<sup>121</sup>Francesco Spampinato, *Come Together: The Rise of Cooperative Art and Design* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2014).

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid*, p.7.

<sup>123</sup>Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, Trans by. Stephen Heath, orig. 1967 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977) and, Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author' (1969) Open University [PDF]

<[https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/pluginfile.php/624849/mod\\_resource/content/1/a840\\_1\\_michel\\_foucault.pdf](https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/pluginfile.php/624849/mod_resource/content/1/a840_1_michel_foucault.pdf)>[access ed 23/06/2019]

<sup>124</sup>Okwui Enwezor, 'The Production of Social Space as Artwork: Protocols of Community in the Work of Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes' *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, Sholette and Stimson (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p.223.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid*, p.223.

boundaries of art and its socio-cultural context and further this blurring ‘tends to lend collective work a social rather than artistic character’.<sup>126</sup>

### *Place and Space*

A significant portion of the literature relating to the artist collective focuses on a number of cultural ‘hubs’ or art centres. This literature is primarily concerned with the complexities of artists within the urban environment and how they shape a sense of place. In an article surveying the work of Newcastle based film collective The Amber Collective, Robert Hollands and John Vail question the notions of place in relation to artistic collectivity.<sup>127</sup> The Amber Collective formed in London in the 1960s and decided to move to the North East.<sup>128</sup> Hollands and Vail analysed this shift and developed the notion of ‘place imprinting’ with the aim of advancing ‘our understanding of the complex relationship between art and locality’.<sup>129</sup> Place imprinting combines the social and geographic effects of place and particularly focuses on the role of ‘artistic clustering’ in order to determine how place shapes the networks and identities of artists working in a specific space-time.<sup>130</sup> They suggested that clustering typically occurs when specific conditions are in play such as,

better transport links to major cities, the increased benefits of sharing skills, being closer to centres of innovation and everyday ‘tacit’ knowledge of a particular art form, the impact of competition on artistic development and nearness to markets and infrastructural networks (i.e. galleries, arts funders, dealers, etc).<sup>131</sup>

They suggested that the research on clustering has typically produced results that indicate size matters. These results highlighted the scale of the market and demand for one’s art product, but also the density of human capital, physical resources and arts infrastructure’.<sup>132</sup> However, Hollands and Vail argue that The Amber Collective was an example of reverse artistic clustering, ‘away from the capital’ and further, this reverse clustering was a complex combination of a ‘desire to relocate to an

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<sup>126</sup>*Ibid*, p.223.

<sup>127</sup>Robert Hollands and John Veil, ‘Place imprinting and the arts: A case study of the Amber Collective’, *Local Economy* (2015), Vol.30, No.2, pp.173-190.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid*, p.179.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid*, p.173.

<sup>130</sup>*Ibid*, pp.174-180.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid*, p.177.

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid*.



area which reflected its artistic concern to document working-class life' and social, material and geographic ties with the area.<sup>133</sup> What is revealed in this analysis are the complex relational dialectic knots which often form collectives in unexpected ways.

Akin to Hollands and Vail, Spampinato observes that, 'collectives are often born from pre-existing communities, such as nonprofit organizations and squats' or other situations with common interests: theatre, publishing, music, fashion, media'.<sup>134</sup> Although Spampinato suggested this could happen on smaller scales within singular organisations or entities, there is a very specific intonation at play in both studies and it involves a sense of place as temporal; not as fixed or static but as ever-changing and embedded in the relationships and experiences which collectives form.

Within this literature are biographical accounts of specific cultural scenes, places, and spaces. One prevalent moment appears to have been the New York art scene from around 1960s to the early 1980s. *Colab Takes a Piece, History Takes It Back: Collectivity and New York Alternative Spaces* by David Little, casts a light upon the early efforts of a group of artist, filmmakers, critics, musicians and performers which established a working collaborative practice in opposition to the New York capitalist mainstream such as the Whitney Biennial and The Guggenheim's incessant retrospectives, amongst others.<sup>135</sup> Spanning two pivotal years from 1977-79, Collaborative Projects, Inc. or 'Colab' as they were known colloquially, engineered a practice of resistance to market forces that organically developed through 'taking over' alternative spaces within New York's boroughs.<sup>136</sup> Little traced the moments of resistance which later became re-appropriated into the system of art historical narrative and historicising polemics. This narrative became prevalent within art schools as a potential mode of production for emerging artists. Similarly, artist and writer Alan Moore focused on the New York scene *Artists' Collectives: Focus on New York, 1975-2000*.<sup>137</sup> The chapter focuses on collectives working in New York- Art Workers Coalition (AWC) and Group Material. The aim was to begin to

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<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*, p.179.

<sup>134</sup>Spampinato, p.7.

<sup>135</sup>David Little, 'Colab Takes a Piece, History Takes It Back: Collectivity and New York Alternative Spaces', *Art Journal* (2007) Vol.66, No.1, pp.60-74.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup>Alan Moore, 'Artists' Collectives: Focus on New York, 1975-2000', *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, pp.193-223.

reveal the workings of the collectives in the specific geopolitical situation of New York. Akin to Little's research on Colab, *Show and Tell: a Chronicle of Group Material* by Julie Ault delved into the depths of the late 1970s New York scene.<sup>138</sup> This was the first monograph of a collective which traced the collective practice of *Group Material* operating in the lower east side of New York. Similar to Colab, Group Material was seen as *Avant-Garde* and Ault incorporates interviews and detailed descriptions of the 45 plus exhibitions which took place.

Following this tradition of monograph literature was Sholette's almost auto-ethnographic publication on *REPOhistory: Circulation*.<sup>139</sup> This journal article aimed to contextualise a highly collaborative and interdisciplinary project which was comprised of artists, teachers, and activists.<sup>140</sup> The group was active over a four year period between 1996 and 2000 and Sholette was a member and co-commissioned a project with Janet Koenig. This article presented documentation of the project *Circulation*, which was based on the concept of human blood and its inherent symbolism beyond simple DNA evidence.<sup>141</sup> This project was not entirely New York-centric as it attracted international academics, curators, artists, and activists. However, the discussions and meetings were held in New York which raises questions regarding how these international collectives and projects perceive the notions of place? And, why do certain cultural centers continue to attract these types of activities? Place imprinting and particularly artistic clustering may provide a research framework to attempt to answer these questions.

Moving away from New York, *Two Minds: Artists and Architects in Collaboration*, by Jes Fernie, highlighted an important contemporary movement within the artist-led universe.<sup>142</sup> Fernie explored repeat case studies of artists working with architects to inhabit and critically re-think modern urban space. This book brought together emerging practices and collaborations such as, David Adjaye,

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<sup>138</sup>Julie Ault, *Show and tell: a Chronicle of Group Material* (London: Four Corners Books, 2010).

<sup>139</sup>Gregory Sholette, 'REPOhistory: Circulation', *Art Journal* (2002) Vol.59, No.4, pp.38-53.

<sup>140</sup>*Ibid*, p.39.

<sup>141</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>142</sup>Jes Fernie, *Two Minds: Artists and Architects in Collaboration* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006).

Jacques Herzog and Chris Ofili in their cross-discipline attempts to create hybrid spaces that problematised the boundaries of what is perceived as art and architecture.<sup>143</sup>

Funding and creating networked economies is a method of instigating a cultural hub within a capitalist society. Michaële Cutaya and Marianne O'Kane-Boal presented this often problematic concept in an article for the *Irish Arts Review*.<sup>144</sup> In this article, Cutaya assesses how Ireland's Arts Council initiative 'Culture Connects' has fostered relationships between local and regional artists and curators. Marianne O'Kane-Boal investigated how another initiative, 'Partners of Imagination', works across European national borders.<sup>145</sup> The article highlighted a number of festivals that have emerged through these initiatives. These festivals tend to be interdisciplinary including music, live art and participatory acts all in one location.

It is apparent that during certain geographical and political times artist-led collectives seemingly become prevalent within specific socio-cultural conditions. The literature discussed reveals that artistic clustering occurs if specific socio-cultural and geo-political conditions become apparent in a specific locality. The limitations within this literature pertain to problems of scale as they specifically focus on one or two case studies and refrain from making theoretical assertions on a wider scale. That said, Hollands and Vail and Spampinato do attempt to make such claims founded on their case study research. Indeed, Spampinato brings together 40 case studies of collectives, duos, and groups through semi-structured interviews.<sup>146</sup>

This trend was further by Gavin Murphy and Mark Cullen in *Artist-Run Europe Practice/Projects/Spaces*, by creating an 'Artist-run Index'.<sup>147</sup> Murphy and Cullen stated that their work is 'Part how-to manual, part history, and part socio-political critique'.<sup>148</sup> This book highlighted the conditions, models and operational structures that are implemented within these often transient spaces. The book is composed of contributions by leaders in the emerging field including - Jason E.

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<sup>143</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup>Michaële Cutaya, 'New Models of Collaboration', *Irish Arts Review* (2013) Vol.30, No.1, pp.82-87.

<sup>145</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup>Spampinato, *Come Together*.

<sup>147</sup>Gavin Murphy and Mark Cullen, *Artist-Run Europe. Practice/Projects/Spaces*, (Eindhoven: Onomatopée office and project-space, 2016), pp.161-198.

<sup>148</sup>*Ibid.*

Bowman, AA Bronson, Noelle Collins, Valerie Connor, Mark Cullen, Céline Kopp, Joanna Laws, Freek Lomme, Megs Morley, Gavin Murphy, Transmission Gallery, Gavin Wade, and Katherine Waugh. They questioned ‘What position do artist-run spaces occupy within the field of contemporary art today?’<sup>149</sup> The index, which once it was constructed was immediately out of date, listed the spaces within a set of European countries in alphabetical order. This list was extensive and incorporated many organisations which were receiving public funding. Interestingly, this index makes an attempt to devise a set of categories to thematically separate each space: Studios, Institutional, Non-Profit/Project, Artist-initiated, and Artist-run. The methodology for this is highly inadequate and is yet another instance of the problematic of language surrounding the subject matter. What is most revealing is that the authors do not use the word ‘collective’. Indeed, this is a pertinent issue throughout much of this literature and is suggestive of the slippery nature of the word and its significations.

Doggerland is an online resource space attempting to document and collaborate through research into artist-led spaces and projects.<sup>150</sup> Although not specifically focusing on artist-led collectives, Doggerland is creating an artist-led interactive map of the UK with some collectives included, although the map is biased toward studio groups.<sup>151</sup> Akin to the index, this map cannot embody the complexities of artist-led projects as it requires a specific site of appearance to be coordinated. This limitation ultimately deconstructs the project as it is only collectives with a ‘studio’ or ‘site’ which can be included. Another attempt to survey current artist-led collective activity is through the website *Dazed Digital*, which notes feminist driven collectives and lists a number of links to websites of contemporary collectives.<sup>152</sup> Again, this is an overview website which highlights activity rather than engaging at a critical level. This online resource simply lists feminist collective activities in London. These attempts, although useful, fail to fully illustrate the extensive nature of collective activity precisely because they require constant updating.

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<sup>149</sup>*Ibid*, p.10.

<sup>150</sup>Doggerland.info, ‘Home’ (2017) <<http://www.doggerland.info/>> [accessed 20/05/17].

<sup>151</sup>Doggerland.info, ‘Artist-led’ (2017) <<http://www.doggerland.info/artistled/>> [accessed 10/06/2017].

<sup>152</sup>Dazed Digital, ‘Our favourite all girl art collectives’ <<http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/24420/1/our-favourite-all-girl-art-collectives>> [accessed 20/5/2017].

## **Chapter 1: The State of Play**

In this chapter, I discuss the problematic of the contemporary artist-led collective in sight of its recent past and the socio-economic hegemony of neoliberal capitalism. I have demonstrated in the introduction and literature review that the term, and its many variations, are used to describe a wide range of phenomena within the art world. If I return to The Tate's definition of the word 'collective' as 'artists working within a collective are united by shared ideologies, aesthetics and, or, political beliefs', this is a prime example of the vagueness and 'slippery' nature of the collective.<sup>153</sup> My research problematises this statement by questioning, what does the word signify? Why is it being used? How and when is it being applied? These questions frame an underlying set of assumptions about how the artist-led collective is positioned within the contemporary art world and reveals a history, an ever-present history or (un)history, which continues to haunt the artist-led collective. It will be argued that this spectral quality, or more precisely 'hauntology', frames the contemporary artist-led collective as a heterotopia within the wider cultural ecology.<sup>154</sup> The concepts which I apply in this analysis are not restricted to this chapter. They weave their way throughout this thesis and help to frame the complexity of the social relationships which constitute the contemporary artist-led collective.

The terms heterotopia and hauntology refer to different phenomena. However, they are interlinked in a particular configuration within this analysis. Hauntology was developed by philosopher Jacques Derrida based on writings compiled from a conference held in 1993 entitled, *Whither Marxism? Global Crises in International Perspective*. Derrida theorised that 'haunting is historical, to be sure, but it is not dated, it is never docilely given a date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of a calendar'.<sup>155</sup> Derrida equated this haunting to a lost sense of revolution, or

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<sup>153</sup>Tate, 'collective', *art terms* (2018) <[www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/collective](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/collective)> [accessed 20/01/2018].

<sup>154</sup>Heterotopia- Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, trans. by Jay Miskowiec (1967) <<http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>> [accessed 06/10/2018] and Hauntology- Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, orig. ed.,1993 (London: Routledge Classics, 2006), Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014). Derrida used the word 'hauntology' as a pun on the word ontology (the study of reality) as he argued that the problem with ontology is it has always favoured 'being' over 'non-being' and 'presence' over 'absence'. Hauntology is the ghosting of this situation and indicates that this obsession itself has haunted philosophers for millennia.

<sup>155</sup>*Ibid*, p.3.

potential for revolution brought to light through the fall of international communism and the supposed ‘end of history’ resulting in endless capitalistic models proliferating in the political, historical and social realms.<sup>156</sup> Hauntology was expanded by Mark Fisher in *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*.<sup>157</sup> Fisher applied hauntology to his own cultural adolescence ranging from punk rock music to the NME magazine. Fisher explored the ‘disappearance’ of the conditions which allowed the culture of his youth to exist in its full form of presence. He traced these lost futures and argues they appear in a virtual or ‘ghost’ state.<sup>158</sup> Fisher’s eloquent analysis of his own experience, thinking through the concept of hauntology, provides a useful conceptual framework to this chapter as it intersects with the historical, political and cultural discourse of the artist-led collective. Further, there is a quality to hauntological thinking which describes the ‘always becoming’, or the simultaneity of absence and presence in the communication of language, which holds similarity with Relational Dialectical Theory (RDT). Hauntology goes one step further than Sholette and Stimson’s recurrent linguistic phantom, as it is at home with its contradictions.

In Bakhtin’s dialogical imagination this quality plays out in the ‘chain of utterances’ which describes how communication, the utterances which are communicated between people, are always interconnected to discourses past and the discourses yet to come.<sup>159</sup> This non-linear temporal experience is riddled with contradiction as the implications of this form of dialogical perspective suggest that there is an inherent both/and quality to life and that ‘things’ can have a multi-vocal and multi-modal existence.<sup>160</sup> It must be noted that both these theories are developed in vastly different contexts and although there are similarities within their tendency for multiplicities there are vast ideological differences.<sup>161</sup> However, for the purposes of this research, the ‘both/and’ quality is of great contextual importance.

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<sup>156</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*.

<sup>157</sup>Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014).

<sup>158</sup>Mark Fisher, pp.22-23.

<sup>159</sup>Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, eds., by Michael Holquist, and trans by., Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>160</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup>Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (London: Routledge, 1990).

Another important concept here is heterotopia, coined by philosopher Michel Foucault in a collated book of essays *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*.<sup>162</sup> It is important to this argument as it provides a conceptual framework to explore the type and properties of ‘cultural space’ in which the contemporary artist-led collective exists. Foucault asserted that heterotopias are ‘non-hegemonic’ spaces that can manifest as physical, mental or virtual.<sup>163</sup> Foucault posited that heterotopias are, ‘places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society, which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted’.<sup>164</sup> It is my contention that the social bonds which underpin the contemporary artist-led collective create enclaved heterotopias that temporarily suspend the hegemonic norms of a given culture or society. These heterotopias are hauntological in the sense that they hold both the possibility of systemic change and the weight of ‘lost collective futures past’. These heterotopias often appear relational both in their art forms and because contemporary artist-led collectives tend towards non-hierarchical relationships and forms of governance. This relational aspect will be questioned throughout this thesis because the complexities of resistance against hierarchical structures, prevalent within the institutions of capitalism, are complex dialectical systems.<sup>165</sup>

The contemporary artist-led collective is a global phenomenon appearing on the streets of Moscow to Dakar, and in the international art fair procession to the myriad of social media platforms.<sup>166</sup> It seems that collectivisation in contemporary art is super networked, shiny and slick without any governing ideologies or totalising unitary positions. In order to make sense of this state of play, I will focus on specific artist-led collectives and begin to trace their points of interconnection and divergence. These

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<sup>162</sup>Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias’ *Des Espace Autres, Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, (1984) trans by. Jay Miskowicz, orig edn. 1967.

<sup>163</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup>*Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>165</sup>David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1989).

<sup>166</sup>See: Spampinato, *Come Together*, and Tate, ‘Laboratoire Agit’ Art’, *Art Terms* <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art-terms/l/laboratoire-agitart>>[accessed 20/07/2019] and, Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, and Lucky PDF, ‘Home page’ (2019) <<https://luckypdf.com/>>[accessed 20/07/2019].

collectives have appeared throughout the research literature for this thesis and their influence within the ecology of the art world is notable.<sup>167</sup>

Chto Delat is an artist-led collective formed in St Petersburg in 2003, their activity is international but their focus is on ‘postsocialist [*sic*] condition and actualization of forgotten [*sic*] and repressed potentiality of Soviet past and often works as a politics of commemoration’.<sup>168</sup> Consisting of members from Moscow, St Petersburg, and Nizhny Novgorod, they originally came together to form a political action, *The Refoundation of Petersburg*.<sup>169</sup> This action was staged by a group of philosophers, writers, and artists and assumed the form of a march to find a ‘new city centre’. Protesting with banners and literature the group made their way to the edge of the city where they were stopped by the police [fig. 2].<sup>170</sup> The police decided it was an illegal protest, arrested the group and they were given financial penalties and released.<sup>171</sup> It was not until they were released did they decided to mark the new centre of St Petersburg at the police station itself, ‘at Zhukova prospect, 33, they solemnly put a stone into the ground, a stone that will stay there until the new center [*sic*] will rise around it’.<sup>172</sup> This action formed Chto Delat and shaped the relationships and thus the output of the collective, from their politically-focused newspaper to their interventionist performances and even the establishment of an anarchic art *School of Engaged Art*.<sup>173</sup>

Assemble is a radical art and architecture collective based in London, consisting of artists, architects, and designers. The critical debate which ensued from the announcement of Assemble as Turner Prize winners in 2015, helps to frame the problematic of the artist-led collective. Assemble helped to refurbish and renovate a dilapidated set of 10 houses in the Toxteth community, Liverpool, UK [fig. 3]. They worked alongside residents to co-create and rebuild the area. The contention appears to be centred upon the nature of the projects in which Assemble is engaged. Journalist, Mark Brown posited

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<sup>167</sup>Spampinato, *Come Together*, pp.48-54, and Turner Prize winner, Tate, ‘Assemble – winner’ (2015) <<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/other-venue/exhibition/turner-prize-2015/turner-prize-2015-artists-assemble>> [accessed 20/07/2019].

<sup>168</sup> Chto Delat, ‘about’ (2019) <<https://chtodelat.org/>> [accessed 20/07/2019], (para.2 of 4).

<sup>169</sup>*Ibid*, (para.2 of 2).

<sup>170</sup>Artiom Magun, ‘The Refoundation of Petersburg’, *Chto Delat*, 7 September 2003, pp.4-5.

<sup>171</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>172</sup>*Ibid*, p.4.

<sup>173</sup>Chto Delat, ‘School of Engaged Art’ (2019) <[https://chtodelat.org/category/c\\_1/](https://chtodelat.org/category/c_1/)> [accessed 20/07/2019].



that 'Assemble is the first non-artists, in the strictest sense of the word, to win the prize'.<sup>174</sup> It is this label of 'non-artists', which, according to one report has, 'declared the death of the Turner prize'.<sup>175</sup> Assemble's work has challenged the established conventions of what is deemed as 'art' and who is 'entitled' to engage in art practice.<sup>176</sup>

Both Chto Delat and Assemble could be considered to exhibit elements of relational art practice. Relational art practice was first brought to a critical discourse by curator and writer Nicholas Bourriaud in the book *Relational Aesthetics*.<sup>177</sup> Bourriaud observed the art of the 1990s was beginning to be produced in, 'the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space'.<sup>178</sup> Bourriaud suggested this form of 'open-ended' art focuses on the collective creativity of an audience thus creates a social space as opposed to 'closed object' based artwork.<sup>179</sup> For Bourriaud, the emphasis was not simply that these were new spaces for art or new social situations. The critical centre to relational aesthetics was the shift from art which predominantly was based on the viewer as a bystander to the viewer as participant.<sup>180</sup> Claire Bishop asserted 'such work seems to derive from a creative misreading of poststructuralist theory: rather than the *interpretations* of a work of art being open to continual reassessment, the work of art itself is argued to be in perpetual flux'.<sup>181</sup> Whether a misreading or simply an extension of the viewer relationship to art, Bishop was critical of what she saw as, 'the aura of being at the vanguard of contemporary production'.<sup>182</sup> Bishop suggested this form of 'laboratory', 'socially engaged' work is ironically highly marketable and can lead to relational practice being co-opted into the system which it attempted to change.<sup>183</sup> In 'Global Dissensus: art and contemporary capitalism since 1989', Gail

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<sup>174</sup>Mark Brown, 'Urban regenerators Assemble become first 'non-artists' to win Turner prize' *Guardian Online* (2015) <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/dec/07/urban-assemble-win-turner-prize-toxteth>> [accessed 23/01/17], (para.3 of 10).

<sup>175</sup>Charlotte Higgins, 'Turner prize winners Assemble: 'Art? We're more interested in plumbing'', *Guardian Online* (2015) <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/dec/08/assemble-turner-prize-architects-are-we-artists>> [accessed 23/01/17].

<sup>176</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup>Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance, FONZA WOODS (Dijon: les presses du reel, 2002)

<sup>178</sup>*Ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>179</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.14-18.

<sup>181</sup>Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October Magazine*, Vol.110, Fall 2004, pp.51-79 (p.52).

<sup>182</sup>*Ibid.*, p.52.

<sup>183</sup>*Ibid.*

Day and Steve Edwards problematised the relational art debate.<sup>184</sup> Day and Edwards positioned Bourriaud's relational aesthetics in terms of its intent to explore the potential socially transformative artistic practices that could lead participants to temporarily negate the onslaught of neoliberal capitalism.<sup>185</sup> Day and Edwards balanced their analysis by outlining the prevailing critique of relational aesthetics which has centred on the tendency for relational art to be utilised by museums and galleries to attain their participation targets, or simply by 'getting people in the room', which cannot alleviate the prevailing winds of the hegemony.<sup>186</sup> Perhaps most powerfully, the mode of network-based situationism actually became a mirror of the financial and economic norms of the tertiary sector; this final point echoes Bishop's argument.<sup>187</sup> However, what has become apparent in terms of the growing discourse of relational practice is an emerging emphasis on change through social artistic production. This is emanating from a range of commentators such as Bourriaud, Bishop on participatory art, Kester with dialogical aesthetics, Miwon Kwon with site-specific art and Enwezor amongst many.<sup>188</sup>

It is this contemporary art history which reveals practices that are beginning to go beyond relational art. Day and Edwards suggested the criticism directed towards relational practice cannot fully account for the antagonistic practices of collectives and artists working in climate camps, anti-capitalist, alter-globalisation movements outside of the traditional art world places and spaces.<sup>189</sup> They stated that 'the 'arty party' label was a damning criticism of the social claims advanced by some relational artists. This designation does not so readily fit artists who press relationality to empower the 'uncounted''.<sup>190</sup> These practices seem to inhabit spaces of activism through engaging in political and social change and developing aesthetic knowledge about the world to aid change through a realist framework. I contend

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<sup>184</sup>Gail Day and Steve Edwards, 'Global Dissensus: art and contemporary capitalism since 1989', in *Exploring Art: from Modernity to Globalisation 1850-2010*, eds., by Wood P and Edwards S J (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), pp.284-315

<sup>185</sup>*Ibid*, pp.284-315

<sup>186</sup>*Ibid*, pp.292-294.

<sup>187</sup>*Ibid*, p.293.

<sup>188</sup>Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso Books, 2012), Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance, FONZA WOODS (Dijon: les presses du reel, 2002), Grant Kester, *The One and the Many Contemporary art in a global context* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004) and Okwui Enwezor, *The unhomey: phantom scenes in global society: 2nd International Biennial of Contemporary Art of Seville* (Michigan: Fundación Bial de Arte Contemporáneo de Sevilla, 2006).

<sup>189</sup>Day and Edwards, p.295.

<sup>190</sup>*Ibid*, p.296.

that artist-led collectives such as Assemble and Chto Delat embody ‘the social turn’, to such a degree, that it is not possible to completely distinguish their ‘everyday’ practice from their artwork. This is exemplified in the practice of both Assemble and Chto Delat and becomes acutely identifiable in projects such as Assemble’s engagement with creating a sustainable housing estate in Liverpool and Chto Delat’s protest marches and their School of Engaged Art. Indeed, in an interview by Spampinato, Chto Delat proclaimed that ‘we do not build any separation between methods and matter’.<sup>191</sup> There is a doubling or plurality at play within the artist-led collective; these projects are socially constructed as is their history. The signification of the word ‘collective’ cannot be ignored and is vital to understand. I argue that this history erodes the critical boundaries shaped by social art theory. It is this difference that defines the artist-led collective over time, as they are never completely ‘fixed’ in a static structure. As a result, the contemporary artist-led collective inhabits both a non-hegemonic space and yet remains open to external forces within society and the specific ecologies within which they operate. This is a Foucauldian heterotopia, a space which temporarily suspends the ‘normal’ socio-cultural conditions, and thus re-frames the artist-led collective as an embodied social phenomena.

I will now discuss two artist-led collectives that have contributed to shaping the perception of the contemporary discourse of the collective. It is crucial to note that they both had an overtly political and critical set of ideologies and that their artistic methods challenged the boundaries between art, life, and politics. It is this activist thread that continues to flow through Chto Delat, and in a less overt but significant way, resides in the *raison d'être* of Assemble’s practice. There is another reason for their inclusion, both General Idea and the Guerrilla Girls continue to hold a position of both resistance and canonisation within the art world. This complex discourse is exemplified by the contradictory status of their artworks being held in museum collections such as The Stedelijk Museum, and retrospectives at MOMA, Tate Modern and The Venice Biennale; whilst simultaneously being historically positioned as radically opposed to the very system in which they are now embroiled.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup>Spampinato, ‘Chto Delat’, *Come Together The Rise of Cooperative Art and Design*, p.50.

<sup>192</sup>Guy Adams, ‘Guerrilla Girl Power: Have America’s feminist artists sold out?’ *Independent* (2009)

<<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/guerrilla-girl-power-have-americas-feminist-artists-sold-out->

General Idea formed in 1969 in Toronto, initially the collective consisted of Michael Tims (AA Bronson), Ronald Gabe (Felix Partz), Slobodan Saia-Levy (Jorge Zontal), with occasional collaboration from Mimi Paige, actor Daniel Freedman, and Granada Gazelle.<sup>193</sup> They developed their initial collective bond through performances, faux- shops, and installations in their shared house on 78 Gerrard St, and began to explore parody and spectacle in order to subvert and critique the increase in mass media and advertisement.<sup>194</sup> The role of friendship is intertwined with the notion of the house and this form of collective living was alluded to by Bronson in a biography about the collective's early years, '[w]e were just a group of people having a good time... We went everywhere together, parties, we always showed up together'.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, they went on to reside in a loft apartment/studio on 87 Yonge Street and their friendship and acquaintance circles began to obscure the formality of the collective, Partz noted that, '[w]e purposely obscured actually, who General Idea was, because we were involved with working and living with a variety of people.... Everybody was seen as General Idea'.<sup>196</sup> These statements reveal a sense that the countercultural scene, that was characterised by Bronson as 'small at that time', blurred the boundaries between live/work relationships. This blurring helped to form the collective identity of General Idea.<sup>197</sup> This form of 'communal' living, as Bronson would have it, was indicative of what Condorelli has advocated is the support structures of friendship.<sup>198</sup> Condorelli argued that 'friendship is addressed in action, as a practice, a way to be and act and in the world'.<sup>199</sup> She evoked philosopher Baruch Spinoza's meaning of friendship which goes beyond the 'suffering' of labour, of work life.<sup>200</sup> This concept of friendship was expressed in relational dialectics theory by Rawlins as 'some people develop friendships which transcend the workplace', these friendships, according to Rawlins, 'encompass more of the friends' lives, meeting

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[1666140.html](#)] > [accessed 21/07/2019] and, The Stedelijk Museum 'Test Tube' Collections online <<https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/collection/49999-general-idea-test-tube>> [accessed 21/07/2019], and Nicola McCartney, *Death of the Artist: Art World Dissidents and their Alternative Identities* and, Sholette, *Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2016).

<sup>193</sup>Fern Beyer, *The Search for the Spirit: General Idea 1968-1975* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1997), p.29.

<sup>194</sup>Gregg Bordowitz, *General idea: Imagevirus* (London: Afterall Books, 2010).

<sup>195</sup>AA Bronson, *General Idea Life & Work*, Sarah E.K. Smith (Toronto: Art Canada Institute, 2016), p.8.

<sup>196</sup>*Ibid*, p.8.

<sup>197</sup>*Ibid*, p.6.

<sup>198</sup>Condorelli, *Support Structures*.

<sup>199</sup>*Ibid*, p.15.

<sup>200</sup>*Ibid*, p.15, and Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Trans by. W. H. White and A. H. Stirling, orig edn. 1677 (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2001).

needs for intimacy, shared discussion and fun, and personal integration beyond mere work roles'.<sup>201</sup> Crucially, this form of friendship as a befriending of ideas and as a catalyst to the development of General Idea was epitomised by the early interventionist style 'fake bookshop windows', which the collective did not see as art or even work, it was seen as something that was simply enjoyable to enact.<sup>202</sup>

As their activities began to increase in frequency and their profile infiltrated the art mainstream they focused on large scale and often erratic conceptual artwork. Critic Alex Kitnick elaborated on this period in *Art Forum*,

General Idea would go on to produce a series of elaborate projects that acted as supports for this collective persona, such as the sprawling, multipart Miss General Idea Pavilion, which included a boutique, a lounge, and a venue for pageants, and FILE Magazine, an alternative "lifestyle" quarterly, in addition to an assortment of other, more conventional undertakings, such as paintings and installations.<sup>203</sup>

As General Idea 'formalised' and started exhibiting internationally they shifted their focus onto one specific subject matter, the political, racial, gendered and medical crisis of AIDS. General Idea's goal was to normalise the crisis by creating a high profile artwork series entitled, *Imagevirus*, 1987-1994 [fig. 4].<sup>204</sup> Their movement away from the sensationalist/spectacular aspect of contemporary art, most notably their destructive intervention through the pavilion, was in order to create a conceptual model to take on a highly politicised subject matter. This level of thinking and utilisation of the powers of normalisation was articulated by the only surviving member of the collective, AA Bronson, in an interview with Mike Kelley in 2003.<sup>205</sup> Bronson stated that in, 'the beginning we took on alter egos, false names and identities that allowed us to function in the world in ways we felt we couldn't have. And then when we got to a certain stage in our career, the so-called alter egos had to appear as real

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<sup>201</sup>Rawlins, *Friendship Matters*, p.159.

<sup>202</sup>Sarah E.K. Smith, *General Idea Life & Work*, pp.4-8. See description of 'artwork', p.6, One project—targeting a nearby nurses' residence—involved a display of romance novels about nurses. This gave the impression that the house was a bookstore, but prospective customers were prevented from visiting by a sign on the door that indicated the shopkeeper would return in five minutes.

<sup>203</sup>Alex Kitnick, 'THE CONFORMISTS', *ArtForum*, Vol.55, No.7 (2017), pp.222-230 (p. 223).

<sup>204</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup>Mike Kelley and AA Bronson, 'Excerpts from a Conversation,' in *General Idea: Editions 1967–1995*, eds., Barbara Fischer (Toronto: Blackwood Gallery, 2003), p.283.

beings, real normal beings that had careers and ambitions and value systems and what have you'.<sup>206</sup>

This was, and still is, the mythology surrounding General Idea, the ability to create false personas, which could then be normalised and become part of their collective practice. This normalisation allowed for a personal distance away from the intense subject matter. This process through 'myth-making' would, of course, be vital in order to carry on their activity as both Partz and Zontal contracted HIV and tragically died from AIDS and thus the social bond which created the collective in the first instance was irrevocably changed.<sup>207</sup> However, General Idea's legacy continues to have an effect on the way collective activity operates and is even perceived. Through the establishment of artist-led spaces such as Art Metropole in Toronto and retrospective touring exhibitions worldwide, General Idea has entered into both art historical and contemporary art discourse.<sup>208</sup>

Mythmaking and parody are, of course, not limited to artist-led collectives. However, these processes are perhaps accentuated or more precisely, intensified by collective activity. The 'false persona' has been extended by the Guerrilla Girls (1985-current) in order to create a form of recognisable anonymity. This self-determined activist group posted on their website the following statement,

The Guerrilla Girls are feminist activist artists. Over 55 people have been members over the years, some for weeks, some for decades. Our anonymity keeps the focus on the issues, and away from who we might be. We wear gorilla masks in public and use facts, humor and outrageous visuals to expose gender and ethnic bias as well as corruption in politics, art, film, and pop culture. We undermine the idea of a mainstream narrative by revealing the understory, the subtext, the overlooked, and the downright unfair.<sup>209</sup>

The collective emerged, in 1984, with a critical response to the Museum of Modern Art's (MOMA) exhibition, *An International Survey of Recent Painting And Sculpture*.<sup>210</sup> Their response to the

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<sup>206</sup>*Ibid*, p.283.

<sup>207</sup>Gregg Bordowitz, *General idea: Imagevirus*.

<sup>208</sup>Art Metropole, 'Home Page' (2018) <<https://artmetropole.com/>> [accessed 28/03/2018] and General Idea: Broken Time (traveling exhibition): Fundacion Jumex, Mexico City; Museo de Arte Latino americano de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires.

<sup>209</sup>Guerrilla Girls, 'Our Story' (2018) <<https://www.guerrillagirls.com/our-story/>> [accessed 28/03/2018].

<sup>210</sup>Museum of Modern Art 'Fact Sheet' (1984) <[https://www.moma.org/d/c/press\\_releases/W1siZiIsIjMyNzM2OSJdXQ.pdf?sha=6bd28a21a15dd204](https://www.moma.org/d/c/press_releases/W1siZiIsIjMyNzM2OSJdXQ.pdf?sha=6bd28a21a15dd204)> [accessed 04/04/2018].

curator's choice of overwhelmingly male artists consisted of a protest in front of the museum.<sup>211</sup> The intervention had limited success and so they began to create a series of posters and slowly expanded their membership to encompass an increasingly international outlook. It was at this time that the Guerrilla Girls began to shift their focus to address race issues and corruption in the art world.<sup>212</sup> Their poster entitled *Guerrilla Girls, Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into the Met. Museum?* (1989) [fig, 5] is an example of their form of street art which garnered a high level of critical attention coupled with their interventional and spectacular press conferences wearing their now-iconic gorilla masks.<sup>213</sup>

The Guerrilla Girls and General Idea occupy a high profile place in art historical narratives of collective activity. They are often cited as the archetypal entity when the conversation shifts to 'radical' collective practices.<sup>214</sup> This characterisation is partly due to the level of self-identification with the word 'collective'. This self-identification was expressed by Nicola McCartney as a potentially problematic regarding notions of authorship. She argued that 'the Guerrilla Girls author all works of art as the collective, but are comprised of several individuals who each have different opinions, which they voice at 'gigs' and in interviews'.<sup>215</sup> Although different opinions and clashes between the members have happened over the years, and indeed these have led to the fracturing of the collective, their strong identification and thus the collective drive to act in defiance of patriarchal, racial and art world corruption remains.<sup>216</sup> This reveals the internal dialectic of connectedness-autonomy of the individual-collective at play which constantly creates a set of personal negotiations and renegotiations between the members and as a collective.<sup>217</sup> This relational dialectic is especially at play in a statement by Guerrilla Girl 'Alice Neel', '[o]ver the past ten years, we've come to resemble a

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<sup>211</sup>Alexandra Weiss, 'Why the Guerrilla Girls are Still the Art Worlds Biggest Rebels', *Bullet Media* (2016) <<http://bulletmedia.com/article/why-the-guerrilla-girls-are-still-the-art-worlds-biggest-rebels/>> [Accessed 04/04/2018], (para.5 of 16).

<sup>212</sup>Kim Kanatani and Vas Prabhu, 'Artists Comment on Museum Practices' *Art Education*, Vol. 49, No. 2, Exploding the Canon (1996), pp.25-32 (p.27).

<sup>213</sup> Donna Kaz, *UN/MASKED: Memoirs of a Guerrilla Girl on Tour* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2016).

<sup>214</sup> National Museum of Women in the Arts, 'Artists Profiles' (2018) <<https://nmwa.org/explore/artist-profiles/guerrilla-girls/>> [accessed 05/04/2018] and Emmanuelle Lequeux, Haute Culture: General Idea- Review, *The Guardian* (2011) <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/mar/01/haute-culture-paris-museum-lequeux>> [accessed 05/04/2018].

<sup>215</sup>McCartney, 'Anonymity and Feminism', p.118.

<sup>216</sup>*Ibid*, pp.115-170.

<sup>217</sup>EM Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory*, edn. 8, orig. 1991 (New York, McGraw-Hill companies Inc. 2012), pp.155-156.

large, crazy, but caring dysfunctional family'.<sup>218</sup> The juxtaposition of contradictory terms such as 'caring' and 'dysfunctional' in the same sentence reveal the constant tensions in being both an individual and a collective. The use of the word 'family' in the sentence alludes to the shared commonality which goes beyond working together, it is a collective word that expresses a deep social bond.<sup>219</sup> The collective is seen in both General Idea and the Guerrilla Girls as something more than the sum of its parts; identification and acceptance between the members of both collectives of what it means to be part of something greater.

It is telling that both collectives seemed to avoid the idealising mantra of their own influence often citing inspiration from the previous generations plethora of artists and groups emanating from what critic Lucy Lippard described the era of Conceptual art 'which was also the era of the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam, the Women's Liberation Movement, and the counter-culture---was a real free-for-all, and the democratic implications of that phrase are fully appropriate, if never realised'.<sup>220</sup> Lippard positioned her own experiences of the studio art scene in New York from the 1960s to the 1970s. Conceptual artists and groups such as Art and Language, Eva Hesse and Joseph Kosuth developed a community and began to take art in two distinct directions, 'art as idea and art as action'.<sup>221</sup> For Lippard, it was the dematerialisation of the art object not just as a reaction to the increasing commodification of culture but also as opening up of Minimalism, after minimal art constrained pop art and expressionism.<sup>222</sup>

It is the form and process in which Conceptual artists developed rather than their varying ideological perspectives which are of interest at this juncture. John Heartfield's media co-opting of large billboards and poster making [fig, 6], Art and Language's conceptual journal making [fig, 7] and Hans Haacke's censored Guggenheim installation which exposed the corrupt landlords entitled *Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of*

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<sup>218</sup>Guerrilla Girls, 'Confessions of the Guerrilla Girls', (1995) <[https://www.guerrillagirls.com/confessions\\_interview](https://www.guerrillagirls.com/confessions_interview)> [accessed 20/07/2019].

<sup>219</sup>Baxter and Montgomery, *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics*.

<sup>220</sup>Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (London: University of California Press, 1973), p.vii.

<sup>221</sup>Lucy Lippard, 'A Biased History', pp.vii-xii.

<sup>222</sup>Lucy Lippard, 'Outside the Frame', pp.xii-xvi.



*May 1, 1971* [fig, 8]. These artworks are echoed in the practices of both the Guerrilla Girls and General Idea, whether they were directly aware of these specific works is somewhat irrelevant because both the Guerrilla Girls and General Idea were active in New York during the late 1970s and 1980s and were clearly embedded in the cultural ecology of the New York art scene. There were also direct connections between elements of the Conceptual art movement; such as General Idea's trade of an 'Imagevirus' version of Ad Reinhardt's *Black Paintings* with Kosuth, and a member of the Guerrilla Girls adopting the name, Eva Hesse.<sup>223</sup>

This contextualisation is one narrative amongst many. It is perhaps one that is narrowly focused on North America and in particular New York. However, what is revealed in Lippard's writing is a social art history, which is explicitly interconnected to art world shifts and trends.<sup>224</sup> This social art history unearths a rhizomatic narrative of cultural, political and social events. It is these events which I will now discuss in relation to the Guerrilla Girls and General Idea.

Anna Chave, akin to Lippard, illustrated the acute relationship between the Guerrilla Girls and a specific history of feminism. Chave suggested that 'besides being indebted to a prehistory of (the 1970s) feminist principles and practices, the Guerrilla Girls also tacitly built a history of politically motivated conceptual work by artists dating back to the 1960s'.<sup>225</sup> Within these statements from both Lippard and Chave, there are overt references to feminist movements and Post-World War II civil rights movements. Socio-political events such as the formation in New York of the Women's Action Alliance (WAA, 1971); National and targeted protests including The Miss America Pageant that took place in 1968 and strikes for equal pay, including at the Ford factory in Dagenham, UK (1968).<sup>226</sup> American writer, activist and feminist Betty Friedan characterised the psycho-social and political core of what would become second-wave feminism, 'In 1960, the problem that has no name burst like a

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<sup>223</sup>Alex Kitnick, 'THE CONFORMISTS' and The collective adopted dead women artists names in order to keep their names alive. Anna Chave, 'The Guerrilla Girls' Reckoning', *Art Journal*, Vol.70, No.2 (2011).

<sup>224</sup>Lucy Lippard, 'A Biased History', pp.vii-xii.

<sup>225</sup>Anna Chave, 'The Guerrilla Girls' Reckoning', *Art Journal*, Vol. 70, No.2 (2011), pp.102-111 (p.105).

<sup>226</sup>Susan Mosher Stuard, 'The Annales School and Feminist History: Opening Dialogue with the American Stepchild' *Signs*, vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn 1981), pp.135-143 and Anne Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second-wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington. D.C.* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

boil through the image of the happy American housewife'.<sup>227</sup> In Friedan's eponymous book, *The Feminine Mystique*, she combined interviews with statistical analysis to expose the oppressive patriarchal dominance within society.<sup>228</sup> These alliances and actions for societal change throughout western discourse at the time, clearly manifested in the practice of the Guerrilla Girls, as they utilised stark statistics coupled with parody in their 'weenie counts' and posters.<sup>229</sup> They shifted the conversation to the art world, or more precisely, they embodied the techniques and processes of this social movement and its history in order to critique the institutions of the art world.

In the case of General Idea, Bronson has frequently located their individual social histories as central to the creation of the collective. Bronson stated in 2003 that, 'General Idea emerged in the aftermath of the Paris riots, from the detritus of hippie communes, underground newspapers, radical education, Happenings, love-ins, Marshall McLuhan, and the International Situationists'.<sup>230</sup> This is a clear indication of the historical socio-political context from which General Idea emerged. Similarly to the Guerrilla Girls, General Idea emerged from civil rights movements and social and civil actions throughout the West. Unlike the Guerrilla Girls, General Idea had a stronger affinity with communal/'hippy' counter-culture movements of 1960s Europe.<sup>231</sup> This discourse appears in the structure of the collective which was articulated by Bronson. He stated that '[w]e believed in a free economy, in the abolition of copyright, and in a grassroots horizontal structure that prefigured the Internet'.<sup>232</sup> General Idea was able to harness the dissensus of Paris 1968 and the anti-capitalist position of communal living coupled with Situationist inspired 'happenings' which they carried out in fake shop fronts and in their own apartment.<sup>233</sup>

The Guerrilla Girls and General Idea were both active at a temporal crossroads. General Idea emerged from a counter-culture, communalist discourse of the 1960s and began to slowly shift

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<sup>227</sup>Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique (50th Anniversary Edition)*, orig eds. 1963 (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), p.31.

<sup>228</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>229</sup>Anna Chave, p.108.

<sup>230</sup>Mike Kelley and AA Bronson, 'a conversation' in Alex Kitnick, 'THE CONFORMISTS', p.223.

<sup>231</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>232</sup>*Ibid.*, p.225.

<sup>233</sup>Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith, orig edn. 1967 (New York Zone Books, 1994) and, Daniel Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968*, orig edn. 1970 (New York: South End Press, 2002).

throughout the following decades to a form of art activism and institutional critique. Their practice became more focused on the specific issue of the Aids crisis and developed in a highly professionally organised manner, which somewhat contradicted their earlier intentions.<sup>234</sup> Although the Guerrilla Girls emerged from a different set of circumstances, albeit a similar time frame, they immediately initiated a form of art-activism. Their practice which inhabited the periphery of the art world has slowly entered its centre. However, they have managed to walk the line between co-option and resistance using their ‘notoriety’ in order to critique the very institutions which invite them to exhibit.<sup>235</sup>

It is within these shifts in practice that is revealed another history. This history is inherently ideological and is characterised by a struggle for power. It is this history, which I contend is inexplicably interconnected with the artist-led collective. It is hauntological and it positions the collective in a social space that is anti-hegemonic. In 1989, with the destruction of the Berlin wall and the unification of Germany, Francis Fukuyama coined the term ‘end of history’.<sup>236</sup> Fukuyama was referring to psychological position, not literally, the end of history. He suggested that the symbolic fall of international communism had ushered in the complete proliferation of capitalism and would enable a form of neo-liberal capitalism to create a global economy without sufficient alternative opposition.<sup>237</sup> It is this sense of ‘flattening’ of horizons that led Derrida to coin the term hauntology, as any form of non-capitalistic action or discourse was deemed futile or as then Prime Minister Margret Thatcher infamously stated, ‘There is no alternative’.<sup>238</sup> Derrida suggested this all-consuming, global, neo-liberal capitalism denied any active form of presence because it denied anything alternative, hence the pun on ‘ontology’, the study of being in presence.<sup>239</sup> The relatively recent history of the artist-led collective is concurrent with the ‘not so cold’ ideological war between communism and capitalism. Of course, the role of contemporary artist-led collectives continues

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<sup>234</sup>Sarah E.K. Smith, *General Idea Life & Work*, pp.7-8.

<sup>235</sup>Nicola McCartney, p.126-131.

<sup>236</sup>Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, orig ed. 1992 (London: Free Press, 2006).

<sup>237</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup>Phrase originally associated with Thatcher in the 1980s. Claire Berlinski, *There Is No Alternative: Why Margaret Thatcher Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

<sup>239</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*.

within this ‘post-ideological’ system. It is for this reason that I argue that contemporary artist-led collectives are hauntological as they embody this history but cannot ‘activate’ it into a full form of presence without being co-opted into the system with which they are historically opposed. As a result, they must create localised or micro-heterotopias in order to deconstruct the episteme.

What is emerging as I discuss these artist-led collectives is a set of common traits which appear to be semantically linked to the word collective and/or the choice to practice collectively. They have an element of nomadic behaviour or the ability, due to the number of members, to act quickly in more than one physical location to form a multi-centred space. They are overtly politically driven and tend to act under one banner. They are non-hierarchical from the outside, however, there is often individual(s) that drive their collective activities. They pool their skill sets, which often results in interdisciplinary artworks which constantly blurring the boundaries of what can be considered art.

The collectives discussed thus far are very different in their respective structures and practice. However, I contend that it is the ‘socio-political’ thread above all which traces its way through Assemble, Chto Delat, General Idea, and Guerrilla Girls. Further, it is this socio-political agency that has informed their collective decision making and indeed their entire direction from their formation to their futures or legacies. If I briefly return to the definition of The Tate’s glossary of art terms, it cannot be as simplistic as ‘political beliefs’ as a catch-all term. As I have illustrated in the discussion above, there is a specific language of political thought entangled within the modus operandi of artist-led collectives. This is the language of the political act, as Condorelli evoked ‘friends in action’, which reveals the dialectical knot in play.<sup>240</sup>

Returning to the case studies, both Assemble and Chto Delat articulate this in different ways. The name ‘Chto Delat’ which translates as ‘what to do’ takes its genesis from a novel of the same name by Russian philosopher and critic Nikolai Chernyshevsky.<sup>241</sup> Chernyshevsky’s novel was also evoked by Vladimir Lenin in the political pamphlet *What is to be Done?: Burning Questions of Our Movement*,

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<sup>240</sup>Condorelli, p.15.

<sup>241</sup>Chto Delat, ‘About’ (2019) <<https://chtodelat.org/>>[accessed 02/07/2019], (para.2 of 4).

which questioned the political and social ideologies of the west and advocated a socialist system.<sup>242</sup> By collectively identifying with the phrase ‘what is to be done?’, Chto Delat started with a question that literally means the act of questioning something and evokes notions of change.

This thread does not simply stop with a naming decision. It is revealed in their entire practice. If I revisit the *10 Houses on Cairns Street*, [fig, 9] project where Assemble essentially aided in the design of a project in which ‘residents reclaimed and planted their streets, painted the empty houses, organized a thriving monthly market and founded a Community Land Trust’.<sup>243</sup> The area had been consigned to demolition and the residents had fought for approximately twenty years to keep their home. Assemble facilitated a form of social design in this project, essentially blocking the planned demolition by collaborating with local trusts, organisations, and vocal residents to create a co-op or community-led action.<sup>244</sup> This engineered not only a sustainable direction but a statement to the planned displacement and the inevitable ‘gentrified’ architecture which would follow.<sup>245</sup>

There is a distinct set of discursive threads that have traced their way through the significations and utterances of collectivism in art. They find their dialectical knot in the relationships between people, places, and politics and in doing so bring about specific socio-cultural change. This dialectical knot is also historical in its flux as I have attempted to draw links between the collective’s mentioned thus far. This thread appears in the importance given to live-work spaces by General Idea and can also be discerned in Assemble’s co-created projects with the residents of Granby. Interconnected with this is the notion of the interventionist act which was articulated in the feminist posters of the Guerrilla Girls embracing the injustices in the art world, to the cultural protest march in St Petersburg which instigated Chto Delat. Further, the similarities between Chto Delat’s political newspaper and General Idea’s equally political File Magazine cannot be ignored. It seems that the blurring of art and life is vital in order to move towards an understanding of the contemporary artist-led collective. This

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<sup>242</sup>Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *What is to be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement*, orig edn. 1902 (London: Wellred, 2018).

<sup>243</sup>Assemble, ‘10 Houses on Cairns Street’, *projects* (2018) <[http://assemblestudio.co.uk/?page\\_id=1030](http://assemblestudio.co.uk/?page_id=1030)> [accessed 20/01/2018], (para.2 of 2).

<sup>244</sup>Michael Krohn, *Social Design: Participation and Empowerment* (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2018).

<sup>245</sup>Hazel Tilley, ‘You’d lie there in the night and hear a piece of wood go’ Granby Workshop Catalogue (2015), pp.48-49.

‘blending’ has a very specific quality within the notion of collectivism and appears to echo throughout history albeit manifesting in different socio-cultural and geo-political contexts, yet it resided in the communication between the individuals involved. Sholette would argue it was a shift in the ‘social imagination’, of the Marxist idea of total synthesised autonomy and the possibility of complete communism.<sup>246</sup> Enwezor and McCartney would position the problematic of the author-as-artist *par excellence*, in the modernist project.<sup>247</sup> All three would argue that it was, and still is, a cultural symptom of capitalism’s hegemonic adoption into globalisation.<sup>248</sup> I argue that it was the interplay between these factors coupled with the complex development of modern class-based society, with its technological and ethical challenges, which brought about the sense of agency in art. This agency was never individualistic in its occurrence and played out in the communication between people, with both destructive and creative consequences. I argue it is this communication that builds friendships that underpin the contemporary artist-led collective. Viewed through the lens of friendship, collectives become complex dialectical relationships full of similarities and differences which are in constant negotiation. Rawlins suggested that friendship occupies a marginal space within society never solidifying into the institutionalised hierarchies.<sup>249</sup> However, friendship can trigger deep social bonds that can continue for a person’s lifetime and equally fracture in an instant. It is these specific qualities and unique status of friendship within society, that can temporarily ‘suspend’ the conditions of capitalism and thus collectives’ become heterotopias. These heterotopic moments are in constant tension between the forces of conformity and creativity. However, it is precisely in this contradiction that the agency of the artist-led collective can occur.

The following chapter traces an historiography of this agency, which now appears hauntological in its contemporary manifestations. These art historical threads weave a set of narratives which reveal how the socio-cultural and geo-political contexts of specific artists, economists, critics, and thinkers have shaped collectivism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century.

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<sup>246</sup>Sholette and Stimson, *Collectivism After Modernism*.

<sup>247</sup>Enwezor, ‘The Production of Social Space as Artwork: Protocols of Community in the Work of Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes’, and McCartney, *Death of the Artist Art World Dissidents and Their Alternative Identities*.

<sup>248</sup>Sholette and Stimson, pp.xi-xv and, Enwezor, pp.223-225 and, McCartney, pp.21-23.

<sup>249</sup>Rawlins, *Friendship Matters*.

## **Chapter 2: (Un)histories of the contemporary artist-led collective**

The aim of this chapter is to trace an historiography of collectivism in art in order to understand the historical discursive threads which have come to haunt the contemporary artist-led collective. As I have established these traces now appear hauntological and contradictory because they are manifested with a ‘strange ever becoming quality’, which appears (un)historical because its historical ‘presence’ has been denied by the history of art. This denial was characterised by Sholette as,

no ism to sustain it as a vital enterprise, no critical literature to give itself pride of place as history. While there were plenty of group exhibitions, ersatz and real professional organizations, international conferences and journals, and other developments in the 1950s and 1960s that helped to make the likes of abstract expressionism, happenings, Fluxus, pop art, minimalism, conceptual art, and others over into art-historical categories, none of these brought the question of collective voice to the fore in the same way, none saw collectivization itself as a vital and primary artistic solution, none sought first and foremost to generate a voice that declared its group affiliation, its collectivization, as the measure of its autonomy.<sup>250</sup>

This lack of critical literature and legitimisation reveals the slippery nature of collective practices which are riddled with problems of recognition and definition. Sholette and Stimson have provided the only periodisation of collectivism to date, this in and of itself, an important document. However, just as the authors are at pains to express, it is a meta-narrative that at times brushes over the nuances of cultural entanglements.<sup>251</sup> Sholette and Stimson frame artistic collectivism in relation to broad socio-cultural shifts that occurred throughout the twentieth century until our current time frame.<sup>252</sup> The focus of their periodisation was collectivism after 1945, ‘[o]f primary interest is the collectivism particular to the cold war—hence the phrase “Collectivism after Modernism”—but only insofar as it exists as a prehistory, as a pivot point, for this moment now, that is, for a collectivism following “collectivism after modernism”’.<sup>253</sup> Further, they argued that ‘the old modernist collectivism was indissolubly linked with a bigger ism, a bigger ideal that had failed—communism—and it had little choice but to distance itself’.<sup>254</sup> This meaning of this distancing is of critical importance to this thesis

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<sup>250</sup>Sholette and Stimson, *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, p.xi.

<sup>251</sup>*Ibid*, pp.1-16.

<sup>252</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>253</sup>*Ibid*, p.3.

<sup>254</sup>*Ibid*, p.xii.

as the authors evoke the imagery of the ghost as a metaphor for these shifts with particular attention to how collectives are still haunted by the old collectivism of modernist nation-building, and the dream of the eradication of the self in order to transcend to some higher form of autonomous nation-state or class.<sup>255</sup> However, conversely, this new collectivism has broken free of these connotations and has embraced the full-blown global neoliberal capitalism through the emergence of enterprise culture.<sup>256</sup> It is the contradictory nature of this historical narrative that alludes to the complexity of collectivism. Similarly, Enwezor cast the historical emergence of collectivism as intertwined with modernism. However, Enwezor further exposed its contradictions by arguing that, '[c]ollective work complicates further modernism's idealization of the artwork as the unique object of individual creativity'.<sup>257</sup> Akin to Sholette and Stimson, Enwezor argued that this modernist prehistory of the artist-led collective has its traces in 'the avant-garde that time and again has tested the faith and power we invest in both the idealized nature of the unique artwork and the power of the artist as author'.<sup>258</sup> This schizophrenic solipsism at the heart of the modernist art world was articulated by art historian Simon Gikandi in his article 'Picasso, Africa, and the Schemata of Difference',

namely that the practitioners of modernism had themselves started the process of containment, that they needed the primitive in order to carry out their representational revolution, but that once this task had been accomplished, the Other needed to be evacuated from the scene of the modern so that it could enter the institutions of high art.<sup>259</sup>

Although Gikandi is deconstructing the modernist art world (western-centric) with regard to the position of African Art, and I am not equating this with the fate of collectivism, his critical analysis reveals the tensions, contradictions and power fields within the modernist era.<sup>260</sup> For as Enwezor suggested collective practices were both vital to the production of the modernist art world and they were shunned, ejected and ostracised within the high art rarefied spaces of an increasingly object-based art history which favoured the 'genius' individual as a monetised commodity for the

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<sup>255</sup>*Ibid*, p.6.

<sup>256</sup>*Ibid*, p.11.

<sup>257</sup>Okwui Enwezor, 'The Production of Social Space as Artwork: Protocols of Community in the Work of Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes', p.223.

<sup>258</sup>*Ibid*, p.223.

<sup>259</sup>Simon Gikandi, 'Picasso, Africa, and the Schemata of Difference', *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol.10, No.3 (2003), p.457.

<sup>260</sup>*Ibid*.



increasingly capitalised system of the art world.<sup>261</sup> This reveals the flaws in periodising the collective as the meta-narratives, themselves espoused by the same art history which neatly tried to flatten and package modernist avant-gardist collectivism as movements and ‘isms’, become too arbitrary to capture the full extent of historiographical nuance.<sup>262</sup>

I now arrive at my argument that the important element overlooked in this ‘periodising’, is friendship and the social bonds which developed these discursive forms of collectivism. I argue that the drive towards forms of collectivity in art cannot be completely explained by ‘the old dream of autonomy’ characterised by Karl Marx or indeed, by the new ‘strike forces collectivization’ in the guise of eBay, Al-Qaida and Flash mobs.<sup>263</sup> Instead, it is by an interplay between them both and the realisation that friendship has, and continues, to pervade these internal-external factors throughout history. Further, I argue that periodising collectivism itself is a fruitless task as by its very nature the artist-led collective does not conform to meta-narratives as they are formed by highly specific socio-cultural and geo-political relationships between people, places and spaces. Thus I advocate a historiographical approach that looks closely at the interplay between what has been written by the members of the collectives, from their perspective, and how historians have studied the specific sources to develop a history.

I will now carry out an etymological operation on the word ‘collective’, in order to reveal this specific socio-political agency. I will begin with the word collective in the English, from the French *collectif*, which in turn is derived from the Latin *collēctīvus* meaning ‘gathered together, collected’, the past participle of *colligere*, ‘to gather, assemble, bring together, collect’.<sup>264</sup> It is the Latin compound word ‘colligere’ which I concern myself with for the moment. The root of the word is *legere*, meaning ‘To gather, collect, pick out, choose, read’, revealing the unconscious significations of meaning, transmitted through the utterances or usages of the word ‘collective’.<sup>265</sup> The root *legere* suggests a

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<sup>261</sup>Okwui Enwezor, p.224.

<sup>262</sup>Griselda Pollock, ‘Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity’, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp.50-90.

<sup>263</sup>*Ibid*, p.4.

<sup>264</sup>Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, vol.1 (Amsterdam: Elsevier Publishing Company, 1966), p.313.

<sup>265</sup>*Ibid*, p.312.

specific intention is inferred through the act of collecting, a choice is being made in order to assemble something in a particular form. At this juncture, this is a purely abstract set of linguistic deductions. However, when the prefix, *com-*, is considered suddenly the perspective shifts.

The prefix *com-*, of which *col-* is a variant, refers to ‘with’, ‘together’ and ‘in association’.<sup>266</sup> This meaning reveals an agency in the signification of the word ‘collective’. It is thus a word concerned with sociality, between people, a form of political agency. This is not to say a common reading between an entire society or simply left and right politics. On the contrary, it is a particular set of relationships gathered together in a highly specific form. It becomes apparent that I am dealing with more than just semantics by referring to entities as ‘collectives’. The word itself has a specific set of connotations that signify a need to change something together, which goes beyond the capabilities of an individual.

This thread was inherently ideological and can be traced through a group of specific individuals, writers, historians, artists and critics practicing from the middle of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, particularly in France, Italy, Russia, and Britain. In *Culture & Society, 1780-1950*, Raymond Williams critically analysed this history and crucially the change of meaning of certain words. For Williams, these linguistic changes were symptomatic of an epistemological shift that gradually manifested itself in technology, art, science, society, and culture. Williams suggested that,

There is in fact a general pattern of change in these words, and this can be used as a special kind of map by which it is possible to look again at those wider changes in life and thought to which the changes in language evidently refer.<sup>267</sup>

Williams specifically highlighted five important words, ‘industry’, ‘class’, ‘art’, ‘culture’ and ‘democracy’.<sup>268</sup> Williams’s analysis began with the notion that industry had previously referred to an industrious person(s) in common parlance. However, the significations shifted throughout the 1800s and the word began to acquire another set of meanings related to, ‘a collective word for our

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<sup>266</sup>*Ibid*, p.317.

<sup>267</sup>Raymond Williams, *Culture & Society, 1780-1950* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, 1960),p.xi.

<sup>268</sup>*Ibid*, pp.xi-xii.

manufacturing and productive institutions, and for their general activities'.<sup>269</sup> Williams argued that the increase of institutionalism realigned the power structures within society and ushered in changes in class structure, artistic practice, democracy and the perception of culture.<sup>270</sup> He believed that this fundamental change in perception, increasingly referred to as the *Industrial Revolution* in Britain, was based on the similarities with the French Revolution of 1789.<sup>271</sup> Interestingly, Williams noted a rise or change in the use and meaning of a lexicon of words in the 1800s, such as, 'collectivism', 'capitalism', 'commercialism', 'atomistic', 'liberalism', 'romanticism', 'proletariat' etc.<sup>272</sup>

The obvious stand out from this group of words is 'collectivism'. Williams articulates this change in usage as a shift from older more generalised meanings such as to collect, or work together. This shift was both political in character and was suggestive of a growing signification with socialist perspectives,

Collectivism, used mainly to describe socialist economic theory, and only derivatively in the political sense of collective, became common in C19; it was described in the 1880s as a recent word, though its use is recorded from the 1850s. In France the term was used in 1869 as a way of opposing 'state socialism'.<sup>273</sup>

As Williams astutely observed the shifts in language and nomenclature during the nineteenth century and early twentieth reveal ideological perspectives, which I argue, contributed to the formation of collective practices that still haunt the contemporary artist-led collective.

Art critic and social thinker John Ruskin (1819-1900) was a proponent of the Gothic Revival style within art and architecture as is evident in *The Stones of Venice (vol. III) The Fall*.<sup>274</sup> Ruskin concluded that art and architecture lost its 'morality' throughout the development of the Renaissance. This is evident through statements such as, 'first corruptions introduced to the Gothic schools' and

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<sup>269</sup>*Ibid*, pp.xi-xii.

<sup>270</sup>*Ibid*, pp.xi-xviii.

<sup>271</sup>*Ibid*, p.xiii.

<sup>272</sup>*Ibid*, p.xv.

<sup>273</sup>Williams, *Keywords A vocabulary of culture and society*, revised edn, orig edn. 1976 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.69.

<sup>274</sup>John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, Vol, 3, orig edn. 1851-53 (London: George Allen, 1905).

‘Grotesque Renaissance’.<sup>275</sup> Although *The Stones of Venice* appears to be a specific critique of Venetian architecture, it revealed Ruskin’s political and social perspective. Ruskin’s oeuvre was suggestive of his political intentions as his writings began to reject the mechanistic, and what he saw as immoral trappings of capitalistic notions within society, through its affinity with Greece and Roman culture.<sup>276</sup> This rejection of the classical and subsequent neo-classical style of art and architecture was epitomised in *True Principles* by A.W.N Pugin (1812-1852). Pugin stressed that ‘the types from which our present buildings are to be formed, it is a monstrous absurdity, which has originated in the blind admiration of modern times for every thing [*sic*] Pagan, to the prejudice and overthrow of Christian art and proprietary’.<sup>277</sup> Although Ruskin evidently shared a commonality with his predecessor in their joint veneration of the medieval gothic and the apparent symbolic connection between the gothic and moralistic Christian values, there appeared a high level of animosity enacted by Ruskin against Pugin. This was characterised by the statement in the appendix contained within *The Stones of Venice*, ‘he is not a great architect but one of the smallest possible or conceivable architects’.<sup>278</sup> This form of ‘one-upmanship’ was perhaps due to anxiety, as was suggested by Rosemary Hill. Hill stated that ‘these concerns blended with the ever-increasing anxiety about finding an idiom for the age, a modern Gothic’.<sup>279</sup> Ruskin needed to establish the theoretical and conceptual framework for his form of Gothic Revival, precisely because it had to carry cultural and intellectual power in order to withstand criticism from the prevalent industrialism and con-current materialistic traits in art and architecture. There was, of course, a dialectical contradiction in Ruskin’s drive to develop his ideas within an establishment that was built upon opposing ideologies. Ruskin was well respected within society and held a powerful, influential position within the hierarchical world of the arts, yet his ideas and the art he was advocating countered the centripetal forces of the establishment.<sup>280</sup> Ruskin was both part of and opposed to the art world at the time. This was evident in

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<sup>275</sup>*Ibid*, p.2.

<sup>276</sup>Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, Vol 1,2,3 and, Ruskin, *Unto This Last and Other Writings*, orig edn. c1860 (London: Penguin Classic, 1985)

<sup>277</sup>Augustus Pugin, *True Principles*, Intro by Roderick O’Donnell, orig edn.1841 (Hereford: Gracewing Publishing, 2003), p.3.

<sup>278</sup>John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, Appendix.

<sup>279</sup>Rosemary Hill, *God’s Architect: Pugin and the Building of Romantic Britain* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), p.432.

<sup>280</sup>Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Early Years* (London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp.73-74.

reviews of his first endeavour into the world of art criticism, *Modern Painters*. Charlotte Brontë, for example, expressed the view that '[he] does not give-himself half measure of praise or vituperation. He eulogizes, he reverences with his soul'.<sup>281</sup> Indeed, the book garnered support, much of which was, in private, from well-respected artistic individuals including George Elliot, William Wordsworth, and Alfred Tennyson.<sup>282</sup> However, the intellectuals of the art world were slow to react, and, when they did, it was not met with universal approval.<sup>283</sup> The October 1843 edition of *Blackwood's Magazine*, maligned Ruskin as,

[h]ere our author jumps at once into his monomania - his adoration of the works of Turner, which he examines largely and microscopically... and imagines all the while he is describing and examining nature; and not unfrequently he tells you, that nature and Turner are the same... This is 'coming it pretty strong'... not that we wish to depreciate Turner. We believe that he has been better acquainted with many of the truths of nature... than any other artists, ancient or modern, but we believe he has neglected others and some important ones too, and to which the old masters paid the greatest attention and devoted the utmost study.<sup>284</sup>

This review was somewhat predicated on the fact that *Modern Painters* had been written as a rebuttal to Blackwell's attack on J.M.W Turner.<sup>285</sup> It must also be noted that Ruskin published the first edition of *Modern Painters* anonymously under the pseudonym 'A Graduate of Oxford'.<sup>286</sup> However, it became an open secret that Ruskin was the author of the work.<sup>287</sup> What is significant about *Modern Painters*, and why Ruskin received strong criticism from certain aspects of the establishment, was his complete belief in the interconnection between society, art, and nature. This became the cornerstone of his work and became evident in his fierce advocations of the sensibility or re-appropriation of the medieval guild, through engaging with young artists and thus critiquing the academisation of art.<sup>288</sup> Ruskin stated that 'it is the great principle of Brotherhood, not by equality, nor by likeness, but by giving and receiving'.<sup>289</sup> This re-interpretation of the supportive structure and power of the guild

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<sup>281</sup>*Ibid*, p.73.

<sup>282</sup>*Ibid*, pp.73-74.

<sup>283</sup>*Ibid*, pp.73-76.

<sup>284</sup>'Modern Painters', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, No. CCCXXXVI. October, Vol. LIV (1843), p.486.

<sup>285</sup>Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Early Years*, p.74.

<sup>286</sup>*Ibid*, p.71-73.

<sup>287</sup>Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vol. 1 (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1848), p. Preface.

<sup>288</sup>Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* and James S. Dearden, *John Ruskin: a life in pictures* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

<sup>289</sup>John Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, p.18.

directly inspired the form of proto-collectivism found in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (1848-1853) (PRB). Ruskin's critique of the establishment and what he saw as the increasingly institutionalised art world (primarily the Royal Academy) was at its most distilled in his work entitled, *Pre-Raphaelitism* (1855).<sup>290</sup> Over a series of pages, he attacked the system of educating painters. He stated that the academy was teaching its pupils, 'nature is full of faults' and that painters must better nature, 'yet the clever something is to be properly subjected to Raphaellesque rules'.<sup>291</sup> Here Ruskin touched upon the notion of the shift from the artist as a craft worker or artisan to the materialistic producer of the imaginary. This shift in meaning from 'imitator of nature' to the human-centric 'creative' practice is evident in Ruskin's defense of the PRB and their central principles of history painting with vibrant colour and adherence to mimesis.<sup>292</sup> For Ruskin these principles represented the counterbalance to the mechanistic approaches to painting promoted by the academy; and moreover, the 'disturbing' shift towards capitalistic material values within society and art.<sup>293</sup>

Ruskin's ideas hold within them a sense of social democracy which he saw as threatened by the mechanistic advancements of capital.<sup>294</sup> His avocation of the PRB and of the Gothic Revival was underlined by a socio-political ideology that would allow for a society to achieve a sense of democracy through 'giving and receiving'.<sup>295</sup> It is this process of sharing through a form of solidarity, which was diametrically opposed to the increased monetary and class-based economy.

In *Pioneers of Modern Design From William Morris to Walter Gropius*, Nikolaus Pevsner posited that by the 1800s the arts had begun to distance themselves from reality and artists self-identified as superior to the rest of the population.<sup>296</sup> Pevsner argued that,

But there had been a time when nothing of all that existed. In the Middle Ages the artist was a craftsman, proud of executing any commission to the best of his ability. Morris was the first artist (not the first thinker, for Ruskin had preceded him) to realize how precarious and

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<sup>290</sup>John Ruskin, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, orig. edn. 1855 (London: George Allen, 1907).

<sup>291</sup>*Ibid*, p.15.

<sup>292</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>293</sup>*Ibid*, pp.15-19.

<sup>294</sup>Ruskin, *Unto This Last and Other Writings*.

<sup>295</sup>John Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, p.18.

<sup>296</sup>Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design From William Morris to Walter Gropius*, orig edn. 1936 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960).

decayed the social foundations of art had become during the centuries since the Renaissance, and especially during the years since the Industrial Revolution.<sup>297</sup>

Pevsner traced a very specific discourse which led to the Arts and Crafts movement; however, my interest is in how William Morris and his friends, colleagues, and acquaintances translated Ruskin and Pugin's fundamental belief that art, morality, politics, nature, and religion were all interconnected and that the trappings of industrialisation had cheapened the craft of the handmade object and had over-complicated design.<sup>298</sup>

William Morris (1834-1896) in his years studying Theology at Exeter College, Oxford, was inspired by Ruskin's commentaries in *The Stones of Venice* alongside writers such as Thomas Carlyle and Charles Kingsley.<sup>299</sup> This introduced Morris into the discourse of the Gothic Revival and the wider trend of Medievalism. The socio-political perspectives forwarded by these thinkers shaped the social circles and ultimately friendships in which Morris operated. Be-friending artist Edward Burne-Jones and later, through Burne-Jones, prominent Pre-Raphaelite Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Morris became interested in the Pre-Raphaelite journal *The Germ* [fig, 10].<sup>300</sup> The periodical promoted the conviction that nature and art must take centre stage, and the 'heroic' history of medieval life must be brought into the present through a form of moralistic romance.<sup>301</sup> Historian Jennifer Harris problematised the *Journal's* influence on Morris, 'influenced by *The Germ*, the journal of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the idea of publishing a periodical began to take root'.<sup>302</sup> Morris would later publish a number of journals and newspaper-type works, notably the Socialist League's *Commonweal*.<sup>303</sup> Indeed, it was Morris's growing derision for industrialism coupled with his close relationship with several artists, architects, socialists, designers and poets which led to the formation of the furnishings

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<sup>297</sup>*Ibid*, pp.21-22.

<sup>298</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>299</sup>Joanna Banham and Jennifer Harris, *William Morris and the Middle Ages: A collection of essays, together with a catalogue of works exhibited at the Whitworth Art Gallery, 28 September-8 December 1984* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp.2-3.

<sup>300</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>301</sup>Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, *The Germ*, ed. by. Andrea Rose, orig. eds, 1850, Vol (1 of 4) (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1992).

<sup>302</sup>Jennifer Harris, 'Chapter 1', p 9.

<sup>303</sup> William Morris, *The Commonweal* (Nineteenth Century Online, British Labour History Ephemera Collection) [accessed 10/07/2018].

and decorative arts company, *Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. (The Firm)*<sup>304</sup> According to Pevsner the idea to form a decorative arts company came to Morris whilst attempting to ‘furnish his first studio in London, the thought struck him that before one can settle down to paint elevating pictures, one must be able to live in congenial surroundings, must have a decent house, and decent chairs and tables’.<sup>305</sup>

The company put Ruskin’s dogma into practice, in a more direct aesthetic way than Ruskin was perhaps proposing. It is this directness which is of interest, as the creation of The Firm was a critical historical moment when the social-democratic discourse entrenched in the growing medievalist movement, manifested in a form of collectivism. Later in his life, in an essay for the *Commonweal*, Morris clarified his conception of the medieval guild and its importance to his ideological perspective.<sup>306</sup> Morris characterised the guild as, ‘associations of mutual protection and help [...] these were followed by associations for the protection of trade, which were called the guilds-merchant’. Morris weaved the importance of this mediaeval societal occurrence into the development of his form of socialism arguing that by, ‘1350 the craft-guilds were fully developed and triumphant’.<sup>307</sup> In the essay, which appeared in the May 1886 issue of the *Commonweal*, Morris emphasised the honest emancipating of labour through the guilds' historical development of free towns against the Church and the emergence of the State.<sup>308</sup> This historicism of the medieval guild is vital to understanding the drive that brought The Firm together.

Operating with the clear intent to create the real possibility of an aesthetic actualisation through arts and crafts in daily life, The Firm was different from the PRB in that it placed at its core an idealisation of the medieval craft worker as more than simply a group of painters.<sup>309</sup> Significantly, The Firm was

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<sup>304</sup>*Ibid*, pp.10-11.

<sup>305</sup>*Ibid*, p.22.

<sup>306</sup>William Morris, *Political Writings Contributions to Justice And Commonweal 1883-1890*, eds by. Nicholas Salmon (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994).

<sup>307</sup>*Ibid*, p.503.

<sup>308</sup>*Ibid*, pp.503-505.

<sup>309</sup>Also, according to Georgiana Burne-Jones (wife of Edward Burne- Jones) the need to furnish Red House led to the formation of the Firm. (Memorials, I, 213).



also registered as a company and thus became one of the first entities to take the arts out of its reified space and into the social sphere.<sup>310</sup>

The importance of friendship and its role in the formation of The Firm and its life cycle cannot be underplayed. Perhaps the most illuminating of projects ever attempted by The Firm was The Red House located in Bexleyheath, southeast London [fig, 11]. Built for Morris and Jane Burton his wife, the guild mentality was expressed within the fabric of this building. Every aspect of its architecture was co-designed by Morris and his friend and colleague Phillip Webb and was an homage to the medieval vernacular with pitched roofs, and a deceptively plain façade.<sup>311</sup> The interior is a tribute to the concept of the ‘artist as craftsman’ forwarded within the notion of the guild. Pevsner suggested that,

Morris refused any connexion with Italy and the Baroque and aimed at something akin to the style of the Late Middle Ages. Webb applied certain Gothic details such as pointed arches and high-pitched roofs; he also adopted the irregularity of the fourteenth and fifteenth-century domestic and especially monastic architecture, but he never copied.<sup>312</sup>

Its main features are functional and the servant areas are quite large which has been seen to signify Morris’s idealism.<sup>313</sup> Crucially, Red House was furnished and decorated by his friends whom had become members of the Firm including, Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Faulkner.<sup>314</sup> In a letter to Frederick Barlow Guy, Morris’s ex-tutor at Oxford, Morris stated that ‘you see we are, or consider ourselves to be, the only really artistic firm of the kind’.<sup>315</sup> Here Morris is making a clear distinction between the practices of other companies and the artistic value of complete design offered by The Firm. There was a clear element of romantic utopianism in the design of the Red House and the way in which Morris articulated his vision. In a letter to Burne-Jones, dated November 1864, Morris opened with, ‘As to our palace of Art’. There is much significance in these words.<sup>316</sup> Firstly, Morris

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<sup>310</sup>Pevsner, pp.22-23.

<sup>311</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>312</sup>*Ibid.*, p.58.

<sup>313</sup>Jan Marsh, *William Morris & Red House* (Swindon: National Trust Books, 2005), p.17.

<sup>314</sup>Joanna Banham and Jennifer Harris, *William Morris and the Middle Ages: a collection of essays, together with a catalogue of works exhibited at the Whitworth Art Gallery* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

<sup>315</sup>William Morris, *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, eds., Norman Kelvin, Vol. 1 (1848-1880, letter. 1861) (Surrey: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp.36-37.

<sup>316</sup>*Ibid.*, p.38.

used the word ‘our’ to refer to the Red House as owned by more than one and thus belonging to the multiple rather than the individual. This inclusivity within Morris’s language is suggestive of a guild mentality, or common pride in a place. It is this notion of reverence and pride which transfers to the overall context of the letter, which referred to a plan of moving The Firm's headquarters to Red House and the long-held ambition of Burne-Jones moving his family into the residence.<sup>317</sup> The use of a capital ‘a’ in the word ‘art’ is also highly suggestive of both art’s importance, given in the statement, and how ‘art’ was conceptualised by Morris and his friends as more than simply one form or another. The evidence for this is in the interior of the house with the walls of the staircase covered with tempera paintings depicting the epic battle of Troy in a medieval style by Burne-Jones, sideboards designed by Webb and tapestry hangings in the bedrooms by Morris. Jane Morris worked on embroidered cloth flower scenes which were mounted on the walls and Georgiana Burne-Jones worked on decorating tiles.<sup>318</sup> Morris and his collaborators did not simply see the Red House as a dwelling, but a work of art in and of itself.<sup>319</sup> This further solidifies the guild narrative because it embodies Ruskin’s ideas of craftsmanship being central to the articulation of ‘great’ architecture. It is evident that The Firm embodied this ethos of drawing inspiration from nature coupled with functional medieval design and contemporary technology in order to emphasize the hand-made or crafted nature of the complete design process in the nineteenth century living.

Red House was described by John William Mackail, the official biographer of Morris, friend, and son-in-law of Burne-Jones, as, ‘[l]ife at Red House in those years was indeed realized felicity for the group of friends to a greater degree than often falls to the lot of schemes deliberately planned for happiness’.<sup>320</sup> Mackail traced the relationships that developed in Red House and which began to establish The Firm,

Here, as soon as the Morrises moved into it at the close of the wet summer of 1860, open house was kept for all their friends. Burne-Jones and his wife he had been married that June

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<sup>317</sup>*Ibid*, pp.38-39.

<sup>318</sup>John William Mackail, *The Life of William Morris* (London: Longmans, Green, 1901), pp.158-159.

<sup>319</sup>William Morris, *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, ed by. Norman Kelvin, Vol. 1 (1848-1880, letter. 1861) (Surrey: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp.36-37, and John William Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*.

<sup>320</sup>John William Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, p.158.

spent their Sundays there almost regularly. Rossetti, Faulkner and his two sisters, Webb, Swinburne, Madox Brown, Arthur Hughes, were also frequent and welcome visitors.<sup>321</sup>

What is revealed in the case of Red House is how friendships become intertwined with the art and became enmeshed with the social bonds in a site, which in and of itself is then constantly being re-made and re-created, as in this case where the decoration and the activity continued for several years.<sup>322</sup> The Red House as a project was a typical instance of Condorelli's conception of the 'befriending of ideas' and 'friends in action'. It was a dialectical knot of people, places, and relationships, in short, it was both about life and art.<sup>323</sup>

The changes and shifts which brought about the end of Morris's life at Red House would go on to cause relational dialectical tensions within The Firm which instigated a shift in its structure and direction. The combination of ill health brought on by the constant travel to London with the flourishing of The Firm, an outbreak of scarlet fever amongst the Faulkner's and the Burne-Jones's, affairs between Rossetti and Jane Morris and the death of Elizabeth Siddal (Rossetti's wife) put a strain on life at Red House.<sup>324</sup> Morris decided to sell the Red House and moved his family to Bloomsbury to the building where The Firm was based.<sup>325</sup> These were examples of complex dialectical knots of familial ties and friendships and the tension which grew between Rossetti and Morris. Similar relationships have been explored by Rawlins. Rawlins observed that 'while friendship is described as the pinnacle of same-sex closeness, romance and marriage are regarded as the highest forms of cross-sex intimacy. As a result, it is considered inevitable that close cross-sex friendships will evolve into something "more than friendships," meaning romantic involvement and/or sexual activity'.<sup>326</sup> Rawlins's findings are still relevant to nineteenth century society and reveal the relational dialectical forces of openness-secrecy and concealment-revelation at play between the members of the

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<sup>321</sup>*Ibid*, pp.159-160.

<sup>322</sup>Morris's lived at Red House from 1859-1865.

<sup>323</sup>Condorelli, p.15

<sup>324</sup>Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, pp. 158-175, and Fiona McCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015).

<sup>325</sup>*Ibid*, p.175.

<sup>326</sup>William Rawlins, *The Compass of Friendship: Narratives, Identities, and Dialogues* (London: Sage Publications, 2009), p.131.

group and their extended networks. It also revealed the risks in the work-life dialectic which are constantly in play within such artistic organisations.

Morris would go on to eventually take sole ownership of the company. Health, relationships and financial issues forced changes, and he re-branded the firm Morris & Co in 1875.<sup>327</sup> Morris would become further disillusioned with the state of poverty within the working classes. In a letter to Georgiana Burne-Jones in 1876, Morris commented on the conditions of the working class at the cloth dyeing factory, 'you must at least imagine that all this is going on on [sic] very nearly the same conditions as those of the Shepard boy that made a watch all by himself'.<sup>328</sup> Morris was working closely with the process of manufacturing his artisanal objects in the factories at this time. It is perhaps these experiences which further fuelled his socialism.

In 1885, Morris joined the *Socialist League*, which was co-founded by Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling. The League was formed through a breakaway from the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). This was the result of a difference in ideological notions of socialism and thus the breakdown of the relationship between, its founder Henry Hyndman and many of its members.<sup>329</sup> The League published a periodical entitled the *Commonweal*, as a vehicle for their socio-political perspective. In the introduction to the *Journal* Morris stated that 'as to the conduct of *The Commonweal*., it must be remembered that it has one aim- the propagation of Socialism'.<sup>330</sup> The *Journal* also contained the league's manifesto. It was primarily constituted, however, by articles from its members and critical thinkers. Notably, there were articles by Friedrich Engels, Walter Crane (illustrations) and Eleanor Marx.<sup>331</sup> These articles ranged from economic critique and workers' solidarity to politically charged revolutionary discourse. The fact that Morris became further associated with left-wing socialism is reflected in his increasingly internationally facing literature. A series of poems entitled *Pilgrims of*

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<sup>327</sup>*Ibid*, p.46. It must be noted that this study was on heterosexual matrices and so is limited, but the findings are relevant to the situation of which I am analysing.

<sup>328</sup>*Ibid*, p.292.

<sup>329</sup>William Morris, *The Collated Letters of William Morris*, eds., Norman Kelvin, vol. II (1885-1888, letter. 1865) (Surrey: Princeton University Press, 1987), p.366.

<sup>330</sup>William Morris, 'Introductory' *The Commonweal*, Vol.1, No.1, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (1885) (para.2) (Nineteenth Century Online, British Labour History Ephemera Collection) [accessed 10/07/2018].

<sup>331</sup>William Morris, *The Commonweal* (Nineteenth Century Online, British Labour History Ephemera Collection) [accessed 10/07/2018].

*Hope*, appeared in *The Commonweal* (1885-86).<sup>332</sup> The story centred on two lovers who travelled to fight in the Paris Commune in 1870-71.<sup>333</sup> It is a tragedy, as the love triangle which includes the wife, husband, and friend is destroyed in the Battle of Paris. As with Ruskin, Morris increasingly shifted his attentions to the political rather than continuing with the proliferation of the artistic guild as a vehicle for ideas. May Morris, Morris's daughter, and John Henry Dearle began to take up the daily running of Morris & Co, as Morris became engrossed in the spreading of socialism and the editing of *The Commonweal*.<sup>334</sup> It is perhaps this point where a discernible difference can be made regarding the intent of a practice. The difference between *The Germ* and *The Commonweal* is vast, the latter being overtly political with the purpose of an activist, and the former coming from an artistic position to change from an overtly cultural standpoint. It is these fine margins that would dominate the left until the present day and also aid in discerning artist-led collective activity from political collectivism. It must be noted that these are exceedingly fine margins and they are often quite liquid in reality.

There was growing dissent within the Socialist League between the different factions.<sup>335</sup> This discord was overtly ideological and was symbolic of the con-current events happening across Europe, Russia and to a less extent in the Americas. Morris's friend and contributor to the Socialist League, Friedrich Engels, famously a lifelong co-worker with Karl Marx, Eleanore Marx's father, had written extensively about the socio-political and economic discourse of the class structures of the time. In the preface to *Conditions of the Working Class in England*, Engels outlined the structure of class within industrialised America. He suggested,

In February 1885, American public opinion was almost unanimous on this one point; that there was no working class, in the European sense of the word, in America; that consequently no class struggle between workmen and capitalists, such as tore European society to pieces, was possible in the American Republic; and that, therefore, Socialism was a thing of foreign importation which could never take root on American soil.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>332</sup>William Morris, *The Pilgrims of Hope and Chants for Socialists*, orig. *The Commonweal* (1885-86) The Project Gutenberg eBook <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3262/3262-h/3262-h.htm>> [accessed 23/07/2018].

<sup>333</sup>William Morris, 'Ready to Depart', *The Pilgrims of Hope*, part X, The Project Gutenberg eBook <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3262/3262-h/3262-h.htm>> [accessed 23/07/2018], p.44.

<sup>334</sup>William Morris, *The Collated Letters of William Morris*, eds., Norman Kelvin, vol. II (1885-1888, letter. 1865).

<sup>335</sup>*Ibid*, pp.366-371.

<sup>336</sup>Friedrich Engels, 'Preface to the American Edition, The Labour Movement in America', *Conditions of the Working Class in England*, orig. 1885, 1887 edn. (London: Penguin, 2009), p.2.

Engels explained how a set of workers strikes up and down the country, from coal miners to the eight hours working pay movements, changed irreparably the class divides.<sup>337</sup> Indeed the combined works of Marx and Engels stand as a vital political and social commentary on events and their ramifications not only for the advocacy of socialism but for their predictions regarding events such as the Paris Commune, the rise of a communist state and the inevitable great recessions within a capitalist model.<sup>338</sup> These events amongst many throughout the last 170 years have played a vital role in the development of the artist-led collective. The focus of this development is not tangential, it is overt, and the evidence has already been touched upon through the re-imagining of the medieval guild and specifically William Morris and the creation of The Firm.

There is a clear relationship between socialist ideals for political change, and the artistic endeavours of The Firm and to lesser extent groups such as the PRB. From the design of Morris's Red House, almost a simulacra of a medieval farmhouse but with an adapted larger space for its working-class servants, to the style and subject matter of a Pre-Raphaelite painting [fig, 12], its pseudo-moralistic code and aesthetic defiance to the academy and refusal to conform to capitalist industry. These socio-political phenomena evolving within the nineteenth century, were the beginnings of a form of collective activity, not yet realised in the contemporary sense but nonetheless culturally significant. Although I argue that The Firm was symptomatic of socialism, it perhaps only existed in its most egalitarian structure, at its wide-eyed, naïve and idealistic inception. As it developed, it became an increasingly hierarchical structure with Morris as essentially the director. This is not to say that it did not stay true to its principles, however, its working practice shifted to a standard nineteenth century operational model.<sup>339</sup> Similarly, The PRB was not an artist-led collective in the contemporary sense because they were only ever loosely connected and were somewhat the product of Ruskin's writings

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<sup>337</sup>*Ibid*, p.2-4.

<sup>338</sup>Karl Marx, *Das Kapital: A Critique of Political Economy*, eds by. Friedrich Engels, Serge L. Levitsky, orig. 1867 (Washington, Simon and Schuster, 2012). And, Friedrich Engels, *Conditions of the Working Class in England*. And, Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, eds., Friedrich Engels, David McLellan, orig edn. 1848 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>339</sup>Jonathan M. Woodham, *A Dictionary of Modern Design*, 2 edn. (online version) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.63.

and patronage. Although they did collectively work on *The Germ* and they published a manifesto, it was short-lived and was initiated primarily by Rossetti with the influence of Morris.<sup>340</sup>

The growing sense of political, social and economic turbulence experienced throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was exemplified by the smorgasbord of ideological strata from communism to the emergence of nationalism and fascistic groups. Williams articulates this epistemological shift,

The idea of culture would be simpler if it had been a response to industrialism alone, but it was also, quite evidently, a response to the new political and social developments, to Democracy. Again, in relation to this, it is a complex and radical response to the new problems of social class.<sup>341</sup>

Just as Morris moved further towards socialism throughout his life so this narrative and its historiography must adjust its course and enter the complex iterations brought on by the rise of collective notions of autonomy within the idea of culture, nation, state, and economy.

There have arguably been two specific works by Marx and Engels that has shaped the discourse of socialism and ushered in the ideological framework and political will power for international communism; *Das Kapital*, 1867-1883 (Capital. Critique of Political Economy) and *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848 (or, originally titled, Manifesto of the Communist Party).<sup>342</sup> In *Das Kapital*, Marx presented a critique of capitalism by exposing its central contradictions,

the subjection of labour to capital was only a formal result of the fact, that the labourer, instead of working for himself, works for and consequently under the capitalist. By the co-operation of numerous wage-labourers, the sway of capital develops into a requisite for carrying on the labour-process itself, into a real requisite of production. That a capitalist should command on the field of production, is now as indispensable as that a general should command on the field of battle.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>340</sup>Jennifer Harris, 'Chapter 1: William Morris and the Middle Ages', pp. 3-14.

<sup>341</sup>Williams, 'Introduction', *Culture & Society 1780- 1950*, p.XVI.

<sup>342</sup>Karl Marx, *Das Kapital: A Critique of Political Economy*, and, Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*.

<sup>343</sup>Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, p.231.

Marx introduced the concept of 'surplus-value' to explain how commodities could be constantly bought and sold for a higher price over time.<sup>344</sup> He theorised that surplus-value was generated by the difference between 'labour-time' worked to create a product and 'labour power' (capacity to work). Thus a skilled labourer can produce significantly more units than it will cost to employ the labourer. This 'extra' value is pocketed by the capitalist as profit.<sup>345</sup> This extra value is added to the cost of producing a product thus the commodity is sold and bought at increasing monetary value. This condition of capitalism essentially re-enforces the class stratification because it is only the capitalist (middle classes, bourgeoisie) which hold the means of production, as the working classes (lower classes, proletariat) cannot access this surplus-value.<sup>346</sup> Marx contended that this would eventually cause a situation where the working class could no longer buy the products which they made and inequality would increase.<sup>347</sup> Further, Marx made predictions regarding technological advancements within the workplace through observations he made about the vast changes in mechanistic production. Marx observed that,

because poverty robs the workman of the conditions most essential to his labour, of space, light and ventilation; because employment becomes more and more irregular; and, finally, because in these the last resorts of the masses made "redundant" by modern industry and Agriculture, competition for work attains its maximum. Economy in the means of production.<sup>348</sup>

This trend, according to Marx, increases the amount of material wealth or commodities and thus services available within a society, reducing, at times dramatically, the economic value which essentially diminishes the profit rates within a capitalist economy. It is this last point that creates a paradox, as the basis of the capitalist mode of production is to generate capital through exploiting surplus-value. This value is reduced through this process and thus the swings from 'boom to bust' become commonplace.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>344</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>345</sup>Karl Marx, 'The Labour Process and the Process of Producing Surplus-value', pp.126-141.

<sup>346</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>347</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.359-378.

<sup>348</sup>*Ibid.*, p.305.

<sup>349</sup>*Ibid.*



*The Communist Manifesto* was commissioned by the Communist Party and sets out the cornerstones of socialism including the various formations and oppositions within socialism and the left.<sup>350</sup> Marx suggested that ‘the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy’.<sup>351</sup> Marx listed a number of measures to evoke a communist revolution which would be required in different countries.<sup>352</sup> These were highly generalised but essentially they would result in the abolishment of class antagonism. Marx stated that ‘in place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all’.<sup>353</sup> It is this implied movement towards a set of different structures, towards complete autonomy, from the biased class system, which captured the social imagination. Sholette employed the notion of the social imagination as a device in order to suggest that collectivism has altered itself since 1945. This may indeed be the case, however, the touch paper was ignited in the nineteenth century. Marx’s infamous opening gambit, ‘A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism’, played out in the houses of the political establishment, the community halls, local public houses and the cafés of Paris.<sup>354</sup> As I have outlined above, socialist ideology played an increasingly prominent role in the activity of Morris and his wider social circles. I contend that socialism was a vehicle for artists to imagine alternative and different futures. Indeed, it instigated direct and violent action in 1871, as the Paris Commune seized control of the city.<sup>355</sup> This was a rebellion led by workers and artists alike, and it implemented a temporary socialist regime.<sup>356</sup> Central to the organisation of the Commune was the *Paris Federation of Artists*. Assembled by the painters Gustave Courbet and Eugène Pottier, the Federation published a manifesto which was the result of a meeting held on 15 April 1871. The central aim of the Federation was to, ‘entrust to artists alone the management of their interests’.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>350</sup>Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*.

<sup>351</sup>*Ibid*, p.26.

<sup>352</sup>*Ibid*, pp.26-27.

<sup>353</sup>*Ibid*, p.26.

<sup>354</sup>*Ibid*, p.14.

<sup>355</sup>Marx, ‘The Paris Commune. Address to the International Workingmen’s Association, May 1871’, *The Communist Manifesto*, p.57.

<sup>356</sup>The Paris Federation of Artists, ‘Assembly of artists’, *Red Wedge Magazine*, trans. by Jeff Skinner, orig edn. 1871 <<http://www.redwedgemagazine.com/online-issue/manifesto-federation-artist-commune>> [accessed 14/08/2018].

<sup>357</sup>*Ibid*.

This movement towards the autonomy of artistic production is an actualisation of Marx and Engels's ideological perspective. The Federation aimed to emancipate themselves from government control and from the patriarchal systems of bourgeois privilege.<sup>358</sup> They intended to establish 'the independence and dignity of every artist taken under the protection of all through the creation of a committee elected by the universal suffrage of artists'.<sup>359</sup> Interestingly, this committee was highly progressive, for this historical and cultural timeframe, and voted for gender equality,

Citizens of both sexes who proved their position as artists – whether through the fame of their works, or through an exhibitor's card, or through a written attestation from two sponsor artists – had the right to take part in the vote.<sup>360</sup>

The direct nature of this manifesto and the revolutionary fervour with which it was carried out was not only a sign of the political climate, with the collapse of Louis- Napoléon Bonaparte's regime and the siege of Paris by the Prussian Army, but a significant shift in power from the ruling classes to the proletariat. This was described by Marx, 'the majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time'.<sup>361</sup>

The Commune was eventually crushed by the regular French Army.<sup>362</sup> However, this spirit of social change towards a sense of autonomy for artistic activity and the generation of artistic discovery through the transformation of society, as expressed in the Commune, became a powerful discourse at the turn of the nineteenth century. Although there were vast differences between the scale, level, and socio-cultural contexts between the Federation and the instances of Morris & Co or the PRB, there was an underlying discursive thread in play. This thread traces its way through the artist's ability to affect socio-political change through working together rather than individually.

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<sup>358</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>359</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>360</sup>*Ibid.*, 'Composition of the committee'.

<sup>361</sup>Marx, 'The Paris Commune. Address to the International Workingmen's Association, May 1871', *The Communist Manifesto*, p.60.

<sup>362</sup>*Ibid.*, p.67.

This discourse became increasingly complex throughout the following half a century. Much has been written about the so-called European *Avant-Garde* of the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. This historiography is not primarily concerned with the term itself or indeed its periodising effects. However, numerous ‘actors’ in the historical dramatization of this ‘movement’ are important to this discourse of collectivism within art. It is also significantly positioned within the work of Sholette, Spampinato, *et al.* as a historical moment which is vitally important to the development of collective activity.<sup>363</sup> As I have traced a narrative through the prevailing century it is somewhat obvious that the actions of certain groups of artists, in a time of great political and social change throughout the world, would rise in frequency and gain historical importance. The actions of Morris & Co, the PRB, the artist of the Commune, amongst many, are not separated from the tendencies of groups and movements which formed throughout the first half of the twentieth century and continue to haunt the contemporary artist-led collective. Indeed, the parallels between the friendship groups which formed General Idea in their shared work-life spaces are not so different from the friendship groups which formed The Firm. Similarly, Morris & Co’s navigation of the capitalist system is echoed in Assemble’s projects in Granby, and the production of the socialist newspaper *The Commonweal* bears a striking similarity to Chto Delat’s activist periodical. Their individual contexts are, of course, different and complex and I do not intend to conflate and cover the entire discursive web within this chapter. However, I will attempt to build a coherent argument by tracing this discourse through different contexts and groups.

Raymond Williams noted the shifts in the symbolic meaning and thus use of the words, ‘industry, democracy, class, art and culture’, throughout this time frame, illuminating the monumental realignments, divisions and changes in which society experienced.<sup>364</sup> The possibility of mass socio-political change, which was often violent, was a catalyst. It is this ideological notion which re-occurs throughout this historiography, this notional drive which manifests as an anti-hegemonic force, in

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<sup>363</sup>Gregory Sholette and Blake Stimson, p. Preface XV, and Francesco Spampinato, *Come Together: The Rise of Cooperative Art and Design*, and Okwui Enwezor, ‘The Production of Social Space as Artwork’ and, Nicola McCartney, *Death of the Artist: Art World Dissidents and Their Alternative Identities*.

<sup>364</sup>Williams, p.17.

seemingly limitless configurations in vastly different contexts. These ‘avant-garde’ groups and individuals formed within this climate and within these differing cultural conditions; like a cloud of dust particles they did not have a coherent solid structure, an origin, or a leader. In *The Theory of the Avant-Guard*, 1962, Renato Poggioli, attempted to map a set of traits in common between these different groups and individuals. Poggioli suggested,

A whole series of relations has thus far been established: activism, or the spirit of adventure; agonism, or the spirit of sacrifice; futurism, or the present subordinated to the future; unpopularity and fashion; or the continual oscillation between old and new; finally, alienation as seen especially in its culture, aesthetic and stylistic connections.<sup>365</sup>

Poggioli then summarised these traits into a further manifestation of the tendency towards experimentation beyond any other factor.<sup>366</sup> Poggioli’s assessment falls within the canon of modernist criticism which attempted to establish meta-narratives. This important point will be discussed in due course. However, I must return to the central thread of this historiography. One such group which has been critically linked to the notion of the avant-garde was the Futurists.

In 1909, Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Emilio Marinetti published the *Manifesto del Futurismo* (the manifesto of futurism).<sup>367</sup> Marinetti’s central grievance with Italian culture at the time was, ‘up to now literature has exalted a pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep. We intend to exalt aggressive action, feverish insomnia, the racer’s stride, the mortal leap, the punch, and the slap’.<sup>368</sup> The Futurists intended to remove themselves from the past and revolutionise Italian artistic discourse by imagining possible futures, in which technology ruled supreme, and how it could restructure society based on speed and performance. Marinetti saw the revolutionary necessity of war, suggesting that, ‘We will glorify war—the world’s only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-

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<sup>365</sup>Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Guard*, trans. by Gerald Fitzgerald (London: Harvard University Press, 1968), p.131.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid*, pp.131-137.

<sup>367</sup>F. T. Marinetti, *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*, orig. edn 1909, Paris, eds. by Umbro Apollonio, trans. by R.W. Flint, et al (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), pp.19-24.

<sup>368</sup>*Ibid*, p.20.

bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman'.<sup>369</sup> It is these elements of Marinetti's manifesto which, on the surface, reveal the fascistic nature of the futurist vision.<sup>370</sup>

The manifesto was published in *La Gazzetta dell' Emilia*, and then reprinted in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*.<sup>371</sup> The language and strength of conviction within the manifesto attracted a number of other young artists which resulted in the Futurists group forming.<sup>372</sup> Marinetti was himself a journalist, author, and poet specialising in the literary. Indeed, it is important to note that his political writings on futurism inspired visual artists to join the early incarnation of the Futurist group. Marinetti did not initially envisage the possibility of this confluence, as is clear from an account of the night in which a group of three painters joined the futurists. The poet, Aldo Palazzeschi, was an acquaintance of Marinetti and was staying with him in January of 1910. Palazzeschi recalls Marinetti working on a manifesto throughout the entire day with the artists, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, and Luigi Russolo,

When Marinetti finally arrived at the Café Savini later that evening, he had a look that I had never seen before. Usually, his face seemed to reflect the world around him; but that night it seemed as though it were aglow with a vivid light from within. He kept looking at me with the air of someone about to say something, and finally he touched my hand and said: "Futurism in painting was born today." He seemed more surprised than I would have expected. The truth was that he himself had never imagined such an event, nor had he ever done anything to bring it about. It was a gift that had unexpectedly fallen from heaven, and at one blow it enlarged his horizons to an incalculable degree.<sup>373</sup>

It is clear this expansion of the Futurist's horizons into the visual arts enabled Marinetti and his circle to transmit the Futurist ideology into a further aesthetic dimension. The Futurists could now develop exhibitions of their work and reach different audiences outside of the literary and political circles of the time.<sup>374</sup> Futurist artist, Umberto Boccioni, had also convinced Paris based painter, Gino Severini,

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<sup>369</sup>*Ibid*, p.20.

<sup>370</sup>Marinetti also wrote manifestoes directly on fascism, including: *Il manifesto dei fasci italiani di combattimento*, 1919. Marinetti founded the Futurist Political Party which merged with Benito Mussolini's Italian Fascist Party.

<sup>371</sup>MoMA, 'Words in Freedom: Futurism at 100', MoMA.org (2018)

<<https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2009/futurism/>>[accessed 10/08/2018].

<sup>372</sup>Members of the Futurists: Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Giacomo Balla, Gino Severini and Luigi Russolo. John Milner, *A slap in the face! Futurists in Russia* (London : Philip Wilson Publishers, 2007).

<sup>373</sup>Aldo Palazzeschi, 'Prefazione: Marinetti e il futurismo,' trans by. Lawrence Rainey, orig edn. in Luciano de Maria, eds., *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, pp.xviii–xix.

<sup>374</sup>Selena Daly, *Italian Futurism and the First World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

to join the group which greatly increased their international reach and resulted in exhibitions in Paris and London.<sup>375</sup> Severini, introduced the group to elements of Cubist and pointillist technique [fig,13] as, art historian Joshua C. Taylor suggested, ‘it was Balla's interest in a systematic divisionist technique that spurred Severini to move to Paris in 1906 where he could seek out and study the works of his idol, Seurat’.<sup>376</sup>

As I have outlined in the previous analysis of the central thread, artists and thinkers imagined social change through the vehicle of socialism and of communism. What is revealing about the Futurists, as a group, is their collective activity and ideological positioning was the antithesis of socialism, it embraced fascism.<sup>377</sup> It was to destroy the past and to exclude great swathes of society, through gender bias, in order to create a new order. Marinetti unequivocally stated that ‘poetry must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown, to force them to bow before man’.<sup>378</sup> It is clear that the socialist ideology is not necessarily the central factor in the establishment of these groups of artists. The Futurists’ fascistic ideology suggests that collective activity can occur throughout the political spectrum. Whether deep left or far right, the fact that collectivist tendencies could occur throughout betrays an underlying nature to this form of activity. The artistic drive for change appears not to be dependent on one set of variations within a generalised ideological perspective. However, the form of activity and aims of the Futurist group indicates major differences from the egalitarianism which developed within Morris & Co, the PRB and the artists of the Commune. Marinetti’s authority as the founder of the Futurists manifested in the cultural DNA of the Futurist’s life-cycle. Marinetti would shape its direction, re-molding it as a political movement and introducing a series of manifestos such as *The Futurist Synthetic Theatre* and the *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature*.<sup>379</sup> It was Marinetti’s inherent authoritarianism that was visible within the manner in which the Futurists endeavoured to preach their socio-cultural change, through issuing political style manifestos and

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<sup>375</sup>Lawrence Rainey, ‘Introduction: Marinetti and the development of futurism’, *Futurism: An Anthology* (London: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>376</sup>Balla was Severini’s first ‘master’ and acquaintance of Marinetti,

<sup>377</sup>Selena Daly, *Italian Futurism and the First World War*.

<sup>378</sup>F. T. Marinetti, *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*, p.20.

<sup>379</sup>F.T. Marinetti, ‘Manifestos’ <<https://www.italianfuturism.org/manifestos/>> [accessed 12/08/2018].

theatrical gatherings. The Futurists used force to seize the ground of representation of the twentieth century and it was by the spectacle that they would attempt to destroy the European hegemony.<sup>380</sup>

In a recent re-investigation of the Futurists, Dr. Selena Daly focussed on the historical experience of the Futurists during the First World War.<sup>381</sup> Daly outlined that much of the analysis and historicization of the Futurists has tended towards a specific narrative as a direct effect of the outbreak of war. However, Daly suggested, ‘although today the idea that Futurism ended in 1915-16 is untenable, the presentation of the First World War as a dramatic conclusion to the movement’s first phase has persisted in Futurist criticism’.<sup>382</sup> Further, she argues that ‘the change in Futurism did not come about as a reactive response’ to the First World War but as a ‘strategy adopted by Marinetti in 1915 to revitalize a movement whose avant-gard provocations were becoming less effective’.<sup>383</sup> Daly pointed to the fact that the Futurists, led by Marinetti, were the first to carry out pro-interventionist and anti-Austrian demonstrations in Italy.<sup>384</sup> She highlights the ineffectiveness of these interventions in the Italian press and of Marinetti’s reluctance (at least in the early days) to carry out skeptical interventions in public places.<sup>385</sup> Daly’s argument revolved around the notion that Marinetti and the Futurists constructed a set of myths, through a heady mixture of the personal embodiment of very real conflicts in which they were directly involved, as a way to raise their profile and experiment with the aesthetics of propaganda art.<sup>386</sup> As Marinetti clearly described the experience of war as, ‘absolute Futurism’, the contentions appear to reside between what has been written about the Futurists and what actually transpired.<sup>387</sup> This oscillation between fact and fiction in and of itself is the most important aspect of my argument. The historical ‘truth’ is actually not entirely relevant to this historiography as the conjecture was used as a strategy by Marinetti to create these contradictions and to develop modes of propaganda through art to raise the profile of the Futurist cause.

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<sup>380</sup>Lawrence Rainey, ‘Introduction: Marinetti and the development of futurism’, *Futurism: An Anthology*, p.8.

<sup>381</sup>Selena Daly, *Italian Futurism and the First World War*.

<sup>382</sup>*Ibid*, p.5.

<sup>383</sup>*Ibid*, p.5.

<sup>384</sup>*Ibid*, pp.18-21. The Italian Socialist government was neutral at the time.

<sup>385</sup>*Ibid*, p.18.

<sup>386</sup>Selena Daly, *Italian Futurism and the First World War*.

<sup>387</sup>F.T Marinetti, *Italian Futurism and the First World War*, trans by. Selena Daly, p.14.

It is Marinetti's opportunistic acts and self-promoted mythologizing of Futurism's importance within Italian and European discourse, which is of importance to this historiography. As Daly argued, much of the criticism and art historical analysis of the Futurists is implicated in this process as historians have often relied upon the 'propaganda' documents and sources created by Marinetti and others which have all contributed to the myth of the Futurists.

The Futurists discourse was clearly contradictory, as I have endeavoured to outline. Their exact political leanings, across the group at different times is never fully clear as many of the members were in fact socialists rather than fascists.<sup>388</sup> There appeared to have been a number of chance encounters within which Marinetti gained an advantage by, loosely at best, adding more members to the group. He would use the manifesto to attempt to solidify these relationships. Indeed, Palazzeschi's account of the meeting with Marinetti at Café Savini revealed the power of these personal connections. Futurism was transformed on that day in January of 1910 because, 'friendship, like support, is considered here as an essential political relationship of allegiance and responsibility'.<sup>389</sup> This juncture marks a specific point in this historiography as I must now draw the argument to its confluence. It is abundantly clear that the Futurists are key to this historiography as their life-cycle is not as simplistic as it seems on the surface. It reveals the change in the cultural consciousness of the early twentieth century, particularly with regards to how the Futurists appeared to embrace technological development and enshrined the idea of what they thought represented modernity. Crucially, their group reveals why collective activity changed throughout the first half of the twentieth century, and how the canonisation of the 'ism' or 'movement', as an art historical critique, not only ignored the possibilities of the collective but denied its full realisation.

To fully articulate this line of inquiry it is necessary to discuss what is referred to as 'isms' and 'movements'. In 1960, prominent essayist and art critic, Clement Greenberg, established the conceptual framework for the modernist project. Greenberg stated that 'Modernism includes more

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<sup>388</sup>Selena Daly, *Italian Futurism and the First World War*, p.35.

<sup>389</sup>Condorelli, 'Too Close to See: Notes on Friendship, a Conversation with Johan Frederik Hartle', p.63



than art and literature. By now it covers almost the whole of what is truly alive in our culture'.<sup>390</sup>

Greenberg outlined a meta-narrative grounded in a deep-rooted epistemological change. This tendency was the central crux of the modernist project. Greenberg argued, 'I identify Modernism with the intensification almost the exacerbation, of this self-critical tendency that began with the philosopher Kant'.<sup>391</sup> Greenberg positioned Emmanuel Kant as the first philosopher to 'criticize the means itself of criticism'.<sup>392</sup> It is this internalising form of criticism, from the inside, as opposed to a traditional conceptualisation of criticism as delivered from the outside. Greenberg outlined this embodiment of criticism by exploring its manifestation within painting. He suggested the modernist turn in painting occurred in the nineteenth century when artists explored,

the limitations that constitute the medium of painting- the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of the pigment-were treated by the Old Masters as negative factors that could be acknowledged only implicitly or indirectly. Under Modernism these same limitations came to be regarded as positive factors, and were acknowledged openly.<sup>393</sup>

As Greenberg astutely pointed out this self-criticism was intentionally utilised by artists to critique the very fabric of modernity itself.<sup>394</sup> If I return to the Futurists, this was evident from the inception of the manifesto to their nomenclature by choosing to be named 'Futurists' and thus entering into the semiotic relationship with the word and its play of significations. The 'ism' located in the overwhelming desire to embrace the machine in, through the motif of the motorcar as a metaphor for modernity, for a vision of the future.<sup>395</sup> As Marinetti stated in the manifesto, 'With it, today, we establish Futurism, because we want to free this land from its smelly gangrene of professors, archaeologists, ciceroni, and antiquarians'.<sup>396</sup> On the other hand, Futurism was diverse in its artistic output and involved many different members across national boundaries and timeframes. For example, Severini and the many painters which became associated both directly and then later by art historians and critics, translated the number of Futurism's tenants into painting by utilising their

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<sup>390</sup>Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', *The collected essays and criticism: Modernism with a Vengeance*, Vol.4 (London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.85.

<sup>391</sup>*Ibid*, p.85.

<sup>392</sup>*Ibid*, p.85.

<sup>393</sup>*Ibid*, p.86.

<sup>394</sup>Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', *The collected essays and criticism: Modernism with a Vengeance*.

<sup>395</sup>F.T. Marinetti, *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*.

<sup>396</sup>*Ibid*.

Futurist versions of other modernist 'isms' such as Cubism. The Futurist exhibitions moved throughout Europe, notably 1912, the Futurist exhibition at the Sackville Gallery and they held an exhibition at the Der Sturm gallery in Berlin.<sup>397</sup> Futurism also expanded into music, clothing, and cinema.<sup>398</sup> It was the scale of Futurism and its influence over different timeframes and disciplines which is why many commentators, including Daly and Rainey, referred to Futurism as a 'movement'. The tendency towards the 'ism' and establishing meta-narratives such as 'movements' exposes a fatal flaw within Modernism. Griselda Pollock argued in her text *Feminist Interventions in Art's Histories* that what we learn about the world and its peoples is ideologically patterned in conformity with the social order within which it is produced'.<sup>399</sup> Pollock illuminated the patriarchal bias within the formation of the modernist paradigm,

We initially thought about women artists in terms of art history's typical procedures and protocols studies of artists (the monograph), collections of works to make an oeuvre (catalogues raisonnées), questions of style and iconography, membership of movements and artists' groups, and of course the question of quality. It soon became clear that this would be a straitjacket in which our studies of women artists would reproduce and secure the normative status of men's artists and men's art whose superiority was unquestioned in its disguise as Art and the Artist.<sup>400</sup>

It will not have escaped the attention of the reader that the actors in this historiography have thus far been predominantly male. This is no coincidence, nor is it an intentional bias, but an almost unconscious condition of the social and political discourse of the time. It reveals the oscillation between what was written about who and further still the, 'mutually inflecting regimes of power' based on class and race.<sup>401</sup> There are elements, not in their entirety, but nevertheless, that suggest

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<sup>397</sup>Barbara Pezzini, 'The 1912 Futurist exhibition at the Sackville Gallery, London: an avant-garde show within the old-master trade', *The Burlington Magazine*, issue July 2013 <<http://burlington.org.uk/media/file/generic/the-1912-futurist-exhibition-by-barbara-pezzini-july-2013.pdf>> [accessed 16/08/2018] and Jullian Suarez, 'Catalogue from 1912 Futurism Exhibition in Berlin', *Guggenheim.org* (2014) <<https://www.guggenheim.org/blogs/findings/catalogue-1912-futurism-exhibition-berlin>> [accessed 16/08/2018].

<sup>398</sup>Francesco Balillia Pratella, 'Manifesto of Futurist Musicians', *Futurism: An Anthology* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), pp.75-80. and, F.T Marinetti, et al. 'The Futurist Cinema', pp.229-233 and, Giacomo Balla, 'Futurist Men's Clothing: A Manifesto (1914)', pp.194-196.

<sup>399</sup>Griselda Pollock, 'Feminist Interventions in Art's Histories', *Kritische Berichte*, No. 1 (1988) <<https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/kb/article/viewFile/10930/4793>> [accessed 12/08/2018], p.5.

<sup>400</sup>*Ibid*, p.5.

<sup>401</sup>*Ibid*, p.5.

discursive contradictions to this hegemonic narrative of modernity which in themselves adds weight to the argument within this thesis. Within the Futurist movement, there was dissent regarding the role of women in Marinetti's manifesto. The poly-math Valentine De Saint-Point wrote her Futurist perspective in response to Marinetti's manifesto 'humanity is mediocre. The majority of women are neither superior nor inferior to the majority of men. They are equal. Both merit the same disdain'.<sup>402</sup> De Saint-Point was an active member of the Futurists group and in her manifesto deconstructs the binary of male and female by suggesting,

Every superman, every hero to the extent that he has epic value, every genius to the extent that he is powerful, is the prodigious expression of a race and an era precisely because he is simultaneously composed of feminine and masculine elements, femininity and masculinity: which is to say, a complete being.<sup>403</sup>

Similarly, Morris's socialist ideologies counter this narrative regarding class and gender, especially his collaborations with Eleanore Marx and designers Agnes and Rhoda Garret.<sup>404</sup> As I have mentioned the egalitarian turn was central to the manifesto of the communitarian artists. It is important to realise that these actions began to challenge the hegemonic paradigm, in order to shift power. However, they were not a totality, they were points of contradiction. If I now return to Pollock's argument the role of artistic collective activity with regard to modernity will become clear. Pollock stated,

In dealing with the study of the history of nineteenth and twentieth-century art the dominant paradigm has been identified as modernist art history. It is not so much that it is defective but that it can be shown to work ideologically to constrain what can and cannot be discussed in relation to the creation and reception of art.<sup>405</sup>

Suddenly, the problematic of the 'collective' is revealed in all its contradictions. The way in which art was understood was through this modernist ideological frame. It was of the grand-narrative, exclusionary at times and predicated on the individual as 'artistic genius', a term which was owned by

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<sup>402</sup>Valentine De Saint-Point, 'Manifesto of the Futurist Woman', *Futurism: An Anthology*, p.109.

<sup>403</sup>*Ibid*, p.109.

<sup>404</sup>Emma Ferry, 'Decorators May Be Compared to Doctors': An Analysis of Rhoda and Agnes Garrett's 'Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture (1876)' *Journal of Design History* Vol. 16, No. 1, *Domestic Design Advice* (2003), pp.5-33.

<sup>405</sup>Griselda Pollock, 'Feminist Interventions in Art's Histories', pp.5-6.

the white, middle-class male. The collective could not be fully realised through this matrix because, by definition, it was the embodiment of socio-political change on a non-hierarchical level. It required multiple ‘voices’ acting, for the most part, in a collective and unified way. It is for this reason that the cultural, social and societal conditions of the nineteenth and early twentieth century would deny its full and complete actualisation. Of course, glimpses of collective artistic activity did occur but were explained by the critics, the institutions and the historians as ‘movements’ and ‘isms’. On the other hand, I cannot state that the groups and movements mentioned thus far in this historiography, were artist-led collectives. They displayed elements of collectivist practices but remained in the majority of the products of the hegemony in which they opposed. This is reflexive because one cannot simply extract each case out of its socio-cultural context.

Sholette and Stimson’s statement that ‘modernist collectivism stopped making sense after the war and is only now coming back into view but often as a half-materialized spectre in denial of its own past’.<sup>406</sup> Here is the crux of my argument, modernist collectivism was never completely realised in the first place because it was always ‘out of its own time’, or more precisely denied its full form of presence, thus already hauntological. In this way, on the surface, there was real social and political change and in this respect Sholette and Stimson’s assertions hold water. However, what is perhaps missed or at least never articulated is the extent to which modernist collectivism itself was never fully realised due to the hegemonic conditions of modernity in and of itself. Indeed, the collective dream was perhaps only realised within the friendships and wider social bonds that formed the relationships between actors of which I have endeavoured to illuminate.

Before I move on to the final remarks in this chapter and summarise the argument which will weave its way throughout this thesis. I must endeavour to briefly analyse artistic collectivism within a different society. A society that had violently embraced communism.

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<sup>406</sup>Gregory Sholette and Blake Stimson, p.Preface XV.

## *State-Run Collectivism*

The Bolshevik faction of the *Marxist Russian Social Democratic Labour Party* seized power in the 1917 October revolution in Russia and eventually formed the USSR in 1922.<sup>407</sup> Inspired by Marx and Engels's work on socialism, the party, led by Lenin, implemented a Russian Marxist ideology.<sup>408</sup> They declared a form of communism, which resulted in regulated agriculture and industry.<sup>409</sup> During the revolution, this regulation began to decimate the Russian people and resulted in mass poverty and economic depletion.<sup>410</sup> The Russian Marxist ideology is perhaps most identifiable in Nikolai Bukharin's, *The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period*.<sup>411</sup> Bukharin was a protagonist in the October revolution and his expression of this ideology is vital to understanding war communism. Bukharin outlined how the ruling classes used the state for their own gain, 'the interests of the ruling class, which are merely concealed behind the pseudonym of the interests of 'the nation' 'the whole', 'the people' and so on, are the governing principle behind the behaviour of the state authority'.<sup>412</sup> Bukharin then outlined, what Marx foresaw, the need for a proletarian dictatorship, a state-controlled transition, after the revolution in order to move towards the pure communist state.<sup>413</sup>

The civil war exacted its withering effect on Russia and the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. As a result, Lenin implemented a brief period of capitalism that would relax the state's iron grip on the economy and agriculture.<sup>414</sup> This New Economic Policy (NEP) was a compromise and Bukharin saw it a necessary measure in order to move towards complete communism.<sup>415</sup> However, this was greatly unpopular and what many saw as a betrayal of the communist principles. In 1928, General Joseph Stalin moved to power and shifted towards a form of collectivisation. Stalin's policies were designed to destroy the *Kulaks*, which were connected to the wealthy aristocratic

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<sup>407</sup>Silvana Malle, *The Economic Organization of War Communism 1918-1921* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>408</sup>*Ibid*, pp.1-2.

<sup>409</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>410</sup>*Ibid*, pp.3-5.

<sup>411</sup>Nikolai Bukharin, *The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period*, trans by. Oliver Field (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

<sup>412</sup>*Ibid*, p.32.

<sup>413</sup>*Ibid*, p.37.

<sup>414</sup>Silvana Malle, *The Economic Organization of War Communism*, p.12.

<sup>415</sup>Nikolai Bukharin, *The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period*.

Russians who had ruled for centuries. This form of agriculture was therefore directly opposed to corporate farming or family-run businesses.<sup>416</sup>

This agricultural model consisted of multiple farms cooperating and collaborating with each other to manage the land.<sup>417</sup> Collective farming was instigated in the USSR from around 1928 and became synonymous with the Soviet regime. There were two major types of collective farms, *kolkhozy* (cooperative-run type) and *Sovkhozy* (State-run type).<sup>418</sup> During the rise of communism in the then USSR, the collective model garnered a rapid political agency as forced collectivisation was ushered into being. A country-wide regime of collectivising through exponentially increasing the number of state-run farms began in the hope of negating the country's food shortages.<sup>419</sup>

Artists practicing throughout the 1920s in the USSR were subjected to state control. Peter Conrad suggested that, 'the Russian Revolution summed up the spirit of the twentieth century- in its reckless anticipation of the future and its belief that technology would deliver a perfect world'.<sup>420</sup> Conrad positioned the artist Kazimir Malevich, who was inspired by the Futurists and Cubists active in Europe, as the embodiment of 'overreaching hubris'.<sup>421</sup> Malevich was given several important teaching positions within the Bolshevik ranks, indeed his radical ideas and invention of Suprematism were vital to the intellectual and cultural developments within Russian modernism.<sup>422</sup> In the Suprematist manifesto, Malevich stated that 'The so-called "materialization" of a feeling in the conscious mind really means a materialization of the reflection of that feeling through the medium of some realistic conception'.<sup>423</sup> Malevich was fervently opposed to the utilitarian and social realism of the other 'ism' which had taken effect in Russia, that of Constructivism. Malevich wanted art to embody the 'new world- the world of feeling ...', as opposed to the functionality of

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<sup>416</sup>Dictionary.com, 'Collective Farming' (2016) < <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/collective-farm>> [accessed 26/10/2016].

<sup>417</sup>Robert William Davies, *The Industrialisation of Soviet Russia 2: Soviet Collective Farm, 1929-1930* (London: MacMillan Press, 1980).

<sup>418</sup>Robert William Davies, p.11.

<sup>419</sup>Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-famine* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>420</sup>Peter Conrad, *Modern Times, Modern Places* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998), p.230.

<sup>421</sup>*Ibid*, p.230.

<sup>422</sup>Aleksandra Shatskikh, *Black Square: Malevich and the Origin of Suprematism* (London: Yale University Press, 2012).

<sup>423</sup>Kazimir Malevich, *The Non-Objective World: The Manifesto of Suprematism*, eds., L. Hilbersiemer, orig edn. 1915 (New York: Dover Publications LTD, 2003).

Constructivism.<sup>424</sup> These movements led to the development of different groups and associations and some of the first forms of recognisable artist collectives in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

One specific group active from 1928-1932, was *The October Group*. This group formally consisted of artists who had been previously associated with the Russian avant-garde and had now become mobilised and ‘concerned with developing an aesthetic model in the service of the revolution’.<sup>425</sup>

They were mostly active in Moscow during 1928 and included artists Sergei Eisenstein, Alexander Rodchenko and Mexican muralist leader Diego Rivera amongst other creatives working on poster design, theatre, architecture, design, and film.<sup>426</sup> They only exhibited once as a collective in Moscow in June 1930.<sup>427</sup> John Bowlt traced the history of the group’s exhibition. He stated that,

A collection of October declarations and articles by members entitled *Izofront. Klassovaya borba na fronte prostranstvennykh iskusstv* [Visual Arts Front. The Class Struggle on the Spatial Arts Front; bibl. R500] was scheduled to appear at the same time as the exhibition, but the adverse political and artistic climate dictated a number of prepublication changes.<sup>428</sup>

The declarations were eventually published in 1931 and had arisen from a rapidly changing political climate within the USSR.<sup>429</sup> This change would eventually see the disbandment of October in 1932 which occurred because of two interconnected, factors. October were a fundamentally constructivist group, meaning their ideological mission was to promote contemporaneity and reject the pre-revolutionary art in favour of an aesthetic form of industrialised collective life for the masses,

We are profoundly convinced that the spatial arts (architecture, painting, sculpture, graphics, the industrial arts, photography, cinematography, etc.) can escape their current crisis only when they are subordinated to the task of serving the concrete needs of the proletariat, the leaders of the peasantry, and the backward national groups.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>424</sup>*Ibid*, p.117.

<sup>425</sup>John Maerhofer, *Rethinking the Vanguard: Aesthetic and Political Positions in the Modernist Debate, 1917- 1962* (Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

<sup>426</sup>John Bowlt, *Russian Art of the Avant-garde Theory and Criticism, 1902- 1934* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976).

<sup>427</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>428</sup>*Ibid*, p.274.

<sup>429</sup>*Ibid*, p.274

<sup>430</sup>*Ibid*, pp.275-276.

In this statement by October, which later began to problematize the art of the past, there appears contradiction. October actively embraced a ‘realism that expresses the will of the active revolutionary class’ and then simultaneously rejects a ‘naturalistic realism with its fruitless copying of reality, embellishing and canonizing the old way of life, sapping the energy and enervating the will of the culturally underdeveloped proletariat’.<sup>431</sup> It is this high level of cultural appropriation of ‘art of the past’ to engineer an aesthetic politics which ultimately could not reconcile an art which sought to promote political emancipation and simultaneously prevent the alienation of mass society.<sup>432</sup> The regime change within USSR signalled the end of many of the different artist associated groups, including October which was closely aligned with the initial Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. This led to Stalin institutionalising and ultimately centralising the Communist Party with dictatorial ‘state-party’ duality.<sup>433</sup>

It is a great irony that within a communist state based on collectivism, artist collectives could not fully realise their potential precisely because the form of communism was never truly egalitarian. The communist party, under Stalin, became an authoritarian state and thus artist collective activity such as the October Group could not be allowed to preach change or dissent. Of course, the spectre of the October Group lives on in the activities of Chto Delat and is actively remembered in their project *Rosa’s House of Culture*.<sup>434</sup> Akin to the hauntological trace of Morris & Co, October Group has informed Chto Delat’s goal of creating a ‘counter-public sphere’ within the now hyper-capitalist Russia [fig, 14].<sup>435</sup>

### *The ‘New Collectivism’*

Modernist collectivism was simplistically categorised by revolution and reflexively interlinked to the complex political movements of power and social change. As I have endeavoured to illustrate, this

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<sup>431</sup>John Maerhofer, p.49.

<sup>432</sup>*Ibid*, p.48.

<sup>433</sup>Irma Ratiani, *Totalitarianism and literary Discourse: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Experience* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012).

<sup>434</sup>Chto Delat, ‘Rosa’s House of Culture, (2019) <<https://chtodelat.org/category/b8-newspapers/c215-embodied-projects/>> [accessed 23/08/2019].

<sup>435</sup>Chto Delat, ‘The traces the genealogy of Soviet Houses of Culture’ (2019) <<https://chtodelat.org/category/b8-newspapers/c215-embodied-projects/>> [accessed 23/08/2019].



simplistic notion cannot adequately describe the sophisticated interrelationships which developed within the cultural realm. It is for this reason I have analysed the documented relationships and literary works of the individuals involved in groups and movements in order to reveal a social art history of the artist collective rather than following a formalistic approach centred on specific artworks.

Sholette's statement, 'modernist collectivism stopped making sense after the war and is only now coming back into view but often as a half-materialized spectre in denial of its own past', holds weight in the sense that there was a paradigmatic shift which occurred after 1945.<sup>436</sup> Rapid political change was realised through world wars. However, I would argue this statement has a contradiction at its centre. It is too specific as we have seen collective artistic activity did occur in forms of microstates in very specific spacetime i.e. The Firm at the Red House, manifestos of the PRB, Communards and the Futurist gatherings. It also, very specifically defines a binary, what happened before 1945 and after. The paradigm shift is far more nuanced. As I have outlined, the actual formation of artist-led collectives within society has been an incredibly long discourse. It also brushes over the very important role in which friendship and social bonds have played in the formation of every single micro case study analysed within this historiography.

Here is the question of all questions at the centre of this thesis. If the artist-led collective is now hauntological by its very nature, the 'ism' that has so far been denied its full form of presence, then how can, as Sholette stated, 'This new collectivism carr[y] with it the spectral power of collectivisms past just as it is realized fully within the hegemonic power of global capitalism'?<sup>437</sup> This full realisation, according to Sholette, is an actualisation of Marx's self-realisation of autonomy which is central to the human condition. No longer in the realm of the imaginary or through counter-hegemonic tactics, 'this new collectivist fetish inhabits the everywhere and nowhere of social life'.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>436</sup>Sholette and Stimson, p.xv.

<sup>437</sup>Gregory Sholette and Blake Stimson, *Collectivism after Modernism*, p.13.

<sup>438</sup>*Ibid*, p.13.

This thesis takes this position as its starting point. I argue that one cannot completely define the artist-led collective in relation to neo-liberal capitalism, as perhaps Sholette inadvertently has done. A further understanding is necessary to understand the paradigmatic shift. As Pollock, called for in her text,

Understanding of what specific artistic practices are doing, their meanings and social effects demands therefore a dual approach. Firstly the practice must be located as part of the social struggles between classes, races, genders articulating with other sites of representation. But secondly we must analyse what any specific practice is doing, what meaning is being produced and how and for whom.<sup>439</sup>

The aim of this chapter has been to problematise the periodisation of the history of collectivism. I argue that such a periodising falls into the old traps of modernist critique which favours the meta-narrative over the discursive intertextuality of communication which is vital to understanding the social human world. In the following chapters, I will explore how friendship and the social bonds which form the totality of the contemporary artist-led collective interact with external forces particular to their socio-cultural and geo-political contexts.

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<sup>439</sup>Griselda Pollock, p.9.

### **Chapter 3: In-depth Case Study- Assemble**

The complex interrelationship between artist-led collectives and society blurs the boundaries of art and life. As Okwui Enwezor eponymously stated, '[t]his tends to lend collective work a social rather than artistic character'.<sup>440</sup> Enwezor was at pains to suggest that this state of affairs leads to the 'simultaneous aporia of artwork and artist'. This second quote reveals the notion which I argue is most pertinent to the central questions of this thesis; what are artist-led collectives? How do they operate, and why?<sup>441</sup> Enwezor's use of aporia is of great significance to my argument because it suggests that this is a dialectical situation, where the social sphere describes both artwork and the collective. Of course, within the circles of contemporary art theory on participatory and relational aesthetics these boundaries have been debated, re-defined, dismantled and regurgitated.<sup>442</sup> However, it is not my intention to carry on this circular thinking. Instead, I want to explore the possibilities of this problematic through the study of artist-led collectives which inevitably embody this state of play.

The role that friendship plays in Assemble's continued existence is demonstrated in the following ways; I trace friendship's importance in the formation of Assemble from architecture degree courses through to their early projects. I then focus on how friendship interrelates with socio-cultural and geopolitical forces in play throughout Assemble's current projects. These projects are initiated in collaboration with different communities and often appear as distanced from the core members of Assemble. As a result, I analyse the ways in which friendship becomes intertwined with more formal models of governance in each project.

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<sup>440</sup>Okwui Enwezor, 'The Production of Social Space as Artwork', *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p.223.

<sup>441</sup>*Ibid*, p.223

<sup>442</sup>For this debate see, Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso Books, 2012), Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance, FONZA WOODS (Dijon: les presses du reel, 2002), Grant Kester, *The One and the Many Contemporary art in a global context* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004) and Okwui Enwezor, *The unhomey: phantom scenes in global society: 2nd International Biennial of Contemporary Art of Seville* (Michigan: Fundación Bienale Internacional de Arte Contemporáneo de Sevilla, 2006).

The ‘simultaneous aporia of artwork and artist’ is no more apparent than in the practice of radical art and architecture collective Assemble. Assemble are based in London and consist of artists, architects, and designers.<sup>443</sup> The critical debate which ensued from the announcement of Assemble as Turner Prize winners in 2015, frames the problematic of the artist-led collective. Assemble helped to refurbish and renovate a set of ten dilapidated houses in the Toxteth community, Liverpool, UK.<sup>444</sup> They worked alongside residents to help raise Granby from decades of neglect. The contention appears to be centred upon the nature of the projects in which Assemble is engaged. As architects, notions of the social sphere’s interrelationships with architecture and design have been established for millennia.<sup>445</sup> However, the media attention within the context of the Turner Prize appears to have been the site of tension. Journalist, Mark Brown argued that ‘Assemble are the first non-artists, in the strictest sense of the word, to win the prize’.<sup>446</sup> It is this label of ‘non-artists’, which, according to one report has, ‘declared the death of the Turner prize’.<sup>447</sup> Assemble’s work has challenged the established conventions of what is deemed ‘art’ and who is ‘entitled’ to engage in art practices.<sup>448</sup> Contextually, Assemble inhabit an ambiguous cultural and political discursive space. In a recent publication by Gregory Sholette, *Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism*, the question of their ‘position’ within the art world is again problematised.<sup>449</sup> Sholette suggested that ‘for some, including members of Assemble, this art world recognition came as a surprise. For others, including those who wish to fortify a link between urban regeneration and social practice art, it was all but inevitable’.<sup>450</sup> Sholette’s statement reveals the internal-external dialectical forces which are acting upon and within Assemble. It is precisely because Assemble’s practice is interdisciplinary and they operate in both the discursive field of architecture and art that these tensions have arisen. However,

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<sup>443</sup> Assemble, ‘About’ (2019) <<https://assemblestudio.co.uk/about>> [accessed 21/03/2019].

<sup>444</sup> Assemble, ‘Granby Four Streets’, Projects (2018) <<http://assemblestudio.co.uk/>> [accessed 22/01/2018].

<sup>445</sup> Farhan Karim, *The Routledge Companion to Architecture and Social Engagement* (London: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>446</sup> Mark Brown, ‘Urban regenerators Assemble become first ‘non-artists’ to win Turner prize’ *Guardian Online* (2015) <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/dec/07/urban-assemble-win-turner-prize-toxteth>> [accessed 23/01/17], (para.3 of 10).

<sup>447</sup> Charlotte Higgins, ‘Turner prize winners Assemble: ‘Art? We’re more interested in plumbing’’, *Guardian Online* (2015) <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/dec/08/assemble-turner-prize-architects-are-we-artists>> [accessed 23/01/17].

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>449</sup> Gregory Sholette, *Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Chicago: Pluto Press, 2017).

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, p.129.

this is simply the veneer which masks the underlying tension which Sholette alluded to in the second sentence, '[f]or others, including those who wish to fortify a link between urban regeneration and social practice art, it was all but inevitable'.<sup>451</sup> This statement is loaded with the contradictions and complexity of the debate which traces its way to the heart of the problematic for it is not simply about categorisations of art and architecture, but a critical questioning of the role which both play in the social fabric of the urban ecology and ultimately in directly shaping people's lives.

This case study incorporates the outcomes of several visits and face to face meetings with Assemble in order to further explore their practice and working methods. These are framed through a set of reflective accounts which are then be analysed using the RDT conceptual framework. This introduced a further dimension to the case study and increased the probability of capturing a detailed set of outcomes. Another important reason for undertaking these visits was to help build a greater sense of rapport with Assemble in order to develop a sense of their projects outside the core collective. The visits included: Sugarhouse Studios, Granby Workshop, and Glasgow Baltic Street Playground.<sup>452</sup> These reflective accounts were then layered with research from the dialogue with Assemble member Frances Edgerley on the digital storytelling platform *Yarn Community*.<sup>453</sup>

### ***Yarn Community and the Dialogical Imagination***

The method and methodology were specifically designed within both in-depth case studies and will help to bring some context to the reader. My aim was to open a dialogue with the collectives in order to create a space in which conversation could develop and ideas could be shared. This form of dialogue has its roots in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin was a proponent of dialogical methodologies, specifically focusing on the differences between poetry and the novel. He argued that poetics had become divorced from society and historical relations and words only related to language

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<sup>451</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>452</sup>Assemble, 'Projects', Assemble (2018) <<http://assemblestudio.co.uk/projects>> [accessed 20/01/2018].

<sup>453</sup>Yarn Community, 'home page' <<http://yarncommunity.com/>> [accessed 17/10/2017].

itself and thus had become monological.<sup>454</sup> His analysis of the novel revealed multi-vocal interplay, '[f]orm and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon- social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning'.<sup>455</sup> For Bakhtin, the multi-vocal communication of life was expressed within the novel and more generally in the process of storytelling.<sup>456</sup> It is this aspect of what he saw as the 'dialogical imagination', which is of great relevance to my argument that artist collectives are based on communication, and thus developing any worthwhile understanding, must entail the analysis of how this communication builds the social bonds which create the collectives. Bakhtin argued that utterances, literally what a person says (or thinks) in one turn of a conversation, occur in the novel and that through this form of storytelling we understand both ourselves and each other,

a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all of this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile.<sup>457</sup>

Utilised as a methodology the dialogical imagination presented this case study with a clear method and structure; to engage in a dialogue with an artist-led collective and create a form of storytelling in which I could then analyse the utterances in play in order to move to an understanding of their social bond, practice and their artwork.

In order to carry out the analysis of the dialogue, I implemented the Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) as a conceptual framework. RDT is based on Bakhtin's theories of communication as articulated by Baxter and Montgomery who posited that, 'the generic conceptual foundations of contradiction, change, praxis, and totality, we have constructed a version of dialectics heavily

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<sup>454</sup>Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*.

<sup>455</sup>*Ibid*, p.273.

<sup>456</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>457</sup>*Ibid*, p.276.

influenced by the dialogic thinking associated with Mikhail Bakhtin'.<sup>458</sup> In this sense RDT perfectly complemented this case study and provided a practical framework for analysis of the dialogue.

Deciding on the correct platform to complement this methodological framework was incredibly important to my research because it needed to create both a tangible space to engage with a relational dialectical analysis, and enough flexibility to become a dialogue rather than a formal interview. *Yarn Community* fulfilled this brief because of its onus on encouraging its users to, '[m]ake, share and connect stories with things on the web' (appendix 2).<sup>459</sup> The online storytelling platform offered a space in which multiple users could co-create a story over time using text, images and other digital media which they themselves own.<sup>460</sup> *Yarn Community* was developed by *The Pararchive Project* in 2015, itself a result of eight years of research between several institutions including the BBC, Science Museum Group and the University of Leeds.<sup>461</sup> Pararchive's aim was to engage with open access networking through the *Yarn Community* platform in order to connect, 'communities to research and document their histories via the creative linking of their own digital content with archival material from public institutions such as the BBC and the Science Museum'.<sup>462</sup> *Yarn Community* provided my research with a resource to begin to develop a narrative between myself and artist-led collectives in order to explore aspects of Bakhtin's dialogic imagination in practice. In essence, the platform enabled the exploration of Bakhtin's concept of utterances and the linking of historical, socio-cultural and geopolitical forces through a form of storytelling. *Yarn's* multi-media sharing capabilities enabled interrelations with text, images, external webpages, and other media in order to co-create a narrative with artist-led collectives rather than a didactically researcher-led project. This produced a mirroring effect, and thus aimed to create a research method based upon the premise of my argument; that artist-led collectives are based on communication and that the social bonds, which constitute the collective, are constantly negotiated and re-negotiated in this communication. Thus a relational dialectical analysis of this communication will reveal insight into how the specific collective in question operates

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<sup>458</sup>Montgomery and Baxter, *Dialectical Approaches To Studying Personal Relationships*, p.156.

<sup>459</sup>*Yarn Community*, 'Landing page' <<http://yarncommunity.com/>> [accessed 10/07/2019].

<sup>460</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>461</sup>The Pararchive Project, 'about' <<https://pararchive.com/about/the-project/>> [accessed 10/07/2019].

<sup>462</sup>*Ibid.* (para.2 of 9).

and will help to further develop knowledge towards the understanding of artist-led collectives beyond this case study.

### ***Sugarhouse Studios- London***

I begin this reflective account into the complexities of this case study by analysing my own experience of a visit to Sugarhouse studios located in Bermondsey in London, UK [fig, 15]. Sugarhouse studios are the current headquarters of Assemble and are where the majority of their members are based.<sup>463</sup>

*On entering Sugarhouse Studios, on a morning in January 2018, I was struck by the functionality of this post-industrial, ex-warehouse.<sup>464</sup> It consists of several different spaces, currently being occupied by other artists, ceramicists, musicians, furniture organisations and graphic designers. The spaces were specifically designed for the needs of each of its inhabitants. I use the word 'inhabitants', as this was my first impression of the activity occurring in this building. They occupied the space. There was a palpable sense of community, embodied not only in the design of communal facilities but also through one of the first conversations I had with Assemble member Fran Edgerley. I had organised the visit by contacting Fran, and she introduced me to the building. Fran began to explain how Assemble frequently shared resources, skills, and ideas with other creatives in Sugarhouse studios particularly fabrications from Jack James Furniture and graphic design*

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<sup>463</sup>Originally based at Stratford High Street, Assemble built and conceived of Sugarhouse Studios in order to, 'find a way for private practice (space for research, design and construction) to be opened up to form the backdrop for a public building. The retro-fit of the building focused on exploiting the assets of the existing light industrial shed, making light touch, inexpensive adjustments to the fabric of the building that maintains flexibility of interior spaces'. As a pilot project for the 'provision of new creative workspace in the Olympic Park', Assemble received a grant from the London Legacy Development Corporation to build Yardhouse which was located in Sugarhouse Yard, hence the name which Assemble have taken to their new site in Bermondsey. Their new site, 'is located on the former site of a school, which is due to be demolished to make way for a large, developer-led housing scheme. In the interim, Assemble's aim is to provide space for artists, designers and fabricators around a core of common facilities – including a wood workshop run by Workshop East – that enable and support co-working and collaboration'. See, Assemble, 'Studios' (2019) <<https://assemblestudio.co.uk/studios>> [accessed 23/07/2019], and Assemble, 'Projects' *Yardhouse* (2019) <<https://assemblestudio.co.uk/projects/yardhouse>> [accessed 23/07/2019].

<sup>464</sup>The use of italics and indentation in this form of vignette indicates a break in writing style from academic to self-reflection as was implemented by Sara Ahmed in Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (London: Duke University Press, 2017).



products.<sup>465</sup> In the building, Assemble occupied a large fabrication space, or as they referred to it, the 'workshop'. They also had a large rectangular office space, which they referred to as the 'studio', with two adjacent rooms which housed a 'library' and a communal dining area. There was an internal open-air courtyard that was multifunctional and apparently used for storage and BBQs. As Fran introduced members of Assemble and the different spaces; I was reminded how efficient Assemble was at tendering for projects and securing funding by the obvious monetary value of the machinery, technology, and materials scattered about the spaces. Fran compounded this situation when she mentioned some intriguing maquettes which were being designed for the new Goldsmiths University gallery [fig, 16].<sup>466</sup> There was another feature in this fabrication area which caught my attention. There appeared to be a Christmas decoration hanging on a set of fabricated steel doors. After asking about this oddity, I was told it was a remnant from the Christmas party which was held in the space in December [fig, 17].

The 'value of community', and its complex interrelationship with the physical 'place' of Sugarhouse studios became apparent through my experience with Assemble. The separation between organisations, collectives, and practitioners within the building was not always clear and often blurred the boundaries between the areas that were designated to Assemble and areas that belonged to other entities. Indeed, I was informed by Fran that many of the areas in the building had been co-habited spaces and that they often changed and shifted over time. These complex interrelationships between places and community were explored by Doreen Massey in the book *Space, Place and Gender*, 'One of the problems here has been a persistent identification with place of 'community''.<sup>467</sup> Crucially, Massey posed a very specific line of inquiry relating to how communities can form and are structured. Communities can exist without the need for a physical place through extended networks of friends, political ideologies, activist groups, and online gaming communities.<sup>468</sup> These are essentially 'placeless', forming in a conceptual place or virtual heterotopia. There are also communities that do

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<sup>465</sup>Frances Edgerley, 'Conversation with Edgerley on site visit', Sugarhouse studios, 10/01/2018.

<sup>466</sup>Frances Edgerley, 'Conversation with Edgerly on site visit', Sugarhouse studios, 10/01/2018.

<sup>467</sup>Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), pp. 153-154.

<sup>468</sup>*Ibid*,

form a ‘coherent social group’ in a specific place or location. Massey argued that these are quite rare and when they do manifest, they contain different perspectives on place and power structures within the community group.<sup>469</sup> Massey stated that ‘people occupy different positions within any community’, individuals within a community will take on different roles and have different perspectives thus a sense of a coherent social group, which exists in a homogenous state of harmony, cannot be fully realised.<sup>470</sup> The community within Sugarhouse studios presented itself as a form of a coherent social group in the sense of localised place-based communities. However, this form of community which had evolved appeared to be based on shared resources and proximity rather than the direct merging of the different organisations and collectives. As Massey argued, ‘what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus’.<sup>471</sup> I found evidence for this throughout the building, both through the designated communal spaces and through the obvious socially produced events such as the Christmas party and summer BBQ’s etc. Further, to this, there appeared to be an instant sense of openness and connection between the people that Fran and I met throughout the tour of the building. It appeared that Sugarhouse was not siloed and pocketed but an interconnected and outward-facing artist-led space.<sup>472</sup>

On the other hand, I would argue that Assemble, as a collective within the overall community of the building, presented a different sense of community. This community, according to Massey’s conceptualisation, is perhaps even closer to the ‘rare’ occurrences of the coherent social group. Massey’s conceptualisation of this form of social group is also prevalent in the close relationships described by RDT. It was immediately apparent, through these initial observations of the community within Sugarhouse, that there were overlapping centrifugal and centripetal forces at play between

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<sup>469</sup>*Ibid*, p.153.

<sup>470</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>471</sup>*Ibid*, p.154.

<sup>472</sup>Workshop East is an example of openness and outward facing nature of the Sugarhouse Studios. The workshop was initiated by designers Mauro Dell’Orco and Steve Cook. They stated that, ‘[w]e are constantly looking to make new links with colleges, universities, local authorities, businesses large and small, galleries and individuals to ensure the long term success of this project. The workshop should be a hotbed of creativity and opportunity and help each of us to develop our own practices. The workshop offers low cost access to design facilities and is predicated on attracting more people into Sugarhouse Studios. Mauro Dell’Orco and Steve Cook, ‘About us’ <<https://www.workshopeast.co.uk/about>>[accessed 24/07/2019].

both Assemble and the other tenants in Sugarhouse. Before this fieldwork had started, I had not realised that Sugarhouse Studios housed several other creative entities. As a result, I had to re-access my frame of reference. This re-assessment suggested a complex entanglement of multiplicities with a host of dialectical relations, particularly resonant across the relational dialectical factors of integration-separation including, openness-discretion, privacy-sharing, and inclusion-seclusion. I have highlighted these dialectical forces as they became apparent, from my first impression, particularly in reference to how the communal spaces were managed, and why specific spaces became private or the domain of different groups, organisations, and collectives. However, this is not to exclude the possibility of different stratifications and contradictions each, in turn, creating a milieu of dialectical tensions that pervade Sugarhouse Studios. This complexity of contradictions within relationships was articulated by Barbara Montgomery and Leslie Baxter. They argued that ‘we hold that there is no finite set of contradictions in personal relationships to be discovered’.<sup>473</sup> As Fran, explained this was not a building where everybody worked in isolation, there was frequent collaboration and sharing between people. On the other hand, groups, collectives, and practitioners had their own spaces.<sup>474</sup> This was presented in Sugarhouse Studios as a relational dynamic of integration-separation where the centripetal forces of discretion, privacy and seclusion played out in the differences between the spaces. For example, *Collective Matter* had partitioned their space of within the building using Oriented Strand Board (OSB) [fig, 18].<sup>475</sup> Of course, this partition provided practical wall space but it also acted as a barrier for privacy and discretion between the members of Collective Matter. This space was also notably different from the adjoining environment within the building because it had a mezzanine area that felt secluded. The OSB drowned out and appeared to insulate this area from the sounds of machinery echoing throughout the building. However, there were clearly other centrifugal relationships in play within the community of Sugarhouse Studios. I had learned that Assemble frequently collaborated with the furniture and design groups such as Workshop East. According to

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<sup>473</sup>Montgomery and Baxter, *Dialectical Approaches to Studying Personal Relationships*, p.158.

<sup>474</sup>Frances Edgerley, ‘Conversation with Edgerly on site visit’, Sugarhouse studios, 10/01/2018.

<sup>475</sup>Collective Matter stated that, ‘[w]e are a collective of artists who work with clay and believe it’s a great material for anyone to express their creativity’. See, Collective Matter, ‘About us’ (2019) <<http://materialaction.com/about>> [accessed 23/07/2019].

Fran, these collaborations happened quite frequently which suggested that there was a depth of interrelationships between people in the building.

This level of openness, sharing and inclusive behaviour holds all the hallmarks of localised ‘artistic clustering’. Robert Hollands and John Vail described the many factors in play within artistic clustering, ‘the increased benefits of sharing skills, being closer to centres of innovation and everyday ‘tacit’ knowledge of a particular art form, the impact of competition on artistic development and nearness to markets and infrastructural networks’.<sup>476</sup> Whilst the more obvious factors of sharing skills and resources were apparent within Sugarhouse Studios, there were also external social interconnections with institutions and wider networks within London such as The Tate and The Royal College of Art and Central Saint Martins.<sup>477</sup> There was also a wider focused engagement with different communities such as both Assemble and Collective Matter were focusing attention on the creative regeneration of the Lambeth area of London.<sup>478</sup> These factors combined in Sugarhouse Studios to create a form of artistic clustering which constituted a place-based community that was, as Massey argued, a ‘distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations’.<sup>479</sup> Another element in this specific case of artistic clustering was that Sugarhouse Studios was initiated by an artist-led collective rather than evolving around an already existing organisation.<sup>480</sup> This reveals the shifting nature and contradictions of the artist-led collective because Assemble acts as both a collective and yet they are beginning to set in place more formal organisational structures epitomised by the decision to have a ‘tenants’ system Sugarhouse Studios development.<sup>481</sup> I will now return to my experiential account in order to explore this further.

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<sup>476</sup>Hollands and Vail, ‘Place Imprinting and the arts: A case of the Amber Collective’ p.177.

<sup>477</sup>Several of the tenants of Sugarhouse Studios are engaged in projects with The Tate and or have studied at The Royal College of art. They include: Collective Matter, Assemble, Jamps Studio and Hayatsu Architects, See for details: Assemble, ‘Sugarhouse Studios Tenants’ (2019) <<https://assemblestudio.co.uk/studios>> [accessed 23/07/2019].

<sup>478</sup>See for details: Assemble, ‘Fabric Floor’ (2019) <<https://assemblestudio.co.uk/projects/the-fabric-floor>> [accessed 29/07/2019], and Collective Matter, ‘About us’ (2019) <<http://materialaction.com/about>>[accessed 23/07/2019].

<sup>479</sup>Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, p.156.

<sup>480</sup>See: Francesco Spampinato, p.7 and, Assemble, ‘Studio’, <<https://assemblestudio.co.uk/studios>> [accessed 23/07/2019]. (para.1 of 4).

<sup>481</sup>Assemble run Sugarhouse Studios and provide space to tenants for a fee, See: Assemble, ‘Sugarhouse Studios’ (2019) <<https://assemblestudio.co.uk/projects/sugarhouse-studios>> [accessed 23/07/2019].

As I experienced more of the building, it was evident that I was entering into a plethora of demarcated and functional spaces which ‘belonged’ to different sets of people, with very different relationships [fig, 19]. These spaces were as specialised as they were personalised, from ceramics to furniture design. There was a knot of complex dialectical entanglement constantly in tension with the internal relationships between the individuals in one group and the wider community of Sugarhouse Studios.

*After the tour of the spaces within Sugarhouse, I sat down with Fran in their library room. According to Fran, it doubled up as a private meeting room/separate office. The room was reasonably small and rectangular compared with their other spaces. I was immediately drawn to an interesting archive/shelving unit at the far end. I inquired to its use, and Fran informed me that it was their archive/ library which was intended to store publications about Assemble and also publications of note which Assemble members found inspiring and deemed important. It was colour coordinated and referenced as such [fig, 20]. Fran and I discussed this desire to begin to record and archive Assemble’s practice.*

The thread which began to emerge from this discussion focused on how Assemble had found the need and desire to archive and record their achievements, inspirational books, and other ephemera in order to think on a contextual and conceptual plane. This seemed to be emanating from the dialectical tensions of formalisation and fluidity as exhibited both organisational and collective traits.

Fran suggested that Assemble were rooted in every day, in the fabricating, designing and building of things. Similarly, this thread was qualified by founding member Maria Lisogorskaya, when Assemble was nominated for the Turner prize, ‘sometimes [it’s] about doing really good plumbing’.<sup>482</sup> In this case, ‘plumbing’ signifies the everyday problem solving, of a reality rooted in praxis. This concept of ‘really good plumbing’ also signifies their adherence to craft and trades, and a notion that Assemble is first and foremost practical in their approach to creating. This also presented in the language of the Yarn dialogue, ‘The aspects that were so rewarding and successful from the first project [were] open

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<sup>482</sup>Maria Lisogorskaya ‘Turner prize winners Assemble: ‘Art? We’re more interested in plumbing’’, Guardian Online (2015) <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/dec/08/assemble-turner-prize-architects-are-we-artists>> [accessed 20/12/2018], (para.3 of 15).

access process, no hierarchy..., DIY/learning through doing, publicly focused'.<sup>483</sup> The first project, mentioned in this extract, was *The Cineroleum* (2010) [fig, 21]. The project was to be the basic blueprint of Assemble's practice and involved the temporary transformation of a disused petrol station into a cinema on Clerkenwell Road, London.<sup>484</sup> In the Yarn statement, specific words and phrases such as, 'doing', 'no hierarchy...', and 'Do It Yourself', collectively signify meaning in relation to action and the act of making or changing things. These words also signify some of the important traits which are embodied by artist-led collectives such as autonomous working, political tendencies toward social change and a sense of the relational bond between members. They suggest a movement towards a non-hierarchical practical way of working, learning through doing and change through action. However, the contradictions within these statements combined with my experience of Sugarhouse Studios, reveal the dialectical tensions at play.

As our conversation continued, this tension revealed itself as a complex multiplicity born out of the practicalities of Assemble's rapidly developing working schedule. These practicalities included the technicalities of accepting and tendering for larger and more complex commissions. A formalisation of roles was becoming more prevalent with members taking on specific tasks such as Fran's outreach role. This movement was forcing them to consider creating policies which felt like a turn towards the more formal elements within established institutions. I detected a tension here which seemed to play out in Fran's comments such as, 'to become more professional'.<sup>485</sup> Indeed, they have established annual 'summit' meetings, which seemed akin to board meetings. This movement towards recognised standards of organisational practice seemed to indicate a formalisation process which appeared to be driven by the need to secure their own position within the wider architecture and design sector. Thus, revealing the contradictions and dialectical tensions of stability-change and expression-nonexpression, the stability of being recognised as presenting an 'industry standard' business model would bring more commissions. This is evident in the desire to 'professionalise' and construct their own history

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<sup>483</sup>Frances Edgerley, 'Here we go!', *Yarn Community* (2018) <<http://yarncommunity.com/stories/628>> [accessed 20/12/2018], (para.1 of 2).

<sup>484</sup>Assemble, 'The Cineroleum', projects (2010) <<https://assemblestudio.co.uk/projects/the-cineroleum>> [accessed 18/12/2018].

<sup>485</sup>Frances Edgerley, 'Conversation with Edgerly on site visit', Sugarhouse studios, 10/01/2018.

through archival processes, which is in turn synonymous with institutionalism.<sup>486</sup> The archival tendency is in flux with the change and expression forces such as innovation, divergence, revelation, which are characterised in Assemble's use of language, 'open access process, no hierarchy..., DIY / learning through doing, publicly focused'.<sup>487</sup> These practices are even less prevalent in the architectural industry than they are in the art world. As Nikil Saval alluded to in an article for *The New York Times Style Magazine*,

While most of the members of Assemble studied architecture at Cambridge University, they stopped short of completing the arduous track that gets you the title of licensed architect in the U.K., some leaving their requisite practical experience at traditional firms after just four or five months. Three have not studied architecture at all. That no one in the group has a license means that Assemble is unlikely to be the firm of choice for a London developer looking to toss up a luxury tower or a swollen pickle of an office building.<sup>488</sup>

These tensions would also explain the level of re-design which Fran began to discuss regarding Assemble's online presence. They were in the process of re-modeling their website with the aid of graphic designers in Sugarhouse Studios. It was this immediate sense of formalisation which was at odds with their often-quirky habits. One such 'habit' presented itself after the discussion with Fran during the lunchtime break.

The centripetal-centrifugal forces at play in this ecology are not simply a dialectic milieu of Assemble, tenants, art world, architectural industry, and 'the public'. They also play out on different levels and through different spheres. As Sholette posited, the 'dynamic process at work in which the converging interests of artists and cultural workers around the globe both confront and make use of conditions opened up by what David Harvey describes as the radical reshaping and re-engineering of capitalism in the post-Cold War era'.<sup>489</sup> This encapsulates the scale at which these forces are at play

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<sup>486</sup>Jacque Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans by. Eric Prenowitz (London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>487</sup>Frances Edgerley, 'Here we go!', Yarn Community (2018), (para.1 of 2).

<sup>488</sup>Nikil Saval, 'Assemble: Making Things Happen', *The New York Times Style Magazine* (2015) <<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/19/t-magazine/assemble-architecture-collective.html>> [accessed 20/10/2018], (para.4 of 10).

<sup>489</sup>Gregory Sholette, 'Encountering the Counter-Institution:

From the Proto-Academy to Home Workspace Beirut', *Essay* (2016) <[http://www.gregorysholette.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Encountering\\_The\\_Counter\\_Institution\\_Sholette\\_2016.pdf](http://www.gregorysholette.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Encountering_The_Counter_Institution_Sholette_2016.pdf)> [accessed 20/12/2018].

and why this dynamic is complex. As Sholette suggests, these conditions which simultaneously require a tendency to towards the entrepreneurial and professionalism, however, open potentialities of ‘radical re-shaping’.<sup>490</sup> This contradiction is constantly in action on and within Assemble, and it is through these dialectical tensions in which Assemble continually re-negotiate their position.

These tensions are intertwined with the need of each member to exist in a capitalist society. Assemble pool their income from the commissions and projects which they undertake. Fran suggested that this process has allowed the core members to work full time.<sup>491</sup> There is a level of equality to this system albeit, in practice, it is not necessarily sustainable because it would require a constant flow of commissions. I could not help but think that it was because of Assemble’s position within the art/architecture world which allowed for this democratisation of their finances. This system would not work in other socio-economic situations, especially when a collective’s output maybe less accessible to capital than architecture is in wider society. Of course, Assemble did not set out with this status, Fran suggested that members had other jobs at times.<sup>492</sup> However, the individual members did exist within relatively affluent socio-economic spheres which aided their ability to sustain a fledgling practice. I will now return to the conversation as it shifted towards discussing the project I was proposing.

*I explained that it would be an online dialogue between Assemble and I, on the Yarn platform and it would be co-designed so that the participants could also lead the discussion at times. Fran seemed interested in this idea and the platform, as it was not as formal as an archive, but carried out some of the functions of an archive. It would be a space to pool ideas and perhaps create new lines of inquiry. It was during this conversation that I received an inkling that Assemble receive a great deal of interest from researchers across the board, as Fran pointed out that they no longer have the capacity to work with undergraduates and even working on MA projects was a struggle. My impression of this capacity issue was that it fed*

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<sup>490</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>491</sup>Frances Edgerley, ‘Conversation with Edgerly on site visit’, Sugarhouse studios, 10/01/2018.

<sup>492</sup>Frances Edgerley, ‘Conversation with Edgerly on site visit’, Sugarhouse studios, 10/01/2018.



*into the move towards professionalisation because Assemble appeared to be moving towards more ambitious and demanding projects that required more formalised structures. It seemed that members were stretched and that they were in a time of flux and metamorphosis. We then discussed the projects which Assemble were currently working on. During this discussion, Granby, Sugarhouse and Baltic Street Playground were mentioned. I would later decide, through discussion with Fran, that these would be my fieldwork visits. What was particularly memorable and perhaps significant about this part of the conversation was Fran appeared to forget, just for a moment, the fact that Assemble had won the Turner Prize. I think this is illuminating because it betrays their perception of the prize and its importance in their work. Their development has been rapid and the prize was perhaps a sideshow, a 'happy accident'. This point notwithstanding, there was a slight sense of Fran's hesitation at inclusion in the 'art world' or more precisely of the world of art prizes and all the rigmarole associated with such a discourse, one which is overtly opinionated and often criticised from many different camps.<sup>493</sup> Then again, I got the sense that architects are, in general, adept at receiving criticism and objection and revel in it to some degree. I will return to this line of inquiry in due course.*

The final part of our conversation alighted upon a view of collectivism throughout the world, as we discussed political and social situations such as alternative economies and co-ops. We discussed how in Mumbai there is the alliance of associations of slum dwellers including the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF).<sup>494</sup> The NSDF essentially helps the poorest invest in workers' schemes to own and build their own houses. There was real excitement in the way we discussed these 'alternative' economic spaces within capitalism, which were not in open resistance but co-opted the market mechanisms to enact social and moral change. This was further supported through a statement on the Yarn dialogue, 'I think alternative economies are fascinating and the work I do within Assemble is building on similar ideas. Emotional labour, respect, relationships... I think they have enormous

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<sup>493</sup>Pierre Pénet, Kangsan Lee, 'Prize & price: The Turner Prize as a valuation device in the contemporary art market' *Poetics*, Vol. 43 (2014), pp.149-171.

<sup>494</sup>Andrew Leyshon, Roger Lee and Colin C Williams, *Alternative Economic Spaces* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), pp.56-57.

potential, who knows how fast they can bring about change'.<sup>495</sup> The significations within this statement are vital to understanding how Assemble operates. The first set of keywords in this statement are 'emotional', 'labour', 'respect', 'relationships'. These words signify the tendency towards a social act of working with people through an ethical framework. It is most telling that these assumptions are conceptualised as 'alternative' in the field of economics. In this case, Assemble are displaying centrifugal forces of divergence from a centripetal, hyper capitalised neoliberal agenda based on reductionism and scarcity.<sup>496</sup> This is an example, yet again, of the conventionality-uniqueness set of contradictions that are only made visible when in dialogue with each other.

*Towards the end of the discussion, after an agreement on the Yarn project, Fran asked if I would like to be involved in lunch. I quickly realised that the sharing of food appears to be central to the working day of Assemble members. This element goes deeper than I immediately understood. Fran informed me that when working on different projects on specific building sites, members would often go hungry and they identified this as a problem so they informally introduced a specific lunch break. To ramp up the competitive nature of this lunch break and to add an element of fun they devised a game that essentially decides who will be responsible for lunch the next day. Lunch on this day was spaghetti in a tomato-based sauce with parmesan cheese (optional). What was interesting was how the overt professionalism and formal elements suddenly melted away during this hour. A communal spirit of togetherness and informality ensued as all members converged on the kitchen/ dining area in order to collectively help out in the serving of food. As they temporarily turned off their MACs and moved away from their technical drawings and workshop designs, so their language changed.*

Archaeologist Christine A. Hastorf analysed the social life of food in her text, *The Social Archaeology of Food: Thing about Eating from Prehistory to the Present*.<sup>497</sup> Hastorf stated that 'food is a principal

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<sup>495</sup>Frances Edgerley, 'Here we go!', (para.1 of 2).

<sup>496</sup>Sendhil Mullainathan, and Eldar Shafir, *Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means So Much* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013).

<sup>497</sup>Christine Hastorf, *The Social Archaeology of Food: Thing about Eating from Prehistory to the Present* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.1.

medium for social interaction'.<sup>498</sup> Although this statement seems somewhat obvious, it allowed Hastorf to enter into a discursive web on the central tenants within culture, time and place. Hastorf links the biological need for food to the traditions of human activity (agriculture) across cultural divides.<sup>499</sup> It is the development of the shared experience of food and how the act of preparing, cooking, serving, and eating together generates a commonality. At the time, I felt this 'coming together' over a shared experience and I was able to talk in a more informal manner to the members in my immediate vicinity at the table. Upon reflection, it was this common space, shared over an everyday act that revealed the clear forms of friendship or set of friendships which appear to reach through the professionalised aesthetic of my experience thus far. I was able to uncover further social bonds within the collective in my immediate proximity. A member had come from Spain. Others had or were carrying out post-graduate study and these different backgrounds suddenly alluded to the amorphous nature of interconnections to what it meant to be a member of Assemble. The importance of friendship in all its amorphous iterations was so overtly discernible between these people that it was almost electric. This resonance crackled in the atmosphere of interpersonal histories and perspectives. Friendship was further discussed in the Yarn dialogue. Fran stated,

I think all there is, is human relationships born of different contexts. Some are created by people who get to know each other in an open context with no particular requirements to interact in a certain way, but through mutual respect, interest and care develop a connection - something like this is called friendship.<sup>500</sup>

These axiomatic concepts of 'mutual respect', 'interest' and vitally 'care', were all in play around the table. There also seemed to be an unconscious element of hierarchy between more recently involved members and the founding members. It was almost imperceptible but it was present in the way in which the micro-social bonds positioned themselves around the table. This was compounded when Fran mentioned that I would get a different version of 'what Assemble was' from each individual around the table.<sup>501</sup> Rawlins argued that this is a fundamental tenant to the ongoing process of

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<sup>498</sup>*Ibid*, pp.1-3.

<sup>499</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>500</sup>Frances Edgerley, 'Here we go!', (para.1 of 2).

<sup>501</sup>Frances Edgerley, 'Conversation with Edgerley on site visit', Sugarhouse studios, 10/01/2018.

friendship and the 'notion of praxis focuses attention on the decisions friends make in the face of objective constraints existing in their temporally and spatially specific social circumstances'.<sup>502</sup> There was an ongoing dialogue between the dialectical positions of connection-autonomy and separation-inclusion. The choice to come together on a regular basis, over the commonality of a meal, had developed through the experience of problems which arose from not having this 'ritual', namely low productivity, and general ill feeling. This praxical change had now fostered an ongoing commonality of inclusion in a space that was principally private. Although, I was also included in this, it was temporal but through invitation, thus a form of private-public dialectic was still essentially private. It suddenly occurred to me that there was not going to be a definition of what Assemble was and how it operated. It was at this moment that I glimpsed an insight into the amorphous and complex nature of 'collectiveness'. This was precisely because each member still retained their individual autonomy within the totality of Assemble. Yet, they would be constantly negotiating this autonomy with both potential problems which may occur and with the connectedness to aid co-existence of the overall collective.

*The lunchtime break ended with a game in which the loser would be tasked with making the next meal. This revealed the inherently competitive nature to Assemble which is another factor of personal relationships including friendships.<sup>503</sup> The game was entitled the game of fives, and involved members, using their hands like a giant game of rock, paper, scissors each member placed a fist into the middle of the table. The person who it was decided would go first was the person who cooked the last meal. They proceeded to shout out a multiple of five (no higher than the number of members playing) and when they guessed correctly they would be out of the game, and so forth until it was down to the final two members (this lasted for approx. 10 minutes). The final two members doubled up their hands and then alternated turns to guess a number out of 20. They lost a hand when they guessed right, and when they guessed incorrectly, they returned a hand until the loser was revealed. It was light-hearted*

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<sup>502</sup>William Rawlins, 'Writing About Friendship Matters: A Case Study in Dialectical and Dialogical Inquiry', p.65.

<sup>503</sup>*Ibid.*

*and brought a level of humour to the daily proceedings. I remember thinking that this space was beyond the physical act of eating. It was a highlight of Assemble's working day as they could drop the facade of professionalism and reveal the interpersonal and the social bonds could be re-enforced. It was also highly creative, not just the jovial games, but also the chatter which ensued at the table. Members catching up and sharing thoughts in an informal environment. It was during this moment that I was introduced to another member of Assemble, Pablo Feito, who was working on the design for the new gallery at Goldsmiths. As we all left this dining area, Fran suggested I talk to Pablo about what he was working on. I followed him into the workshop area, and we started to discuss his role in Assemble which centred on the fabrication and architectural designs for the Goldsmiths gallery. Throughout the conversation, he was putting together a scale model of the new gallery space [fig, 22]. It was interesting to see his perspective coming from Spain as an 'outsider' to Assemble and then slowly integrating himself into the collective. He made some interesting comments about class and we discussed the problematic of middle-class structures in which artist-led collectives often form. This is of course not a rule, but it seems that collectives such as Assemble, etc. often form through art school or in similar institutional contexts and we began to discuss the problematics at play. Assemble are from many different backgrounds, multi-gendered. However, it is this question of class which pervades and often presents as contradictions. There is a constant tension between their relatively privileged position and the nature of their goals and aims which reside in how art and architecture can both challenge the class structure and concurrently work within a neoliberal capitalist society. Pablo openly questioned this contradiction, through a very honest assessment of his own class context from a fairly middle-class family in Spain. I also, concurred that my own context was transitional, both working and middle class, but the issue was how we must recognise this and understand what we can and cannot act upon.*

An example of this problematic has occurred in the monologic discourse of criticism specifically suggestive of their practice as ‘exploitative’.<sup>504</sup> They have received criticism on these issues in the past. In 2015, journalist Rowan Moore suggested that Assemble worry that media attention could give rise to false readings of their work, such as that Granby Street could be taken “as justification for the big society”, on the basis that it is being done in collaboration with local people. It is “a reaction to a really bad situation”, they say, “not a solution to a broader problem”.<sup>505</sup>

I did not get the impression that this was the case. It seemed that they had perhaps reconciled themselves with this situation. They seemed to have evolved since that first project in Granby, no longer filled with that level of self-doubt as described by Moore. However, I did get the sense that they had to adapt their practice and methods over a period to negate this issue. Of course, this tension through the contradiction of Assemble’s privilege coupled with the projects which they are involved will constantly produce interplay within a class-based socio-cultural context. As said, ‘most of the members of Assemble studied architecture at Cambridge University’.<sup>506</sup> However, in an interview with John O’Reilly for Building Centre, Maria Lisogorskaya sheds more light on the subject,

About two thirds – the majority are architecturally-educated, either part one or part two – no one has done part three. Then there are quite a few Humanities subjects, so somebody studied philosophy, somebody studied English Literature, one guy studied History but it’s funny because he brings other skills like plumbing and construction, which is mainly due to his personal experience.<sup>507</sup>

Although I am not denying their collective position within society and their obvious advantages through an Oxbridge education, it is never completely monologic nor dualistic in respects to their evolution. It is clear that university as an institution of learning is once again implicated in the formation of the collective. However, the university was only the beginning, and it was the hotbed of

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<sup>504</sup> Stephen Pritchard, ‘Artwashing and Gentrification’ (2018) <<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2018/04/27/artwashing-and-gentrification/>> [accessed 23/08/2019].

<sup>505</sup> Rowan Moore, *Assemble: the unfashionable art of making a difference*, *the Guardian* (2015) <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/nov/29/assemble-architecture-collective-london-turner-prize>> [accessed 20/10/2018], (para.3 of 12).

<sup>506</sup> Nikil Saval, ‘Assemble: Making Things Happen’, *New York Times Style Magazine* (2015).

<sup>507</sup> Maria Lisogorskaya, ‘Exclusive Assemble Interview: re-assembling architecture’, John O’Reilly (2015) <<https://www.buildingcentre.co.uk/news/assemble-interview-interview-assembling-the-practice-of-architecture>> [accessed 12/02/2019].

projects and ‘self-determined’ desire which seemed to form Assemble. This was re-iterated in the Yarn dialogue,

Some people talk about first deciding to do a project at a party. Another group – practice architecture – were also the contemporaries of most members of Assemble and they were probably the inspiration for that conversation. For me a key moment was going to Rural Studio and seeing the extent of the responsibility and trust given to young students in their capacity to make physical change in the world.<sup>508</sup>

Talking to Pablo, I was able to gain an insight into how creatives join Assemble often for specific tasks or projects and then go on their own way. Pablo had specifically joined Assemble because of his fabrication skills and he seemed to share their collective sense of social and cultural responsibility to society. We discussed the moral and ethical aspect of what architecture can contribute to society and he divulged that he had the ambition to create a self-sustaining, carbon-neutral community. This community would be a blueprint of sorts for this form of living, which will be vital for the continuation of our species. It seemed to me that he might actually succeed, I got the impression that Assemble had created a space for these ideas to flourish. It presented as more than the physical community located in Sugarhouse studios, it is a conceptual space which allowed thinking time. I remember thinking that when you were in Assemble anything was possible.

*As my conversation with Pablo drew to a close I went for one last walk around the site. The building was in flux somewhere between community space and private enterprise. It was both a workshop and an office space that possessed a utility by impressing itself upon its occupants. Assemble had co-created a habitat that reflected their own practices. The site reminded me of an amalgamation of an artist-led space come art school technicians’ workshop. Even the smell of the fabrication area, from the sawdust and the metalwork, reminded me of the days I spent in workshops at Leeds Arts University. This workshop space would then suddenly morph into an institutional-esque office space which was akin to The British Library’s digital curators’ offices. I began to think that it was undecided and that was its strength it was able to be a simultaneously a multitude of things, just as Assemble were*

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<sup>508</sup>Frances Edgerley, ‘Beginnings’ <<http://yarncommunity.com/stories/743>> [accessed 12/02/2019], (para.1 of 1).

*themselves never completely fixed. They operated in a political space which was both art and architecture, collective and institution. As I left Sugarhouse I was left with the rare feeling that I had witnessed something highly original and I had gained a better understanding of what made Assemble function.*

It is this last point that ‘I had gained a better understanding of what made Assemble function’ which required criticality. In order to achieve this criticality, I resolved to investigate two specific projects *Baltic Street Adventure Playground* and *Granby Workshop*.<sup>509</sup> Both these projects are not simply ‘Assemble projects’, they are ongoing dialogues with different communities located outside the London cultural scene. This is of incredible advantage for my analysis because I was able to move towards an understanding of how Assemble develop relationships outside of their immediate cultural ecology centred on London. The themes which had arisen from my visit to Sugarhouse such as the forces of formalisation, the value of community, the role of friendship and Assemble’s role in regeneration and class consciousness, help to frame the *Baltic Street Adventure Playground* and *Granby Workshop* projects.

### ***Baltic Street Adventure Playground- Glasgow***

The *Baltic Street Adventure Playground* (BSAP) had been conceived in partnership with Assemble and Creative Scotland.<sup>510</sup> The project was initiated a year before The Commonwealth Games (The Games) commenced and was funded by a consortium formed as part of the wider VELOCITY project.<sup>511</sup> The consortium included Glasgow City Council, Clyde Gateway Development Corporation and Creative Scotland.<sup>512</sup> The BSAP was set up as a Community Interest Company and ‘has a board

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<sup>509</sup>Assemble, ‘Projects’ (2019) <<https://assemblestudio.co.uk/projects>> [accessed 15/06/2019].

<sup>510</sup>Baltic Street Adventure Playground, ‘Background’ (2019) <<http://www.balticstreetadventureplay.co.uk/background>> [accessed 06/01/2019].

<sup>511</sup>The VELOCITY project was already defunct when I arrived at BSAP. However, it was a response to the impact of The Commonwealth Games and the impact it had on local communities. See, Glasgow Life, ‘posts’ (11<sup>th</sup> of April 2013) *Facebook* <<https://www.facebook.com/glasgowlife/posts/velocity-glasgow-launched-their-new-website-this-weekvelocity-art-for-a-changing/353361424765760/>> [accessed 23/07/2019].

<sup>512</sup>*Ibid.*



of six, a staff team of four and a community of some 250 children'.<sup>513</sup> The project was initiated because of the lack of play areas and after school or out of term time facilities in the Dalmarnock area. It was clear from their website and my discussion with Fran that BSAP had specific elements built by Assemble but that it was constantly changed and added to by the children. This revealed a complex interplay between Assemble, BSAP, community, and staff. Further complexity was added to this dialectical knot because it seemed as if BSAP had indirectly received funding as a result of The Games through the consortium. For this reason, it was implicitly interlinked to the re-generation of the area and subsequently the socio-economic and geo-political problematics in play. In order to analyse these interrelated issues, I will begin my reflective account of my volunteer work with BSAP.

*On arrival in Glasgow, I was confronted by the volume of people flooding in and out of the train station. It reminded me of the day in January when I arrived in London for my first site visit with Assemble. It was a few minutes before I got my bearings and I decided to call a taxi to take me to the apartment in which I was staying for the next three days. The apartment was located outside the bustle of the city centre in the community in which BSAP was located. BSAP was to the east of Glasgow in an area called Dalmarnock, sandwiched between Celtic Park, the river Clyde, Bridgeton and Rutherglen [fig, 23]. This area was historically working class and comprised mainly of terrace housing or 'slum' housing. Historian Gordon Adams recalled his own experience of the area, 'the biggest impact in my own recollection was the seemingly massive slum clearances of the early period of the Glasgow Eastern Area Renewal (GEAR), project which started around 1976'.<sup>514</sup> The area was relatively close to the centre, approximately 10 minutes from Glasgow central station. I was met with an eerie sight; enormous swathes of land had been left by the removal and subsequent desolation of unfulfilled initiatives both past and present. These great open spaces of wasteland seemed to haunt the area. Although the apartment I was staying in was located in the re-developed estate, it was on the edge closest to the wasteland.*

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<sup>513</sup>*Ibid*, (para.3 of 5).

<sup>514</sup>Gordon Adams, *Glasgow's East End Through Time* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing Limited, 2014), p.5.

The current re-development project is intertwined with the legacy of the Commonwealth Games, hosted by the City in 2014.<sup>515</sup> The re-developed estates comprised multiple types of housing including detached, semi-detached and apartments. It was interesting to see that houses appeared to have solar panels and also there were clear areas of ‘greenspace’. However, on my arrival, there was something markedly isolating about their layout and the design of the streets seemed to suggest an unfinished nature to the project. This was compounded when I discovered it was a 15-20 min walk to the nearest supermarket. The urban planning in the area had not completely succeeded in creating all the facilities necessary to generate a sense of community. I was already developing an understanding of why Assemble had engaged with the project as it correlated with their emerging *modus operandi* which was based on, ‘[e]motional labour, respect, relationships...’.<sup>516</sup> The BSAP appeared to be in a similar context to other projects which they had undertaken such as, *Granby Four Streets* and *New Addington*.<sup>517</sup> These projects were about working with different communities that were in transition and had experienced economic deprivation or neglect. These projects were not engaged in generating large profits. On the contrary, Assemble’s aim appeared to be striving for, ‘self-determination’ both for themselves and for the specific ‘communities’ engaged in each project.<sup>518</sup> How this played out at BSAP is the key thread throughout this study.

*This initial impression was the driving force behind my first evening in the area, as I was determined to find out what was going on and how BSAP had come to fruition. I decided to take a walk around the area and then carry out some contextual research on Dalmarnock before I started volunteering at BSAP. I decided to walk to BSAP at around 17:00 that evening, as I knew it would be closed, and I would be able to scout out the location and its immediate surroundings. The area was markedly different from the re-developed area in which I was staying, even though it was only three minutes away. Located in an older council housing estate it was separated by a stretch of wasteland. There were a few young children, maybe between age eight to twelve years, hanging around, and I suspected they had probably*

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<sup>515</sup>The Commonwealth Games, ‘Glasgow 2014’ <<http://www.glasgow2014.com/>> [accessed 24/06/2019].

<sup>516</sup>Frances Edgerley, ‘Here we go!’ <<http://yarncommunity.com/stories/743>> [accessed 12/07/2019], (para.1 of 2).

<sup>517</sup>Assemble, ‘Granby Four Streets’, *Projects*, and Assemble, ‘New Addington’, *Projects*.

<sup>518</sup>Frances Edgerley, ‘Here we go!’ (para.2 of 2).

*been at the playground in the day. The BSAP was located behind a wooden fence, the land had previously been disused, which backed onto the gardens of the houses in the estate. On the opposite side of the road was a stretch of more wasteland and some form of trading/industrial estate. I could see one of the main roads which extended to the local train station. This area, at first glance, was not child friendly and was in a liminal state between neglect and re-development. If there was an overall urban plan it felt as though it had stopped at this point. The BSAP seemed to me to be on the border between different areas and different societal structures [fig, 24].*

*The silence of the area was noticeable. It seemed that the entire area was only occasionally interrupted by the traffic on the main artery into and out of Dalmarnock. It was like something at the end of its time, not quite onto the next episode. The weather probably added to this sense of anticipation with its heavy atmosphere as if a storm was building. I decided to head towards the main road and make my way to the nearest supermarket. This journey involved moving back through the new developments and over the river Clyde. The re-generation project had clearly set out to create a footpath beside the river, in order to link the thoroughfares into the housing area. There was something strongly municipal and public about this aesthetic, in contrast to the older almost segregated council estate within which BSAP resided. My first impression when I crossed the bridge to the supermarket area was that the sound had been on mute. It was generated by the hustle and bustle of people going about their daily business. There was life here, because of the facilities. Yet, I could have been anywhere and nowhere, as the standardised plan of a global non-place architecture was imposed.<sup>519</sup> This included fast food outlets and a large glass and steel box in which Tesco was housed. It was at this point that I realised the strange unintentional ‘incompleteness’ of the Dalmarnock housing estate resulted in a fracture of contemporary life. It metaphorically*

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<sup>519</sup>Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans by. John Howe (London: Verso Books, 1995).

*exposed the barebones of the global neo-liberal project, which had successfully captured this space over the river.*

*I bought my dinner at Tesco and walked back to the apartment. From the apartment's micro balcony I had a vantage point in which I could view a park and woodland space that had been developed adjacent to the river. This area also included Celtic Park and thus the legacy of the international sports development which was a result of the Commonwealth Games. I felt that although this area had seen investment, the authorities had merely aesthetically addressed its issues, and had perhaps inadvertently disrupted its ecology. It was as if the facilities were there in reach, however symbolically separated by the river. It was at this point that I decided to carry out some contextual research on this area.*

In a report published by the Scottish Government entitled, *An Evaluation of Legacy from the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games: Post Games Report*, details had been published about the projects initiated in the east end area.<sup>520</sup> The report highlighted some key events and aspects of the area's recent transformations. The central change was the physical infrastructure which included the Athletes' Village, and subsequent re-purposing of land left by the demolition of the power station in the 1980s, described by Adams as 'the power station walls loomed over Dalmarnock Road'.<sup>521</sup> This description was from the perspective of crossing the bridge which I had earlier ventured over to find the supermarket. As I read both the report and Adams's history, I suddenly realised I was staying in the Athlete's Village. The report detailed the changes,

The Athletes' Village, situated in Dalmarnock, has completed the retrofit process following the Games, with a large proportion of the furniture and fittings from the Games being donated to local, charitable causes in Glasgow. It now provides a new residential community with 300 private homes, 400 homes for social rent and a new 120-bed care home for the elderly on the 38.5 hectare site. The first residents have now moved in to the village which was home to around 7,000 competitors and officials during the Games. Further phases of development at the Athletes' Village are planned which will create another 765 homes, shops and commercial property.<sup>522</sup>

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<sup>520</sup>The Scottish Government, 'An Evaluation of Legacy from the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games: Post Games Report' (2015) [PDF], <<https://www.gov.scot/publications/evaluation-legacy-glasgow-2014-commonwealth-games-post-games-report/>> [accessed 01/06/2019].

<sup>521</sup>Gordon Adams, 'Dalmarnock Bridge', *Glasgow's East End Through Time*.

<sup>522</sup>The Scottish Government, 'An Evaluation of Legacy from the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games: Post Games Report', pp.86-87.

It was clear the proposed ‘further phases’ had yet to be completed, as the wastelands still dominated the area. Indeed, there was a conspicuous lack of facilities including shops, commercial properties, and visible community areas. I also began to think about the occupants of these new houses and if the community had been somewhat displaced. My research led me to the formation of the BSAP, and its connection with the legacy of The Games.

There was a specific set of dialectical forces in play regarding the notion of this re-generation. Locating Assemble’s position within this knot may assist in a deeper understanding of their practice. Firstly, the question of ‘art and gentrification’, was once more illuminated through the perceived tensions, both geographically and culturally. In, a paper published in the *European Journal of Housing Policy*, entitled, ‘Art, Gentrification and Regeneration - From Artist as Pioneer to Public Arts’, Stuart Cameron and Jon Coaffee explored the ‘waves’ in which artists have been implicated in gentrification.<sup>523</sup> Their case study is compelling as they analyse the linkages between art and gentrification in, Gateshead and the wider Newcastle area. This is a comparable urban space to Dalrnock and the wider Glasgow area. The three waves are characterised as follows: ‘artist as pioneer’ of gentrification, where the artist leads to the identification and ‘valorisation’ of often decaying urban zones.<sup>524</sup> Whether culturally unconscious or, at least partially aware of their implication, artists become trailblazers for the forces of capital and potential investment associated with expanding middle classes.<sup>525</sup> The second wave was characterised as, ‘the commodification of art in gentrification’, this wave was strongly associated with real estate and,

The artist was presented as a ‘stalking horse’ for the needs of investment capital to revalorize urban neighbourhoods. The commodification of the artistic milieu by property and investment capital takes advantage of the ‘aesthetic conjuncture’ in which ‘artists’ living habits became a cultural model for the middle classes, and . . . old factories became a means of expression for a ‘post-industrial’ civilisation.<sup>526</sup>

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<sup>523</sup>Stuart Cameron and Jon Coaffee, ‘Art, Gentrification and Regeneration – From Artist as Pioneer to Public Arts’, *European Journal of Housing Policy*, Vol.5, No.1 (2005), pp.39-58.

<sup>524</sup>*Ibid*, pp.40-42.

<sup>525</sup>*Ibid*, p.40. Also see, David Ley, *The New Middle Classes and the Remaking of the Central City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>526</sup>*Ibid*, p.42.

Cameron and Coaffee particularly drew upon the work of Sharon Zukin, and her analysis of artist loft living in SoHo, New York in the 1980s.<sup>527</sup> This form of gentrification simultaneously pushes house prices up which forces out the artists and local communities and also attracts larger corporations and ‘big business’ to the area, which often pushes up rent rates for local and smaller firms.<sup>528</sup>

Cameron and Coaffee theorise that a third wave has occurred in which,

In this third model the main driver of gentrification is public policy, seeking to use ‘positive’ gentrification as an engine of urban regeneration. This includes the use of public art and cultural facilities, sponsored by local government and other public agencies, as a promoter of regeneration and associated gentrification.<sup>529</sup>

It is this third wave, which on the face of it, was at play in Dalmarnock. The BSAP was established through the consortium. The consortium was a partnership of public agencies and local government, acting under the wider project initiative VELOCITY, which consisted of a ‘programme of projects that looked to bring together the best ideas and practice within regeneration, cultural development, and community engagement. A central part of VELOCITY was a major commission seeking to create a highly imaginative permanent public project of international significance’.<sup>530</sup>

VELOCITY and its partners used The Games as a ‘catalyst’ to further the Scottish Government’s creative industries policy in which Creative Scotland is the designated body which is engaged in, ‘promoting and supporting industries and other commercial activity the primary focus of which is the application of creative skills’.<sup>531</sup> According to Cameron and Coaffee’s argument, this ‘support’ to generate ‘creative skills’ presents all the hallmarks of positive gentrification.<sup>532</sup> The result of the VELOCITY commission for a ‘public project of international significance’, was the creation BSAP, and thus Assemble where implicated within this process. This is the spectre which is touched upon in Moore’s article ‘The Unfashionable Art of Making a Difference’, which was further outlined by critic

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<sup>527</sup>*Ibid*, p.42. Also see, Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (London: Radius, 1988).

<sup>528</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>529</sup>*Ibid*, p.40.

<sup>530</sup>Creative Scotland, ‘Playtime adventures at Baltic Street’ (2015) <<https://www.creativescotland.com/resources/our-publications/annual-reviews/2014-15/place-and-quality-of-life/playtime-adventures-at-baltic-street>> [accessed 06/01/2019], (para.3 of 7).

<sup>531</sup>The Scottish Government, ‘General functions of Creative Scotland’, *The Public Service Reform Act*, Section 36 (2010) <<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2010/8/part/4/crossheading/creative-scotland>> [accessed 06/01/2019].

<sup>532</sup>Stuart Cameron and Jon Coaffee, pp.39-58.

Adrian Searle.<sup>533</sup> Searle suggested that the ‘danger of projects like theirs is that it will be seen to replace government intervention, leading to further withdrawals of public funds and further atomisation’.<sup>534</sup> Although it is clear that centripetal forces of neo-liberalising capital were involved in the creation of BSAP, and that third wave of ‘positive’ gentrification may well be in play, the fact remains that it was Assemble which were awarded the commission and theirs is a practice which displays centrifugal forces of ‘working with’ rather than ‘working for’ communities. As Searle stated, ‘their work can be seen as part of a battle against social division, and against the precariousness of life under neo-liberal capitalism’.<sup>535</sup> Nicola McCartney illustrated this tension by suggesting that collectivism, ‘can be seen as both critical of and an adaptation to neoliberal institutions of authorship’.<sup>536</sup> It is apparent there are multiplicities of dialogic and dialectical forces in play as Assemble are simultaneously implicated within this process of ‘positive’ gentrification and at the same time exhibit divergent tendencies. This dialectical flux is constantly played out on numerous levels of integration-separation, stability- change, and expression-non-expression. I will now return to the reflective account in order to further trace these sets of contradictory forces.

*The following day I made my way back through the building site, over the wasteland, to the community of terrace houses that enclose the BSAP. I had arranged with Alan Kennedy (playworker/ coordinator) to arrive at 10:30 before the playground opened. When I arrived, I walked through a wooden gate and was confronted with a surprising sight. There appeared to be a food delivery of some kind in progress. I quickly introduced myself to several people, who I presumed were staff, and I started to help bring fresh produce into the playground. It soon became clear that there were several dynamics at play. Firstly, we began to set out the food on trestle tables lined up in front of what appeared to be a temporary, single level structure, with a ramped walkway leading to an entrance. The wooden structure reminded me of a trailer from a 1960s building site. Secondly, I began to quickly find out about the nature*

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<sup>533</sup>Adrian Searle, ‘Power to the people! ‘Assemble win the Turner prize by ignoring the art market’, *the Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/dec/07/turner-prize-2015-assemble-win-by-ignoring-art-market>> [accessed 06/01/2019].

<sup>534</sup>*Ibid*, (para.6 of 8).

<sup>535</sup>*Ibid*, (para.7 of 8).

<sup>536</sup>Nicola McCartney, *Death of the Artist: Art World Dissidents and Their Alternative Identities*, p.59.

*of the food. I was introduced to a member of staff called Alistair, he explained that the food was part of a scheme entitled, FareShare.<sup>537</sup>*

FareShare was an organisation which distributes surplus food from local supermarkets to charities. BSAP had signed up to the scheme to help feed the local children and anyone in the playground. Children, parents, and staff did not have to pay for the food and BSAP had implemented an informal policy of ‘open to all’, as they received frequent deliveries on a weekly basis.<sup>538</sup> It occurred to me that BSAP was enacting a vital role in the community by essentially providing an element of welfare for the local population. This function became increasingly apparent throughout my time at BSAP and it is another example of how this project has changed overtime. Alistair pointed out that BSAP’s participation in the scheme was something he had brought with him when he joined the playground, as he had been involved with similar schemes in the past. This notion of staff members bringing their specialties seemed fundamental to the function of the playground. I would later find out that they all had specific roles or duties, as well as general daily tasks. However, from the outset, I sensed a fluidity and perhaps a non-hierarchical informal method of working. There was a collective effort to help the children and the wider community in learning, play, and social life. As I would come to understand, they all played their separate roles in this process, but then again, they all participated with a form of work ethic which negated the strict organisational structures of an institutional system, as was evident in the statement from the Yarn dialogue, ‘the idea of human practice is key I think. Understanding that we perpetuate the structures we work within and use’.<sup>539</sup> It was as if I was seeing an extension of Assemble’s practice with a grounding in ‘human practice’, praxis, play out in the relations formed at BSAP.

*After I had helped set out the food, Alan arrived, and he formally introduced the team and we moved to the office on the other side of the playground. The office was in a building that aesthetically seemed slightly out of place given its setting [fig, 25]. It was clearly a structure built by Assemble as it reminded me of an image, I had seen of Assemble building a larger*

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<sup>537</sup>FareShare, ‘What We Do’ (2019) <<https://fareshare.org.uk/what-we-do/>> [accessed 06/01/2019].

<sup>538</sup>Alistair McCall, ‘Conversation with Alistair’, *BSAP* (11/07/2018).

<sup>539</sup>Frances Edgerley, ‘Here we go!’, (para.2 of 2).



*version of the 'hut-like' structure [fig. 26]. However, Alan enlightened me as to this building was here and its purpose.*

The structure was called the *Wikihouse* and was initiated and co-designed by Civic Fabrications, a design and architecture unit within Edinburgh University (Edinburgh College of Art).<sup>540</sup> According to Alan, ECA students had been coming to help design and build parts of the playground for several years. The beauty of the structure was that the children could help in the process and essentially it was constructed like a giant jigsaw. A statement on the ECA website suggested the 'Baltic Street structure is a 4.7m x 4m insulated pavilion constructed from digitally-fabricated, lightweight plywood 'jigsaw' pieces clad with a bright red Wraptite membrane'.<sup>541</sup>

*As I walked into the Wikihouse I could still detect the smell of plywood which reminded me of my visit to Assemble's headquarters in Sugarhouse Studios. This space was vastly different from the rest of the playground, it was populated with technological devices and reminded me of Assemble's office space. This was clearly the official meeting and office space of the site and housed an archival unit. Alan and I set about discussing my involvement, and Alan painted a history of the playground. I immediately sensed the pride which Alan felt about his work and towards the playground in general. He told me he had grown up in the area and moved away and had returned. This experience helped him understand both the children and their parents. He understood the challenges of creating such as space in a relatively deprived area and more importantly what positives it could bring to the area.<sup>542</sup> He outlined how the site was always evolving as the children helped shape its future. This included creating and physically helping to build aspects of the site. This was of course with supervision and was always in co-creation with everyone involved in the Community Interest Company.<sup>543</sup>*

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<sup>540</sup>Alan Kennedy, 'Conversation with Alan', BSAP (11/07/2018).

<sup>541</sup>Edinburgh College of Art, 'Raising A Wikihouse at Baltic Street Adventure Playground' (2016) <<https://www.eca.ed.ac.uk/news/raising-wikihouse-baltic-street-adventure-playground>> [accessed 06/01/2019].

<sup>542</sup>Alan Kennedy, 'Conversation with Alan', BSAP (11/07/2018).

<sup>543</sup>Baltic Street Adventure Playground, 'Mission Statement' (2019) <<http://www.balticstreetadventureplay.co.uk/mission-statement>> [accessed 24/08/2019].

Indeed, it was already apparent that an interplay between the children and BSAP, as a project, demonstrated dialectical tensions. As was evident from the conversation with Alan and the BSAP's website, the children were part of the organisation, including having a say on the Board.<sup>544</sup> Their inclusion in this process is indicative of the collective focus embedded in the playground. Of course, this 'focus' is central to the notion of a community interest company. According to the UK Government's website, a community interest company 'is a special type of limited company which exists to benefit the community rather than private shareholders'.<sup>545</sup> Then again, the level to which this 'benefit to the community' is always subjective. In this case, there seemed to be a tangible practice emerging that moved beyond public policy initiatives and implemented this sense of community voice. The fact the playground was actively positioning its children as content creators set a precedent for the ongoing relationship with the wider community. I was beginning to see, how Assemble's belief that, 'internal relations then reflect outwards through your work' played out in practice.<sup>546</sup> This was my first inkling towards the notion that Assemble were enacting a facilitating role, which 'speaks with' a community rather than 'speaks for' a community. The Playground's governance structure reveals this working relationship because members of Assemble are not directly involved in the day to day running of the Playground. Instead, they have an advisory and strategic policy role on the Board.<sup>547</sup> There were at the time two members of Assemble on the Board and they were there to make sure that, 'play workers have the resources, time and support they need to uphold objectives on site'.<sup>548</sup> From a dialectical perspective, there is a contradiction in terms of connection-autonomy because the playground is both part of Assemble and acts autonomously. They are simultaneously dependent-separate, in a sense that Assemble initiated its creation, and continue to be part of the board, yet BSAP makes its own decisions. Thus a state of ongoing flux of centripetal-centrifugal forces pervades this relational position.

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<sup>544</sup>Baltic Street Adventure Playground, 'Board', *meet the team* (2019) <<http://www.balticstreetadventureplay.co.uk/board>> [accessed 06/01/2019].

<sup>545</sup>United Kingdom Government, 'Setting up a social enterprise' (2019) <<https://www.gov.uk/set-up-a-social-enterprise>> [accessed 06/01/2019], (para.2 of 3).

<sup>546</sup>Frances Edgerley, 'Here we go!', (para.2 of 2).

<sup>547</sup>Baltic Street Adventure Playground, 'Board' (2019) <<http://www.balticstreetadventureplay.co.uk/board>> [accessed 20/07/2019].

<sup>548</sup>*Ibid*, (para.3 of 11).

*The conversation with Alan turned to an explanation of what my role might entail over the following three days. I would help out as a volunteer on all aspects of the day to day running of the playground. This would give my research the highest probability of gaining invaluable insights into BSAP. Alan suggested I start by only doing what I felt comfortable with and allowing myself time to adjust to the rhythms of the playground. As we walked out of the Wikihouse, Alan began to tell me a little of the history of the place. The site itself had always been something of a problem area, originally an overgrown spare section of land it had inevitably succumbed to low level crime and general neglect. It seemed there had always been some sort of plan to turn it into a community space, but it was not until Assemble, Create and partners had got involved, coupled with the changes in the area post the Commonwealth Games, that anything had materialised. Alan began to explain the challenges which had arisen throughout the birth of BSAP. These included some vandalism, a few thefts, etc. However, these had been remarkably few and far between over the years.<sup>549</sup>*

*As I walked back with Alan to the entrance next to the trailer cabin, I was introduced to the team. There was project Co-ordinator Robert Kennedy, playworker with special responsibility for food - Alistair McCall, playworker with special responsibility for accessibility & diversity - Laura Harrison, Music Worker- Andrew Flett and artist in residence Lauren Gault. My impression thus far had been an overriding sense of being welcomed to a family, as though I had always been a part of the playground. During the first few hours at BSP I rapidly gained an understanding about what the organisation meant to the local community.*

At this juncture, it would be prudent to analyse my position as a volunteer in order to both situate myself in this section of the case study and to reveal the interdependencies of BSAP. Firstly, the overwhelming sense of being welcomed at the playground, was presented as an openness-closedness dialectic.<sup>550</sup> This dialectic was more complex than the binary of openness-closedness and presented in

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<sup>549</sup>Alan Kennedy, 'Conversation with Alan', BSAP (11/07/2018).

<sup>550</sup>Baxter and Montgomery, *Dialogues & Dialectics*, p.140.

a more holistic set of tensions which included: openness-discretion, openness-reserved, and openness-concealment positions. These dialectical tensions were all dependent on time and the specific subject matter within communication. For example, Alan pointed out a few behavioural problems with some of the local children, which I would need to know during my time at BSAP. This information was communicated with discretion, as it was not something that was specifically public knowledge. Similarly, there would be initial aspects of the playground which were off limits or concealed to an outsider. Then there were the personal aspects of self-disclosure, as Baxter and Montgomery attested, ‘On the one hand, the self-boundary must be protected from the vulnerability and risk inherent in disclosure. At the same time, however, there is pressure for a person to grant others access.’<sup>551</sup> This is described as the constant interplay between the ‘openness-closedness with’ dialectic.<sup>552</sup> In this case, I was volunteering with BSAP for a time period and as a result there was a pressure, both from my perspective and from members of staff, to appear as open and approachable as possible in order to work together in a positive manner. On the other hand, I was also a researcher which fostered an element of caution with self-disclosure which moved towards the dialectical force of closedness. This presented in another interplay between openness-closedness, and uncertainty-certainty because there was a sense of not knowing what I was going to publish and then how to judge at what level of openness was required.

Crucially, this was not a negative set of contradictions. The social bonds formed through a constant interplay within the continuum of the conversation between myself and members of staff. This played out over time and slowly change occurred with respects to a greater understanding between myself and each individual member of staff. The openness-reserved dialectic was very noticeably in play during my communication with the parents and guardians. My position as an outsider, was further heightened by my English accent. I had polite but reserved conversation with several local residents. However, this position shifted overtime as my involvement became routine. This shift resulted in several parents and guardians opening up a level of self-disclosure centred on the community and the

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<sup>551</sup>*Ibid*, p.140.

<sup>552</sup>*Ibid*.

area in general. It must be noted that this conversation never reached the level of personal self-disclosure and was different in every single case. Interestingly, my role as researcher did not seem to affect these positions, as the purpose did not seem as important as my temporary role within the playground's team.

*Throughout the day, several schools brought classes into experience a different form of learning. These were primary school children from around 5 years of age, and they seemed to respond to their environment with surprising ease. I began to shadow several the playworkers in order to find out exactly what they did and to help out with the daily running of the playground. Andrew and Lauren had taken the first group of younger primary school children to what I was reliably informed would become the 'veg' patch (not yet fully operational). They proceeded to play several games which included storytelling, sharing food and making an elaborate headdress. I mainly observed this more structured play which had a specifically designed outcome for younger children. This structure allowed the children to roam around the 'veg patch area' and gather their materials to create their headdresses without straying too far into the rest of the playground. This reduced the probability of potential accidents or incidents with other older children. However, this area was 'interesting' enough to keep them entertained and so the playworkers and teachers were able to easily communicate with the whole group.*

*After helping some of the children with finding twigs and stones etc., to adorn their headdresses, I decided to move onto a different section of the playground. I was beginning to see that it informally operated in different zones. The central zone was currently occupied by several local children, as signified by their lack of high visibility jackets and hats.*

I got the sense that there was an immediate connection between the children and their environment. This was not specifically a 'child friendly' landscape with bricks, nettles, nails etc. prevalent throughout the site. However, it was precisely because of this situation that the children were immediately careful with how they navigated the playground. It was as if the 'child safe' culture of

play equipment was inherently counterproductive. In other words, the ‘safe’ environment encouraged a lack of care in play because it was perceived as inherently safe.

I decided to speak to Alan about this observation and he informed me that although this was obviously the intention, it was quite difficult to stay within the health and safety laws and guidelines. In essence BSAP required a special extended form of health and safety assessment which took into account the potential hazards onsite. The level of risk was inherently higher but precautions and measures were in place if there was an incident. Interestingly, Alan informed me that there had been only a few isolated incidents over the years. I was initially surprised at this comment, however it appeared to concur with my observations regarding the way the children played. I was beginning to see the potential of this form of learning through play in a ‘real’ context. BSAP was not overly designed. It had specific elements which had been initiated by Assemble and students at Edinburgh University. However, the children were always adding to these designs. For example I witnessed a group of local children starting to build a section of a tree house [fig, 27]. This discourse of self-build, self-organised development epitomised the role of Assemble in the Playground. In an interview for *the Guardian*, member of the Collective, Amica Dall stated that Assemble had ‘capped off the coal and brought in tonnes of mud and soil. We’ve put in play hills, tunnels, a water feature and a new fence. We’ve got a community food garden and a campfire to cook on, which is important because lots of kids in this area don’t get a hot meal every day. [...] we’ve put in a lot of tools and material that children can use to make whatever they’d like. We’ve already been open over some of the school holidays and they’ve built an array of dens and tyre swings’.<sup>553</sup> Dall’s statement reveals the ideological perspective which drives Assemble to develop projects such as BSAP. As Fran stated in the Yarn Community dialogue, ‘Assemble was formed out of a collective project that aimed to do something, ourselves (build, develop, create, design, program, run)’.<sup>554</sup> Assemble’s role at the Playground was to help facilitate a form of autonomous self-creating for the children of Dalmarnock. This was even more pertinent because the community had lost their playing field to the transport hub of the Games development and

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<sup>553</sup>Amica Dall, ‘Glasgow kids rediscover adventure in shadow of the Commonwealth Games’ *Guardian* (2014) <<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/scotland-blog/2014/jul/25/glasgow-kids-rediscover-adventure-shadow-commonwealth-games>> [accessed 30/07/2019], (para.17 of 25).

<sup>554</sup>Fran Edgerley, ‘Here we Go!’, (para.1 of 2).

the children did not have any suitable area to play.<sup>555</sup> It was becoming apparent that Assemble had helped to bring back a level of control and self-determination to an area that was in flux.

*This play was initially supervised by both Alan, Robert and myself. We helped the children locate wooden panels, rope and other material in order to set the children on a micro project. This process also involved supporting the children with cutting the material using hand saws and building the basic structure on the tree. I initially, felt anxiety when the children handled the tools, in particular the use of the hand saw. However, over time and with supervision from Alan and Robert, I became more at ease with this process. This activity was incredibly illuminating. It was this form of experience which most the children would not be able to learn in any other situation. There was a level of trust both between the staff, the children and their guardians. It was as if the unwritten social relationships at play in the activity were understood by everybody involved from the very beginning. The children understood the rules around safety as the process was in fact quite difficult for several of the younger treehouse builders.*

*The activity lasted until lunchtime was announced and we made sure all the tools were safely returned to their storage unit. Lunch was an incredibly interesting moment in the day. Just as at Sugarhouse Studios, the socio-cultural dynamics of the situation revealed some of the underlying interconnections within the BSAP. Alistair was leading this part of the working day and I assisted with the serving of the food (which was apparently tradition with new volunteers). The act of sitting around a communal area and sharing food presented some interesting behavioural shifts. I witnessed how suddenly the apparent chaos of 50 or so children running around changed to an ordered queue of parents, guardians, teachers and children all waiting in line for their choice of lunch.*

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<sup>555</sup>Owen Duffy, 'Glasgow kids rediscover adventure in shadow of the Commonwealth Games' *Guardian* (2014) <<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/scotland-blog/2014/jul/25/glasgow-kids-rediscover-adventure-shadow-commonwealth-games>> [accessed 30/07/2019].

*There was an incredible range of food on offer both vegetarian and meat based such as: sausages, beef burgers, lasagne, curry, couscous, salad, fruit and soup. What was intense about this situation, as a server, was the constant management what people wanted balanced with how much was left of the popular dishes. Throughout the process I could not help but think how this would work in the winter, as lunch was taking place outdoors on the trestle tables in front of the kitchen/store building. This activity would not 'fit' into any of the sheltered buildings. Thus the dynamic would change, in this case it was a relatively warm day and everyone seemed to be amiably socialising. This would be disrupted, if the situation with the weather changed. I wondered if they had an awning or canopy for such situations.*

*To serve lunch I was joined by both Laura and volunteers Gerry and Irene Clancy from the local area. We created a relay system to make sure we served the food whilst it was still warm. Lunch lasted for approximately one hour and I was exhausted by the end of the rush. However, it gave me a chance to meet everybody in the playground and also to talk to some of the parents. They informed me of how vital this service was to the local community. I was surprised to find out the local schools, which visit the playground, also find it incredibly important.<sup>556</sup> The parents were quite forthright with me on the need for the service. They said that they often could not afford to feed their children the range and diversity of food available at the playground. The Fareshare programme really appeared to be making a difference. One of the parents even alluded the fact that their children had, 'never been to the toilet as much'.<sup>557</sup> I understood that this was in reference to the fresh food. The lunchtime activity provided more than healthy dietary requirements, it also became a space for socialising between the adults as well as the children.*

I observed that informal groups occurred in proximity, comprised of friendship groups, both within school and local groups of children. There appeared to be wider community interconnection or perhaps 'loose connection' between some of the local parents and the teachers of the school groups. In

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<sup>556</sup>Conversation with the teacher of the primary school, *BSAP* (11/07/2018).

<sup>557</sup>Irene Clancy, 'conversation with Irene and a several other parents', *BSAP* (11/07/2018).



a paper entitled, 'The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited', Mark Granovetter illustrates the importance of these loose connections or acquaintances,

The argument asserts that our acquaintances (weak ties) are less likely to be socially involved with one another than are our close friends (strong ties). Thus the set of people made up of any individual and his or her acquaintances comprises a low-density network (one in which many of the possible relational lines are absent) whereas the set consisting of the same individual and his or her close friends will be densely knit (many of the possible lines are present).<sup>558</sup>

Granovetter suggests these loose connections act as conduits between groups of people in socially identifiable structures such as; familial, friendship or romantic.<sup>559</sup> In this case the connection between several of the parents and the teachers, who were explicitly linked to the local institution of the primary school, acted as loose acquaintances within the group's totality. These 'weak ties' co-existed with the stronger familial and friendship groups through constant interplay between the individuals. Indeed, this was a group of people which made up a 'micro-community', some which were local and others that had various different relationships and connections to each other and thus the physical locality of this area of Dalmarnock. As Baxter and Montgomery observed, 'Context is not an independent phenomenon, apart from the relationship. Instead, communication between the relationship parties, and with third-party outsiders and social institutions, shapes the dynamic boundary that distinguishes the "inside" from the "outside" of a relationship'.<sup>560</sup> This dynamic would be changeable, on different days, depending on the different relationships which constituted each given space-time. There would be some similarities regarding the local residents, but at that the same time there would be different school groups from other localities. However, what I observed was the importance of a lunchtime space, which punctuated the day and created a moment where everyone in the playground could come together and communicate with one another. Even though the relationship dynamic would always be in flux, the conversation was embedded in the playground, it was in the local context, and it constantly informed these boundaries.

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<sup>558</sup>Mark Granovetter, 'The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited', *Sociological Theory*, Vol.1 (1983), pp. 201-202.

<sup>559</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>560</sup>Baxter and Montgomery, *Dialogues & Dialectics*, p.45.

*After I had finished serving, I helped to clear up and store the left-over food. During this process I talked to Robert and Alistair about the programme, Alan walked in as we discussed the importance of the food share scheme. I got the sense this scheme was a vital part of what BSAP provided, which echoed the parent's comments. Alistair managed to shed some light on the context. He had served in the Scottish police force for many years and had witnessed first-hand the worst effects of poverty imaginable. This had led to him being involved in these food sharing schemes and he had brought the idea to the playground as part of his role. Both Robert and Alan echoed this sentiment and Alan went on to inform me of how they made sure everybody had access to what they needed and it was free for all.<sup>561</sup> Robert, whom I had little interaction with so far, began to illustrate the financial side of the scheme. I was beginning to see how the different strengths of the members worked together.*

Financially, the playground budgeted for the inclusion of the scheme and because they paid in advance they received more than enough to feed everyone for the duration of summer (this was their peak time, during school holidays). As a result, they did not charge anyone for the food and were able to offer fresh food to the community. What I was already gathering was working here and keeping the playground running required immense energy. This entire conversation took place as we moved vats of food and cleaned the utensils. I had been constantly in action since I arrived. Their dedication to the community was admirable from all the staff I had spoken to thus far. Alan then began to talk about the social etiquette around the food scheme. It had become embedded within the daily running of the playground, and as a result, had become normalised. The non-hierarchical nature of their policy, which was essentially 'for everyone', had removed any of the stigma around receiving food in this way. This negated the tension and socio-economic crisis of the food bank system.<sup>562</sup> I got the sense that all involved felt a moral and ethical obligation to the sustainability of the scheme. It clearly highlighted a social need in the area and a failure of the 'welfare state' in the UK.

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<sup>561</sup>Robert Kennedy, Alistair McCall and Alan Kennedy, 'conversation with Robert, Alistair and Alan', *BSAP* (11/07/2018).

<sup>562</sup>Kingsley Purdam, Elisabeth A Garratt, and Aneez Esmail, 'Hungry? Food Insecurity, Social Stigma and Embarrassment in the UK', *Sociology*, Vol. 50, 6 (2016).

*The afternoon continued much the same way as the morning's events. I peripatetically moved around the different areas getting involved in different elements of play. I noticed the school children began to leave the playground around 14:00 and were replaced by an increasing number of local children. I spent most of the afternoon making sure the children building the treehouse did not injure themselves on the equipment. Their imagination was amazing. After around one hour of building the tree house they started to develop games on the treehouse which turned rapidly into a fort. There was an embankment of grass on the other side of the trees. The children started to create a 'war' game by launching toys and mud at each other. In the end the game ended when the children moved on or went home.*

It was played with a surprising level of democracy and there was not a single moment when the play became violent. The children revelled in the environment using the landscape in a highly advanced way for their average age. I began to think about the importance of learning in this 'non-child friendly' space which was essentially a junkyard. Again, this reiterated the reason why Assemble had taken on the project and continued to assist its development because this was a space of both architecture and play. As Fran articulated, 'I always talk about it as kind of like falling in love, totally intoxicating, changed the way I looked at everything'.<sup>563</sup> I could see a similar form of excitement in the way the children discovered the space through the act of playing with planks of wood and rope. Indeed, my impression of the Playground was as of a space of community and 'non-curricular' learning group, this more than just a playground it was a place in which life learning could occur.

*The final hour before I helped close up consisted of clearing up any rubbish left by the children and adults. During this activity I managed to talk to Laura. She talked about how she was particularly interested in the way the playground helped younger children, who were perhaps struggling at nursery or preschool. It allowed parents to drop their children into a space in which they express themselves in a different way. She suggested it was a form of controlled chaos, as it encouraged all children to tackle problems on a level playing field, rather than privileging children that had advantage through their parent's income and thus*

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<sup>563</sup>Fran Edgerley, 'Here we go!', (para.1 of 2).

*access to resources and 'advanced' childcare. BSAP was a dynamic interplay between the children, the parents and the staff. It was a collective space, more than just a playground, it was created by the relationships which people had forged. I left the playground that evening exhausted but with a complete sense that the playground was serving a social purpose beyond the element of play. This was art and architecture which was social and culturally embedded to such a degree some of its children, parents and guardians did not realise what they were involved in.*

*The following day I arrived at the BSAP, a little later than my first day, at 11:00 am. It was a particularly warm and sunny day and as a result, many of the local children had arrived early and were already playing in the sandpit area. I checked in with Alan and Alistair and started to help litter pick. This was a daily routine at the playground as detritus was often blown in from the surroundings. I began to think this was because a number of avenues to the playground were open wasteland thus detritus was blown in without obstruction. This process lasted for 20 mins and involved a litter picker and a plastic bag. Alan informed me that often he would find old rusted nails and bottles, as this area used to be a prime place for illicit activity. He suggested the ground was constantly disturbed by people, and as a result, things would constantly re-appear. During the litter picking, I explored the furthest section of the playground which was dominated by a number of large trees and overgrowth. This section sprawled out over the fort-like grassy earthwork structure. It reminded me of the infamous grassy knoll in Dallas, Texas. I could see why the children had found it appealing as a fort with its vantage point.*

*After I had finished this task I moved back to the central section to help out with a growing number of children. They had discovered that they could use the water in the sandpit and were beginning to construct sandcastles. I could begin to see this being an active day! I spent the next hour or so helping fetch water for a group of local children, which resulted in a great deal of sand on my clothes rather than in the sand pit. This activity was much to the delight of the BSAP team. I got the feeling they encouraged the volunteers to 'get stuck in' to such*

*potentially 'messy' activity. By this time, I had been chatting to both local children and their guardians. It was incredibly obvious that this place served the adults as much as the children, as they played, the adults would socialise on the benches. Several the adults and some of the older children enquired as to my involvement as the playground. I was only happy to talk to them about my research. At first, I thought this may have been a mistake, as the previous day I had been met with a reserved response from some of the adults, however, I was pleasantly surprised at the result. They all opened up a little more, and I gained some insights into the area. A lot of the children, as I suspected, were obsessed with video games, specifically Fortnite, the online multiverse fantasy game.<sup>564</sup> Interestingly, this did not fall on gender norms, as both girls and boys were talking to me about the game.<sup>565</sup> I asked them if they preferred the playground or their online 'playground'. I got a mixed response, most said both and they would be upset if they had to give up the playground or if it was not available.*

It was clear that the Playground's opening in the school holidays was vital in order to give the children a place to go outside of school hours and it also provided a form of temporary childcare. It was also the reason why I had chosen to volunteer at BSAP during the summer holidays because I would be able to observe the Playground during its busiest period.

*At times during the morning I would go and hand out paperwork to the parents, which contained basic contact and emergency details and consent for the children. During these moments I would strike up conversations with the parents and guardians. They confirmed my observations of the area. They suggested the 'promised' facilities had not been delivered and in fact the area had undergone rapid change which had displaced much of the community out of the area, as it had hiked up house prices. Some had managed to benefit from the changes, but the majority suggested that they now had to make the journey over the river to the Tesco for shopping and all the local pubs and youth clubs etc. had not been installed.*

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<sup>564</sup>Epic Games, 'Fortnite', homepage (2019) <<https://www.epicgames.com/fortnite/en-US/buy-now/battle-royale>> [accessed 10/01/2018].

<sup>565</sup>Mitch Reams, 'Bumble Forms All-Women's Fortnite Team to Drive More Female Involvement in Esports' *Ad Week* (2019) <<https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/bumble-forms-all-womens-fortnite-team-to-drive-more-female-involvement-in-esports/>> [accessed 10/08/2019].

The socio-economic and geo-political complexities of the area have been documented by Glasgow based photographer and essayist Chris Leslie. Leslie characterised the slow decline of the area as a result of ‘deindustrialisation in the 1960s and 1970s [which] had left the area in ruins’.<sup>566</sup> Leslie paints the uncertain reception and mixed emotions expressed by local residents to the changes brought about by the Games. On the one hand, residents had been subjected to such deprivation that any change was welcomed.<sup>567</sup> However, there was resistance characterised by Margaret Jaconelli, a long term resident and owner of a house that was to be demolished. Jaconelli had her home valued £29,000 and thus could not afford to move elsewhere.<sup>568</sup> She was eventually evicted by a court ruling and her home demolished.<sup>569</sup> However, what is of great interest is that her argument was that there was not sufficient evidence to suggest that the Games would bring any tangible long term advantage to the residents of the area.<sup>570</sup> This sentiment was echoed by several people that I had met at the Playground and was further encapsulated in a statement by a resident in Leslie’s essay. Tony, aged fourteen, argued that, ‘There is nothing here, it would be hard to imagine more people wanting to come here when there is nothing’.<sup>571</sup>

*This state of affairs was, in a word, half a completed job which made the playground even more important and I could see why Assemble had taken the initiative. Alistair appeared at the door of the trailer building as I was discussing this lack of facility. This prompted a discussion around the nature of the facilities ‘available’ at Celtic Park and issues with access.*

I detected an element of tension around the community having a say in the running of the park post-games. Indeed, it appeared that they had found it hard to access the board meetings and had repeatedly raised the issue of facilities in Dalmarnock but had come up against resistance. It seemed that BSAP was embedded in a familiar story of class tension and public policy problematics. Yet, I was

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<sup>566</sup>Chris Leslie, ‘Disappearing Glasgow’, *The Legacy* (2019) <<http://www.disappearing-glasgow.com/portfolio/dalmarnock-2/>> [accessed 21/06/2019], (para.2 of 11).

<sup>567</sup>*Ibid.*, (para.5 of 11).

<sup>568</sup>*Ibid.*, (para.6 of 11).

<sup>569</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>570</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>571</sup>Tony, ‘Disappearing Glasgow’, *The Legacy* (2019), (para.4 of 11).

beginning to understand that it was far too simplistic to make the connection between BSAP and the process of positive gentrification. Although, the funding of the playground and the conditions which had led to its creation were undoubtedly interrelated with the changes in the area, it seemed indirect and partially removed from the re-development schemes. My experience of the volunteering in the playground was one of community ownership. The way in which they talked about the playground was always separate from the way they talked about 'The Games effect' or the housing re-development. The playground had become integral to their way of life.

*Once more the lunchtime routine ensued, I was rapidly becoming accustomed to the routine. This time I had help from some of the local volunteers. Irene and Gerry Clancy made me feel very welcome during the rush and we discussed how the playground had become such a focal point for the community, it was now successfully embedded in its location. This thread continued when I talked to Alan during the afternoon, which became markedly slow going, as the heat set in and the children notably slowed their play down.*

We discussed how there had been some tension, mainly in language when Assemble had first arrived at the site. There had been an initial feeling of distrust in the community. Alan said this was natural, as far as he was concerned, the 'outsider', with the London accents. However, this was momentary as Assemble collaborated with workers from the area, including himself, and the community became accustomed to the situation. They could see what Assemble were trying to achieve, they got involved at board level and it became about themselves not about an architecture collective from London. This was apparent in the Yarn dialogue, as Fran revealed that Assemble had, 'recently been doing some work relating to Elinor Ostrom's work on common pool resource management. I think these ideas are totally fundamental to the idea of collective, and how you can be effective'.<sup>572</sup> Common Pool Resource management (CPR) is a 'common-pool resource, such as a lake or ocean, an irrigation system, a fishing ground, a forest, or the atmosphere, is a natural or man-made resource from which it is difficult to exclude or limit users once the resource is provided, and one person's consumption of

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<sup>572</sup>Frances Edgerley, 'Here we go!', (para.2 of 2).

resource units makes those units unavailable to others'.<sup>573</sup> Ostrom's argued that, standard models of 'public good' have moved towards individualisation through what has become known as the 'zero contribution thesis'.<sup>574</sup> This essentially disputed the idea of collective action in favour of self-interest.<sup>575</sup> Ostrom traced how this notion has been built into public policy and used as a way to introduce top-down measures of coercion and incentive culture.<sup>576</sup> However, Ostrom presented numerous empirical and theoretical studies which contradict these assumptions.<sup>577</sup> Ostrom outlined a set of conditions which can lead to sustained collective action, these included, '1) Clearly defined boundaries; 2) Proportional equivalence between benefits and costs; 3) Collective choice arrangements; 4) Monitoring; 5) Graduated sanctions; 6) Fast and fair conflict resolution; 7) Local autonomy; 8) Appropriate relations with other tiers of rule-making authority (polycentric governance)'.<sup>578</sup> In the case of BSAP there is a limitation of land and also material resources, however, the most pressing finite resource is the function of the playground in general. The reason the BSAP was initiated in the first instance was the result of a lack of outdoor play facilities in the local area. I noticed that each day numbers seemed to increase to at least 150 children. This number of 'users' would become an issue if not managed appropriately. A facet of Ostrom's research into CPR becomes particularly important, and it centres on local autonomy. The most effective area of Assemble's practice is the concept of working with a community and to foster local autonomy. Elements of Ostrom's thinking are clearly represented in the management and evolution of BSAP from its non-hierarchical structure to its local autonomy.

*I was exhausted by the end of the day and was ready to leave. I helped the staff clear up and we locked up for the night. The next morning would be my last few hours in at the BSAP before I headed home. I had become accustomed to the routine and its quirks, the*

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<sup>573</sup>Elinor Ostrom, 'Coping with tragedies of the commons', *ANNUAL REVIEW OF POLITICAL SCIENCE*, Vol.2,1 (1999), p.497.

<sup>574</sup>*Ibid*, pp.97-535.

<sup>575</sup>Elinor Ostrom, 'Collective Action and the Evolution of Social Norms', *The Journal of Economic perspectives*, Vol.14, 3 (2000), pp.137-158.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid*, pp.137-140.

<sup>577</sup>*Ibid*, pp.137-158.

<sup>578</sup>David Sloan Wilson, 'The Tragedy of the Commons: How Elinor Ostrom Solved One of Life's Greatest Dilemmas' *Economics: The Next Evolution of Economics* (2016) <<http://evonomics.com/tragedy-of-the-commons-elinor-ostrom/>> [accessed 02/02/2019].



*conversations with everyone on site was heartening. This was about community, about the sociality of life.*

*The final morning was hectic, it seemed there was a growing number of children attending the playground each day. Indeed, the Playground was welcoming numbers of children approaching triple figures. I had become part of the team by this point sharing less-guarded conversation. Interestingly, I received a lot of praise for my 'non-southern' accent, I had explained how I grew up in Cumbria and Irene suggested that this had helped when I talked to the children as my accent was not completely alien to them. I felt closer to the community at this point, I had even seen a couple of people that evening during a walk to the Tesco for my evening meal, and they had waved and acknowledged my presence. There had of course, been much discussion about the appalling end to England's journey in the FIFA World Cup, as my visit coincided with the defeat to Croatia. I felt that this defeat helped my presence in the playground as everyone wanted England to lose, so they were all quite happy. I enjoyed this 'banter' and it generally aided cohesion of my interaction with people. I actually felt quite sad to be leaving, I had discovered something more than an architecture project. It was collectivism at its most potent, community, community and some more community.*

Assemble's ambition for BSAP was characterised by an everchanging dialogue intertwined with forces of separation and inclusion. Assemble's ambition appears to move towards BSAP having complete control and autonomy over how it is run as was articulated in a statement by Anthony Engi Meacock, a member of Assemble. Meacock stated that they aimed to, 'blur boundaries between the designer, builder and public. With the public becoming on-going collaborators, participants and eventual owners of the project'.<sup>579</sup> This sense of ownership is particularly pertinent to understanding Assemble's practice because it is an extension of the complex internal forms of relational power dynamics. However, how this dynamic externally manifests is unpredictable as I will now explore in another project.

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<sup>579</sup>Anthony Engi Meacock, 'Baltic Street Adventure Playground' <<https://agile-city.com/agile-city-research/blurring-social-boundaries-play/>>[accessed 23/08/2019], (para.4 of 8).

## ***Granby Workshop- Liverpool***

Granby Workshop is a project established by Assemble a part of their continued dialogue with the Granby area of Liverpool. The area has a similar story to Dalmarnock, as an area of economic deprivation and famous for the Toxteth Riots in the 1980s.<sup>580</sup> The riots which were contextualised in deep racial tensions were characterised by political William E. Nelson as, ‘rooted in the post-World War II movement into Britain of Black from the West Indies’.<sup>581</sup> Clashes with the police and local authority over increasingly racial targeted governmental policy throughout the 1970s and 1980s led to further economic and social decline in the area over the past thirty years.<sup>582</sup> However, this is not the only narrative to frame this case study. Resistance groups and self-organisation in the face of hardship traces its way through the hearts and minds of the residents of Granby.<sup>583</sup> The Workshop is part of this discourse of self-determination. From the Workshop’s inception in 2015 it has aimed to produce architectural ceramics inspired by the material history of the neighbourhood.<sup>584</sup> The Workshop has since grown and developed securing commissions from the Victoria and Albert Museum and The Venice Biennial.<sup>585</sup>

*As I pulled up to Granby Market the first thing I became aware of was the music. There was a rhythmic beat of drums and a sense of a carnival atmosphere. It was a heady mix of different jazz styles from multiple traditions.<sup>586</sup> The road had been closed off and the community were out in force. As I made my way around the stalls on Granby Street, there was the typical mix of miscellaneous items coupled with some interesting local art and products. These items were from diverse backgrounds, in fact, the diversity within the community was the first real impression I had of both the stall holders and the visitors.*

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<sup>580</sup>William E. Nelson, *Black Atlantic Politics: Dilemmas of Political Empowerment in Boston and Liverpool* (New York: State of New York Press, 2000).

<sup>581</sup>*Ibid*, p.197.

<sup>582</sup>*Ibid*, pp.197-230.

<sup>583</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>584</sup>Assemble, ‘Granby Workshop’ (2019) <<https://assemblestudio.co.uk/projects/granby-workshop>> [accessed 23/06/2019].

<sup>585</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>586</sup>Granby four Streets, CLT, *Granby Street Market* <<https://www.granby4streetsclt.co.uk/street-market>> [accessed 12/02/2019].

The history of the market began more than a decade ago with a small table top sale hosted by a single resident and then developed over the years into a 60-70 stall event.<sup>587</sup> The Granby market is now run by Granby Four Streets Community Land Trust (CLT), and is thus owned by the community.<sup>588</sup>

Assemble's role in this state of affairs is to work directly with the CLT as a creative partner. The approach is 'characterised by celebrating the value of the area's architectural and cultural heritage, supporting public involvement and partnership working, offering local training and employment opportunities and nurturing the resourcefulness and DIY spirit that defines the four streets'.<sup>589</sup>

The CLT, which includes Beaconsfield Street, Cairns Street, Ducie Street, Jermyn Street and Granby Street, was legally recognised in 2011 but its historical discourse is long and intertwined with the political and social landscape of Liverpool and the wider UK. During the post war years, the area was a hive of activity with an ethnically and racially diverse community including one of the oldest black communities in the UK.<sup>590</sup> However, decades of decline began to bite as a succession of Government and Council "re-generation" schemes demolished great swathes of Victorian housing in the Toxteth area.<sup>591</sup> This of course is a familiar story, albeit in different context, to the situation in Dalmarnock.

The result was a rise in unemployment, dereliction of the area and "managed decline".<sup>592</sup> Tracey Gore, CLT board member and director of the Steve Biko Housing Association, illuminated the situation, 'of course, the riots happened in the midst of this, in the early 80s- so the stigma of the area, Granby as a 'bad area', as 'unsafe' was magnified'.<sup>593</sup> The council used these myths as an excuse to asset strip and suspend bin collections. Their goal, according to Gore, was to allow the corporate housing association (the result of privatisation of the housing market) to re-build the area because in reality people wanted to live there, it was a prime location.<sup>594</sup>

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<sup>587</sup>Ellen Kirwin, 'Meet the People from Granby Four Streets- the community market that EVERY Scouser needs to experience', *Liverpool echo* (2018) <<https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/meet-people-granby-four-streets-14990920>> [accessed 12/02/2019].

<sup>588</sup>Granby four Streets, CLT, *Granby Street Market*.

<sup>589</sup>Assemble, 'Granby Four Streets', (2019) <<https://assemblestudio.co.uk/projects/granby-four-streets-2>> [accessed 23/06/2019], (para.3 of 5).

<sup>590</sup>Granby four Streets CLT, 'History of Granby Four Streets ' (2019) <<https://www.granby4streetsclt.co.uk/history-of-the-four-streets>> [accessed 13/02/2019].

<sup>591</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>592</sup>Hazel Tilley, 'You'd lie there in the night and hear a piece of wood go' *Granby Workshop Catalogue* (2015), pp. 48-49.

<sup>593</sup>Tracey Gore, 'Housing in Granby', p.42.

<sup>594</sup>*Ibid*, p.42.

These factors led to the community which remained in the area forming the Granby Residents Association (GRA) in 1993.<sup>595</sup> The GRA lobbied to try and halt the increased demolition of the Granby area which was the result of the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Pathfinder Programme - a New Labour initiative intended as a strategy, 'to renew failing housing markets and reconnect them to regional markets, to improve neighbourhoods and to encourage people to live and work in these areas'.<sup>596</sup> However, this scheme played out as an excuse to flatten Granby with plans to "re-generate" the entire area.<sup>597</sup>

The GRA was eventually disbanded as it appeared the Housing Market Renewal scheme had achieved its purpose. However, it was at this time that some of the local residents started to take matters into their own hands once again and they, 'organised a guerrilla gardening group, to green the streets with tubs and wild planting', they organised a market selling Caribbean food and cleaned up the waste in the streets.<sup>598</sup> It was at this time that the HMR scheme was abandoned by the in-coming Coalition Government due to cuts on public spending.<sup>599</sup> This allowed the CLT to finally mobilise and start changing the conversation. In 2012, the council put the Four Streets out to tender. The winner, however, did not follow through.<sup>600</sup> The CLT wrote to the council suggesting a different approach with multiple developers all working together to share the risk.<sup>601</sup> This was the breakthrough which the residents had been dreaming of for many years. The CLT now collectively owns the land and the houses were taken off the market and leased to individuals at an affordable rate for the area.<sup>602</sup> Dr Matthew Thompson suggested that CLTs are, 'distinct from either private or public, state or market

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<sup>595</sup>Granby four Streets CLT, 'History of Granby Four Streets ' (2019) <<https://www.granby4streetsclt.co.uk/history-of-the-four-streets>> [accessed 13/02/2019].

<sup>596</sup>Wendy Wilson, 'Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders' (2013) <<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN05953>> [accessed 23/01/2019].

<sup>597</sup>Granby four Streets CLT, 'History of Granby Four Streets' (2019) <<https://www.granby4streetsclt.co.uk/history-of-the-four-streets>>[accessed 13/02/2019].

<sup>598</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>599</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>600</sup>Marc Waddington, 'Liverpool council pulls plug on £25m housing regeneration scheme in south Liverpool', *Liverpool Echo* (2012)<<https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/liverpool-council-pulls-plug-25m-3328587>> [accessed 29/07/2019].

<sup>601</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>602</sup>Matthew Thompson, 'What exactly is a Community Land Trust?', p.56.

forms of property- CLTs do things differently. They combine some of the best parts of individual homeownership with renting from a housing association to create a distinctive mutual model'.<sup>603</sup>

Assemble's involvement in the project arose after the community had formed the CLT and were beginning to change the area. Erika Rushton, chair of the community land trust, stated that, 'Assemble are the only ones who have ever sat and listened to the residents, and then translated their vision into drawings and models, and now into reality'.<sup>604</sup> This statement re-iterates Assemble's continued relationship with people and places. Through a constant conversation and dialogue which is never completely resolved. Their involvement in the area is not a monologic situation of 'middle class artist collective helping out in a deprived area'.<sup>605</sup> It is a collective partnership of community authorship and experimental endeavour. Assemble bring obvious expertise, however, it is the vision of the community and the residents which has driven the area. I will now return to my reflective account.

*As I carried on past the stalls, I talked to several of the holders-residents. The Granby Market was held on the first of every month and it was a real community get together [fig, 28]. The smells from the outdoor grills enthused by the music transported my senses elsewhere. There was a ceramic and print stall which caught my eye as I made my way through the throng of people. I had wondered whether I would feel out of place as an outsider to the area, but it was one of the most welcoming places I had visited since BSAP.*

This was echoed by co-founder of the Trust, Hazel Tilly, 'It brings people together who live in the area and it brings people from outside the area here too'.<sup>606</sup> It was the constant dynamic interplay between the residents-outsiders and the individual-community which played out in a specific location of the market, and thus rooted in the discourse of Granby. The market functioned as a larger 'suprasystem' in which the plethora of relationships, however different from each other, could

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<sup>603</sup>Matthew Thompson, p.56.

<sup>604</sup>Erika Rushton, 'Granby four Streets', *Archello.com* <<https://archello.com/project/granby-four-streets>> [accessed 13/02/2019].

<sup>605</sup>Stephen Pritchard, 'Caught Doing Social Work? - socially engaged art and the dangers of becoming social workers', *Culture Matters.org* (2018) <<https://culturematters.org.uk/index.php/culture/theory/itemlist/user/780-stephenpritchard>> [accessed 23/10/2019].

<sup>606</sup>Hazel Tilly, 'Meet the People from Granby Four Streets- the community market that EVERY Scouser needs to experience', *Liverpool echo* (2018) <<https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/meet-people-granby-four-streets-14990920>> [accessed 12/02/2019].

develop.<sup>607</sup> The market acted similarly to BSAP in Dalmarnock, it was both part of the wider Granby community and a connection or conduit space to the external ‘people who live outside’. The market is only held on the first of every month, thus it had a temporal significance of revelation-concealment allowing its boundaries to be defined. This constant interplay of revelation and concealment played out through the relationships which I observed. There were local sets of friendships, family bonds and local acquaintances all communicating both on stalls and within the market in general. Then there were the obviously external visitors which I overheard at times, either engaged in the transaction of buying goods or discussing their visit in general. These interactions were in constant interplay between openness-closedness dialectical tensions. For example, I enquired into one of the postcards on the ceramic and painting stall and overheard an interaction between a stall holder and a visitor. The conversation was in the context of buying a product, and as a result, the dynamic interplay between openness-closedness was in the specific language which was limited to the transaction of trade and to the discussion of the product being sold. As Baxter asserted, this was only a partial or fragment of an appreciation of each party within a specific social and societal norm.<sup>608</sup> However, there were also a myriad of other relationships both internal and external, and every other dyad between and within. The market was a dynamic knot of dialectical tensions which created the flux and change of both perceptions of the parties involved, and also the wider discourse of the area.

*As I exited the market area my next mission was to find Granby Workshop. Located in an old newsagents’ shop [fig, 29], it was deceptive at first glance I nearly walked passed the entrance. The space inside was a cross between a studio, workshop and a house. There was a distinct smell of clay and plaster. Every available space seemed to be filled with shelves for the ceramics which were being produced. There was a bustle about the place and there must have been five or six sets of visitors entering or leaving in a matter of minutes. I glimpsed a whole host of rooms in the Victorian terrace building. All appeared to house kilns and other assorted ceramic making equipment. This workshop was in full swing, oozing creativity,*

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<sup>607</sup>Baxter and Montgomery, *Dialogues & Dialectics*, p. 10.

<sup>608</sup>Baxter, ‘Relationships as dialogue’, p.12.

*which was signified by the thin layer of plaster covering all the machines and several of the work surfaces. As I walked around the small space, I briefly talked to Sumuyya Khader, the operation manager of the workshop, as I had been introduced to Sumuyya by Fran. This conversation was brief because the workshop was busy, and I was conscious that Sumuyya was running the sale of the many different products the workshop was producing.*

Granby Workshop was established by Assemble as ‘a means of continuing to support and encourage the kind of hands on activity that has brought immense change in the area’.<sup>609</sup> Of course, this is the method in which Assemble operate, it is their *raison d’être*. The workshop, just as the BSAP, was run by local people and residents of the area.

The conversation with Sumuyya centred on how Assemble had set up the workshop, in collaboration with the residents and the local community, with the aim of community-led ownership rather than Assemble leading the running of the workshop and its future direction.<sup>610</sup> Akin to BSAP, Granby Workshop operates as a social enterprise, and the revenue is invested back into the business.<sup>611</sup> Sumuyya began to talk about the connection the workshop had with the market. The workshop was essentially open to the public on the market days and it was clearly a successful, as there was a constant stream of visitors moving in and out of the workshop.

It was apparent from the way Sumuyya talked about the workshop and the area that it meant a great deal, not just personally but also for the entire community. Indeed, it is vital to recognise that the workshop is both part of the community, originally established for the renovating of the Granby homes, and part of Assemble’s ongoing projects. This is yet again the “both/and” quality in play, because the workshop operates in the community and is of the community, however, it is interlinked with Assemble and thus the complex web of socio-cultural discourse of another set of relationships. This complexity is highlighted in a statement on the Granby Workshop’s website, ‘the Workshop has since grown considerably, a process accelerated by being awarded the Turner Prize in 2015, and now

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<sup>609</sup>Assemble, ‘Granby Workshop Catalogue 2015’, eds., Niamh Riordan (2015), p.3.

<sup>610</sup>Sumuyya Khader, ‘Conversation with Sumuyya’, Granby Workshop (01/11/2018).

<sup>611</sup>Emma Tucker, ‘Assemble’s Granby Workshop social enterprise in Liverpool will sell locally produced homeware’ (2015) <<https://www.dezeen.com/2015/10/23/assembles-granby-workshop-social-enterprise-liverpool-locally-produced-homeware-assemble/>> [accessed 12/02/2019].

undertakes a range of commissions, supplying its distinctive architectural ceramics worldwide'.<sup>612</sup>

This statement reinforces the fact that Granby, a community, is in a constant state of flux or change and that, in this sense, Assemble have entered into a relationship with a community already engaged in creating its own future. The relationship between Assemble and Granby was further positioned in the Yarn dialogue,

I think our practice, where it is interesting, is fundamentally interested in architecture as self-determination - that is why we set up Blackhorse workshop, Baltic street adventure playground, and originally the idea behind Granby workshop. The level at which these ideas are realised varies greatly at different points through time.<sup>613</sup>

This self-determination appears to concur with my observations and conversations with Sumuyya and at BSAP. The second sentence in this statement alludes to how this self-determination is negotiated and marked by change over time. Montgomery and Baxter suggested that the, 'self becomes only in relating' and this both produces and reproduces an 'historical-cultural-social milieu'.<sup>614</sup> In this case, both Assemble, and Granby workshop 'found' self-determination in each other, and this played out as a varied 'realisation' over a time period. It is thus not a linear set of changes but a multiplicity of dialogue from different perspectives shaping the ongoing relationship. These forces are not searching for a synthesis or a 'merged consciousness', it is an ongoing centrifugal-centripetal set of forces acting throughout the dialogue. This played out most profoundly in the nomination and subsequent award of the Turner Prize. Whether both parties wanted to admit it or not, this was a moment of change. Indeed, change and self-determination are key concepts of the artist-led collective, they define collective practices and often set collectives apart from other artist-led entities which may have formal organisational structures.

A relationship has developed between Granby and Assemble, and the fact that this relationship has happened reveals a set of questions regarding the hierarchical institutional power structures of the art world. If I return to the statement on the Granby Workshop website, 'the Workshop has since grown considerably, a process accelerated by being awarded the Turner Prize in 2015, and now undertakes a

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<sup>612</sup>Granby Workshop, 'About' (2019) <<https://granbyworkshop.co.uk/about/>> [accessed 12/02/2019].

<sup>613</sup>Frances Edgerley, 'Here we go!', (para. 2 of 2).

<sup>614</sup>Montgomery and Baxter, *Dialectical Approaches to Studying Personal Relationships*, p.158.



range of commissions, supplying its distinctive architectural ceramics worldwide’, it is clear that the award of the Turner Prize, ‘accelerated’ the process, thus opening further levels of exposure and commissions.<sup>615</sup> This was characterised by subsequent commissions for the Venice Architecture Biennial, being collected by the Victoria and Albert (V&A) museum and the Crafts Council.<sup>616</sup> The dialogue between Assemble and the residents of Granby created a relationship which was then recognised by the selection jury of the Turner Prize, itself funded by the Tate in 2015.<sup>617</sup> By recognising Assemble’s activity within Granby, the Turner Prize jurors were also implicitly recognizing the Granby community as winners of the prize. This not only practically injected funds into the project but, as suggested by the Granby website, it opened the workshop to the wider conversation within the art world.<sup>618</sup> Of course, the prize was never the intention of both parties. It occurred however, because Granby entered into a dialogue with Assemble, whom were already and always implicated within the various echelons of the art establishment. There is another dialogue at play within this dynamic which was characterised by the “will of the jurors”. Adrian Searle elaborated on this factor,

I am unsurprised that Assemble have won, given that one of the current Turner judges, Alistair Hudson, director of Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (mima), views his museum as a service to the community, a facility rather than a place where big-shot artists have major shows.<sup>619</sup>

Indeed, perhaps a cynic would also point out that Assemble are prevalent in two cities with which the Tate has its residence. Whether this was ‘tapping’ into the anti-gallery turn or an attempt to expand the boundaries of an institution, the fact remains that the choice was made, and the dialogue opened.<sup>620</sup> I will now return to my reflective account from the Granby Workshop.

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<sup>615</sup>Granby Workshop, ‘About’ (2019).

<sup>616</sup>Granby Workshop, ‘About’ (2019) <<https://granbyworkshop.co.uk/about/>> [accessed 12/02/2019].

<sup>617</sup>The Tate, ‘Governance’ (2019) <<https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/governance>> [accessed 14/02/2019]. And, Morgan Quaintance, ‘Freedom of Information Request’, Tate Ref: 644 (2017) <[https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/382061/response/937225/attach/3/FOI%20644%20Letter%20to%20Morgan%20Quaintance.pdf?cookie\\_passthrough=1](https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/382061/response/937225/attach/3/FOI%20644%20Letter%20to%20Morgan%20Quaintance.pdf?cookie_passthrough=1)> [accessed 14/02/2019].

<sup>618</sup>Assemble used the prize money, funded by Tate, to re-invest in the Granby Workshop, Adrian Searle, ‘Power to the people! Assemble win the Turner prize by ignoring the art market’, *Guardian Online* (2015) <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/dec/07/turner-prize-2015-assemble-win-by-ignoring-art-market>> [accessed 14/02/2019].

<sup>619</sup>Adrian Searle, ‘Power to the people! Assemble win the Turner prize by ignoring the art market’ (para.8 of 8).

<sup>620</sup>Claire Bishop, ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents’, *Artforum*, Vol.44, No 6 (2006).

*I decided to head out of the busy environment to take some photographs from the outside. As I rounded the corner, I found a gridded set of tiles on the outside of the building [fig, 30]. These tiles were the ‘Cut-Out Tiles’, and I had noticed they were available to buy in bulk or as singles in the micro shop within the workshop. According to the workshop catalogue the tiles were inspired ‘by vegetation or spontaneously random- the design on each tile is different, and characteristic of its maker’.<sup>621</sup> I remember seeing them in several promotional photographs for the Turner Prize in 2015.<sup>622</sup> I decided to go back inside and to take a closer look at the tiles, I was compelled to purchase two of the large single tiles [fig, 31].*

The tiles seemed to be symbolic of Granby Workshop as they resonated with the Victorian heritage of the buildings.<sup>623</sup> The tiles also served another set of significations, the free form cut out shapes represented the self-determined work ethic embedded in the social memory of the Granby. The tiles were crafted rather than machine made and there seemed to be an entanglement of care and skill about these tiles that became almost purposeful in their apparent random form. These tiles, and indeed much of the ceramic production of the workshop, have also taken on a significance within the international art world. Assemble and Granby Workshop installed 8,000 tiles on the floor of the Chini Room for the 2018 Architecture La Biennale di Venezia [fig, 32].<sup>624</sup> These tiles were different from the ‘cut out’ form as they employed an adaption of the encaustic tile process,

Encaustic tiles were originally popularised by the Victorians, who valued their durability and vibrance, using them to pave the floors of many of that era’s grandest buildings. Granby Workshop were interested in rethinking this type of tile by applying their unique, experimental manufacturing ethos to this historic process. Blocks of clay are marbled together by hand, sliced and flattened in a 60 tonne hydraulic press, meaning every tile is different. They are suitable for interior and exterior use on floors and walls.<sup>625</sup>

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<sup>621</sup>Assemble, ‘Cut Out Tiles’, *Granby Workshop Catalogue 2015*, p.32.

<sup>622</sup>Assemble, ‘Tateshots’, (2015) [video] <<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/other-venue/exhibition/turner-prize-2015/turner-prize-2015-artists-assemble>> [accessed 14/02/2019], (1 minute, 19 seconds).

<sup>623</sup>Leslie Durbin, *Architectural Tiles Conservation and Restoration*, orig eds Butterworth-Heinemann 2005 (London: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>624</sup>La Biennale di Venezia, ‘Participants’, *The Factory Floor* (2018) <<https://www.labiennale.org/en/partecipants/assemble>> [accessed 14/02/2019].

<sup>625</sup>Granby Workshop, ‘Catalogue’ (2019) <<https://granbyworkshop.co.uk/catalogue/encaustic-tiles/>> [accessed 14/02/2019].

The symbolic use of these tiles reveals the unconscious historical relationships between collectivisms past and the spectre of Pugin and Ruskin. In an article for the Dublin Review, Pugin argued that

Unless [the ancient glazed and figured tile pavement] be revived, our churches will never produce the rich and harmonious effect of the ancient ones. The specimens now remaining of these ornamented tile floors are in general so worn and mutilated that they convey but a very imperfect idea of their pristine beauty to a general observer; but their effect on a grand scale, such as in the chapter-houses of Salisbury, Winchester, or York, must have been truly splendid; their manufacture has been lately most successfully revived in the Potteries. The chancel of the conventual chapel at Birmingham, and that of St. John's Hospital, Alton, have already been laid after the ancient manner with great effect; and it is proposed to lay the whole floor of St. Giles's church, now erecting at Cheadle [...] In churches where much gilding and colour is introduced, these incrusting tiles of various hues are indispensable to produce harmony of effect: for if so large a surface as the pavement is left of a dull uniform tint, whilst the rest of the building is covered with diaper and ornament, the contrast will be painfully striking.<sup>626</sup>

The use of these encaustic tiles referenced this history and echoes both Pugin and Ruskin's derision of the manufacturing process which removed the hand-crafted element from design and architecture.<sup>627</sup>

Assemble and the Granby Workshops affinity with these tiles appears to embody this same ideological position. They stated that '[w]e were interested in rethinking the encaustic tile by applying our experimental manufacturing ethos to this historic process'.<sup>628</sup> In a similar way to Pugin's advocacy the 'grand scale' use of the tiles, Assemble implemented them in vast quantities for the Venice Biennial [fig, 33].

The installation of *The Factory Floor*, at the 16th International Architecture Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, was a site of dynamic interplay between often contradictory dialectical forces. The world of biennials, particularly Venice, operates with a particularly capitalist and neoliberal set of forces.<sup>629</sup>

This situation was characterised by Yahya M. Madra's critique of the Biennale, where corporate funding has replaced national funding, Madra suggested that it 'would probably be stating the obvious to remind the reader that the new patrons are the transnational corporations'.<sup>630</sup> Of course, I must

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<sup>626</sup>Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, *The Present State of Ecclesiastical Architecture in England*, (London: Charles Dolman, 1843), pp.19-20.

<sup>627</sup>John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, Vol, 3, orig edn. 1851-53 (London: George Allen, 1905).

<sup>628</sup>Assemble, 'Assemble's Granby Workshop releases "extremely vibrant" Encaustic Tiles' Dezeen (2018) <<https://www.dezeen.com/2018/09/26/assemble-granby-workshop-encaustic-tiles-extremely-vibrant/>>[accessed 23/06/2019].

<sup>629</sup>Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents'.

<sup>630</sup>Yahya M. Madra, 'From Imperialism to Transnational Capitalism: The Venice Biennial as a "Transitional Conjuncture"', *Rethinking Marxism A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society*, Vol. 18, No.4 (2006), p.529.

qualify that the 16<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition was a separate biennial from the La Biennale di Venezia, however it is run by the same foundation and is an extension of the brand.<sup>631</sup> There is contradiction at play in terms of how Granby Workshop operates as a community-led practice and part of the community-land trust, and the overtly corporate and institutionalised space of the Biennial. On the face of it, these two worlds seem intrinsically different. Indeed, it was the neo-liberalising forces behind several public policies, which contributed, in part, to the decline of Granby. Of course, this is an indirect power relation. I am not suggesting the Venice Biennale is responsible for problems which Granby faced and are still facing. However, this contradiction is akin to the Turner Prize context, where fundamentally different parties come into dialogue with each other in a specific moment. In this case the moment was a set of utterances of becoming but never being. In order to explain what I am referring to here, I will return to Madra's critique,

Without doubt, this dual transition (the simultaneous radicalization of art practice and the corporatization of art funding) needed a new institutional form. As it has become impossible to sell art as a "sublimated" object- the very premise of critical art practices has been to deconstruct the object-hood of art- the need for new institutional forms, that would substitute for the art galleries and auctions where art used to be exchanged, has become more and more urgent. I believe that the institution of the biennial is one such form.<sup>632</sup>

Madra's statement revealed the centrifugal-centripetal forces which pervaded this relationship system. Before I carry on this analysis, I would like to qualify that the actual installation at the Biennale is also part of the dialogue. In this case, there was a dialectical set of unified contradictions of certainty-uncertainty and novelty-predictability at play in the dialogue between all the relationship parties. The Biennale requires the constant movement towards novelty provided by contemporary art and architecture, in order to address the implicit contradiction of 'radicalisation' and 'corporate funding'.<sup>633</sup> This, in turn, is as predictable as it is certain, and thus one cannot acknowledge certainty without uncertainty and vice versa. As a partnership, Granby Workshop and Assemble were in the moment of biennial context, and thus moving towards the institutional form through the

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<sup>631</sup>La Biennale di Venezia, 'landing page' (2018) <<https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2018>> [accessed 14/02/2019].

<sup>632</sup>Yahya M. Madra, p.528.

<sup>633</sup>*Ibid.*

commissioning and curatorial process, yet at the same time they were moving away. The movement away was characterised by their non-hierarchical, community-led dialogue. This dynamic which can be described through a meta-narrative of connection-autonomy twists like a spiralling helix. As a result, there is not a hierarchy of agency i.e. the biennial attempting to re-appropriate or co-opt Granby and Assemble. The relationship is more complex in a dialectical system, because the centrifugal forces of certainty, connection and predictability are not 'favoured' over the centripetal forces, and further still, they are 'stripped of their negative connotations of non-progress. Thus, movement and change assume a rightful and significant meaning in the moment'.<sup>634</sup> Thus it is an ongoing dialogue 'located' in the utterances already spoken in the distant past- which includes Assemble and Granby's Turner Prize winning story. The utterances already spoken in the immediate conversation within the biennial context and the anticipated response of the addressee- in this case the visitors to the biennial. What remains is the anticipated response of the superaddressee- this is the wider societal discursive response to the moment, including the voices within this thesis.<sup>635</sup>

Granby Workshop never was what it seemed on the surface, a simple community-led articulation. It was a complex knot of relationships both internally and externally. As I walked out of the Granby area back towards the city centre, I became aware of its geographic location within the city of Liverpool as a totality. It was a matter of rethinking closeness, although its geographical position was relatively close to the city centre, Granby was distinct and separate. This was noticeable both architecturally by the shift from Victorian building to gentrified Georgian town houses, and through the sudden change in actions and mannerisms of the people within both areas. Everyone was in transit as I moved towards the city centre, the pace was markedly faster, whereas, there was a relaxed, meandering, and un-hyped quality to the people in the Granby area. Indeed, this directionality, will be discussed further in relation to artist-led collectives in the forthcoming chapters.

Through an exploration of the Granby Workshop and Baltic Street Adventure Playground projects it has become apparent that Assemble project their ideological perspective of self-building, autonomy

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<sup>634</sup>Montgomery and Baxter, *Dialectical Approaches to Studying Personal Relationships*, p.161.

<sup>635</sup>Baxter and Montgomery, *Dialogues & Dialectics*, p.29.

and socially engaged practice. These elements are typical significations of the word ‘collective’ and present themselves internally within the core collective. These traits played out in the relationships which I witnessed at Sugarhouse studios. However, they become infinitely more complex when applied as working practices to projects in the different socio-economic and geo-political contexts of Granby and Dalmarnock. As Fran stated in the Yarn Community dialogue, ‘I think the appetite for political applications of our work is very diverse within the group. [G]enerally people just want to feel excited, like they’re learning and have self-determination’.<sup>636</sup> It is clear that Assemble think these forms of working practices can be extrapolated to external projects. In both Granby and Dalmarnock this autonomy is always complex because the projects are delicately intertwined in class struggle, gentrification, and race relations. In these projects Assemble have become facilitators, involved in elements of governance, but with the clear desire to work with the specific communities in order to shift the power balance towards a form of self-governance and determination that is born from the desire for change. This role of facilitator is incredibly important because Assemble are inherently embedded in a position of privilege and to enact socially engaged projects with communities in different socio-cultural positions could potential become problematic at best and at worst seen as active exploitation. As a collective there is a demarcation between projects like Granby and BSAP. The people involved in these projects are separate from the core members of Assemble, yet at the same time because of Assemble’s status within the art world these projects are often seen as being ‘owned’ by Assemble.<sup>637</sup> This is the constant tension that is generated throughout Assemble’s discourse. Interestingly, this tension does not exist, at least in the same way, between the people directly involved in each project. I argue that Assemble are both implicit and resistant to the forces of gentrification and it is this contradiction which constantly unfolds.

Throughout this case study there has been a sense that friendships, acquaintances, and social relations in all their complexities and expanded forms, are of vital importance, both to the formation of Assemble and their ongoing dialogue with themselves and the communities which they work with in

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<sup>636</sup>Fran Edgerley, ‘Here we go!’ (para.1 of 2).

<sup>637</sup>Stephen Pritchard, ‘Artwashing and Gentrification’ (2018) <<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2018/04/27/artwashing-and-gentrification/>> [accessed 23/08/2019].

many different socio-political contexts. As has become apparent this friendship is an interplay between the institutional and non-institutional, playing out through multiplicities never fixed and constantly in a state of flux. Over the forthcoming chapters I will question the dialectics of friendship and the artist-led collective in more detail.

## **Chapter 4: In-depth Case Study - The Cool Couple**

The constellations of the contemporary artist-led collective consist of a multiverse of interrelationships and manifestations. An enigma within the cosmos are collective duos' which exist as a relationship between two people and as such represent the minimum requirement for the word 'collective' to assigned. However, does that make these duos artist-led collectives, and if so why? Are duos simply collaborations between artists? What boundaries and differences can be ascertained? Posing these questions is essential to move towards a theoretical and practical understanding of the contemporary artist-led collective.

The role of friendship within collective duos is also of importance in order to understand how they form. The argument which frames the following investigation was that friendship and the development of sustained engagement beyond the act of a single project or happenstance, can bring about change which may begin as a collaboration but they move towards collectivism. Within this specific dialectical interplay, there are sets of tensions that are always acting upon the relationship. They reveal themselves in autonomy-connectedness, dependence-independence, closedness-openness. I argue that it is the constant negotiation throughout space-time which shifts the notion of collaboration into a collective because it is in these negotiations with the other that a level of creativity occurs when authorship and ownership are de-stabilised. The collaborative still has a strong notion of independence from the other as is revealed in the definition of the word, 'the act of working together with other people or organizations to create or achieve something'.<sup>638</sup> Although this may appear similar to the definition of the 'collective' there are specific differences in the notions of independence-dependence dialectic. Collaborations act to create something very specific; the collective may not have a centralised goal but instead a set of shared ideological positions with which they attempt to act upon as a unitary force. This unitary force is of course always in dialectical tension but nevertheless, the difference is its sustained tendency towards fleeting movements of totality over a

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<sup>638</sup>Cambridge Dictionary, 'Collaboration' <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/collaboration>> [accessed 20/07/19].



longer period of time. It is this contradiction which shapes the collectivism in art and is perhaps at its most distinctive and concentrated in the collective duo. Once again, I utilised Yarn Community as a platform to engage with TCC and explore the dialectical tensions in play.

### *Introducing The Cool Couple*

The Cool Couple (TCC) was formed in late 2012 by artists Niccolò Benetton and Simone Santilli in Milan, Italy.<sup>639</sup> The duo self-identify as a ‘collective’ through an understanding of the word and its connotations. In the Yarn Community dialogue TCC state that, ‘[w]e are a collective. We are two, as it is clear from the choice of our name, The Cool Couple [...] individual identities aren’t important because TCC is a sort of brand’.<sup>640</sup> The word collective, in this context, has multiple functions. It refers to their relationship with each other and simultaneously to their practice. What is revealed in these interrelations is the *raison d’être* behind their inclusion in this thesis. The word ‘brand’ signifies one the most complex and significant dialectical contradictions which reveals itself in the interplay between the collective and commodification. This contradiction was explored by Nicola McCartney in relation to how collectives can appear to adopt elements of ‘the contemporary art group [which] might sometimes appear to act in a similar way to larger corporations, museums and galleries by having shared spaces, designated roles, coherent branding and a manifesto’.<sup>641</sup> Similarly, Sholette explored these connotations in relation to the development of ‘a new urban lifestyle woven from equal parts entrepreneurship and avant-garde dissent’.<sup>642</sup> For Sholette, this contradiction is illuminated by the post-Fordist enterprise culture of the neoliberal, de-regulated art market, coupled with the increasing awareness of an ‘artistic ‘dark matter’ that infiltrates high schools, flea markets, public squares, corporate websites, city streets, housing projects, and local political machines in ways that do not set out to recover a specific meaning or use-value for art world discourse or private interests’.<sup>643</sup> TCC

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<sup>639</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘Who We Are’ (2017) <<http://thecoolcouple.co.uk/who-we-are/>> [accessed 17/10/2017].

<sup>640</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘John’s questions part 1’, *Yarn Community* (2017) <<https://yarncommunity.org/stories/556>> [accessed 20/10/2017], (para.3 of 5).

<sup>641</sup>McCartney, p.59.

<sup>642</sup>Sholette, *Dark Matter*, p.xiii.

<sup>643</sup>*Ibid*, p.4.

occupies this precarious existence by adopting the capitalist notion of brand advertising in a ‘knowing’, tactical way which is both co-opted by the forces of art market commodification and yet plays with its absurdity. TCC sell their ‘brand’, but in doing so bring into question the forces of authorship, commodification and art market saturation.

Contextually, there is a precedence for their inclusion, Francesco Spampinato influenced TCC in the way they have set up their working life.<sup>644</sup> In 2017, TCC interviewed Spampinato. In the interview Simone Santilli stated that ‘I bought your book a couple of years ago, it attracted me because, working in a collective, I have always been fascinated by the collective dynamics of cultural production in relation to authoriality [*sic*] and relationship with the public’.<sup>645</sup> This sentiment was echoed in an interview with Francesca Orsi for the visual anthropology journal *Urbanautica*.<sup>646</sup> In the interview, TCC suggests that ‘the way we work is based on collaboration in order to build a network that often counts many people more than we’.<sup>647</sup> It seems that from their inception they aimed for something greater than the sum of two. Although there is a rich discourse of collaborative artist duos such as Gilbert and George, Eva and Franco Mattes and Jake and Dinos Chapman, TCC are attempting to enter a process of ‘deleting our names and creating a third entity’.<sup>648</sup> This ‘third entity’ often requires engaging with other artists and even groups. In order to begin to question what constitutes an artist-led collective, this thesis must engage with the phenomenon of duos and their ambiguity within collective practices, because commentators such as Spampinato and Sholette often include them as case studies of collective activity

This sense of collective representation with which TCC express themselves could be thought of as problematising authorship. TCC effectively embody the word ‘collective’ as the authorship of the work is indistinguishable from each other. Although they are two individuals, they resist the need to proclaim separate ownership over their artwork.<sup>649</sup> They have achieved a level of complexity in their

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<sup>644</sup>Spampinato, *Come Together: The Rise of Cooperative Art and Design*.

<sup>645</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘Interview with Spampinato’ (2015) <<http://poiuyt.it/2017/05/02/the-cool-couple-francesco-spampinato/?lang=en>> [accessed 21/07/2019].

<sup>646</sup>Francesca Orsi, ‘The Cool Couple. Exploring a collective imagery’, *Urbanautica* (2015) <[http://www.urbanautica.com/index.php?az=edita\\_articolo&id\\_articolo=17](http://www.urbanautica.com/index.php?az=edita_articolo&id_articolo=17)> [accessed 21/07/2019].

<sup>647</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>648</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘John’s questions part 1’, (para.3 of 5).

<sup>649</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘Who We Are’ <<http://thecoolcouple.co.uk/who-we-are/>> [accessed 21/07/2019].

working practice which requires investigation. This is immediately problematic in the art world, and more specifically the art market, which is predicated upon the ideological notion of the individual artist as the archetypal authentic protagonist.<sup>650</sup>

It is thus their awareness and political sensibility to the signification of the word ‘collective’ which carries such an appeal. Their practice appears to be specifically focused upon *free play*, in the Derridean sense, of visual languages.<sup>651</sup> This free play is illustrated in the variety of projects and media in which TCC engages. They harness the collective potentials of image-making through the vast data sources available on the internet. The concept of ‘the image’ takes centre stage within their practice, specifically focusing on how the digital image forms and challenges the notions of materiality, authenticity, power, and ownership. An example of this interrelationship can be found in the film series *The Fluffy Wipe Case* which is composed of archival footage overlaid with text. The narrative ‘lies in some rumors about cleaning agencies operating in NATO military bases in Italy. The Fluffy Wipe is an electrostatic cloth that makes military planes impossible to be tracked by radar, and therefore invisible at all because almost nobody is able to distinguish a warplane in flight from whether a drone or a passenger plane’.<sup>652</sup> This is a political stance and one which questions the art market, the economics of a capitalist system and the potential disruption between objects and their collective representation. Their practice is almost ‘research-like’ as they explore different thematic positions to produce exhibitions, events, and network building. This is exemplified in their series *Karma Fails* which attempted to engage with the concept of the Anthropocene,

We approached the problem with a question: despite the fascination for geologic time scales, deep time, dystopian sceneries, the mainstream apocalyptic rhetoric and humanity self-subtle-celebration through the acknowledgment of its almost-divine agency on Earth, what kind of humanity is endowed with such a power? The answer is scary and discouraging, usually resulting in a laugh. A bitter one, maybe.<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>650</sup>Karl Marx, *Capital: a critique of political economy*, orig. edn, *Das Kapital*, 1867 (New York: Regnery Publishing, 2009).

<sup>651</sup>If we understand the nature of the West as a history of substitution of logocentric signifiers e.g. magic, god, man, science etc. Then Derrida suggests that there is in affect an absence of presence within the centre of a logocentric structure. As a result, there is no structure at all and language can enter a state of ‘free play’ between significations. TCC’s practice exploits the potential of visual language to enter this free play. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* Trans. Alan Bass. (London: Routledge, 1978), pp.278–294.

<sup>652</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘The Fluffy Wipe Case, episode II. Chemtrails’ (2013) <<http://thecoolcouple.co.uk/what-we-do/the-fluffy-wipe-case-episode-ii-chemtrails-2013-2/>> [accessed 02/07/2019].

<sup>653</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘Karma Fails’ (2016) <<http://thecoolcouple.co.uk/what-we-do/karma-fails/>> [accessed 02/07/2019].

Through a series of interventions, including a pseudo yoga class in a museum [fig, 34], TCC framed these questions in relation to the exploitation of meditation, wellbeing retreats and self-help mantra which have become synonymous with late-stage capitalism's ideological turn towards wellness as a status symbol.

There are several threads still left to trace before I can move on to the analysis. Firstly, in relation to the questions posed in this thesis, TCC represent a problem of definition; how many members are required to constitute an artist-led collective? And is this requirement relevant? As I have mentioned, TCC is made up of two artists, the minimum number possible. Secondly, their practice seeks out other creatives and collectives in order to establish 'networks' which often lead to projects consisting of multiple collectives and groups of artists becoming 'super-collectives' or 'meta-collectives'.<sup>654</sup> An example of this is a recent and ongoing project entitled, POIUYT, which purposely appears as a spelling error and is based on the last 6 letters on the top line of a standard computer keyboard.<sup>655</sup> The projects website states:

The project is the result of the collaboration between curators Francesca Lazzarini and Gaia Tedone with artists Alessandro Sambini, Discipula and The Cool Couple. They all share a photographic background, an inclination to push its boundaries and a critical approach towards the image. The group is characterized by a desire for horizontal interaction, collective exchange and for the promotion of networking and participatory processes.<sup>656</sup>

POIUYT is the collective investigation into the economy of images through a practice-based framework and is comprised of a series of events, exhibition-making, and interactions coupled with a publication and digital resources. This project will be questioned throughout this chapter, particularly with regards to its desired objective of collective exchange, meaning-making and curatorial collaboration.<sup>657</sup>

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<sup>654</sup>POIUYT, 'POIUYT Radio' *Unseen Photography Fair* (2017) <<https://www.facebook.com/events/1738779749752356/>> [accessed 02/07/2019].

<sup>655</sup>POIUYT, POIUYT. 'Point Zero

Critical practices in contemporary Italian photography', Press Release (2017) <[http://poiuyt.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Press-Release\\_POIUYT.pdf](http://poiuyt.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Press-Release_POIUYT.pdf)> [accessed 20/10/2017], (para.10 of 10).

<sup>656</sup>POIUYT, 'about us' <<http://poiuyt.it/about-us/?lang=en>> [accessed 21/10/2017].

<sup>657</sup>POIUYT, 'About us' (2019) <<http://poiuyt.it/about-us/?lang=en>> [accessed 02/07/2019].

Finally, it is apparent that each member of TCC works to their strengths in a non-hierarchical relationship. This is revealed in the Yarn community dialogue; ‘You're never alone. So, it's all 50-50. You get used to people switching your name and calling you Nico instead of Simo and vice versa and so on’.<sup>658</sup> These two sentences allude to the nature of their collective endeavour; they each have a fifty percent stake in their collective; one member does not hold a disproportionate amount of power over the other. This is a vital notion within the democratic ideology of the artist-led collective.

There are several practical reasons for their inclusion. On a visit to Rome, I stumbled upon their work and it caught my attention. I decided to reach out on Twitter before I had framed their work as a case study for this thesis, and in doing so I opened a dialogue. This is a method in my own curatorial practice and how I prefer to establish relationships within the art world. By establishing direct communication, I was able to ‘test the waters’ for inclusion in my thesis. All these aspects will be questioned throughout this chapter as they are vital to further the understanding of artist-led collectives and to aid in the tracing of what it means to work within the collective structures.

### ***Installation at Festival Internazionale di Roma XV Edizione: ROMA, IL MONDO, The MACRO, 2016***

I will begin this case study by firstly framing TCC within my own initial experience of their practice through a visit to The MACRO in October of 2016.<sup>659</sup> The installation entitled *Turbulent times. Nothing happens in nice weather Chapter 2: Cool people pay happily* [fig. 35] was installed in 2016 as part of the *Fotografia Festival Internazionale di Roma XV Edizione: ROMA, IL MONDO*.<sup>660</sup> TCC had been selected as part of the international photography art fair, which was in its fifteenth incarnation and was organised under the thematic ‘Rome, the world’.<sup>661</sup> The Art Fair also functioned as a prize with a final selection of winners made at the end of The Fair’s duration. Fotografia had a selection and judging panel in place to decide on the winners akin to The Venice Biennale and The

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<sup>658</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘John's questions, part 1’, *Yarn Community* (2017) <<http://yarncommunity.com/stories/556>> [accessed 27/10/2017], (para.6).

<sup>659</sup>Museo D’Arte Contemporanea Roma, ‘MACRO via Nizza’ (2017) <[http://en.museomacro.org/macro\\_via\\_nizza/macro\\_via\\_nizza](http://en.museomacro.org/macro_via_nizza/macro_via_nizza)> [accessed 20/02/2017].

<sup>660</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘Cool People Pay Happily’ (2016) <<http://thecoolcouple.co.uk/what-we-do/cool-people-pay-happily-2016-ongoing/>> [accessed 24/7/2019].

<sup>661</sup>Fotografia, ‘Open call 2016, Selected finalists and winner’ (2016) <<http://www.fotografiafestival.it/open-call-2016-selezionati-i-finalisti-e-il-vincitore/?lang=en>> [accessed 21/07/2019].

Turner Prize.<sup>662</sup> The Art Fair ‘has always made of the relationship with the city one of the most characteristic features of its established history of fifteen years’. This statement reveals the level to which The Fair had become an institution within the contemporary art scene in Rome.<sup>663</sup> This status had led to The Fair’s regular establishment at The MACRO over recent years. The MACRO itself is a municipal contemporary art museum in Rome and one of the central institutions for contemporary art in the city.<sup>664</sup> The Museum’s architecture is postmodern and the Fotografia art fair was held within ‘white cube’ style galleries [fig, 36].<sup>665</sup> This set the scene for my first experience of TCC’s work and frames the following analysis,

*On entering the exhibition room, I was acutely aware of two specific elements.<sup>666</sup> Firstly, the jovial music which was produced by another installation entirely (I will return to this element in due course), and secondly a large plinth in the centre of the room with what appeared to be an ‘image’ segmented into a grid of 16 rectangular sheets of paper [fig, 37]. The artwork had an obvious interactive quality, as it was clearly the intention of the artist to permit the viewer to ‘take-away’ a section of the image. Of course, there was a ‘vital’ piece of the image missing in the printed takeaway segments. To access this piece, and thus complete the image, it was necessary to subscribe to a ‘premium’ subscription type of membership. The instructions for this adorned the gallery wall in vinyl image and text [fig, 38]. The visual composition was clearly an enlargement and adaption of an online space. The aesthetic was clearly signifying an internet portal complete with a QR code in order to access TCC’s online shop and purchase the subscription to, ‘Complete your artwork: buy the missing piece and*

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<sup>662</sup>The Tate, ‘What is the Turner Prize’ <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/turner-prize>>[accessed 24/7/2019], and La Biennale di Venezia, ‘Biennale Arte 2019: Official Awards’ (2019) <<https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/biennale-arte-2019-official-awards>>[accessed 24/7/2019].

<sup>663</sup>Fotografia, ‘Open call 2016, Selected finalists and winner’ (para.3 of 10).

<sup>664</sup>Museo D’Arte Contemporanea Roma, ‘Introduction’ (2019) <<https://www.museomacro.it/pagine/macro-presentazione>> [accessed 24/7/2019].

<sup>665</sup>Museo D’Arte Contemporanea Roma, ‘MACRO History’ (2019) <<https://www.museomacro.it/pagine/macro-history>> [accessed 24/7/2019], and Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the white cube: the ideology of the gallery space* (San Francisco, The Lapis Press, 1986).

<sup>666</sup>The use of italics and indentation in this form of vignette indicates a break in writing style from academic to self-reflection as was implemented by Sara Ahmed in Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (London: Duke University Press, 2017).

*get a Certificate of Authenticity signed by The Cool Couple*'.<sup>667</sup> However, these everyday functionality screens had been creatively constructed. There was a free base level of subscription, which entitled the viewer to the incomplete image which was also available to take-away in the Gallery space. There was a 'plus level' of subscription with a limited time only offer of €19.99, for the duration of the show, which would normally be priced at €49.99. There was a 'plus level membership' which would guarantee a large size edition of the complete image and a signed 'Certificate of Authentication'. Notably, this plus level did not allow the viewer to receive the image on, 'Fine art paper, Fine art frame, Fine art glass'.<sup>668</sup> Finally, there was a 'premium level' adorned with an infinity symbol where the price should have resided. This level was seemingly negotiable with TCC, and included the tag line, 'paying has its privileges'.<sup>669</sup> This premium service would allow the viewer to receive everything previously excluded from the other levels.<sup>670</sup>

It was clear having studied this 'subscription wall' that TCC was attempting to 'play' with several contemporary phenomena. Firstly, the 'internet' aesthetic was one of the two overt elements in the space. There has been much debate and continued discourse on the emergence of terms such as 'internet art', 'post-internet art' and 'internet aware art'.<sup>671</sup> I contemplated these debates as I experienced TCC's installation. Their installation seemed to oscillate between these terms, never fully declaring itself. I was reminded of an article in *Art Forum* on the programmer and artist Guthrie Lonergan, by media critic, Ed Halter. Halter positions the debate on the internet's role in contemporary art and outlines the slippery nature of these terms through the differences and increasingly nuanced spaces between online and offline.<sup>672</sup> Halter traced Lonergan's practice from the 'internet born' art which appeared to utilise the technology and actual platforms of cyberspace, to the

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<sup>667</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Artist Statement' (2015) <[http://www.fotografifestival.it/portfolio\\_page/the-cool-couple-turbulent-times-nothing-happens-in-nice-weather-chapter-2-cool-people-pay-happily/?lang=en](http://www.fotografifestival.it/portfolio_page/the-cool-couple-turbulent-times-nothing-happens-in-nice-weather-chapter-2-cool-people-pay-happily/?lang=en)> [accessed 10/11/2018].

<sup>668</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>670</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>671</sup>Ed Halter, 'In Search of: The Art of Guthrie Lonergan', *Art Forum*, Vol.53, No.3 (2014) <<https://www.artforum.com/print/201409/in-search-of-the-art-of-guthrie-lonergan-48701>> [accessed 10/11/2018].

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*

increasing translation of ‘post-internet’ art which was ‘finding a way to work in galleries’.<sup>673</sup> Halter outlined the further nuances in the debate which go beyond the binary opposition of virtual vs. the physical.<sup>674</sup> He points to a debate that ensued from Lonergan’s suggesting that he was thinking of moving away from internet and technology whilst retaining the integrity of his concepts.<sup>675</sup> In this statement, Lonergan used the term ‘Internet Aware Art’, which in turn sparked a debate about what he was inferring.<sup>676</sup> Halter quotes a lecture in which Lonergan clarified his position by suggesting,

I’ve sort of defined it as related to these ideas of the big database that I was trying to talk about. And just being aware that even if you’re not making Internet art, that your art is going on the Internet, probably. And somehow any attempt to be aware of that will change your work, thinking about that Internet context.<sup>677</sup>

It was this statement and the idea that art is both consciously and unconsciously influenced by the structure, operation, and aesthetic of internet functionality, which came racing into view as I entered a dialogue with the installation.<sup>678</sup> It was abundantly clear this was not just an example of this liminal world between the different terms assigned to these developing forms of art, but that TCC was clearly aware of the debate and were in fact purposefully manipulating its central tensions. Each element of the composition cannot escape the essence of the role of the internet in the operation of art within the gallery space. This is evidenced from the decision to create an interpretative device, through the wall vinyl, which simultaneously signified the museum’s institutional functionality and the internet’s ‘user-friendly’ interfaces and the photograph of the Cossack Boots, which resides somewhere between Adobe Photoshop, Instagram, and a commercial gallery art fair context.

There was an overwhelming sense in the gallery space that this work would slip between definitions and avoid conceptualisation. It was constantly frustrating my efforts to plot, through my frame of reference, what the work was ‘doing’ or how it was ‘acting’. The installation walked a line between more traditional institutional installation devices such as plinths, framed photographs, etc. and an

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<sup>673</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>674</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>675</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>676</sup>Michael Conner, ‘What’s Postinternet got to do with Net Art’, *Rhizome.org*

<<http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/nov/01/postinternet/>>[accessed 10/11/2018].

<sup>677</sup>Guthrie Lonergan, ‘In Search of: The Art of Guthrie Lonergan’, *Art Forum*, Vol.53, No.3 (2014).

<sup>678</sup>David M. Berry and Michael Dieter, *Postdigital Aesthetics: Art, Computation And Design* (Berlin, Springer, 2015).



awareness of how the work would operate in a different context, in a virtual environment. It was this disconcerting oscillation that ignited my interest in further researching TCC. The installation appeared to not only enter into the debate regarding the impact of the internet on art, but it also brought into question the complex interrelations and tension between the institution, the art market, and wider discursive societal shifts in a digital age. This was further compounded when I read the interpretive text outside the gallery space. In this text TCC state that,

The widespread crisis in which we are now accustomed to living has changed the way we exist in the world. The invasion of digital products has created a new form of economy based on a combination of credit cards, connection, loyalty, democratisation and happiness. The essential concept behind this business model often called freemium, is the offer of a free item or service, with some limitations, which can only be removed if the client purchases the complete version of the product.<sup>679</sup>

The installation was an attempt to utilise the concept of 'Freemium'. Freemium was described by venture capitalist Fred Wilson as,

Give your service away for free, possibly ad supported but maybe not, acquire a lot of customers very efficiently through word of mouth, referral networks, organic search marketing, etc., then offer premium priced value-added services or an enhanced version of your service to your customer base.<sup>680</sup>

As Wilson noted, this model is frequently used in the software industry and is a particularly effective marketing tool for subscription-based media.<sup>681</sup> Again, by exploring the interrelationship between capitalist uses of technologies as a platform, TCC was entering into a deconstruction of the art market forces by allowing the viewer free access to ownership or part ownership of the artwork. This is evidence of the politics of collectivism by co-opting the freemium strategies and implementing them in the gallery space they turn capitalism in on itself.

There was an increasing familiarity with TCC's installation through the dissolving of the viewer and the rise of the active participator. This artwork would not reach its 'actualisation' without the participator to 'complete' the work, by taking their sections of the Cossack boots, or by paying for the

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<sup>679</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Artist Statement' (2015) <[http://www.fotografifestival.it/portfolio\\_page/the-cool-couple-turbulent-times-nothing-happens-in-nice-weather-chapter-2-cool-people-pay-happily/?lang=en](http://www.fotografifestival.it/portfolio_page/the-cool-couple-turbulent-times-nothing-happens-in-nice-weather-chapter-2-cool-people-pay-happily/?lang=en)> [accessed 10/11/2018].

<sup>680</sup>Fred Wilson, 'My Favorite Business Model' AVC (2006) <[https://avc.com/2006/03/my\\_favorite\\_bus/](https://avc.com/2006/03/my_favorite_bus/)> [accessed 10/11/2018] (para.1 of 8).

<sup>681</sup>*Ibid.*

different subscription levels. As I briefly discussed in Chapter 1, this discourse of participation in art is yet another debate in which this thesis is predicated. As positioned by Claire Bishop, ‘as an artistic medium, then, participation is arguably no more intrinsically political or oppositional than any other’.<sup>682</sup> Bishop furthers this point by suggesting that, ‘one of the main impetuses behind participatory art has therefore been a restoration of the social bond through a collective elaboration of meaning’.<sup>683</sup> It is this notion of the multiple as opposed to the individual, which held my attention whilst I performed the intended action or ‘transaction’ at the heart of this installation. The installation was a form of situationism within the gallery space, which began to de-centre its authority by immediately transporting the viewer elsewhere, i.e. TCC’s virtual space. By creating an installation utilising the socio-economic structure of the art market and by enabling the participant to become complicit in this act, TCC effectively inhabited the liminal space between co-option and resistance of the institutional forces at play within the work’s context.

Before I move on, I would like to address the context in which TCC’s installation was positioned both institutionally and within the discourse of the ‘art fair’.

*Firstly, the jovial music which was playing in the gallery space strangely heightened the ironic absurdity of TCC’s artwork.<sup>684</sup> The music was clearly an intentional factor and I began to feel a sense of excitement that TCC had intentionally incorporated this whimsical tune. Having a soundtrack to the experience of the work added a ‘knowing’ layer of humour to the absurdity of the task. Secondly, due to the installation’s location in the ‘final’ space within the art fair and physically in the museum, it was almost akin to a final word of an argument or question. This question seemed to be; what the current socio-cultural position of photography and its relationship to the art market was, to the art fair, and to the institution. Thinking curatorially, I could see this as a socio-political statement, perhaps aimed at the nature of these ‘prize’ driven art fairs. Essentially, TCC was critiquing the system in which they were*

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<sup>682</sup>Claire Bishop, *Participation* (London: Whitechapel/Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), p.12.

<sup>683</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>684</sup>The Music was from a pseudo advert that TCC had filmed to promote the installation, see video, The Cool Couple, ‘Cool People Pay Happily’, *promotional video*, video, HD, 1’18”, single channel, colour, sound <<http://thecoolcouple.co.uk/what-we-do/cool-people-pay-happily-2016-ongoing/>> [accessed 21/05/2019].

*participating. The choice of their inclusion can only have been the result of a conscious decision to deconstruct the very notion of these platforms.*

There was a palpable sense of ‘knowing’ about their installation at the MACRO. I am referring to their obvious drive towards some form of sociality through a politically framed deconstruction of the state of play within both the art world and wider society. I was not, at this stage, even aware of who TCC was and even how many members were involved. I had a hunch from their choice of name but all the evidence pointed to the fact that they were most likely multiple, and they appeared to have successfully removed any form of separate identity within the work. I could not distinguish two separate voices within the installation. Indeed, the work was highly polished in an aesthetic and conceptual way. I remember thinking that it resided in the context of the ‘white cube’, post-modern style gallery space remarkably successfully without intentionally revealing its contradictory qualities. This work was a metaphorical Trojan horse, on the surface a ‘glossy’ example of art fair-style discourse but underneath a complex hoard of contradictions shifting the artwork to a social space. This sociality is always looking for the exit from the institution, which was literally represented by the exit door to the far left of the installation. I was left with an urgent sense that I needed to establish contact to discuss their thoughts on the state of play.

### ***Analysis of A Yarn Community conversation with The Cool Couple***

I established contact with TCC a few months after my visit to Rome and they agreed to engage in a dialogue on Yarn Community. The following section is the analysis of this dialogue through a Relational Dialectic framework. The dialogue on the Yarn Community platform is not in a simple question and answer format. Although the project was initiated through my research, it rapidly became a co-created investigation into this seemingly innocent term, ‘collective’ and its complex significations. This section of the chapter will now begin to examine a set of central themes or questions generated through this dialogue. The first and second central discursive threads to articulate themselves through the conversation were as follows; the role of the author and the contradictions which arise from the concept of the author, and its relationship to the idea of the collective and the

collective voice. These two themes are perhaps the most extensive as they appeared to act as meta-thematic throughout the other themes of discussion and for this reason, they will be given more attention within this analysis. First of all, a contextualisation of the function of the author is important in order to trace the following analysis and link back to the central questions; can artistic duos be collectives? Why is this the case? What are the boundaries between collaboration and collectivism?

The erasure of individualism attributed to the author has a long discourse in and of itself. This discourse is far too extensive to be traced in this thesis. However, there are several specific texts which may contextualise this trope, on a wider socially discursive scale. Michel Foucault's essay, 'What is an Author?' and the text, 'The Death of the Author' by Roland Barthes, was part of a discourse in French thinking in the 1960s, which attempted to challenge the privileged position of the author and instead re-position the author with respect to its socio-cultural context.<sup>685</sup> Foucault deconstructs the notion of the author or more precisely the 'authored' text,

[T]he author's name characterizes a particular manner of existence of discourse. Discourse that possesses an author's name is not to be immediately consumed and forgotten; neither is it accorded the momentary attention given to ordinary, fleeting words. Rather, its status and its manner of reception are regulated by the culture in which it circulates.<sup>686</sup>

Foucault goes on to suggest this 'privileged' position which the author has over a 'work', is a relatively recent ideological construct, and it is limiting and dangerous.<sup>687</sup> Foucault argued

[I]t was at the moment when a system of ownership and strict copyright rules were established (toward the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century) that the transgressive properties always intrinsic to the act of writing became the forceful imperative of literature. It is as if the author, at the moment he was accepted into the social order of property which governs our culture, was compensating for his new status by reviving the older bipolar field of discourse in a systematic practice of transgression and by restoring the danger of writing which, on another side, had been conferred the benefits of property.<sup>688</sup>

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<sup>685</sup>Jane P. Tompkins, *Reader-response criticism: from formalism to post-structuralism* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

<sup>686</sup>Michel Foucault, *What is an Author? Modernity and its Discontents*, orig. 1969 lecture, eds., The Open University. <[https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/pluginfile.php/624849/mod\\_resource/content/1/a840\\_1\\_michel\\_foucault.pdf](https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/pluginfile.php/624849/mod_resource/content/1/a840_1_michel_foucault.pdf)> [accessed 20/11/2018], p.305.

<sup>687</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>688</sup>*Ibid*, pp.305-306.

Similarly, Barthes attempted to shift the focus away from trying to re-construct the author's 'thesis'. Barthes suggested that 'Once the Author is distanced, the claim to "decipher" a text becomes entirely futile. To assign an Author to a text is to impose a brake on it, to furnish it with a final signified, to close writing'.<sup>689</sup> Both Barthes and Foucault argued that the concurrent discourse of science, which is searching for empirical truth, erases the need for the author, whereas the literary work installs it in order to properly 'sell' the work to its audience.<sup>690</sup> It must be noted, however, that Foucault's analysis was specifically concerned with text-based 'work'. In comparison, Barthes's theorisation encompassed a wider sense of the creative author in a transdisciplinary context.<sup>691</sup> It is this author-function that presents itself within the limiting discourse of the art market and thus re-affirms the notion of authenticity and originality within the significations of the proper 'name'. This discourse, towards the effacement of the author-function, was transmitted through the 'social turn' in art and art theory and criticism. As explored in Chapter 1, Bishop, Bourriaud, Kester, and Sholette *et al.* have explored these emerging practices of artist groups, collectives, and collaborations which attempted to experiment with the 'multi-author'.<sup>692</sup> In *The One and The Many*, Grant Kester frames this shift; 'During the 1980s and '90s a new generation of collectives emerged [...] that experimented with multiple authorship and novel reconfigurations of the artist's relationship to the audience'.<sup>693</sup>

This problematizing of the author-function is immediately called into question when artist-led collectives are involved in the creation of a work. One statement which arose during the first engagement with the Yarn project was suggestive of TCC's practice and the tensions between the collective and the individual;

We are a collective. We are two, as it is clear from the choice of our name, The Cool Couple. And we are not intended to become a trio, or a quartet or a symphonic orchestra. The Cool Couple is born with a clear intention and a precise approach to problems. Its genesis is to be found in the previous researches we conducted individually and the unique path of TCC is due to this background.<sup>694</sup>

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<sup>689</sup>Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', *The Rustle of Language*, orig edn. 1967 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p.53.

<sup>690</sup>Foucault, pp. 305-306 and Barthes, pp.50-55.

<sup>691</sup>Foucault, p. 302, and Barthes, pp.50-52.

<sup>692</sup>This discourse is outlined in; Grant H. Kester, 'Autonomy, Antagonism and The Aesthetic', *The One and the Many Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp.19-67.

<sup>693</sup>*Ibid.* p.4.

<sup>694</sup>The Cool Couple, 'John's Questions, part 1' (para.3 of 5).

This statement is incredibly illuminating. It was prompted in the Yarn discussion in relation to how they identify with the word ‘collective’. Firstly, there is a level of self-identification with the word, ‘collective’ and its significations. TCC use several words in which to signify their affinity to the multiple rather than the individual, including; ‘we’, ‘two’, ‘couple’. They also refer to TCC in the third person or as something other than themselves. Yet there is a contradiction at play here because they do not intend to become ‘a trio, or quartet or a symphonic orchestra’.<sup>695</sup> Further, still, they allude to an individual past through the phrase, ‘researches we conducted individually’.<sup>696</sup> I will now attempt to unpack these dialectical tensions.

Firstly, according to RDT, ‘discursive tensions are both inevitable and necessary’ and ‘meanings emerge from the struggle of different, often opposing discourses’.<sup>697</sup> This is the basic theoretical assumption within the RDT conceptual framework for communication and thus why relationships tend to form.<sup>698</sup> I will now assign a number system to this statement by TCC in order to make clear the ‘dynamic interplay of contradictions’.<sup>699</sup>

1. We are a collective. We are two, as it is clear from the choice of our name, The Cool Couple.
2. And we are not intended to become a trio, or a quartet or a symphonic orchestra.
3. The Cool Couple is born with a clear intention and a precise approach to problems.
4. Its genesis is to be found in the previous researches we conducted individually and the unique path of TCC is due to this background.

Firstly, in statements 1 and 4, there is revealed the internal dialectical oppositions within TCC’s relationship of ‘connection-autonomy’.<sup>700</sup> The use of words such as, ‘we’, ‘two’, ‘our’ and ‘couple’ reveals the intent to form a connection between both parties through the decision to create a ‘third entity’, in this case, The Cool Couple. However, in statement 4, there is revealed an individualistic

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<sup>695</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>696</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>697</sup>Leslie A. Baxter and Dawn O. Braithwaite, *Engaging Theories in Interpersonal Communication Multiple Perspectives* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2008), p.350.

<sup>698</sup>*Ibid.*, p.350.

<sup>699</sup>Baxter and Montgomery, *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics*, p.6.

<sup>700</sup>*Ibid.*

past, a divergence from the ‘connectedness’ which briefly separates both Niccolò and Simone. The phrase, ‘previous researches’, is imbued with a sense of formal privilege in the statement by the preceding word, ‘genesis’, alluding to the formation of TCC.<sup>701</sup> In other words, there is a sense of autonomy at play and a suggestion that their previous experience, as individual artists, became vital to the formation of the third entity, TCC. Statements 1 and 4 can thus be understood as a ‘both/and quality of relating’, they are simultaneously individual and collective, constantly re-affirmed through the language in the statements.<sup>702</sup> This dialectic tension is explicitly revealed in a 5<sup>th</sup> statement,

5. We have always been interested in the potentialities of a collective as an entity where the single author loses his/her importance. Individual identities aren't important because TCC is a sort of brand that swallows everything and vomits it out as a blob or a good-mannered-schizo-montage.<sup>703</sup>

The phrase within this part of the dialogue, ‘where the single author loses his/her importance’, epitomises what TCC are attempting to develop within their practice, a symbolic gesture towards the erasure of the individual in order to create a space between the dialectical oppositions of connection-autonomy. Of course, this is founded in unified contradiction, and is always in process between connection and autonomy, between the individual and the collective. Space between is important in this relational dialectic analysis because the opposition of connection-autonomy is not a binary. In this instance, TCC articulates the coexistence of centripetal dialectical positions of connection against the countervailing centrifugal forces of autonomy- connection-separation, connection-identity, and connection-independence are all at play. The use of the words ‘unique’ when describing their separate journeys, signifies the connection-identity dialectic because it is suggestive of difference. However, this is then positioned as a basis for the collective ‘wholeness’ of TCC, thus the dominant force of centripetal comes into play. This position is then further re-enforced with the phrase, ‘TCC is a sort of band that swallows everything’.<sup>704</sup> A vast majority of TCC’s language is based around the totality of

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<sup>701</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘John’s Questions, part 1’ (para.3 of 5).

<sup>702</sup>Baxter and Montgomery, *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics*, p.5.

<sup>703</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘John’s Questions, part 1’ (para.3 of 5).

<sup>704</sup>*Ibid.*

the collective identity rather than the individual. It seems that they have attempted to present a very coherent public persona based on the multivocal.

The concept of the 'collective voice' and its often-problematic logical conclusions was explored by Nicola McCartney in an attempt to test the idea that, 'collective practice is a critique of the singular genius'.<sup>705</sup> She questioned the agency of this position within the context of neo-liberal forms of institutionalised authorship and the market-driven art world.<sup>706</sup> McCartney's analysis centres on critical questions of the potentialities of collective practice to negate, at least partially, the totality of a neo-liberal system. Issues of intellectual property, democratic values and the flux and flow of members are central to this analysis.<sup>707</sup> Interestingly, this question of collective voice was also explored by TCC,

The second part of your question concerning collective mentality is something which needs a lot of talking. Collective mentality is a nice concept, but does it work? Does it belong to an old idea of democracy - or to a nostalgia for democracy?<sup>708</sup>

Both TCC and McCartney suggested that it is may be possible to sustain some resistance in the multimodality of the Internet and 'alternative' non-hierarchical models of production.<sup>709</sup> However, there is a sense of sacrifice of authorship rather than an embodiment of 'full authorship' of the work.<sup>710</sup> TCC take up the position of creators rather than authors thus entering into the problematic of centripetal dialectical forces towards individualism, autonomy, instrumentality, and convention. These appear as overt in the binary opposition of co-option-resistance. However, the centrifugal forces tending towards, collectivism, connection, affection, and uniqueness are constantly in play. It is perhaps not a question of resistance, but that through tension and contradiction creativity can evolve, as these tensions are never resolved.

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<sup>705</sup>Nicola McCartney, *Death of the Artist Art World Dissidents and Their Alternative Identities* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2018), p.59.

<sup>706</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>707</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.59-89.

<sup>708</sup>The Cool Couple, 'John's questions, part 1', (para.2 of 5).

<sup>709</sup>McCartney, p.59-89, and The Cool Couple, 'John's questions, part 1' (para.5 of 5).

<sup>710</sup>The Cool Couple, 'John's questions, part 1', (para.2 of 5), and, Nicola McCartney, *Death of the Artist Art World Dissidents and Their Alternative Identities*.



I will now return to the metaphor of the homogenous 'blob' or 'band' in the latter sentence of statement 5. This further supports the intent and need to connect and share, in order to reach a form of shared space. In contradiction to this intention, further in the dialogue, TCC reveals, 'you can make a solo album'.<sup>711</sup> Again, this reinforces a key concept in RDT regarding the process, and how the contradiction between the individual and the collective can create meaning through constant flux. Baxter and Braithwaite suggest to, 'argue that meaning-making is a process of dialectical flux between different, often opposing, discourses is to argue against a view of meaning as stable, consensual, and unitary'.<sup>712</sup> Baxter and Braithwaite are not suggesting that total 'chaos' reigns but that meaning is found in the exchange between contradictions in the dialogue. In TCC's case through the metaphor of forming a band with the intention of always practicing together but with the constant possibility that either Simone or Niccolò could go solo or even create a new band at any time. This presents the contradictions of certainty-unpredictability, connection-separation, and connection-independence which constantly co-exists within TCC. According to Baxter and Braithwaite, the linguistic use of metaphor and utterance is often used to mask tensions and contradictions within relationships.<sup>713</sup>

I will now turn my attention to how statement 2 relates to 1, 3 and 4. Statement 2, '[A]nd we are not intended to become a trio, or a quartet or a symphonic orchestra', begins to inform the reader of TCC's position in relation to wider society. A dialectic contradiction at play here is external and is between, inclusion-seclusion.<sup>714</sup> They un-equivocally state that they do not intend to invite other members to join TCC. Their social contract with wider society suggests their 'collectiveness', is between themselves in opposition to potential others. However, what is important to understand is this is not a negative attribute, as I will explain by positioning a sixth statement from the dialogue.

6. However, it doesn't mean we don't collaborate with other artists. Also, it doesn't mean we don't like becoming part of a wider collective, as in the case of POIUYT (the core of which is composed by three artists - two collectives and an individual artist - and two curators).<sup>715</sup>

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<sup>711</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>712</sup>Baxter and Braithwaite, *Engaging Theories in Interpersonal Communication Multiple Perspectives*, p.351.

<sup>713</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>714</sup>Baxter and Montgomery, *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics*.

<sup>715</sup>The Cool Couple, 'John's Questions, part 1' (para.3 of 5).

This statement reveals the constant desire for inclusion within their practice, yet there is always a layer of seclusion at play. The use of the words ‘part’ and ‘collaborate’ suggest a concept of ‘revelation’, to reveal themselves and be open to co-creation with the other, in this case, with other artists. However, they still retain their separation from other artists as they consciously use the word, ‘collaborate’, which suggests to ‘work jointly’ with artists, rather than complete collective integration.<sup>716</sup> However, once again this opposition of inclusion-seclusion comes into play. TCC reveal that they did, in fact, join a ‘wider collective’, in the shape of the project POIUYT (I will return to this project in due course). This is again demonstrating the desire for inclusion, to be a member of a wider collective. Interestingly, TCC list POIUYT’s individual roles, akin to actors in a play or bands in a supergroup. Again, this language reveals the tensions between inclusion and seclusion because they are separating POIUYT into its constituent parts thus signifying the need for individuality which is important in the connection-identity dialectic.

This contradiction of inclusion and seclusion presented itself within the installation at the MACRO, Rome, specifically, in the inclusive offering of the Cossack Boots in the form of a gift. However, the audience/consumer is immediately excluded from owning the totality of the artwork by the missing piece, and thus a financial barrier is placed on fully accessing the artwork. This will inevitably exclude a proportion of the audience. Conversely, the artwork relies on this form of partially denied participation in order to function. The artwork is built and sustained on the tensions created between exclusion and inclusion. For the totality of the artwork to function, a relationship with the viewer must be created through the relinquishing of the power of authority. It is through the experience of participation or more precisely, praxis, that this artwork is ‘activated’. A relationship is formed through the dialectical tensions between the viewer and TCC via this situational artwork. The ongoing evidence for this form of praxis is almost entirely imperceptible. The only mark left from the participation was both the number of artworks downloaded and the number of image sections taken from the installation. This installation was discussed in the Yarn dialogue and TCC positioned this aspect of their practice as presenting the viewer with a ‘key’,

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<sup>716</sup>*Ibid.*

1. Usually, when we mention the image-text relation we refer to the exhibition space (be it digital or physical) and the question of providing an access key to the visitor. Of course, sometimes you can have a key in the work itself and a key doesn't mean to tell everything to the public, to impose your vision.

2. The most stimulating thing about an artwork that works is the fact that it's open to different interpretations, still maintaining its strong core so that you will get the author's intention.<sup>717</sup>

Section 1 in this statement reveals the dialectical contradictions of revelation-concealment at play within the signification of the 'key'. Here the metaphorical action of the 'key' is both/and; it simultaneously offers the viewer access to the 'work', in this case through the interplay between image-text, in the form of the exhibition at the MACRO, and prevents this access by concealing the 'ownership' of the Cossack Boots. On the other hand, this concealment can be 'purchased', and thus circumvented through a financial transaction. In short, *Turbulent times. Nothing happens in nice weather Chapter 2: Cool people pay happily* shifts the location of the 'art' from a passive viewer to ownership. TCC, implement a partially denied 'key' which 'activates' the viewer into participator.

Section 2, of this statement, complicates the revelation-concealment contradiction by alluding to Foucault and Barthes's analysis of the author.<sup>718</sup> TCC's use of the word 'author' is perhaps misleading as it seems more akin to the creator of the work rather than the hyper 'individualised' author.<sup>719</sup> This becomes apparent in the context of the sentence because TCC stated their intention is to provide a way in, or an access point for the visitor to build layers of interpretation and meaning. Thus, the work is 'freed' from the authority of the author and developed in the praxis of the visitor. However, a concealment factor is also at play within TCC's explanation of the work, as they imply that they attempt to maintain a 'strong core' of 'closed' meaning, which shifts a unit of ownership back to the author-function.<sup>720</sup> It is through these dialectical contradictions in which the artwork exists rather than being in binary opposition.

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<sup>717</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Answering to John, part 2' <<http://yarncommunity.org/stories/574>> [accessed 02/12/2018], (para.3 of 12).

<sup>718</sup>Michel Foucault, *What is an Author?*, and Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author'.

<sup>719</sup>Michel Foucault, *What is an Author?*, pp.299-305.

<sup>720</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Answering to John, part 2' (para.3 of 12).

Grant Kester suggested that this form of collaborative, socially engaged art can form a liminal space in which, the 'art' 'can be found in the condition and character of dialogical exchange itself'.<sup>721</sup> This dialogical exchange, according to Kester, is the basis for this form of art which he defines as Littoralist or littoral,

It is necessary to consider the Littoralist work as a process as well as a physical product, and specifically as a process rooted in a discursively-mediated encounter in which the subject positions of artist and viewer or artist and subject are openly thematized and can potentially be challenged and transformed. I am particularly interested in a discursive aesthetic based on the possibility of a dialogical relationship that breaks down the conventional distinction between artist, artwork and audience - a relationship that allows the viewer to "speak back" to the artist in certain ways, and in which this reply becomes in effect a part of the "work" itself.<sup>722</sup>

By shifting the rules of the now traditional modernist 'indeterminacy' of the artwork and its aesthetic function, i.e. to be opposed to a specific instrumentality and defined by what the artwork is not, TCC was able to enter a specific localised dialogue with the visitor to the MACRO. By creating a 'key', to literally open space for the visitor to become the 'owner' and enter a different form of relationship with the 'work' and TCC. This form of exchange actively utilised the capitalist function of Freemium and embraced its contradictions in order to raise the question of 'ownership' within a capitalist hegemony.

I have now come to the critical point in this analysis because the work at the MACRO essentially created a virtual market-place through a reflexive dialogic determined within a constant dialogical contraction between ownership-authorship and revelation-concealment. The physical or virtual mark was, in a sense, of little or no importance to the work, because it was about creating a situation, a liminal space for an exchange or dialogue, freed from the institution of the art object. This has consequences for the role of the institution and even this form of 'art prize' or festival in which the work appeared. I will come to this point in due course; however, it is important to move towards the next section of this analysis.

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<sup>721</sup>Grant Kester, 'Dialogical Aesthetics: A Critical Framework For Littoral Art', *Variant*, Vol. 9 (1999/2000) <<http://www.variant.org.uk/pdfs/issue9/Supplement9.pdf>> {accessed 02/12/2018}, p.2.

<sup>722</sup> *Ibid.*

I will now return to the collective project, POIUYT, in order to analyse the concept of authorship through the dialectic of integration-separation. The project's subheading is a 'platform for image-based research'.<sup>723</sup> In the most simplistic way, this is the aim of the project and its reason for existing in the first instance. The network was formed through discussions between curators Francesca Lazzarini and Gaia Tedone with artists Alessandro Sambini, the artist-led collective Discipula, and TCC.<sup>724</sup> A press release from their inaugural exhibition/launch, Point Zero event, hosted by *MLZ Art Dep* in Trieste, Italy, stated, 'the platform was conceived in response to an urge to start a collective reflection on the dominating role of images in our networked society and on their political implications'.<sup>725</sup>

This ethos is articulated in the Yarn conversation. According to TCC, the project is 'an osmotic entity that welcomes contributions and tries to understand how to build a fertile exhibition model'.<sup>726</sup> TCC explain how the project started out with a more 'traditional' model simply because it needed a visible platform to begin to research and develop [fig, 39].<sup>727</sup> This has allowed the project to begin to challenge the power of the image within contemporary life, by metaphorically unfolding and revealing a complexity from their first event *Point Zero*.<sup>728</sup> TCC suggested that 'On the one hand, indeed, we shared the same questions and urgencies; on the other, however, we were conscious that we couldn't work without abolishing the distinctions between artists and curators inside the meta-collective'.<sup>729</sup>

Within this practice, there are several concurrent dialectical points at work. Firstly, there was a very specific need to shape the initial project to 'fit' within certain criteria. It is inferred, by the fact that POIUYT is supported by three galleries, MLZ Art Dep, Michela Rizzo Gallery, and Metronom that there was a certain set of procedures that shaped and framed how the project was first initiated. This

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<sup>723</sup>POIUYT, 'Home Page' (2018) <<http://poiuyt.it/poiuyt/?lang=en>> [accessed 28/11/2018].

<sup>724</sup>POIUYT, 'POIUYT. Point Zero Critical practices in contemporary Italian photography' Tamara Lorenzi communication (2017) <[http://poiuyt.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Press-Release\\_POIUYT.pdf](http://poiuyt.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Press-Release_POIUYT.pdf)> [accessed 28/11/2018].

<sup>725</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>726</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Answering to John, Round 2!', *Yarn Community* (2017) <<http://yarncommunity.org/stories/574>> [accessed 28/11/2018], (para.12 of 12).

<sup>727</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Answering to John, Round 2!', (para.12 of 12).

<sup>728</sup>POIUYT, 'Point Zero' <[http://poiuyt.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Press-Release\\_POIUYT.pdf](http://poiuyt.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Press-Release_POIUYT.pdf)> [accessed 20/11/2018].

<sup>729</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Answering to John, Round 2!', (para.12 of 12).

point is clarified by TCC within the Yarn dialogue, ‘We started with an exhibition like that because we needed a starting point to present POIUYT's members. Now we are trying to move on. We made a radio. Now we're developing it and working on the consequences of that approach’.<sup>730</sup> This highlights the dialectical tensions within the hierarchies of the art world. By conforming to ‘industry tropes’, such as the traditional gallery launch of an exhibition, POIUYT was entering a recognised format, thus presenting in a language inclusive to a specific community. This is revealed in the dialectical contradictions of conventionality–uniqueness, in which POIUYT must conform to the expectations of the institutional art world, particularly the gallery system, in order to legitimise and thus authenticate their position.<sup>731</sup> However, there is evidently a dialectical process at play and a flux, epitomised in the phrase, ‘Now we are trying to move on’.<sup>732</sup> POIUYT are clearly attempting to force a form of change from within the system, through a search for the ‘uniqueness’ of their project. Uniqueness in this sense is perhaps not a search for the problematic of originality, but for a method in which to ‘collectively challenge’ the ideological function of images within contemporary society, in order to generate understanding and knowledge.<sup>733</sup> TCC elaborate on how the project has spawned a radio station format; ‘Radio POIUYT also gained a lot of good reviews and there are some requests. So, we need to understand exactly what we are going to do, in terms of an action strategy’.<sup>734</sup> In 2017, TCC gathered in Amsterdam together with other members of POIUYT, in order to deliver an event/intervention at the Co-Op UNSEEN Photography Fair.<sup>735</sup> This iteration of POIUYT consisted of the creation of a radio booth and a series of web-broadcasts over YouTube for the duration of the art fair [fig, 40]. This experimental radio broadcast attempted to,

turn the booth into a live streaming broadcast for the four days of the fair. Instead of showcasing images, we are going to talk about images, sing images, and make noises with and about images. Treat images as language, language as image. Explore the space between what we see, we hear, and we imagine.<sup>736</sup>

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<sup>730</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>731</sup>Baxter and Montgomery.

<sup>732</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘Answering to John, Round 2!’, (para.12 of 12).

<sup>733</sup>POIUYT, ‘Platform for Image-Based Research’ (2017) <<http://poiuyt.it/poiuyt/?lang=en>> [accessed 20/11/2018].

<sup>734</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘Are We Such Dreamers?’ <<http://yarncommunity.org/stories/605>> [accessed 20/11/2018] (para.4 of 5).

<sup>735</sup>POIUYT, ‘CO-OP Insights: POIUYT’, Unseen CO-OP (2017) <<https://unseenamsterdam.com/co-op-insights-poiuyt>> [accessed 20/11/2018].

<sup>736</sup>POIUYT, ‘POIUYT Radio Sept 21-24’, *Facebook*, 15 September 2017 <<https://www.facebook.com/poiuyt.social/>> [accessed 21/11/2018], (para.2 of 3).

The live stream had everything from Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* broadcast (1938) to content created by visitors, both virtual (over YouTube) and other collectives at the art fair. This was all interspersed with a photography-based playlist created by Niccolò.<sup>737</sup> The section of the radio broadcast entitled 'meet the collective' was designed to give all the collectives featured in the fair, a space to generate debate and question different subject matters. In short, the creation of a 'non-traditional' platform within a more mainstream format of the 'art fair', began to actualise POIUYT's socio-political aims. It was in this space-time that the dialectical contradiction of conventionality–uniqueness, and unity-difference found its 'both/and' moment.<sup>738</sup> These contradictions are dynamic as they are elusive at times and are suggestive of the conventionality–uniqueness between the spaces of appearance such as the gallery space and the art fair, the virtual space (website as an archive) and the iteration of the radio POIUYT.

However, the tensions run deeper than this, as POIUYT is engaging in 'image-based research'.<sup>739</sup> The word 'research' is of interest as its significations are specifically institutional. From the university to the laboratory, research suggests a very specific set of parameters for POIUYT. Gregory Sholette, brings this aspect into focus, problematising the trend towards the 'para-academy' or 'Mockstitution'.<sup>740</sup> Sholette positioned this trend as, 'Today artists imitate a product particular to the post-industrial economy: the administrative, affective and intellectual power of institutions'.<sup>741</sup> Sholette traced the 'mimicry' of the artist throughout discourse, utilising Plato's assertions about the role of the artist in the Republic.<sup>742</sup> POIUYT in a sense is entering into a mimicry of contemporary art institutions through their intent to almost create a 'thinktank' or 'thinking-lab', a cross-disciplinary entity akin to *Demos* or the many cross-institutional museum group collaboration.<sup>743</sup> Yet, as Sholette suggested, POIUYT is not entirely one thing or another, they are political, non-hierarchical, morphing

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<sup>737</sup>POIUYT 'POIUYT RADIO UNSEEN AUDIO REEL' YouTube (2017) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbR0lO6R0a>> [21/11/2018].

<sup>738</sup>Baxter and Montgomery.

<sup>739</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Answering to John, Round 2!', (para.12 of 12).

<sup>740</sup>Sholette, 'Mockstitutions', *Dark Matter Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, p.152.

<sup>741</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>742</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>743</sup>Demos, 'about' <<https://www.demos.co.uk/about/>> [accessed 20/10/2018].

from one structure to another from the gallery space to the radio station. There is always an ‘edge’ to their decision making that forgoes institutional structures through a strange doubling, like a ghost or a Derridean supplement.<sup>744</sup> Sholette suggested that these entities are, ‘responding to the ruined public landscape of cultural enterprise’ as if they have taken on the fragments of failed mechanisms of welfare and neoliberal precarity.<sup>745</sup> However, through this dynamic interplay and mimicry, POIUYT create a sustained dialogue and a sense of artistic investigation into the role of images as

the value of images today is determined by their degree of circulation. They don't matter as singularities, but they count as patterns. And our experience of images is always the experience of a complex bundle of text and visuality where none of the two elements can be disentangled without it losing its meaning (and value).<sup>746</sup>

Here is the central methodology of POIUYT, which reveals their collective structure and immediately designates their practice as not entirely institutional. They have created a collective which attempts to question the power behind the movement of images by experimenting with the medium of the image in and of itself. This is the mimicry, or the ‘meta’ practice at play, both conforming to the specific infrastructure of the institution and simultaneously changing the institution by creating a different set of communicative relationships.

I will now return to TCC’s statement about their relationship with POIUYT, as it reveals another concurrent dialectical thread. They suggest the notion of the ‘meta-collective’, essentially referring to several different collectives and practitioners coming together to form something other. This otherness is embodied in POIUYT because it seems undefinable and different. Even TCC seem unsure about POIUYT as an entity.<sup>747</sup> It is an ambiguous entity, never completely solidifying, always in dialectical tensions precisely because it is built on a constantly shifting dialogue. Firstly, POIUYT is a collective as is revealed in the language which they used in the POIUYT radio broadcast. They suggest they have ‘a political attitude’ to images and they are an ambiguous collective never completely artistic or

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<sup>744</sup>Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, ‘Part 2, ‘... That Dangerous Supplement...’ pp.141-164.

<sup>745</sup>Sholette, ‘Mockstitutions’, *Dark Matter Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, p.153.

<sup>746</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘Answering to John, Round 2!’, (para.3 of 12).

<sup>747</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘Answering to John, Round 2!’, (para.12 of 12).



curatorial.<sup>748</sup> On the face of it, this meta-collective appears to act within the same set of social relations as I have previously discussed with TCC. They are constantly in flux, re-shaping their dialectic both internally and externally. However, there appears to be a change or difference because the dynamic has shifted within POIUYT as a result of the different set of people, and the multitude of different perspectives. TCC stated in the Yarn dialogue that,

we end up saying it's a platform for image-based research. It's not a curatorial platform. It's not an artist collective. It's an osmotic entity that welcomes contributions and tries to understand how to build a fertile exhibition model that can't be reduced to a list of artworks without any relation with the space or among them.<sup>749</sup>

This statement reveals the effacement of the separation of roles between artist, curator, etc., and indeed, the aesthetic identities of everyone involved, for the collective goal and the cohesion of the POIUYT platform. This was particularly at play in POIUYT radio and Baxter suggested these instances are *aesthetic moments*. The aesthetic moment occurs when, 'Through dialogue in the third sense, parties can occasionally create a fleeting moment of wholeness in which fragments and disorder are temporarily united'.<sup>750</sup> Of course, ambiguity is not entirely without dialectical tensions as one can ascertain specific traits from TCC, for example in posters produced for the POIUYT radio [fig. 41]. As TCC, suggest in their own practice, each person takes on their strengths for the betterment of the project.<sup>751</sup> This is an important aspect of RDT because it is evidence of possible friendship within POIUYT. Baxter suggests that when we engage in communication with others beyond one facet of their identity, in this case, more than simply the role of the artist, curator or as TCC, it reveals an *aesthetic love*, (not necessarily romantic) an appreciation of someone beyond simply one or two specific roles.<sup>752</sup> If I return to the Yarn conversation, this form of aesthetic love is palpable in a response to a question I posed specifically around practical organisation within POIUYT. TCC suggested that 'the first thing we need to do is to catch up. We need to talk and

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<sup>748</sup>Simone Santilli, 'POIUYT RADIO - LIVE FROM 2.30 PM' YouTube (2017) < <https://youtu.be/dYBU5CzYAAQ> > [21/11/2018] (19:35).

<sup>749</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Answering to John, Round 2!', (para.12 of 12).

<sup>750</sup>Leslie. A. Baxter, 'Relationships as dialogues' *Personal Relationships* (2004) [PDF], p.12.

<sup>751</sup>The Cool Couple, 'John's Questions, part 1' (para.4 of 5).

<sup>752</sup>Baxter, 'Relationships as dialogue', p.12.

discover each other better than we already do'.<sup>753</sup> The specific phrase, 'discover each other better' is further evidence of a need for a more complete understanding of each other through the process of communication. TCC qualify that when they 'meet up' as POIUYT, the process is predicated on a dialogue, by 'talking' to each other. This process is embedded in the entirety of the project from its inception to iterations such as POIUYT radio.

This form of 'collective voice' is not totalitarian, as Baxter posits, which is frequently the tendency in relation to the notion of the collective voice. Baxter argued that this tendency can lead to 'monologic wholeness, oneness or unity achieved through the hegemony of a single voice dominant over other voices, is the wholeness of totalitarianism'.<sup>754</sup> This is an important dynamic within POIUYT because the 'collective voice' is not dominated by one specific voice; it is multivocal and is further evidenced in the collective process of broadcasting POIUYT radio.<sup>755</sup> The broadcast was a platform for many different voices that came together in a dynamic aesthetic moment.

The interpersonal communication, which I have endeavoured to explore, brings my analysis onto the third discursive thread at play in the dialogue. This was the concept of friendship and how friendship operates as an important factor within TCC. In an illuminating dialogic moment, TCC reveal something of about their interpersonal relationship,

We are not a couple in life and for life. We close the studio and go home, where each of us has his private life and nightmares. We of course have a lot of things in common: same luggage, same jackets, we both have a dog, but then a lot of differences too.<sup>756</sup>

Firstly, they confirm that they are not romantically involved with each other, through the first sentence, 'we are not a couple in life and for life'.<sup>757</sup> Their relationship is not familial; thus, they have the ambiguity of being within a friendship or a work-related professional relationship or both/and within some amalgamation. This interrelated space of friendship and co-worker is complex within

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<sup>753</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Are We Such Dreamers?' (para.4 of 5).

<sup>754</sup>Baxter, 'Relationships as dialogue', p.12.

<sup>755</sup>POIUYT, 'POIUYT RADIO UNSEEN AUDIO REEL' YouTube (2017) [21/11/2018].

<sup>756</sup>The Cool Couple, 'John's Questions, part 1' (para.4 of 5).

<sup>757</sup>*Ibid.*

TCC's relationship as I will demonstrate. Their relationship shifts from the simple work-based association, to a deeper 'blended' personal connection and friendship. From the statement above, they went on to discuss how they have separate personal lives. This is the internal dialectic of integration-separation and, more specifically, the autonomy-connection interrelation. There is a clear tension revealed in phrases and words which signify a need to clarify separation towards autonomy such as, 'where each of us has his private life and nightmares'.<sup>758</sup> However, even in this statement, they began to list commonalities, 'same luggage, same jackets, we both have a dog'.<sup>759</sup> This dialectical contraction traces its way through much of the Yarn dialogue, including another revealing statement,

A collective does not have a definition. Every collective is like a little habitat and all its inhabitants have to find the balance in order to coexist. There's no golden rule or the safe conduct...It's both a modesty thing and something that makes every decision more complex, longer, or sometimes impossible to take. On the other hand, a collective means some warranty. You're never alone. So it's all 50-50. You get used to people switching your name and calling you Nico instead of Simo and viceversa and so on...<sup>760</sup>

There is a closeness in TCC's relationship revealed in the dialogue. This concept of habitat is central to their modus operandi, reappearing throughout the Yarn dialogue. A habitat has been defined in many ways according to what is being studied or what field of research is being undertaken. However, there appears to be some consensus in social philosophy and wider sociology that a human habitat is the ethics of embodiment within a place in the world, be that virtual, spiritual or physical.<sup>761</sup> TCC's habitat is one of shared authorship, 'so it's all 50-50', where they attempt to create a 'balance in order to coexist'.<sup>762</sup> This habitat is clearly more than just a workplace relationship. It goes beyond the economic, and in this sense it is a space for life and belonging, where 'you're never alone'.<sup>763</sup> As TCC point out, this is complex and difficult and sometimes it is an impossibility, but their interpersonal

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<sup>758</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>759</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>760</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>761</sup> M. Lloyd, A. Thacker, *The Impact of Michel Foucault on the Social Sciences and Humanities* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan 1997), p.88.

<sup>762</sup> The Cool Couple, 'John's Questions, part 1' (para.4 of 5).

<sup>763</sup> *Ibid.*

communication finds a form of unity in contradiction, indeed the reason they practice collectively is because of these contradictions.<sup>764</sup>

The concept of friendships (in all their possible formations) is central to William K. Rawlins's RDT research. Rawlins positions friendships as, 'Dialectically composed and culturally enacted as both marginal and moral, friendship can function as 'a double agency'; weaving in and out of larger social orders and fulfilling both individual and social services'.<sup>765</sup> Rawlins suggested this change over time reveals the flux and re-negotiation in friendships.<sup>766</sup> This re-negotiation is both internal, between each person, and externally facing. This exteriority is on a societal level, always culturally specific, and is simultaneously an internalisation of how friendships are supposed to function in any given culture. Rawlins suggested that this reveals the constant tensions and dialectical positions of the private and the public, the ideal and the real.<sup>767</sup> For Rawlins, this was a thread within the very architecture of the social fabric of communication within friendships and represented a strand of relational dialectics entitled *contextual* dialectics.<sup>768</sup> Simultaneously, Rawlins positioned the role of *interactional* dialectics which proposes four interrelated positions which pervade through the flow of ongoing communication, 'the dialectic of freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependent'.<sup>769</sup> Next is the dialectic of 'affection and instrumentality'. This is somewhat difficult to determine in this case study, however, it will be analysed in subsequent chapters. Rawlins positions the interactional dialectics of, 'judgement and acceptance' and 'expressiveness and protectiveness'.<sup>770</sup>

I will now explore these two dialectical fields, the contextual and interactional, in order to reveal how TCC's friendship traces its way through their practice. According to Rawlins, contextual dialectics 'derive from the place of friendships in Western culture'.<sup>771</sup> This presents an interesting line of inquiry regarding the formation and development of TCC. The idea of 'place' and how the socio-

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<sup>764</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>765</sup>William K. Rawlins, 'Cultural Double Agency and the Pursuit of Friendship', *Cultural Dynamics*, Vol.2 (1) (1989), p.28.

<sup>766</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.28-40.

<sup>767</sup>William K. Rawlins, 'Writing About Friendship Matters', *Dialectical Approaches to Studying Personal Relationships*, eds. By, Barbara M. Montgomery and Leslie A. Baxter (London: Psychology Press, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), p.72.

<sup>768</sup>*Ibid.*, p.72.

<sup>769</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>770</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>771</sup>*Ibid.*, p.72.

cultural and political contexts of a specific location could inform a collective and may reveal a deeper understanding of how they operate within the world.

It is vitally important that I address the reasons why Niccolò and Simone decided to start TCC in the first instance. They suggested the ‘genesis is to be found in the previous researches we conducted individually and the unique path of TCC is due to this background’.<sup>772</sup> This context is further articulated in the interview with Francesca Orsi in *Urbanautica*,

When we decided to start working as a couple we were sure of the fact that it went far beyond a simple collaboration between two artists. It was fall 2012 and we met after a period working as assistant in two artist studios. We knew each other since 2011 when we attended an MA in Photography and Visual Design at FORMA foundation in Milan. We always worked in a team, even studying. The idea of cooperating with other people attracted us, so we decided to start the duo deleting our names and creating a third entity. The Cool Couple is a name that reflects our main interests, the idea of collective imagery, the connections between everyday life and the most important contradictions of contemporaneity. It is coherent under the point of view of our practice, which often privileges irony.<sup>773</sup>

This initial meeting at the FORMA foundation, Milan, as students is a pivotal moment. Although they formed TCC after this initial meeting, they suggest that they ‘always worked in a team, even studying’.<sup>774</sup> This is suggestive of the role in which an institution may play in the formation of collectives by socio-culturally generating spaces in which friendships potentially can develop. Rawlins traces this relationship between friendships and societal context; ‘it is not objectively defined economic contracts as are work and professional affiliations. Even so, friendship persists as an ‘institutionalized non-institution’.<sup>775</sup> Rawlins suggests this is because of the ‘double agency’ of friendship, ‘because it often complements, fuses with, competes with or substitutes for these other personal and social relationships’.<sup>776</sup> Both Niccolò and Simone were studying for an MA in photography at the FORMA Foundation when they first met. This institution, with its prominent hierarchical position in Milan as the site of leading photographic exhibition making and experimental

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<sup>772</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘John’s Questions, part 1’ (para.4 of 5).

<sup>773</sup>Francesca Orsi, *Urbanautica* (para.1 of 15).

<sup>774</sup>*Ibid*, (para.1 of 15).

<sup>775</sup>Rawlins, ‘Cultural Double Agency and the Pursuit of Friendship’, p.28.

<sup>776</sup>*Ibid*, p.29.

degree programme, correlates with the duo's interests and practice.<sup>777</sup> This is particularly qualified with the sentence towards the end of the statement, 'The Cool Couple is a name that reflects our main interests, the idea of collective imagery, the connections between everyday life and the most important contradictions of contemporaneity'.<sup>778</sup> In essence, TCC has internalised the dialectical 'contradictions of contemporaneity' as central to their *modus operandi*. As they qualify in the Yarn dialogue when addressing the issue of these contradictions as friction points, 'the friction points we mentioned just pop up in our daily immersion in visual and non-visual contents. They emerge from the unconscious ephemeral "montage" that is our interaction with the Internet and the smart city'.<sup>779</sup> The image or more importantly the 'flow' and flux of imagery and the spaces between images is constantly changing and at the same time this change is the only constant in TCC's praxis. Questioning the role of collective imagery, forged their interest at FORMA Foundation, and informed their decision to develop TCC. This 'ephemeral montage' continues to manifest contradiction, for example, they expressed doubt over their ability to create any form of resistance to the institutional hierarchies of cognitive capitalism other than their ability to illuminate friction points,

The problem generates when we consider our position as artists. One thing is to make art without being an artists, but when you consciously decide to be part of the art world, you inevitably get rights and duties. And you live within a contradiction between cultural production and politic action.<sup>780</sup>

Finally, this reveals the dialectical knot in play. TCC exist because of their relationship which was forged within a hierarchical art world, the moment they decided to work together from within the studio and gallery system in Milan, with a pre-history through FORMA Foundation, they had to begin to negotiate their own position within said culture. This negotiation was both a result of their context and simultaneously their interactional dialectical position. It reveals the constant interplay between the emotional centrifugal (tendency for unity) and centripetal forces (tendency for divergence), between the 'smart city' and its institutional hierarchies (including FORMA Foundation), the 'ephemeral

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<sup>777</sup>Robert Koch, 'FORMA MERAVIGLI, La Fotografia al Centro' (2015) <<http://www.formafoto.it/spazio-forma/>> [accessed 02/01/19], (para.1 of 5), and, Where Milan City Guide, 'A Cultural Dream', (2019).

<<https://www.wheremilan.com/museums-news/forma-foundation/>> [accessed 02/01/19], (para.1 of 1).

<sup>778</sup>Francesca Orsi, Urbanautica (para.1 of 15).

<sup>779</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Answering to John, Round 2!', (para.1 of 12).

<sup>780</sup>The Cool Couple, 'John's questions, part 1', (para.5 of 5).

montage' of images (The Internet) and the 'cultural production' of the art world which is explicitly implicated within both the 'city' and the 'image'. TCC's friendship and thus collective is a constant negotiation and re-negotiation between these relational dialectical positions between 'the city', 'the image', 'the art world'- the dialectic of freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependant on a system which demands expressiveness and uniqueness but at the same time fosters protectiveness and conformity.

Another interrelated contextual dialectic is revealed in the mirroring or situational position of both Niccolò and Simone. Rawlins suggested that, 'friendships are constrained but not determined by public roles or institutions, tensions between public and private comportment and standards of evaluation persist' although there are examples of friendships which bring together completely different people from many different social strata, Rawlins argued that the institutionalisation of social life becomes an important factor in how friendships form between people on comparable levels within a hierarchy.<sup>781</sup> Both Niccolò and Simone were working as studio assistants in Milan and at the time when they decided to form TCC they were in a comparable socio-cultural position. However, just as this similarity is important and they share a commonality, they made the decision to form TCC from different perspectives. In an interview with *Fantom Magazine*, TCC illustrate these variations by responding to the question, 'What was your first approach to photography?' Simone responds, 'I was a dummy with a strong interest in art history until the day I got frustrated by the lack of answers about the art world and I tried to look for them into that of photography'.<sup>782</sup> Niccolò's response was, 'As a university student, I had the possibility to pick some optional courses and I'd always wanted to get to know more about cinema and photography'.<sup>783</sup> Although both came to photography in their early adulthood, Simone alludes to his frustrations with art history and his initial lack of skill and that he was more concerned with the role of images within society. Niccolò, alludes to an urge to learn how to use the camera, perhaps more in the realms of skill and he was particularly influenced by a course

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<sup>781</sup>Rawlins, 'Cultural Double Agency and the Pursuit of Friendship', p.31.

<sup>782</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Focus on: The Cool Couple for 2016 – On New Italian Photography' *Fantom Magazine* <<http://www.fantomeditons.com/2016-on-new-italian-photography-the-cool-couple/>> [accessed 02/01/2019], (para.2 of 12).

<sup>783</sup>*Ibid*, (para.3 of 12).

he attended at University in a ‘History of Photography held by Claudio Marra, who started his first lesson by showing a picture by Wolfgang Tillmans – an artist I still love today’.<sup>784</sup> According to Baxter and Montgomery, there are always differing dialogical perspective in play within a relationship, indeed these are constantly in action within the relationship.<sup>785</sup>

What is striking as I trace this dialectical notion of friendship is that TCC was not only conceived through friendship but that it continues to be shaped in this way. The habitat and the inherently socially driven space in which TCC operates, through constantly changing sets of utterances, is fundamentally friendship centred. This evidence is beginning to illustrate the importance of friendship (throughout its spectrum of possibilities) within the creation and development of the artist-led collective.

The fourth theme was the role of curating the artist-led collective, or more specifically, the complex interrelation which TCC has with the notion of curating within their practice. They suggest that ‘often we have to curate for ourselves, because galleries sometimes don't hire curators or because a museum curator is just a supervisor not interfering with you...’.<sup>786</sup> This sentence within the Yarn dialogue is perhaps the most revealing, and shows how TCC has internally conceptualised their position within the art world and to the role of the curator. In the first instance, curation is seen as a part of TCC’s practice, ‘often we have to curate for ourselves’.<sup>787</sup> Curation is an internal process, it is characterised within TCC’s language as an action or an act (in praxis). The trend of the artist as curator or artist-curator seems incumbent within the contemporary art world. I do not intend to linger on the phenomenon itself, as this would be to drift off the subject matter of this thesis. However, the discourse does intersect at points, this I will qualify with a brief overview.

In *The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse*, Paul O’Neill questioned the debate which has taken centre stage for the last 25 years. O’Neill positioned several arguments that echo throughout symposia, art journals/magazines, and international art fairs. These range from fierce rebuttals against

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<sup>784</sup>*Ibid*, (para.5 of 12).

<sup>785</sup>Baxter and Barbara M. Montgomery, *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics*.

<sup>786</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘Answering to John, Round 2!’, (para.11 of 12).

<sup>787</sup>*Ibid*, (para.11 of 12).



the hybridisation of artists as curators, such as curator Robert Storr's rejection of curation as part of artistic practice, and vice-versa and Storr even suggested that curation was not a medium at all.<sup>788</sup> Storr's reasoning was based on the notion that the 'auteurization' of the work of art is transferred to the curator in the process of developing the artist as curator.<sup>789</sup> In essence, this supplements the power of the modernist critic in the process of authenticating power within cultural production.<sup>790</sup> O'Neill positioned the counter to the argument through the example of John Miller's critique of international biennial and group shows.<sup>791</sup> Miller highlighted several examples of artists 'adopting' elements of curatorial practice including using other artist's work as 'raw material'.<sup>792</sup> Whether one agrees or disagrees with these points of view is not as relevant as the debate itself, as O'Neill provocatively asserted that, 'curating is becoming discourse' meaning that the two disciplines are becoming intertwined through the movement of the curator as a creative producer.<sup>793</sup> Crucially, this shift is articulated by TCC in the dialogue as they suggest, 'sometimes galleries don't hire curators' and 'because a museum curator is just a supervisor not interfering'.<sup>794</sup> This suggests, that in TCC's experience, there remains a difference between the role of the 'museum curator' and the evolution of curator as a creative producer. In this dynamic, the institution (and its infrastructure) possesses a more traditional 'caring' curatorial responsibility.<sup>795</sup> In a sense, the museum curator plays a transactional or partial role in the dynamic because TCC interact only partially with the curator, in a specific set of dialogical rules. TCC infer that this role is somewhere between a supervisor and a technician mainly helping with the install of the exhibition and through other institutional mechanisms such as public relations.<sup>796</sup> If I apply the concept of Baxter's aesthetic moment to this situation, it becomes clear that interaction between TCC and the museum curator is transactional, and each party only conceives of a

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<sup>788</sup>Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse', *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, eds. By. Judith Rugg, Michèle Sedgwick (Bristol, Intellect Books, 2007), p.19.

<sup>789</sup>*Ibid*, pp.19-20.

<sup>790</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>791</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>792</sup>*Ibid*, pp.15-19.

<sup>793</sup>O'Neill, p.22.

<sup>794</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Answering to John, Round 2!', (para.11 of 12).

<sup>795</sup>O'Neill, p.18.

<sup>796</sup>The Cool Couple, (para.11 of 12).

partial 'facet' of each other rather than a complete wholeness of each other, as in a close personal relationship.<sup>797</sup>

What is interesting is that TCC retains the space of creativity in this dynamic, because TCC has a level of authority-power as a result of this passive dynamic. This is perhaps heightened in situations where the institution cannot afford or does not hire a curator. In these cases, TCC self-curate, and thus, according to O'Neill, enter a space of the 'curator as creative producer' and the problematic of the 'artist as meta-curator'.<sup>798</sup> This is a contested field as I have briefly outlined, between often antagonistic points of view centred on a tendency to attempt to critically separate the curator and artist within a binary field of cultural production. However, in these contradictory perspectives, there is revealed a dialectic that is reflexively interrelated to the first theme within this analysis, i.e. the author and authority. McCartney offers a possible line of inquiry in a study of the 1960s collective *Art & Language*. McCartney suggested that 'through their self-authored criticism and self-produced publications, Art & Language almost managed to appropriate the authority of the connoisseur, critic or curator in conveying meaning'.<sup>799</sup> It seems this contested space of creativity described by O'Neill and McCartney is revealed as a dialectic of both a tendency for the artist and the curator to engage with the position of the author and ultimately the power to control over cultural meaning and production within a hierarchical art world.

This form of relationship between the museum/gallery, the role of the curator and TCC is not the only dynamic. TCC state that,

In other cases the museum or the gallery wants to be part of the process. You just need to have clear ideas. When you reach the museum you already have quite a clear idea of what you are going to do there, so there's no space for uncertainties or doubts once you start. It doesn't compromise our work.<sup>800</sup>

This relationship dynamic is different because the institution, through the role of the curator, is active within TCC's process. TCC suggested that in this dynamic they would already have a clear idea of

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<sup>797</sup>Baxter, 'Relationships as dialogue', p.12.

<sup>798</sup>O'Neill, p.18.

<sup>799</sup>Nicola McCartney, 'Collective Practice', *Death of the Artist Art Worlds Dissidents and Their Alternative Identities*, p.63.

<sup>800</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Answering to John, Round 2!', (para.11 of 12).

what they wanted to achieve. The word ‘compromise’ is the most revealing word in this statement because it alludes to the tension between the institution and the artist. It suggests resistance to the museum through a revelation–concealment dialectic in order to keep aspects closed off from the agency of the institution. The authority and power in this dynamic are always in flux, the space of creativity is different in this context and is a complex dialectical knot.

This knot was in play within the exhibition at the MACRO. In this instance, TCC was selected by a panel to feature in the *Fotografia- Festival Internazionale di Roma*. The panel was ‘composed of the artistic direction of the Festival’.<sup>801</sup> The Fotografia festival was in its 14<sup>th</sup> edition and had gained an institutional position within the Roman art scene.<sup>802</sup> Although Fotografia is a not-for-profit, it is supported by several sponsors with commercial ties.<sup>803</sup> The Festival also takes on a generalised art prize format with a series of shortlists and then a winner announced throughout the exhibition. TCC’s participation in this festival immediately problematises their authority as the themes, concept and aesthetic are all selected by the curators. To complicate this dynamic further, the festival was hosted at the MACRO which supports the prize and supplies Fotografia with an internationally recognised institutional venue. As a result, the installation, and subsequently the author-function, is in flux and dialectically undecided between parties. In this instance, TCC had already commenced the project *Cool People Pay Happily* (2016-on going). This was an example of their ‘clear idea’ when entering a dialogue with an institution.<sup>804</sup> Indeed, as I noted in my reflective account of the installation, ‘the work’ was in a liminal space between participator-artist-institution. TCC set out to purposely surrender an element of authority to the participator and thus negate (to some extent) the authority of both all the parties involved.

There is a third iteration of the curator/artist dialectic in play within TCC’s practice. This dynamic is akin to self-curation as previously discussed. It pertains to the dialectical tensions observed within the

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<sup>801</sup>Fotografia ‘OPEN CALL 2016- APPLICATIONS WILL BE OPEN UNTIL NOVEMBER 28, 2016’ (2016) <<http://www.fotografiafestival.it/open-call-2016-->aperte-le-iscrizioni/?lang=en>> [accessed 18/12/2018].

<sup>802</sup>As characterised by its international presence and its central position within a tradition institution, the MACRO.

<sup>803</sup>Fotografia, ‘About’ <[https://www.facebook.com/pg/fotografiafestival/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/fotografiafestival/about/?ref=page_internal)> [accessed 20/12/2018] and, there are a number of commercial or arm’s length sponsors Quodlibet, ‘home’ <<https://www.quodlibetroma.com/>> [accessed 20/12/2018] and, Zetema Progetto Cultura, ‘About us’ <<https://www.zetema.it/societa/>> [accessed 20/12/2018].

<sup>804</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘Answering to John, Round 2!’, (para.11 of 12).

self-curation of POIUYT. I will return to the section of the Yarn dialogue in which TCC discuss the internal process of working in the meta-collective,

It's not a curatorial platform. It's not an artist collective. It's an osmotic entity that welcomes contributions and tries to understand how to build a fertile exhibition model that can't be reduced to a list of artworks without any relation with the space or among them.<sup>805</sup>

What is clear is that TCC and other members of POIUYT are attempting to deconstruct the borders of their collective practice by negating the assignment of the 'curator' or 'artist' through a form of multiple authorship. McCartney forwarded the notion that 'for contemporary collectives to exercise the control structures of the aesthetic institution it is no longer enough to employ collectivism, the group must also avoid assimilating the same internal hierarchies of the gallery and museum'.<sup>806</sup> What is revealed through the spaces of appearance such as, Radio POIUYT at the UNSEEN festival, is that POIUYT is attempting to create a working relationship which acts on exactly what McCartney is suggesting. In a sense, they leave some of their ego at the door, and attempt to develop what TCC would term a 'habitat', by dissolving the traditional institutional roles of artist and curator to engage with a space which 'welcomes contribution', and is intent on the not only the more obviously defined exhibition site but also the 'relation with the space'.<sup>807</sup> POIUYT is, in essence, a collective that is neither artist nor curatorial because it is 'both/and' changing and morphing as they develop their collective approach.

The final theme was the purpose of the Yarn dialogue in and of itself. This is perhaps the most complex as it requires an analysis of a totality, complete with all the contradictions of three voices within a dynamic. I am of course referring to the relationship between TCC and myself, which changed through the duration of the project. To illustrate this change is important because it is yet more evidence as to how and why TCC operate and it may also move towards an understanding of collective duos.

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<sup>805</sup>*Ibid*, (para.12 of 12).

<sup>806</sup>Nicola McCartney, p.67.

<sup>807</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Answering to John, Round 2!', (para.12 of 12).

In TCC's initial introduction to Yarn, they stated, 'our lives were nothing special until John invited us to join Yarn'.<sup>808</sup> This opening line was of course in jest, however, the use of humour – and probably sarcasm- immediately 'broke the ice' and set up the conversation as one which did not take itself too seriously. This flash of irony and humour through the playful use of language is always at play within TCC. It is an aspect I detected when I visited the MACRO installation and it was re-enforced by this opening gambit. This sense of irony is important to RDT because it suggests that things have multiple conflicting meanings. In *Dialogism and Relational Dialectics*, Baxter and Montgomery address irony as, 'irony entertains both belief and doubt, both hope and despair, both seriousness and play, and in these kinds of complexities, it hints at the very nature of relational dialectics'.<sup>809</sup> In this case, TCC was suggesting that the act of my invitation was both a welcome change to their lives and also inversely that they indeed had 'special' lives before, and that they would have them despite this opportunity. Simultaneously, it was also a suggestion of the potentiality of what was to come which was qualified with a more serious line, 'In the past years, we swept a bunch of questions under the carpet (you can even think we closed them in the wardrobe if it sounds creepier)'.<sup>810</sup> This is again filled with dialectical tensions of both the opportunity- for openness, but acknowledging that these issues may be difficult, and simultaneously that there will be 'questions' that are closed, and that they would have the opportunity to keep them closed.

These differing centrifugal-centripetal dialectics of openness-closedness, openness-discretion, and openness-silence all play out in the Yarn dialogue. What was evident is that the conversation was taking place in a partially public domain. It was not a private space, and this would affect the relationship which was forged between the parties. Certain topics of discourse and certain private, and highly personal matters would be off-limits on the Yarn platform. This was explicitly signified in the statement by TCC, 'then there's our personal life. But we can't talk about that because it's secret'.<sup>811</sup>

However, other elements were on the metaphorical table, including the politics of collectivism

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<sup>808</sup>The Cool Couple, 'How Did We End Up Here', <<https://yarncommunity.org/stories/552>> [accessed 20/12/2018], (para.1 of 1).

<sup>809</sup>Barbara M. Montgomery and Leslie A. Baxter, *Dialectical Approaches to Studying Personal Relationships*, (London: Psychology Press, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), p.156.

<sup>810</sup>The Cool Couple, 'How Did We End Up Here', (para.1 of 1).

<sup>811</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Answering to John, Round 2!', (para.11 of 12).

through discussions of geo-political and socio-cultural discourse within the West and contemporary life. Indeed, it was through this dialogue that we made some observations about the state of contemporary life and through a collaborative effort we asked the questions what is an artist collective and how does it operate? This question was positioned through the lens of TCC's practice and my own experience and research on the artist-led collective.

As has been explored in the preceding analysis the answer to these two questions is complex and paradoxical. There were points of convergence and divergence and all the strata in-between. This stratum reveals the axis of our debate and a change in our positions. One point of divergence was the discussion on the current state of cognitive capitalism and the 'smoothing' out of differences within the project of globalisation. My own position suggested that,

I agree cognitive capitalism or capitalist realism is a full-blown ideology now, as it refuses to allow any conceptual horizon. However, I get a sense that the rise in collectivism (and I do think there is such a rise) throughout the world is in fact a symptom of these ruptures as the traditional hierarchies and left and right politics suddenly isn't fit for purpose, I guess that is another reason why some have coined the term post-politics.<sup>812</sup>

TCC suggested there is a need for change and new forms of systems, however they did not share my position that through a rise in the antagonistic dialectics within collectivism that any real ruptures currently exist, 'we are not so optimist [*sic*] as you, even if we believe that a change is necessary and that we live in a moment where there's a small chance to do something. We face a crisis of politics'.<sup>813</sup> This is an example of the multiplicity of dialectical positions. On the one hand, there is agreement, as we both point to a 'need for change' but there is an element of agreement-difference located through the dialogue 'we are not so optimist as you'.<sup>814</sup> This is not the binary opposition of agreement-disagreement as there is a commonality in our shared opinion that we are facing a global political crisis.

In another section of our dialogue, there was a point in which we mostly agreed with each other's position. I stated that 'the ominous drive for professionalisation within a neo-liberal economic model

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<sup>812</sup>John Wright, 'A Discussion with The Cool Couple- part 2' <<https://yarncommunity.org/stories/570>> [accessed 20/12/2018], (para.1 of 2).

<sup>813</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Answering to John, Round 2!', (para.4 of 12).

<sup>814</sup>*Ibid*, (para.4 of 12).

exerts tension and locates friction within its socialist tendencies'.<sup>815</sup> Interestingly, TCC entitled this section 'Well said, bro!', the obvious connotations of an accepted western shorthand for 'brother' aside, this heading suggested that what they were saying would be in predominant agreement. TCC stated that,

Thank you for having elegantly expressed this contradiction, that we might label THE contradiction: the boundaries of the art world are comprised between the poles of buyers and merchants on the one hand and its socialist, political or cultural drives.<sup>816</sup>

TCC is re-affirming and re-articulating the point I made, which in turn, I had reciprocated from their initial points. However, further down the Yarn page, their understandable pessimism played out, 'it is hard to think about solutions because alternatives often suffer from an excess of purism. Artist-run spaces most of the times [sic] end up as small galleries or fall completely out of the art system (who cares? - you may say. Anyway, how can you be heard if you're an outsider?).<sup>817</sup> This was a tendency which repeated itself from the earlier example. In this instance, I agreed in the sense of difficulty to achieve such a goal, although, in relation, my view was perhaps more optimistic, founded again in the ethics of the 'new' collectivisms and political micro-ruptures. In this case, the agreement-disagreement dialectic is under a stronger sense of centripetal force because we almost have consensus. There would be a further stratum added; agreement-similarity agreement-difference, agreement-disagreement. Here, 'similarity' signifies the minuscule deviation located in levels of optimism-pessimism dialectic which of course is itself a constant stratum. These are internal dialectical positions between parties that would reside under the rubric of connection-autonomy.

The multiplicities which underline the dialogue also reveal the arc of the relationship and change that occurs throughout the Yarn project. Baxter and Montgomery suggested that 'from Bakhtin's dialogical perspective, interaction between relationship parties is laced with a broader variety of praxical reverberations'.<sup>818</sup> These 'reverberations play out as a dialectical quartet of dialogue's past with impression on the dialogue of the present, a dialogue of the 'immediately prior' utterances with

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<sup>815</sup>John Wright, 'A Discussion with The Cool Couple- part 2'.

<sup>816</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Well Said, Bro!' <<https://yarncommunity.org/stories/627>> [accessed 20/12/2018], (para.1 of 2).

<sup>817</sup>*Ibid*, (para.1 of 2).

<sup>818</sup>Barbara M. Montgomery and Leslie A. Baxter, *Dialectical Approaches to Studying Personal Relationships*, p.162.

the present, a dialogue with the present with the anticipated, and finally a dialogue with the present and the ‘anticipated response of the generalised other’.<sup>819</sup> Of course, this is arguably more evident in close personal relationships, but it does play out in the Yarn conversation. It can be acutely observed within the movement and flow of language from the initial phases to the most recent. There was a more formal address and tone to the opening exchanges such as ‘There seems to me to be a political resistance within your work or a search for alternative modes of production through a collective mentality’, and ‘Social media platforms have contributed to the rise of a culture of aggression and victimhood, where the debate, the discussion and the sense of belonging have been deeply altered’.<sup>820</sup> These were somewhat emotionally detached abstract concepts with less emphasis on the personal. At this stage, we were establishing the levels and boundaries of our communication and thus relationship. However, overt opinion and the personal began effervescing its way to the surface of our communication. An example of this inference was the use of our forenames and even shortened nicknames such as, ‘Simo’, ‘Nico’.<sup>821</sup> Other areas were addressed such as TCC’s daily routine, and in a real moment of openness they described a personal change in their lives, ‘at first we had the bad habit of smoking in the studio, it looked so Mad Men, but then Nico became a vape-man and accordingly smoking became forbidden’.<sup>822</sup> Similarly, we explored cultural references we had in common, including through visuals, the film *The Dreamers*, a stylised evocation of Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* and even Donald Trump.<sup>823</sup>

This movement and change in our relationship was of course, non-linear. There were clearly elements that were off-limits, however, the arc from researcher-participant to a more nuanced John-Nico-Simo or more formally, ‘participant as researcher’ and ‘researcher as participant’ began to emerge. It is at this juncture that it became clear that our dialogue had exposed an overt limitation. For our relationship to change it would require extended interaction ‘in person’ so to speak, in order to interpret ‘the full range of human actions- verbal and nonverbal, vocal and nonvocal, intended and

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<sup>819</sup>*Ibid*, p.162.

<sup>820</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘John’s, Questions part 1’, (para.1 of 5).

<sup>821</sup>The Cool Couple, ‘Are We Such Dreamers’, (para.2 of 5).

<sup>822</sup>*Ibid*, (para.2 of 5).

<sup>823</sup>In various stories in our Yarn project see, <<https://yarncommunity.org/projects/18>> [accessed 20/12/ 2018].



unintended, sincere and contrived'.<sup>824</sup> These limitations to this study and thus this chapter will be addressed in chapters to come.

To revisit the question that I asked at the beginning of the project, how do artist-led collectives operate? What has become apparent is that each collective is different. This may seem obvious, however, it was revealed when I ascertained that TCC is informal in its structure. They do not mirror or mimic traditional business organisational structures. However, there may be some generalised processes which they enact when engaging in a dialogue with museums and galleries. These procedures are centred on having a strong sense of what they want to achieve and essentially the aesthetic they want to curate. One of the most compelling outcomes of this project was the suggestion that the fundamental reason for why collectives form and how they develop is communication and that their relationship shows that 'individual and the social are dialogically inseparable. The individual self becomes only in relating' and 'relating both produces and reproduces historical-cultural-social milieu'.<sup>825</sup> Thus collectives are only collectives in relation to their communication. They exist only in dialogue and their relationship is the space developed between this communication. In the case of TCC, they specifically set out to create a 'habitat' where this dialogue could be explored between themselves and others. This is overtly referenced in their meta-collectivity with POIUYT. This tendency of 'networking', as they refer to it, has become their modus operandi. This negotiation is perhaps where their 'work' is located, constantly in flux and the exhibition spaces are bi-products of this communication. This 'habitat making' is also based on friendship and the central place in which friendship pervades their existence. This important notion of how communication can build a sense of belonging to a place is not exclusive to TCC, as it played out in my observations of Assemble. As a result, this form of a personal relationship between themselves and others can allow for creativity beyond the economic interdependency, this is a challenge to much of the literature on 'collectivism' within contemporary art. It suggests something beyond the Marxist-dialectic, which much of the said literature is based upon.<sup>826</sup> As to the question, can artist duos be referred to as collectives? The answer

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<sup>824</sup>Barbara M. Montgomery and Leslie A. Baxter, *Dialectical Approaches to Studying Personal Relationships*, p.161.

<sup>825</sup>*Ibid*, p.158.

<sup>826</sup>Adam Schaff, 'Marxist Dialectics and the Principle of Contradiction', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.57, No.7 (1960), pp.241-250.

is complex. On the one hand, TCC is a potentially rare example of an entity that is both a collective and a duo. The propensity for the inclusion of the other in a temporal space, as a central mode of practice and praxis, embraces the possibility of the collective. On the other hand, they resist it by never permanently becoming a triplet or a quartet, etc. This may not be the case in other duos, and as a result this project, further adds to this debate. Indeed, if a duo can be a collective then it begs the question are there other forms of collectivisms lurking in the art world's 'dark matter'?

Finally, it is my argument that TCC essentially embody what Sholette and Stimson began to define as the *new collectivism* operating with the hauntology of collectivism but inside the capitalist present.<sup>827</sup>

TCC's collectivism is not, on the surface, in direct opposition to hegemonic powers of the neoliberal West, as they appear comfortable in the postmodern gallery or museum, for example in their installations at The Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome (MACRO) and the MLZ Art Dep gallery in Trieste.<sup>828</sup> Instead, they operate within the system itself, searching for frictions, walking the line between co-option and resistance, all the while creating liminal spaces and contributing to the discursive language of this new collectivism.

There is an unanswered question which has emerged from both in-depth studies. It concerns how the different relationships which constitute artist-led collectives both create and are created by place. The following chapter begins to map out these entities and their interrelationships with the cultural ecology of Leeds.

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<sup>827</sup>Sholette and Stimson, pp.1-15.

<sup>828</sup>The Cool Couple, 'Selected Exhibitions' <<http://thecoolcouple.co.uk/who-we-are/>> [accessed 21/07/2019].

## **Chapter 5: The Ecology of Cultural Space: Mapping Artist-led Collectives**

The ‘space of appearance’ that artist-led collective activities inhabit appears to be diverse and ever changing. As the previous case studies have demonstrated these spaces are occupied and created by different sets of social bonds. What has become most apparent regarding artist-led collectives is the role of friendship, and how friendship shapes their evolution. This mapping study aimed to explore the implications of friendship and its interrelationship with spaces and places in which artist-led collectives appear. This study also aimed to question the perception that artist-led collectives are in some way in opposition to the institutions of the art world. I argue that this binary position is no longer tenable when the dependencies and interrelationships of our current socio-political and cultural happenstance are revealed.

The term ‘Space of Appearance’ was coined by philosopher and critical theorist Hannah Arendt.<sup>829</sup> Arendt described the space of public assembly for political protest. In her work entitled, *The Human Condition*, Arendt suggested ‘action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost anywhere and anytime’.<sup>830</sup> What was startling about Arendt’s assertions was how the nature of public space is not constructed as some abstract concept dictated entirely by the state and/or private corporation. Political and public space is transferrable and is constructed by the very act of alliance and allegiances.<sup>831</sup> Arendt evoked the idea that public discourse needs a platform or physical public space, like a square, in order to ‘support’ action. This is a contradiction because collective action needs public space to occur, yet this public space does not exist without the public to act and construct the space which Arendt suggested was the ‘space of appearance’.<sup>832</sup> However, it is not the square or piazza itself that conjures up this discourse, ‘the Polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together’.<sup>833</sup> Further, Arendt traced the historical movement of

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<sup>829</sup>Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd edn.1958. (London: Chicago University Press, 1998).

<sup>830</sup>*Ibid*, p.198.

<sup>831</sup>*Ibid*, pp.38-39.

<sup>832</sup>*Ibid*, pp.198-200.

<sup>833</sup>*Ibid*, p.198.

public and private realms from antiquity to the twentieth century.<sup>834</sup> Crucially, Arendt argued that, ‘we are in a far better position to realize the consequences for human existence when both the public and private spheres of life are gone, the public because it has become a function of the private and the private because it has become the only common concern left’.<sup>835</sup> Arendt characterised the modern age through this movement and the rise of the social realm. The implications of the rise of the social realm and Arendt’s public space theories are vitally important when considering artist-led collectives. The collective is thus located in the conversation between its members. If this logic is followed, collectives could exist in a multiplicity of spaces, whether physical or virtual.

What is at stake in this conception is the understanding or point of view that I am attempting to formulate. The words ‘space’ and ‘time’ must be addressed in order to explore the complexities which arise when attempting to ‘map’ artist-led collective activity. Doreen Massey argued that space was not a static, neutral entity which needed to be separated from everything else. For Massey, ‘seeing space as a moment in the intersection of configured social relations (rather than as an absolute dimension) means that it cannot be seen as static. There is no choice between flow (time) and a flat surface of instantaneous relations (space)’.<sup>836</sup> Further, Massey posited that, ‘space is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation. This aspect of space has been referred to elsewhere as a kind of ‘power-geometry’.<sup>837</sup> These interdependencies which constitute the space in question (i.e. for Arendt the development of the social sphere and in Massey’s conception, that of modern society) was for David Harvey the compression of the experience of space-time through the processes of capital and the rise in communication technologies.<sup>838</sup> Harvey argued that,

Since capitalism has been (and continues to be) a revolutionary mode of production in which the material practices and processes of social reproduction are always changing, it follows that the objective qualities as well as the meanings of space and time also change. On the other hand, if advance of knowledge (scientific, technical, administrative, bureaucratic, and rational) is vital to the progress of capitalist production and consumption, then changes in our

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<sup>834</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>835</sup>*Ibid.*, p.69.

<sup>836</sup>Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p.265.

<sup>837</sup>*Ibid.*, p.265.

<sup>838</sup>David Harvey, ‘Time and space as sources of social power’, *The condition of postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1989), pp.201-308.

conceptual apparatus (including representations of space and time) can have material consequences for the ordering of daily life.<sup>839</sup>

This ‘ordering of daily life’ is important when considering artist-led collectives. If I follow Arendt’s conception of the rise of the social sphere coupled with Harvey and Massey’s arguments about the perception of space-time in a society based on accumulation and consumption, then in order to move towards an understanding of artist-led collectives it is vital that I consider change and how that change is represented in the spaces which collective appear over time. Further, in terms of this study, there are power dynamics involved in these changes throughout Leeds as an urban environment. These dynamics reveal the interdependencies of resources, place and assemblages of people working in the cultural ecology of Leeds.

There are strong correlations between Arendt, Massey and Harvey’s arguments and the studies of friendship from an RDT perspective. Although, the commentator’s concepts engaged with different scales of space, place and contexts, there are similarities within their arguments regarding the interrelations which create and shape space-time for example, Arendt’s conception of the ‘Polls’, the sphere of human activity, and its inter-dependencies with the act of speaking together.<sup>840</sup> The word ‘speaking’ immediately involves communication and thus dialogue between people, which both creates and is subject to context. This emphasis on the act of speaking together plays an inherent role in creating the physical socio-cultural space which is evident in RDT’s positioning of the ‘utterance’.<sup>841</sup> Montgomery and Baxter qualified this by suggesting that utterances can create forms of ‘joint action’ between relationship partners, which constitutes, ‘a special form of communication not understandable through public traditions or individual predispositions’.<sup>842</sup> This ‘unique language’ is understood to be unique with regards to traditional structures and in relation to wider socio-cultural

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<sup>839</sup>*Ibid*, p.206.

<sup>840</sup>Hannah Arendt, p.198.

<sup>841</sup>Baxter, ‘Personal Relationships’, Vol.11 (2004), p.1–22.

<sup>842</sup>Montgomery and Baxter, *Dialectical Approaches to Studying Personal Relationships*, p.162.

discourse. This joint action is not restricted to spoken language, but the entire multiplicity of gesture, non-vocal, written discourse, artistic discourse.<sup>843</sup>

The social bonds which have appeared to be so vital both historically and through the contemporary case studies of Assemble and TCC, must be understood in their relation to the spaces which they create and pervade. As Rawlins suggested, friendship is the ‘non-institutional institution’, constrained but never determined by the institutionalisation of our socio-cultural paradigm.<sup>844</sup> It is for this reason that it is necessary to further explore the spaces of appearance in which artist-led collectives, and their peculiar social bonds inhabit, and what these spaces can reveal about the contradictions and tension within collective activity both in Leeds and beyond.

This tracing of friendship was not limited to simply friendship as an abstract concept, as it revealed its own interdependencies with external-internal forces which pervade society. The concepts of ‘safety’, ‘access’ and ‘proximity’ continually occur and re-occur both in relation to friendship and through the activity of artist-led collectives. In considering a relational dialectical framework it is important to trace how these factors interrelate and to avoid a monologic focus on friendship. This is not simply an arbitrary decision but has become evident through the mapping process. I will now outline the shape of the study and discuss the methodology behind the mapping process in order to contextualise the analysis.

### *The Shape of the Study*

This study aimed to map the spaces of appearance in which artist-led collectives become visible. Through this analysis, I questioned the socio-political conditions which determine how artist-led collectives operate, within a locality, by specifically focusing on their interrelationships with institutions in Leeds.<sup>845</sup>

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<sup>843</sup>Montgomery and Baxter, p.161.

<sup>844</sup>Rawlins, *Friendship Matter*.

<sup>845</sup>The geographical limitation set on this study was a Leeds postcode for the main space of activity of each collective. This did not inhibit mapping of collectives when they carried out work in other locations, for example when a collective based in Leeds appears in London or in Glasgow. However, a collective based in London which occasionally appear in Leeds were not counted. The rationale was based on the fact that this would involve a longer duration of study to map a significantly expanded geographic area. This is outside the scope of my thesis due to time constraints.

The participants for the study were chosen through two methods. Firstly, an open call for participation was sent out via social media and Curator Space.<sup>846</sup> This was designed to capture as many participants as possible. Secondly, as a research-led curator working in the city, I utilised my own knowledge and networks in order to invite several collectives to participate (Appendix 3 provides details of the artist-led collectives involved and their statements).

Limits were also set on the ‘type’ of artist-led entities invited to participate. The conceptual framework which I applied was specifically designed to allow for as much diversity as possible regarding the different collectives involved. In order to set boundaries, I identified what was **not** an artist-led collective, rather than trying to quantify the un-quantifiable. From the respondents of the call out, I excluded arts organisations, artist-led studio groups and facilitating organisations. There was no limit prescribed to the field of activity, other than to be identifiable within the art world. There was also no limit set on the number of participants as participants may fluctuate and collectives may disband or form during the study. The map was designed as a longitudinal study over the duration of 1 year, 1<sup>st</sup> March 2018- 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2019. Activity may have gone ‘un-noticed’ by the study as the map is only as effective as its participants’ visibility and the limits as outlined previously. The map is a ‘snap-shot’ or representational sample data of the sum of the collective activity which contributes to the cultural ecology in Leeds (appendix 4).

The willingness of the collectives to be part of this study was vitally important both from an ethical perspective and links into the broader themes of my thesis. From an ethical perspective, each collective could self-determine what information they wished to become public. Thus, the collectives had a greater level of agency as opposed to a study with a hierarchical relationship between the researcher and their participants. This form of co-production between myself and the collectives has led to an emergent dialogue, which is both fundamental to the dialogical methodologies which have

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<sup>846</sup>John Wright, Research Study: Call Out for Artist-led Collectives! *Curator Space* (2017) <<https://www.curatorspace.com/opportunities/detail/research-study-call-out-for-artistled-collectives/1569>>[accessed 24/10/2017].

shaped my thesis and reflected in the notions of communication, which I am arguing is inherent in collective practices.

There have been several attempts to map or survey artist-led activity in recent years and a growing sense of researchers becoming interested in the mapping process as methodology in and of itself to understand the multitude of activity emerging from the shadows. The following studies formed a starting point for the development of my mapping study:

*Artist-Run Europe Practice/Project/Spaces*, by Gavin Murphy & Mark Cullen was an attempt to survey the artist-run sector within Europe. The book includes an ‘artist-run index’ which lists activity across Europe. Its methodology is of interest as they attempt to categorise different types of artist-run organisations/ collectives and projects. There are: ‘Studios, Institutional, Non-Profit/Project, Artist-initiated, Artist-run’. The index also defines ‘Nomadic’ as a status of some of its directory.<sup>847</sup>

Interestingly, the index fails to mention the word ‘collective’, instead a series of specific terms are used to differentiate. The project is exploring the homogenous tendency to generalise collective activity. The flaws in this index are obvious, as the print format cannot be easily updated so almost as soon as the publication is finished it is ‘out of date’. There are issues of taxonomy which have been implemented in order to categorise specific activity, itself problematic, as it relies on a specific use of language rather than a more nuanced reading of the emergent themes at play. This becomes too generalised to capture the full breadth of the subject matter.

Leeds Creative Family Tree is a non-for profit project designed to connect the creative people of Leeds.<sup>848</sup> The project was co-designed by creatives located in Leeds and the design based organisation Split. Although free to purchase the maps are only available fully in print format and do not currently have a digital counterpart. The project also appears to be thematically sectioning off the city into specific areas such as: Central Leeds, Mabgate and Sheepscar etc. Although this makes the process manageable there is perhaps a sense of dislocation brought about by not being able to view the whole.

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<sup>847</sup>Gavin, Murphy and Mark, Cullen, *Artist-Run Europe. Practice/Projects/Spaces* (Eindhoven: Onomatopoe Office and Project-space, 2016), pp.161-198.

<sup>848</sup>Leeds Creative Family Tree, ‘Project’ (2012) <<http://creativefamilytree.co.uk/>> [accessed 12/09/2017].



However, the entire map of the ‘family tree’ was on display at a launch night in the Leeds Corn Exchange earlier this year and at subsequent events.<sup>849</sup>

One particular project has utilised geographic data in the development of an online interactive map. Doggerland is a project which conducts collaborative research documenting the breadth of artist-led activity across the UK with the purpose of contributing toward a wider, more deeply concerned understanding and dialogue with artists and arts writers on the modes in which this practice operates and influences - and is influenced by - practitioners, non-professionals, place, policy, ideology and community.<sup>850</sup> They have created a digital map of the UK and are beginning to populate it with projects. Akin to the other examples I have mentioned there are issues with taxonomy of activity, and how we describe certain characteristics. Doggerland have an added challenge of scale as their area, the UK, is so vast that details are lost.

The problem with all these surveys is they are either too prescriptive or not prescriptive enough. Confined by the static nature of print they become out of date as soon as they have been created or so overly ambitious that they cannot succeed. However, what they are all attempting is to develop a sense of the creative world to understand what is going on in our society. This is exactly what I am attempting: my project was open source, digitally available, easily updatable and took place in a specific area and so has the potential to be scaled up. I specifically focused on the spaces of appearance which collectives made, as opposed to the ‘broad-brush’ mapping studies, the aim being to collate a potentially richer body of data which will aid a more informed understanding of the activities of artist-led collectives.

### ***Method and Methodology***

The methodological approach which I implemented was based of Massey’s concept of relational space coupled with the concept of ‘place imprinting’.<sup>851</sup> This methodology was both inductive and

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<sup>849</sup>Leeds Creative Family Tree, ‘Leeds Creative Family Tree - Launch Party’, Facebook (2017) <<https://www.facebook.com/events/213597692378720/>> [accessed 21/05/2019].

<sup>850</sup>Doggerland, ‘Artist-led Map’ (2017) <<http://www.doggerland.info/artistled/>> [accessed 12/09/2017].

<sup>851</sup>Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), and Robert Hollands and John Vail, ‘Place Imprinting and the arts: A case of the Amber Collective’, *Local Economy* (2015) Vol.30, No.2, pp.173-190.

deductive because it was simultaneously pursuing a specific line of enquiry into the link between institutions and artist-led collectives, and open to the emergent data from the study. The specificity of the methodology and the subsequent method which I implemented was implicitly interrelated with the notions of ‘space’ and ‘place’. Drawing on Massey’s conception of relational sense of place and ‘place imprinting’, I developed a methodological framework which was both critical and relational in terms of the multiplicity of human and non-human activity.<sup>852</sup>

Massey set out the terms for a relational sense of place in the publication *For Space*. Here, she argued that, ‘what is special about place is precisely that throwntogetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now (itself drawing on a history and geography of thens and theres)’.<sup>853</sup> For Massey, and I concur, this reveals the difference between space and place. On the one hand, space is constituted from a multitude of trajectories which, ‘may be a living thing, a scientific attitude, a collectivity, a social convention, a geological formation’, these are then intertwined with stories which are literally the ‘history, change, movement of things’, stories also include trajectories themselves.<sup>854</sup> For Massey, place is created when emplaced actors negotiate relationships with trajectories and thus place is explicitly intertwined with space, however they represent a different set of processes.<sup>855</sup> Thus a sense of place is always temporal and in the case of this study by entering the spaces of appearance, collectives are momentarily negotiating relationships with a multitude of trajectories both on a global scale and in their specific locality.

The methodological concept of ‘place imprinting’ was integral to the mapping study as it provided a practical ‘tool kit’ in order to develop a process for the analysis and method of mapping which I implemented. Robert Hollands and John Vail applied the concept of place imprinting in order to, ‘advance our understanding of the complex relationship between art and locality. In doing so, we emphasise the need to draw together three elements of place: geographical location, material form, and place as meanings and values’.<sup>856</sup> Although I employed my own version of place imprinting

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<sup>852</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>853</sup> Massey, *for Space*, p.140.

<sup>854</sup> *Ibid.*, p.140.

<sup>855</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>856</sup> Robert Hollands and John Vail, ‘Place Imprinting and the arts: A case of the Amber Collective’, p.173.

which is based on Holland's and Vail's study, it is important to note that the central tenants for the term place imprinting were developed by Thomas F. Gieryn and outlined in, *A Space for Place in Sociology*.<sup>857</sup> Through an empirical mapping of geographic data utilising the online platform *Google My Maps* (appendix 5), I then drew on specific information regarding what type of event the collectives performed and the material forms which they embodied. I then began to draw out the relationships with the trajectories at play such as, political, social and economic trajectories which coalesced in their specific localities.

I made a very conscious decision to utilise Google My Maps in order to visualise the data. This was primarily because of accessibility, as it is an open access platform with no specialist skills required to use the platform. As a result, the collectives could both view the map and share it publically at the end of the study. The map is also easily updateable and could be utilised for future research on different scales and localities.

The map in a virtual sense, is the visualisation or aesthetics of place which cannot be entirely understood by itself and requires the interpretation of the relationships which constantly form and inform the localities of artist-led collectives. Their spaces of appearance, or their act of temporarily 'becoming' is impacted on by the trajectories and stories that intertwine and from the ever-negotiated place of being together. By implementing this hybrid methodology of place imprinting with a relational sense of place, I was able to explore the complexities of the relationships between collectives and the institutions of Leeds. This hybrid is important in another sense because it speaks to the notions embedded within my articulations of RDT as a conceptual framework running throughout my thesis. This methodology allows for analysis and interpretation on multiple levels rather than becoming too rigid, which is important when considering the plasticity of the subject matter and the arguments posed in this thesis.<sup>858</sup>

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<sup>857</sup>Thomas F. Gieryn, 'A Space for Place in Sociology', *Annual Review of Sociology* (2000) Vol. 26, pp.463-496.

<sup>858</sup>This is a preference for weak theory rather than strong theory, John Baldwin, 'Putting Massey's relational sense of place to practice: labour and the constitution of Jolly Beach, Antigua, West Indies', *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* Vol. 94, No.3, pp.207-221.

## *The Importance of Studying Together*

Before I move onto the analysis of the mapping study it is important to sketch a brief history of artist-led collective activity in Leeds. This history has pervaded the spaces of appearance, and indeed, the aesthetics at play. It reveals a very specific relationship between the evolution of self-initiated artist-led collectives and the universities within the city. Black Dogs is a nomadic collective which formed in 2003 at the University of Leeds.<sup>859</sup> They formed as a result of their degree show and exhibited as a collective for the first time in 2004.<sup>860</sup> They remain to this day a non-for-profit, voluntary, entity without the formal structures required from engaging with funding bodies or commercial contexts. In 2010, Cassandra Kill opened a dialogue with Black Dogs and compiled a case study of their activities.<sup>861</sup> Kill, suggested two central discursive threads are inherent within Black Dogs,

The group's political focus is reflected by the positioning of concepts at the core of their practice, with diverse media used to articulate each particular idea. This works well alongside their collaborative framework as various techniques can be shared by individual members as best suits each project.<sup>862</sup>

This correlates to the statement on the Black Dogs' website, 'firstly, the projects and artwork we create. Secondly, the process of working as a collective'.<sup>863</sup> This project-driven way of working together appears to constantly re-shape Black Dogs both collectively, as their membership is fluid, and creatively as their ideas are constantly shaped by different voices. Even in the early days of the collective their membership was flexible for example in their second exhibition entitled *Technically Wrong*, 2004, they had been joined by artist Eleanor Johnson.<sup>864</sup> This tendency towards a flexibility in collaboration is akin to TCC's practice and in the way Assemble work on a project basis.

Black Dogs have exhibited nationally. For example in 2010 at Tate Modern they exhibited an interventional performative artwork entitled *How Not To Sell Your Soul at No Soul For Sale* [fig. 42].

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<sup>859</sup>Andy Abbott, 'What is Black Dogs?' (2019) <<http://www.black-dogs.org/>> [accessed 02/04/2019], (para.1 of 5).

<sup>860</sup>Casandra Kill, 'WHAT IS BLACK DOGS?', *MA Case Study* (2010) Leeds Beckett University (formally Leeds Metropolitan University) <<http://www.black-dogs.org/>> [accessed 02/04/2019].

<sup>861</sup>Casandra Kill, *Black Dogs Case Study*.

<sup>862</sup>*Ibid.*, 'WHAT IS BLACK DOGS?'.

<sup>863</sup>Andy Abbott, 'What is Black Dogs?' (2019), (para.3 of 5).

<sup>864</sup>Black Dogs, *Technically Wrong*, Top floor of Pizza Express, White Cloth Hall, Leeds, 1st - 12th November (2004).

This intervention was part of a festival to celebrate non-for-profit and independent organisations in the artworld. Black Dogs stated that,

[t]he invitation prompted much anxiety and cynicism within the group as we were concious [*sic*] of the contradictions and tensions involved in partaking in an event that both flattened out the nuances of independent and autonomous art production and valorised the Tate; a signifier par excellence of the institutional Artworld [*sic*] with which we feel little affinity.<sup>865</sup>

Black Dogs eventually decided to go ahead and created a simulacrum of a pub, the aim being to engage the audience in a different way by transporting them into the mechanisms of how Black Dogs operate.<sup>866</sup> The intervention also re- created a pub quiz and had spaces for discussion where the audience could write thoughts on beer mats about the challenges of co-option and recuperation in the artworld.<sup>867</sup> There was also table football, a piano, and other ‘tat’ sourced from actual pubs.<sup>868</sup> This challenge to the institutional hierarchies of the art world not only changed the whole atmosphere of the space, into a social rather than a gallery space, but also helped Black Dogs to widen their networks, ‘Black Dogs came away from the event with some new excellent friends and knowledge of inspirational artist groups, slightly hungover but having had a seriously good time’.<sup>869</sup> Indeed, since their conception Black Dogs have been developing connections with others from many different areas of the UK. In an email response to Kill’s case study, Steven Allbutt a collaborator with Black Dogs expresses this movement throughout the UK, ‘[t]here are a number of BDs [*sic*] now in London, Newcastle, Coventry etc who all wish to remain part of BDs but are unable to be at meetings and therefor[*sic*] influence opinion or take responsibility. To be at the centre of Bds [*sic*] you must be at the centre of Leeds’.<sup>870</sup> Here was located the tension of place which is constantly related to the space-time in which they were formed. Although, it is clear that Black Dogs were attempting to move to a wider culturally democratic collective with a de-centred, or at least, non-hierarchical structure by way of all members having a say, the problematic of ownership due to geographic location had become

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<sup>865</sup>Black Dogs, ‘How Not To Sell Your Soul at No Soul For Sale’, Tate Modern, London, May 14th - 16th, (2010) <<http://www.black-dogs.org/>> [accessed 24/05/2019], (para.1 of 6).

<sup>866</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>867</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>868</sup>*Ibid.*, (para.5 of 6).

<sup>869</sup>*Ibid.*, (para.6 of 6).

<sup>870</sup>Steven Allbutt, *Black Dogs Case Study*, Casandra Kill.

apparent.<sup>871</sup> This is further characterised by the use of term *Leeds Core* to describe the ‘original’ set of members which still work and live predominantly in Leeds, Bradford and Huddersfield.<sup>872</sup> This interrelationship between people, spaces and places appears to be vital in moving towards an understanding of artist-led collective activity. Indeed, Hollands and Vail described these negotiations with the trajectories of material and social resources as ‘artistic clustering’ in their case study of the Amber Collective.<sup>873</sup> The clustering within the Black Dogs history, or story to use Massey’s terminology, seems to be always shaped by Leeds and the City’s particular university culture. Similarly to Black Dogs, Leeds 13 developed during their time at the University of Leeds, although Leeds 13 developed in their second year of their fine art course and Black Dogs became formally a collective after their degree show.<sup>874</sup> The collective formed in 1998 while studying Fine Art at the University of Leeds. A controversial start to the collective centred on their first project *Going Places*, which featured documentation from a ‘trip to Malaga’.<sup>875</sup> The trip had supposedly been funded by a University Student Union grant.<sup>876</sup> Leeds 13 later revealed that the trip had been completely fabricated and was staged to question ‘what is art?’ and, what are its ethical and moral dimensions in the context of contemporary society?<sup>877</sup> This elaborately staged hoax, which even consisted of tutors being ferried to Leeds and Bradford airport to see them arrive back in the country, set the media and art world alight.<sup>878</sup> The outrage was somewhat quelled over the double bluff by the fact that the money had already been returned to the University and donors with interest.<sup>879</sup>

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<sup>871</sup>Andy Abbott, *Black Dogs Case Study*, Casandra Kill.

<sup>872</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>873</sup>Robert Hollands and John Vail, ‘Place Imprinting and the arts: A case of the Amber Collective’, p.179.

<sup>874</sup>Jen, ‘Degree Show’, Pages & Files, *PB Works: archive* (2010)  
<<http://leeds13.pbworks.com/w/page/16040050/Degree%20Show>> [accessed 02/02/17]

<sup>875</sup>Louise Jury, ‘Going Places? No we only took a trip to the Costa Del Spoof’, *The Independent* (1998)  
<<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/going-places-no-we-only-took-a-trip-to-the-costa-del-spoof-1158560.html>> [accessed 01/02/2017].

<sup>876</sup>John, Crossley, ‘Leeds 13’ <[http://johncrossley.co.uk/John\\_Crossley/Leeds\\_13.html](http://johncrossley.co.uk/John_Crossley/Leeds_13.html)> [accessed 02/02/17].

<sup>877</sup>Unknown, ‘Leeds 13 win their appeal for a first for art’, *The Times Higher Education* (1999)  
<<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/leeds-13-win-their-appeal-for-a-first-for-art/147973.article?storyCode=147973&sectioncode=26>> [accessed 02/02/17].

<sup>878</sup>melancholic1, ‘Going Places’, Synopsis, *PB Works: archive* (2010) <<http://leeds13.pbworks.com/w/page/16040055/Going%20Places>> [accessed 02/02/17].

<sup>879</sup>Newspaper articles: ‘Education Top marks for ‘Costa Scarborough’ students’ *BBC*, 1998  
<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/132283.stm>> [accessed 20/02/17] and Richard, Allan, ‘The Con Artists!’ *Yorkshire Evening Post* (19 May 1998) and Chris, Benfield, ‘Sun, sangria--and the meaning of Art...’ *Yorkshire Post*. (19 May 1998).

A year later and perhaps more interestingly, the students devised a collective degree show, entitled ‘The Degree Show’, in which they exhibited work by other artists such as Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst, Auguste Rodin, Marcel Duchamp, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Georgina Star, Jake and Dinos Chapman and Jo Spence.<sup>880</sup> In short, over £1 million worth of artwork were exhibited at West Riding House.<sup>881</sup> This exhibition not only challenged what was considered the boundaries of artistic practice, asking, for example, whether they were acting as curators in the context of the show, but also questioned how one might assess and grade a degree show and student work of this nature.<sup>882</sup> Members of Leeds 13 continue to work in the art world both with each other and in other creative capacities.

Over last ten years there have been a plethora of successive artist-led collectives which have developed and disbanded in the context of both the educational institution and their interconnections with arts facilitating organisations such as, East Street Arts.<sup>883</sup> There is a specific central thread which has become apparent and cannot be ignored, there is a strong interrelationship between the role of education, particularly in fine art, and the development of artist-led collectives. These collectives have morphed and changed and occasionally become different artist-led entities. They include, Precious, a collective formed in their second year of fine art at Leeds College of Art (now Leeds Arts University);<sup>884</sup> Seize, was a collective formed at the University of Leeds, who held their inaugural exhibition in 2013;<sup>885</sup> Woolgather, formed at Leeds Metropolitan University (Leeds Beckett University), who commenced their activities circa 2008 and went on to become a ‘contemporary arts organisation that works with creative practitioners to develop new work and dialogue in all visual & live art forms’.<sup>886</sup> Of course, these are only a few amongst many that have practiced within the city’s arts ecology, but what these stories reveal is not just a tendency of artists to work together at

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<sup>880</sup>Leeds 13, *The Degree Show* (Leeds: The Wild Pansy Press, 1999), *Notes*.

<sup>881</sup>Leeds 13, ‘*The Degree ‘Show’*’.

<sup>882</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>883</sup>East Street Arts, ‘About’ (2019) <<https://eaststreetarts.org.uk/>> [accessed 02/02/2019].

<sup>884</sup>Precious, ‘@PreciousLeeds’, *Twitter* (2019) <<https://twitter.com/preciousleeds>> [accessed 02/04/2019], and I was completing my BA (Hons) Fine Art at Leeds College of Art concurrently with Precious and established friendships and acquaintances with several members.

<sup>885</sup>Sarah-Joy Ford, ‘Seize Projects’ (2019) <<http://sarahjoyford.com/seize-projects-paste>> [accessed 02/04/2019].

<sup>886</sup>Woolgather, ‘Woolgather Art’, *Biography, Axisweb* (2019) <<https://www.axisweb.org/p/woolgatherart/>> [accessed 02/04/2019].

University, but of some underlying trajectories in play within the teaching of Fine Art in Leeds. Why is it that these artist-led collectives so often form during their degree course?

Before I move onto discussing this question amongst others, it is important to discuss what I am referring to as ‘the institution’. This is a complex question. On the one hand there is a sense of the institutionalisation of society, which is by now practically global in its reach. This was characterised by Arendt’s conception of the totalitarianism which spread across the Western world in the twentieth century.<sup>887</sup> On the other hand, there are a multitude of different institutions with a myriad of purposes throughout every aspect of human existence. This includes political institutions, cultural institutions, religious institutions, educational institutions and many more ambiguous entities. The relational dialectical perspective on the matter moves away from the often touted notion of institutional ‘behaviour’, to a more nuanced articulation.<sup>888</sup> Professor Geoffrey M. Hodgson articulated this notion, ‘without doing much violence to the relevant literature, we may define institutions as systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions’.<sup>889</sup> What is revealed in this statement suggests that institutions do not create behaviour, but effectively structure potential patterns and trends in a system. This correlates with Rawlins’ articulation of friendship being constrained but never dictated to by institutional mechanisms.<sup>890</sup> It is this conception that I will predominantly be discussing, with the notion that these social precedents are embodied within specific art world institutions such as: museums, galleries, and universities. The following mapping study will explore this interrelationship between the institution and artist-led collectives.

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<sup>887</sup>Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

<sup>888</sup>Geoffrey M. Hodgson, ‘What are Institutions’, *Journal of Economic Issues*, Vol.XL, No.1 (2006), pp.2-3.

<sup>889</sup>*Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>890</sup>Rawlins, *Friendship Matter*.



## *Analysis*

The following analysis is thematised by several different factors. They overlap and diverge at times presenting contradictions and tensions both with the urban environment of Leeds and with their internal relations. These factors have presented themselves as evident throughout the study and have aided in the mapping of collective activity within the locality of Leeds. It must be noted that these factors are not intended to be a rubric or set of categorisations which collectives conform to but a loosely defined web of discursive traits which reveal elements of the city's cultural ecology.

To begin with there is the notion of the University, or more precisely, the role in which degree courses play within the city as a space of emergence for collective activity. The importance of artistic clustering plays a vital role throughout this study but in particular with regard to the university and the space of the degree course. As previously touched upon, the importance of studying together has become apparent as 50% of the collectives featured in this study formed within the space of the degree course (appendix 6). This reveals the extent that geographic proximity of artists in a cohort environment can foster potential relationships which can lead to collectively.

I approached Arturn Collective after attending a multi-centred exhibition which they hosted in November 2017 at Melbourne Street Studios, and a film screening at The Reliance pub.<sup>891</sup> This appearance, although not directly within the study time frame, reveals geographic clustering of artist-led and arts organisations which provide physical exhibition space and artists' studios within the city. The area is known as Mabgate and is home to numerous relatively low rent post-industrial buildings.<sup>892</sup> The link between this form of urban environment and artistic activity has been much explored and will be discussed in relation to artist-led collectives further on in this analysis. However, what is important to note is that the Mabgate area and its abundance of low rent, large space properties has provided many self-organised arts organisations the opportunity to develop their ideas. This has of course become attractive to students both during their university careers and the crucial

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<sup>891</sup> Arturn Collective, 'Unrest: Film Screening' (2017) <<https://arturncollective.wixsite.com/arturn/past-events>> [accessed 05/03/2019].

<sup>892</sup> Louise Fletcher, 'Mabgate: A Thriving Cultural Hub To Keep To Yourself', *The Confidentials* (2016) <<https://confidentials.com/leeds/mabgate-a-thriving-cultural-hub-to-keep-to-yourself>> [accessed 05/03/2019].

time proceeding their graduation. Indeed, organisations in the area such as East Street Arts have established links with the universities in the city.<sup>893</sup>

Arturn was founded in 2015 by Kendra Howard and Tilly Davies. The duo met in the same cohort at Leeds Beckett University. Their spaces of appearance within the window of the mapping study were positioned entirely within the institution of Leeds Beckett University. This was essentially because both Kendra and Tilly were in their final year of their BA Fine Art, and as a result their focus was on their exhibit in the Beckett's degree show, *Beautiful Thinking*, 2018.<sup>894</sup> Arturn's activity reveals an interesting interdependence dialectic which correlates with the situations and contexts with the historical discourse of artist-led collective activity in Leeds. The specific conditions of the institution and more precisely of the creative undergraduate course, can foster collaboration between students, beyond the often-prescribed elements of group work within the curriculum.<sup>895</sup> In Arturn's case, there appears to be more than a working relationship, and a suggestion of a form of friendship. This social bond becomes visible in their use of imagery on their Instagram feed [fig, 43] and was also eminently discernible from my first conversation at Melbourne Street Studios.

There is a connection here between the space of appearance, within Leeds Beckett University, and the formation of Arturn. If I return to Rawlins's investigation into friendship this connection will become apparent. Rawlins argued that, 'the dialectic of the freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependant describes the contradictions of availability, obligation, absence and copresence stemming from the voluntaristic ethic underlying friendship in Western culture'.<sup>896</sup> The relationship between Kendra and Tilly was such that they decided to work together throughout their degree, thus attempting to constantly negotiate and re-negotiate the dependence and independence dialectic in relation to both themselves and an institutional system which required independence and individuality.<sup>897</sup> This is the contradiction at the heart of this space of appearance, the University at once fosters the conditions for

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<sup>893</sup>East Street Arts, 'Guild', (2019) <<https://eaststreetarts.org.uk/portfolio/guild/>> [accessed 05/03/2019], (para.4 of 5).

<sup>894</sup>Arturn Collective, 'arturncollective', *Instagram* (2018) <[https://www.instagram.com/p/BjW\\_ZlnnBeV/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BjW_ZlnnBeV/)> [accessed 05/03/2019].

<sup>895</sup>Leeds Beckett University, 'Teaching and Learning', BA Fine Art Course Overview (2019) <<https://courses.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/fineart/#year2>> [accessed 03/04/2019].

<sup>896</sup>William. K. Rawlins, 'Writing About Friendship Matters: A Case Study in Dialectical and Dialogical Enquiry', *Dialectical Approaches to Studying Personal Relationships*, p.72.

<sup>897</sup>*Ibid.*, p.72.

such a relationship but then requires individuality from each student to pass the course. This is where the complex non-institutional institution of friendship intersects with formal institutional mechanisms.

This change reveals another important centripetal force within the dialectical knot of the relationship between Kendra, Tilly and their degree course at Leeds Beckett University. This relational force pervades in both their degree show, as a place, and the space with which they inhabited on their course. What is most interesting in Artturn's case is the lack of collective activity post-degree show. They also became somewhat un-responsive towards the end of the study, and this coupled with the lack of activity on their central website, suggests that they are in a moment of flux and or closure. The space in common between Tilly and Kendra has now changed, in the sense of the formal 'work place' support structure of the institution, is no longer directly implicated in the relationship. This support structure which included the opportunity to access material resources, peer-to-peer critique, technical and academic support and expert guidance was no longer directly accessible. This presented a massive change in their dynamic, as the internal-external dialectic shifted and the support structure and the place in common realigned themselves.

This question of the university environment fostering collective artistic activity is not simply limited to undergraduate Fine Art courses. TCL formed out of a cohort of students from the MA in Creative Practice at Leeds Arts University in 2017.<sup>898</sup> This state of play poses several questions firstly, if multiple universities and courses are fostering artist-led collectives is there a generalised set of conditions or trajectories at work? Secondly, are there any differences in the way in which these creative courses are delivered by the different universities? The later question is incredibly subtle and maybe almost imperceptible through the lens of this study, however, its importance in understanding the role of place in the spaces of appearance.

TCL's practice is disparate, working as individuals then coming together to collectively curate group shows. This is an important distinction as there is a constant contradiction at the heart of their

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<sup>898</sup>TCL, 'Home' (2019)  
<<https://tclartcollective.wordpress.com/?fbclid=IwAR0fv0XfhKNU7ePygAgL42bR5A9arlIeDiM3ElisIcwOCZrSEuVjw0z2XYw>> [accessed 12/04/2019].

practice, as they do not work on installations or even co-designed objects but come together in a group show format. This is an example of the dependence-independence dialectic within the collective. This dynamic social bond is evidenced on their website, in their spaces of appearance and in the language they use in their 'about statement'. Their WordPress based website, has tabs and subpages for each artist individually by name.<sup>899</sup> Similarly, in their group shows at Leeds Arts University, Coffee on the Crescent, and Horticap, they exhibited their art works as individuals under the 'banner' of TCL artist-led collective.<sup>900</sup> This trend is made even more explicit in their about statement, 'TCL Art Collective are a group of independent artists; Mel Dewey, Carol Sowden, Paula Hickey, Sue Wright & Ann Barrass who have come together to exhibit, collaborate, support, respond & create dialogue through our individual practices'.<sup>901</sup> What is evidenced within this discourse is the dialectical knot of integration-separation and more precisely the centrifugal-centripetal forces of independence-dependence. As Rawlins asserted, 'the dialectic of freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependent'.<sup>902</sup> This dialectic pervades TCL. Their particular interpersonal dialogue has developed into a collective with an apparent sophisticated empathetic relationship, which is constantly in dynamic tension and creates the capacity for both the individual and the collective to exist. Words such as, 'collaborate', 'support' and 'dialogue' suggest a notion of collective endeavour, and simultaneously they develop their own identities in relation to each other and the totality of the TCL collective.

TCL's spaces of appearance are in a constantly shifting relationship both with the Leeds Arts University, in which they were formed, and with an extended set of interrelationships with people. Their group show format which first emerged in the context of the MA in Creative Practice degree show appears to have become the blueprint for their on-going practice.<sup>903</sup> It is a-typical when the language of the course aims is taken into account, 'The course encourages you to pursue an individual

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<sup>899</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>900</sup>John Wright, 'Mapping Study', TCL (2018) <<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/2/edit?mid=18S6-rS7eYf0UOdn-JO18l6Gm57g&ll=45.77833496043872%2C-3.2463840499999605&z=5>> [accessed 12/04/2019].

<sup>901</sup>TCL, 'Submitted statement to mapping study'.

<sup>902</sup>William K. Rawlins, 'Writing About Friendship Matters', *Dialectical Approaches to Studying Personal Relationships*, eds. By, Barbara M. Montgomery and Leslie A. Baxter (London: Psychology Press, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), p.72.

<sup>903</sup>TCL, 'Activities' (2017) <<https://tclartcollective.wordpress.com/activities/>> [accessed 02/06/2019].

research interest for the duration of study which will allow you to examine and strengthen your own practice and place it at the centre of your studies'.<sup>904</sup> This clearly encourages individualism, to pursue a practice which has already begun, as this is an MA aimed at, 'graduates who want to continue to develop their practice and identities in the context of the creative and cultural industries'.<sup>905</sup> In TCL's case, every member was already a practicing artist/within the art world in some capacity. Obviously, this MA is entirely different to the taught BA Fine Art at Leeds Beckett University in which Arturn formed. This is exemplified in the language of the latter course's aims, '[Y]ou will be taught by nationally and internationally recognised artists and practitioners, who will help you to develop your artistic identity'.<sup>906</sup> The word 'taught', 'develop' and 'identity' position the course aims at developing an artist practice in the first instance. This is not simply the difference between BA and MA as they do not constitute a direct progression. Nevertheless, forms of collective practice have emerged from both contexts.

A focus on the space of the degree show may provide some answers to this emergent trend. As a required component of both courses, the degree show acts as a space of appearance for students to reveal their practice to the wider art world.<sup>907</sup> The degree shows for both these collectives became more than a space of appearance because they represented a pivotal moment in their collective relationship. If I return to Massey's argument regarding place the importance of this component in the students' university life becomes clear. Massey argued that, 'what is special about place is not some romance of a pre-given collective identity [...] what is special about place is precisely that throwntogetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating the here-and-now'.<sup>908</sup> This reveals the importance of the degree show for both TCL and Arturn as they each had to negotiate their own dialectical relationship with their respective institutions and their own history becoming enacted within the physical place of the exhibition space.

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<sup>904</sup>Leeds Arts University, 'MA Creative Practice' <<https://www.leeds-art.ac.uk/study/postgraduate-courses/ma-creative-practice/>> [accessed 02/06/2019], (para.2 of 6).

<sup>905</sup> *Ibid*, (para.3 of 6).

<sup>906</sup>Leeds Beckett University, 'Course Details' (2019) <<https://courses.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/fineart/>> [accessed 02/06/2019].

<sup>907</sup>Degree shows are also open to the general public, thus to wider society than specifically the art world.

<sup>908</sup>Massey, p.140.

The importance of the degree shows as a space for collectivity and collaboration within a cohort must be recognised as a vital factor in the continued emergence of artist-led collectives. Drawing on my own experience of being a part of a degree show at Leeds Arts University and having witnessed several degree shows at The University of Leeds and Leeds Beckett, there is a profound sense of collective responsibility for organising and working together to create, curate, promote and install the degree show, which acts as a form of group exhibition.<sup>909</sup> This was highly student-led at Leeds Arts University, from the exhibition build to the promotion and the invigilation rota of the gallery space. It seems this method of working collaboratively within a cohort engenders a sense of both autonomy, from the institutions predication on individuality, and connection, to a sense of collective responsibility to actualise the degree show as a representation of both the self, the cohort and the university to the wider polis. This is of course contradictory, yet it is in this dialectical tension that the ‘happening’ or ‘event’ of the degree show can occur. If I return to Black Dogs, this sense of complex belonging, imprinted itself from the outset, ‘[t]he original aim of the Black Dogs collective was for the six Leeds University fine art students involved to produce an exhibition to develop their skills for their final degree show’.<sup>910</sup> Of course there is a vast difference between the University of Leeds’s fine art course and others within the city, as the students at the University of Leeds have complete control over the curation of the degree show.<sup>911</sup> However, this sense of belonging to a cohort and through identifying with a university, which in a sense is forged through relationships and communication between staff and students, plays a vital role in the transition from the collectives embedded in place, to the collectives negotiating their relationships post-university.

Studying the method in which collectives have negotiated this change reveals the level of continued connection which they continue to experience post- university. TCL were invited back to exhibit at Leeds Arts University in October 2018, as part of an Alumni programme of exhibitions.<sup>912</sup> This was a

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<sup>909</sup>I attended Leeds Arts University (then Leeds College of Art) between 2009-2012 and studied Fine Art. I also, attended several degree shows at Leeds Beckett University (then Leeds Metropolitan University) and had friends and a loose network of connections which experienced the Fine Art course at the time and this claim has been raised several times.

<sup>910</sup>Casandra Kill, ‘WHAT IS BLACK DOGS?’, *MA Case Study* (2010) Leeds Beckett University.

<sup>911</sup>As an embedded researcher, within the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, I have observed this occurrence. In comparison to my knowledge of the other Leeds Arts University and Leeds Beckett University this claim appears to stand.

<sup>912</sup>John Wright, ‘Mapping Study’, TCL October 2018.

direct result of the continued relationship with the institution in which they formed. However, there is evidence of this form of dialectics extending beyond the physical site of Leeds Arts University. TCL's appearance at Coffee on the Crescent was directed and curated by Stu Hansom, who studied at Leeds Arts University concurrently with TCL members.<sup>913</sup> Similarly, their appearance at Horticap in June 2018, was aided by a collective member working with the charity.<sup>914</sup> TCL have appeared in Ireland as part of a residency which is tangential in its connection to Leeds Arts University through TCL's involvement. However, this contextual interrelationship with not only the physical geographic location of the institution but its wider discursive influence appears to be a vital thread in the development and formation of TCL. If I return to this notion in RDT, Baxter and Montgomery posited that context, 'is not an independent phenomenon, apart from the relationship. Instead, communication between the relationship parties, and with third-party outsiders and social institutions, shapes the dynamic boundary that distinguishes the "inside" from the "outside" of a relationship'.<sup>915</sup> In other words the institution pervades TCL's existence and should not be seen as an adjunct but part of their story.

After agreeing to the study, it appears that Unlocked Collective are an example of the change and flux which pervades the practice and life cycle of artist-led collectives. They only appear once within the duration of the study and appear to have disbanded. However, they are yet another example of the institutional university space providing the conditions for different artists to find common ground and work together to form and develop collective working. When this structure and common working place is removed, as in the duration of a degree, then the collective will face some form of change, whether this to the extremes of disbanding or finding new spaces to convene. In the case of Unlocked Collective, their already disparate individual locations may have contributed to this change of circumstance.<sup>916</sup> Indeed, the role of geography and the capacity to convene meetings where members can easily be in one physical location appears to be a factor in continued communication within

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<sup>913</sup>TCL, 'Tweet by @TCLcollective', *Twitter* (November 2018)

<<https://twitter.com/TCLcollective/status/1066265544079355904>> [accessed 20/03/2019].

<sup>914</sup>Horticap, 'Meet the Staff', Horticap Harrogate (2019) <<https://www.horticap.org/meet-the-team/>> [accessed 13/04/2019].

<sup>915</sup>Baxter and Montgomery, *Dialogues & Dialectics*, p.45.

<sup>916</sup>Unlocked Collective, 'Mapping Study Statement' (2018).

collectives. Hollands and Vail described the many factors which were involved in the Amber Collective's relocation from London (where they were emerging from art school) to Newcastle in the late 1960s.<sup>917</sup> Hollands and Vail suggested that, '[w]hile some members left because they still had strong ties to London (in fact, one or two never completely uprooted from the capital)'.<sup>918</sup> Although in Amber's case these changes did not spell the end for the collective, it was just the beginning, there is a strong connection between the ideas of the universities in Leeds, as places in common, which can support and provide many of the practicalities, including a specific geographic location with transport links, which collectives require to form. This appears to be supported through the data collected in this mapping study, as not only have Arturn and Unlocked Collective reduced their spaces of appearance, but two further collectives, Goat Collective and The Other Collective (formed at the University of Leeds and Leeds Arts University) dropped out of the study in the preliminary stages citing that they were disbanding (in their current form) and relocating to London.<sup>919</sup>

This place in common and the practicalities of geography, professional support and facilities is only one aspect of why the university provides a space of appearance for artist-led collectives. As has been briefly discussed, proximity to fellow creatives within a relatively lengthy and pivotal point in their education and emotional development presents as an important factor in the formation of both friendships and the possibility of collectives. Historian and Marxist academic, Gareth Stedman Jones explored the notion of the politicisation of students as a group throughout their time at university.<sup>920</sup> Stedman Jones argued, 'this period of training is the one time in their life when they are assembled together, and so have a chance to develop a *collective consciousness*'.<sup>921</sup> Further, Stedman Jones suggests that these assemblages can foster group action and rebellion because, '[l]arge numbers of alert and culturally equipped individuals grouped together, will in the long run, inevitably become rebellious against a society founded on unreason and repression'.<sup>922</sup> These points appear to strike

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<sup>917</sup>Robert Hollands and John Vail, 'The art of social movement : Cultural opportunity, mobilisation, and framing in the early formation of the Amber Collective' *Poetics* Vol.40, No.1 (2012), pp.22-43

<sup>918</sup>*Ibid*, p.38.

<sup>919</sup>These collectives were Goat Collective and The Other Collective. Email and social media correspondence.

<sup>920</sup>Gareth Stedman Jones, 'The Meaning of the Student Revolt', from: Alexander Cockburn, and Robin Blackburn, *Student Power: Problems, Diagnosis, Action*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), pp.25-56.

<sup>921</sup>*Ibid*, p.35.

<sup>922</sup>*Ibid*, p.35.



accord with the data collected in the mapping study as it would add further weight to the universities particularly high percentage regarding formations of collectives. Thus the particular socio-cultural and geo-political factors coupled with the practicalities of the university creates the perfect conditions for artist-led collectives to form.

Both Stedman Jones and Hollands and Vail made a particular observation that there is a sense of ‘dispersal and dilution’ of these collective tendencies post university.<sup>923</sup> Again, this trend is discernible in the mapping study as both Arturn and Unlocked Collective appear to have become less and/or inactive. This state of play, coupled with the disbanding of Goat Collective and The Other Collective at the preliminary stage, appears to suggest that the internal-external dialectical forces within the neoliberal capitalist system, which is predicated on the individual, can all too frequently come to bare. This is not to say that the university is a place which is immune to such forces, indeed if I take Stedman Jones’s argument, it becomes clear that this an important contradiction within the institution.<sup>924</sup>

Within the mapping study TCL are the exception to this ‘dispersal and dilution’ trend as they increased their activity and appear to have strengthened their collective identity. The decisive forces at play in this occurrence appear trace their way through the socio-economic sphere. The members of TCL all live and work in and around Leeds. Akin to Hollands and Vail’s assessment of the Amber Collective, strong socio-economic ties to an area appear to embed and emplace a collective which can result in a level of sustainability.<sup>925</sup> In addition to this TCL members had already semi-established or established artistic practices and thus did not rely on the collective identity to raise their profile. As a result, I would argue that they are a collective formed with a certain level of equality, life experience and knowledge of the socio-cultural ecology of Leeds and the wider region.

It is clear that the conditions which pervade the university have a profound effect on the formation of artist-led collectives. However, this does not guarantee the formation of collectives nor does it secure

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<sup>923</sup>Gareth Stedman Jones, ‘The Meaning of the Student Revolt’ and Robert Hollands and John Vail, ‘The art of social movement: Cultural opportunity, mobilisation, and framing in the early formation of the Amber Collective’.

<sup>924</sup>Gareth Stedman Jones, ‘The Meaning of the Student Revolt’, p.35.

<sup>925</sup>Robert Hollands and John Vail, ‘The art of social movement: Cultural opportunity, mobilisation, and framing in the early formation of the Amber Collective’.

their longevity. Indeed, the findings of this study suggest that it is a relational dialectical complex of competing forces, which is anything but predictable. Further, the educational institutions have played a direct role in the formation of 50% of the collectives in the study. If I expand this to include spaces of appearance, where collectives appeared in university spaces, that figure becomes 75% of the collectives involved in the study. This reveals the influence and thus power of the educational institutions throughout the city's arts ecology. Indeed, there were 10 appearances within the university area of the city and this is by far the highest proportion than any other area. This result is perhaps unsurprising when the facts of the matter are considered. However, what is of note is that the role of friendship within the university, as a place, is highly interrelated with socio-economic and geo-political factors.

Moving away from the notion of the university, another important distinction can be made from the data collected during this mapping study. There was the appearance of a different form of collective, one which is concerned with creative industry and profitability. Of course, this has an obvious historical thread to the previously discussed Morris & Co and as such does not present as something surprising. However, what is of interest is the way in it reveals itself in the overall mapping of collective activity and the contradiction and tensions which arise from its inclusion.

Buttercrumble who, akin to Morris & Co, have familial bonds at the heart of their relationship, responded to the call out for collectives via Curator Space and were thus included in the study as they self-identify with the word, 'collective'. Buttercrumble is a design and illustration-led duo, which places them in a different sphere to other contemporary artist-led collective activity. However, they engage with what Gregory Sholette positioned as 'enterprise culture' within the wider 'creative industries'.<sup>926</sup> Sholette argued, 'such universal demand for imagination and innovation inevitably places added value on "creativity" previously dismissed as informal or non-professional'.<sup>927</sup> In Sholette's conception the 'role' of creativity is placed front and centre and in fact leaks out of the 'arts' and is somewhat hijacked by the neoliberal agenda.<sup>928</sup> This was characterised by their

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<sup>926</sup>Sholette, *Dark Matter Art in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, pp.42-44.

<sup>927</sup>*Ibid*, p.7.

<sup>928</sup>*Ibid*.

partnership with Leeds Creative Labs, in which Buttercrumble attended the launch event held in School of Earth & Environment, University of Leeds. Buttercrumble stated that,

We will be attending the Leeds Creative Labs launch event to begin a ground-breaking programme. We will be partnered with a researcher from the University to explore climate change and sustainability in a creative way.<sup>929</sup>

This relationship is at once dialectical because it is a sign of an intention by the University to both reach out to professionals within creative industries and generate new research and funding opportunities.<sup>930</sup> The Leeds Creative Labs programme is funded through the Cultural Institute at the University of Leeds, which itself is funded by several different government, public and arms-length bodies including Arts Council England, Heritage Lottery Fund and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.<sup>931</sup> In this case the relational dialectics in play was a dynamic knot of connection-autonomy, where Buttercrumble were both a separate entity to the University, and included as part of its wider network; as Abigail and Chloe Baldwin are alumni of the University.<sup>932</sup> This is not simply a binary position of self vs. other but a complex of becoming, between people, in this case Abigail, Chloe and Dr Katy Roelich.<sup>933</sup> As a result of this working relationship *Newtopia* was created, which is a, ‘toolkit of visual assets, to be used by researchers in order to engage with participants. The public can use Newtopia to build their dream cities’.<sup>934</sup> This is a moment of interplay where research into climate change and sustainability intersects with design and illustration. The language and the aesthetics employed revealed the trace of Sholette’s conception of enterprise culture, by focusing on the symbolic images of green spaces (for example, a woman on a bench in a park, cycling etc.) [fig.44], and words such as, ‘infrastructure’, ‘corporate’, and ‘mission’.<sup>935</sup> This tool kit is clearly in its infancy

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<sup>929</sup>Buttercrumble, Mapping Study, [17/05/2018].

<sup>930</sup>Cultural Institute ‘Sparking Collaborations’ (2019) <[http://www.leeds.ac.uk/info/130553/cultural\\_institute/482/leeds\\_creative\\_labs](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/info/130553/cultural_institute/482/leeds_creative_labs)> [accessed 02/04/2019].

<sup>931</sup>Cultural Institute, ‘A Guide to the Cultural Institute’ [PDF]

<[https://www.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/130553/cultural\\_institute](https://www.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/130553/cultural_institute)> [accessed 15/06/2019], p.9.

<sup>932</sup>Lisa Hassell, ‘Grad Spotlight: Abigail and Chloe Baldwin’, Inky Goodness (2016)

<<http://inkygoodness.com/features/grad-spotlight-abigail-chloe-baldwin/>> [accessed 02/04/2019].

<sup>933</sup>Buttercrumble, ‘Newtopia’ (2019) <<https://www.buttercrumble.com/leeds-creative-labs>> [accessed 02/04/2019].

<sup>934</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>935</sup>*Ibid.*

and it appears to be a set of ideals at this current moment. However, this is a prime example of when the ‘arts’ in its most expanded sense meets a tangible field of specialist research.

There is another thread weaving its way into view at this point and it concerns Buttercrumble’s intersectionality which emerges through their spaces of appearance. As has become apparent, Buttercrumble appear to inhabit a space which fluctuates between corporate business orientated events, creative engagement and research focused projects, and ‘live illustration’ pop-ups, which appear closer to the live art or performance spectrum. Indeed, of the 27 (plus 1 site of their studio) appearances Buttercrumble made throughout the study, 51.85% (just over half of all appearances) were events which comprised of some form of performative live illustration or workshop. At first glance this near even split correlates with Buttercrumble’s tag line, ‘we empower young-at-heart businesses to express themselves through brand identity and illustration’.<sup>936</sup> Of course, Buttercrumble are a business, in the sense that they aim to turn a profit, however, their use of language reveals the complex of centripetal-centrifugal forces which shape their identity. On their website they state that they aim to, ‘introduce positivity and fun into everyday lives through the power of design’.<sup>937</sup> There is a trace element of care and attentiveness within their use of language which is both ‘corporate speak’ and the informal language of the everyday. Words such as ‘positivity’, ‘power’ and ‘design’ are juxtaposed with ‘fun’ and ‘lives’. This interplay can be traced throughout their spaces of appearance within the study. This trace is evident in a range of their appearances, from live illustrations at York library and their award event in London for the FBS small business of the year, to holding workshops and lectures at the University of Leeds. However, what is most apparent in their activity is that they appear to value the ‘power of design’ to reach different audiences and communicate ideas which are not at odds with the institution, or indeed the wider, ‘enterprisation’ of society. Buttercrumble work both with the institution, including in a more corporate sense with a neoliberal economy, and for their own conception of what illustration and design can do to challenge our collective predicament.

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<sup>936</sup>Buttercrumble, ‘landing page’ (2019) <<https://www.buttercrumble.com/>> [accessed 02/04/2019].

<sup>937</sup>Buttercrumble, ‘About us’ (2019) <<https://www.buttercrumble.com/about-us>> [accessed 02/04/2019].

The nexus of art, design and economy which is revealed in Buttercrumble's language, geographic locations of their appearance, and through their projects is implicitly interconnected with the neo-liberal economy. As Harvey stated, '[t]he struggles that were once exclusively waged in the arena of production have, as a consequence, now spilled outwards to make of cultural production an arena of fierce social conflict'.<sup>938</sup> Indeed, I argue that Buttercrumble's inception is predicated upon this notion and what Arendt termed as the rise of the social sphere.<sup>939</sup> The places and spaces of the social sphere are neither private nor public. In the strictest sense they are a hybrid which constitute a movement to the social, 'both the public and private spheres of life are gone, the public because it has become a function of the private and the private because it has become the only common concern left'.<sup>940</sup> As Grant Kester illustrated, this is a complex situation of contradictory cultural and geo-political forces which, 'have witnessed the rise of a powerful neoliberal economic order dedicated to eliminating all forms of collective or public resistance (institutional, ideological, and organizational) to the primacy of capital'.<sup>941</sup> For both Arendt, Harvey and Kester, this shift has resulted in a situation where the public and the private proper have become only veiled ghosts of their former selves in service to the 'imperatives of capitalism'.<sup>942</sup> This is evident through the almost schizophrenic (not in the medical sense) dialectic of languages employed by Buttercrumble. This is not to simply say that Buttercrumble are able to engage with multiple audiences in their use of language, but this schizophrenic dialectic is the interplay between their self-identification with the word 'collective', and their business model.

Buttercrumble are a limited company and as such trade mark their design. This legal protection of their work goes beyond intellectual property rights and ring-fences their designs in order for Buttercrumble to be able to compete with other design companies on a commercial level.<sup>943</sup> On the surface there is nothing inherently problematic about this, however, the contradictions occur when

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<sup>938</sup> Harvey, *Postmodernism*, p.63.

<sup>939</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.71

<sup>940</sup> *Ibid*, p. 71.

<sup>941</sup> Kester, *The One and The Many*, p.5.

<sup>942</sup> *Ibid*, p.5.

<sup>943</sup> Buttercrumble's registered company number 11920015, and Intellectual Property Office, 'unofficial consolidation of the Trade Marks Act 1994', (2018)

<[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/742949/Trade-Mark-Act-1994.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/742949/Trade-Mark-Act-1994.pdf)> [accessed 15/06/2019].

their self-identification with the word collective is taken into account. The tension is not in the making of profit, as many artist-led collectives have and continue to generate income, the tension is in the co-option of the word ‘collective’ and its significations. Although they identify themselves as, ‘the happiness atelier’, and appear to work with individuals, groups and businesses with a collaborative methodology, it is the totality of aims and their function as a whole which creates this schizophrenic dialectic.<sup>944</sup> As they do not adopt the neo-liberal market economic model as a way to subvert and to change the system, or even in with postmodern irony, they are born of its very ideological fabric. This is of course not negative or positive it is both/and, depending on the perspective of the viewer. However, when I consider the spaces of appearance within the study coupled with the language and the projects which Buttercrumble create, there is dislocation within the chain of signifiers in the collective context. As a result, the meaning of the artist-led collective is shifted into realms which break with its historiographical discourse. In other words, as Sholette argued, the value placed on creativity is such that it is hijacked by enterprise culture and as a result becomes a commodity, or in this case a service.<sup>945</sup>

The obvious rebuttal to this would be to insist that Buttercrumble are not in fact a collective and that self-identification is in some way misguided or misconstrued. To some degree this rings true.

However, if I consider the work of Bakhtin within relational dialectics this in and of itself reveals the dynamics of contradiction and tension.<sup>946</sup> For Bakhtin, as with relational dialectics, *utterances*, the act of speaking or stating something continuously play off in relation to each other, even in contradiction they are part of communication and thus language and discourse.<sup>947</sup> This is highly problematic as it becomes clear that I cannot dismiss Buttercrumble as a non-collective, they are intertwined with the utterances of collectives both past and becoming. They may contradict the significations of artist-led collectives, but by the act of self-identification and they become part of collectivism's trajectories and

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<sup>944</sup>Buttercrumble, ‘landing page’ (2019) <<https://www.buttercrumble.com/>> [accessed 19/06/2019].

<sup>945</sup>Sholette, *Dark Matter Art in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, pp.42-44.

<sup>946</sup>Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, eds by., By Michael Holquist, and trans. By Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, orig. 1981 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), pp.358-359.

<sup>947</sup>*Ibid*, pp.358-359.

stories. Thus, Buttercrumble are always becoming, intertwined in their contradictions and tensions and characterised by design at the intersections of life, art and the economy.

There is another discernible discourse of note emerging from the mapping study and it is one which I have touched upon before, the emergence of artist-led collectives from other artist-led and arts organisations. These constellations are complex and often invisible; however, they provide further insight into the multiplicities of the arts ecologies in Leeds. The Glass Cyphers are a collective duo, who met and formed within East Street Arts (ESA) building at Patrick Studios.<sup>948</sup> The duo work in a collaborative format in order to pool their skills, and to create, ‘site-specific/interactive installations using glass sculpture, projection-mapping, video and sound’.<sup>949</sup> The spaces of appearance within the mapping study are limited by only two instances and a lack of communication. However, there are a few threads which can be discerned from the two spaces. Firstly, artists Griet Beyaert and Paul Miller both hold a studio at Patrick Studios which is a permanent multifunctional contemporary art space run by ESA. The formation of The Glass Cyphers is predicated on the interrelationships which can occur in these studio-based environments. The conditions appear to be like that which Artturn collective encountered in the cohort studio context of the educational institution. There are some obvious situational and contextual differences between an educational institution and an arts facilitating/administrative organisation, including purpose, funding streams and organisational structure. However, often a communal spirit can occur in the studio context which can lead to close collaboration and even collectivism. Francesco Spampinato briefly touched upon this trend in his conceptualisation of collective practices.<sup>950</sup> Spampinato argued that, ‘these collectives are often born from pre-existing communities, such as nonprofit [*sic*] organizations and squats, or other situations with common interests: theatre, publishing, music, fashion, media’.<sup>951</sup> It seems that the common interest situation of the studio, in combination with tendency to experiment with specific materials

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<sup>948</sup>Glass Cyphers, ‘Mapping Study’, *Google My Maps* (2018) <<<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=18S6-rS7eYf0UOdn-JOI8l6Gm57g&ll=53.80009630299957%2C-1.529332698161852&z=17>> [accessed 20/03/2019], and @EastStreetArts, ‘Tweet’, *Twitter* (September 2018) <<<https://twitter.com/EastStreetArts/status/1045746598599430144>> [accessed 20/03/2019].

<sup>949</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>950</sup>Francesco Spampinato, *Come Together The Rise of Cooperative Art and Design*.

<sup>951</sup>*Ibid.*, p.7.

and media, aided in the formation of the relationship which developed into The Glass Cyphers. This studio situation is an example of artistic clustering both on a micro scale and an example of how clustering presents itself within Leeds. Hollands and Vail draw on research which suggests that mid-size cities, such as Leeds, attract numbers of artists because ‘artists may trade-off the advantage of larger arts markets and networks, for lower cost of living/affordable space, the opportunity to develop different artistic subjects and the freedom to innovate in their artistic field’.<sup>952</sup> Not only is it clear that clustering can occur on a micro level within organisations and institutions, but also on a local level within a city. In the case of The Glass Cyphers they were formed by the proximity of studio holding in an area of Leeds city which has relatively affordable space, which was already populated by arts organisations and other artist-led activity.<sup>953</sup> This factor coupled with the opportunity to experiment with projection and glass by pooling their resources and skills correlates with concept of artistic clustering.

The Glass Cyphers appearance at The National Museum of Scotland is a different type of institutional appearance. The Glass Cyphers were amongst a broad selection of artists, makers and designers which the Museum showcased as part of the exhibition, *Art of Glass*.<sup>954</sup> This reveals the duo’s status in the art world in terms of the contemporary use of glass, and for installations of this kind developed for the exhibition.<sup>955</sup> As previous recipients of Arts Council funding they have gained a recognised position within institutional networks.<sup>956</sup> There is a ‘legitimisation effect’ of appearing in a museum, and further still, in a universal survey museum.<sup>957</sup> Interestingly, The Glass Cyphers a-political and thus their non-hierarchical, informal relationship does not directly find tension in appearing in the institutional space. Indeed, The Glass Cyphers appear to be both at home in the studio as they are in the museum. It is because their focus is on how they can collaborate with both the place (through

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<sup>952</sup>Robert Hollands and John Vail, ‘Place Imprinting and the arts: A case of the Amber Collective’, p.177.

<sup>953</sup>East Street Arts, ‘Studio’ (2019) <<https://eaststreetarts.org.uk/fluxcapacitor/studio/>> [accessed 20/06/2019].

<sup>954</sup>Museum of Scotland, ‘Art of Glass’, *Past Exhibitions* <<https://www.nms.ac.uk/national-museum-of-scotland/things-to-see-and-do/past-exhibitions/art-of-glass/>> [accessed 12/04/2019].

<sup>955</sup>Museum of Scotland, ‘Griet Beyaert & Paul Miller’ <<https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/stories/art-and-design/glass-artists/artists/griet-beyaert-paul-miller/>> [accessed 12/04/2019], (para.3 of 5).

<sup>956</sup>Paul Miller, ‘The Glass Cyphers’, *Projects* (2019) <<http://www.whoispaulmiller.co.uk/projects#/theglasscyphers/>> [accessed 12/04/2019].

<sup>957</sup>Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, ‘The Universal Survey Museum’, *Art History*, Vol.3, No.4 (1980).



sound recording and other site-specific ephemera) and with each other. This is not a case of resistance to the institution, or re-appropriation by the institution as this is not a set of binary oppositions. The Glass Cyphers practice exists in communication both/and with the ‘physical’ environment of the museum and the studio, the polis and the visitor, and each other. The Glass Cyphers appearance in Edinburgh is part of the 27.27% of appearances by collectives outside of Leeds (appendix 7).

Although this reveals an overwhelming local concentration of collective activity, it does point to the fact that collectives are not entirely fixed within a specific city and the importance of place is not a totalisation within the study.

This non-specificity of place is a contradiction in terms if I take into account Massey’s conception, however, it describes the movement and practice of another collective within the study, The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe (RBATEOU). RBATEOU are not entirely nomadic in the sense that there is a locality within the wider Yorkshire region to the collective’s spaces of appearance. However, they are not placed within a building, organisation or institution. This does not pre-suppose a creative vacuum or neutral force behind the collective’s formation. Indeed, it was implicitly interrelated to a specific institution, the institution in question was Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Akin to The Glass Cyphers, RBATEOU formed through a shared interest in making work and developing projects for a specific goal. In this case it was a political aim rather than a material pursuit. However, the role of artistic clustering and relationships which formed in a specific environment by emplaced actors was once again pivotal to a collective’s inception. I will discuss the specifics of this formation in Chapter 6.

The relationship between institutions, art organisations and RBATEOU is a complex knot of interdependencies. The spaces of appearance are evidence of this discourse because even though they seem randomised, they are inherently interrelated. RBATEOU’s appearance at both Whitehall Industrial Park and Yorkshire House, in September and October 2018, was the culmination of a dialogue between the collective and arts organisation Skippko.<sup>958</sup> This dialogue was initiated through the extended network of acquaintances which pervade the institution of the University of Leeds. Cath

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<sup>958</sup>Skippko, ‘Home’ (2019) <<https://skippko.org.uk/>> [accessed 20/03/2019].

Brooke, project manager at Skippko, was a student of Professor Chris Taylor's and through a chance re-union at an event at the University they re-connected. I was then introduced to Cath by Chris and we had a meeting. The meeting was held at the University and the director of Skippko, Arthur Stafford attended. I then introduced the RBATEOU to Skippko, who themselves had developed a partnership with the University. This information sharing and set of interpersonal ties is an example of 'Weak Ties Theory' in action.<sup>959</sup> As discussed with regards to the community at Baltic Street Adventure Playground, Sociologist Mark Granovetter conceived the notion that, 'the set of people made up of any individual and his or her acquaintances comprises a low-density network'.<sup>960</sup> To begin to understand the importance of this low-density network I will briefly illustrate the initial connection. In this case I will assign letters to people, Chis (A) has a strong connection with both myself (B) and Cath (C) thus the probability of C-B becoming acquainted and forging further connections with each other increases because of their stronger connection to A. Of course in this situation A, B and C are each part of differing strong tie groups and thus, '[w]eak ties are more likely to link members of different small groups than are strong ones, which tend to be concentrated within particular groups'.<sup>961</sup> This reveals the importance and consideration that must be given to the role of weak ties within RBATEOU's activity, as one of the many outcomes of this low-density network, on a macro scale, was to forge a network between an arts organisation, a university and an artist-led collective. Skippko hold temporary leases on commercial properties and create arts and community hubs.<sup>962</sup> They offered RBATEOU Whitehall Industrial Park and then a unit on the fourth floor of Yorkshire House during the mapping study. This was more than a relationship based on temporary space. It was a constant dialogue of shared ideas and meetings around practical matters as well as conceptual thought. In effect RBATEOU collaborated with Skippko to make these appearances happen. The boundaries between the 'ins' and 'outs' of the relationship were in flux, this was not simply RBATEOU appearing in a neutral monological space. The appearance at Yorkshire House, reveals the

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<sup>959</sup>Mark Granovetter, 'The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited', *Sociological Theory*, Vol.1 (1983), pp.201-202.

<sup>960</sup>*Ibid*, pp.201-202.

<sup>961</sup>Mark Granovetter, 'The Strength of Weak Ties' *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol.78, No.6 (1973), p.1376.

<sup>962</sup>Skippko, 'Our Work', *Blank Canvas* <[https://skippko.org.uk/our\\_work/blank-canvas/](https://skippko.org.uk/our_work/blank-canvas/)> [accessed 20/04/2019], (para.2 of 3).

level of dialectical complexity. The exhibition was formed in a previous space as a partly site-responsive installation to the industrial space on Whitehall Industrial trading estate. Meta-themes of work-leisure, wellbeing and the socio-political landscape of the city pervaded the installation and were then translated into a different context. This context was the private sector of the finance and law, of tertiary services. This shift is of course symbolic on an epist-ontological level. However, this exhibition in and of itself became an investigation. It set the question, ‘are things really like this, and or, is that just the way we perceive the shift?’.<sup>963</sup> The space became a place, for the duration of the exhibition, as it was both actually and symbolically entangled in this question, whilst simultaneously pervaded by the entanglement of integration-separation, and separation-autonomy in communication and thus dialogue between ourselves, as a collective, Skippko and The University of Leeds.

These interconnections and relations played out in other instances throughout the mapping project. RBATEOU appeared at both the Art Hostel and Leeds Printworks as part of the multi-centred happening, #G.E.18.<sup>964</sup> Both sites are run by ESA and the appearance at the Leeds Printworks was a residency in partnership with ESA. Again, this played out on a personal level as Liam McCabe was working for ESA at the time and was able to set up a meeting between John Ledger and ESA. Liam was a personal friend of mine as we met at The University of Leeds several years earlier on an MA discovery module. Thus, here the dynamic of context, the institution and third party outsiders played out, forever changing and shaping the spaces of appearance. The theory of weak ties and connections through low density-networks of acquaintances does appear to play role in the activity of RBATEOU, and indeed, throughout this mapping study. However, I must be clear when I state that it is not a complete and adequate view of the complex interplay in communication, emotion and language within collective activity. It also does not describe the nuances of place imprinting, particularly the socio-economic and geo-political forces at play within Leeds. That said, weak ties remains highly useful for providing a basis for describing how networking actually occurs.

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<sup>963</sup>Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, eds by. Friedrich Engels, orig edn. 1867 (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2012), and Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

<sup>964</sup>RBATEOU, ‘The Public Secret Exhibition: A virtual presentation’, *WordPress* (September 2018) <<https://retrobarattheendofuniverse.wordpress.com/2018/09/07/the-public-secret-exhibition-a-virtual-presentation/>> [accessed 30/03/2019].

There is another narrative in play within the ecology of cultural space and place within Leeds. Its trajectories and stories coalesce in the specific place of Mabgate. This is an underlying current which has been discussed previously in this thesis and is concerned with the rapid expansion of retail, commercial and housing developments into Mabgate. As has been discussed, the Mabgate area is home to a community of artist-led organisations.<sup>965</sup> As Hollands and Vail discuss in their analysis of the Amber Collective, the artists transform the materiality of the urban environment. The extended artist-led clusters, including collectives of the Mabgate area, have shaped its aesthetic.<sup>966</sup> This is most visibly notable through both the emergence of street murals such as the Come Find Us mural painted on the cross roads of St Mary's Lane and Mabgate [fig, 45], and the abundance of buildings which are occupied by arts organisations and artist-led activity.<sup>967</sup> Organisations include Music and Arts Production Charity (MAP) located in Hope House, which is part of Hope Foundry a grade II listed building, once home to a plethora of multi-disciplinary crafts activity.<sup>968</sup> MAP Charity is an 'alternative provider in creative education, offering qualifications and first-hand experience to young people at risk of exclusion from the mainstream school system'.<sup>969</sup> Their location on Mabgate is strategic as it provides access to resources, links to creative professionals working in the arts and is also embedded in one of the epicentres of culture within Leeds. Crucially, MAP are tacitly aware of the history of the Foundry and want to connect with its heritage, 'MAP Charity plans to return Hope Foundry to a space of making and creating, restoring it into a permanent asset for the vibrant cultural scene in the area'.<sup>970</sup> It is this relational approach to the historio-cultural echoes throughout the artist-led activity in the area. These stories and trajectories, can appear almost intangible at times but they embed themselves in places such as MAP and become visible in their actions.

This discourse is incredible pertinent to this mapping study, in this specific space-time, because Mabgate is currently undergoing socio-cultural, and geo-political change which is manifest through a

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<sup>965</sup>Emma Hardaker, 'Map', *Come Find Us* (2019) <<https://www.comefindusleeds.co.uk/>> [accessed 29/05/2019].

<sup>966</sup>Hollands and Vail, 'Place imprinting and the arts: A case study of the Amber Collective', p.182-186.

<sup>967</sup>Come Find Us, was set up by Emma Hardaker, a mixed media and mural artist who co-founded Modes of Expression- an arts making, education and facilitating entity. Come Find Us is a platform which offers seasonal walking tours of the cultural ecology of Leeds.

<sup>968</sup>MAP Charity, 'About' (2019) <<https://mapcharity.org/about/>> [accessed 04/06/2019].

<sup>969</sup>*Ibid*, (para,1 of 3).

<sup>970</sup>MAP Charity 'Our Vision for 2020' (2019) <<https://mapcharity.org/our-vision/>> [accessed 04/06/2019].

swathe of urban regeneration which has already claimed the building opposite Hope Foundry. This building was home to several arts groups, studio and event spaces, notably Lady Beck run by artist-led organisation Assembly House.<sup>971</sup> These artists were subsequently displaced from this building when the incoming developer bought the property.<sup>972</sup> This ‘re-generation’ not only has threatened the future of MAP Charity, and the Hope Foundry building, but it is also changing the dynamics of Mabgate and the artist-led culture which has resided in the area for decades. As the available physical real-estate is bought up by private property investment companies, the possibility of collectives forming within the studios and artist-led organisation of Mabgate is reduced or even negated. Further still, the culture of Mabgate is transformed, not only within the urban architecture of the gentrified buildings but also through the displacement of people.

The severity of the situation was captured in the two day symposium which I co-organised with fellow doctoral researcher, Kerry Harker. The symposium was entitled *Ecologies and Economies of the Artist-led: Space, Place, Futures* and was co-hosted by MAP Charity and The University of Leeds.<sup>973</sup> One of the key themes to emerge from the symposium was, the displacement of artist-led organisations and spaces in the wake of commercialisation,

[p]recarity can shape and limit the scope and capacity of shorter-term projects: the role of impending gentrification was explored by Jonathan P. Watts in his presentation on LOWER.GREEN, which looked at how an artist-led initiative can become somewhat isolated amid the slow intentional decline and de-investment in an area by landowners wanting to generate the conditions for re-development.<sup>974</sup>

Although the case of LOWER.GREEN is located in a different city and context, the forces at play are indicative of what has happened in Mabgate. Indeed, there was much discussion in the symposium on the emergent issues of gentrification within Leeds and across the country.<sup>975</sup> In the specific context of Mabgate, it is not just short term or temporal projects at risk but established and long term

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<sup>971</sup>Lady Beck Studio, ‘Announcement’ *Facebook* [posted July 2018] <<https://www.facebook.com/pg/ladybeckleeds/posts/>> [accessed 20/06/2019].

<sup>972</sup>KMRE Group, ‘Mabgate Leeds’ (2019) <<http://www.kmregroup.co.uk/our-investments/mabgate-gateway-leeds/>> [accessed 12/05/2019].

<sup>973</sup>Kerry Harker and John Wright, ‘Ecologies and Economies of the Artist-led: Space, Place, Futures’, *Artist-led Research Group* (2018).

<sup>974</sup>*Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>975</sup>*Ibid.*

organisations such as MAP Charity. This was further illustrated through a presentation by Hannah Vallis, programme manager, at ESA, on day one of the symposium.<sup>976</sup> Vallis outlined the creative neighbourhood plan for Lincoln Green and Mabgate, which ESA had been working on with local people and partners.<sup>977</sup> The implementation of a community-led neighbourhood plan would, ‘be a key community led and democratic way for all those in the local area to have a say in the future development’.<sup>978</sup> In essence the neighbourhood plan would give the stakeholders, i.e. business and residents influence over, ‘where new homes, shops, offices and other development should be built. Identify and protect important local green spaces. Influence what new buildings should look like’.<sup>979</sup> In short, they would be able to democratically decide on the future of Mabgate, which would take into account the needs of both residents and the extended arts ecology in the area. However, the rapid speed of development driven by multi-million-pound developments of Victoria Gate, John Lewis and institutional expansion on neighbouring area of Quarry Hill have already taken effect. Land owners are now more and more likely to sell to large property developers with little interest in the histories and cultural trajectories of the area.<sup>980</sup> According Vallis, the mechanisms and process involved in the creation and subsequent adoption of the plan by the planning regulators and the city council may take years.<sup>981</sup> However, the neighbourhood plan is a sign of resistance to the forces of gentrification in Leeds and a call to arms not only at local level but to the city council.

It is within this temporal tension that I will return to the mapping study, as the collectives involved in the study have a curious relationship with this state of play. The obvious problematic is the availability of space for artists, with the continued threat of displacement of organisations and artist-led entities. Artist-led collectives will both experience a reduction in the dedicated spaces to appear within, and also have less opportunity to form within said organisations. Indeed, this appears to be

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<sup>976</sup>*Ibid*, p.15.

<sup>977</sup>East Street Arts, ‘This is our Leeds: building an inclusive growth strategy for the whole city’ (2019) <<https://eaststreetarts.org.uk/fluxcapacitor/this-is-our-leeds-building-an-inclusive-growth-strategy-for-the-whole-city/>> [accessed 09/06/2019].

<sup>978</sup>Leeds City Council ‘The Mabgate Project: A Culture-led Community’ Leeds Culture Strategy (2018) <<https://leedsculturestrategy.co.uk/mabgate-project-a-culture-led-community/>> [accessed 09/06/2019].

<sup>979</sup>Planning Help, ‘What is neighbourhood planning?’ <<https://www.planninghelp.cpre.org.uk/improve-where-you-live/shape-your-local-area/neighbourhood-plans/what-is-neighbourhood-planning/>> [accessed 09/06/2019].

<sup>980</sup>Leeds City Council ‘The Mabgate Project: A Culture-led Community’ Leeds Culture Strategy (2018).

<sup>981</sup>Hannah Vallis, ‘Ecologies and Economies of the Artist-led: Space, Place, Futures’, Artist-led Research Group (2018).

doubly problematic when I consider the role these spaces play in the retention of collectives which have formed within the city's universities. For example, Artturn were able to develop their practice throughout their degree course by 'testing' out their ideas in spaces such as Melbourne Street studios.<sup>982</sup> As was observed by Hollands and Vail, such spaces are vital to arts ecologies as their relatively low cost and availability is attractive to students and recent graduates.<sup>983</sup>

Conversely, this study also finds a contradictory thread to this narrative in the guise of 'placelessness'. Although, collectives are influenced by the Mabgate area, and the organisations which have spawned within its ecologies, this does not account for the totality of collective activity. There is a clear discursive trend of placelessness which manifests in the notion of the temporality regarding seven of the eight collectives within the study. This is characterised by their relative nomadic behaviour and the fact they do not have a permanent building in which they reside. This is not to say that they do not have regular places in which they convene. For example Buttercrumble have a studio in Garforth, and The Glass Cyphers have studios at Patrick Street Studios with ESA. However, the reliance, pressures and interrelationship between the physical buildings, i.e. in MAP Charity's case, do not manifest in the same way as the collectives in the study. There is a relationship with ephemerality and of a temporality as each of the spaces of appearance are for a relatively limited time. This aspect does appear to, at least temporarily, create a scenario where the centripetal forces of gentrification do not have as devastating an effect on the collectives' ability to practice. However, as I have illuminated in this mapping study, these forces are explicitly interconnected with these spaces of appearance and indeed the ecology of the Leeds arts scene. It is at this point that I should re-visit the word 'placelessness', I am not simply implying that these collectives somehow occupy a non-place or in exist in a liminal space between places because as Massey pointed out, the trajectories and stories which coalesce in the experience of the embodied actors within a location are not limited in a temporal sense.<sup>984</sup> In other words, collectives are constantly creating places by the act of appearing in public, in a specific location. This state of play is articulated by social geographer, Professor Gillian

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<sup>982</sup>Artturn, 'Unrest: A Film About M.E. LEEDS Film Screening', *Eventbrite* (2017) <<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/unrest-a-film-about-me-leeds-film-screening-tickets-38863162766#>> [accessed 20/06/2019].

<sup>983</sup>Hollands and Vail, 'Place imprinting and the arts: A case study of the Amber Collective', pp.179- 184.

<sup>984</sup>Massey, p.140.

Rose; Rose argued that, ‘space itself- and landscape and place likewise- far from being firm foundation for disciplinary expertise and power, are insecure, precarious and fluctuating’.<sup>985</sup> It is rather the specific engagement in which each collective exercises with a multitude of different spaces that could be argued to be a relational placelessness and thus which is never fully embedded in one fixed location.

It is at this juncture that I must now address the issues of a collective which is emplaced, in the sense of a physical building, and identifies with another formation of collective activity. This instance is important to explore in order continue to map this ecology and it is the curious case of an arts charity acting as a collective. Pyramid of Arts (POA) is a registered charity with a permanent location at Barkston House located near the Armley Gyratory. POA describe themselves as, ‘a Leeds-based arts collective [...] our mission is to invest in people with a learning disability through the discovery, development and disruption of the arts’.<sup>986</sup> There are a number of discursive threads in play with regard to POA, firstly, they are the only artist-led collective in the study to reside in a permanent site. This challenges the trend towards a nomadic method of working which seems to pervade the practice of artist-led collectives. However, the spaces of appearance are more complex than this statement may suggest. POA appear in 12 other locations throughout the study. These spaces varied from The Tetley to the Leeds City Museum. The commonality between these appearances is the ubiquitous space of ‘the public’. To make sense of the decisions to appear in these spaces I will return to Hannah Arendt’s conception of the *polis*. Arendt proposed that, ‘for us, appearance—something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves—constitutes reality’.<sup>987</sup> Arendt argued that a form of ‘transfiguration’ occurs when something enters the public sphere, it is transformed to ‘fit’ the conditions of the public space, be it the institutions of the museum, art gallery or the city square.<sup>988</sup> According to relational dialectic theory, the dynamic of something being seen by both ‘others’ and by ‘the self’ is in a constant flux. Indeed, the ‘something’ is only ever becoming and exists because of the

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<sup>985</sup>Gillian Rose, *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p.113.

<sup>986</sup>Pyramid of Arts, ‘Home’ (2019) <<https://pyramid-of-arts.org.uk/>> [accessed 04/04/2019].

<sup>987</sup>Arendt, *Human Condition*, p.50.

<sup>988</sup>*Ibid.* pp.50-51.



relationship, which is formed in communication between people, not by individuals.<sup>989</sup> Thus cultural institutions are constructions of specific relationships formed by communication over time. In other words, ‘these constructions do not exist in a social vacuum. Their influence flows through the social structure demarcated by selves, relationships, and cultures’.<sup>990</sup>

In close intersection with this thread, I will now focus on the specifics of, what is ‘seen’ in these spaces of appearance. This is a political position, or more precisely, a message which POA articulate by assembling in these spaces of appearance. POA’s decision to enter into dialogue with the specific spaces of appearance becomes clear when their declaration of intent is considered, ‘Our goal is to help people with a learning disability to discover the arts, develop their talents to become world-class artists, and to disrupt the social and institutional barriers that prevent them from being recognised, supported and celebrated’.<sup>991</sup> The language used in this statement coupled with the spaces of appearance reveal the tensions in play. The decision by POA to enter communication, through a plethora of events and visual installations, with public facing institutions is a clear political intention to challenge both perceived institutional barriers and actual barriers to its members. The specific appearances in the municipal institutions of Leeds Town Hall, Leeds Central Library, and Leeds City Museum were designed to increase the numbers of people ‘seeing’ their members work. It was about visibility, as Arendt suggested, ‘it means, first, that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity’.<sup>992</sup> For POA, the very act of entering into these spaces was political from the outset; their appearance was political in the sense that their aim was to, ‘disrupt the social and institutional barriers that prevent them from being recognised, supported and celebrated’.<sup>993</sup> POA’s appearance in these spaces disrupts the socio-cultural boundaries by engaging in a dialogue which is either non-existent or marginalised. This marginalisation was brought to light in a 2018 Arts Council report on representation of disabled people in the arts, it was

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<sup>989</sup>Montgomery and Baxter, ‘Dialogism and Relational Dialectics’, pp.155-183.

<sup>990</sup>*Ibid*, p.165.

<sup>991</sup>Pyramid of Arts, ‘Mission statement’, Home (2019) <<https://pyramid-of-arts.org.uk/>> [accessed 02/04/2019].

<sup>992</sup>Arendt, ‘The Public Realm: The Common’, p.50.

<sup>993</sup>Pyramid of Arts, ‘Mission statement’, Home (2019) <<https://pyramid-of-arts.org.uk/>> [accessed 02/04/2019].

found that 4% of workers in National Portfolio Organisations, Museums, and other organisations self-defined as disabled.<sup>994</sup>

POA have a recognisable organisational structure which includes a board of trustees, director, manager, and administrator. POA are a charity and are part funded by numerous bodies including, Arts Council England, Leeds City Council and Aspire.<sup>995</sup> They also reside in a permanent location at Barkston House. These attributes reveal a collective agency to make a change, and alludes to the societal ambition which they are evidently portraying through their spaces of appearance. Of course, there is a tension in this ambition, as they become more formalised and adopt the institutional frameworks which they are attempting to disrupt. However, they have not set out to be ‘anti-institutional’, their aim is to bring about societal change within structures and cultures. This removes the binaries of ‘in’ and ‘out’, ‘anti and pro’ because POA are both simultaneously for and against the cultural structures in play. There is of course, another interrelationship with the history of collectivism within Leeds, as one of the directors James Hill was previously a member of Black Dogs.<sup>996</sup> This reveals the complex history of collectivism in Leeds as artists occupy multiple roles in different situations. Akin to strands of DNA, they break off and re-form throughout time.

The final participant I want to consider in this analysis are Sketch That, a seemingly structureless entity which consists of artists, illustrators, photographers and makers who assemble in spaces throughout West Yorkshire in order to, ‘go out and draw/paint/photograph’.<sup>997</sup> They joined the study after I had sent a call for participation out via social media.<sup>998</sup> The members of Sketch That work and study within several professional bodies, educational institutions and museums.

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<sup>994</sup>Arts Council England, ‘Making A Shift’ Report (2018) <<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ACE206%20MAKING%20A%20SHIFT%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>> [accessed 02/04/2019], p.4.

<sup>995</sup>Pyramid of Arts, ‘Our Funders’, About (2019) <<https://pyramid-of-arts.org.uk/>> [accessed 02/04/2019].

<sup>996</sup>38b, ‘Black Dogs Bursaries’ *Call outs* (2019) <<http://www.yvonnecarmichael.com/38b/>> [accessed 0808/2019].

<sup>997</sup>Sketch That, ‘Mapping Study Submission’, *Text* (2018).

<sup>998</sup>John Wright, ‘Research Study: Call out for Artist-led Collectives’, Facebook (2017) <<https://www.facebook.com/artistledresearchgroup/photos/rpp.272352346584316/302324730253744/?type=3&theater>> [Accessed 20/03/2019].

The informality of the collective's practices is revealed in their 'structurelessness'.<sup>999</sup> They only come together for their monthly 'sketching meetings', with the express aim of skills sharing, 'We aim to support each other and share skills and advice'.<sup>1000</sup> This emphasises the importance of the artistic support group. Sketch That exists to support its members not for a political reason or even professional, but for the joy of making. This is expressed in what might appear as a banal statement at the end of their 'description' on their Facebook group page, 'We're looking for people who will enjoy meeting up to draw/photograph/etc'.<sup>1001</sup> The key work in this statement is 'enjoy', which reveals the central thread which appears to run through their entire existence.

This thread is also expressed in their spaces of appearance throughout the study. Appearances at HEART Centre, in Headingley, and White Wells in Ilkley have a distinctly informal social character which is expressed through descriptive phrases such as, 'social meet up' and 'opening party'.<sup>1002</sup> Indeed, these are non-institutional spaces which present a different set of cultures and social norms, the expectations of those involved within these events are different from a more traditional exhibition opening in a cultural institution. Sketch That's appearance at White Well's café on Ilkley Moor is a prime example of the difference between the institutional show and an informal social meeting between members of a collective. This was a 'non-art' space, in the sense that its primary public use is not specifically for artistic endeavour, as it is a café and thus part of the services and catering industry. However, by choosing to temporarily enter a dialogue with the space and its context, Sketch That create a form of heterotopic space which momentarily changes the dynamics of the local site. This space is was both private and public, as Sketch That's purpose was for a private meeting between its members with no expressed aim of engaging the public in an open way. In dialectical tension with this situation was Arendt's concept of the polis, specifically the 'being seen' element.<sup>1003</sup> This immediately brings into play the dialectical position of the public-private and openness-closedness.

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<sup>999</sup>Jo Freeman, 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness' orig edn. 1970 <<http://www.struggle.ws/pdfs/tyranny.pdf>> [accessed 23/06/2019].

<sup>1000</sup>Sketch That, 'Description', About this Group, *Facebook* (2019) <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/SketchThat/>> [accessed 20/03/2019], (para.2 of 3).

<sup>1001</sup>*Ibid*, (para.3 of 3).

<sup>1002</sup>Sketch That, 'Mapping Study', Text, *Google My Maps* <<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=18S6-rS7eYf0UOdn-JO18l6Gm57g&ll=53.82116386276664%2C-1.5761268204194038&z=16>> [accessed 20/03/2019].

<sup>1003</sup>Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.50.

Although, this is not a public space, as in the municipal sense, it is a private entity and opens its doors to the polis i.e. its potential and regular customers. As Sketch That entered the space they were immediately in communication with the other people in the café, including the staff on shift and any customers. Their intentions may have been for a private meeting of the collective but this closedness was always subjected to the centripetal forces of openness in proximity to others.

This tendency towards the private is also apparent in their communal place of residence, which is the virtual space of social media in the form of a Facebook group page.<sup>1004</sup> The page is very specifically for its members as it is a private group and requires authorisation by its members to join. This is Sketch That's only form of formal organisational apparatus which they described as a place to share skills and support each other. This is an example of a contraction between the 'democratic' intentions of the group, to be inclusive and non-hierarchical, and the clear cultural boundary between the collective and everyone else. This is an example of openness with conditions, it is both open and closed, in the sense that Sketch That clearly want to embrace new members, but at the same time it is a clearly demarcated collective with an informal initiation process. This would be more precisely described as openness-restricted, and openness-controlled dialectic.

It is at this point that I will return to the concept of structurelessness and what it reveals about Sketch That and how they operate within the Leeds arts ecology. Firstly, what I am referring to as structurelessness is more precisely the unstructured and informality of entities such as Sketch That, rather than a structureless group which according to Jo Freeman is, 'is organisationally impossible. We cannot decide whether to have a structured or structureless group; only whether or not to have a formally structured one'.<sup>1005</sup> It is clear that Sketch That operate in a relatively unstructured way, and it is this informal structure which, according to Freeman, reduces groups like Sketch That's political potency and ability to enact change.<sup>1006</sup> Freeman argues that this impotency is due to the fact that, '[t]he informal structure is rarely together enough or in touch enough with the people to be able to

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<sup>1004</sup>Sketch That, 'Sketch That', *Facebook Group* <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/SketchThat/>> [accessed 20/03/2019].

<sup>1005</sup>Freeman, p. 1.

<sup>1006</sup>Freeman, p. 2.

operate effectively. So the movement generates much emotion and few results'.<sup>1007</sup> It must be noted that Freeman is referring to the US women's liberation movement in her essay, however, the conceptualisation is just as applicable to artist-led collectives. Indeed, Freeman's insight into these unstructured groups reveals the dialectical contradiction within this mapping study, that self-identification with the word 'collective', is insufficient to becoming an artist-led collective. Further still, if I return to the etymology and set of significations of the word 'collective', then Sketch That's lack of structure and formalisation, and thus political potency, is contradictory to the fundamental meaning of collectivism. They are in essence a loose network of individuals which come together in order to sketch and share knowledge, and thus not an artist-led collective.

### *The Importance of Scale and Critical Perspectives*

It is at this analytical juncture that I will move to a meta-view of the data collected in order to extrapolate some important threads with regards to the ecology of artist-led activity in Leeds. From the analysis of each individual collective there appears different sets of relationships with the institution both within the city of Leeds and beyond. Indeed, all 8 collectives have links of some form with one or more institution(s). This can be unpacked further to reveal the different types of institutional involvement. A vital factor in this trend can be observed through the spaces of appearance and the language which the collectives use. The role of social bonds, be it friendship, or in one case familial, appears present in the 4 collectives which formed in the art school context.<sup>1008</sup> This is not to say that friendship is the defining factor, as in the case of POA it appears as part of their set of principles.<sup>1009</sup> However, it seems as if the social bonds formed within the art school contexts are a motivating factor in the development of close collaboration and collective activity. The art school context also provides a space of appearance partially removed from the constraints of financial independencies, as the institution provides studio space, exhibition space, facilities, and peer to peer

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<sup>1007</sup>*Ibid.* p.2.

<sup>1008</sup>These collectives are: Buttercrumble, TCL, Artum Collective, and Unlocked Collective.

<sup>1009</sup>Pyramid of Arts, 'The Way We Work' *About* (2019) <<https://pyramid-of-arts.org.uk/about/the-way-we-work/>> [accessed 20/04/2019].

resources. These factors come into play regarding collectives practicing in different contexts, without readily available access to these resources.

Within the study, the art school is the single greatest contributor to the formation of artist-led collectives. This is because the other 50% of collectives were formed within a different set of social and cultural contexts. Artist-led collectives also formed in studio group organisations (12.5%), by co-workers and loose connections in cultural institutions (25%), and as a charity (12.5%), (see chart, Appendix 8). These findings appear to support Spampinato's assertion that, 'collectives are often born from pre-existing communities' because each of these different contexts provide artists access in varying degrees, to the factors which are readily available in the educational institution.<sup>1010</sup> For example, Glass Cyphers were able to access studio space through ESA, this provided both a space in common, i.e. Spampinato's community, and also access to facilities for the making and experimentation of art. Similarly, RBATEOU were able to pool their resources, skills, and expertise through their work connections within institutions such as the Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP).<sup>1011</sup> Yet again the institutions and art organisations played the role of spaces in common where artists could meet as co-workers and develop collectives. It seems that the formation of artist-led collectives requires not only access to resources and, or space, but also a sense of proximity between, as Grant Kester coined the term, 'the one and the many'.<sup>1012</sup> This is evidence of artistic clustering both within organisations and institutions, through weak ties and loose connections, and on a macro scale within Leeds such as Mabgate and the area dominated by the universities. These environments where artists work, practice and are in generalised contact with each other for sustained periods of time appear to increase the number of spaces of appearance thus result in the formation of collectives.

The relationship between the institution and the artist-led collective is not just limited to the spaces of appearance regarding the educational institution. As I have demonstrated, there are many different cultural institutional appearances, along with non-institutional spaces. Out of the 66 appearances by

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<sup>1010</sup>Spampinato, p.7.

<sup>1011</sup>RBATEOU were formed at YSP.

<sup>1012</sup>Grant Kester, *The One and The Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (London: Duke University Press, 2011).

artist-led collectives throughout the duration of the study, 24 were institutional and 14 were a combination of museums and galleries, public municipal institutions such as libraries and town halls and sporting arenas. Although there is clearly a strong correlation between the artist-led collective's and institutions in terms of the spaces of appearance within the study, when all the appearances are considered a different picture emerges. Retail and service sector spaces become the dominant spaces of appearance, followed closely by arts organisations. To unpack this further reveals the tensions and contradictions between the artist-led collective, institutions and the 'other'. On the face of it, this trend expresses a movement away from institutional spaces in favour of cafés, bars, retail, commercial spaces, hotels, offices etc. The primary goal of these places is not that of art, but in providing the public with a specific set of services such as food, entertainment, and shopping. A recent report may shed further light on this trend. According to the report carried out by Carter Jonas, in 2017,

Leeds' position as one of the UK's leading retail destinations has been cemented in recent years, notably with the opening of the 1 million sq ft Trinity Leeds scheme in 2013. More recently, the launch of the 380,000 sq ft Victoria Gate development in October 2016 has further strengthened the city's retail appeal. The centre allowed John Lewis to open its first store in the city, which has reportedly helped to boost footfall significantly. The scheme's casino will open in 2017 and will be the largest in northern England.<sup>1013</sup>

Retail space is beginning to dominate the city centre and indeed out of town areas.<sup>1014</sup> It seems that this trend is concurrent with the 27% of artist-led collectives appearing in these types of spaces. This also reveals the power dynamics in the city, as more and more space is given over to retail, then it is only retail and commercial outfits and the wider services sector which can afford to pay the rent on these spaces.<sup>1015</sup>

By entering into dialogue with these spaces collectives are both in resistance to, and complicit within a system which is predicated on the individual or more precisely, the individual under surveillance, always on show to the wider polis.<sup>1016</sup> Of course if I follow this logic through, this state of play has

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<sup>1013</sup>Carter Jonas, 'Leeds & Yorkshire Commercial Edge' *Report* (2017), p. 9.

<sup>1014</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>1015</sup>The current average cost per head per month in commercial space is between £200- £450. For Figures See, Instant Offices, 'How Much Does It Cost To Rent Office Space In The UK?' (2019)

<<https://www.instantoffices.com/blog/featured/cost-rent-office-space-uk/>>[accessed 20/04/2019].

<sup>1016</sup>Arendt, p.72.

led to the contestation by corporate power into the traditionally educational, public and municipal institutions. As a result, the dialectical concept of resistance- co-option is far more complex. The collectives which enter the many different spaces of appearance are not simply in resistance to the ‘institution’ by entering non-institutional spaces of the services industry, as they are themselves intertwined with imperatives of capital. It thus becomes a dialogue, enacted on multiple levels in temporal contexts and never entirely the same in each instance.

Concurrently to this trend there appears a growing discourse of ‘alternative’ arts spaces characterised by organisations such as ESA, Seven Arts and HEART. Sholette positioned these forms of artistic discourse as,

These informal, politicized micro-institutions are proliferating today. They create work that infiltrates high schools, flea markets, public squares, corporate Web Sites, city streets, housing projects, and local political machines in ways that do not set out to recover a specific meaning or use-value for art world discourse or private interests. This is due to the fact that many of these activities operate through economies based on pleasure, generosity and the free dispersal of goods and services, rather than the construction of a false scarcity required by the value structure of art world institutions.<sup>1017</sup>

Sholette suggested that these different forms of self-organisations are both in opposition to and often at the mercy of the hegemony.<sup>1018</sup> These borders are increasingly shifting and porous as the line between these different forms of organisational structures become formalised, often in the search of sustainability, through centralised funding bodies such as Arts Council England. They mirror institutions at times, and or become almost indistinguishable. As I have illustrated, collectives can grow out of these spaces and indeed choose to inhabit them, both as places of difference and of necessity. It is perhaps a complex dialectical knot of forces which led the collectives in the study to inhabit these spaces in their numbers. Having a place to communicate with others, facilities, peer- to peer sharing, and having a place to practice partially shaded or hidden from the spotlight of the polis, and the lights of the institutional art world, is an important factor in these decisions.

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<sup>1017</sup>Sholette, ‘Dark Matter Activist Art and the Counter-Public Sphere’, orig edn. Article for *Art Forum* <[http://www.gregorysholette.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/05\\_darkmatterwo1.pdf](http://www.gregorysholette.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/05_darkmatterwo1.pdf)> [accessed 20/04/2019], pp.5-6.

<sup>1018</sup>*Ibid.*



The final, but equally important thread I want to discuss is that of geography. As the study has shown over 70% of the spaces of appearance have occurred within the locality of Leeds.<sup>1019</sup> However, there was significant activity in many other areas both national and international. This correlates with Rose's articulation that, 'space itself- and landscape and place likewise- far from being firm foundation for disciplinary expertise and power, are insecure, precarious and fluctuating'.<sup>1020</sup> The spaces of appearance within this study are anything but fixed and neutral, collectives are in constant dialogue with power fields of the art institutions, and wider cultural, geo-political temporalities. The evidence suggests that collectives such as, RBATEOU, Glass Cyphers, Buttercrumble, and TCL operate in a semi-nomadic or nomadic way which allows for a level of flexibility regarding where they appear. Indeed, the constraints of place are less geographically specific to these collectives. Interestingly, Sketch That have specifically decided to concentrate their activity in and around Leeds, even though they are the most non-space specific of all the collectives. Their spaces of appearance depend on convening physically in a place, as their only other place of communication is virtual. As a result, their spaces of appearance are more likely to be within the local area of Leeds where most of the members live.<sup>1021</sup>

If I return to the statement by Montgomery and Baxter, 'context is not an independent phenomenon, apart from the relationship. Instead, communication between the relationship parties, and with third-party outsiders and social institutions, shapes the dynamic boundary that distinguishes the "inside" from the "outside" of a relationship'.<sup>1022</sup> When applied to the spaces of appearance throughout the study this statement describes incredibly accurately what is at stake in every instance. It is not the case that artist-led collectives are in open opposition to the institutions of art and it is too simplistic to state that they resist the institutions power fields. What has become clear is the complex dialectical relationship in which institutions, collectives, the polis, and wider cultural and societal discourse play out within the spaces of appearance.

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<sup>1019</sup>This study considers a Leeds postcode to define the city boundaries.

<sup>1020</sup>Gillian Rose, *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p.113.

<sup>1021</sup>Sketch That, 'Statement for Mapping Study' (2018).

<sup>1022</sup>Baxter and Montgomery, p.45.

This study was limited to artist-led activity located in Leeds city. However, the study could be expanded to focus on any area and indeed greater scales of reference. I focused on the spaces of appearance in physical place within the city and urban environment. This begs the questions; would the patterns and outcomes be the same in different environments such as rural space? Do collectives form in these spaces? And, what of the virtual space in which collectives inhabit? These are questions which fall outside the purview of this study, as its aim was to explore the interrelationship between the institution and artist-led collectives.

The following chapter is an auto-ethnographic study through my own experience of working in a collective. As has been identified within the mapping study and the previous historical analysis and in-depth case studies, the role of friendship pervades the artist-led collective. This line of enquiry is expanded in the following study, and I raise questions including, how and why friendship is vital in the life cycle of the artist-led collective? I draw upon the work of Celine Condorelli, on the role of friendship within the creative industries, in order to further develop the case for friendship as a practical and conceptual necessity within the artist-led collective. <sup>1023</sup>

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<sup>1023</sup>Céline Condorelli, *The Company She Keeps* (Online: Book Works, 2014).

## **Chapter 6: An Auto-ethnographic study of The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe**

The aim of this chapter is to conduct a study of the artist-led collective entitled, *The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe* (RBATEOTU). Following on from the previous chapter, this study maps my own experience of the places, spaces and people which led to the development of the RBATEOTU. This study is informed through an auto-ethnographic methodology because I am a co-founder of the collective and my practice is interlinked with its historical development. This experimental approach will help to frame the research in this chapter and will draw upon a multitude of documentation. This documentation includes: a WordPress blog, YouTube videos, self-published material, own experiences, meeting notes and recordings and project documentation. These sources will help to critically analyse RBATEOTU in order to question how and why the collective formed. What are the socio-cultural conditions within which RBATEOTU operates? What different roles do members embody within collectives and are they definable? And, crucially to explore the ways in which friendship has informed the collectives genesis.

This auto-ethnographic approach adds further layers to this research and offers an experiential account which invites a sense of personal connection to the formation of a contemporary artist-led collective. In an article for the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Nicholas Holt suggested that, ‘authors use their own experiences in a culture reflexively to look more deeply at self-other interactions’.<sup>1024</sup> As Holt asserted, this approach explored insights into the social relations within an artist-led collective which other more contemplative and formal approaches would not be able to fully access. Positioning RBATEOTU and my own experiences as a practitioner within this traditional PhD format is challenging. There are potential ethical, creative and personal problematics when considering this form of research. However, by informing all other members of the collective and any other participants of my role as researcher-member I was able to avoid potential pitfalls. This involved frequent discussions with members about my research and developing a level of

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<sup>1024</sup>Nicholas Holt, ‘Representation, Legitimation, and Autoethnography: An Autoethnographic Writing Story’, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol. 2 (2003) <[https://sites.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/2\\_1/pdf/holt.pdf](https://sites.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/2_1/pdf/holt.pdf)> [accessed 11/02/2018], p.2.

understanding in order to facilitate the research to its full potential. It was somewhat unavoidable that my wider research within this thesis influenced my own creative input with regards to the weekly direction of RBATEOTU. However, this potential osmosis could lead to unexpected creative directions and should not be seen as a negative position.

To begin this chapter in earnest, a level of historical and contextual detail must be revealed in order to explore the RBATEOTU. As with previous chapters, I formed my reflective account within several vignettes in order to balance the change between writing styles. The first section of this chapter is concerned with the formation of the collective and its interrelationship with Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP). The second section focuses on a pivotal exhibition in which the RBATEOTU staged an intervention in an abandoned pub in Baildon, West Yorkshire.

### *Genesis*

The name of the artist-led collective was not always *The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe*. The collective began as a set of philosophical discussions in 2013 when I was working as a gallery assistant at YSP. I was at first a volunteer and then gained a paid position. This distinction is important to this narrative as my experience of the YSP changed as a result. This change relates specifically to the amount of time I would spend in the gallery spaces because, as volunteer, I would only be required for less than four hours per day and a maximum of two days per week. This relatively short exposure did not allow for a sense of inertia which I experienced as an employee. The word *inertia*, in this instance, refers to the pattern of disrupted contemplation which gallery workers experience. There are long periods of time consisting of little interaction with visitors, whereby workers are left with ‘thinking space’, and then there is a sudden interruption from a visitor. This pattern becomes considerably mentally exhausting after a full days shift.

It was this experience that was the product of a working condition which forged a conversation between myself and artist John Ledger over the course of approximately fourteen months between August 2013 and October 2014. This conversation was invariably fragmented due to shift patterns and other commitments, particularly due to my taught MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies at the

University of Leeds and John was busy with a series of exhibitions. However, we quickly gained a shared sense through this continued dialogue that we should explore this gallery worker phenomenon. What was important at this specific moment in space-time was that we also shifted from colleagues to friends as we began to meet outside of YSP. Curator, writer and artist Céline Condorelli explored the elements of friendship in a dialogue with Philosopher Johan Frederik Hartle.<sup>1025</sup> Condorelli framed friendship as a condition of support by suggesting that ‘friendship, like support, is considered here as an essential political relationship of allegiance and responsibility’.<sup>1026</sup> Condorelli illustrated that friendship can lead to forms of solidarity between people, places and things. Solidarity in friendship can ignite the process of cultural production.<sup>1027</sup> This conception of friendship, as an element or factor in support structures and further as intertwined with the creative process itself, certainly played out in the friendship which John and I had formed. This moment of solidarity can be traced to a specific conversation which John and I had as we were invigilating Roger Hiorns’s *Seizure* [fig, 46]. The decision was made to move the conversation into action, or more precisely, ‘Friends in action’.<sup>1028</sup>

*Standing at the large rusted metal door of Seizure I could see down the hill towards the old college.<sup>1029</sup> It was obscured by several trees and a Barbra Hepworth sculpture. It was the beginning of the morning shift at YSP and there was still a chill in the air, even though it was one of those days which was inevitably going to be warm with potential for a thunderstorm. I was on shift in Seizure with John Ledger whom I had struck up a work friendship with since my first day. There was something intense about John’s demeanour this morning, he seemed slightly agitated, and I decided to open the conversation with something banal about getting*

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<sup>1025</sup>Céline Condorelli, ‘Too Close to See: Notes on Friendship, a Conversation with Johan Frederik Hartle’, *Self-organised* (London: Open Editions, 2013), pp.62-73.

<sup>1026</sup>*Ibid*, p.63.

<sup>1027</sup>*Ibid*, p.65.

<sup>1028</sup>*Ibid*, p.63.

<sup>1029</sup>The use of italics and indentation in this form of vignette indicates a break in writing style from academic to self-reflection as was implemented by Sara Ahmed in Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (London: Duke University Press, 2017). The advantage of this auto-ethnographic methodology was I could analyse my own experience from the perspective of an ‘insider’ rather than an outsider looking in on the relationships which constitute artist-led collectives. See, Sharon Macdonald, ‘Embedded Ethics and Research Integrity: A Response to ‘The Quest for Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research’ by David Carpenter’, *Finding Common Ground: Consensus in Research Ethics Across the Social Sciences*, eds by. Ron Iphofen (Bradford: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017), p.33 and, Carolyn Ellis and Arthur. P. Bochner, ‘Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject’, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (California: Sage Publications, 2000).

*the plastic boot covers out for the visitors. I walked over to the concrete bench where the gloves were stored and John shot off into Hiron's crystalline box room. As John walked in, he started to talk about a moment of growing tension he had felt in 2011 in London during the riots. He described a sense of the potential for change that had boiled over into rage and the subsequent looting and destruction of public and private property. I began to recall how the riots had failed to occur in Leeds, even though there was a whole set of class and racial tensions particularly within areas such as Harehills and Beeston, where there had been flash points in the past. I recalled how a news article had suggested that community leaders had managed to turn the justified rage into a march and several of gatherings. John began to outline his thoughts on the matter, suggesting that the socio-economic conditions brought on by the Tory cuts had finally done away with any real resemblance of the welfare state. It was at this point, as we sat on the partially heated concrete bench, that the crunch of approaching footsteps on the gravel path pierced our conversation.*

*I immediately jumped up and welcomed the oncoming visitor into the gloomy space, the weather was beginning to cloud over and the close heat was rising. I ushered the group, a family of four, onto the bench and explained about the boot covers. John then launched into the gallery spiel about the installation and I walked to the entrance of Seizure in anticipation of taking the group inside. As they walked over, I caught John's eye he looked how I felt which was that the conversation was beginning to touch upon something. Thankfully, the family did not stay long as the youngest child kept trying to touch the crystals. As I led the family out the father thanked me and they left. By this time John was positively charged with dialogic eagerness. We commenced our conversation at the door just in time to catch the first flash of lightning and rumble of thunder. As we looked out into the inky atmosphere, John returned to his thread, he began to suggest that during that summer in 2011 Britain or more precisely the power cities in England had expressed its psychic pain at the current state of play. We began to discuss on many different levels how this pain was both expressed and at the same time denied. We agreed that there had been a growing sense that something was*

*going to have to give, and that the riots had failed to bring about social change because they had become unstructured. At the time there were too many different factors in play, too much hate and mindless violence. Indeed, I brought up how the ruling classes in this country had always managed to eventually negate any long lasting social change through public spectacles, we both agreed that it was the London 2012 Olympics, and more precisely its media coverage which had squashed that trembling sense of anticipation John had so keenly felt during his time in London.*

*It was at this moment, when the heat was becoming uncomfortable, that the first slow drops of rain fell. This momentarily interrupted our conversation, and was doubly annoying as we heard the footsteps of yet another set of visitors coming around the large hedges outside. We braced ourselves for the same processes, this time I gave the spiel and John escorted them around the crystallised room. As this happened another group turned up, this time a mix of relationships of which I could not discern. This interrupted our conversation further, indeed it was a steady flow of visitors for around an hour. Finally, we were able to resume our conversation. I had been mulling over aspects of it for some time whilst talking to visitors. We were exhausted by the time we could resume our conversation. However, there was a specific sense that we had stumbled across a shared sense of hope in the face of endless formations of neoliberal capitalism. At this moment the crunching happened again and we wearily moved into position. They appeared in the doorway, thankfully it was another colleague coming to relieve one of us. I decided to stay and let John go for lunch. However, before he left he suggested that we should consider collaborating on this profound sense of stuckness which we both felt.*

The specific conditions on that morning in Seizure was the catalyst for the inception of the RBATEOTU. It was the culmination of these thoughts and theories which we were vocalising in a dialogue. This dialogue was incessantly ‘cut’ short by the numbers of visitors entering Seizure coupled with the effects of environmental conditions such as bad weather, the architecture of the installation, the number of visitors and energy of the dialogue; led to the decision to create a

performative interventional artwork. A performance which we would perfect in several iterations over the next two years.

The artwork was entitled *Non-Stop Inertia: A Stuck Record*, and formed the basis for what would become an artist-led collective of three members initially referred to as the *(Un)realised Project*.

However, it is necessary to discuss all the different interconnecting threads which led to the notion of the collective. The basic premise for the proposed intervention can be explained through the reading of specific texts which we had in common. I was reading *Of Grammatology*, by philosopher Jacques Derrida along with a set of his earlier works on deconstruction.<sup>1030</sup> I was particularly interested in how Derrida observed the hierarchical binary oppositions of speech over the diminutive figure of writing within the discourse of Western Metaphysics. Derrida deconstructed this hierarchy suggesting that writing contains legitimate signifiers of its own accord rather than being the pale secondary to oral speech.<sup>1031</sup> Further still, Derrida suggested that much of speech is in fact ‘dead language’ and filled with cliché with only a small percentage of ‘original’ throughout expressed. It was this thought in particular which captured my imagination and I began to share my thoughts with John. It seemed to indicate a deep philosophical truth, as we both regaled the visitors with a gallery speech composed and repetitive and full of cliché. Even the questions posed by the visitors were always derivative, an example of such a question was, ‘so, is it poisonous?’ this was in reference to the copper sulphate which adorned the former flat in Elephant and Castle. The answer was always, ‘no, unless it is ingested’. Other questions ranged from how it was transported to the rigours of the process. There was minimal discussion beyond the technical aspects of Seizure. It was for this reason that in the intervals between visitors arriving, John and I discussed the ‘state of play’ within global discourse and shared our thoughts about readings.

It was during this discussion that John began to recall a pivotal text in his thinking. The text was by writer and thinker, Ivor Southwood entitled *Non- Stop Inertia*.<sup>1032</sup> Essentially, Southwood argued that

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<sup>1030</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans by. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

<sup>1031</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>1032</sup>Ivor Southwood, *Non-Stop Inertia* (Oxon: John Hunt Publishing, 0-Books, 2011).



a ‘deep paralysis of thought’ was occurring perpetuated by 24 hour rolling news, perpetual job seeking, ‘always on’ social media, the gig economy and the deep nuanced layers in which digital technology has invaded our lives.<sup>1033</sup> It was as we discussed these two aspects of interruption, intertwined with our current precarity as gallery workers that we decided to create an interventional artwork based on the author’s ideas. We combined the emotional and physical labour of gallery work as a platform for practical action in which to base the performed intervention. The method of the intervention involved John and I posing as invigilators within another gallery space. There was an interesting triangular inflection at play within this initial concept developed in the Seizure dialogue. Firstly, the intention to work together was not to form a collective but to collaborate on this one idea. We had not the foresight at this stage, wrapped up in our excitement, to envisage continuing after this intervention was ‘completed’. Secondly, by transplanting our shared workplace, or more precisely our experience of the conditions of invigilation labour at YSP, into another institution we were attempting to enter into a deconstruction of the institutionalised practice of invigilation. This was not a critique in the direct sense because we were not trying to flip the hierarchy of museum work on its head, and thus maintaining a hierarchy of sorts. By re-creating specific conditions of gallery work in the context of ‘art’ or in the name of an artwork, we attempted to play on what Derrida termed, *The Supplement*.<sup>1034</sup> Derrida analysed the texts of philosopher Jean Jacque Rousseau suggesting that, ‘Rousseau condemns writing as destruction of presence and as disease of speech’.<sup>1035</sup> Derrida pointed out the contradictions in Rousseau’s work, as to disseminate his ideas requires writing (writing being a supplement for Rousseau). Essentially, these contradictions play out throughout discourse. For Derrida, it was not simply a matter of reversing the hierarchical binary oppositions of speech and writing, presence and absence, life and death but an understanding that these binaries actually destabilise each other. In other words, there is speech in writing and writing in speech. The supplement, then, is not inferior as it simultaneously adds and replaces, it is exterior, but cannot be separated from the entity it supplements.<sup>1036</sup> It is this exteriority and addition which revealed the tensions at play in the gallery

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<sup>1033</sup>*Ibid*, p.5.

<sup>1034</sup>Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Part 2, ‘... That Dangerous Supplement...’ pp.141-164.

<sup>1035</sup>*Ibid*, p.142.

<sup>1036</sup>*Ibid*, p.145.

space. By recreating an act that was already present, this action of supplementing suggested the relative absurdity of the emotional plight of the gallery worker. It destabilised the absence of these tensions normally invisible to the viewers' perspective with the presence of the intervention. This interplay would be the main focus of much of the RBATEOTU's practice to come. Finally, although we did not realise it at the time, we had stumbled across a specific trope of artist-led action, the relational dialectical knot of art and life. This 'Social Turn', as it has been referred to by Claire Bishop, is framed as a trend in art since the late 1980s which utilises the everyday as artistic media and medium.<sup>1037</sup> This art embodies cultural and social life as its materiality, conceptual framework and platform. Everything is 'in play' because art has moved out of the gallery space or museum into daily life as is suggested by Bishop in *Participation*,

Less familiar is the history of those artistic practices since the 1960s that appropriate social forms as a way to bring art closer to everyday life: intangible experiences such as dancing samba (Hélio Oiticica) or funk (Adrian Piper); drinking beer (Tom Marioni); discussing philosophy (Ian Wilson) or politics (Joseph Beuys); organizing a garage sale (Martha Rosler); running a café (Allen Ruppersberg; Daniel Spoerri; Gordon Matta-Clark), a hotel (Alighiero Boetti; Ruppersberg) or a travel agency (Christo and Jeanne-Claude).<sup>1038</sup>

The irony was, of course, we intended to use the gallery space as our material and site of action. However, as this performative work was dependant on visitors entering the space, and thus interrupting our dialogue. The performance re-appropriated the 'everyday' practices of museum work because the visitor was suddenly participant rather than passive viewer. Thus the Derridian supplement was in play, as if a mirror was suddenly held up and the institution could see itself. This element of 'social art practice' would become vital in the RBATEOTU's *modus operandi*.

The final strand of thinking, which led to the development of the performance's title *Non-Stop Inertia: A Stuck Record*, was developed through an interview I carried out as research for my MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies. I interviewed Dr Simon Morris in June 2014, the interview was centred on his practice as an artist, curator and academic because I was exploring the dialectic

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<sup>1037</sup>Claire Bishop, *Participation* (London: Whitechapel/Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006)

<sup>1038</sup>*Ibid*, p.10.

between disciplines. It was towards the end of the interview when Morris suggested that he was sounding like a stuck record.<sup>1039</sup> This was a through away line that reverberated around my mind. I was momentarily transported back to the conversation in Seizure with John. The sense of profound ‘stuckness’ we both felt with the flattening of society through neo-liberal capital. This stagnation was profound and it neatly looped back on itself and essentially, read like a ‘stuck record’, in a feedback loop because according to Southwood, the result of non-stop inertia was a form of stuckness.

The intervention happened on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July 2014 at Leeds Art Gallery.<sup>1040</sup> The performative intervention consisted of myself and artist John Ledger recording a conversation as if we were invigilating the gallery space [fig, 47]. The set of rules for the intervention were as follows: we would document our conversations through video and sound recording devices. Every time a visitor entered the gallery we would deliver a ‘gallery spiel’ and we would then return to our conversation. We carried out the intervention in the Ziff gallery, which was at the time, a gallery devoted to Leeds Museums and Galleries’ collection of Victorian paintings.<sup>1041</sup>

*I remember feeling slightly nervous whilst attaching the pseudo-visitor notice to a plinth just outside the Ziff Gallery entrance. The visitor notice, which was also part of our intervention was bright yellow and informed visitors of what was happening in the gallery whilst also suggesting some handy phrases in order to ‘interrupt’ our conversations. This was both to appease the Leeds Art Gallery staff, as it was part of their policy, and also an ironic dig at the institution. As I walked back into the gallery John appeared slightly out of breath, as he had endured some public transport problems. The gallery was eerily quiet as we set up the camera and started to record our conversations. I began the interventional performance by talking about the décor and the fact that the Ziff gallery was in fact a simulacra of a nineteenth century gallery, even though it appeared to aesthetically resemble a Victorian*

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<sup>1039</sup>John Wright, *Antinomies and Paradox: the Artist, the Institution and language* (MA Dissertation, University of Leeds, Unpublished, 2014).

<sup>1040</sup>John Ledger, ‘Non-Stop Inertia: A Stuck Record (performance)’, *Wordpress.com* <<https://johnledger.me/2014/07/16/non-stop-inertia-a-stuck-record-performance/>> [accessed 09/10/2018].

<sup>1041</sup>Martin Oldman, ‘A revamped Leeds Art Gallery cements the city’s cultural life’, *Apollo Magazine* (2017) <<https://www.apollo-magazine.com/a-revamped-leeds-art-gallery-cements-the-citys-cultural-life/>> [accessed 04/05/2019].

*salon it was in fact re-decorated in the twentieth century. We began to move around the room as if we were shooting a documentary or simply, on a shift at YSP. I began to get a sense that this gallery was perhaps not the busiest in terms of footfall in the Leeds Art Gallery. Indeed, about half an hour into our discussion the first visitor appeared and we both pounced upon this individual with such eagerness that they promptly turned around and left. I felt a slight pang of guilt, as this was the opposite of our intention. However, this was soon brushed away as our conversation returned to how we could perhaps develop the project further by adding a timed noise, such as the crunching of gravel, as on that fateful day in Seizure.*

*It was at this point that another two visitors arrived and we were very careful to speak to them in the manner we would at YSP. They seemed receptive and actually asked a question from the visitor notice, 'can you tell me about the artwork in this room'.<sup>1042</sup> I began to talk a little about the painting, *Retribution* by Edward Armitage [fig, 48]. John decided to take a different approach and began to make up stories about the room which the visitors appeared to believe. After they had left, the conversation shifted to the strange authority with which the invigilator has in the space. The invigilator is at once a totality from the visitor's perspective and yet towards the bottom of the museums hierarchical structure. This contradictory tension was soon interrupted by a fellow MA student Laura Swithenbank. Laura explained she was there by happenstance as she was working on her placement. However, the interruption reminded me of the strange almost uncanny nature of seeing a former teacher, colleague or relative at your place of work, the strange disconnect and collision of people out of place.*

The gallery had a nineteenth century Salon-style hang which somewhat problematized the intervention because we had originally envisaged the performance happening in a contemporary, 'white cube' style, gallery space. Carrying out the performance in a white cube space would have begun to deconstruct the role of the gallery worker and positioned the artwork as almost imperceptibly removed from the reality of the everyday. However, the contrast with the nineteenth century style

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<sup>1042</sup>John Ledger, 'Non-Stop Inertia: A Stuck Record (performance)', *Wordpress.com*.

gallery, or at least a simulation of such as space, resulted in emphasising the intervention because the work was ‘out of time’ in that particular gallery. This is of course contradictory as the gallery itself was also ‘out of time’ in the sense of its hauntology; the symbolic order of the gallery itself was a constantly differed origin.<sup>1043</sup> This hauntology was characterised by the twentieth century re-creation of a nineteenth century gallery, which was itself in a style haunted by ghosts of the neo-classical. Further still, this contradiction, which can be metaphorically discussed as a ghost, and is both present and absent at the same time, played out in the dialogue of the performance. This overtly manifested in the utterances within the conversation, ‘[I] began the interventional performance by talking about the décor and the fact that the Ziff gallery was in fact a simulacra of a 19<sup>th</sup> [*sic*] century gallery, even though it appeared to aesthetically resemble a Victorian salon, it was in fact re-decorated in the 20<sup>th</sup> [*sic*] century’.<sup>1044</sup> This acknowledgement of the dialectical contradiction became in and of itself part of the performance thus intertwined in a chain of utterances, characterised by Leslie Baxter as, ‘RDT encourages us to tack between synchronic (in the moment) and diachronic (over time) analytic perspectives’.<sup>1045</sup> In this sense the performance was part of a discourse and thus could not be ‘out of time’ as time is not linear. Rather the performance and its place momentarily fused in an aesthetic moment where seemingly different contradictory discursive threads of ‘then and now’ became both ‘now’ and ‘then’. This of course, could only be located in the synchronic instance of the performance and almost immediately dispersed.

The work became heightened because we were the only ‘invigilators’ in the gallery. These elements, along with the fact that Leeds Art Gallery required that we notify the visitors of the intervention, had the effect of nullifying the ‘confusion factor’ making the performance conspicuous throughout its duration. This was the failing of the attempt, coupled with the relatively low level of footfall. These problems failed to fully re-create the conditions in which we experienced at YSP, in the end resulting

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<sup>1043</sup>Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*.

<sup>1044</sup>Simulacra in reference to, Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans by. Sheila Faria Glaser, orig edn, 1981 (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press: 1994).

<sup>1045</sup>Baxter, *Engaging Theories in Interpersonal Communication: Multiple Perspectives*, p.353.

in a successfully accomplished discussion which was not fully interrupted. This showed that the conditions were not quite as it would seem and uniform across all institutions.

Immediately after the intervention we decided the performance needed perfecting and re-staging in a different context, something closer to that of YSP or a more contemporary gallery in order to reach the desired effect. The desire to re-imagine the performance continued to grow after we had carried out the intervention at Leeds Art Gallery and we started to meet regularly after shifts at YSP. These staccato-like conversations would often carry on throughout our working day, and then resume in a set of non-places such as service station cafes, shopping malls and retro style bars. This was mainly for convenience as the location of YSP, directly between Sheffield and Leeds, had easy access via the M1. The banality of these twenty first century non-places became subject of our discussions. We discussed these places in which we met and indeed, these places were able to generate the dialogue which fuelled our thoughts and ideas. We began to discuss these meetings as vital to our practice and started recording our conversations through creating blog posts.<sup>1046</sup>

The work of Marc Augé became of interest as he coined the term ‘non-places’. In *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Augé suggested that in these non-places ‘everything proceeds as if space had been trapped by time, as if there were no history other than the last forty-eight hours of news, as if each individual history were drawing its motives, its words and images, from the inexhaustible stock of an unending history in the present’.<sup>1047</sup> It was as if the erasure of history, in the terms of the sheer amount of transience and movement through these spaces, granted a level of cognitive space in which our conversations could manifest without interruption precisely because these space were never intended for anything other than the service sector. Their often vacuous nature could negate the instances of complete interruption prevalent within the gallery space and in a strange twist of fate their transience allowed the (Un)realised Project to inhabit their spaces for extended periods of time.

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<sup>1046</sup>The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe, ‘Home’ (2019)  
<<https://wordpress.com/view/retrobarattheendofuniverse.wordpress.com>> [accessed 14/05/2019].

<sup>1047</sup>Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans by. John Howe (London: Verso Books, 1995), pp.104-105.

In December, 2014, came the first real test of the project. I decided to leave YSP as I received a job offer of Exhibition Officer at Leeds College of Art (Leeds Arts University). Concurrently to this instance the dynamic changed once more by the inclusion of the (Un)realised Projects third member D.S. Jarvis. Jarvis was first a volunteer at the YSP and then gained a paid position just as I left the Park. John had started to converse with him in a similar happenstance to our first encounter. Jarvis started to come to the project meetings and began to position his input. Coming from a construction background, along with a comprehensive knowledge of twentieth century philosophy his input further fuelled debate. Jarvis was not yet completely on board with the project, as John became friends outside of work with Jarvis, this slowly shifted. An interesting dynamic formed where John would often relay comments that Jarvis had made during work hours, as Jarvis was not always present at our discussions because of personal commitments. As a result, I would often communicate with Jarvis via proxy, thus a change in communication and dialogue shifted the dynamic of the project. The three way communication with Jarvis became both refreshing, as at times he brought an even deeper level of philosophical knowledge to the discussion, and yet Jarvis was deeply pessimistic when it came to the idea of change or the possibility of social shifts. This seemed to temper the discussions and thus the Collective's development.

Concurrently to these relational changes, John and I had decided to develop the performative intervention *Non-Stop Inertia: A Stuck Record* by applying to a call out for participation at Espacio Gallery, in the Shoreditch area of London. The exhibition was initiated by Degrees of Freedom, an artist-led collective with a penchant for finding modes of socio-political resistance.<sup>1048</sup> At this stage Jarvis was in the process of becoming a member and as a result was not physically present within the performance. However, his ideas and thoughts laced the re-envisaged *Non-Stop Inertia: A Stuck Record* from the introduction of philosophical readings, such as Jean Paul Sartre and Walter Benjamin, into the performance. Jarvis also added a further sense of the comedic in our actions. In retrospect, I think the competing discourse which constituted our relationship at that moment in space-time; between myself with a more positive perspective, Jarvis with a negative outlook, and John's

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<sup>1048</sup>Degrees of Freedom, 'About us' <<http://www.degreesof-freedom.com/about-us.html>> [accessed 20/06/2019].

which was positive in respects to the action of change, created a tension which was incredibly creative. It was not harmonious in the slightest but it fuelled the continued development of the project.

The performance of *Non-Stop Inertia: A Stuck Record* unfolded in January 2015, and the events which occurred changed the course of the project and began to usher in the possibility of a collective. The changes we had decided to make included a sound recording timed to interrupt the dialogue at different intervals, philosophical texts which would be read aloud to each other throughout the performance, and a rule that we would engage with anyone.

*It was a relatively busy trek across London from Kings Cross station via Liverpool Street Station. It was midday when we arrived on Brick Lane and began to make our way past the many hipster vendors selling overpriced shirts. There was a sense of anticipation as we neared the end of the street which was adjacent to Espacio Gallery. Our ideas had evolved from the previous iteration of the performance and we were both eager to get started. As we approached the gallery I mentioned to John 'how should we position ourselves in the entrance or further in?' John seemed to prefer the latter option. As we walked over the threshold into what looked like a converted high street shop, we were met by a hive of furious activity. The gallery was occupied by what seemed like 30-40 people, which was by far more than I was expecting. Indeed, I was slightly taken aback by the noise and the intensity, likewise, John looked slightly nervous. We were approached by the director of Espacio Gallery who introduced himself as Carlos and we began to discuss how we would set up.*

*This iteration of the performance involved not only the audience but the artists in the gallery space. As I surveyed the scene I could tell that our plan would work in this environment because there appeared to be a great mix of different people. John and I decided to set up halfway between the rear of the gallery and its front entrance. We set up the speaker and the iPod to random, picked up our texts, which John had randomised and printed out in a continuous fashion. We had also decided to get bright yellow t-shirts made with the words 'gallery experience enabler' emblazoned on the front in black lettering [fig, 49]. It was as I pulled on this t-shirt that the full weight of what we were about to enact hit me, and the*



*moisture in my mouth began to dry up. I couldn't help but think what if our fellow artists in the space became pissed off with the sheer intrusive nature to this work. As I began to think of these aspects John clicked record on the camera and away we went...*

*I remember the first three or four hours of this performance being intense, we ended up coming to the end of the philosophical readings by hour two and we started to move around the space, as if we were invigilating, some of the artists clearly became irritated by the incessant interruptions from the recording. This was particularly apparent when we went to 'invigilate' Chloë Louise Lawrence's interactive artwork, which was somewhere between a mathematical problem and mosaic designing [fig, 50]. As we chatted with Chloë and the participants, we would break off our conversations when the sound recording kicked. This pierced everybody's concentration and I remember having to apologise to her after the show. It was for this reason that as the afternoon turned to evening I called time on the performance for the day. I couldn't remember a time when I had been more mentally and physically spent.*

The exhibition duration lasted for three days and resulted in over eight hours of film footage. The overwhelming success of this iteration of *Non-Stop Inertia: A Stuck Record* resided in the levels of exhaustion and fatigue in which John and I experienced. This was illuminated in John's blogpost, in which he stated, '[t]hat I am in a well-and-truly-spent state the day after our Non-Stop-Inertia piece means that if it was as much a psychological experiment as it was a piece of artwork then the experiment was successful'.<sup>1049</sup> The impact of this performance upon our decision making and direction of the project post-London was profound. The shared experience of exhaustion which amplified the actual 'real world' job at YSP, had a redoubling effect upon our thinking which was not negative but instead influenced our levels of commitment to the project. The tensions which we had experienced such as when, 'artists clearly became irritated' and being 'mentally and physically spent' had proved creative not only in exploring the dialectical knot of work-life, art-life, leisure-work, and

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<sup>1049</sup>John Ledger, '3 Days of Non-Stop Inertia: A Stuck Record in London', *WordPress* (2015) <<https://johnledger.me/2015/01/19/texts-used-for-anti-gallery-show-performance/>> [accessed 04/06/2019], (para.2 of 23).

art-leisure within the temporal space of the gallery, but also, in our collective desire to experiment with the performance.

The desire to further develop our ideas on the intersections between work, life and art were bolstered by Jarvis's official commitment to the project and the subsequent search for a re-naming of the (Un)realised Project. This re-naming was symptomatic of the aftermath of London and the actualisation of a project which had experienced change. Firstly, Jarvis had helped shape the conversation both in his informality as almost a ghost member never fully committed but never completely removed from the conversation. This interesting both/and situation had manifested in a surge in text messages which John had received throughout our performance in London; thus Jarvis had been involved hauntologically by proxy. Indeed, Jarvis's inclusion had shifted the potential of the project to go beyond its initial totality and confinement. Secondly, by enacting the performance it now inhabited a space of appearance, in public, and thus according to Hannah Arendt, '[t]he space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action'.<sup>1050</sup> This space is of course transient and only ever has the potential to become. However, in this case the enactment and re-enactment of the performance had 'realised', at least momentarily, what we had set out to investigate. Therefore, it seemed as if the collaboration had developed beyond its initial totality; a form of metamorphosis had occurred and it could not be justified to refer to the collaboration as simply the (Un)realised Project, i.e. John Ledger and John Wright. The project required a re-naming and that name had to signify the shift in relationship.

This shift in relationship was doubly interesting as it revealed the moment the collaboration became a collective. I have analysed collective duo's throughout this thesis including The Cool Couple, Arturn, and Glass Cyphers; yet there is something very different about the way in which the RBATEOTU developed from the (Un)realised Project. It is not as simple as to state that the inclusion of a third member was entirely responsible for the shift. Although I do not dispute that this had a bearing on the decision; instead it was a change in direction of the project which could be characterised as the devolving of our conceptual horizons to allow for different thoughts and other possibilities beyond

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<sup>1050</sup>Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.199.

simply the performance *Non-Stop Inertia: A Stuck Record*. This could be described as a dialectic of openness-closedness, or more precisely the freedom to be open to different possibilities which was embodied in the shift in communication between the members of the RBATEOTU at the time. This dialectic was captured in the language which I employed in an essay that was later published on the RBATEOTU's WordPress blog in 2016. I argued that, '[i]t is socio-political discourse, or perhaps deeper a shift on an epistemological level, which has sparked the cultural conditions of which we now find ourselves a collective. This collective entitled The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe (TRBEU) aims to impress its agency upon this state of play'.<sup>1051</sup> This was the first instance of self-identification with the word 'collective', and with particular reference to the intersections of the political sphere through the use of the word 'agency', in order to signal an intent to bring about real change, no matter how naive or localised.

It was in the months which proceeded London that *The Retro Bar at the End of The Universe* was formed. The name itself was developed collectively as there is no single author; all three members were reading Mark Fisher's *Ghosts of My Life*, at the time and Fisher's in-depth discussion on the symbolic imagery of 1980s Television drama *Sapphire and Steel*.<sup>1052</sup> This slow 'cancelation of the future' coupled with a series of 'heady' nights discussing this state of play, within what can only be described as bars which employed what Elizabeth Guffey described as 'retro' functioning as 'an iconic status, denoting an undefined time gone by', resulted in the emergence of *The Retro Bar at the End of The Universe*.<sup>1053</sup> There has been some suggestion amongst collective members that Douglas Adams's *The Restaurant at the End of The Universe* played a major part in the naming process.<sup>1054</sup> However, on reflection I think there is somewhat of a blurring of the facts on the matter, we were all aware of Adams's narrative, and yet it was the influence of our meeting venues and of Fisher's imagery which directly coined the name.

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<sup>1051</sup>John Wright, 'The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe – A Manifesto', *WordPress* (2016) <<https://retrobarattheendofuniverse.wordpress.com/2016/07/22/the-retro-bar-at-the-end-of-the-universe-a-manifesto/>> [accessed 24/6/2019].

<sup>1052</sup>Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, pp.2-6.

<sup>1053</sup>Elizabeth Guffey, *Retro: The Culture of Revival* (London: Reaktion Book LTD, 2006), p.9.

<sup>1054</sup>Douglas Adams, *The Restaurant at the End of The Universe* (London: Pan Books, 1980).

It is at this moment that I feel it necessary to begin to analyse the relationship between the ‘site in common’ and the formation of the collective in more depth. As I have previously mentioned in the preceding chapters friendship appears to play a vital role within the formation of artist-led collectives, not just in their formation but continually, as they negotiate both internal and external forces at play. In his work on friendship William Rawlins made the argument that, ‘a spirit of equality pervades friendship [...] some facet functions as the leveller’.<sup>1055</sup> In the case of the RBATEOTU we each came from different locations, class structures and were at different ages. However, the ‘leveller’ was our shared experience of working at YSP, which according to Rawlins, functions as ‘the place of friendship in the prevailing social order’.<sup>1056</sup> Although Rawlins was conducting his research with American participants and focusing on American society, the theory can still be applied because of the universality of specific aspects of friendship. Thus, the members of the RBATEOTU were subject to the centripetal-centrifugal dialectic of forces at play within the social order of YSP. We had each experienced the same emotional labour of the gallery assistant position and could identify the specific institutional hierarchical structure of YSP. The Sculpture Park had a distinct separation between front of house and the curatorial/ senior management; this structure often felt oppressive, which was partly due to the enormity of the site and thus the physical separation between the Lodge (where management were housed) and the galleries throughout the park [fig, 51]. We often made the assertion that we felt the structure of the institution was hauntological in and of its own right; as it was likened to a ghost of Bretton Hall which was owned the Wentworth and later the Beaumont family.<sup>1057</sup> Of course, the YSP management cannot be compared to the English aristocracy and vice-versa. However, as Doreen Massey argued, ‘what is special about place is precisely that throwntogetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now (itself drawing on a history and geography of thens and theres)’.<sup>1058</sup> This history was within our consciousness and it informed the contextual

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<sup>1055</sup>William Rawlins, *Friendship Matters*.

<sup>1056</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>1057</sup>Tony Rigby, ‘Archive’ (2015) <[http://www.bretton-hall.com/archive/college-days/mansion\\_revisited/entrance-hall/](http://www.bretton-hall.com/archive/college-days/mansion_revisited/entrance-hall/)> [accessed 20/06/2019].

<sup>1058</sup> Massey, *for Space*, p.140.

dialectics of the RBATEOTU by acting as a centripetal force within our communication and thus our friendship.

These two central factors occur as dialectical contradictions within the RBATEOTU because it was this structure in and of itself which informed the development of the informal, non-hierarchical structure of the collective. Indeed, tensions between the external-internal and the informal-formal relational dialectics of the institution, the member's friendship and the art world remain constantly in play within the RBATEOTU. Interrelated to this notion of YSP as integral to the formation of the RBATEOTU is Spampinato's argument that, 'these collectives are often born from pre-existing communities'.<sup>1059</sup> Although, Spampinato argued that these 'pre-existing communities' are more akin to squats, not-for-profit organisations etc. I argue that this can be extended to formal institutions as the conditions at YSP fostered the notion of a collective practice between the members of the RBATEOTU.

### ***Will The Last Person To Leave The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Please Turn Out The Lights?***

*Will The Last Person To Leave The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Please Turn Out The Lights?*, was the title of an intervention which the collective developed over a period of several months in 2017, and one which has since come to embody the collective to this day. It was the culmination of a series of interlinked events, which changed the collective's trajectory. The importance of this period of time cannot be underestimated as RBATEOTU expanded its activity and its membership to such a degree that it became somewhat fractured in its rapid development. This fracture illuminates the relational dialectic of both the social bonds which formed the collective and their interrelation with external forces which were felt on different levels.

The events which spawned the collective concept behind *Will the Last Person to Leave The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Please Turn Out The Lights?*, can be traced to an abandoned pub located in Baildon, a town near Bradford, West Yorkshire. The opportunity to intervene in this pub which was about to be demolished, was instigated by the Collective's involvement with Skippko, who became more than

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<sup>1059</sup>Francesco Spampinato, p.7.

simply a space facilitator to enable artistic discourse, they became temporally interconnected to the Collective's dialogue. Interestingly, the conversation was only between myself, Cath and Arthur at this stage, and I would then relay the information to the rest of RBATEOTU. In other words, I was acting at the conduit, this also reveals my shifting relationship within the collective. I was adopting an increasingly curatorial role where I would negotiate with external bodies and thus the focus for the other members was in the development of the Collective's material output. This shift was illuminated on the day in which I came face to face with the Baildon Pub for the first time.

*As we drove along the A6038 between Bradford and Otley I was deep in conversation with the members of Skippko, Cath, Arthur and Artist Phil Dodsworth (Skippko's Blank Canvas co-ordinator).<sup>1060</sup> Arthur was telling me about Skippko's ambitious plans to engage with real communities in Leeds, not just within the art ecology. As a result their programme and property portfolio was about to expand exponentially. They were also perusing Heritage Lottery Funding for a project about the underrepresented stories told by women across the region.<sup>1061</sup> I began to suggest that this emphasis was much needed within Yorkshire, and that they were attempting to create a programme that was both for artists and for people in order to change the status quo which often seemed siloed and self-interested. It was at this moment that I realised the Collective was also searching for these changes, and that collaborating with Skippko could open up avenues which we had not even contemplated.*

*As we neared our destination Cath began to fill me in about the pub. Apparently, the landlords had ripped out a lot of the furnishings and there was some issue about them returning and randomly taking out fixtures such as toilets and sinks. It felt as if Cath was tempering my expectations, as she also informed me that the taps and brass had been removed. As we approached the pub we shot past a petrol station and a garage, it was obvious that this road was a busy, fast flowing thoroughfare.*

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<sup>1060</sup>Skippko, 'Staff', (2019) <<https://skippko.org.uk/people/phil-dodsworth-blank-canvas-york-co-ordinator/>> [accessed 24/06/2019].

<sup>1061</sup>Skippko, 'Women Reflecting on Women', Our Work, (2019) <[https://skippko.org.uk/our\\_work/women-reflecting-on-women/](https://skippko.org.uk/our_work/women-reflecting-on-women/)> [accessed 24/06/2019].

*The pub had been called The Little Blue Orange, and had clearly been designed in the style of the late 1990s Gastro pub [fig, 52]. As we entered through an incredibly stiff door there was a distinct stale smell of dried beer and decay which reminded me of a nightclub the morning after or when you know you shouldn't be there. As I received a tour of the pub it became apparent to me how sizable it had been. The entire building was available to us and stretched out over three floors. The vastness of the space became apparent when I began to think about how the Collective would attempt to use the pub in its entirety. There were several rooms which were filled to the ceiling with ephemera and would have to be blocked to visitors, as the job of cleaning them would take months. I could also see what Cath had said about the landlords ripping things out, even light switches were missing in places. As we convened in the main bar area Arthur asked what did I think, and could I see the Collective taking over the space? I realised in that moment, that I was both taking responsibility as a representative of the collective, and also; I got the feeling that Arthur saw my role as curatorial within the collective as the following discussion became about how I would curate the space. We discussed the possibility of engaging the local history and the practicalities and limitations of installing work in each area of the pub.*

Several interconnecting threads are pertinent to my analysis at this point. Firstly, I must address my relationship to the other members of the Collective and in particular, what this relationship revealed about the internal-external dialectics in play. Concurrently to the collaboration with Skippko, two new members had permanently joined the Collective. Benjamin Parker (Ben) and Rebekah Whitlam (Bek) joined the Collective's dialogue in the January of 2017. The catalyst in this instance was a combination of both YSP and John's ever-growing political circles. Benjamin had started working at YSP and Rebekah had developed a friendship with John through the politically fuelled exhibition *PANDEMIC!*, in 2011.<sup>1062</sup> From my perspective, the introduction of both Bek and Ben profoundly

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<sup>1062</sup>John Ledger, 'Pandemic – Sheffield' *WordPress* (2011) <<https://johnledger.me/2011/10/28/pandemic-sheffield/>> [accessed 20/06/2019].

shifted the communicative channels within the collective. I could no longer expect John to relay information to me from both members, as with Jarvis, because Bek was not part of the structure at YSP. Similarly, Ben, Jarvis and John were not always on shift with each other, thus it was at this point that we instigated a level of organisational structure which could be described as loose formality. We developed an email thread and entered into a pattern of regular meetings in different 'retro bars' throughout Leeds, Sheffield and Wakefield. The dynamic within the Collective had also experienced its first real negotiation of the private-public dialectic. Jarvis had decided to distance himself from the Collective due to the tensions between personal commitments, and to some extent theoretical disagreements with the Collective's intentions to instigate social change. However, Jarvis would remain a ghost member occasionally contributing with ideas, and in one instance politically designed beer mats [fig, 53]. Similarly, my relationship to the new members Bek and Ben was also different to my relationship with John. The social bonds and places in common had shifted because both Bek and Ben had stronger social bonds with John.

William Rawlins argued that, 'interaction of friends continually generates and manages multiple contradictions and dialectical tensions that arise over time in dyads and in light of how they are situated in enveloping social contexts'.<sup>1063</sup> In this case, both Ben and Bek were essentially friends of a friend and although my strong social-bond to John prescribed a certain openness to becoming friends with both Ben and Bek, it was not guaranteed. This is an example of what Rawlins described as, 'the reflexive constitution of human beings in their social world'.<sup>1064</sup> This revealed the praxical notions of motion, activity and change which affect relationships. In other words, the totality of the collective is constituted by these relationships, which are in and of themselves always in flux. The collective at any given space-time is relationally different, at this specific moment in question, the introduction of 'outsiders' into the RBATEOTU, from my perspective, became dialectically uncertain-certain. I was certain that I understood John's intentions. However, the uncertainty manifested in my level of understanding and comprehension of what Ben and Bek would bring to the dialogue. John's position

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<sup>1063</sup>Rawlins, 'Writing About Friendship Matters', p.64.

<sup>1064</sup>*Ibid*, p.65.



was far more certain than I was as he had a greater connection and thus knowledge of both Ben and Bek. Indeed, Bek's perspective would also have been greatly different from Ben's, as Ben had the shared experience of YSP coupled with the understanding that I had previously worked at YSP. On the other hand, Bek was a complete outsider to both the RBATEOTU and YSP, thus Bek had to rely on the conversations she had with John to build a conceptual picture of this state of play.

The social context and places in common were also in flux, as YSP retained commonality between the members but in very different ways. I was no longer an employee and thus it was a former workplace, and I had gained some emotional distance from the conditions of the park. For Ben and John, it was still a shared place of work although both had differing emotional responses to those conditions it still retained a closeness- immediacy dialectic. Bek had an outsider connection to the Park, as a visitor and not an employee, albeit with a level of understanding of the politics via proxy. Indeed, because fifty percent of the collective no longer had a high level of emotional and financial dependence upon YSP, the place in common and thus the social context shifted. What is highly significant is this shift represented a renegotiation of the Collective's relationship to YSP and the place in common became RBATEOTU. Of course, the RBATEOTU was not a physical location but a conceptual space which was forever changing and was itself constituted by our ongoing relationship with each other. This does not prohibit many other places and social contexts being involved in this dialectical knot at any given time, however, the importance of this on-going shift is vital to understanding the continued story of the RBATEOTU. It is at this point that the importance of place came back into play, because the collective was in and of itself based on communication and the dialogue between its members, which Grant Kester characterised as a form of dialogical aesthetics, it stands to reason that its output i.e. its artwork would be social in its character.<sup>1065</sup> If I return to Okwui Enwezor's articulation in which he suggested that, '[t]his tends to lend collective work a social rather than artistic character', it suddenly becomes clear that the relationship between artwork (only fully comprehended through the spaces of appearance) and the social-bonds developed through communication between members and thus constituting the relationship, are dialectically knotted, and continuously intersecting with each

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<sup>1065</sup>Kester, 'Dialogical Aesthetics: A Critical Framework For Littoral Art'.

other.<sup>1066</sup> Of course, there are many variables in play here, and I would not suggest that every collective presents in this way to such as degree. However, it seems that this relational dialectic is in effect what makes artist-led collectives so indefinable.

I will now return to the notion of place and its importance to the RBATEOTU. I relayed the information about the pub, which Skippko had offered as a potential venue for the collective, at a meeting with the other members of the collective. It was decided that we could not turn this opportunity down as the pub's 'late 90s Bistro' style coupled with its geographic location, would provide a physical 'vessel' for our dialogue. This space also provided a new place in common; this aspect would prove invaluable in the life cycle of the collective.

In her thesis *In Support: a theoretical and practical investigation into forms of display*, Condorelli asserted that, '[f]riendship is treated both as an association with other people and with ideas, a befriending of issues'.<sup>1067</sup> Condorelli's observation is vital to the understanding of the RBATEOTU and the symbolic relationship which developed between the collective and the pub. This relationship was implicitly interrelated to both the outcome of the intervention, and the continued communication between the members of the collective. The pub became more than simply 'a space to show art', it became a place in which the RBATEOTU developed a collective sense of the issues it identified with and these issues became the instigators of deeper social ties between each other.

The RBATEOTU engagement with the pub unfolded over the course of three months, and the majority of this time was spent in preparing the space and working together to decide on how we would approach the intervention.

*It was a hazy day in June and I had picked Bek up on my way to the pub; we had planned to meet John and Ben there to discuss the main plan for the intervention. I remember talking to Bek about the practical problems of getting to the pub on public transport. She talked about*

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<sup>1066</sup>Okwui Enwezor, 'The Production of Social Space as Artwork', p.223.

<sup>1067</sup>Condorelli, 'In Support: a theoretical and practical investigation into forms of display' *Thesis* (2014) (Centre for Research Architecture, Department of Visual Cultures Goldsmiths, University of London), p.15.

*the fact that it was pretty difficult from Sheffield regarding the time and the train changes. We decided to bring this problem up when we arrived.*

*As I pulled up I noticed John and Ben had arrived before us, there was a surprising lack of parking for the pub as the landlord had blocked the entrance to the large car park with an immobilised car. As a result, I had to negotiate a rapid exit of an incredibly busy road onto a narrow forecourt type area just outside the main entrance. I remember thinking this was always awkward. I pulled up behind Ben's car and we began to unload the car which was full of material and equipment for the day. John met us at the door and promptly said that there was no way to light the ground floor through the existing wiring. It had become apparent that the landlords had removed the lighting and so we would be forced to think of an alternative method. I began to float the idea that we could probably scrounge some lighting from our homes/ studios. This led to an interesting discussion about using candle light to evoke that nostalgic feeling of a back street tavern.*

*As we unloaded all the material into the many rooms of the pub, we began to discuss everyone's thoughts and ideas around 'artwork' and what was to be created. It was at this point that John brought up the notion of hauntology for the first time in response to the space. I remember thinking that on our first meeting between myself, Bek, Ben and John we had talked at great length about our different conceptions of what the term signified. It appeared to strike a cord with what Ben was proposing as a sound piece which was based on a composition he had created on the hauntological notions in musical score.<sup>1068</sup> As we moved through the rooms discussing these issues it became abundantly clear that we each had a similar sense that this place was akin to a ghost, a shell of a pub, its history laid bare both in its current state of disrepair and the way in which it echoed a very near past.*

*Bek had been unusually silent up to this point as we surveyed the rooms but she began to talk about the possibility of an encounter in a place such as this, how would the visitor feel if they*

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<sup>1068</sup>Benjamin Parker, 'I thought I was Awake...' (2017) (Original Score, 2013-2016 and performed at The Yard Theatre: London, 2017).

*stumbled across something that evoked actual 1990s culture, could there be a psychic disconnect or a feeling of the uncanny? Both Ben, Bek and John to some extent seemed to favour the upper floor. I felt this had to do with practicality as much as the conceptual because up here we had power, lighting and running water. Indeed, as the day continued and we focused on cleaning the rooms and moving old sections of congealed ovens etc. into the designated storage room, it became clear that the environment was beginning to take its toll on our sense of excitement about the project. I remember thinking this was going to take months to reach the standards for a public opening.*

*We decided to debunk to, ironically, a local pub which actually functioned as one, to discuss the situation over some much needed sustenance. As we walked out of the gloom into the sunshine of the day our collective mood seemed to lift. I remember the conversation being fluid and with a sense that we were being to comprehend the totality of the pub and locate a sense of place within its location. It was at this point that Bek brought up the problems with travel and that it was because of its location in a hinterland between different areas that direct public transport and access was so very difficult. I couldn't help but think that it was precisely because of this factor that the pub itself had probably shut down. I suggested that we should pool our resources as it was only myself and Ben who had a car and that we should help out John and Bek wherever possible. We also, decided that we would meet regularly but if not everybody could then we would relay any important info via email/text. The key was a particular issue as in order to meet in the space the key holder would need to be present. As a result, we agreed that we would keep in constant communication throughout the project and that nobody would on their own in the space. In a sense this would work quite well as we would be most likely all be physically in the space at the same time.*

There were various interconnecting threads at play on that day in June which would come to define the RBATEOTU and the intervention at the pub in Baildon. Firstly, the complex internal-external dialectic of the collective had experienced another dynamic shift. The totality of the collective could no longer be understood through the relationship between myself, John, and Jarvis. The collective

now had new voices and differing perspectives on the trajectory, practical internal-external communication, and our social identities. An issue that had been brought up both practically and conceptually was access to the site because of the relative geographic differences between the members of the Collective. The financial cost for Bek via multiple trains far outweighed the cost of petrol for both myself and Ben.<sup>1069</sup> Similarly, there was a distinct dialectical tension in the early days of this project between the members that had access and ability to drive to the relatively remote location and the members that had difficulty. From my perspective it often resulted in long drives to collect and drop members off which cut down on actual project time on site, as was evident on that ‘hazy day in June’.

This state of play presented itself as such a friction point that more than once threatened the project. However, it also provided the catalyst for the discussion which would prove decisive in creating both a social bond between the members of the collective and the development of a shared conceptual understanding to the intervention at the pub. These forms of ‘real life issues’ were discussed by Hollands and Vail in their article on the Amber Collective, when they stated that infrastructure and the ‘better transport links to major cities’ have a massive impact on artistic practice in the urban environment.<sup>1070</sup> This was the problematic at the Baildon site which was located in the hinterlands between areas of suburbia and rural countryside and thus was difficult to reach via public transport [fig, 54].<sup>1071</sup> As a result, it required both a level of organisation and commitment from each other in order to create the project in the first instance. The dialectical tensions of dependence-independence were especially acute as either Ben or I had to be available for either John or Bek to be at the space, thus there was an uneven level of dependence on myself and Ben. Of course, Bek and John did make journeys via public transport, but these were costly in both time and money. In order to work out this issue Bek and John would often stay with friends in Leeds and then myself or Ben could easily

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<sup>1069</sup>In Bek’s case it was approximately £20 from Sheffield with a change at Leeds station (which could take up to an hour) to Baildon Station (20 minutes) and then a 15-minute walk to the site. This was with a railcard.

<sup>1070</sup>Hollands and Vail, ‘Place imprinting and the arts: A case study of the Amber Collective’, p.177.

<sup>1071</sup>Google Maps, ‘The Little Blue Orange’,

‘<<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/place/The+Little+Blue+Orange/@53.8524955,-1.745997,723m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m1!1m6!3m5!1s0x487be39dce03878f:0xe89b9614cd96d6e4!2sThe+Little+Blue+Orange!8m2!3d53.852038!4d-1.746563!3m4!1s0x487be39dce03878f:0xe89b9614cd96d6e4!8m2!3d53.852038!4d-1.746563>>[accessed 13/07/2019].

provide transport. This situation was heightened by the two interconnecting factors of precarity and the state of the public transport network in across Yorkshire. Firstly, I will deal with the issues of precarity, each member of the Collective was at the time in various states of, what economist Guy Standing argued was the emergence of a new global strata of people, *The Precariat*.<sup>1072</sup> Standing argued that these people existed as, ‘many millions around the world without an anchor of stability’.<sup>1073</sup>

In an article for the *International Social Review*, social activist and film maker Geoff Bailey concurs with Standing’s position, suggesting that the implementation of Neoliberal policies driving individualism and commodification of every entity has contributed to the development of the precariat.<sup>1074</sup> Bailey critiques the concept of the precariat, in particular ‘how one understands the precariat depends on how one defines the “proletariat”’.<sup>1075</sup> Here, Bailey posits that uncertainty has become embodied within contemporary life and proliferates into many different class structures in the form of the precariat. Bailey’s precariousness does not completely undermine or deny the existence of the precariat but it suggests Standing’s definition of the term is often vague and deeper divisions and complex interrelations may exist.<sup>1076</sup> This state of precarity, if it reaches beyond the so called precariat, has the potential to be one of the driving factors in the perceived increase in collectives and collectivism on a global scale. The precariat is no longer confined to a supplement of the proletariat, it is a seam which runs through the strata of society. Indeed, members of the Collective came from various backgrounds between the traditional working and middle classes, yet we all were experiencing financial uncertainty and job unpredictability working on zero hours contracts, limited funding streams, low paid museum work and uncertain social care work. It was our shared circumstances which acted as both a friction with regard to the commitment to the project, and also as a unifying force as described by Rawlins in his theories on friendship, ‘a spirit of equality pervades

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<sup>1072</sup>Guy Standing, *The Precariat The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).

<sup>1073</sup>*Ibid*, p.1.

<sup>1074</sup>Geoff Bailey, ‘Precariat or Precariousness?’, *International Socialist Review* (2012) Vol.85 <<http://isreview.org/issue/85/precarious-or-precariat>> [accessed 24/10/16].

<sup>1075</sup>Bailey, ‘Precariat or Precariousness?’

<sup>1076</sup>Standing, *The Precariat*.

friendship [...] some facet functions as the leveller'.<sup>1077</sup> This 'leveller' was our shared precarity and the tensions between the 'want' forces to act as part of the Collective, versus the 'need' forces in our personal circumstances. These centrifugal-centripetal dialectical forces were contradictory in their behaviour, yet their tension helped the creativity of the Collective and formed the concept of the intervention itself.

In order to explore this concept it is important to understand another internal-external dialectic of the public transport system across Yorkshire. In an article for *CityMetric*, Chris Sharp articulated the main issue with the transport network, he stated, 'the problem with the Leeds' railway network: how it has only one station, a through station where 70 per cent of its trains terminate'.<sup>1078</sup> What seems like an innocuous comment, in reality represented a major problematic for the Baildon project because of this issue fifty percent of the RBATEOTU would not only have to change trains to get to Baildon but also expend precious time and money in transit. Indeed, the uneven and disjointed state of play was brought to bear in the level of service and speed of the train line. The train lines coming from South Yorkshire were often slow and still needed electrifying, whereas the Leeds to Saltaire line was electrified and thus travel time was within fifteen minutes.<sup>1079</sup> Compare this with London and the South which has seen significant investment in infrastructure and a similar journey from Westminster in central London to Milton Keynes will take on average fifty three minutes whereas from Sheffield to Baildon can take up to two hours.<sup>1080</sup> This state of affairs was brought to light in Owen Hatherley's publication *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain*.<sup>1081</sup> Hatherley argued that the lack of

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<sup>1077</sup>William Rawlins, *Friendship Matters*.

<sup>1078</sup>Chris Sharp, 'Here's why Bradford is the key to fixing the West Yorkshire transport network', *CityMetric* (2017) <<https://www.citymetric.com/transport/here-s-why-bradford-key-fixing-west-yorkshire-transport-network-3461>> [accessed 21/07/2019], (para.1 of 35).

<sup>1079</sup>Chris Sharp, 'Here's how to fix the Leeds railway network' *CityMetric* (2017) <<https://www.citymetric.com/transport/here-s-how-fix-leeds-railway-network-3328>> [accessed 21/07/2019].

<sup>1080</sup>Helen Pidd, 'Transport gap: London gets £419 more per head than the north of England' *The Guardian* (2018). <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/aug/01/transport-spending-gap-london-north-of-england-ippr>> [accessed 08/08/2019], and Google Maps, 'Route from Sheffield to Baildon' <<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/dir/Sheffield/Baildon/@53.6350634,-1.881744,10z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m1!4m1!4m1!3m5!1m1!1s0x48790aa9fae8be15:0x3e2827f5af06b078!2m2!1d-1.47008512d53.381129!1m5!1m1!1s0x487be30b87e8694f:0xde7186d71ee63154!2m2!1d-1.768142!2d53.852716!3e3>> [accessed 08/08/2019], and Google Maps, 'Route from Westminster Station in London to Milton Keynes' <<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/dir/Westminster+Station,+London/Milton+Keynes/@51.7675786,-0.7242143,10z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m1!4m1!3m5!1m1!1s0x487604c449b45ed3:0x25f3edbdeb1538df!2m2!1d-0.12483612d51.50132!1m5!1m1!1s0x48764cf882238685:0x161a9df74cb97e14!2m2!1d-0.7594171!2d52.0406224!3e3>> [accessed 08/08/2019].

<sup>1081</sup>Owen Hatherley, *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain* (London, Verso Books, 2010).

infrastructure linking the cities and towns across the expanded West Riding has created a hyper local differences and discontinuities.<sup>1082</sup> He stated that, '[d]espite having two great and greatly contrasting cities, Leeds and Bradford, at its heart, and a multitude of smaller but often equally architecturally rich towns packed close together, the West Riding is far from unified.'<sup>1083</sup> He evoked Will Alsop's concept for the northern 'Supercity' connecting the cities of Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds along the M62 corridor, arguing that, '[i]f this is a Supercity in waiting, it's an extraordinarily strange one, a multi-centred mess, marked by sharp, shocking geographical and urban/rural contrasts'.<sup>1084</sup>

This sense of discontinuity coupled with the dialectics of precarity framed the discussion throughout the entirety of the project. It penetrated our collective consciousness to such a degree that it became the central concept and focus behind the intervention. In other words, to evoke Condorelli, we 'befriended the idea' as a psycho-geographic reaction to the situation which we experienced.<sup>1085</sup> The use of the word 'befriending' is apt as the Collective's social bonds and our relationship to each other morphed into friendship through the act of creating this project. From a personal perspective our shared situation solidified the social bonds between myself Bek and Ben and in turn drew the entire collective together. An outcome of this change towards stronger relationship ties was that our friendship surmounted the transport challenges as we were prepared to go that one step further for each other in terms of provided support in the form of car sharing and collective pooling of resources such as materials for the intervention. Rawlins argued that this level of solidarity is precisely what distinguishes friendships from other forms of co-worker relationships.<sup>1086</sup> Indeed, by positioning our own experience of the pub as subject matter for the intervention we became, as Doreen Massey argued, 'emplaced actors'.<sup>1087</sup> This collective sense of place as subject matter for the intervention weaved its way through the different interpretations and artworks which constituted the totality of the project.

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<sup>1082</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>1083</sup>*Ibid.*, p.232.

<sup>1084</sup>*Ibid.*, p.232.

<sup>1085</sup>Condorelli, p.15.

<sup>1086</sup>Rawlins, *Friendship Matters*, p.159.

<sup>1087</sup>Doreen Massey, *For Space*, p.140.



If I return to my reflective account of ‘that hazy day in June’, the dialectical knot of precarity and the pub’s geo-political context will become apparent within the intervention,

Bek had been unusually silent up to this point as we surveyed the rooms but she began to talk about the possibility of encounter in a place such as this, how would the visitor feel if they stumbled across something that evoked actual 1990s culture, how there could be a psychic disconnect or a feeling of the uncanny.<sup>1088</sup>

This sense of being ‘out of time’ in a pub which aesthetically resembled my own memory of journeying with family to a local Gastro pub in the late 1990s was doubly heightened by its state of decay [fig, 55].<sup>1089</sup> The pub embodied our collective sense of precarity, it was literally on the verge of being demolished. Although there were several reasons as to why it had failed as a business, its location next to a major road, yet severed from a town centre in the hinterlands of rural Yorkshire and the cities which dominate the region, all contributed to the abandoned atmosphere. The pub had clearly relied on passing trade, but the road was a main thoroughfare and the likelihood of potential customers stopping their journey on a fast flowing road was low at best. As a collective we identified with the building because it was hautological, caught in the same socio-cultural and geo-political forces of late capitalism as each member felt on a daily basis.

The intervention and thus the artwork in the pub was reflexive of its context. Bek’s installation *Milly-Molly-Mandy Gets Loaded and Other Stories* [fig, 56] was a parody of a childhood book series based on ‘a Blyton-esque explorer of the mundane’.<sup>1090</sup> Occupying the upstairs bathroom, the work was a juxtaposition of 1990s rave and ‘lad’ culture, containing explicit material from magazines published at the time, and ‘go-getting spirit of the 90s’ neoliberal dream of social mobility.<sup>1091</sup> Bek described the installation as, ‘a mixed media installation exploring the nation’s 21<sup>st</sup> [sic] century come down from twentieth century neoliberal hedonism. A new generation of adults become petrified in 90s juvenility. Numbers in anxiety, depression, ADHD, and liver disease have doubled over the past 30 years. We’re

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<sup>1088</sup>John Wright, ‘Reflective account of the first project day at Baildon’.

<sup>1089</sup>Jessica Boak and Ray Bailey, ‘BOOK EXTRACT: The Birth of the Gastropub, 1990’ (2018) <<https://boakandbailey.com/2018/04/book-extract-the-birth-of-the-gastropub-1990/>> [accessed 21/08/2019].

<sup>1090</sup>Rebekah Whitlam, ‘Milly-Molly-Mandy Remembered’ (2017) <<https://retrobarattheendofuniverse.wordpress.com/2017/07/19/milly-molly-mandy-remembered/>> [accessed 23/7/2019], (para.1 of 2).

<sup>1091</sup>*Ibid.*

broke, confused, and desperately scrambling for the exit'.<sup>1092</sup> The citing of the installation in the bathroom was purposeful for several interconnecting reasons. The bathroom was located upstairs at the far end of the pub and thus was the final space where the visitors would arrive if they explored the ground floor before the top floor. This had the doubling effect of being their final experience of the intervention thus it was important to be communicate a powerful message achieved by the jarring collision of the old and the new, the world of the child and the adult. Secondly, it was so to speak, as far 'down the rabbit hole' as the intervention could venture and represented the hauntological discourse in which the Collective so desired to explore. The installation was both absent and present within the space, consisting of actual material from the 1990s whilst simultaneously being a simulation of possible lost futures in the form of a trace of neoliberal hedonism.

In contrast to Bek's brutal hauntology was Ben's intervention *I thought I was Awake...* [fig, 57] Utilising a form of mise-en-scène evoking a non- place lounge area or 'chill out room' the work was an ever repeating fractal sound scape, a remix of Ben's composition *I thought I was Awake...* first performed at the Yard Theatre in London earlier that year.<sup>1093</sup> Ben attempted deconstruction through repetition of the score in order to create potential futures in each sequence. The soundscape was designed to echo throughout the upstairs area mirroring its possible futures through a form of metaphorical sonic resonance.<sup>1094</sup> This repetition of form through a sampling of performances past haunted the space because these futures were not actualised in the sense that they only existed as a memory. One moment was immediately lost in another and so on throughout the duration of the intervention. This intervention, akin to Bek's, was also an investigation into the self because by deconstructing his own work Ben was questioning his 'career path' of becoming a composer. Indeed, the endless repetition of the score mirrored Ben's endless ruminations on his feeling of disassociation with the hierarchical elements within the profession.

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<sup>1092</sup>*Ibid*, (para.2 of 2).

<sup>1093</sup>Benjamin Parker, 'I thought I was Awake...' (2017) (Original Score, 2013-2016 and performed at The Yard Theatre: London, 2017).

<sup>1094</sup>Sonic Hauntology is elaborated on by Mark Fisher in, 'The Metaphysics of Crackle: Afrofuturism and Hauntology', *Dancecult*, Vol.5, No.2 (2013), p.45.

John's durational installation *Writings From HMS Brexit* [fig, 58], consisted of recordings from four speakers thinking through the theme of Brexit in different ways.<sup>1095</sup> Staged as a discussion in a pub around a table in the far corner of the main downstairs bar area, the installation encouraged participants to sit down with the 'absent' speakers. This installation referenced the many discussions taking place up and down the UK in pubs except that the participant was forced to listen to these disembodied voices rather than engaging in a direct dialogue. This dislocation and disembodiment was a metaphor for the perpetual 'stuckness' of the national debate on Brexit, which framed through a hauntological lens, becomes an endless precession of national ghosts from our collective cultural past squeezed into the binary of vote 'remain' or 'leave'. However, the different 'voices' on the recording strip back this binary narrative and reveal the complexity and multi-modality underneath what Mark Fisher would have suggested was the, 'superficial frenzy of 'newness'' which is so endemic to the processes of capital that we do not even notice its veneer.<sup>1096</sup> In other words, these recordings began to 'trouble' the media narrative of Remain equals progressive, non-racist, middle class, intellectual, centre-left; and Leave equals closed minded, racist, working class, unintelligent, right wing.<sup>1097</sup> Instead, John described the hauntological notion of the work-labour relationship in our anachronistic culture. The same jobs and thus life opportunities afforded by our parents and grandparents do not exist for great swathes of the population, yet the same 'work a day ethic' lives on like a zombie and haunts the minds of many.<sup>1098</sup> John argued that Brexit was an 'accidental hand-grenade' handed to those left behind by global neoliberalism and economic injustice, yet by 'throwing' the grenade they 'blew the limbs off all sides'.<sup>1099</sup> Similarly, Jonathan Butcher, another one of the four speakers, created a 'cut up' word poem from news articles which brought to life the complexity of the interrelated realities which contributed to the referendum's outcome.<sup>1100</sup> These arguments became like a news reel of 'clichés' that Butcher composed into a coherent narrative which spelled out the

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<sup>1095</sup>John Ledger, 'Writings From HMS Brexit' *SoundCloud* (2017) <<https://soundcloud.com/theunrealisedproject/writings-from-hms-brexit-1>>[accessed 18/08/2019].

<sup>1096</sup>Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, p.6.

<sup>1097</sup>Jake Hall, As we descend further into 'Us vs Them' territory over Brexit, we need to talk about working-class Remainers *The Independent* (2019)<<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/brexit-remain-leave-march-protest-working-class-voters-a8841671.html>> [accessed 14/08/2019].

<sup>1098</sup>John Ledger, 'Writings From HMS Brexit' (time stamp: 1.00-2.00).

<sup>1099</sup>*Ibid*, (time stamp: 2:00- 2:35).

<sup>1100</sup>Jonathan Butcher, 'Shattered Exit', *Writings From HMS Brexit* (time stamp: 9:53-10:45).

reactions from increased uncertainty to the myth of European Union restrictions on the shape of bananas.<sup>1101</sup>

JD Taylor's *The Tale of Two Countries* talked about the need for change which had become obvious at a cultural level. He suggested that some see Brexit as 'moments of culminated British revolution', whereas Taylor argued they reveal long lasting and existing social 'scars' of the class system which have come to the forefront.<sup>1102</sup> He suggests that 'never before in our history has been easier to get filthy rich, store up your loot in some vertical luxury apartment bank. Never before in our history has it been easier to go hungry and starve, kill yourself, go hungry because of benefit sanctions'.<sup>1103</sup> Taylor's psycho-geographic journey around the UK illustrated the divided country of extremes between the poor and rich he suggests that the Brexit vote was a protest in the way the country is governed and a need to return to a sense of connectedness to each other.<sup>1104</sup>

Mere Pseud's *I am Run By Time* described how the cultural memory of an imperfect but well-funded post-war capitalist Britain with a strong welfare state appears to be hauntological and out of time with the onset of free market libertarianism which instigated and championed the atomised individual as an entrepreneur and as a 'free' consumer through the rise in 'retail as therapy'.<sup>1105</sup> Pseud argued much like the other speakers in the installation, that this masked the rise in inequalities as a result.<sup>1106</sup> Pseud then began to shift his language to begin to open these issues into a spoken word poem which argued that society is enslaved by time, but this time has changed and become an endless procession of cultural regurgitations from the past.<sup>1107</sup> Pseud's response was unlike the other three *Writings From HMS Brexit*, as his perception of Brexit was from the outside as he moved to Canada and the US. However, the forces in play are the same as in North America and Pseud related to psychological pain brought to the fore by Brexit.<sup>1108</sup>

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<sup>1101</sup>*Ibid*, (time stamp: 9:53-14:00).

<sup>1102</sup>JD Taylor, 'The Tale of Two Countries', *Writings From HMS Brexit* (time stamp: 15:10)

<sup>1103</sup>*Ibid*, (time Stamp: 14:40- 14:55).

<sup>1104</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>1105</sup>Mere Pseud, 'I am Run By Time', *Writings From HMS Brexit* (time stamp: 24:10)

<sup>1106</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>1107</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>1108</sup>*Ibid*, (time stamp: 33:47).

These collaborations with others ‘outside’ of the Collective perforated the intervention like ghosts adding to the sense of dislocation. For example, Mere Pseud had contacted the RBATEOTU through John’s WordPress blog and become a contact of the Collective. His name was a pseudonym derived from the 1980s Post Punk band *The Fall*, which he states was a soundtrack to the diaries he wrote at the time.<sup>1109</sup> The diary entries form the basis for his project which was a, ‘four yearlong autofiction project mixes diary entries, cultural observation, teen confessionals, an enduring love for UK postpunk band The Fall, image-meditations on memory, and spoken word fragments; it’s a reckoning with the passages of time and the spectral intermingling of futures and pasts, a slantways slide through places, spaces, and states of mind’.<sup>1110</sup> Pseud created images derived from ephemera and family photographs to illustrate his diary entries [fig, 59]. As a collective it was decided that these images could be dispersed throughout the pub in ‘retro’ style picture frames [fig, 60]. There was a distinct relationship between these images and the location of the pub because Pseud was a former resident of Shipley and his images referenced the area.

These collaborations including the Collective’s engagement with Skippko revealed the constant dialectical relationship between the desire for autonomy and the need to reach out for connection beyond the immediacy of the ‘core’ relationships which formed the RBATEOTU. The intervention at the Little Blue Orange pub was more than simply artists entering a space and creating ‘art’, it was the emplacement of ideas and the befriending of issues through a sustained dialogue between each other and a specific local context. However, this local context is always interlinked with the different scales and trajectories from the regional to the global. Indeed, this is perhaps expressed in a summation John penned on his blog in late December of 2017, he suggested that, ‘[t]he pub, which epitomises the weird and eerie landscape of post-industrial West Yorkshire, was situated on the relentless Otley Road, within the Saltaire/Shipley region. Yet, the building itself contained ghostly remnants of a political and cultural era which the RBATEOU argues is currently coming to an end’.<sup>1111</sup>This

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<sup>1109</sup>Mere Pseud, ‘The Secret 1980s Journal of a Teenage Modernist’ (2017) <<http://teenpseud.blogspot.com/>> [accessed 20/07/2019].

<sup>1110</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>1111</sup>John Ledger, ‘Works of 2017’ *WordPress* (2017) <<https://johnledger.me/2017/12/25/works-of-2017/>> [accessed 23/07/2019].

relationship between the hyper local as signified by, ‘Otley Road, within the Saltaire/Shipley region’ and the meta-scales waving throughout society as signified by words and phrases such as, ‘post-industrial’ and ‘political and cultural era’ epitomises the *modus operandi* of the RBATEOTU.

The relationship bonds which were formed within the duration of the project continue to echo throughout the Collective. They constantly play out in contradictory forms and tensions and shape the development of the Collective. It is perhaps tempting to close this autoethnography with a set of sweeping statements about how we found our collective working method within the project aptly, given our name, in a pub. However, these practices are never fully enshrined in stone. They are always in flux and indeed, depend on the relationships which constitute the collective at any given time. However, what I can state is that we found a set of complex interdependent ideas with which to think through together, and most importantly this process changed our dynamic. It is important to understand the power of befriending ideas in this way as I argue that it led, in this instance, to a brief *aesthetic movement* in which the members of the Collective, ‘create[ed] a fleeting moment of wholeness in which fragments and disorder are temporarily united.’<sup>1112</sup> This ‘wholeness’ was immediately lost when the intervention ended and we separated both in our physical locations and also in our conceptual engagement. However, this aesthetic movement appears to be vital in order to understand not only the RBATEOTU but also may aid in the movement towards an understanding of the contemporary artist-led collective.

Since the intervention at the Little Blue Orange pub, the RBATEOTU has seen a revolving door of members. Interestingly, these members have joined on a project by project basis, often working with the collective as opposed to becoming long term members. The correlation with YSP remains apparent as two of the three new members worked with John and Ben. The result of this has been an almost constant period of activity as one project informs elements of another. This time of flux has brought further tensions and disagreements about the direction in which the RBATEOTU should take. This friction has resulted in several different forms of emergent practice characterised by the creation

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<sup>1112</sup>Baxter, ‘Relationships as dialogues’ *Personal Relationships* (2004) [PDF], p.12.

of four different WhatsApp conversations.<sup>1113</sup> These conversations have become the platform in which much of the communication and decision-making takes place. This is because of the increased difficulty in bringing every member together in one physical place. One side effect of this use of social media is that it has solved the underlying problematic of the Collective because the RBATEOTU is able to both develop ideas in a private heterotopic space and formalise elements of our conversations into action plans. The dialectic of formality-informality often creates tensions in the Collective between those who want the RBATEOTU to remain a ‘thinking space’ and those who want to shift to a more formal organisational structure. This will always be the tension at the heart of the relationship that the Collective has both with each other and with the external world. However, in the tension creativity can occur, as is apparent within the relational dialectics in play.

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<sup>1113</sup>There are four WhatsApp groups: Retro\_bar action ideas, Retro Bar Tumblr, RB Academic/life support and Retro Bar RPG’s.

## Conclusion-Place Matters

I now return to the beginning as this thesis folds back on itself and reflexively begins again. However, this time it is changed and the word ‘collective’ is no longer an abstract term in my mind. It is instead loaded with semantic and dialectical contradiction, which challenges the perceived notions often attributed of the contemporary artist-led collective. Repeatedly, throughout this thesis the meaning of the word ‘collective’ arrived in the crosshairs of my critical perspective, only to ‘slip’ away again and escape definition. This is precisely the reason why Gregory Sholette and Blake Stimson struggled to historically periodise collectivism.<sup>1114</sup> They readily admitted that it was somewhat futile by stating, ‘[I]et us be as clear as we can be here: the ambition driving our inquiry and our periodization is structurally no different from the old (modernist) ideal of nation-building’.<sup>1115</sup> Sholette and Stimson, however, justify their periodisation by suggesting that it is the forces of collectivism that have changed,

Patriarchs, empires, and markets all played their respective roles in previous rounds of nation-building, of course—they were, after all, the strike forces of collectivization that brought people together into new and expanded social forms and conjurations, but so too, we shouldn’t forget, did ideas and ideals, and not just the false ones. The Enlightenment was many things but among them it was an engine of social production, a way of imagining community—and Marx is only the best example, nothing more—that did not forfeit individual autonomy to one form of illegitimate force or another. It is nothing other than this old dream of actually existing autonomy, of autonomy realized, of autonomy institutionalized, that haunts now with new vigor [*sic*] as a ghost from the past, but it does so not on the basis of the sheer strength of principle but instead by drawing its renewal and revitalization, by drawing replenishment of its lifeblood, from those strike forces of collectivization that are peculiar to our moment now.<sup>1116</sup>

To an extent I agree with this statement. However, it is a meta-narrative and the reality of the situation is complex because those ‘old’ strike forces of collectivism are still threaded into the web of contemporary existence. Granted, modern telecommunications and the invention of social media have played a vital role in shaping the activity of the contemporary artist-led collective; as I have illustrated with TCC’s collaborative project with POIUYT and to some extent in all the case studies within this

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<sup>1114</sup>Sholette and Stimson, *Collectivism after Modernism*.

<sup>1115</sup>Ibid, p.3.

<sup>1116</sup>Ibid, pp.3-4.



thesis. However, the situation is far more nuanced and is a complex dialectical knot of both those old strike forces, in the guise of world superpowers and the art market; and the new strike forces of mass communication, self-organisation and atomised befriending of ideas. It is not simply that one is giving over to the other, but a complex contradiction of both the past and the future playing out in a strange hauntological present that is always becoming and never arrives.<sup>1117</sup>

With this in mind, I return to the questions which I framed at the beginning of this thesis; what is an artist-led collective? How do they operate, and why? Then the traditional art historical lens of ‘periodisation’ becomes even more problematic. I argue that in order answer these questions it is vital to understand the social bonds which form collectives in the first instance. Further, it has become apparent through my analysis, that the role of friendship is the deciding relationship factor which informs the totality of unified oppositions from which the collective is perceived.<sup>1118</sup> To paraphrase Okui Enwezor, the collective is always social in character and can be understood through the realisation that artwork is not divorced of the artist, and in fact, it is of paramount importance that both/and are considered when studying the contemporary artist-led collective.<sup>1119</sup> Thus the tenants of ‘periodisation’, which are inherently based on art objects in a certain aesthetic or ideological trend, become both too restrictive and overly generic. Indeed, I have endeavoured to weave a historiography which punctures the broad brush of periodization by revealing how ‘micro-states’ of collectivist discourses existed throughout the nineteenth century. These micro-states coalesced at times to form a diverse range of interconnecting relationships from The Firm and the PRB, to the Federation of Artists in the Paris Commune. These moments were ever-changing and cannot be framed as artist-led collectives in the contemporary sense. Nevertheless, they continued to haunt the collectives which formed throughout the following century. They continue their utterances within the ideals of Assemble, TCC, Cto Delat. It is for this reason that I argue the collective was the ‘ism’ that could never be realised, it is an (un)history, continually echoing throughout the many iterations of the contemporary artist-led collective.

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<sup>1117</sup>Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, pp.2-6.

<sup>1118</sup>Baxter and Montgomery, *Dialectical Approaches to Studying Personal Relationships*.

<sup>1119</sup>Enwezor, ‘The Production of Social Space as Artwork’, p.223.

I argue in order to understand the contemporary artist-led collective becomes contradictory because there is not a 'the', or a set of definitions, because collectives develop from friendships then each relationship must be understood relationally within its particular context. Indeed, this reveals why I have repeatedly referred to the political significations of the collective because if collectives can be understood through their communication and thus social bonds, then their artwork will most likely appear to take on political connotations, whether intentionally or by happenstance. Celine Condorelli described this as, 'the befriending of ideas' and ideas are forms of knowledge, which according to Mikhail Bakhtin, develop through dialogue in the social realm.<sup>1120</sup>

Analysing the contemporary artist-led collective through the lens of friendship begins to describe the apparent heterogeneity of collective formations. It also reveals the dialectical tensions and contradictions which collectives constantly negotiate both internally and externally. These negotiations played out within the in-depth case studies of Assemble and TCC. In TCC's case the tension was a constant dialectical flux of both the centrifugal-centripetal forces of autonomy-connectedness and the individual-collective. This was particularly characterised by their tendency to enter into a collaboration with others at specific times and places such as their on-going dialogue with POIUYT. On the other hand, they specifically expressed the notion that they would never consider 'permanent' addition of other members. It was in this tension between their autonomy and their desire to connect that the contradictions of the individual-collective resided. As a duo they had attempted to eradicate their individuality in order to practice as TCC. However, they recognised that to create TCC required their separate individuality to inform the relationship which was always becoming TCC. This contradiction was articulated by Barbara Montgomery and Leslie Baxter as the 'individual and the social are dialogically inseparable. The individual self becomes only in relating and relating both produces and reproduces an historical-cultural-social milieu'.<sup>1121</sup> The factors of time, space and place appeared to intertwine with their relationship which changed accordingly. Indeed, I argue that TCC are both a collective and a duo dependent on the dialectical context.

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<sup>1120</sup>Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*.

<sup>1121</sup>Montgomery and Baxter, *Dialectical Approaches to Studying Personal Relationships*, p.158.

William Rawlins argued that, '[c]ontextual dialectics derives 'from the place of friendships in Western culture'.<sup>1122</sup> This was certainly evident in my study with Assemble, as the role of the University as a place in common played out in Assemble's practice. Predominantly Oxbridge and London educated, they formed their social bonds at parties and through a loose network of self-organised entities.<sup>1123</sup> These factors of a high-class education coupled with an emergent artist-led culture in London have provided Assemble with a privileged position. Assemble member Frances Edgerley suggested that, 'Assemble was formed out of a collective project that aimed to do something, ourselves (build, develop, create, design, program, run). We shared the experience and skills we had and used each other's energy and enthusiasm to make a project that was a social public thing in the city'.<sup>1124</sup> This statement encapsulated exactly what Assemble were attempting to achieve. The interrelationship, for better or for worse, was always predicated on an interplay between themselves as individuals, the public and the city. This was Assemble's *modus operandi* and it traced its way through every project.

The important role of friendship was inferred in Edgerley's statement and is further elaborated on in the Yarn Community dialogue. Edgerley argued that, '[f]riendship makes for a different context for working together. We can support each other in intimate ways and have expectations of one another that are perhaps beyond professional support, on the flipside the familial nature of our relationships can also breed carelessness'.<sup>1125</sup> Rawlins observed that '[t]hese bonds encompass more of the friends' lives, meeting needs for intimacy, shared discussion and fun, and personal integration beyond mere work roles'.<sup>1126</sup> This is, of course, a constant tension within Assemble's ongoing practice, as they are both becoming formalised through pursuit of commissions and funding, whilst simultaneously they continue to act through the informal relationships of friendship bonds. This contradiction is what constantly shapes and re-shapes their practice and played out in many ways throughout each of the

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<sup>1122</sup>Rawlins, *Friendship Matters*, p.72.

<sup>1123</sup>Oliver Wainwright, 'The street that might win the Turner prize: how Assemble are transforming Toxteth' *Guardian* (2015) <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/architecture-design-blog/2015/may/12/assemble-turner-prize-2015-wildcard-how-the-young-architecture-crew-assemble-rocked-the-art-world>> [accessed 25/09/2019].

<sup>1124</sup>Frances Edgerley, 'Here we go!', *Yarn Community* (2018) <<http://yarncommunity.com/stories/628>> [accessed 20/12/2018], (para.1 of 2).

<sup>1125</sup>Frances Edgerley, 'Friendship' *Yarn Community* (2018) <<http://yarncommunity.org/stories/744>> [accessed 22/01/2018].

<sup>1126</sup>Rawlins, *Friendship Matters*, p.159.

collectives within the case studies. This re-shaping was particularly evident in The Cool Couple's practice in terms of the constant dialectical flux between their internal and external worlds. TCC temporarily form new habitats with others which challenge the notion of the collective.

As a collective duo TCC's friendship was formed at university. This was highly evident in the mapping study of Leeds based artist-led collectives. The constant dialectical tensions of connectedness-autonomy between institutionalisation and self-organisation revealed themselves in the collective's spaces of appearance. These spaces revealed how artist-led collectives both form within institutions and attempt to resist their hierarchical structures. Of importance was the role of University as a place in common in which fifty percent of the collectives in the study formed. I argue that practical factors such as access to materials, financial support and facilities coupled with the proximity to other likeminded people provides the conditions for friendships to develop through a shared experience.

The role of the University is an example of artistic clustering which alludes to the importance of place within the understanding of the contemporary artist-led collective.<sup>1127</sup> I argue that the relationships which form collectives are always interrelated to the place in which they occur. This was highly evident within my own experience of working within The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe. I bore witness to the notion of the embedded experience of place within the Baildon pub project. The pub was a form of heterotopian space, which echoed reality but temporarily suspended the conditions of capital through the realisation of an aesthetic moment. The pub was no longer just a pub, it momentarily functioned as place in common for the members of the collective to develop a greater understanding of both each other, and the tensions which pervaded our socio-cultural situation. It was this realisation, on a personal level, that informs my final argument. The contemporary artist-led collective can only begin to be understood through the interconnectedness that its relationship bonds have with the experience of place. As a result, each member's understanding will be slightly different,

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<sup>1127</sup> Hollands and Vail, 'Place Imprinting and the arts: A case of the Amber Collective', p.179.

and yet, the befriending of ideas can momentarily result in a coherence and creativity in the contradictions and tensions which pervade the collective.

Viewing contemporary artist-led collectives through the conceptual lens of friendship fundamentally changes the way in which collectives are studied and thought about. My thesis has gone beyond the current literature on this subject by tracing how friendship is interrelated to external-internal forces such as place, class, institutionalisation, authorship and capital. Further, this originality and new knowledge illuminates how and why friendships spawn collectives both historically and in the contemporary.

### ***Dialogical Methodologies***

The reasoning behind my use of a mixed set of methodologies was to attempt to understand the complexity of the artist-led collective, rather than falling into the monologic and rigidity offered by simply employing a unified methodology. This decision was also predicated on my argument that because collectives can only be understood through the interplay of both their social bonds and their output (artwork), then it stands to reason that I needed to reflect this in the methodologies that dealt with communication and dialogue. I also included elements of historiography and autoethnography in my understanding of dialogic methodologies because they both ‘speak’ to an exchange between people. In the case of the historiography this dialogue was between the reader, myself and the historical accounts. Similarly, the elements of reflective accounts and autoethnography speak to both the reader, myself and the wider socio-cultural and geo-political context.

This autoethnographic approach proved to be an invaluable source of insight when it came to the analysis of *The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe*. I was able to trace the changing relationships between members of the collective from a perspective that would have been impossible from the outside. Through analysis of my first-hand accounts I was able to build layers of meaning as both a researcher and a member of the collective. This interplay between the internal and external mirrored

the realities of the forces which collectives must navigate. As a result, I was able to gain an indepth insight into how and why collectives change throughout time.

This mixed methodology has its weaknesses. I found working with Assemble far more challenging compared with my open discussions with TCC. Indeed, I was not able to engage with members of Assemble as frequently as was needed to breakdown the barriers of closedness-secrecy and move towards a more interpersonal relationship. This is the one of the main ethical problematics in play because I needed to move towards a more familiar relationship in order to discover their social bonds, yet I was always an outsider in my role as a researcher. As I outlined in the introduction this situation revolved around disclosure and what the entire relationship dynamic- which included myself, Frances Edgerley, the core members of Assemble, the staff at BSAP, the parents and guardians of the children, the children, Sumuyya Khader and the residents of Granby with whom I conversed- deemed appropriate to disclose.

To remedy this situation I attempted to gain a greater insight into their interrelationships by concentrating on their projects which were also slightly removed from the core members. In this way I was able to gain a different perspective from how they were perceived from this partially-removed position. If I was to re-design this study I would have afforded more time to engaging with the core group of Assemble in order to realise the full potential of the dialogic methodology. However, this outcome further illustrates that every artist-led collective is different, and their social bonds determine how they interact with the external world.

The other main weakness with a mixed methodology is also its greatest strength. By implementing elements of these field specific methodologies, I was opening my findings to critique by discipline specialists within academic discourse. They may find my interpretation of their methodologies different to the standard model. However, I have specifically set out not to implement each methodological model in its pure form, because that would fall back into the same set of assumptions and outcomes that have pervaded art from time immemorial. This mixed methodology is an attempt to find new ways to study a phenomenon which requires the emergence of different ways of thinking.


In effect, I have attempted a framework that has not been implemented in this configuration to date. This mixed methodology is by definition part of my 'unique contribution to knowledge'.

The importance of Yarn Community as a platform to engage with collectives in a dynamic dialogue cannot be underestimated. I was able to create an ongoing discussion with TCC and Assemble that became itself a form of collective learning. A vital factor in engaging with Yarn Community was that dialogue could develop over a sustained period of time, not limited by the constraints and pressures of an interview situation. As a result, multiple threads and subtext emerged which ultimately led to a deeper level of analysis throughout my thesis. Yarn Community fostered a relationship between myself and both collectives because it created a shared space where communication could organically take its course without being forced or coerced into specific outcomes.

A final word on this thesis requires a fold back to the beginning. Of course, this was not the beginning, as I had come to this subject matter long before I initiated my research for this thesis. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this text I will refer to my opening remarks. I embarked on this journey through the repeated notions that I wanted to find out; what was the contemporary artist-led collective? How did it function within culture, and why? I purposely started with my own experience as I endeavoured to deconstruct my own assumptions through the development of relationships with others whom had experienced collectivism in its many different amalgamations. Each case study challenged my perspective and eventually the guiding lens of friendship emerged. I then attempted to close this thesis with an autoethnographic chapter that was framed by the outcomes of the previous case studies. This reflexivity is important because it is vital that knowledge towards the understanding of the artist-led collective is shared and brought into the open for the continuation of this emerging field of research.

## Illustrations

Fig.1.




**Translated State**  
The Essence of an Industry

Featuring:  
Elizabeth Loren  
Chris Freitag  
Beth Gadd  
John Wright  
Samantha Chtimi  
Emily Towler

Private View—Thursday 25th July, 5pm—7pm  
Open Friday 26th July—Thursday 1st August

Leeds Corn Exchange  
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**Leeds  
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Fig.2.



Fig.3.



Fig.4.



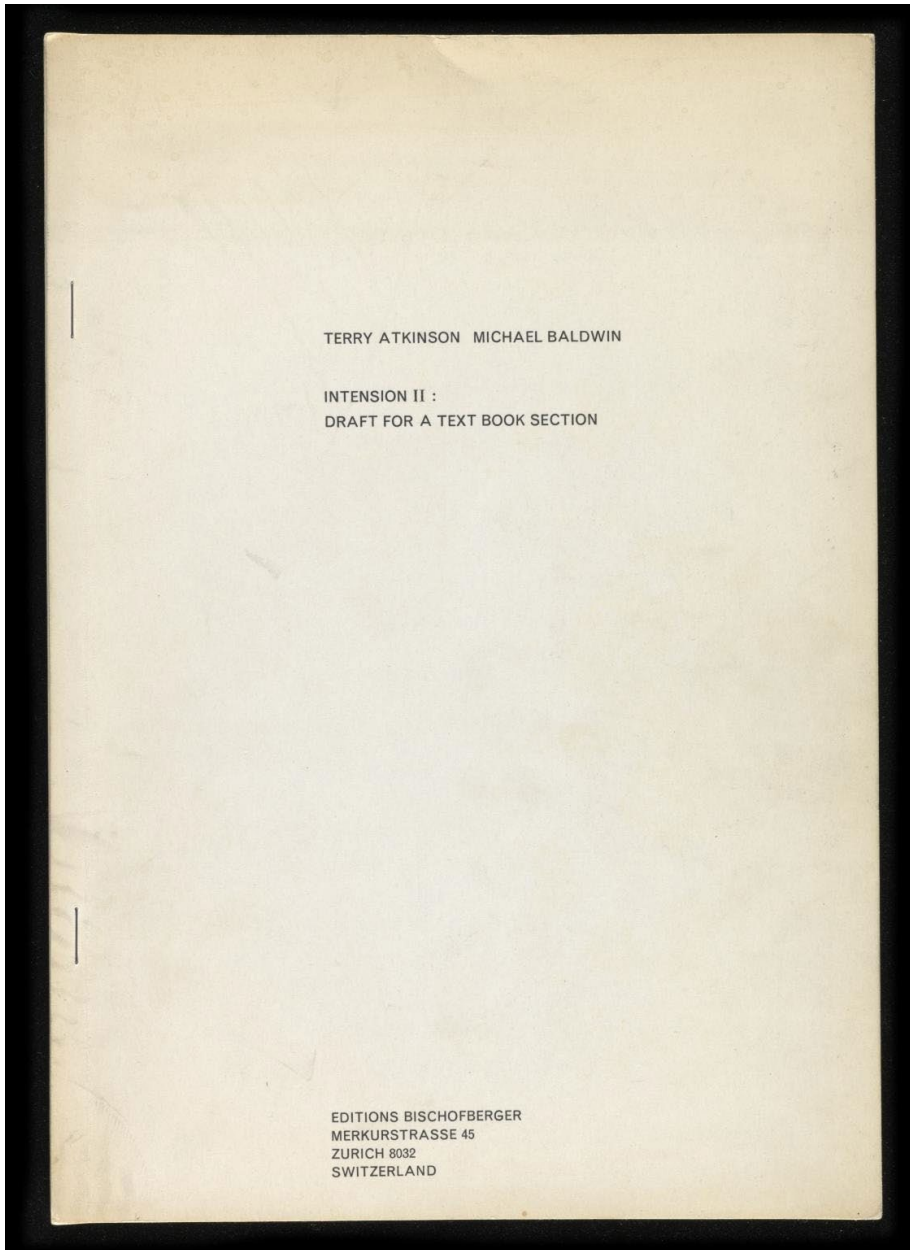
Fig.5.



Fig.6.



Fig.7.



TERRY ATKINSON MICHAEL BALDWIN

INTENSION II :  
DRAFT FOR A TEXT BOOK SECTION

EDITIONS BISCHOFBERGER  
MERKURSTRASSE 45  
ZURICH 8032  
SWITZERLAND

Fig.8.

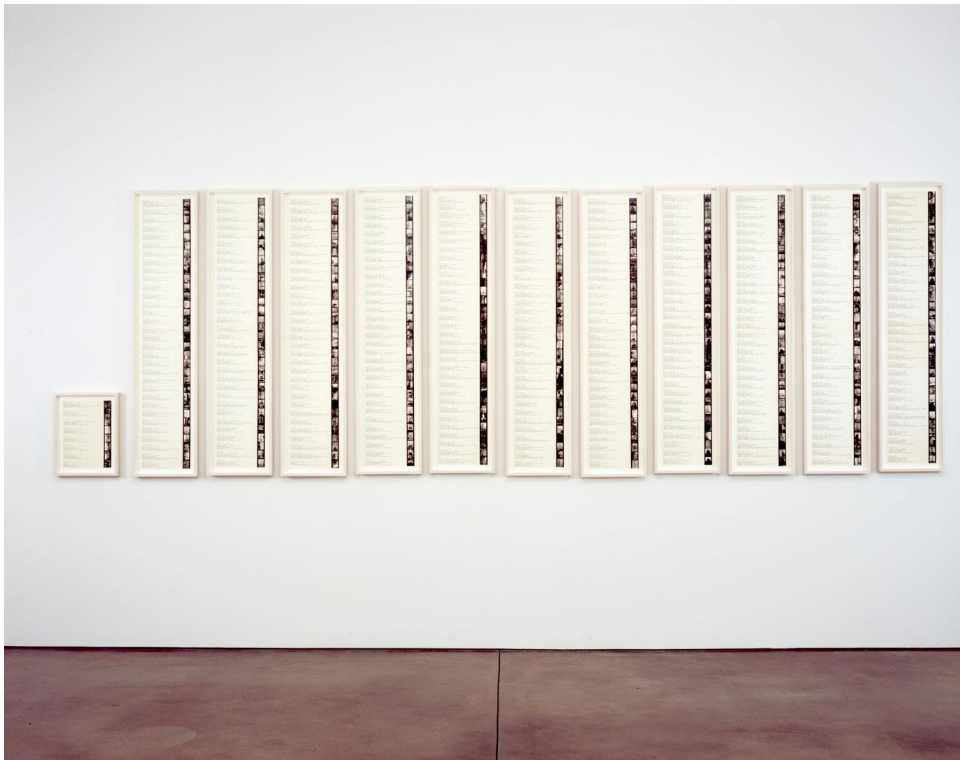


Fig.9.



Fig.10.

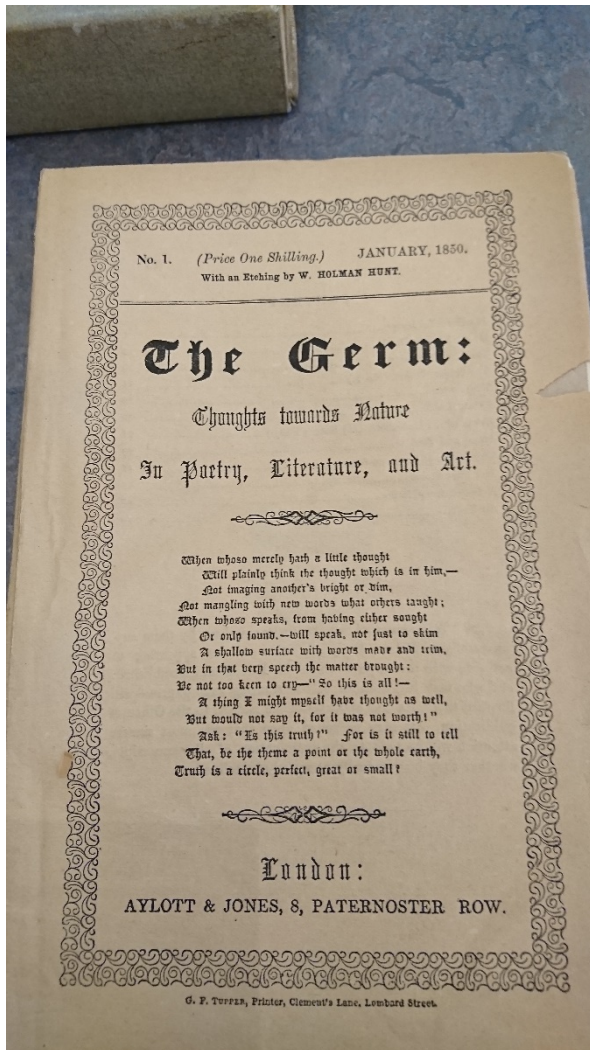


Fig.11.



Fig.12.

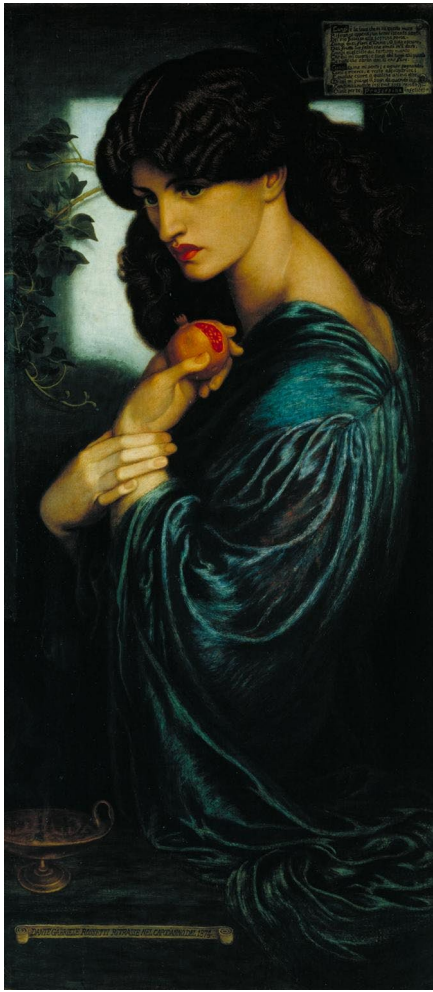


Fig.13.



Fig.14.



Fig.15.





Fig.16.



Fig.17.



Fig.18.



Fig.19.



Fig.20.



Fig.21.

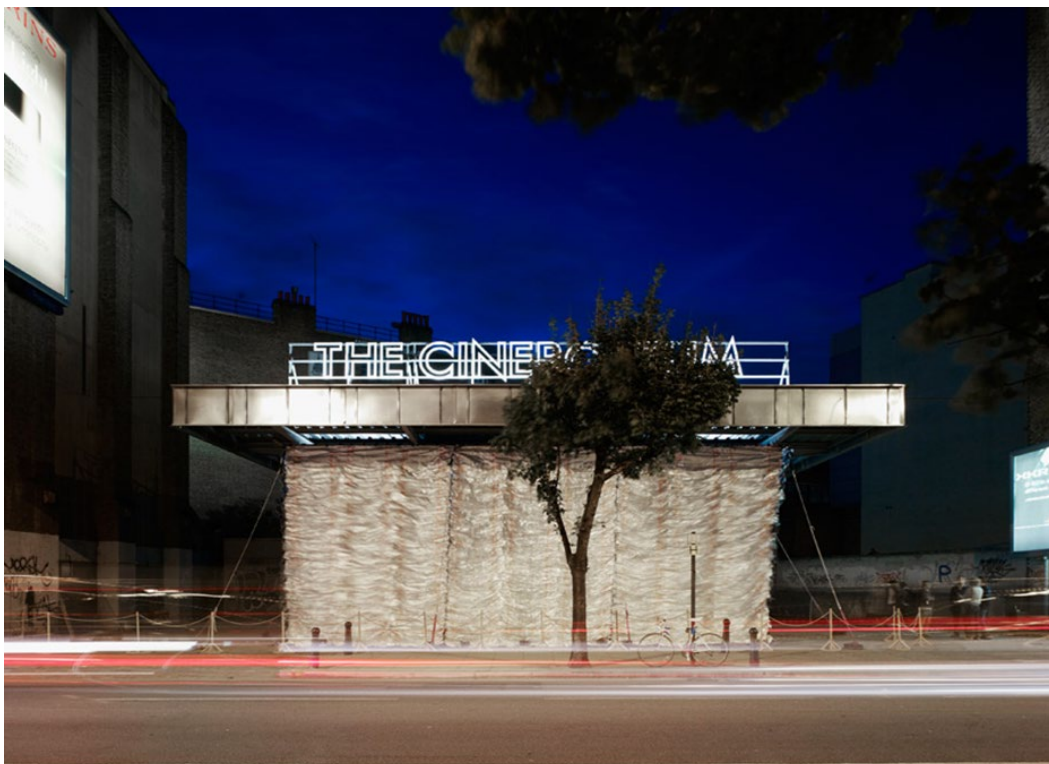


Fig.22.



Fig.23.

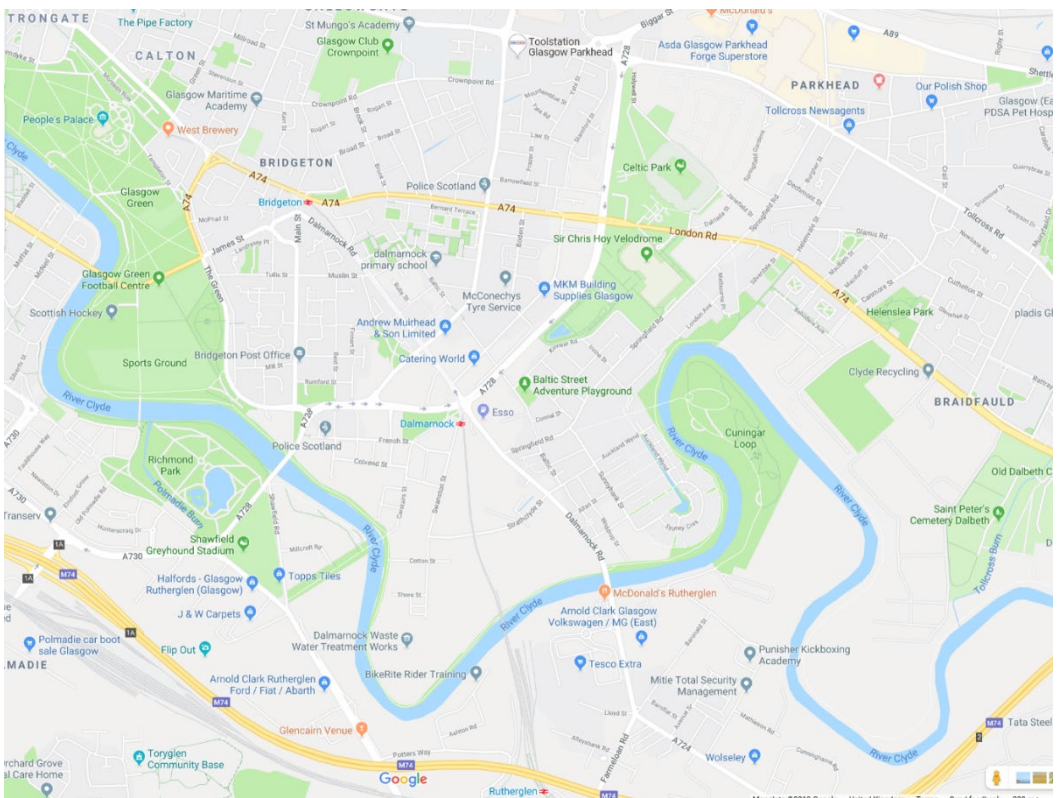


Fig.24.



Fig.25.



Fig.26.



Fig.27.



Fig.28.



Fig.29.



Fig.30.



Fig.31.





Fig.32.



Fig.33.



Fig.34.



Fig.35.

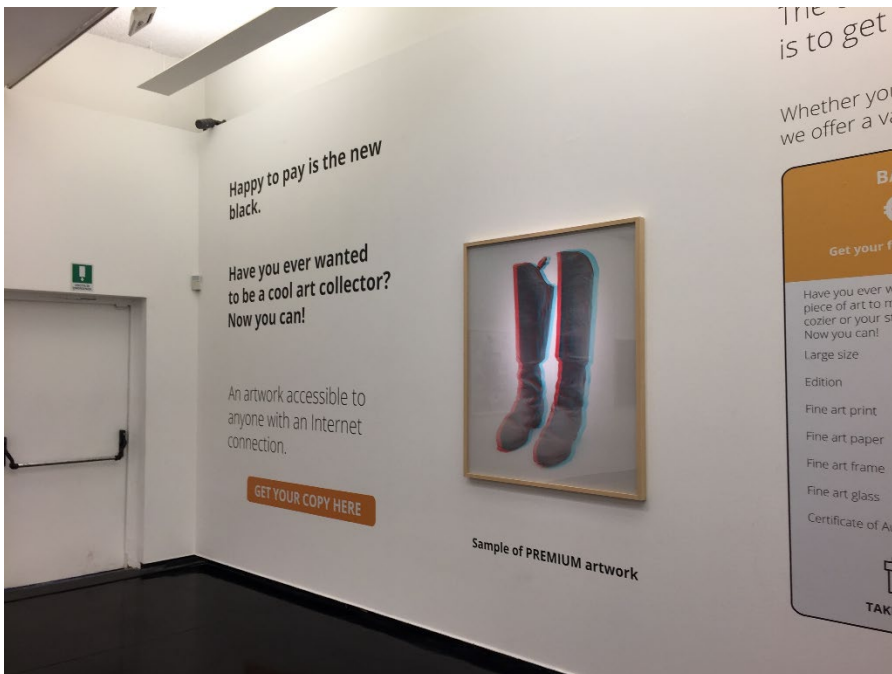


Fig.36.



Fig.37.

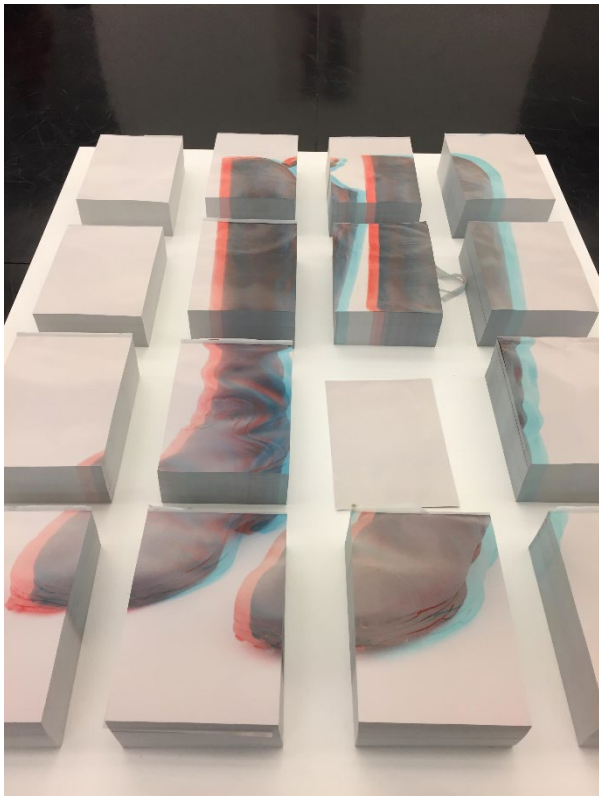


Fig.38.

THE COOL COUPLE: TURBULENT TIMES. NOTHING HAPPENS IN NICE WEATHER. CHAPTER 2: COOL PEOPLE PAY HAPPILY

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Fine art paper	✗	Fine art paper	✗	Fine art paper	✓
Fine art frame	✗	Fine art frame	✗	Fine art frame	✓
Fine art glass	✗	Fine art glass	✗	Fine art glass	✓
Certificate of Authenticity	✗	Certificate of Authenticity	✓	Certificate of Authenticity	✓
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Fig.39.



Fig.40.



Fig.41.



Fig.42.



Fig.43.

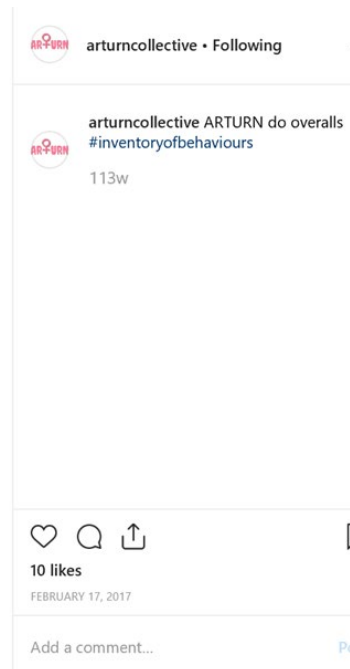


Fig.44.

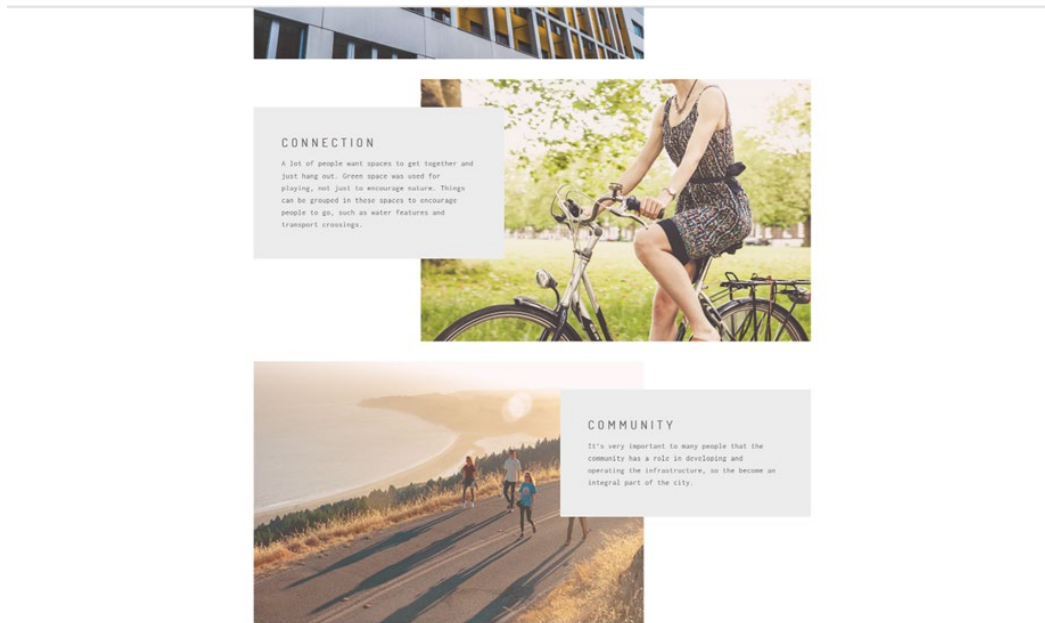


Fig.45





Fig.46.



Fig.47.

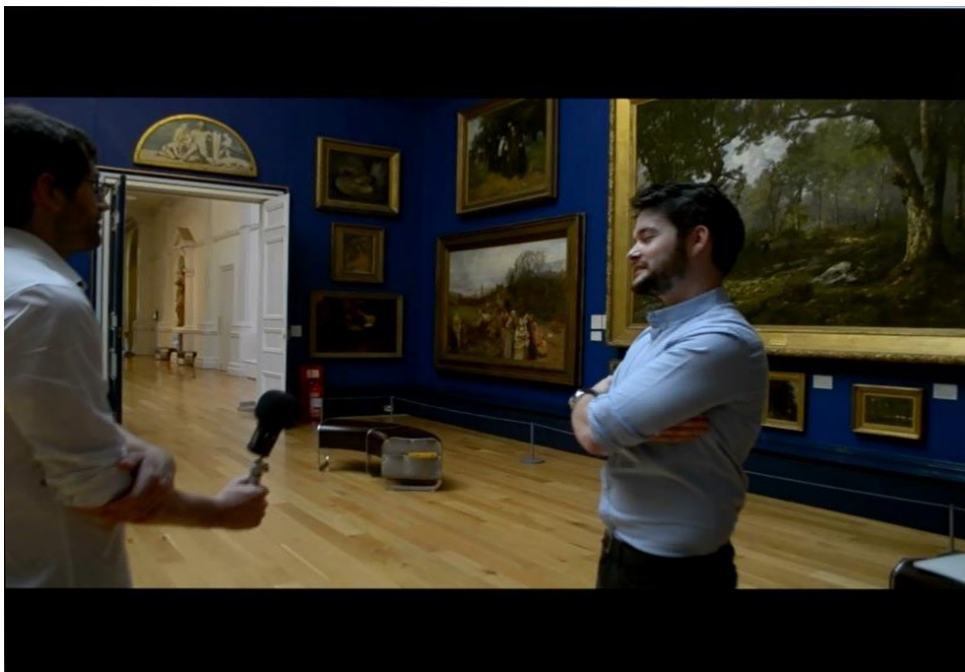


Fig.48.



Fig.49.



Fig.50.



Fig.51.

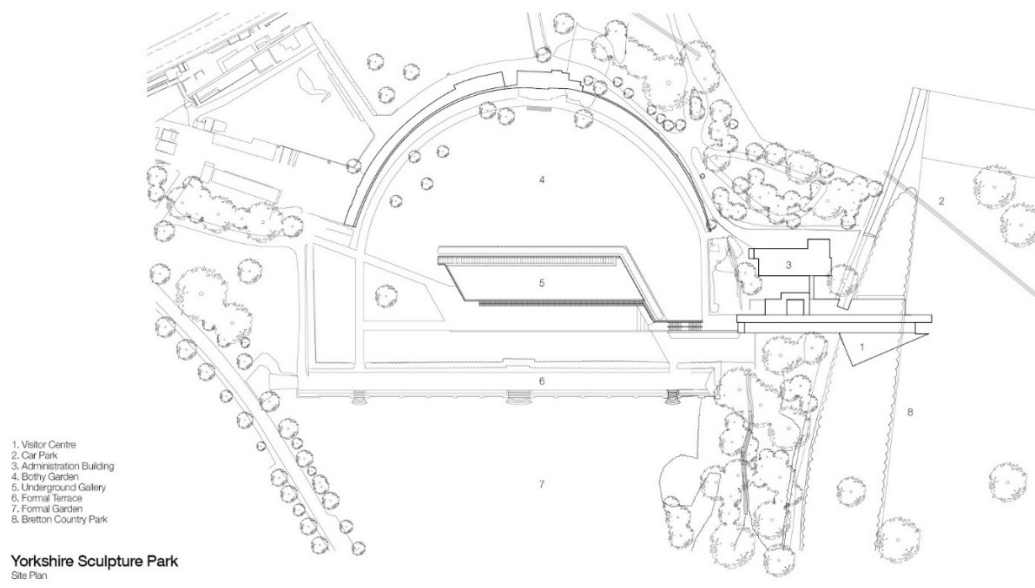


Fig.52.



Fig.53.

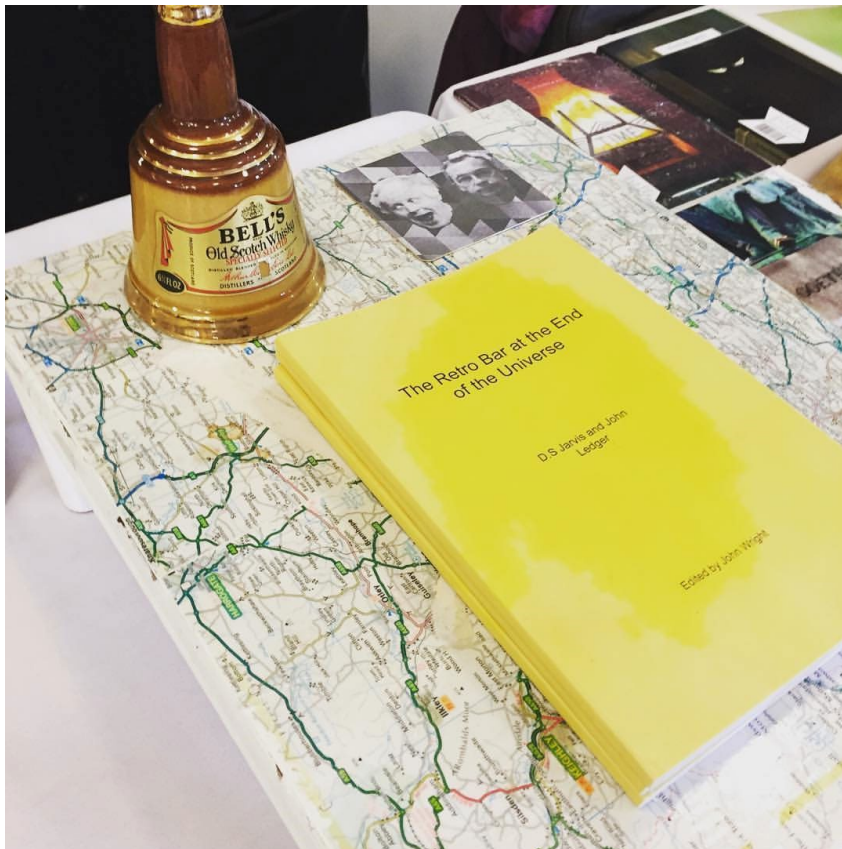


Fig.54.



Fig.55.



Fig.56.



Fig.57.



Fig.58.



Fig.59.



Fig.60.





## Appendix

### **Appendix 1.**

The purpose of this literature review is to present a survey of the current academic literature concerned with *contemporary artist-led collectives*. When envisaging the scope of this endeavour it is vital that consideration is made for the multitude of information of ‘culturally related’, histories and theoretical paradigms which are entangled in the formation of collectivist activities within contemporary art. The nature of the contemporary artist-led collective cannot be separated from its socio-cultural context. As a result, many apparently abstract texts, theories and seemingly un-related fields of study could be argued into the fold. However, what this literature review will focus on are texts which specifically engage with the problematic of artist-led collectives. In initiating this task the inevitable problem of language rears its head. What term or set of terms should be employed in order to effectively capture (within human reason) all that has gone before this metaphorical line in the sand? As we have witnessed through an etymological study of the word *collective* there are a plethora of synonyms which authors denote to signify the collective connotations of any given instance. How, then, do we navigate this field of terms and related words?

It is precisely this situation which will be re-appropriated in order to compile a comprehensive lexical glossary of key words, which in combination, will increase the capture success rate. The following section will propose the search terms and discuss the archives /databases which will be chosen to survey the potential literature on the subjects.

Below is a list of the terms which will be used in *Boolean Operators* (And, Or and Not) or combinations with each other in order to maximise the search capture.<sup>1128</sup> These terms have been chosen because they appear in the majority of the literature which forms the body of this research. It has been through the investigation, up to this moment, which has defined these searches. It must be noted that the literature review is a perpetual process through this PhD.

---

<sup>1128</sup> Boolean Operators- Library Alliant.edu, “What is a Boolean Operator?”(2015) <http://library.alliant.edu/screens/boolean.pdf> [accessed 25/03/2017].

<b>Primary term</b>	<b>Secondary term</b>
Art	Collective
Artist	Group
Artist-led	Enterprise
Artist-run	Organisation
	Collaborative
	Assembled
	Co-operative

The primary terms will be used in conjunction with the secondary terms in order to refine the search and define current academic research. This glossary has been limited to these terms through a trial and error process. It was found that adding further synonyms to the Boolean structure limited the search results to such a degree important texts were omitted.

The following databases and archives have been chosen to develop a comprehensive and ‘complete’ review of the current literature which is emerging and has formed the basis of knowledge surrounding the contemporary artist-led collective. The databases are as follows: University of Leeds Library, EThOS, White Rose eTheses, DART Europe etheses portal, The Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD), JSTOR, Art Full Text (H.W. Wilson) -- EBSCO Databases and Bibliography of the history of art -- Free Databases. It must be stressed this is a complete a search of the current literature regarding contemporary artist-led collectives at this time. One does not profess to have captured everything ever written regarding the subject. However, to the best of available time and ability this is a comprehensive overview. I have also investigated various archives of the artist-led in order to develop my research in specific case studies, these include: Skippko’s archive, Leeds 13’s online resource, East Street Arts Archive and The University of Leeds Special Collections.

## Appendix 2

This is the QR Code to link to the dialogue with Assemble on Yarn Community.



Here is the transcript from the Yarn Community dialogue (note this does not include any images or links used in the dialogue).

Key: JW= John Wright

FE= Fran Edgerley

JW: To begin I thought I would outline a few thoughts I have had about how this project may work. I don't want this to be a simple question and answer exchange, it will only be productive if we can both get something out of this conversation. There is no hierarchy here; I may have initiated the project but this format allows for a democratic approach. This digital story telling platform will hopefully allow this to be a co-authored project with no direct end point, other than when it 'naturally' comes to a close.

I am becoming more and more interested in how friendship -or something that goes beyond simple working relationships- develop in the cultural nebula. As it seems that contemporary artist-led collectives are formed on such terms. I wondered if you had an opinion on this? With regard to Assemble or otherwise?

We talked in our meeting, earlier this month, about how ‘alternative economies’ have developed within the global system of capital, here is a link to a text on the subject which was used in a reading group formed by myself and Kerry Harker in Leeds (see link in the Items section). I would love to know your thoughts on these economies and if they essentially fail or whether you think they have potential? They are obviously developing due to a social need. Here also is the link to a fairly interesting article on the artist collectives forming in India and in some cases adopting similar ‘alternative systems’ <https://homegrown.co.in/article/801473/11-indian-art-collectives-that-you-should-know-about>. This website is obviously Western focused as its as sleek as an art marketing website but the information is useful.

I am currently researching ‘the artistic guild’ or a political re-imagining of such a construct within 19th century socio-political discourse. Figures such as Pugin, Ruskin, Morris, Dickens and Marx were all in Britain at the time and they appear to have tapped into this sense of social and political change which led the proto-collective groups like the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and socialist movements within arts and crafts. I am beginning to see the possibility of change being a central factor in the evolution of the artist collective during this time. This sense of change is still embedded within the term collective. I wondered if you felt it was a factor in Assemble? Even if it is not a conscious concern all of the time.

Finally, for now, you began to talk about how Assemble formed? I wondered if you could briefly remind me?

FE: I think all there is, is human relationships born of different contexts. Some are created by people who get to know each other in an open context with no particular requirements to interact in a certain way, but through mutual respect, interest and care develop a connection - something like this is called friendship. I think the lines are blurry and the best professional relationships and romantic ones are born of the same conditions without pressure or hierarchy. It makes sense that as old professional silos breakdown and young people have more agency to mobilise they will start to create things out of groups of people they have shared interests with - friends.

Assemble was formed out of a collective project that aimed to do something, ourselves (build, develop, create, design, program, run). We shared the experience and skills we had and used each others energy and enthusiasm to make a project that was a social public thing in the city. It was a hybrid, a collage of multiple people working away fairly autonomously. I always talk about it as kind of like falling in love, totally intoxicating, changed the way I looked at everything. the way I experienced the world around me. I think the appetite for political applications of our work is very diverse within the group. generally people just want to feel excited, like they’re learning and have self-determination.

The aspects that were so rewarding and successful from the first project - open access process, no hierarchy..., DIY / learning through doing, publicly focused (‘the public’ as client) -became post-rationalised and drawn out as vague guiding principles for what we collectively thought (or at the very least spoke about) was important to inform a practice moving forwards.

I think alternative economies are fascinating and the work I do within Assemble is building on similar ideas. Emotional labour, respect, relationships... I think they have enormous potential, who knows how fast they can bring about change.

I think they have enormous potential, who knows how fast they can bring about change. We have recently been doing some work relating to Elinor Ostrom’s work on common pool resource management. I think these ideas are totally fundamental to the idea of collective, and how you can be effective. How your internal relations then reflect outwards through your work.

I think our practice, where it is interesting, is fundamentally interested in architecture as self-determination - that is why we set up Blackhorse workshop, Baltic street adventure playground, and originally the idea behind Granby workshop. The level at which these ideas are realised in reality varies greatly at different points through time.

I am very interested in ideas of complexity and the fluid relationship between words/titles/names and activities/practice/actions. The idea of human practice is key I think. Understanding that we perpetuate the structures we work within and use. Where are the reading selections from in the document you sent me? I would like to read more...

I'm currently on holiday in Japan. I have been reading a book musing on the cultural context and colour theory of Black, DT Susuki's book on zen's influence on Japanese culture, and one detailing the history of quarries in Yorkshire. I have also been carrying pedagogy of the oppressed, a guide to non-violent communication and collection of poetry, none of which I have yet managed to progress. Make of that what you will! (other than that I really need to get a Kindle)

A couple of leads relevant to ideas of self-determination and alternative economies:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elinor\\_Ostrom#Design\\_principles\\_for\\_Common\\_Pool\\_Resource\\_\(CPR\)\\_institutions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elinor_Ostrom#Design_principles_for_Common_Pool_Resource_(CPR)_institutions)

<http://www.balticstreetadventureplay.co.uk/more-about-adventure-play>

JW: Firstly, the texts were from several books. See as follows; Moments of Excess: movements, protest and everyday life, The Free Association p. 11-21 (one chapter). Crack Capitalism, John Holloway, p. 20 final paragraph – p. 26. A Postcapitalist Politics, JK Gibson-Graham. Intro to The Makings of an Imaginary xxiii – xxxvii and finally Alternative Economic Spaces (quick definition of alterity using alternative economic institutions) Edited by Leyshon, Lee and Williams, p. 56-57. I hope this helps, the extracts are perhaps the most useful parts of the texts. However, they are all interesting.

I agree that there are different contexts which shape the way in which relationships develop. 'Assemble was formed out of a collective project that aimed to do something, ourselves (build, develop, create, design, program, run). We shared the experience and skills we had and used each other's energy and enthusiasm to make a project that was a social public thing in the city.' I'm really interested in how and when you decided to join forces collectively to change/ make something? I wondered if you could outline some key moments from your own perspective?

Yes, I can understand that sense of freedom and excitement in starting a new project. I really like that analogy of 'falling in love' it's like something more than yourself, not a purpose, but a sense of action occurs. This emotional labour and sense of common ownership is really important! I really believe that in an age of institutions and intense hierarchy- this aspect- is lost or often seen as irrelevant. It's almost the ethics of this form of relational human behaviour needs to be re-positioned. I am doing some work on this as part of the collective of which I am a member. We are trying to create a series of interventional works about governing emotions or #G.E 18, which is a play on general elections, but one which would completely realign the current state of the neoliberal agenda.

There is a lot of discourse on mental health which is positive, but it often misses the point about a societal change which is needed before things become irreversible. This includes how we re-imagine the city and the welfare system. It's not some leftist bullshit or utopian dream of democracy but a rational need to drag the conversation to something positive, a systemic change in how we live. I wondered if this line of thought maybe present within Assemble?

Elinor Ostrom, I've actually been doing some light reading on the 'commons' and co-operation between communities with finite resources. It looks really interesting, I wondered if you could tell me a little bit about how you deal with such issues when you start projects etc.?

'I think our practice, where it is interesting, is fundamentally interested in architecture as self-determination - that is why we set up Blackhorse workshop, Baltic street adventure playground, and originally the idea behind Granby workshop. The level at which these ideas are realised in reality varies greatly at different points through time'. This is really interesting and I think these projects may be a useful 'site' for my research. I think your idea of volunteering would be excellent. I will definitely like to visit these sights for my case study. We can discuss logistics over email regarding this and the volunteering.

Also, the collective I was thinking about in Delhi was Maraa <http://maraa.in/>. Really interesting thoughts on gender politics.

I guess for now, I am really interested in hearing about how you formed and the problems, things that worked well?

Best

John

FE: I think the foundational moments are seeing other people who are like you (non-professionals, young) doing something together. Making it seem possible. There is a European group called Exyst who did self-build projects on Union St in London for a number of years. This is in turn inspired people - some of whom are now members of Assemble - to start trying to start self-initiated projects themselves.

Some people talk about first deciding to do a project at a party. Another group - practice architecture - were also the contemporaries of most members of Assemble and they were probably the inspiration for that conversation.

For me a key moment was going to Rural Studio and seeing the extent of the responsibility and trust given to young students in their capacity to make physical change in the world.

People should be mobile, questioning and social, but we have developed a culture that doesn't encourage or support either of these. Inequality and racism are rife. I think systemic change is present within individuals within Assemble, but not necessarily within the collective. We operate within certain worlds where we are complicit in - even while being critical of - the status quo.

It depends on who in the practice is managing a project as to whether we even acknowledge such issues, even less try to consider them. Personally it's something I've tried to talk to students about in relation to their negotiation of institutions.

I hope your time volunteering was of interest and more fruitful than your time with me has been.

JW: A lot of my research is bringing up the notion of friendship and its role in solidarity within the creative sector, I wondered how you felt friendship and Solidarity may operate within Assemble?

FE: Friendship makes for a different context for working together. We can support each other in intimate ways and have expectations of one another that are perhaps beyond professional support, on the flipside the familial nature of our relationships can also breed carelessness.

Solidarity is complicated as we are all individuals with complex and different ambitions, each with our own shifting relationships to both the work of the collective and being within it. We have solidarity with each other – and when you feel it, it’s powerful – but it is always nuanced.

This is the QR Code to link to the dialogue with The Cool Couple on Yarn Community.



Here is the transcript from the Yarn Community dialogue (note this does not include any images or links used in the dialogue).

Key: JW= John Wright

TCC= The Cool Couple

JW: It was almost a year ago when I arrived in the eternal city. I didn’t realise it at the time, as I had just commenced my PhD, but I would stumble upon an interesting and politically charged installation. This installation moved me to the extent that I had to reach out.

The installation was the creation of the enigmatic duo, The Cool Couple. The artwork entitled, Turbulent times. Nothing happens in nice weather Chapter 2: Cool people pay happily, was satirically proficient in that often dangerous place between comedy and contemporary art. However, the work successfully tapped into the problematics of contemporary society. These issues are so complex that I cannot do justice within this single story, as we go they will be revealed.

On my return to the UK I decided to contact The Cool Couple through social media and email (like any self respecting 21st Century researcher). Low and behold they responded to the digital semaphore.

This world of Yarn community allows for a dialogue or a story to emerge from the ether. Like a talk show unfolding in hyperspace without a visible audience but still words and sentences are exchanged. So it is in this mode that we should continue. This is not simply a question and answer modus operandi, but a conversation which creates a space for further ideas with which to act upon. So here goes! I'm talking directly to you both now. Hopefully we can find out how you ended up here on Yarn community. Let's cut to the chase...

There seems to me to be a political resistance within your work or a search for alternative modes of production through a collective mentality? Would you identify with that term collective? This action, call it your practice, walks the razors edge between being co-opted into the hegemonic dominances of capitalist west and occupying a space of resistance both working within and striving for change? Am I wrong in this perspective?

TCC: TCC: Well. What do you mean by political? What do we mean by resistance? Of course we like to investigate the frictions in a present that is quickly becoming smoother and smoother day by day. At least in wealthy countries we are all heading towards a future with no conflicts. That's the general idea. Everyone is promoting it, in very different ways: from the Pope to Donald Trump, from the environmentalists to transhumanists we are all trying to make heaven happen on Earth. In most of the cases, unfortunately, the only thing that's actually realizing this smooth present is cognitive capitalism, through a variety of techniques. The most effective and scariest are those affecting the way we produce and experience culture. Social media platforms have contributed to the rise of a culture of aggression and victimhood, where the debate, the discussion and the sense of belonging have been deeply altered. Even the most open-minded have been infected by this sense of protection and exclusion. Heaven, in fact, is probably the best example of exclusiveness.

So, as artists, we have always been interested in friction points. What happens when your plans hit the ground?

The second part of your question concerning collective mentality is something which needs a lot of talking. Collective mentality is a nice concept, but does it work? Does it belong to an old idea of democracy - or to a nostalgia for democracy? Or is it trendy because now we read its meaning differently, as it is lit by a sci-fi/posthumanist framework everybody in the art world is talking about? The expression collective mind is complex and not easy to handle. It probably applies better to machine learning and collective habits that involve huge amounts of individuals. Usually, we refer to our work as the practice of network-building. It starts before the work enters an exhibition place and actually it never ends. Perhaps part of the network dissolves once its task is accomplished, but perhaps some sections will become active again in the future due to external causes. Or we will become part of a wider network. You really can't tell. Networking happens on several layers and it doesn't mean necessarily human contact opposed to virtual interactions...

We are a collective. We are two, as it is clear from the choice of our name, The Cool Couple. And we are not intended to become a trio, or a quartet or a symphonic orchestra. The Cool Couple is born with a clear intention and a precise approach to problems. Its genesis is to be found in the previous researches we conducted individually and the unique path of TCC is due to this background.



However, it doesn't mean we don't collaborate with other artists. Also, it doesn't mean we don't like becoming part of a wider collective, as in the case of POIUYT (the core of which is composed by three artists - two collectives and an individual artist - and two curators). We have always been interested in the potentialities of a collective as an entity where the single author loses his/her importance. Individual identities aren't important because TCC is a sort of brand that swallows everything and vomits it out as a blob or a good-mannered-schizo-montage, which is probably a better definition of what we do (even if, under this point of view, we could refer to attention deficits caused by FOMO and the fact of being Millennials).

A collective does not have a definition. Every collective is like a little habitat and all its inhabitants have to find the balance in order to coexist. There's no golden rule or the safe conduct...It's both a modesty thing and something that makes every decision more complex, longer, or sometimes impossible to take. On the other hand, a collective means some warranty. You're never alone. So it's all 50-50. You get used to people switching your name and calling you Nico instead of Simo and viceversa and so on...

The last thing to say is that we've always thought of TCC as a band. We are not a couple in life and for life. We close the studio and go home, where each of us has his private life and nightmares. We of course have a lot of things in common: same luggage, same jackets, we both have a dog, but then a lot of differences too. So the band-idea was a simple way to say: if you want to take your time, do it. You can make a solo album or start another band, without forgetting that remains the first and main thing. We've never done that, but we're getting more specialized year by year, which means that we do almost everything together except things where one of the two is better than the other (like delicate phone calls or writing texts). It really helps. All the thinking, developing, designing, still remains a totally shared practice where the person's contribution is indistinguishable from the other's. Quite a mess, yeah.

the razor edge is quite a nice metaphor, but perhaps it makes everything more heroic than it is in reality...:D Well, maybe it's time to open a door into cynicism and disillusion. We'd like to confirm what you state in the question. It's a wonderful reading, so powerful and we would love to do that. But lately we started to doubt that such an approach inhabits our practice. Working on friction is fine, we can identify them and try to develop devices or strategies in order to expose it (and try also to fight attention deficits, stereotypes and the prejudices inside the art world). But then the question remains: what is political art? Can we do something that really is an act of resistance? The problem generates when we consider our position as artists. One thing is to make art without being an artists, but when you consciously decide to be part of the art world, you inevitably get rights and duties. And you live within a contradiction between cultural production and politic action. Or, perhaps this isn't a problem any longer because at this stage of cognitive capitalism we're all always cultural producers, cultural consumers, exploited slaves and teachers.

JW: First of all thank you for your considered response. I wondered how you go about choosing those friction points? and are there any specific points which are continually drawn into 'play' within your practice? I mean, I see language games within your work, the liminal spaces between text (written language) and the 'image' is always up for grabs.

Do you think this perceived notion of moving toward eternal smoothness is in fact causing rupture of the hegemony within western discourse? I agree cognitive capitalism or capitalist realism is a full blown ideology now, as it refuses to allow any conceptual horizon. However, I get a sense that the rise in collectivism (and I do think there is such a rise) throughout the world is in fact a symptom of these ruptures as the traditional hierarchies and left and right politics suddenly isn't fit for purpose, I guess that is another reason why some have coined the term post-politics. I agree social media and the internet is acting almost as a social accelerant or catalyst, as I guess the invention of the printing press was perceived to aid the mass media and propaganda. Do you see a part of your role as an artist-led

collective to utilise the technologies we have to create difference or perhaps a more ethical difference within discourse? I say this with all its wide eyed ideological optimism.

Your question on collective mentality is one of those brilliant slippages within signification. I was actually referring to a more Marxist perspective of collective production or tendency within artistic discourse over the last century or so. However, you bring up a fascinating point I do think it belongs to a nostalgia for an unattainable utopian view of collective mind, within human history. However, without diverting the conversation toward the partially terrifying notion (definitely about power and control) of the android mind. A more realistic and accidental happening is the hive mind of the internet?

(this is section 2 of part 2) I ran out of characters.

The Internet doesn't act as a mind (as yet) in the consciously connected way but perhaps exists as a gigantic data sourcing machine which is being mined by certain technocrats through algorithms to exploit capital. I'm not this is entirely a question but feel free to build upon anything here.

'A collective does not have a definition. Every collective is like a little habitat and all its inhabitants have to find the balance in order to coexist.' This is fantastic and highly interesting to my work as I am taking an ecological approach to researching artist-led collectives. This involves multiple perspectives and also imaging the different cultural spaces in which collectives can exist. Would you be able to say a little about TCC's habitat?

I think your concept of network-building could be a really important point. When your network engages with different institutions, perhaps the more traditional museum or art gallery. I wondered how your organised, non-hierarchical and autonomous practice worked within those very different institutional conditions? Also, along these lines is a very complex question, which is actually my central argument within my thesis, I wondered how the curatorial or self-curation manifested within your practice? POIUYT might be interesting to discuss? And what happens when you work with those institutional curators?

I think I will leave my questions there for now and let you think.

TCC: John, now you're going definitely deeper.

Such existential doubts should remain our biographers' matter for letting them speculating a bit. An artist without an aura of mystery is no artist.

This conversation has yet turned into therapy: we usually do not think too much about such choices - we mean, not too surgically.

As we probably said in the previous story, there aren't fixed rules and, especially when you work together, it's really hard to say how things work. We can't build a system out of our practice. It's based on a few principles, it has a method, but it's flexible. It's a matter of adaptability in a sense.

The friction points we mentioned just pop up in our daily immersion in visual and non-visual contents. They emerge from the unconscious ephemeral "montage" that is our interaction with the Internet and the smart city. The nature of the friction points may be radically different: from politics to games, from gender to history...but, yes, we prefer political topics. Where political is a wide label where almost everything is comprised since the political and the personal are probably the same.

We don't actually "choose" a friction point. We notice it. Then you discuss it because a friction point is just the ignition key of the work. Then you need an idea. There are a lot of interesting subjects and

anecdotes that we've never used because we couldn't find the right perspective to deal with them or to deploy them in the proper way, trying to address the right issues.

We should make business with them. Renting them. Like an upgrade of Rob Pruitt's 100 art ideas...

Surely there are some procedural patterns that could be identified in our practice, or some themes that may recur more than once. Some underlying connections, also. This is why we decided to build a huge project that could fagocitate almost all the new work we produced and will produce for some time. It is called "Turbulent Times. Nothing happens in Nice Weather" and we announced it last year.

Turbulent Times originated from the awareness that we had been working on similar issues, simply declining them in different ways: different stories, different media. We always tried to address the present, our responsibilities as both artists and citizens, or the coincidence of the political and the personal, always paying special attention to the role of images.

Last year we felt that we were more and more revolving around these topics, combining them with "infrastructural" questions as the role of the artist in the art system, the meaning of an exhibition, the possibilities of interacting with the public in some ways, be they negative or positive. And so on.

Turbulent Times is a huge basket, and it collects our new projects. All we do is Turbulent Times, simply declined in different ways. We live in Turbulent Times, we think in Turbulent Times, we act in Turbulent Times, we have sex (Millennials' sex, which is a synonym of rare) in Turbulent Times, and so on...

You mentioned games and the role words and images play in our work. We will wear out the keyboard typing and deleting the answer, now you know man! ;)

Play is fundamental in all we do. We would love to say that we play when we do art, but it's quite far from the truth. Art is serious business. The system is serious business. Even when you look like you're playing. Even when you look like you're having fun. But isn't it how things go everywhere?

It's always like that when you try to chase the big buck.

But, in our modest way, we try to have fun when we can and at least we try not to care too much about labels and good manners. At least in a conceptual way.

The reason why we don't paint with shit on the walls (apart that it already happened in the past because of the genius of Ozzy Osbourne) is that we care about the public. Art isn't a monologue. At least in theory you are an artist as long as you produce a work and that work is meant to circulate

This brings us back to your question and the relation of images and words.

Let us just drop a concept here, that we might use later:

the value of images today is determined by their degree of circulation. They don't matter as singularities, but they count as patterns. And our experience of images is always the experience of a complex bundle of text and visuality where none of the two elements can be disentangled without it losing its meaning (and value).

Ok.

(we're always impressed by ourselves when we can sum up an hour of lecture in three sentences)

We combined text and images in a lot of ways, but perhaps the most interesting one is the less obvious. Or maybe the most obvious, according to your point of view.

Usually, when we mention the image-text relation we refer to the exhibition space (be it digital or physical) and the question of providing an access key to the visitor. Of course, sometimes you can

have a key in the work itself and a key doesn't mean to tell everything to the public, to impose your vision. The most stimulating thing about an artwork that works is the fact that it's open to different interpretations, still maintaining its strong core so that you will get the author's intention.

In our case, text is intended widely as additional processual material useful for the comprehension of the work.

In the first exhibitions we tended to provide a lot.

Now we try to be less invasive.

When we combine image and text in an artwork (let's say, when we design a poster), it's not to do with a profound reflection of the meaning of this combination. It's a more practical decision. If a poster is the right device for translating the core of the work, then we use it.

We think this explanation applies especially to "Cool People Pay Happily", exhibited at MACRO in Rome last year.

The movement toward a smoother society is something that goes quite deep into the folds of Western thought. It probably goes so deep because it is a movement that precedes the birth of "Western thought". There's an interesting connection between agriculture and the birth of patriarchy, segregation, exploitation and environmental catastrophes. It is particularly stimulating because agriculture relied on a logic that, translated in our words, aimed at recreating Heaven through a pathological self-reproducing process. On the one hand, a lot of mythological narrations from the dawn of agricultural societies condemn agriculture; on the other, heaven is a concept based on exclusion. Agriculture is probably at the origin of both culture and property, of hierarchy and discrimination. And it never worked fully under a productive point of view. Agriculture behaves more like a virus: it is a program replicating itself and humans are only extensions of it. It proceeds with blind will. We are and have always been its extensions, replicating it and replicating as a species. The dualities of Western thought, both in the humanities and the sciences can be traced back to this. Put it simply, this program aims at deleting all inconveniences. The smoother the ground, the better it works. Cognitive capitalism is just one of the many versions of it, now. We are a frontier, our body is, so why not exploiting it?

We are not so optimist as you, even if we believe that a change is necessary and that we live in a moment where there's a small chance to do something.

We face a crisis of politics. It can't keep the pace with the rising monopolies of Internet. Amazon, Facebook, Alphabet and so on are growing and dominating the web. Concepts as territorialization and deterritorialization are being redefined radically by what happened in the last few years. Not only because we are always somewhere, tracked and monitored. Not only because dynamism has become part of a rhetoric of instability...

But especially because we are always in a place. The place is Earth. Perhaps the saddest discovery of recent years is that Earth is smaller than we thought. It's unbelievably small. And what we do resonates on all the planet. Billions of people turning ignition keys result in passing 400 parts per million...

Another problem is that we can recognize we need a new system of coordinates for thought, but it may be harder than we think. The Soviet Union tried to build different people, but to straighten things or people you always need violence. Perhaps we're lucky, because the effects of centuries and millenniums of violence are reverberating back at us. It's a psychological violence and maybe it helps. It helps because what we need is literally a dimensional shift (what scholars mean when they say that we should abandon a human-centered perspective). This idea, as many others, are interestingly seeping into pop culture, as in the case of *Stranger Things*, with all their talking about the upside-down.

But yes, it's what we need. With the only difference that we should start to think at ourselves in a totally different perspective, we should acknowledge new intelligences, new housemates and so on. It's a non-human politics. An alien politics. Where aliens are the things and the beings that surround us. We ourselves are aliens.

Even Marxism should be revisited because it was deeply based on this rupture between human and everything else. Abolishing nature and culture as concepts, that may be a starting point. Accepting a more fluid definition of things, with no rigid boundaries between reigns, subjects, disciplines.

All of this is probably far. And in the meanwhile we can't sit on the sofa waiting for it. We can't remember who said that hope is a word we should use more often now. Hope not intended as a blind faith in something or someone. There aren't any deus-ex-machina descending from the sky...

There are no spaceships ready to take us in another galaxy, as in *Interstellar*. Beside discovering that Earth is small and compromised, we had realized also that our space programs are still stuck in a prehistory of science fiction. And terraforming Mars might be a matter of centuries, if lucky.

So, hope.

Hope is the narrow window of possibility in a desperate situation. No doubt that we are definitely in a desperate moment. Until we have a possibility to do something, to take advantage from it, we should try. The problem is what to do. Often the secondary characters of horror, thriller or sci-fi movies die because they think too much about what to do. Or they don't think at all.

We can't wipe out all problems with a simple gesture. But we can act virally, for instance. Trying to redistribute wealth in a community of interest. Trying to educate other people to do the rest. Nobody knows what will happen in the future, because we can make projections of Earth's behavior but there's always a good percentage of uncertainty. We should try to make our moves in advance. Trying to figure out the worst scenario in order to be prepared, to avoid being shocked. We can't lose time being surprised. We can't think too much at what we've lost. Because we will lose more tomorrow and more the day after tomorrow, and so on.

We're not so much into new technologies. We don't know how to write code. Most of the times, we have a user's experience of technology. And perhaps it's fine. We lose a lot of details for sure. For example, we struggle trying to understand how bitcoin works. But we know that a bitcoin transaction needs more energy of your house in a week or more. That's significant. And you don't need technology to address urgent themes. Social platforms and a huge part of the Internet work through filters, so that it is really hard to build communities. You always create collectivities that already share the same interests and views. Social media polarize us.

We can build and we should build communities. But what about the purity of our intents? Maybe they're too pure. Too high.

A good community would be one gathering people with completely different backgrounds. A ground of confrontation. A ground of exchange. A playground. Exactly the opposite of what happens online: think about the problem of dank memes, aggressive or sexist comments, bullying in gamers forums...

We should learn to interact again, but it goes in the wrong direction and it will become more and more complicated in the future.

On one side thus we need to figure out what might happen and be ready to play with it, to imagine counter-proposals that aren't nostalgic; on the other, we should involve people and avoid being too fair.

Unfairness sometimes helps. Nobody is fair with you. Everything tries to exploit you or mine your work or grab your attention or whatever. So, what if you do the same? Who's going to judge you? Who's going to do that if you do it in the proper way?

Perhaps we will end up as the museum chef in "the square". Acting impolitely and creating a shock, grabbing everybody attention for a while. But then, wasting it because we have nothing to say unless: go and enjoy the buffet.

The Internet hive as a collective mind.

First: is it a hive? If it were a hive that would be an amazing similitude considering that its biological analogous is quickly disappearing.

A lot has been written about Internet as a collective consciousness. What kind of consciousness is it? My body is conscious, as conscious is a fly or a bacteria. It's a series of loops, addictive or not, that generate responses. It's just algorithms.

We humans are an incredibly complex version of this, relying on billions of individuals of different species that interact following more or less a shared set of instructions.

Under this perspective we're like cells or bacterias inhabiting a huge infrastructure, half living, half mechanical. The machine part is trying to become less invasive as possible, inhabiting our bodies or other bodies. We are probably going towards a society where machines will be permanently implanted in everyone of us. Machines thinking. Doubling our thinking, enhancing our thought, extending our memories, seeing for us.

But the scary part of this is who do those technologies belong to? We're not in a cyberpunk comic where we custom everything to adapt it to our needs. Most of the people on Earth aren't hackers. So what can they do?

Will they become just automatons of a post-work society, employed as full-time entertained people?

How can we stimulate thinking? Will we still be able to choose for ourselves? To make mistakes? Willingly?

Or is it natural to renounce to our individuality in order to let the collective mind work smoothly?

This sounds as a derangement...sorry.

We totally agree with the end of your "question": "The Internet doesn't act as a mind (as yet) in the consciously connected way but perhaps exists as a gigantic data sourcing machine which is being mined by certain technocrats through algorithms to exploit capital."

Yet the point remains. Is action possible inside this system? We can't act outside of it, if we want to reach people. And also, we believe you can't subtract to it. It's a challenge, face it. Even if physically you can't face it. Where's the problem? It's everywhere and nowhere. Bitcoins are mined in our computers while we're writing...

We think it's more a call to action and reflection. We should review everything we do and understand what it means to be an artist, a curator, a museum director today. Because our world has a lot of tools that could be deployed. We just need to update them. We can't rely on pre-packed good old stuff. Because it stinks, it's rotting.

TCC's habitat is quite simple. But, as in all habitats, you miss something. You don't really miss it, but you miss it because of your narrow perspective and your specifically designed receptors. Since you don't have suckers, probably you perceive a world that's different from an octopus' one. The same is valid for plants, insects and so on. So, there's always something or someone missing. You realize it

when you walk your dog, he/she sniffing everywhere, listening to things and getting excited about something your senses can't catch.

The same applies to cultural habitats. We notice certain things, but there are probably a lot more that we miss, but are fundamental in defining the environment suitable for our activity.

The first thing to say is that we are Italian and we never decided to move abroad, even if it's becoming hard to stay in our country and make art. Italy is undergoing several interesting processes, many of them regressive. Our society is slowly falling back into the fascist nest. You see the darkness coming but it's bright, full of talent shows and lights, parties and economical growth. It's cute and spooky as Google's new camera, Clip.

Making culture or art in such a country is hard. It's hard because there's no money and because generally it is hard to see the point of art.

Especially if you choose to talk about geopolitics or to deal with political issues, your situation is definitely complicated. But you go on.

Watching news programs or reality shows is better than a BBC documentary on the African savannah. The news widget on our iPhones always gives us great surprises. In this moment the most important news is about a guy in Padua whom was refused the last glass of beer by the bartender. So, he decided to bash the bar in with his van.

That's normal. It's Italy and it's funny. Then you go to the supermarket and pay attention at children toys. Lego, for example. And you realize that there are huge sets with policemen and anti-protesters units.

Then there's our personal life. But we can't talk about that because it's secret.

Then there's the fact that we are monitor-based. In the sense that we spend a huge amount of our time in front of a monitor. In this sense a studio isn't fundamental. You can work from home for most of the time.

And then, there's the people around you, the people in the art world, the residencies, the travels, casual encounters and so on.

But if we had to reduce our environment to the minimum terms it would be a computer (and books, paper ones, for Simone). But we can't avoid the fact that both of us love staying outside of our houses. Be it a wood or the city is fine. Breathing the air, walking on the ground.

If we had to talk about our ideal environment, well. It's hard. But we would like to start an independent space, multi-functional, run by artists and other people. A place where to work and meet people, where to build an enlarged family.

We always go back to network building. When our practice meets highly institutionalized contexts such as museums, you establish different layers of interaction. The museum, for what concerns our project, doesn't need all the information or it doesn't have to manage every aspect of a work. So we establish are the referents for the project, together with a curator, and then there's what we present as "technical stuff or meetings" with "the people helping us in doing the things we need to do". Generally it works pretty well.

In other cases the museum or the gallery wants to be part of the process. You just need to have clear ideas. When you reach the museum you already have quite a clear idea of what you are going to do there, so there's no space for uncertainties or doubts once you start. It doesn't compromise our work.

Often we have to curate for ourselves, because galleries sometimes don't hire curators or because a museum curator is just a supervisor not interfering with you...

It really depends on the situation. We guess there's no definition of curating even if we feel there's a sensible difference between the ways in which an artist and a curator operate. For instance, we are not that good at PR. A lot of curators are frustrated artists.

In many cases however, often at the intersection of the two fields, you find the most brilliant people ever. Because they don't care. They simply don't care about the definition of what they do.

POIUYT is probably born with such an attitude in mind. On the one hand, indeed, we shared the same questions and urgencies; on the other, however, we were conscious that we couldn't work without abolishing the distinctions between artists and curators inside the meta-collective. Even in defining it we find a challenge. So we end up saying it's a platform for image-based research. It's not a curatorial platform. It's not an artist collective. It's an osmotic entity that welcomes contributions and tries to understand how to build a fertile exhibition model that can't be reduced to a list of artworks without any relation with the space or among them. We started with an exhibition like that, because we needed a starting point to present POIUYT's members. Now we are trying to move on. We made a radio. Now we're developing it and working on the consequences of that approach. We often refer to it as infrastructural procedures, something that is somewhere between the artwork and the display structure itself. Like a symbiont, perhaps.

We think it's all. Enjoy!

JW: I quite like the idea of therapy- admittedly this is a highly cathartic conversation/project for myself and I do hope this is reciprocal in its nature. I believe we share a common want to change something, even if it is unclear how and what form it may take. Yes, I concur with the 'no fixed rules'. I think my task is not to specifically define the collective, but to draw out nuanced characteristics with which we can begin to gain a greater understanding and to ultimately legitimise practices (and thus languages) which seem logical to artists and creatives within the sector, such as ourselves. This is not to co-opt 'what we do' into conventional institutionalised art history, but in fact, to contribute a small change in new knowledges of social art history.

It's interesting that my introduction to your work was through the Rome exhibition and your meta-project "Turbulent Times. Nothing happens in Nice Weather". I immediately recognised a deeper criticism of our current times it's what set that work apart from the rest of the exhibition. Also, yes by 'play' I was referring to a general aesthetic rather than the actual notion that we can entirely be at play, as artists, all of the time. I think that the aesthetic of play is really important in our times as its at once relatable (somewhat satirical in form) by the audience/viewer. However, it simultaneously reveals the interplay between the personal and the political (political, in the broadest sense of those friction points) intention in your work.

Yes, I couldn't help but think of Walter Benjamin when you positioned images as non-singular, it's about circulation, hit rate and sharing, this is the other side of collectivism which I'm reticent to spend time on as it is probably a whole other PhD. However, it does of course play a role and cannot be ignored. I suppose a post-structuralist would argue that the relationship between text and image creates the illusion of a single meaning.

We are in fact now beginning to witness a mass deconstruction of binary oppositions (in the tradition of western metaphysics) exacerbated by the proliferation of the internet. Even though they are, on the surface, still constantly being reaffirmed. Derrida would love the now! I like your distinction between



core -author intention- and the subjective view of the audience. It's bring us full circle to my visit and interpretation of your work and hence to this very conversation.

Your tracing of agriculture and this deep discursive thread within western metaphysics is something I myself ruminate upon frequently, I would be interested to know if you have read 'Anthropocene or Capitalocene' by Jason Moore? It's a collection of writings but essentially it questions the distinction between humanity and nature- It's a one among many. If not it's a good read, not anywhere near bringing any answers to the fore but it quite eloquently speaks to what we are talking about here. I particularly enjoyed reading your assertions on this problematic or set of problems we collectively face. I share this view even though I am perhaps less convinced overall that there aren't a set of cracks appearing in the smoothness of the hegemony. I'm thinking the 'alternative' economies of migrant workers savings banks in the India, the slum towns in South America, gift economies etc. These of course are not positive or negative but are simply occurring. Of course they too can readily be co-opted back into the flattening global capitalist hegemony. I would say though that there is some resistance or perhaps friction which is almost imperceptible but nevertheless observable.

I agree about 'the hive mind' I wanted to instigate your thoughts on it as I cannot see it fully operating in that way. I agree we need to reflect! As Google and the global unregulated are rushing into post-humanism without a thought for the consequences!

I read more and more instances of this happening in the daily stream of visual and textual non stop inertia. Art is obviously immersed as much as everything else. I do however, think it plays a vital role in uncovering the mechanics of the system and really 'good' art provides a head space to generate thoughts and ideas which may in time help to tackle these issues.

I want to come down or up or sideways from this thread now and direct the conversation, again back to you and your specific cultural ecology. Just a simple question for now, I know you probably don't have typical days, but would you mind indulging me in a specific day you might have recently? How did it pan out? Just on a basic level nothing to in depth. I'm also interested to hear about the 'scene' in Milan or Italy in general?

Here in Leeds the scene is dominated by the educational and municipal institutions of art. However, there is more and more graduate retention in the city and my friends and I and many other collectives, studio groups, facilitating organisations such as East Street Arts are creating a growing artist-led culture within the city which will hopefully re-address the hierarchical 'visible core' of art within the city. It's hard in the north of England to make a living in the sector, most go to London but there are movements afoot. It's all very siloed still though with the obvious art market driven glitterati still holding the majority of the big bucks.

'It's an osmotic entity that welcomes contributions and tries to understand how to build a fertile exhibition model that can't be reduced to a list of artworks without any relation with the space or among them'.

This is fantastic – my hypothesis and argument within my phd is that artist-led collectives are creating heterotopias, spaces for new forms of curatorial and artistic hybrids to occur. They almost erode or erase the very terms I am using. I'm fascinated with Poiuyt as a meta-project.

Do you have any future plans for Poiuyt? I know from what you have said, and my own experience of these 'type' of projects that they are often develop entirely through the social relationships within a group (we can perhaps extend this to all discourse) and don't conform to a specific organisational structure. However, I wondered if you had any practical plans on your next steps?

I may have more for you, but for now enjoy.

You know, John, the more we think about "play" after what you've written, the more the concept reveals itself as something far more ambiguous than it is...It's like you seem to grasp it and then it's somewhere else, completely altered in form and substance. Talking of play both as an attitude and an aesthetic...The question that have risen at a certain point is: how can we play and talk about play-aesthetics (playful aesthetics?) in the framework of a wider debate about the resources artists, critics, curators, museums and so on can deploy to build an alternative to the present? How can we do that without confronting ourselves with the incontrovertible fact that play is subsumed into a globally spread perspective of gamification of life?

From memes to apps, from consoles to productivity tricks, even the projects of a general basic income...everything seems to point to a society where work will be disguised as play in order to be as addictive as ever.

So, the doubt is whether can we subtract to this logic or not. Or better, should we be amoral? Can we deploy play as a strategy that contrasts the logics of capitalism? Can we get rid of it or should we appropriate of play (in its widest sense) conceiving it as a viral/unfair strategy to produce a sort of reaction/shock?

Our typical day. . . . .

when we still were renting a studio space (we are looking for it at the moment) we met in the studio around 9.30 and then started. It depended on the day: sometimes you had some commercial work to finish so there was no talking at all. You just entered, waved a hello, and turned on the computer. The first who arrived chose the music. At first we had the bad habit of smoking in the studio, it looked so Mad Men, but then Nico became a vape-man and accordingly smoking became forbidden.

Lunch was always quick and easy. Pasta most of the time. Then another 4 hours of postproduction or video editing and then we went out to see some gallery openings. But, as said before, it really depended on the day. If we were working hard on a project or exhibition, there were no working hours and the studio was a mess. When we were creating the Meditation Rocks series, we were burning things and the studio floor was covered with sand, rocks and other stuff. It was a mess, actually. You couldn't do anything but producing those stones those days.

Now we work separately. It's a momentary solution, but it's a nonsense to rent a co-working desk or something like that. We are looking for a cheap and flexible space, which is something rare in Milan.

As a city, Milan is probably the only place to be in Italy if you don't want to leave the country and still work in the art system. Rome is disconnected and overwhelmed by archeology and bureaucracy, in Venice everything is swallowed by the Biennale and so on...Milan is probably a good compromise between a ugly city, a place designed only to work, a City (business), building speculation, and connections with the rest of Europe. Turin is far more interesting in our opinion, but it's smaller. On the one hand it's easier to create connections there, but it's not active as Milan.

Milan is a stratification of different games, different circles, different networks.

In Milan you have the big galleries, a constellation of mid-class galleries, the art institutions (Hangar Bicocca and Prada Foundation for instance), the public institutions, and a growing fauna of independent spaces, small galleries, bookshops, hybrid spaces, all presenting good works in general. However we're still far from the creation of a network.

For example, talking about the Anthropocene debate, Italy is a bit late on it and now the word is becoming trendy, so someone is trying to organize a bit of material in order to provide a proper education or introduction to the theme. The point is that the activity of translating and making contents available, of generating debate, is always and still seen as competition. So you have a small

group in one region of Italy doing that, another in Milan, one in Turin, another in Rome...That's a problem that you can find everywhere in Italy but especially in Milan. It's frustrating and tiring.

But, anyway, Milan is growing and it's quite good to live there, even if it still needs a lot of work to be something like Berlin.

The first thing we need to do is to catch up. We need to talk and discover each other better than we already do. We have been proposed some exhibitions, but they are not fixed yet. Radio POIUYT also gained a lot of good reviews and there are some requests. So, we need to understand exactly what we are going to do, in terms of an action strategy. We don't like so much to distinguish between roles, but what will it mean to make an exhibition as POIUYT as it grows and gathers more and more contributions? Will we be able to question the term "exhibition" as we want to do?

There's a lot of talking and discussing, now, in front of us...that's all we know for now :D

But, there's a question for you. As you may have noticed, we're contradictory because we alternate moments of great excitement with days in which we strongly criticize our role, our utility, our purpose as artists. Perhaps these two sides coexists always in everything we do, even if we sometimes express one or the other.

We were interested in understanding the aim of your research, because, according to the things we have discussed so far, it's not just an interest toward how an artistic collective works, but something more. It seems that the artistic collective may become a paradigm or an association model. If we're wrong, please, correct us!

JW:A colleague at the University is looking into the role play has in urban design. I agree with your assessment, however I would argue that art is the only vehicle to challenge this state of play (pardon the pun). Further, that in the social ecology of the artist collective play could become a powerful tool. I found this article ( see link) that might be of interest?

HAHA! This is great! Yes another machine invasion- probably for the better in this case. I now have an image of Don Draper looking really confused :D and trying to think how to market Vaping. Maybe this could be an alternative universe.

Yes! You are right at least in how my research is panning out. It seems to be apparent that there is a 'deeper level' of human agency at work in the collective. What I mean by this is, through beginning to develop an historiography of the evolution of the artist collective, what seems to be emerging is something I hadn't quite expected. There is an almost imperceptible discursive thread which seems to have evolved out of the immense social and political changes which occurred during the early 19th century. This thread which unsurprisingly, follows the development of modernism, seems to have produced a paradigmatic shift carried by the notion that, change was and is possible. My research has actually pin pointed this to a set of thinkers, writers, curators, architects and artists/critics all operating within Britain from around the 1820s to 1900. They include Pugin, Ruskin, Morris, Dickins, Marx and Engels (in Manchester). There is a sense of a re-imaging of the 'artistic guild' overtly within Ruskin and positioned in other ways with the other writers. This guild was different to previous guild-type iterations, as it wasn't principally about installing a framework for manufacturing crafts or workshops. This time it had a political engine. Proto-collectives such as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Morris & Co developed directly from these writings. After this era the same thread migrates to France, Germany, the then USSR and Italy and exponentially developed and was questioned. The thread became consumed by the socialist movement and eventually the internationalist tendency to develop manifesto's and wider groups such as the Futurists, October, DADA and Bauhaus emerged. However, this thread has a perceptible shift again after 1945 and both wars, when we enter the cold war era and overtly politically engaged artist collective Internationalist groups take a centre stage such as The Situationists etc.

Of course, in the West, capitalism begins to take hold and we enter a third distinct era of evolution, where very specific groups occur during the 60s -the late 80s such as Art and Language, Black British Artists and Artemesia (feminist collective) these were highly linked to civil rights movements.

Now my argument comes to its main point that I contend we have entered into a different phase of evolution of the artist collective. One as we have discussed, with all the problematic connotations of which the human race is grappling to understand. It is in the face of this history and accumulation of capital that the collective appears once again in a spectral form. Changed and shifted in its focus but with ghosts of its collective past still very much alive within its intent. The ominous drive for professionalisation within a neo-liberal economic model exerts tension and locates a friction within its socialist tendencies.

I must point out that this is a very brief summary and I have glossed over vast elements. Off course this is not a linear progression either, with artist collectives forming at different times and for different social and political reasons. However, there is a thread which I intend to prove (as best I can within Humanities) that exists within the artist collectives cultural DNA. In a sense this history is (un)historical as it is entirely contemporary in a time when history appears as a space or place to engage with.

Anyway, I'm going to leave it there for now. I just wanted to sign off with a few questions for you in general. Firstly, this is a co-authored project so If you think we need create any changes let me know? or if you have any suggestions. Secondly, I have been invited to deliver a paper at a conference in Toronto at the OCAD University (art and design) in March and I intend to highlight our project on YARN. I wondered if there was anything you wanted me to show? As I will have a presentation to accompany my paper.

TCC: "The ominous drive for professionalisation within a neo-liberal economic model exerts tension and locates a friction within its socialist tendencies."

Thank you for having elegantly expressed this contradiction, that we might label THE contradiction: the boundaries of the art world are comprised between the poles of buyers and merchants on the one hand and its socialist, political or cultural drives. Purity and the integrity of ideologies are long gone, but still: how can we make political art or at least pretend to hold a position? When we all gather to fair openings and VIP previews in order to meet those with the money, those who buy your political art and then support racist, fascist or more moderate right wing parties the decisions of which cut funds to the arts or make your life as a self-employed worker in the cultural world more and more difficult. The same people who devalue culture.








It is hard to think about solutions, because alternatives often suffer of an excess of purism. Artist-run spaces most of the times end up as small galleries or fall completely out of the art system (who cares? - you may say. Anyway, how can you be heard if you're an outsider?). Bringing art back to the people and start a true and participatory dialogue is interesting, but how? We are all struggling to survive, and it looks like adding another hole in the belt is a historical-proved warranty of the quality of an artistic research.

Collectives differ quite a lot from each other, especially because often their internal organization influences deeply on their political orientation. The one mirrors the other. It is also true, on the other hand, that we are quite naive if compared to other artistic fields with a stronger tradition in team-building and collective administration (just think about independent theatre).

Congratulation! For the moment we have no suggestions, but there's a question that arose last week.

You mentioned some feminist positions in your brief excursus through your research. Does any of the case studies you focus on belong to feminist, cyber feminist or queer positions?

### Appendix 3

Name of Artist-led Collective	Location	Website/ contact	Logo
Artum Collective	Leeds	<a href="http://www.artumcollective.wix.com/artum">http://www.artumcollective.wix.com/artum</a>	
Buttercrumble	Garforth, London, Leeds	<a href="mailto:smile.chloe@buttercrumble.com">smile.chloe@buttercrumble.com</a> <a href="http://www.buttercrumble.com">www.buttercrumble.com</a>	
Sketch That	Leeds/West Yorkshire Leeds Beckett University	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/SketchThat/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/SketchThat/</a>	
TCL	Leeds/Leeds Arts University	<a href="https://tclartcollective.wordpress.com/">https://tclartcollective.wordpress.com/</a>	
The Glass Cyphers	Leeds/East Street Arts – Patrick Studios	<a href="http://theglasscyphers.uk/">http://theglasscyphers.uk/</a>	
The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe	Leeds, Sheffield	<a href="https://retrobarattheendofuniverse.wordpress.com/">https://retrobarattheendofuniverse.wordpress.com/</a>	
Unlocked Collective	Leeds/Yorkshire	<a href="http://www.unlockedcollective.co.uk">www.unlockedcollective.co.uk</a>	

Pyramid Of Arts	Leeds	<a href="http://www.pyramid-of-arts.org.uk">http://www.pyramid-of-arts.org.uk</a>	
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## Statements

### *Artturn Collective*

‘In 2015 Kendra Howard and Tilly Davies founded ARTURN Collective, a female collaborative duo that aims to challenge the boundaries of socially concerned art practice as well as exploring the devices of contemporary curation. Over the past three years we have produced a number of artist-curated exhibitions based on collaborations between mediums, ideas and approaches to contemporary art with an aim to understand the wider social context of our position in Leeds and its current art climate. This has taken shape through exhibitions, seminars, workshops, talks and film screenings which have brought together both students and young and emerging artists that work across a broad range of mediums’.

### *Buttercrumble*

‘Buttercrumble is the only twin-team, in Yorkshire, producing graphic design and illustration for the design-seekers and beauty-seekers of the world. Abigail and Chloe pursue projects that make them smile, their clients smile and, in turn, make their clients customers’.

### *Pyramid of Arts*

‘Pyramid of Arts is a Leeds-based arts collective. Our members are artists with and without learning disabilities who work together to explore and develop their creativity, and to make great art for a wide public.

We run weekly collaborative arts groups, including a programme for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD), and offer 1:1 professional development support to artists with learning disabilities to apply for arts funding, put on exhibitions and advance their artistic practice.

Our groups consistently produce high quality work for exhibitions and performances throughout Leeds. We value diversity in the arts and work to overcome the barriers that prevent people with learning disabilities from taking part’.

### ***Sketch That***

Location: Leeds/West Yorkshire

‘Purpose- Sketch That is a group of artists, illustrators, photographers and makers who meet regularly to go out and draw/paint/photograph in West Yorkshire.

All the artists have different styles and approaches to art making, but all are respected within the group.

We aim to support each other and share skills and advice through our Facebook group, and to explore our local area through our monthly sketching meets’.

### ***The Glass Cyphers***

‘The Glass Cyphers is an ongoing collaboration between glass artist Griet Beyaert and digital artist Paul Miller exploring the experimental fusion of glass and digital technology within the experience of space that surrounds us. We create site-specific/interactive installations using glass sculpture, projection-mapping, video and sound’.

### ***TCL***

‘TCL Art Collective are a group of 5 independent artists who create dialogue through their individual practices by exhibiting and creating informal events locally, regionally and internationally. They are a collective of printmakers, artist-photographer, fine artist and an environmental artist who formed following the completion of the MA in Creative Practice at Leeds Arts University in 2017. Their main concern is using creative enquiry to respond to various facets of their environment, resulting in original and diverse outcomes’.

### ***The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe***

“This is Nowhere ...and it's forever...” The world is spinning feverishly, yet is also static, stuck. Things happen, yet nothing seems to be happening. We are an artist-led collective. Our aim is to create a place to experiment and generate new thoughts and ideas in order to deconstruct the state of play. We are a nomadic collective without a fixed location, often appearing in temporary spaces. Sustained conversation and forms of collective dialogue are central to our practice’.

### ***Unlocked Collective***

‘We are a collective of 6 artists from in and around Leeds one of whom is currently working at Leeds College of Art. The rest are spread further afield in Harrogate, Ripon, Bradford, Selby. We have been exhibiting in Yorkshire for a number of years and our exhibitions are always location specific.



## Appendix 4

This is this QR code for Google My Maps link to the Leeds Artist-led Collective Map



## Appendix 5

### March 2018

Name of Artist-led Collective	Location (co-ordinates)	Type of Appearance
The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe	Leeds- The Social 53.80035, -1.54008	Recorded discussion- deep thinking on political issues including: strike action, mental health, collective consciousness.
The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe	Leeds- Nation of Shopkeepers 53.80074, -1.54752	Meeting to discuss the direction of the overall meta-project of the Retro Bar at the End of the Universe.
Glass Cyphers	Patrick Street Studios, East Street Arts 53.79921, -1.52934	Based at Patrick Street Studios, The collective are specialists in glass sculpture; sound; projection mapping; installations.
Buttercrumble	Garforth 53.79208, -1.38848	Studio based in Garforth, Abigail and Chloe Baldwin formed the Graphic design and illustration collective duo.
Buttercrumble	Leeds Central Library 53.8002, -1.54876	13th March 2018 - 1-2-1 Design Surgery Leeds Central Library, Calverley Street, Leeds, LS1 3EY
Buttercrumble	Huddersfield Stadium 53.65492, -1.76756	Buttercrumble 7th March 2018 - FSB Celebrating Small Business Awards (Yorkshire)-
Buttercrumble	BBC Media City, Manchester 53.47223, -2.29761	16th March 2018 - Live Illustration at Women in Sports Conference North BBC MediaCity UK, Salford, M50 2EQ
Buttercrumble	John Lewis, 53.37571, -2.21528	24th March 2018 - John Lewis Easter Activities John Lewis Cheadle, Wilmslow Road, Cheadle, SK8 3BZ
Unlocked Collective	Leeds Arts University 53.80882, -1.55152	Founded at Leeds College of Art (Leeds Arts University) in 2014.
Arturn Collective	Leeds Beckett University 53.80408, -1.54839	In 2015 Kendra Howard and Tilly Davies founded ARTURN Collective while studying at Leeds Beckett University
TCL	Leeds Arts University 53.80874, -1.5513	TCL Art Collective are a group of 5 independent formed in 2017 on the MA in Creative

		Practice run by Leeds Arts University.
Sketch That	Leeds Beckett University 53.80388, -1.54847	Nomadic group of artists, illustrators, photographers and makers.
Pyramid of Arts	Barkston House 53.78776, -1.56608	Based at Barkston House, Pyramid of Arts is a Leeds-based arts collective. Their members are artists with and without learning disabilities who work together to explore and develop their creativity, and to make great art for a wide public.

*April 2018*

Name of Artist-led Collective	Location (co-ordinates)	Type of Appearance
The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe	Sheffield, 92 Harewood Street (Studio) 53.36988, -1.47247	First meeting (recorded discussion) held in Rebecca's studio, with new member Sam to discuss Skippko space and flesh out ideas for proposal on new project #G.E.18
The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe	University of Leeds, MA Fine Art studio 53.80788, -1.55775	Meeting to discuss logistics of creating the installation at the Skippko venue.
Buttercrumble	York 54.24591, -1.05939	Hosting an Illustration workshop at Helmsley Art Centre.
Buttercrumble	Marks & Spencer 53.95884, -1.08011	Buttercrumble 12th April 2018 - York Fashion Week VIP Party M&S, 9 Pavement, York, England, YO1 8NB
Buttercrumble	York Explore Library Learning Centre, 53.96143, -1.08624	22nd April 2018 - Create a Lookbook Workshop York Explore Library Learning Centre, York, YO1 7DS
Buttercrumble	Anthropologie, Leeds, 53.79867, -1.53886	Buttercrumble 8th April 2018 - Happy Mail Workshop at Anthropologie Anthropologie, Victoria Leeds, 26 Eastgate, Leeds, LS2 7JL
Buttercrumble	Elland Road 53.77757, -1.5716	13th April 2018 - The Yorkshire Choice Awards The Centenary Pavillions, Leeds United, Elland Road, Leeds, LS11 0ES

TCL	Kinvara Area Visual Arts 53.13921, -8.9376	TCL members pop up art exhibition, at KAVA. Kinvara Area Visual Arts - The Courthouse Gallery- as part of a residency programme entitled, Inspired.
Sketch That	University of Leeds 53.80775, -1.55263	April 21st 2018, Sketch That draw Leeds University Public Art Trail

### May 2018

Name of Artist-led Collective	Location (co-ordinates)	Type of Appearance
The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe	East Street Arts/ Whitehall Road Warehouse 53.79921, -1.52934 and 53.77931, -1.61237	Professional development session and journey to Skippko Space on Whitehall Road.
Sketch That	Rodley Nature Reserve 53.82284, -1.64624	May 27th 2018, Sketch That at Rodley Nature Reserve
Buttercrumble	University of Leeds 53.80575, -1.55579	17th May 2018 - Leeds Creative Labs Launch Event School of Earth & Environment, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT
Buttercrumble	Park Plaza, London, 51.50097, -0.11664	3rd May 2018 - FSB Celebrating Small Business Awards (The Final) Park Plaza, Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 After winning Micro-Business of the Year for Yorkshire and Humberside, Buttercrumble were thrilled to be attending the National Final Awards Event as a nominee.

### June 2018

Name of Artist-led Collective	Location (co-ordinates)	Type of Appearance
The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe	Leeds Art Hostel 53.79582, -1.53792	The General Election of Governing Emotions, #GE18, Intervention and election night with a social.

The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe	Leeds Print Workshop 53.80051, -1.53935	Print residency show to run concurrently with #GE18.
Arturn Collective	Broadcasting Place, Leeds Beckett University	Degree Show, entitled Beautiful Thinking
TCL	Horticap 53.97583, -1.57911	Group Show, TCL Group Show at Horticap.
Pyramid of Arts	The Tetley 53.79216, -1.53966	Visual art @ The Tetley (LS10 1JQ) throughout June - September.
Sketch That	Heart, Headingley 53.82027, -1.5777	Sketch That 5 opening party. The 5th annual group exhibition from Sketch That, at Heart in Headingley LS6 3HN (Exhibition until 13/08/18)
Buttercrumble	Bruntwood Office Space, Platform, 53.79506, -1.54619	28 <sup>th</sup> of June 2018, Share Event for Leeds Creative Labs: Climate Edition Bruntwood Office Space Platform, Leeds, LS1 4JB (We presented our collaboration with Dr Katy Roelich from The University of Leeds)

### July 2018

Name of Artist-led Collective	Location (co-ordinates)	Type of Appearance
The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe	Whitehall Road Industrial Park 53.77931, -1.61237	Work started on the new space with Skippko.
TCL	Horticap 53.97583, -1.57911	Exhibition continues, Group Show, TCL Group Show at Horticap.
Pyramid of Arts	Studio 24, Mabgate, Leeds 53.80175, -1.53095	Pyramid of Arts Visual art installations @ Studio 24 LS9 7DZ 5th - 22nd July
Pyramid of Arts	Leeds Industrial Museum 53.80298, -1.58278	Interactive performance @ Leeds Industrial Museum LS12 2QF 19/7/18
Pyramid of Arts	Wharf Chambers 53.79552, -1.53787	Performance @ Wharf Chambers LS2 7EQ 20/07/18
Pyramid of Arts	Leeds Central Library 53.8002, -1.54876	Visual art installations @ Room 400 (Central Library) 5th - 22nd July

Pyramid of Arts	Kirkgate Market	Visual art installation @ Kirkgate Market 5th - 22nd July
Pyramid of Arts	Seven Arts 53.82792, -1.53739	Performance @ Seven Arts (LS7 3PD) 20/7/18
Pyramid of Arts	The Tetley 53.79216, -1.53966	Visual art @ The Tetley (LS10 1JQ) throughout June - September.
Pyramid of Arts	Leeds Town Hall 53.80013, -1.54958	Visual art @ Leeds Town Hall July - September
Sketch That	Heart, Headingley 53.82027, -1.5777	Sketch That 5 opening party. The 5th annual group exhibition from Sketch That, at Heart in Headingley LS6 3HN (Exhibition until 13/08/18)
Buttercrumble	Meadowhall 53.414, -1.41202	Ladies Night at Meadowhall Meadowhall, Sheffield, S9 1EP We performed live illustration at Meadowhall to celebrate their Ladies Night Shopping Event.
Buttercrumble	Dakota Deluxe 53.79821, -1.54846	TopicUK Launch Event Dakota Deluxe, Leeds, LS1 5RN As the magazine's illustrators, we attended their relaunch event.
Buttercrumble	York Theatre Royal 53.9619, -1.08518	Bloom! Festival York Theatre Royal, York, YO1 7HD We created a large-scale mural and hosted a workshop with York Theatre Royal and Bloom!

### August 2018

Name of Artist-led Collective	Location (co-ordinates)	Type of Appearance
The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe	Whitehall Road Industrial Park 53.77931, -1.61237	Install of the Public Secret intervention and private view.
Pyramid of Arts	The Tetley 53.79216, -1.53966	Visual art @ The Tetley (LS10 1JQ) throughout June - September.
Pyramid of Arts	Leeds Town Hall 53.80013, -1.54958	Visual art @ Leeds Town Hall July - September

Sketch That	Heart, Headingley 53.82027, -1.5777	Sketch That 5 opening party. The 5th annual group exhibition from Sketch That, at Heart in Headingley LS6 3HN (Exhibition until 13/08/18)
Sketch That	White Wells, Ilkley, 53.91688, -1.8218	Sketch That at White Wells, Ilkley. Sketching and social meet up.
Buttercrumble	Seasalt, Lytham, Cornwall, 53.73703, -2.96433	4th August 2018 Seasalt Lytham Store Opening Seasalt Cornwall, Lytham Saint Annes, FY8 5LW We performed live illustration for customers to celebrate the store opening.

### September 2018

Name of Artist-led Collective	Location (co-ordinates)	Type of Appearance
The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe	Whitehall Road Industrial Park 53.77931, -1.61237	The Public Secret- 31st of August to the 12th of September 2018. This interventional work aims to find new ways to discuss politics and wellbeing in the 21st century.
Glass Cyphers	The National Media Museum of Scotland 55.94719, -3.18929	Art of Glass, a show focusing on the work of leading glass artists in Britain today. The work is in Edinburgh at the National Museum of Scotland 6 Apr – 16 Sep 2018 10:00-17:00.
Pyramid of Arts	The Tetley 53.79216, -1.53966	Visual art @ The Tetley (LS10 1JQ) throughout June - September.
Pyramid of Arts	Leeds Town Hall 53.80013, -1.54958	Visual art @ Leeds Town Hall July - September
Buttercrumble	Cloth Hall Court, Leeds, 53.79672, -1.54929	5th September 2018 IEEC Conference Cloth Hall Court, Leeds, LS1 2HA We attended the event as alumni of The University of Leeds' enterprise scholarship

Buttercrumble	Browns Department Store, York, 53.95975, -1.0824	8th September 2018 - Live Illustration Browns Department Store, York, YO1 8QT
Buttercrumble	Leeds Art Gallery, 53.80006, - 1.54828	20th September 2018 - Start- Up Panel Discussion Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds, LS1 3AA
Buttercrumble	Javea, Spain, 38.78867, 0.16104	21st September 2018 - 7th October 2018 - Design Residency Sun and Co, 0370 Javea, Spain

### October 2018

Name of Artist-led Collective	Location (co-ordinates)	Type of Appearance
The Retro Bar at the End of the Universe	Yorkshire House, Level 4 53.7986, -1.54901	The Public Secret, After a successful launch of the intervention at Whitehall Road Industrial Park, we were invited by Skippko to re-install the intervention at Yorkshire House as part of their 30th Anniversary event.
Pyramid of Arts	Leeds Central library 53.80026, -1.54874	Visual art installation @ Central Library LS1 3AB 05/10/18
TCL	Leeds Arts University 53.80887, -1.55149	Alumni Installation

### November 2018

Name of Artist-led Collective	Location (co-ordinates)	Type of Appearance
TCL	Coffee On The Crescent 53.81478, -1.56125	TCL Art Exhibition Continued Part 2, Group Show at Coffee on The Crescent.
Pyramid of Arts	City Museum 53.80157, - 1.54702	Visual art installation @ City Museum LS2 8BH 10/11/18 - 17/11/18
Buttercrumble	University of Leeds, 53.80772, -1.55587	5th November 2018 - Lecture on Design after University School of Design, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT
Buttercrumble	John Lewis, Leeds, 53.7984, - 1.53713	7th November 2018 - Live Illustration



		John Lewis, Leeds, LS2 7AR
Buttercrumble	York Theatre Royal, 53.96179, -1.08526	19th November 2018 - Live Illustration York Theatre Royal, York, YO1 7HD

### December 2018

Name of Artist-led Collective	Location (co-ordinates)	Type of Appearance
TCL	Coffee On The Crescent 53.81478, -1.56125	TCL Art Exhibition Continued Part 2, Group Show at Coffee on The Crescent.
Pyramid of Arts	Seven Arts 53.82792, -1.53739	Drama performance @ Seven Arts LS7 3PD 06/12/18
Pyramid of Arts	Seven Arts 53.82792, -1.53739	Music performance @ Seven Arts LS7 3PD 14/12/18
Buttercrumble	John Lewis, Leeds 53.7982, -1.5374	5th December 2018 - Live Illustration John Lewis, Leeds, LS2 7AR

### January 2019

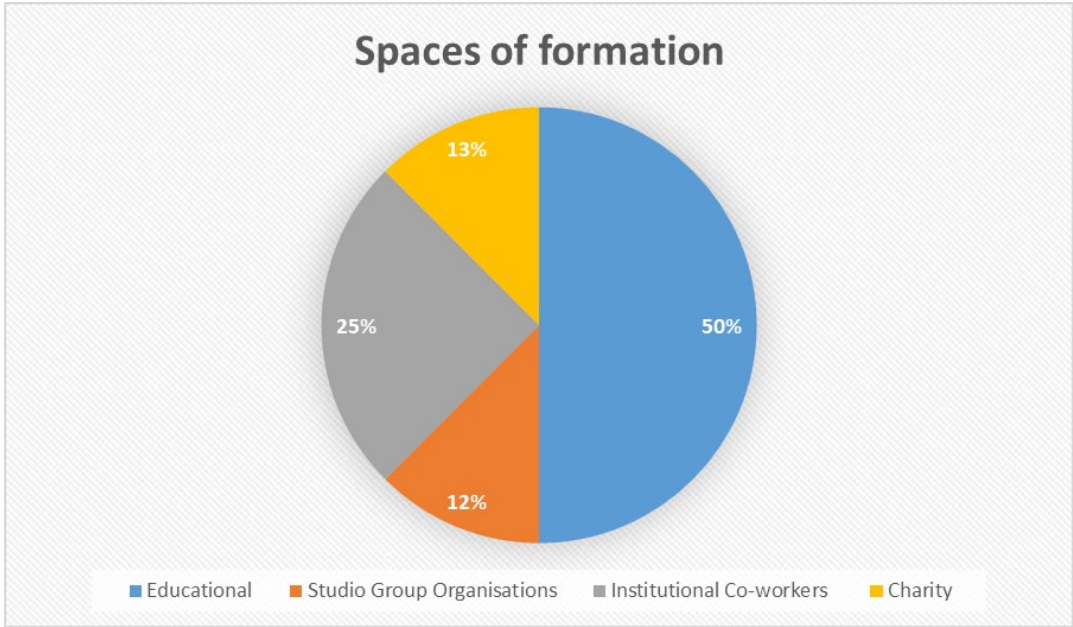
Name of Artist-led Collective	Location (co-ordinates)	Type of Appearance
TCL	Coffee On The Crescent 53.81478, -1.56125	TCL Art Exhibition Continued Part 2, Group Show at Coffee on The Crescent.
Pyramid of Arts	Wharf Chambers 53.79554, -1.53786	Visual art installation @ Wharf Chambers LS2 7EQ 16/01/19
Buttercrumble	Parc Floral de Paris, 48.83596, 2.44483	26th - 28th January 2019 - Interactive Mural Illustration Playtime Paris, Parc Floral de Paris, Paris, 75012, France

### February 2019

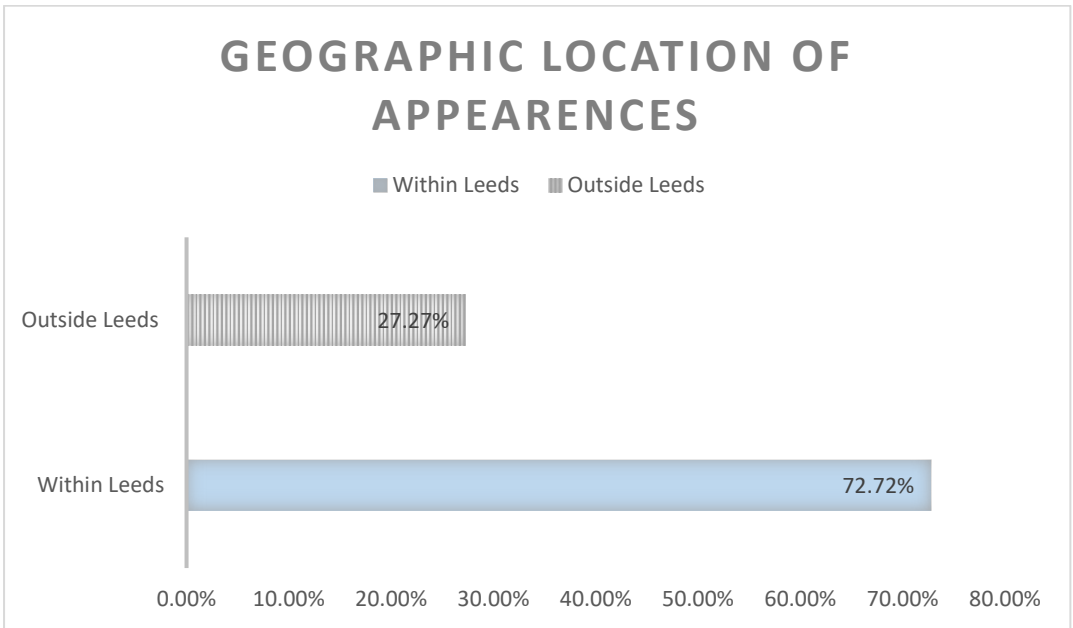
Name of Artist-led Collective	Location (co-ordinates)	Type of Appearance
TCL	Coffee On The Crescent 53.81478, -1.56125	TCL Art Exhibition Continued Part 2, Group Show at Coffee on The Crescent.
Buttercrumble	University of Leeds, 53.80773, -1.55605	22nd February 2019 - Observational Illustration Workshop

		School of Design, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT
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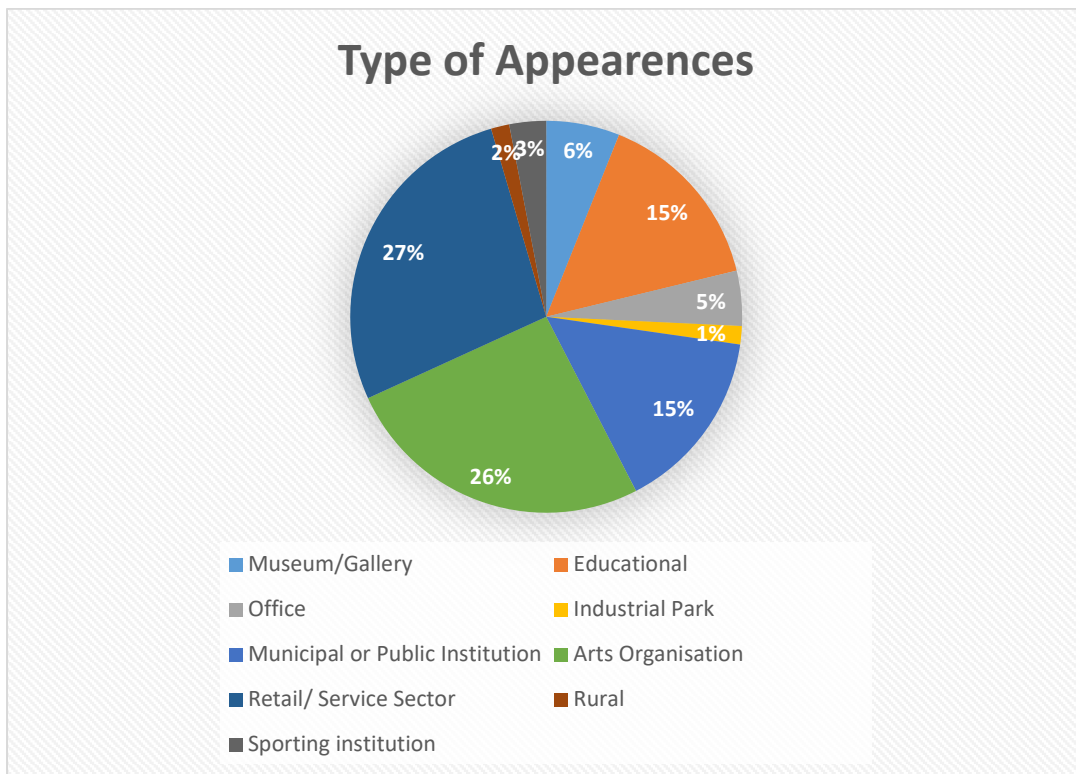
**Appendix 6**



**Appendix 7**



## Appendix 8



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