

**Artist-led initiatives and cultural value/s in the
contemporary art sector in the UK and Ireland
from the 1990s to the present**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis challenges the misrecognition of artist-led initiatives as a merely casual or anticipatory epiphenomenon within the increasingly commercialised and centralised administration of contemporary art that is leading such initiatives towards funder-directed institutionalisation. Using qualitative research methods to analyse a significant archive of original interviews, in conjunction with my own research-led curatorial practice, the thesis poses a challenge to the discourses on *cultural value* and *cultural ecology* that form the dominant policy framework. From my analysis of the interviews with artist-led organisations and their directors, I displace these official frameworks by discovering counter-concepts of *value and values* sustaining artist-led initiatives as a singular and long-term component of cultural activity.

I identify the creation of artist-led spaces as a ‘locus of desire’ for self-organisation.¹ In order to research this question, I have worked with the Grounded Theory Method [GTM] to analyse ten interviews with participants through the process of coding their statements in order to formulate new concepts through which to understand their practice and its challenges. The key concepts I have produced are: *Doing, Negotiating, Lacking and Losing*, and *Feeling*. These concepts capture the contemporary realities for artistic practice and the affective labour of artists beyond the circulatory meritocracies of major arts institutions. The concepts have been tested and thickened through analysis of three case studies moving from the centres of a major city and a northern town (Birmingham and Rotherham) to the specificity of one local community situated at the urban margins (Gipton in East Leeds). Finally, I propose artist-led spaces as critical spatial practices that incubate alternative – kinaesthetic – forms of collective knowledge production and community building.

The thesis presents a critical analysis of a major and widespread area of cultural production that has been a problematic and contested discursive and historiographic field. By researching and assessing the value and impact of artist-led initiatives in their own accounts and, by using primary qualitative research, I argue for the distinctive yet varied and socio-economically challenged role of sustained artist-led initiatives and their potential relevance elsewhere across the whole portfolio of contemporary artistic activities. Largely situated in urban settings, intersecting with

¹ Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*, (New York: The New Press, 1997), p. 4.

the vagaries and changing terms of urban development and regeneration, my research addresses policy debates within civic initiatives in terms of cities and culture, creative education, and the challenges of creating and sustaining inclusive and egalitarian polities in which artists are able to practice beyond the centralised models that assume a single career path based on marketability and institutionalisation.

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INTRODUCTION

I wasn't interested in a career so much... and I'd started to draw the distinction between having a practice and having a career at about 1973. Consciously, I saw it as a distinction.²

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 0.1, Exterior of *Womanhouse*, 1971. From top to bottom: Janice Lester, Robin Schiff, Miriam Schapiro, Susan Fraser. Standing at front: Christine Rush, unidentified person on the right. Photographer unknown. From the archives of Miriam Schapiro. © Rutgers University, New Jersey.

In 1971, the year of my birth, *Womanhouse* was created as a large-scale collaborative project by women educators and students from the Feminist Art Program at California Institute of the Arts [Cal Arts].³ The following year, Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, who led the pioneering programme, recalled:

There [at Cal Arts] the women students had spent a lot of time talking about their problems as women before they began to do any work. We wondered if those same problems could be dealt with while working on a project.⁴

² 'Terry Atkinson Interviewed by Sebastiano Dell'Arte', *YouTube* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=DqX5seISxF0>> [accessed 20 January 2020].

³ Included in the group were Beth Bachenheimer, Sherry Brody, Judy Chicago, Susan Fraser, Karen Le Coq, Janice Lester, Robin Mitchell, Christine Rush, Miriam Schapiro, Robin Schiff, Mira Shor, Faith Wilding and Nancy Youdelman. The project began at the suggestion of art historian Paula Harper.

⁴ Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, 'Womanhouse', in *Documents of Contemporary Art: Practice*, ed. by Marcus Boon and Gabriel Levin (London: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2018), pp. 100-102 (p. 100).

Having located a suitable space in which to test this proposition – a deserted mansion in a run-down part of Hollywood – they began:

On 8 November 1971, 23 women arrived at 533 Mariposa Street armed with mops, brooms, paint, buckets, rollers, sanding equipment and wallpaper. For two months we scraped walls, replaced windows, built partitions, sanded floors, made furniture, installed lights, and renovated the 75-year old dilapidated structure. One of the goals of the Program [at Cal Arts] is to teach women to use power equipment, tools and building techniques. The House provided a natural context for the women to learn these things.⁵

This evocative passage makes visible realities that are normally hidden, yet central to artistic labour. Specifically, it elaborates the processes by which artists undertake collectively the tasks of creating the places that are not only essential for the production and dissemination of their work, but which also provide fundamentally important spaces of community and mutual support. By creating these, artists bring to bear their skills and expertise for spatial organisation as makers, curators, technicians, cleaners, caretakers and designers. These roles are all facets of the condition of being an artist as they become central to the realities of artistic practice beyond the exclusive geographic centres of a global art market and the elevated careers that it affords to a very few.

The Research Question

Womanhouse serves as a historical jumping off point to open out a number of issues and questions that occupy my thesis. In particular, throughout this introduction I wish to draw out from the project how it illuminates aspects of self-organisation, for example how it reveals the value of community, which establishes a basis for the emergence of both individual and collective agency for those who participate. It also reinforces the necessity of self-organisation as an artistic strategy in the face of institutional indifference: *Womanhouse* was triggered by Cal Arts' failure to provide the studio spaces so fundamental to the women's practices. My thesis addresses the status, history, definitions and challenges of an area of self-organised, contemporary artistic production that is generally and casually defined as 'artist-led'.⁶ I want to understand these initiatives in ways that challenge and move beyond a reductive tendency from within the centralised arena of cultural policy to characterise them as a

⁵ Chicago and Schapiro, 'Womanhouse', p. 101.

⁶ I employ this term throughout my thesis.

casual and ephemeral epiphenomenon. I will examine a specific example of this misrecognition later in my introduction.

In my research, in contrast, I ask what the phenomenon of artist-led initiatives is and how I can study it. Does it have a history and its own discourses? How is it represented within the landscape of literature and policy? How is it situated in relation to major cultural debates? What does the term ‘artist-led’ mean? How do the contemporary practices that it covers emerge and sustain themselves and how do funding bodies understand the place of such activities within what is being theorised as *cultural value* and the *ecology of culture*? These are the central questions that my thesis addresses.⁷ I shall approach these questions in three ways. The first is a genealogy of the artist-led sector, which is both a historical study establishing its longevity, diversity and enduring centrality to the contemporary visual arts, and also a slow discerning of the complexity encoded in the labelling of this field of artist-initiated and defined practices. The second is an analysis of the history of attempts to define this area in the literature. The third is to identify and analyse the dominant concepts at work within the field of culture, specifically that of *cultural value*, in relation to which current artist-led activities must negotiate their own values and ambitions alongside the associated challenges.

Having established this triple framework, the main body of my research involved three related practices: theoretical and documentary research, primary qualitative research and a practice of curatorial initiation which, working alongside the other two, was shaped by and also shaped the qualitative research methods. The primary research produced an archive of twenty-five interviews with individuals involved in running artist-led initiatives and the analysis of ten of these using the Grounded Theory Method [GTM]. Undertaking this original qualitative research was necessary in order to analyse the accounts of those who actually participate in generating and sustaining artist-led practice as a daily-lived reality. The interviews enabled me to ask questions about the contemporary context within which they operate and the affective dimensions of self-organisation that evade the arena of official cultural discourse. Central to GTM is the process of carefully coding the

⁷ Throughout my thesis, I work with a definition of cultural value borrowed from the Arts and Humanities Research Council’s *Cultural Value Project*. ‘Cultural Value Project’: ‘...why the arts and culture matter and how we capture the effects that they have’.
<<https://ahrc.ukri.org/research/fundedthemesandprogrammes/culturalvalueproject/>> [accessed 14 August 2020].

interview statements. The coding analyses not only the narrative constructions and phrasing of what the participants experience, think and understand of their own practices, but also the unsaid, affective dimensions of thoughts that are not formally formulated. GTM as a qualitative method refuses the application of concepts *to* the data, instead seeking to discover conceptual understanding from semantic analysis of solicited speech, reflection and commentary. The emergent concepts can then be tested against given historical understandings of the subject in order to challenge the existing categories of the dominant discourse. My coding of the interviews reveals the complexity of a set of practices that, on the one hand, generate extraordinary creativity yet are permanently caught, on the other, within simultaneous and pervasive conditions of uncertainty.

An example of the fragility of artist-led practice occurred in June 2017 when Glasgow's high profile, artist-run gallery Transmission announced the postponement of its annual Members' Show. Citing reduced capacity, the gallery's unpaid organising committee stated:

We currently have a significantly reduced personnel, with several committee members having recently left, and others out of the country undertaking other projects. Those of us who are around (and even those who are not) are worn to the bone, having already experienced multiple burnouts, whilst other crucial administrative work continues to pile up.⁸

The sense here is of deep individual and collective commitment to the initiative's many artistic projects, tempered by the realities of the administrative tasks necessary to *organisation*. On both fronts, the pressures are clearly relentless in the context of unpaid labour. The email goes on to describe the 'very intense' strain imposed on committee members who must attempt to balance their unremunerated commitments to Transmission with paid work elsewhere. The individuals involved are forced to choose constantly between these various roles and to manage the anxiety associated with not being able to commit to any of them fully. When the 'burnout' becomes too extreme, some elect to withdraw temporarily from paid work, resulting in a downward spiral of 'further financial instability and precarity'.⁹

Discussion of the 'precarity' of artistic labour has become commonplace in recent years. My research goes further, however, to propose artist-led initiatives as

⁸ Transmission Committee, email to members, 21 June 2017.

⁹ Transmission Committee, 21 June 2017.

perpetually caught in dialectical opposition between a desire to participate in contemporary cultural life and yet simultaneously being subjected to constant negotiation with the changing, uncertain and multiple institutional and economic frameworks for culture and its governing discourses. This movement, a permanent struggle between self-determination and external determination by others, may be akin to magnetism. In physics, this force incorporates the states of both attraction and repulsion.¹⁰ My analysis further reveals the subjective cost – exhaustion, anxiety, feelings of loss – experienced by those engaged in this struggle that is perpetually positioned between the poles of desire and rejection, autonomy and dependency.

Through the GTM analysis and selection of three case studies that extend and test the resulting discoveries, my research elects to focus more specifically on the physical *spaces* created by artists as opposed to other forms included in this very broadly defined set of artist-led practices. As a researcher I have been deeply involved in creating such spaces and think it is, therefore, important to give a situated account of my own experiences in the field. My determination to research, analyse and understand both the specificities of the artist-led and the conditions and limitations imposed upon them arises from the concrete experience of these challenges, struggles and ambitions. The issues concern the relations of artist-led initiatives to place and to cities as cultural as well as political and administrative entities; the relations of places to increasingly centralised funding and policy formation structures; and the specification of singular roles for artistic activity beyond the institution.

The Research Subject

The image of *Womanhouse* by an unknown photographer, taken during its making, captures the women's artistic labour (Figure 0.1). In the photograph, six of the artists are seen sitting or standing on the driveway and by the kerb outside the mansion, surrounded by timber, cardboard boxes, an old mattress and other debris that they have pulled from the building. Their physical proximity to one another produces a sense of togetherness and this potentially encourages a reading of the task at hand as a positive endeavour of solidarity and friendship among the participants as artists and women. Their later recollections, however, revealed tensions within the project that

¹⁰ 'Magnetism', *National Geographic*
 <<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/magnetism/>> [accessed 28 November 2020].

Chicago regarded simply as ‘...creative struggle - what happens’.¹¹ These tensions were due, in part, to the eight-hour days of hard physical labour that she demanded of her students. Discipline had been a central trait of her earlier teaching at Fresno State College, before transferring her pioneering Feminist Art Program, along with some of her students, to Cal Arts. At Fresno, Chicago had required her women students to learn building skills and to embrace collaborative working. While these women came from working- and middle-class backgrounds, Chicago would later view the ‘privileged’ students at Cal Arts, a private institution, as both resentful of the hard labour of making *Womanhouse* and desirous of concentrating on their ‘own’ work rather than collaboration with others.¹² Mira Shor would describe the project as a ‘boot camp of feminism’, while Faith Wilding would complain about the long hours, claiming, ‘I was never home for three months - that was Womanhouse’.¹³ It is not difficult to imagine how the women’s extraordinary commitment to creating *Womanhouse*, a short-term project, would result in the ‘multiple burnouts’ of the Transmission committee when experienced as a constant condition.

These testimonies resist any easy reading of the histories of such spaces as artistic utopias. Despite the perhaps inevitable tensions of such a pioneering project, between November 1971 and January 1972 the women produced a temporary community of feminist art practice centered around *Womanhouse* by working collectively and responding opportunistically to the availability of the site. The project originated, as Chicago and Shapiro stated, not in a primary desire to simply create an *exhibition*, but to explore and express ideas and issues – through artistic *practice* – that inscribed within the group a collective understanding of themselves as *a community*. It was also a necessary move catalysed by environmental factors: the artists’ shared ‘problems as women’ combined with the fact that the new studios on campus at Cal Arts, promised to the Program for the 1971-72 academic year, were not yet ready for occupation. In the absence of these essential facilities and in search of agency, the artists turned to self-organisation and collectively produced a space of their own in which to explore their individual and collective practices.

¹¹ ‘Judy Chicago on Womanhouse,’ *MCA Chicago* <<https://mcachicago.org/Publications/Websites/West-By-Midwest/Research/Topics/Womanhouse>> [accessed 14 August 2020].

¹² ‘Judy Chicago on Womanhouse,’ *MCA Chicago*.

¹³ Lauren Elkin, ‘Womanhouse’, *Art Review* <<https://artreview.com/ar-april-2018-feature-womanhouse/>> [accessed 14 August 2020].

Although not explicitly described by its makers as an ‘artist-led initiative’ at the time, as this term came into common usage at a later date, I reclaim *Womanhouse* here as typical of a trajectory of social and spatial practices by which artists have been collaboratively producing such spaces since at least the 1960s. They are manifestations of artist imaginaries. Typically, they take the form of galleries and project spaces, or a combination of these with studios and shared facilities for fabrication and socialising. They occur most commonly when artists reclaim and repurpose unwanted or overlooked spaces within the built environment that are peripheral either geographically, situated at the urban margins, or economically unattractive in the purview of those at the helm of the increasingly powerful forces of commercial development.

Some of these spaces in the UK and Ireland, including Catalyst Arts (Belfast), Eastside Projects (Birmingham), g39 (Cardiff), Transmission (Glasgow) and Workplace Gallery (Gateshead), are still managed by practising artists today, or by founders who trained as artists. A relatively small number of such spaces have not only achieved longevity several decades after they began, but along with it a level of visibility and influence as permanent features of the landscape of contemporary visual art. I have chosen to focus on spaces produced by artists in part because the imperative to create them occupies an enduringly central and critically relevant place within artist-led practice as it emerges even in the digital age. The ineluctable fact is that artists need spaces in which to produce and show their work. In his introduction to a 2004 publication on *Workplace*, the artist-led gallery founded in Gateshead by Paul Moss, Miles Thurlow and Richard Forster in 2002, JJ Charlesworth suggested:

Visual art is always, eventually, about a space, a physical location, and whilst art in the first decade of the 21st century may be thriving, it persists in the shape that 19th century culture first gave it, a society before technological mass reproduction and transmission, in which culture for the first time took place in the open space of the public realm¹⁴.

These *spaces* instituted by artists, as material interventions into the urban landscape, are still initiated widely by artist communities today. It is important to distinguish the type that I focus on here from the phenomenon of temporary or ‘pop-up’ art spaces that have become commonplace as urban features, particularly since the 2008

¹⁴ JJ Charlesworth, ‘Workplace: Work in Progress’, in *Workplace*, ed. by Miles Thurlow, Paul Moss and Richard Forster (Sunderland: Art Editions North, 2004), pp. 9-13 (p. 9).

recession necessitated new thinking on the rapidly emptying retail core of towns and cities across the UK and Ireland. The specificities, challenges and future potential of this more recent phenomenon, and its intersections with private development and civic policy, have been addressed elsewhere.¹⁵

The spaces I focus on here, in contrast, were initiated by artists with some degree of intent in terms of longevity and future sustainability. These more permanent spaces have continued to emerge with some resilience amid the fabric of towns and cities across the terrain, even while being under pressure in the context of changing economic conditions since 2008. I shall argue that they have specific relevance for artistic practice and its cultural dissemination, as well as formal and alternative art education. Largely situated in urban settings, intersecting with development and regeneration, they provide material for research that is relevant to all those engaged in the study of cities and culture, and the challenges of creating and sustaining inclusive and egalitarian polities. Specifically, I shall demonstrate that artist-led initiatives continue to play a crucial role in the maintenance of the visual arts ‘ecology’ of contemporary cities. This is distinct from an image of biodiversity and natural processes, as opposed to the interdependencies envisaged by the term *cultural ecology* as it is increasingly being conceived within the wider totality of the relatively recently and homogeneously defined ‘creative industries’.

Artist-led initiatives, I shall argue, are of material importance to artists at all stages of their careers, providing a critical support structure, particularly for the majority of those practising beyond the frame of institutional recognition and commercial representation. They also make major contributions to the formation and sustenance of communities and places at the most local level. This role, however, is at best only anecdotally understood, due in part to an absence of dialogue between this field of practice, academia and makers of cultural policy. Further, an ambition to sustain artist-led spaces beyond their early years necessitates interaction with cultural

¹⁵ Between 2018 and 2020, *More Than Meanwhile Spaces* was a collaborative research initiative between the NewBridge Project and Universities in the North East that aimed to question the value of temporary spaces for artists in the region. More recently, *Meanwhile in the North* is a research project co-commissioned by a consortium of small-scale visual arts initiatives to provide a critical analysis of meanwhile spaces in the work of the consortium partners. ‘Focus on Long-term Future of Creative Businesses’, *Newcastle University* <<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/press/articles/archive/2018/10/morethanmeanwhilespace/>> [accessed 28 August 2020]. ‘Opportunity: Freelance Researcher and Writer Needed’, *The NewBridge Project* <<https://thenewbridgeproject.com/news/opportunity-freelance-researcher-writer/>> [accessed 28 August 2020].

policy and the framework for allocating public funding for the arts. This is due to the need to cover the significant, consistent and unavoidable operating costs associated with the maintenance of physical venues – rent and other overheads, staffing, budgets for programming, marketing and so on – that differentiate them from the often lower and potentially sporadic costs of non venue-based initiatives. It is at this intersection that the issues of *value* and *values* with which my thesis is concerned come most sharply into focus. Here, as my research identifies, artist-led initiatives often find themselves at odds with emerging directives in cultural policy. As part of the ‘creative industries’, the visual arts, along with the rest of the arts sector, are being increasingly harnessed to narratives of *value* and *impact* to justify continued investment under an elective economic politics of austerity, and to narratives of economic growth as the key driver of enterprise culture.¹⁶ This trajectory was reinforced only recently with the enveloping of the creative industries within the rubric of a centralised ‘Industrial Strategy’.¹⁷ My thesis thus examines the tension between the discourse of *value* as in the cultural value of the ‘creative industries’, and the *values* – political, aesthetic and social – of artists and their projects realised through artist-led practice. This tension is a critical issue facing all those engaged in self-organisation beyond the dominant approaches to culture.

The Situated Researcher

Chicago and Schapiro’s description of the making of *Womanhouse*, as collaborative art project and collective political action, with its focus on physical space and the prioritisation of learning by doing, resonates strongly for me in relation to my own practice in the artist-led field over the last twenty-five years. My desire to understand and analyse, in a larger critical and theoretical context, these at times difficult experiences – looking back in order to move forward in my own curatorial practice, while producing material of wider relevance for others engaged in self-organisation –

¹⁶ For example, the Creative Industries Federation’s [CIF] response to publication of the UK Government’s *Industrial Strategy*, in 2017, cites the ‘value of the creative industries’ through a variety of metrics including the value of exported services, employment statistics, Gross Value Added [GVA] and a comparative analysis of its year on year growth potential compared to other sectors of the UK economy. The visual arts and museums and galleries are included in the CIF’s definition of the ‘creative industries’. Creative Industries Federation, *A Blueprint for Growth* (London: Creative Industries Federation, 2017).

¹⁷ UK Government, *Building Our Industrial Strategy: Green Paper* (London: HM Government, 2017).

was and is the catalysing force propelling my research. My thesis is in part a love letter to these fragile but hopeful emergences, as well as a critically situated, contextualised and comparative analysis of the wider questions of *value and values* at stake within them. It is, therefore, crucial to begin this study with a critical analysis of my work in the field, as it provides an entry point into my research questions, along with access to relevant participants and case studies. I have, therefore, included in my first chapter a reflexive narrative grounding my research in my own long-term experiences of the processes and challenging conditions of practice within artist-led initiatives. This traces the emergence of The Tetley, the Centre for Contemporary Art and Learning that I co-founded with Pippa Hale in 2013, which developed from Project Space Leeds [PSL], an artist-led initiative that we had earlier co-founded with Diane Howse. It was during my near ten-year involvement with these initiatives and particularly the transition from one to another, that the key challenges of specific relevance to my analysis of *value* and *values* crystallized. The relationships with major funders such as Arts Council England [ACE] that were necessary to sustaining this emergence have likewise been crucial in approaching my research subject.

The genesis of The Tetley as a more prominent, visible and centrally located space for contemporary art, brought into sharp focus for me the acute tensions inherent in attempting to secure the future sustainability of an artist-led initiative while retaining a fidelity to the founding values with which it began. In the case of PSL, I shall argue that these tensions arose within contested (mis)understandings, both internal and external, of the perceived *value* of the organisation's activities from 2007-12, the inaugural period during which it occupied its first venue in Leeds before the subsequent move to The Tetley. This second stage in PSL's evolution triggered further debates on the organisation's *values* and the meaning of processes of institutionalisation. I shall argue that this process is one that is effectively coerced from artist-led initiatives by the requirements of 'culture' as an increasingly centralised and instrumentalised sphere.

Since my arrival in 1990 to study Fine Art at the University of Leeds forms the earliest extent of my frame of reference for artist-led practice, my thesis is bookended by that date and the present day. My enquiry is further bounded geographically by a focus on the phenomenon of artist-led initiatives in the UK and Ireland, a territory marked by allied practices and concerns and where my

professional experiences have generated extensive networks that have become important in undertaking my research.

Theoretical Framework

The distinction between *career* and *practice* drawn out by the artist Terry Atkinson in the opening quotation, while explaining his reasons for leaving the group *Art & Language* in 1974 which had by then become the ‘academy’ in his view, goes to the heart of the question as to why artists continue to self-organise on a significant scale. Atkinson suggests here that there is more at stake for practising artists than a simplistic relation to any notion of ‘success’ as defined through interactions with the established institutions of contemporary art, on terms defined by them. The chosen few who do have careers at an elevated level must navigate by the coordinates of having a dealer, promotion at art fairs, selection for major international exhibitions and critical visibility in art magazines and journals. Access to these involves a series of self-presentations, artistic choices and accommodations to taste, market directions and curatorial or institutional judgements. This enduring art-historical framework excludes most while elevating only certain individuals to commercial recognition. Andrea Phillips has described the circulatory networks of major institutions within the meritocratic framework of the contemporary cultural sphere:

Meritocracy removes the contextual and historical basis of any individual or collective emergence. It produces a landscape of individuals whose randomized ascent is based on autonomy... This concept of autonomy is the job description of the contemporary artist, curator, and art critic, and it is so due to the fact that the art market requires autonomous objects to be made and displayed, whose value is based on the meritocratic placement of the artist, the work, etc.¹⁸

This hierarchical system divides artists from one another, elevating and celebrating a chosen few while producing a vast surplus down below, the ‘invisible mass’ of artists who lack institutional validation. The artist, educator and writer Gregory Sholette has compellingly framed these apparently ‘failed’ artists as the ‘creative dark matter’ of the art world.¹⁹ Borrowing the concept from the discipline of astrophysics, where dark

¹⁸ Andrea Phillips, ‘Remaking the Arts Centre’, in *Cluster: Dialectionary*, ed. by Binna Choi, Maria Lind, Emily Pethick and Natasa Petresin-Bachelez (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), pp. 214-230 (p. 220).

¹⁹ Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), pp.1-22.

matter denotes the vast majority of essential – yet invisible – space matter, Sholette extends his analogy to describe the vast and varied forms of creative *practice* that are not concerned with building *careers* within the narrow meritocracy exposed by Phillips:

...this type of creative dark matter is invisible primarily to those who lay claim to the management and interpretation of culture – the critics, art historians, collectors, dealers, museums, curators, and arts administrators. It includes makeshift, amateur, informal, unofficial, autonomous, activist, non-institutional, self-organized practices – all work made and circulated in the shadows of the formal art world...²⁰

Art's market-oriented system demonstrably marginalises forms of practice that are socially situated, engaged with specific issues, made by women and minorities, not sale-oriented, and/or seek to intervene in and work with the formation of local, regional or specialist communities, all those who may perceive their practice as constituting the cultural life of society rather than the circulation of financially valued works of art as commodities and markers of 'taste'. I argue that the work of artist-led initiatives to some extent exists under conditions of structural invisibility and inaudibility. Take this example of an email from the University of Leeds' Cultural Institute circulated to recipients across and beyond its campus:

The City of Leeds has a wealth of cultural sector organisations and a dispersed group of small/micro creative industries and independent creatives. Anecdotally we understand that there is a healthy DIY sector, which operates independently in small clusters, servicing itself. This poses challenges in terms of a collective approach to economic development and growth, work force development and skills.²¹

From the institutional perspective, the voice of the artist-led is inaudible. It is consequently configured as an unknowable 'other' to the institution as it can only be discerned 'anecdotally'. In *Introducing Disagreement*, Jacques Rancière draws on Aristotle's *Politics* in discussing the relationship between the possession of language and the right to participate in political discourse. Aristotle had differentiated between those who possessed language and those who did not:

Traditionally, it had been enough not to hear what came out of the mouths of the majority of human beings – slaves, women, workers, colonised peoples,

²⁰ Sholette, *Dark Matter*, p. 1.

²¹ Email received by the author from the Cultural Institute, 28 February 2017.

etc. – as language, and instead only to hear only cries of hunger, rage, or hysteria, in order to deny them the quality of being political animals.²²

Rancière states that the possession of language is not a ‘physical capacity’. It is, rather, ‘a symbolic division’. To possess language is not enough, then, as what matters is the ability of those who govern to hear the speech of the other by first admitting that *they do speak*. The ‘demos’ – those who are ‘outside the count’ because they possess no right to rule – must force themselves to be heard:

...the fact of hearing and understanding language does not in itself produce any of the effects of an egalitarian community. Egalitarian effects occur only through a forcing, that is, the instituting of a quarrel that challenges the incorporated, perceptible evidence of an inegalitarian logic. This quarrel is politics.²³

The assumptions about this ‘other’ which are folded into the Cultural Institute’s statement are revealing: that a *DIY* (for which read ‘amateur’) sector exists *over there* (at a remove from the institution - the email’s ‘we’) *servicing itself* (of no greater importance to the city at large) and effecting a series of closed loops. The challenges it thus poses concern an inability to recognise and thereby easily quantify and evaluate its activities within the dominant discourses. The email makes explicit an ideological link between ‘culture’ and ‘economy’. Within this, the cultural sector’s role is to populate a ‘talent pipeline’ in the service of centralised economic growth. Wendy Brown has demonstrated how the remaking of the world in economic terms is a central operation of neoliberalism, which effects an ‘...“economization” of political life and of other heretofore noneconomic spheres and activities’.²⁴ Brown’s point is not that neoliberalism ‘literally marketizes all spheres’ even as this is one of its effects. Rather, she argues that it is the ‘model of the market’ that neoliberal rationality introduces to every aspect of contemporary life. The effect is that, ‘human beings [are configured] exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus*’.²⁵ She goes on to demonstrate how this reconfiguration as human capital takes place within a competitive landscape determined by relative *value* – Phillips’ meritocracy – that is to be assessed according to ‘actual or

²² Jacques Rancière, ‘Introducing Disagreement’, *Angelaki*, Vol 9 (2004), 3-9 (p. 5).

²³ Rancière, ‘Introducing Disagreement’, p. 5.

²⁴ Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), p. 17.

²⁵ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, p. 10.

figurative' ratings and rankings, guidelines and benchmarks. Analysis of my research data demonstrates that the processes of measurement and evaluation that are required by this individuation of subjects poses an ideological challenge to the formation of communities of practice within artist-led initiatives.

My thesis, therefore, aims to enact a political forcing, a disruption of what Rancière calls the 'distribution of the sensible' where this is understood as a 'legitimization of certain ways of seeing, feeling, acting, speaking, being in the world with one another...'.²⁶ This forcing is two-fold: I will trace the challenges of neoliberalism's marketisation for artist-led initiatives, specifically as it manifests itself through a migration of what Marilyn Strathern has defined as 'audit culture' into the arts and an attendant and increasing focus on the determination of relative value.²⁷ I will also create a space where the subjective experiences of actors in the field can be heard *on their own terms*, demonstrating the inadequacy of the given terms of *cultural value* as descriptors of artist-led specificities. I do not seek, therefore, to merely 'reinsert' artists into an institutional narrative because, following Rancière, institutions cannot hear the speech of artists in any terms other than those which are already sanctioned.

The compelling analyses offered by Phillips and Sholette illuminate what Sholette argues is the 'structural redundancy' of the vast majority of artistic practice viewed from the meritocratic perspective of the institution. Yet, as Sholette points out, the art world itself remains paradoxically and structurally dependent on the same creative dark matter that it otherwise excludes – artists and the micro-formations they collectively initiate. I extend his thesis here to include the associated institutions of higher education and their approaches to art pedagogy within Sholette's definition of the 'art world'. As he notes, artists who may be denied access to the institution in terms of exhibiting their own artwork, are still called upon to service galleries and museums as technicians, fabricators, invigilators, workshop leaders, outreach workers, catering and retail staff, receptionists, administrators and as audience members.²⁸ Indeed, artists and artist-led organisers are present within the body of the

²⁶ Robert Porter, 'Distribution of the Sensible', *Variant* <<https://www.variant.org.uk/30texts/Rancier.html>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

²⁷ Marilyn Strathern, 'Introduction: New Accountabilities: Anthropological Studies in Audit, Ethics and the Academy', in *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy*, ed. by Strathern (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 1-18.

²⁸ Sholette, *Dark Matter*, p. 3.

University itself as lecturers, technicians, doctoral candidates and in administrative roles that enable them to support and invest in their artistic practice. Self-organisation has historically offered a means to mitigate these potentially problematic relations as an elective differentiation from art's official institutions, markets and apparatus of both financialised and curatorial selectivity. In the face of these ineluctable facts, artists turn to self-organisation and resuscitate from neglected corners of the urban landscape the missing structures of community and shelter that culture under neoliberalism fails to provide. This necessary move retains a critical urgency now no less than that which catalysed *Womanhouse* almost 50 years ago when, as Judy Chicago recalled, there were major problems concerning the visibility of art made by women within the context of a 'restrictive role of "artist" as it was defined by men' at that time.²⁹

The continuing need for the emergence of artist-led initiatives reflects the unchanging status in society of artists themselves. Questions of visibility and equality persist and have arguably become more acute a half-century later. As Susan Jones worryingly concluded in a recent presentation to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS] in June 2020, based on decades of researching artists' livelihoods, 'visual artists... are no better off in social or economic terms than they were in 1985'.³⁰ In the early Twenty-first Century, artists must tread an uncertain path through the mounting challenges of austerity and the accompanying contraction in public subsidy for the arts, near invisibility within the purview of contemporary cultural policy and, more recently, seismic shifts in the cultural sector reeling from the deep and unfolding impacts of the global Coronavirus pandemic. The absence of substantive support for freelancers across all facets of the creative economy, despite their very centrality to its existence, has been key to critiques of the UK Government's response and its rescue package for the cultural sector to date.³¹ Yet my research finds that artist-led initiatives have continued to emerge even under the precarious conditions imposed by neoliberalism and to produce positive affects

²⁹ 'Judy Chicago on *Womanhouse*', *MCA Chicago*.

³⁰ 'Support for Artists' Livelihoods in a Covid-19 World', *Padwick Jones Arts* <<http://www.padwickjonesarts.co.uk/support-for-artists-livelihoods-in-a-covid-19-world/>> [accessed 27 July 2020].

³¹ See, for example, Amanda Parker, 'Covid-19: Freelancers Need our Support', *Arts Professional* <<https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/comment/covid-19-freelancers-need-our-support>> [accessed 28 August 2020].

experienced as community and even family among their participants. They are arguably more urgently needed than ever before as they provide a critically needed corrective to the harsh – and becoming harsher – realities of contemporary society. As Phillips further notes:

Neo-liberal culture is so hard. People's bodies need to find places to take care of themselves and their communities in this hard culture...³²

Chapter Structure

Three major concepts are woven through my thesis: *place*, *value* and the *institution*. These concepts emerged as discoveries during the early stages of my research and writing, and from my own account of my experiences in the field. They are grounded, therefore, in both the language of the institution and policy makers and in my experiences as a maker of artist-led spaces. The concepts provide a frame for my thesis, leading from my own situatedness as a researcher and my analysis of external perspectives on the work of artist-led initiatives – histories, policy documents and literature – in Part 1 and then subsequently to their more detailed enfleshing via the GTM analysis of the interviews and the case studies in Part 2. The chapters thus serve to elaborate these concepts in different contexts and to qualify, change or make more concrete their real meanings.

Chapter One provides a contextual analysis of my longitudinal involvement with artist-led initiatives, beginning with an early and formative encounter with East Street Arts post-graduation. My central focus in this chapter, however, is on my experiences with two artist-led spaces that I later co-founded: PSL and The Tetley. In retelling this narrative I necessarily move between the position of self-reflecting participant to that of situated researcher seeking to elevate my experiences to the level of analytical inquiry. I therefore find relevance for my thesis in the challenges that accompanied the emergence of these spaces, specifically those associated with being caught in wider narratives of place-based or culture-led regeneration as well as the jeopardy for artist-led *value and values* that accompany processes of institutionalisation. From my analysis I tease out some of the critical issues at stake in any attempt to sustain an artist-led initiative beyond its formative years, introducing the key challenge of 'sustainability' that then becomes a major line of enquiry within

³² Phillips, 'Remaking the Arts Centre', p. 230.

the thesis. My narrative also provides the context for the methodological route that I subsequently elected to follow.

Chapter Two then sets out the wider research context. Through an overview of contemporary artist-led initiatives in the UK and Ireland, I argue here that artist-led spaces occupy a position of continuing and central relevance for practising artists, particularly those working in the regions and beyond the geographic centres of the global art market. Despite this centrality, however, my analysis of some of the key literature demonstrates that there is an absence of substantive longitudinal studies of scholarly rigour that examine the complex and interconnected genealogies and legacies of these, from *Womanhouse* to those which are active today. I also show how the contested definitions and meanings of artist-led practice additionally combine with this absence of critical analysis to present the researcher with a problematic and contested discursive and historiographic field.

Chapter Three takes the form of a discourse analysis. My focus on value and values necessitates an analysis of the wider policy landscape that artist-led initiatives must negotiate in striving for longevity. Of specific relevance for my thesis are the dominant concepts of *cultural value* and the associated *cultural ecology*, that have become widespread terms in both institutional discourse and critical analysis.³³ I approach these through my analysis of two key texts: firstly, ACE's *Achieving Great Art and Culture for Everyone*, which occupies a central place as the primary framework for its investment in the arts from 2010-2020; and secondly, the Arts and Humanities Research Council's [AHRC] *Cultural Value Project* through its final report, *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture* (2016). I also look at one of the key papers informing this, *The Ecology of Culture* by John Holden, which has been highly influential in encouraging a broad adoption of the term throughout the cultural sector. My analysis shows how Holden's imagining of culture as three interconnected and interdependent spheres has consequences for our understanding of the place, value and contributions of artist-led initiatives.

Having established the contextual terrain for contemporary artist-led initiatives, the second part of my thesis presents the original research that I then

³³ See in particular Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kaszynska, *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture: The AHRC Cultural Value Project* (Swindon: Arts & Humanities Research Council, 2016) and Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value, *Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth* (Coventry: University of Warwick, 2015).

undertook. This was necessary in order to test the appropriateness of the available concepts that I had discovered. It was also critically important to hear and analyse the testimonies of individuals experiencing artist-led initiatives from the inside in order to produce a ‘forcing’ through of alternative concepts and terms. Even the basic details of *Womanhouse* that I have outlined in my introduction conjure something of the extraordinary physical and emotional commitments required for self-organisation and the subjective cost extracted from participants. Yet these affective dimensions escape the language of value and impact enshrined within policy documents that structure the dominant discourses on culture. How do participants in artist-led initiatives situate themselves in relation to histories of self-organised practices? What is their sense of the *value and values* at work within them, their contributions, fragilities and the challenges they face?

The interviews that I undertook sought to discover the critical dimensions of artist-led practice through a series of situated, subjective accounts. Analysis of these enable me to propose, in Chapter Four, new understandings of artist-led initiatives and their complex interactions with cultural value. I demonstrate that, for many working in the artist-led field, these forms of practice make visible a desire for agency, even while they are constrained by a set of environmental factors – at work within the frameworks for arts funding and urban planning for example – which impact negatively upon them. These damaging effects may also impose a subjective cost on the individuals engaged in their production that even compromise the sustainability of this area of artistic organisation and practice. In order to investigate the specificities, contributions and jeopardy of artist-led practice, I undertook original qualitative research by creating a body of data through interviews with selected artist-led organisations in the UK.

These were analysed following one of the most widely used qualitative research methodologies: Grounded Theory. Sociologist Antony Bryant has qualified the now expanded range of its basic principles and applications as the *Grounded Theory Method* [GTM], drawing on Kathy Charmaz’s intervention with *Constructivist Grounded Theory*.³⁴ Charmaz and Bryant developed a flexible methodology for

³⁴ Antony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz, *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory* (London: Sage, 2012); Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (London: Sage, 2014); Antony Bryant, *Grounded Theory and Grounded Theorizing: Pragmatism in Research Practice*

analysing experiences and actions, and accounts of and understanding of these experience and actions, solicited through interviews with individuals and groups managing and involved with artist-led initiatives. I chose to analyse the data from ten of the twenty-five interviews and these were coded using GTM, which I explore within the chapter. Moving from detailed coding of the transcribed texts, I describe the process by which I subsequently identified four key theoretical codes – *Doing*, *Negotiating*, *Lacking and Losing*, and *Feeling* – that enabled me to analyse artist-led initiatives as relational practices.

Chapters Five to Seven then offer a ‘deep dive’ into the specificities of contemporary artist-led initiatives through three case studies: Grand Union in Birmingham, Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance [ROAR] and the East Leeds Project [ELP], an initiative that I founded in 2017. These allow me to test from a grounded perspective and through detailed contextual research the findings from my GTM analysis and thus to resist the distanced, panoptical view from the perspective of cultural policy. Although in all three cases these initiatives can be understood externally as ‘artist-led’, I show how in each case difficulties arise from this nomenclature and this thus speaks back to the value of the term ‘artist-led’ in attempting to define and articulate the contributions of what is a very diverse field of practices. Chapter Five examines Grand Union at a critical juncture in its evolution as the organisation prepared to make several significant transitions deemed necessary to its future sustainability. In particular, it sought to protect its creative community from the rising threat of displacement triggered by major infrastructure development for the proposed HS2 terminus nearby. The impacts of this threatened Grand Union’s ongoing occupancy of its original venue. In response, at the time of my interview with the organisation’s Director, Cheryl Jones, it was planning a move to a more prominent building nearby where it could secure its longer-term future through a new business model based on expansion of its studio provision and commercial lets to creative industries organisations. This expansion also triggered debates on transition to a new organisational structure. The chapter, therefore, considers the opportunities and challenges associated with possible routes to future sustainability available to the organisation and the potential consequences of these significant changes for its approach to *value and values*.

In contrast, ROAR occupies a geographically central position in Rotherham, a second-tier northern town not yet feeling the full effects of commercial regeneration after deindustrialisation. When I interviewed Sharon Gill, the organisation's CEO, and Stephen Rogers, its Chair and also a co-founder of ROAR, it was facing multiple challenges concerning its role within a nascent cultural strategy for Rotherham and its negotiation of policy directives as a National Portfolio [NPO] client of ACE. It was also considering its options following a failed bid to take on more prominent and accessible premises in the town, from which to build a more sustainable future.

In Chapter Seven, my third and final case study revisits my own curatorial practice through my initiation of the ELP. Developing concurrently with my research, this relatively new initiative to some extent takes the form of an experiment within it and has been directly informed by the research discoveries of the GTM. In contrast to both Grand Union and ROAR, cultural initiatives that are centrally located in geographic terms, the ELP makes its intervention on the fringes of the city where existing cultural provision is chronically sparse and debates on contemporary art are all but entirely absent. What challenges does this double absence then present for articulating the project's *value and values* within a contextual void? What other discourses on value might it draw on in order to gather a community of practice within the specific and multiple societal and cultural challenges of East Leeds? This final case study examines the evolution of my curatorial practice in order to propose an alternative model that speaks back to the challenges of institutionalisation that I identified in the movement from PSL to The Tetley.

What I have established through this introduction are three major issues at stake within my analysis of my research subject. They concern, firstly, the key tension between 'value' as it is established through the discourse of *cultural value* and the potentially destructive impacts of this on the *values* that are understood to be at work within artist-led initiatives, rendering them as provisional, amateur forms. Secondly, I have sought to locate artist-led initiatives along two conceptual axes: one is a vertical relationship of the artist-led field as a whole with cultural policy and discourse, directed and imposed centrally, while the other is a horizontal axis that connects individual initiatives to their immediate context of cities and the specific and localised challenges of commercial and civic development. Thirdly, there are my own concrete experiences in the field, an elective, systematic and longitudinal participation in artist-led practice. I examine this personal history in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 1 - FROM PSL TO THE TETLEY: A SELF-REFLEXIVE CASE STUDY FROM THE FRONT LINE

Introduction

In light of my own involvement in the field, in this chapter I need to introduce my experiences of initiating The Tetley as a substantive source of research about my subject. I set out here a situated analysis of my sustained practice in artist-led initiatives over the last 20 years.³⁵ This practice is systematic and not merely an effect of the loss of agency or ‘failure’ to progress along a more formally delineated career path that navigates by the coordinates of major institutions. These experiences have also necessitated interaction with the structural framework for the arts in England, particularly through a sustained relationship with ACE and local authorities since at least 2001. As my experiences have taken place largely in Leeds, they have also provided material relevant to my contextual analysis of the relations between artists, artist-led initiatives and cities. What follows is not, therefore, merely a personal memoir but a critical reflection that has been central to developing my approach to my research.

I have decided that it is vital to situate myself as a researcher within this field as it forms the context both for why it is important for my research to understand how people in similar situations have understood their own experiences and for my final case study, which traces the continuation of my practice through the emergence of the ELP. What became the sensitizing concepts for undertaking the GTM analysis – *place, value* and *institution* – emerged not just from the literature, but from this detailed account of my practice that generated concepts and ideas which I then used to initiate my research with individual leaders of artist-led initiatives. This does not presume that these individuals shared the same experiences as I have had, nor preempt my research findings, but instead enabled me to draw out concepts – such as negotiating the policy landscape – that informed the interviews that I carried out. It has, as a result, been essential to make a distinction between autoethnography and my

³⁵ Alongside the two major projects that I revisit here – PSL and The Tetley – I have had many other encounters with artist-led initiatives, as an artist and as a curator. They include three years as Curator of Exhibitions for Harewood House Trust, where I worked on the programme of the Terrace Gallery, founded by artist Diane Howse in 1989, and 18 months on the Advisory Group of Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun, founded by Leeds Metropolitan University Fine Art undergraduate Tavienne Bridgwater, in 2014.

role as a researcher. Jeremiah Moss acknowledges the difficulties of separating these different senses of self in the preface to *Vanishing New York*, a work that commits to paper his near 30-year love affair with the city, when he writes, ‘This book... is both a historical record and a personal document. I can’t disentangle the two’.³⁶ Yet it is essential that I do so in order for the thesis to have rigour as well as a wider relevance and readership, and this has had consequences for my methodological approach. I elected to use GTM as this allowed me to base the research in my experiences while ‘grounding’ my analysis in new data – generated through the interview process – as a way to counter any biases and *a priori* assumptions that I may hold. I shall now provide an overview of some key moments in my practice, from an early and formative encounter with East Street Arts and then on to PSL and The Tetley, spaces that I co-founded with others in 2006 and 2013 respectively.

A Formative Encounter with an Artist-led Community

I began this research project as a practitioner, as a curator and artistic director with a significant body of practice in Leeds and across the region over the last twenty years or so. Before that, I would have called myself an artist, after emerging from a Fine Art degree and an MA in Feminism and the Visual Arts at the University of Leeds in the mid-1990s. In common with many young artists, the years immediately after graduation were precarious as I experienced a profound disjuncture between the promise of formal art education and the alienating realities of artistic practice in the northern city of Leeds at that time. I remember the feeling of loss after the inevitable separation from the support structures provided by the School of Fine Art in the shape of a discursive environment created collectively among staff, visiting artists and my peers, and access to studio and workshop facilities. Periodic participation in a disconnected series of exhibitions across the UK over the following few years did nothing to encourage a sense of sustainable practice, or progress. I had also exhibited in *New Contemporaries* in my penultimate year of undergraduate study, a touring exhibition which, ‘showcases the best new art emerging from the [*sic*] colleges around the country’.³⁷ This apparently prestigious opportunity, however, encouraged

³⁶ Jeremiah Moss, *Vanishing New York: How a Great City Lost its Soul* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017) p. 4.

³⁷ David Manley in *BT New Contemporaries 1994-5*, ed. by Patricia Bickers (London: New Contemporaries, 1994), n.p.

in me a growing sense of the sector's systemic bias towards practice in the capital and those emerging from its leading art schools, rather than the presence of wider national networks available to me as a young artist. Attending the launch of *New Contemporaries* at Camden Arts Centre in May 1994, I had the distinct sense of stumbling into a private party as it became clear that many of those in the room were already acquainted and circulated in the same networks of practice in London.³⁸ Selection for this one exhibition, then, was hardly transformative in opening the door to the inner sanctum of a perceived 'art world' and I returned to practice on the margins in Leeds.

Five years later, I was almost ready to walk away from the idea of an artistic career when I found East Street Arts [ESA] after responding to an advert for a professional development programme for artists. ESA was an artist-led initiative working close to home in Leeds but practically invisible then to all but insiders, having inhabited a disused mill on the edge of the city centre during the first few years of its existence. Formed in 1993, by the year 2000 the organisation was just about to undergo a period of growth and expansion after securing funding to convert the former St Patrick's Social Club, in the inner east ward of Burmantofts and Richmond Hill, into its flagship centre for artists. This offered 34 studios, a project space, offices, and shared social and production facilities. In retrospect I recognise the *DCAP* programme ('Demystifying Contemporary Arts Practice') as an early precursor of the expansion in alternative MAs and self-organised art education projects that are the subject of Sam Thorne's recent history, *School*. Cautioning against any attempt to describe these pedagogical initiatives as a coherent field of activity, due to their varying aims, structures and contexts, Thorne does, however, note the recurrence of certain traits:

Most [of these] projects are small and occasionally nomadic, while emphasizing an approach to learning that is collaborative and discursive. In this sense, many are more about learning than education; that is, they are about change through experience, about a type of process... Organizationally, these projects are self-directed and anti-hierarchical, frequently not making

³⁸ Twenty-five of the exhibiting artists that year had already completed a Master's degree, 18 of them (72%) at London colleges (Chelsea, Goldsmith's, the Royal College of Art and the Slade). Of those, exactly half graduated from the RCA. Patricia Bickers, ed., *BT New Contemporaries 1994-5*.

distinctions between teachers and students—“participants” is the more usual term.³⁹

I can certainly situate *DCAP* within this descriptive framework. It nurtured new relationships founded on friendship, collaboration and peer-to-peer learning. My participation in the programme from 2000-2002 recreated the collegiate environment of formal study and with it the regularity of contact with a small cohort of artist peers and exposure to ESA’s networks across the UK and beyond. ESA’s founders, Karen Watson and Jon Wakeman, approached the programme by generously opening up a discursive and social space within their professional and personal environments. This was founded as much on the practicalities of self-organisation (co-producing projects and exhibitions, group visits to artist-led initiatives in Europe and at home) as it was on conveying the immutable facts of self-employment and applying for grant funding. These mundane truths were approached within the programme through structured sessions led by industry professionals, but their status was no more elevated than that of our collective activities over the 18 months of the programme: attending football matches together at Elland Road; social evenings at Patrick Studios; drinking together at the Vic, a traditional artists’ pub behind Leeds’ Town Hall; or eating together at Watson and Wakeman’s home in Chapeltown. As Wakeman told me:

I’ve never used this before but it probably for me and Karen feels more like a family. We’ve built a family rather than an institution.⁴⁰

Participation in *DCAP* and exposure to ESA’s ethos and values marked for me the beginning of a sustained engagement with the processes and practices of artists’ self-organisation that manifests itself in the present in the writing of this thesis. Which is to say that *DCAP* opened up the possibility of a sustainable path through artistic *practice*, to return to the distinction made by Terry Atkinson in the statement that opens my thesis. This was grounded in a notion of art as a set of social relations and actions produced collectively among peers, reproduced daily and taking place at the level of the local and the everyday. It had little to do with artistic careers understood as an intersection with major institutions or a global art market. Raymond Williams insisted in 1958 that ‘culture is ordinary’ and on the significance of a conjunction between the two senses of the word, understood as both a ‘whole way of life - the

³⁹ Sam Thorne, *School: A Recent History of Self-organized Art Education* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), p. 48.

⁴⁰ Interview with Jon Wakeman, 23 March 2018.

common meanings' among any human society and, simultaneously, 'the arts and learning - the special processes of discovery and creative effort'.⁴¹ The daily interactions of *DCAP*'s participants generated a common culture in the environment around ESA, one comprising equally the 'art' and 'non-art' activities described above. This environment provided an alternative to 'contemporary art' understood as a product of Williams' 'special processes of discovery and creative effort,' an exclusive sphere that I had already glimpsed through the earlier encounter with *New Contemporaries*.⁴²



Fig 1.1 Opening of *Last Few Days*, May 2003. Photograph by the author.

⁴¹ Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', in *The Everyday Life Reader*, ed. by Ben Highmore (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 91-100 (p. 93).

⁴² The focus of *New Contemporaries* has shifted considerably under the Directorship of Kirsty Ogg since 2013. For example, in 2018 its submission criteria were widened to include those participating in alternative, non-affiliated art education programmes: 'Opening up our annual call to artists outside of formal, degree-awarding programmes has been a way to publicly acknowledge that not all artists follow the same path when developing practice', Kirsty Ogg quoted in Holly Grange, 'In Response to Changing Practice: New Writing with New Contemporaries', *Corridor8* <<https://corridor8.co.uk/article/in-response-to-changing-practice-new-writing-with-new-contemporaries/>> [accessed 9 June 2020].

Thinking through concepts of ‘value’ and ‘values’ in relation to artist-led initiatives, my participation in *DCAP* foregrounded values associated with collaboration and collective action, along with an ethos of pushing the boundaries and definition of artistic practice outside of evaluative mechanisms based on institutional taste or market values. This extended to the way in which ESA encouraged the colonisation of disused or forgotten corners of the urban landscape as spaces in which non-institutional practice could flourish: the programme culminated in a short exhibition called *Last Few Days* created collectively by the six participating artists inside an empty retail unit in the city’s run-down Merrion Centre. In these ways, this early and formative encounter with ESA laid the foundations for the next 20 years of my professional practice, specifically informing what was to come next.

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Figure 1.2, *Three Functions* by Hewitt and Jordan, commissioned by Vitrine and installed at Leeds Train Station in May 2007. Photograph by Jonty Wilde. © The artists and Situation Leeds.

After *DCAP*, between 2004 and 2006, with fellow participant Pippa Hale, we piloted a programme of artist commissions in similarly overlooked spaces around the city centre, including deeply recessed shop windows and empty display cabinets inside Leeds Art Gallery, the Central Library and the train station, uniting these disparate

sites as one exhibition space under the title *Vitrine*. The challenges of working peripatetically across the city centre, however, soon resulted in a desire for a more permanent and expansive space where roots could begin to take hold.

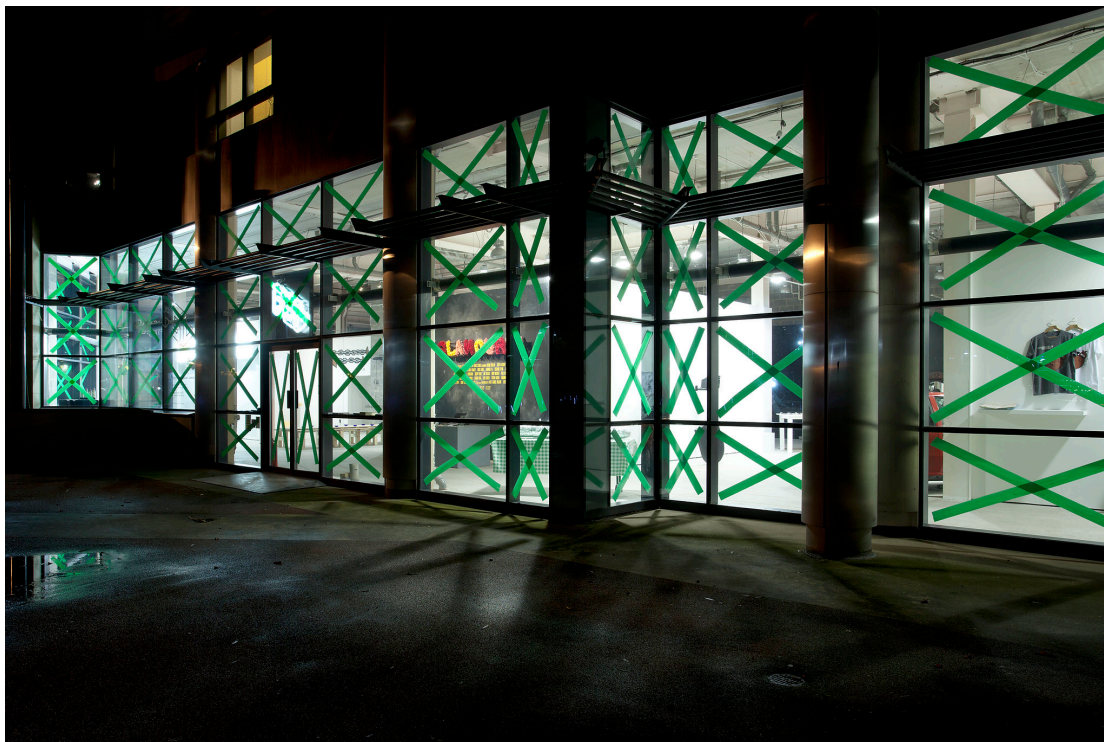


Figure 1.3, Exterior of PSL's space at Whitehall Waterfront during the exhibition *Glamourie*, 2012, with artwork by Joseph Buckley in the windows. Photograph by Ben Statham.
© The artists and Project Space Leeds. Courtesy of the Trustees, Project Space Leeds.

Project Space Leeds: Testing an Artist-led Model Embedded in Place

PSL was co-founded by Pippa Hale, Diane Howse and me in 2006. In many ways its story is familiar enough: it began with a rough and ready artist-led space occupying a newly built but vast and unlet unit adjacent to the riverside on the western fringes of the city centre. Styled as the new 'West End' of Leeds, the burgeoning area was characterised in the early 2000s by its fast-developing financial services and gleaming riverside apartments for young professionals.⁴³ Through Howse's existing friendship with Kevin Linfoot, founder of property company K.W.Linfoot Plc, we were able to

⁴³ In February 2008, Leeds City Council's Executive Board approved a proposal from its Director of City development that it enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with six private developers to create the 'West End Partnership' in order to, 'co-ordinate the successful implementation of high quality public realm and the promotion of the West End vision'. K W Linfoot Plc, developer of the Whitehall Waterfront location where PSL was based, was a member of the Partnership. 'City Development Report', *Leeds City Council* <<https://democracy.leeds.gov.uk/documents/s17065/West%20End%20Partnership%20cover%20report%2030%20jan.pdf>> [accessed 27 May 2020].

secure the use of a ground-floor unit at Whitehall Waterfront, a large mixed-use development completed by the company in 2004. [REDACTED]

In the period immediately preceding PSL's tenure at Whitehall Waterfront, Linfoot sponsored *appearance*, a two-week exhibition curated by Howse in the same space in 2005.⁴⁴ When Hale and I viewed the exhibition, we were instantly moved to contact Howse to test the potential to work together on the future of the space. The use of the cavernous but raw commercial unit, the scale and ambition of the exhibition and the participation of artists represented by major blue chip galleries in London, rendered *appearance* a unique exhibitionary event in the histories of independent, artist-curated practice in Leeds.

Howse's connections were, therefore, critical in enabling access to Linfoot and eased his ready agreement to our use of the unit that became PSL's home, free of charge, on an ongoing basis. [REDACTED]

The connections to London galleries, employed in staging the earlier *appearance* exhibition, also enabled Howse to invite artists including Heather and Ivan Morison, and Laura Ford, to participate in exhibitions at PSL. The initiative's presence at Whitehall Waterfront undoubtedly also played to economic and reputational drivers. K.W.Linfoot Plc's patronage of PSL as a space for contemporary art impacted positively on the company's status with the local authority while enhancing the reputation of Linfoot himself as collector-philanthropist. As a journalist for *The Times* noted when interviewing Linfoot at his home in 2007:

⁴⁴ *appearance* took place at Whitehall Waterfront from 29 September to 14 October 2005. The participating artists were George Barber, Richard Billingham, Jason Brooks, Thomas A Clark, Stuart Croft, Michael Curran, Susan Derges, Dryden Goodwin, Paul Graham, Paul Hodgson, Diane Howse, Tom Hunter, Sophie Lascelles, Neeta Madahar, Melanie Manchot, Andrew Mansfield, Alain Miller, Eugene Palmer, Kate Scrivener and Gavin Turk. Selected artists were represented at the time by Anthony Reynolds Gallery, Danielle Arnaud Contemporary Art, Fred (London) Ltd., Houdsworth Gallery, Max Wigram Gallery, Purdy Hicks Gallery and White Cube. *appearance*, unpublished exhibition catalogue, 2005.

The art on the walls reveals that this is the home of a serious collector. Linfoot has one of the largest private collections of Soviet socialist-realist art outside Russia; some pieces are on show, though much of it is in secure storage.⁴⁵



Figure 1.4, Opening of the exhibition *The Mapping Project* at PSL, July 2007. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Trustees, Project Space Leeds.

The developer's relationship with the local authority, central in terms of obtaining planning permission for new builds such as Bridgewater Place, a 32-storey mixed-use monolith in south central Leeds which opened in 2007, was drawn directly into PSL's programme. This was particularly evident in opening show *The Mapping Project*, a series of large-scale drawings by civic architect John Thorp, through which he imagined the future development of the city centre, alongside commissioned responses by artists Leo Fitzmaurice, Lucy Gibson and Nichola Pemberton.⁴⁶ During the project, Linfoot displayed an architectural model of *Lumiere*, his ambitious scheme to construct Europe's tallest residential tower on a nearby plot, within the

⁴⁵ Caroline Brannigan, 'Personal Development: Caroline Brannigan Meets the Yorkshire Multimillionaire for Whom a 25-acre Property just isn't Enough', *The Times* <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/personal-development-6x715jxkngv>> [accessed 16 June 2020].

⁴⁶ 'The Mapping Project', in *Leaving Las Vegas*, ed. by Pippa Hale and Kerry Harker (Leeds: Project Space Leeds, 2011), pp. 18-19.

exhibition space. This act made explicit the connection between his patronage of PSL and a corporate narrative that sought to knit Linfoot, as benevolent patron, into a positivistic story of culture-led regeneration that Leeds was then beginning to weave.⁴⁷ Corporate support from K.W.Linfoot Plc helped to extend PSL's reach beyond its meagre resources, particularly in its earliest days. It was not alone, however, in enjoying establishment support.⁴⁸ In hindsight, sponsorship of PSL achieved both of these aims for K.W.Linfoot Plc. [REDACTED]

PSL's story thus begins at the complex intersection of economic drivers and cultural capital in Leeds in the early years of the Twenty-first Century. It was a city about to face a recession which would threaten its earlier reliance on economic growth through its burgeoning retail, property and financial sectors, but not yet looking to culture as a route to an alternative future based on inclusive growth, almost a decade before igniting its bid to host the European Union's 'Capital of Culture' event in 2023.⁴⁹ In 2006 the team at PSL were, however, all but oblivious to our entanglement in these agendas, or our potential use value within narratives of economic growth and the creative city. At best we believed these to be benign or potentially useful *to us*, as

⁴⁷ Despite Linfoot's insistence that it would go ahead, the Lumiere development was eventually permanently shelved due to the post-2008 recession. 'Linfoot Laughs off Lumiere Claims', *The Business Desk Yorkshire* <<https://www.thebusinessdesk.com/yorkshire/news/2015-linfoot-laughs-off-lumiere-claims>> [accessed 17 August 2020].

⁴⁸ SPACE, seen as an otherwise 'artist-led' initiative, enjoyed the patronage of established art-world figures from the beginning. Bridget Riley was already an influential figure in 1968, representing Britain at the Venice Biennale in the same year that she co-founded SPACE with Peter Sedgley. Riley, 'adept at working her connections', used her platform to gain access to MPs including Jennie Lee, Minister for the Arts in Harold Wilson's administration, and art-world luminaries including Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Mark Rothko among many others. These she successfully recruited in support of SPACE's goal to persuade the Greater London Council to turn a building at the historic St Katharine Docks over to artists rather than developers. Moore also supported the young initiative financially, agreeing at Riley's suggestion to give half of his Erasmus Foundation prize money, which he had won that year, to SPACE. Anna Harding, 'Introduction', in *Artists in the City: SPACE in '68 and Beyond*, ed. by Harding (London: SPACE, 2018), pp. 5-12.

⁴⁹ 'About', *Leeds2023* <<https://leeds2023.co.uk/about/>> [accessed 16 June 2020].

nothing in our formal art education had prepared us for the pitfalls of negotiating with the forces of private capital. As we noted later, ‘In the beginning, we simply began’.⁵⁰



Figure 1.5, Installation view of *Meet Pamela*, which took place at PSL from November 2009 - February 2010, showing artwork by Laura Buckley (left) and Amy Stephens (centre). Photograph by Simon Warner. © The artists. Courtesy of the Trustees, Project Space Leeds.

The rawness of the roughly-finished space at Whitehall Waterfront, vast at 500 square metres with triple-height ceilings and curtain wall glazing, matched our individual and collective unpreparedness to undertake the journey on which we were embarking and the sparseness of our material resources. This blind faith in just getting on with it came heedless of the absence of a set of relevant skills that we would then proceed to learn on the job, or the potential pitfalls and later consequences of this approach.⁵¹ The first five years of PSL’s existence there, from 2007-12, were dominated by what I will identify later in the thesis as *Doing*, a particularly generative mode that characterises approaches within artist-led initiatives to fostering spaces, communities, networks, dialogues and opportunities among peers. PSL created a physical space that became a hub for a growing local community of artists, students

⁵⁰ Pippa Hale and Kerry Harker, ‘Introduction: PSL has Left the Building’, in *Leaving Las Vegas*, p. 2.

⁵¹ When the doors at PSL opened for the first time in July 2006, we were yet to secure any financial investment for the venture from any source other than Linfoot.

and new graduates who took part as exhibitors, curators, writers, technicians, staff and volunteers, creating networks among them and their peers alongside more established artists from further afield.⁵²

The early careers of artists who would later gain national and international visibility were nurtured at PSL, among them Simeon Barclay, Hardeep Pandhal and Rehana Zaman, all named in June 2020 among the artists selected for the high-profile *British Art Show 9*.⁵³ Although not overtly conscious of its role in supporting an artist-marketplace at the time, PSL undoubtedly played an anticipatory role in supporting the careers of artists who would later enter the arena of major institutions, among them Barclay, Pandhal and Zaman alongside Harry Meadley, Peter Mitchell, Aidan Moesby, Nous Vous, Janis Rafailidou, Amy Stephens and others. Histories of the contributions of artist-led initiatives to the earlier stages of artists' careers are, however, largely only to be found in anecdotal form and in the footnotes of history, buried within individual artists' *curricula vitae*. As such, their critical role in supporting emerging practice evades substantive analysis.

The years at Whitehall Waterfront were formative among the PSL team in testing possibilities for artist-led practice, and allied curatorial strategies, on an ambitious scale. Our presence there facilitated connection to other artist-led initiatives across the North, with whom we began to network and develop artist exchanges and residencies. We consciously identified as part of a northern 'scene' for artist-led practice, particularly as it was given shape at that time through editorial and photographic coverage in *Corridor8*, a journal of contemporary art and writing in the North. For its 2012 *Annual*, the journal published quarterly editions, 'focussing on

⁵² For example, an early project called *Wildwood* included work by established artists Heather and Ivan Morison and Laura Ford, alongside Manchester-based Rachel Goodyear, then on the verge of wider recognition and gallery representation, and Emma Bolland, who was then an early career artist based in Leeds. 'Wildwood', *Leaving Las Vegas*, pp. 20-21.

⁵³ Occurring every five years, this is the largest touring exhibition for contemporary art in the UK and is 'widely acknowledged as the most important recurrent exhibition of contemporary art produced in this country, unrivalled in its ambition, scope and national reach'. 'Press Release: British Art Show 9 – List of Artists and New Dates Announced', *Southbank Centre* <https://bynder.southbankcentre.co.uk/m/35866bb73ffa9790/original/Press-Release-British-Art-Show-9-List-of-Artists-and-New-Dates-Announced-.pdf?_ga=2.77561109.181070732.1593610132-1263556348.1593610132> [accessed 30 June 2020]. Both Barclay and Pandhal took part in *Glamourie*, curated by David Steans, at PSL from 14 January 2011-31 March 2012. Pandhal also curated *The Panj Piare*, a two-hour long exhibition in the space on 23 September 2010, and took part in *The Drawing Shed for No Soul for Sale* at Tate Modern from 14-16 May 2010. Zaman exhibited in *Peering Sideways* at PSL from 10 September - 10 December 2011. *Leaving Las Vegas*, pp. 36, 46-47, 50-51 and 57.

particular locations and facets of the visual arts ecology'.⁵⁴ This 'ecology' was understood to comprise at least four aspects: a commercial art market; artist-led spaces; art schools; and influential individuals, all explored through subsequent editions. The second of these mapped 27 artist-led spaces active at that time across the north. Described as, 'another important cog in the visual arts ecology,' the issue focused on seven of these, including PSL, through interviews with their organisers.⁵⁵ Hale and I were interviewed alongside artists who were then running The Royal Standard (Liverpool), S1 Artspace (Sheffield), the NewBridge Project (Newcastle), Rogue Project Space and Malgras|Naudet (Manchester), Supercollider (Blackpool) and Platform A Gallery (Middlesbrough).⁵⁶ These were the networks of peers with whom we self-identified.

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 1.6, Portrait of Project Space Leeds taken during the exhibition *Glamourie* for Corridor8's *Annual 2012*. Left to right: Pippa Hale, Kerry Harker, Zoë Sawyer. Photograph by Stephen Iles. © Corridor8.

⁵⁴ Bryony Bond, 'Editorial', in *Annual 2012: Quick Slow, Part 1* (Manchester: Corridor8, 2012), pp. 4-5.

⁵⁵ Mark Doyle and Rebecca Morrill, 'Artists Do It Best: The Artist-led Spaces', in *Annual 2012: Quick Slow, Part 2*, ed. by Bryony Bond (Manchester: Corridor8, 2012), p. 15.

⁵⁶ Diane Howse resigned from PSL in July 2011 prior to this interview.

Figure 1.7, Portrait of four of the The Royal Standard's directors, for Corridor8's *Annual 2012*. Left to right: Madeline Hall, Sam Venables, Frances Disley and Natalie Hughes. Photograph by Stephen Iles. © Corridor8.

Each initiative was represented by photographs of its organisers *in situ* taken by Stephen Iles, a Manchester based artist-photographer who was regularly commissioned by *Corridor8* at the time to produce a particular type of portrait photography that instilled a sense of 'cool' within featured initiatives.⁵⁷ For PSL,

⁵⁷ Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, future research might consider how a dominant aesthetic of the artist-led has been configured historically through photographic and filmic imagery. Although an under-researched area, this has nevertheless been critical in constructing enduring representations of artists' collective self-organisation, and their relationships with spaces. I am thinking, for example, of photographs documenting the early years of SPACE Studios, from 1968 onwards, which are used to illustrate the organisation's 50th Anniversary publication *Artists in the City*, or William Raban's 2015 film *72-82* which chronicles the first decade of Acme Studios. This imagery finds later echoes in Johnnie Shand Kydd's photographs of the 'Young British Artists' [YBAs] and his portraits of them as commissioned for the *Sensation* exhibition catalogue in 1997. Shand Kydd's aesthetic consciously drew, in turn, on Lord Snowdon's portrait of the 1960s London art world, published in *Private View*. More recently, Michael Heilgemeir's book *The Nomadic Studio*, documenting a transitional artist-led community in Bermondsey over a period of 18 months, references this tradition. Collectively, work by photographers such as Shand Kydd and Heilgemeir construct and perpetuate a narrative of the artist-led community as young, predominantly white, socially liberated, pictured in the studio or the social setting of the pub, and inevitably located in London. Nevertheless, it was within this art-historical lineage that Iles' image making for *Corridor8* evidently sought to situate itself. Johnnie Shand Kydd, quoted in 'Innocence Lost: Johnnie Shand Kydd on Photographing the YBAs in the 1990s,' *Artimage* <<https://www.artimage.org.uk/news/2016/innocence-lost-johnnie-shand-kydd-on-photographing-the-ybas-and-the-1990s-art-world/>> [accessed 4 June 2020].

inclusion in these dialogues and representation through Iles' image making was undoubtedly instrumental in encouraging a particular understanding of our role within what we then accepted as an actually existing, and benign, 'arts ecology' of which artist-led initiatives formed merely one cog among others. For example, in the interview with PSL, by Mark Doyle and Rebecca Morrill, Hale stated, 'As well as providing artists with exhibition opportunities, we can offer profile, contacts and professional development to help them move on to the next level'.⁵⁸ The implication here is clear: PSL's role was to provide a stepping stone in an artist's career understood as a linear trajectory to bigger and better things. What is critical to my analysis here is the normalising role of such statements in configuring the place, status and function – i.e. the value – of both artist-led initiatives and major institutions as *naturally occurring* within an ecology of the visual arts and thereby immutable.

This first period of PSL's activities was characterised by curatorial experimentation which foregrounded recurring devices such as the concept of the gallery as an extended studio. This was explored through artists' residencies that typically maintained public access to the space while artists produced work within it, followed by a more formal exhibition-type presentation of whatever had been generated. As artists ourselves, we took issue with the expulsion of the artist from the traditional gallery space, echoing Brian O'Doherty's assertion that,

In the gallery, the artist, when present, is an embarrassing piece of mobile furniture haunting his or her own product. Indeed, one of the primary tasks of the gallery is to separate the artist from the work and mobilize it for commerce.⁵⁹

Central to PSL's ethos was a belief that artists should be a visible presence in the gallery and that the subject of contemporary arts practice could be demystified by bringing artists and non-artists together in a relaxed and welcoming space. This, we believed, could be clearly differentiated from the precious environment and interpretative voice of the gallery configured as a white cube separated from its specific historic, geographic and temporal context.⁶⁰ The unit that PSL occupied bore

⁵⁸ Mark Doyle and Rebecca Morrill, 'Project Space Leeds', in *Annual 2012: Quick Slow Part 2*, p. 42.

⁵⁹ Brian O'Doherty, *Studio and Cube: On the Relationship Between Where Art is Made and Where Art is Displayed* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), p. 5-6.

⁶⁰ We drew here, in particular, from Brian O'Doherty's important critique of the ideology of the formal gallery space, originally published as a series of essays in *Artforum* in 1976 and

the inescapable traces both of its making, in its roughly finished concrete floor and bare breezeblock walls, and of its immediate environment, as the gigantic glazed panels that made up its exterior walls brought the riverside, nearby car park and new-build apartments directly into the exhibition space. In this, it aided our keenness to mitigate against misunderstandings of our activities as simplistic mimicry of formal, bespoke gallery spaces elsewhere. Accordingly, the organisation's name had been chosen very deliberately:

Our focus is on artists themselves as opposed to 'finished' artworks... But our intention, in choosing the label 'project space' as opposed to 'gallery' (around which there was much debate and careful thinking), was to signal that practice is central to our curatorial approach.⁶¹

This focus on artistic *practice* reconnects with the statement from Terry Atkinson that opens my thesis, in which he identifies a tension between *practice* and *career*. PSL's approach at that time arose in a belief that giving greater visibility to artists themselves within the exhibition space could potentially render contemporary art more accessible to the diverse publics who were becoming our audience. This comprised at times an incongruous mingling of suited business folk associated with our property developer sponsor, alongside artists, arts professionals, art students and academics primarily from Leeds and the immediate region. There was in reality, however, a tension between the desire to foreground connections between people, by breaking down divisive barriers separating artists and curators (as 'art professionals') from audiences (as non-professionals) for example, and PSL's magnetic attraction to the institutionalised sphere of contemporary art that is founded on the meritocratic values that Andrea Phillips has critiqued. In other words, PSL sought to challenge the hierarchical structures and behaviours associated with major institutions, while simultaneously adhering to the notion that we could help artists progress in their careers - inevitably meaning progression towards precisely that sphere. This tension was not visible to us at the time, not did we begin to imagine what other forms of organisation, structures, spaces or communities might offer more appropriate alternatives for sustaining these values into the future. This myopia was, I argue, exacerbated by a narrow focus on established and hierarchical models, primary

later collected under the title *Inside the White Cube*, as well as on his *Studio and Cube* of 2007. My quoting of O'Doherty in the Introduction to *Leaving Las Vegas* demonstrates our awareness of these critiques at the time.

⁶¹ Pippa Hale and Kerry Harker, 'Introduction: PSL has left the building', p. 2.

among them the status of registered charity, promoted through our relationship with ACE as our leading funder.



Figure 1.8, Nicolas Burrows of the artist collective Nous Vous in the group's temporary studio at PSL during the opening of *Morphic Resonance*, March 2009. Photograph by Simon Warner. © The artists. Courtesy of the Trustees, Project Space Leeds.

Nonetheless, at the time PSL articulated its values as relational and based upon practices of invitation, hosting and exchange. These underpinned the artistic programme. For example, the project *Morphic Resonance* (2009) sought to examine 'the urge among artists to control the dissemination and production of art' and invited other artist-led spaces to nominate artists and collectives for participation.⁶² Many of the artists involved utilised this platform to extend invitations to other artists and collectives in turn, and so the project became an unfurling series of 'Russian Dolls' that illustrated the central importance of artists' networks. *Peering Sideways* (2011) sought to nurture these by bringing together three groups of artists connected with

⁶² 'Morphic Resonance', *Leaving Las Vegas*, p. 29. The project was co-curated by PSL and Zoë Sawyer. The nominating organisations were theartmarket (Leeds), Castlefield Gallery (Manchester), Static and The Royal Standard (Liverpool) and Workplace (Newcastle). *Morphic Resonance* took place from 25 March – 27 June 2009, and the participating artists were Rachel Lancaster, Ant Macari, No Fixed Abode, Nous Vous, David Steans and Hardeep Pandhal, Rebecca Chesney, Robina Llewellyn and Elaine Speight (Pest Publication), Richard Rigg, Silver Mawson (Rhiannon Silver and Joe Mawson), Daniel Simpkins and Penny Whiteread.

studio groups around the UK within a discursive space for the examination of collectivity.⁶³ This was presented as three separate group shows running concurrently in the space, with the aim of ‘expand[ing] the networks of the participating artists and groups [and] sparking new relationships and collaborations’.⁶⁴ Alongside the development of these networks of practice, PSL sought to connect its work to that of established spaces, working with major UK and European institutions such as London’s Whitechapel Gallery and higher education institutions including KUVA, the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts. The organisation therefore inhabited, ostensibly, a middle ground between artist-led practice and major nodes on the landscape of established visual arts infrastructure. PSL aimed to occupy this intermediary space that we had already identified as one that was being constantly evacuated as artist-led initiatives attempted to walk the tight rope between precarity and longer-term sustainability, a challenge that animated several of the interviews I carried out in the research for my thesis. PSL’s mission was to cement a new model of a mid-scale contemporary arts space that could speak to the artist-led as much as it could to the established institution, connecting them along a trajectory that represented an artistic career as we then understood it:

The other thing about artist-led organisations is that it’s about sustainability. A lot of them run on very few resources and a lot of good will and energy by people who are early on in their career... It gets to a point, well it did for us, where you think to yourself, ‘right – I’m in my 30s now, still knocking around doing a lot of voluntary stuff not [and] not really seeing the fruits of our labour here, this just isn’t sustainable, we’ve got to find a way...’. With more and more graduates coming out that regenerates itself year on year but there needs to be stepping stones to the next level and I think that’s what we always wanted PSL to be. To be that stepping stone to establishing an artist’s career.⁶⁵

Crossing the Rubicon: Challenges of ‘Institutionalisation’

Sustainability was, therefore, at the forefront of our thinking as we sought alternatives to the short-lived nature of so many peer initiatives, although as I have stated this was

⁶³ The project ran from 10 September – 10 December 2011. The studio groups were Rogue Studios in Manchester, the Art House in Wakefield, and a group emerging from the MA Fine Art course at Goldsmiths’ in London, and the participating artists were Sophie Carapetian, Tom Crawford, Frauke Dannert, Ross Downes, Patrick Goddard, JL Murtaugh, Megan Rooney, Rehana Zaman, Paul Cordwell, Dave Griffiths, Jessica Longmore, Lee Machell, Dan Mort, Untitled Gallery, Ben Cove, Gill Greenhough, Victoria Lucas, Marion Michell, Aidan Moesby and Lois Palframan. *Leaving Las Vegas*, pp. 46-47.

⁶⁴ *Leaving Las Vegas*, p.47.

⁶⁵ Susanna Davies-Crook, ‘We’ve Got to Find a Way: An Interview with PSL’, in *Leaving Las Vegas*, p. 15.

compromised by the narrowness of the options available to us at that time. Progression, as we then imagined it, necessitated modifying the organisation to accommodate the structural realities of arts funding. In PSL's case, formalisation as a company in 2010 was followed swiftly by registered charity status in 2012, dramatically increased levels of public subsidy, and attaining NPO status with Arts Council England at the 2012-15 funding round. Just a few short years after its founding, PSL was emerging as a proto-institution that found itself in possession of employees, a Board of Trustees, and contractual obligations to its major funders, ACE and Leeds City Council.

The continuing impacts of the 2008 recession, including the voluntary liquidation of K.W.Linfoot Plc the following year, the resulting loss of the company's patronage, and our inability to determine the future ownership of our space, created increasingly unacceptable levels of uncertainty regarding our continued presence at Whitehall Waterfront.⁶⁶ In 2010 we began the search for more centrally located premises, aided by members of our Advisory Board that was newly instituted at the suggestion of ACE.⁶⁷ A presence in the city centre, we believed, could enable us to diversify our activities and generate earned income through commercial trading to lessen our dependence on a shrinking and already over-subscribed public purse. An explicit ambition to establish a permanent, independent home for contemporary art in Leeds was also hard-wired into PSL's ethos from its inception. Its programme, accordingly, recurringly sought partnerships with the local authority, academic institutions and leading arts organisations, and was specifically designed as a test bed to accelerate our progress towards establishing such a space while winning the hearts and minds of city gatekeepers and arts funders. This was an ambition that, at the time and arguably since, remained unarticulated in Leeds at the civic level, despite the comparable, contemporary emergence of regional galleries elsewhere across the UK including Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art (Gateshead, 2002), Middlesbrough

⁶⁶ Joe Shute, 'Debt Setback for Former Property Tycoon Following Court Hearing', *Yorkshire Evening Post* <<https://www.pressreader.com/uk/yorkshire-post/20120810/281681137024895>> [accessed 9 June 2020].

⁶⁷ Prior to becoming a registered charity, PSL's Advisory Board, instituted in 2010, included Iwona Blazwick (Director, Whitechapel Gallery), Professor Susan Collins (Artist and Director, Slade School of Fine Art), Jean Dent (Director of City Development, Leeds City Council), Gerald Jennings (Portfolio Director, Land Securities), Nigel McClea (Managing Partner, Pinsent Masons, Leeds), Peter Murray (Director, Yorkshire Sculpture Park), Gaby Robertshaw, and John Thorp (Civic Architect, Leeds City Council).

Institute of Modern Art (2007), Nottingham Contemporary (2009), the Hepworth Wakefield and Turner Contemporary in Margate (both 2011). Leeds was viewed then by its visual arts sector as a city that had historically led with its nationally and internationally-renowned performing arts institutions, particularly in dance, theatre and opera, without demonstrably sharing the same ambition for its visual arts. As the Leeds-based artist, writer and educator Derek Horton stated in 2012,

Like many postmodern postindustrial cities that have transformed their decaying industrial past, Leeds has attempted to turn itself into a destination city not just for the banks and finance companies but for affluent British and international tourists. Theatre, opera and ballet have benefitted, with major investment and influential champions, but the visual arts have rarely been an ingredient... with Leeds developing nothing to match the Baltic, Tate Liverpool, or even smaller institutions such as the Ikon in Birmingham, the Cornerhouse in Manchester or the Bluecoat and FACT in Liverpool.⁶⁸

This desire for what might now be termed a ‘levelling up’ to reflect more equitable distribution of funding to its visual arts sector, was a commonplace of discussions among artists and smaller-scale initiatives in Leeds at that time. It is a thread that runs through the pages of *Leaving Las Vegas*, the publication which reflected on PSL’s first five years as we prepared to exit Whitehall Waterfront in 2012. This is crucial in understanding an agenda that underpinned both PSL’s genesis and its later development, because it speaks to the question of *value* and *values* that concern my thesis: those of the visual arts sector in Leeds at the time, of artist-led initiatives, and of the next phase of PSL’s evolution as ‘The Tetley’. Even in 2012, these questions were central to internal discussions at PSL, as demonstrated in this statement that draws on *Size Matters*, Sarah Thelwall’s 2011 enquiry on behalf of Common Practice into the value, operation and potential of small-scale visual arts organisations:

Leeds still does not have [a permanent independent venue for the visual arts] and we wonder when the potential value of the visual arts (artistic, social, societal and fiscal) to the city will be fully recognised.⁶⁹

I return to Thelwall’s report later in my thesis. What I want to foreground here, however, is a critical misunderstanding complicating PSL’s role and reception in Leeds and the consequences of this for the early days of The Tetley. What I have conveyed here is that PSL clearly wanted to articulate both the value *and* values of artist-led praxis. This was evident in its foregrounding of the artist’s right to be

⁶⁸ Derek Horton, ‘Five Years’, in *Leaving Las Vegas*, pp. 8-9.

⁶⁹ Pippa Hale and Kerry Harker, ‘Introduction’, in *Leaving Las Vegas*, p. 4.

present within the exhibition space, its curatorial emphasis on open-ended exploration rather than formal exhibitionary modes, maintaining a provisional approach to knowledge production, and in its investment in sustaining artists' networks, particularly in the North. Simultaneously, PSL sought to force the city's hand on the creation of a larger, better funded and more visible permanent space for contemporary art aligned with regional equivalents mentioned earlier. In hindsight, this attempt to marry two competing ambitions – promoting an artist-led modality while achieving a level of sustainability that accompanies well-funded institutions – was unachievable for reasons to do with the systemic limitations of arts funding and approaches to cultural value that underpin its structural framework. This contradiction forms the central question that my thesis seeks to address and to put under pressure.

In 2011, as we prepared to step into a physical and conceptual intermediary space positioned somewhere between 'artist-led' and 'institution', there was only a hint of the trouble to come. In the light of PSL's rapid development, increased funding levels and evolving relationships with both ACE and the local authority, we had clearly felt compelled to begin questioning the validity of self-identifying as 'artist-led'. In *Leaving Las Vegas*, we stated:

We have always thought of and articulated PSL as an 'artist-led' organisation until quite recently. Our background in fine art education and as practicing artists undoubtedly informed our early thinking about what PSL was and could be, who it was for and how it would operate. As we move on to pastures new our modus operandi remains the same, even if the way in which we articulate it has shifted slightly (i.e. 'artist-focussed' rather than 'artist-led').⁷⁰

This apparently slight, but in practice fundamental, shift deserved closer examination than we allowed it. In 2011, however, amid a deep global recession and with our property developer sponsor in administration, the urgent need to secure alternative premises, and with them a better shot at sustainability, took precedence over any doubts about our course of action. We spent a year viewing city-centre properties left vacant due to the contraction in the commercial sector, but these routinely proved either unsuitable for our purposes, or inaccessible on the basis of cost or limiting short-term leases as 'meanwhile' space.

⁷⁰ *Leaving Las Vegas*, p. 2.



Figure 1.9, Interior of The Tetley during the capital programme, 2013. Photograph by Stephen Iles. Courtesy of the Trustees, Project Space Leeds.

Then, in early 2011, we were invited by engineering firm Arup to view the former Directors' Offices on the site of the former Joshua Tetley & Son Brewery that had come into the ownership of Carlsberg UK in 1998. This handsome building with art deco leanings was solidly constructed in 1930-1931 from red brick, Portland stone, terrazzo, wrought iron and oak as material manifestation of the Tetley company motto, 'Quality Pays'.⁷¹ Its solid material presence seemed to offer a vision of future stability and it was an easy leap to picture its generous spaces, organised over four floors with a substantial basement, as a new home for PSL. The building offered ample accommodation for gallery spaces as well as income-generating commercial activities. Repurposed from 2012-2013 in partnership with Carlsberg UK, Arup, architects Chetwoods and Leeds City Council, with funding from ACE, trusts and foundations and private donations, 'The Tetley' opened as a 'Centre for

⁷¹ Clifford Lackey, *Quality Pays: The Story of Joshua Tetley & Son* (Ascot: Springwood Books Limited, 1985), p. 49.

Contemporary Art and Learning’ in November 2013.⁷² The word ‘learning’ was chosen knowingly: my hope was not only that the venue would become a place for audiences to experience and learn about contemporary art through direct interaction with artists and a programme that prioritised participatory work, but that the organisation itself could learn and grow with them. Lubaina Himid neatly encapsulated this dialogical approach, which characterised The Tetley’s early years, when she described the building’s spaces as ‘a promenade through the processes and practices of contemporary art’.⁷³ At this juncture, roles that had hitherto been implicit among the team, in terms of the division of labour among its members, became explicit and were made public for the first time as we departed from what Alicia Miller terms the ‘sweat equity’ among artists within artist-led initiatives.⁷⁴



Figure 1.10, Artwork by Simeon Barclay during installation of the exhibition *The Feast Wagons* at The Tetley, October 2015. Photograph by the author.
© The artist and Project Space Leeds. Courtesy of the Trustees, Project Space Leeds.

⁷² The Tetley is a trading name and the venue is operated by PSL as the registered charity.

⁷³ Lubaina Himid in conversation with the author, 2011.

⁷⁴ Alicia Miller, ‘Artist-led Initiative to Arts Charity’, in *Artists in the City*, p. 154.

The Tetley: A Bruising Encounter with the Bureaucrat

With the opening of The Tetley, I took on the title of ‘Artistic Director’ as well as being a ‘Co-director’ of its newly established trading subsidiary, PSL Enterprises Ltd. Alongside the creation of galleries on the building’s first floor, including an expansive triple-height atrium, rooms on the ground floor were repurposed for commercial activities on an ambitious scale. These included a bar and restaurant, spaces for corporate hire with accompanying catering offer, and a small retail space. The entire third floor, which comprised a suite of smaller office spaces, was designed to generate further income through rentals to creative industries start-ups and SMEs. By the end of the 2014-2015 financial year, the organisation’s expeditious growth could be expressed quantitatively within its annual report, which showed a group income in excess of £1.52 million; nearly 120,000 visitors; over 6,000 participants in its events programme; opportunities for 183 artist and creative practitioners; the delivery of 11 major projects; and the involvement of 38 volunteers.⁷⁵

This journey, from PSL’s early existence in a makeshift space with access to only minimal financial resources, to The Tetley as a far more visible node on the cultural landscape of Leeds, with a significant turnover, was accomplished at a headlong pace in just seven years from the organisation’s founding moment in 2006. The statistics quoted above are a blunt tool for any deeper analysis of the challenges accompanying this rapid evolution. Any such scaling up in the arts requires the establishment of close partnerships with key stakeholders and funders, among them ACE and local authorities. Access to higher levels of funding is traded for capitulation to firmly established processes, discourses and modes of evaluation. What this journey initiated, for me, was a set of increasingly acute challenges occurring at the intersection of this established framework for culture and an approach that I consider within this thesis as ‘artist-led’. While a discourse on cultural value might situate this approach in binary opposition to that which is considered ‘institutional,’ as I will go on to demonstrate, it is not my intention here to uphold this dialectic. I contend, rather, that its *a priori* existence was manifest in a struggle for

⁷⁵ ‘Report of the Trustees and Audited Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2015 for Project Space Leeds’, *Charity Commission* <https://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/Accounts/Ends16/0001148716_AC_20150331_E_C.pdf> [accessed 27 May 2020].

meaning, among many of those directly involved in its stewardship, about the potential role, functions and ethos of The Tetley in its first two years of operation while I was its Artistic Director. This led directly to a confrontation between what were understood as two diametrically opposed, and therefore irreconcilable, modalities already established in the given discourse as artist-led *versus* institutional. Some have argued that this represents a ‘stagnated discourse’. In their introduction to *Institutions by Artists*, Jeff Khonsary and Kristina Lee Podesva argue:

Though the institution of art may have come to be defined as the museum and gallery, this is a theoretical conceit contradicted both by history and practice. It has, nevertheless, demonstrated a remarkable discursive endurance, more often than not stalling the art institution in the ditch of the museum and gallery.⁷⁶

Khonsary and Podesva’s argument is contextualised by the long histories of discourse on ‘artist-run centres’ in Canada and the parallel ‘alternative spaces’ of the United States. I argue through my later analysis of my interview data that this discursive endurance endlessly reproduces an oppositional misunderstanding that persists in troubling attempts to secure the future sustainability of artist-led initiatives in the UK and Ireland.

The increasing weight of funders’ requirements, particularly from ACE after entering its National Portfolio, coupled with the expansion of our team and influx of new voices to incorporate commercial expertise in catering and event management, combined to accentuate an internal contestation of how The Tetley could be positioned and communicated to its multiplying audiences. The venue became increasingly conceived as an institution with a civic role, for example by providing a ‘cultural anchor’ within the emerging ‘South Bank’ regeneration zone. This development, made possible by the evacuation of the extensive former industrial site around the Brewery, and the possible future arrival of a nearby Northern terminus for the HS2 high-speed rail project, elevated land values and fostered an enervated environment into which the fledgling Tetley stepped. Leeds City Council’s *South Bank Planning Framework*, adopted in 2011 and updated in 2016, specifically identified an opportunity to repurpose the building for cultural use within the site’s redevelopment:

⁷⁶ Jeff Khonsary and Kristina Lee Podesva, *Institutions by Artists: Volume One* (Vancouver: Phillip Editions, 2012), p. 13.

The Tetley's headquarters building should also be retained as a physical link to the brewing heritage of the site. Retention of this headquarters building could incorporate cultural uses such as a gallery, museum or other visitor attraction, and/or integrate a micro-brewery and public house, as it is a valuable heritage asset to the area. In developing proposals for the site, developers are encouraged to consider options which retain the brewery gatehouse building on Hunslet Road.⁷⁷

This assessment of the potential value of the building is significant, firstly as it brings into play processes of top-down cultural planning at the local authority level, and demonstrates how two trajectories collided in the making of 'The Tetley'. Not only was PSL transitioning from one concept of what an artist-led space could be into an altered vision of sustainability, but this also intersected with the transition of the former brewery site itself from an operational, industrial one to one that became codified, newly valued, and ultimately marketised as 'cultural heritage'. This collision complicated internal and external discussions on the role and purpose of The Tetley as a new venue attempting to wrestle meaning from this weighty 'heritage', in terms of visitor economy, while carrying with it the traces of its artist-led origins. Secondly, the statement demonstrates how processes of culture-led regeneration were explicitly understood contemporaneously in Leeds as developer-led. The *South Bank Planning Framework*, as quoted here, is specifically addressed to the city's commercial development sector as primary instigators of city development. The document contains no such invitation to artists, or indeed the cultural sector as a whole.

The intersection of PSL's foundational values as an artist-led initiative and the future potential of The Tetley as a cultural institution with a new symbolic role within a high-stakes regeneration initiative on the South Bank, perhaps inevitably caused tensions to arise regarding the interplay of its artistic and commercial agendas. This particularly concerned the role of these values, which had earlier been central, in generating sufficient footfall, and thereby income, to sustain the organisation at its newly enlarged scale. Promises made to funders regarding a bold new model of enhanced financial independence came of necessity to the fore, and the artistic programme risked taking on the role of facilitator, serving to generate footfall to the building and thereby to its bar and restaurant. The relentless pressures of establishing

⁷⁷ 'South Bank Planning Framework', *Leeds City Council*
 <<https://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/South%20Bank%20planning%20statement%20ADOPTED%20web%20LR.pdf>> [accessed 4 June 2020].

a new financial model were deemed to necessitate a departure from behaviours and forms of praxis that had characterised the development of PSL since 2006. Central to this was The Tetley's artistic programme, with increasing pressure to jettison a curatorial approach that had become PSL's hallmark, articulated in its prioritising of emerging artists, participatory projects, open-ended enquiry, and its support for work not yet validated by the art market. As the staff team was unable to move into The Tetley until just prior to opening due to asbestos-related delays in the construction programme, opening project *A New Reality* took a deliberately dialogical and elongated approach to encountering the new spaces, as my Co-curator Zoë Sawyer explained:

Deliberately paced over nine months, we wanted [*A New Reality*] to permit time to familiarise ourselves with The Tetley, to test out how our 'project space' ethos would translate in this setting and develop curatorial programming in response to our new home. The project is very much a 'live' process, designed to create a discursive and reflective environment to stimulate the production of new artwork and encourage new encounters with and experiences of art.⁷⁸



Figure 1.11, Book making workshop led by Jay Cover in a gallery at The Tetley during the *Nous Vous* residency *A Watery Line*, 2014. Photograph by Mat Dale. © The artists and Project Space Leeds. Courtesy of the Trustees, Project Space Leeds.

⁷⁸ 'Interview with The Tetley Co-founder and Curator Zoë Sawyer', *Aesthetica* <<https://aestheticamagazine.com/interview-with-tetley-curator-and-co-founder-kerry-harker-and-zoe-sawyer/>> [accessed 11 June 2020].

Maintaining a focus on the physical presence of artists in the gallery, the 2014 project *A Watery Line*, by the artist collective *Nous Vous*, took the form of a residency at The Tetley. During this, the artists extended invitations to the audience to take part in workshops that ‘sought to investigate the point where art interacts with everyday life through various forms of making’.⁷⁹ The building’s smaller galleries each became live and informal production spaces for recording music, making DIY books and prints or working with clay on a potter’s wheel, while the artists themselves produced a collaborative and improvised large-scale sculptural installation as a durational intervention within its central atrium. This subsequently evolved and unfolded as a platform for staging performances and readings. Such projects were to be rejected in favour of more formal exhibitions, and even, it was suggested, ‘blockbusters’. Attempts to explain art-historical processes whereby institutions such as the Whitechapel Gallery rose to prominence supporting the early careers of later luminaries including Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, David Hockney, Gilbert & George and Richard Long, or more recently Liam Gillick and Nan Goldin, were rejected in favour of a received wisdom that the programme needed to reflect more ‘popular’ concerns.⁸⁰

The Tetley in its early days was in effect an artist-led initiative in institutional clothing, an organisation still clinging tenuously to its foundational vision and values, even as these became increasingly obscured by new economic and artistic imperatives. Audience expectations of the emerging institution were arguably heightened by its tenure in a large and prominent building, its relationship with Carlsberg UK as a wealthy commercial sponsor with global reach, and the support of influential Trustees, among them Simon Wallis, Director of the Hepworth Wakefield, and the artist Lubaina Himid. In addition, the highly visible traces of the former Brewery, and our stewardship of a collection of associated memorabilia, presented opportunities to explore issues such as the gendered histories of Fordist labour and to link these to allied concerns regarding the nature of contemporary artistic labour. However, in opting to approach this weighty history head on, particularly through *A*

⁷⁹ ‘A Watery Line’, *Nous Vous* <<https://nousvous.eu/project/a-watery-line/>> [accessed 29 May 2020].

⁸⁰ ‘History of Firsts’, *Whitechapel Gallery* <<https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/about/history/history-firsts/>> [accessed 9 June 2020].

New Reality, we arguably only increased opportunities for misreadings of The Tetley as a ‘heritage’ venue. The effect of these combined factors was to instill, both externally and internally, an apparition of an institution with means far beyond the actuality. Even had they been appropriate, the resources for ‘popular’ programming choices of the kind being promoted by some were entirely absent and the building lacked the climate controls that would have been a prerequisite to borrowing valuable artworks from the city’s collection, something that Sawyer and me, as the curatorial team, were being increasingly pressured to do.⁸¹

The value of PSL’s earlier concerns began to be subject to constant pressure and renegotiation, with consequences for the organisation’s relationships with artists and audiences alike, particularly given that artists constituted a major audience group for the earlier venue.⁸² Where PSL had combined all of its activities in one space, drawing no formal distinction between the space of the artist and that of the audience, at The Tetley the presence of a new ‘Learning Studio’, now physically separated from the galleries, drew a clear delineation between the two. Keen to maintain parity among these functions, I created and recruited for a new role with the title ‘Curator of Participation’, which was designed to mitigate against the emergence of hierarchies among members of the ‘curatorial’ and ‘learning’ teams that could be seen to exist elsewhere, and indeed to challenge this ingrained division.⁸³ This in itself proved controversial as it departed from established practices within the sector. Nevertheless, such moves were evidence of a struggle, by the curatorial team, to open up new thinking about the behaviour and values of The Tetley as a mid-scale contemporary arts initiative attempting to inhabit an alternative space as something yet to be defined in the interstice between the given categories of ‘artist-led’ and ‘institution’. Due to these and other tensions, and the breakdown of certain personal friendships, I

⁸¹ For example, it was even suggested that we borrow a series of watercolours by J.M.W. Turner that would have required strict climate controls, heightened security and government indemnity.

⁸² Iwona Blazwick, Director of London’s Whitechapel Gallery and member of PSL’s Advisory Group prior to the move to The Tetley, once relayed to me a piece of advice which had been passed to her: ‘An audience arrives on foot but leaves on horseback’. These cautionary words were in my daily thoughts.

⁸³ Separation between the curatorial and learning functions of a gallery or museum is commonplace among major institutions. For example, the Hepworth Wakefield divides these into ‘Exhibitions and Collections’ and ‘Learning’ teams. ‘Our Staff’, *The Hepworth Wakefield* <<https://hepworthwakefield.org/our-story/about-us/our-staff/>> [accessed 4 June 2020]. After my departure the role reverted, unchallenged, to ‘Head of Participation’.

ultimately made the decision to leave my role in September 2015. This move, bringing to an end almost a decade of relentless struggle during which I routinely neglected my self-care and experienced what the organisers of Transmission termed ‘multiple burnouts’, brought unexpected feelings of relief as well as an inevitable sense of loss.⁸⁴

Artists Have Names, Don’t They? Exit and Aftermath

After leaving The Tetley, I held the post of Interim Director of The Art House in Wakefield for a few months after being a Trustee of the organisation for the preceding seven years. The Art House – one of the largest studio providers in the North of England – was itself founded by artists, in this case disabled artists seeking self-representation and the accessible workspaces that were in short supply in 1994. By 2016 it, too, had migrated to charitable and NPO status, and was no longer directly led by artists. Leaving The Art House in early 2016, as a new permanent position was being filled, I took this natural hiatus as an opportunity to return to the idea of Doctoral study, a long-held ambition left unrealised at that point by the realities of professional practice and family life.

It is beyond the scope and ambition of my thesis to set out the full extent of the challenges that I experienced as profoundly undermining and silencing, both as an experienced professional and as a woman in a leadership role, during the two fraught years at The Tetley.⁸⁵ Nor to count the personal cost of my commitment to PSL and its development, my investment of physical and emotional labour over a period of nearly ten years. How am I to account, within the given terms of *cultural value* and the audit culture of the arts, for the time spent caring for and about PSL, the mundane but essential acts of cooking, cleaning, shopping and transporting, that nurtured its early days? Michael Hardt proposes affective labor as a facet of today’s immaterial labour (‘that is, labor that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, knowledge or communication’) and notes how feminist analyses have long identified the potentiality of ‘*kin work* and *caring labor*’ as aspects of the affective labour

⁸⁴ Transmission Committee, 21 June 2017.

⁸⁵ When PSL became a registered charity in 2011, I had already served as a Trustee on the Board of the Art House in Wakefield for three years and had also worked as Curator of Exhibitions for Harewood House Trust for three years from 2008-11.

traditionally regarded as women's work.⁸⁶ The more recent phenomenon that Hardt identifies, however, is how affective labour has become central to the capitalist mode of production: 'What are new, on the other hand, are the extent to which this affective immaterial labor is now directly productive of capital and the extent to which it has become generalized through wide sectors of the economy'.⁸⁷ This includes the creative and cultural industries, as they are now styled. Hardt sees the potential of affective labour as 'biopower', a force that can operate from below, inverting Foucault's concept of biopower imposed from above as the exercise of governmentality. Further, this biopower from below is 'strongly configured as gendered labor'.⁸⁸ These observations have consequences for how women and nature can be conflated as they are both subordinated by capitalist economic development. What is interesting to note here, however, is the invisibility of the women's labour that initiated and sustained PSL, particularly in the period prior to securing more significant investment from funders. The value of these affects for capital became more explicitly tangible, however, in the context of The Tetley at the point where actual economic value began to be generated for private commerce, for example through sales of food and beverages, and the development of new products that were developed in The Tetley's kitchen but later privatised as separate commercial entities.⁸⁹

It is difficult to find the words to describe my deep connection to PSL as an initiative that began in the same year that my son was born, or how precious the hours were that we spent growing together at Whitehall Waterfront and The Tetley - an entanglement of my maternal labour, understood as both the tasks of reproduction (procreation) and the biopolitical production involved in the creation of life (for Hardt the 'production and reproduction of affects').⁹⁰ Until recently, The Tetley's website recorded only anecdotally that the organisation was 'originated by artists', neglecting to name the individuals – all women as I have recalled – who founded it and who

⁸⁶ Michael Hardt, 'Affective Labor' in *boundary 2*, Vol.26, No.2 (Summer 1999), pp. 89-100.

⁸⁷ Hardt, 'Affective Labor', p. 97.

⁸⁸ Hardt, 'Affective Labor', p. 98.

⁸⁹ The Tetley is in effect a 'tied house' due to the nature of its relationship with Carlsberg UK who retain ownership of the building. During the first two years of its existence, at least, the venue was contractually obliged to the exclusive purchase of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks from Carlsberg, through the terms of its lease on the building.

⁹⁰ Hardt, 'Affective Labor', p. 99.

made such significant contributions to its early years.⁹¹ The wider and specific contributions by women to the initiation and sustenance of artist-led initiatives are an under-researched phenomenon.⁹² Traces of this significance emerge, however, from my case studies on Grand Union, ROAR and the ELP, all of which are currently led by women, as well as echoes that are discernible from historical accounts. For example, Dinah Prentice and Sylvani Merilion were among the artist-initiators of Ikon, originally conceived as a peripatetic ‘gallery without walls’.⁹³ As the initiative began to grow, however, their continuing involvement was problematised, for both women, by their experiences after having children. As the young organisation was not yet on an even financial keel, Prentice took a more secure job at the city’s recently opened Midlands Arts Centre, while Merilion faced similar choices:

I resigned in 1967 after my second exhibition [at Ikon’s first space], mainly because I was pregnant (having married in 1963) and I continued teaching and making my own work. I thought, ‘I’ve got to give up something, I can’t do it all’.⁹⁴

PSL’s status as a women-led initiative was never explicitly addressed in its programming, although Zoë Sawyer and I expressed our feminism through an insistence on creating equitable space for women among the exhibiting artists. Of the 310 individual artists and collaborators from 2007-12 named in *Leaving Las Vegas*, almost half (47.4%) were women. This statistic demonstrates a progressive approach to addressing the gender division on representation of women artists that has been the subject of much recent debate about institutions such as Tate.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Alongside PSL’s Founders, I want to also acknowledge here the enormous contribution of Zoë Sawyer, herself a fellow alumna of Fine Art at Leeds, to the development of both PSL and The Tetley, where she remained as Curator after my departure until September 2017. The artist and more recently educator Amelia Crouch, who was PSL’s Gallery Manager and Co-Programme Manager prior to 2011, needs also to be credited here. I am grateful to my supervisor, Professor Griselda Pollock, who ensured that her role as a Trustee of The Tetley enabled her to address the erasure of the founders’ names.

⁹² An exception is Gill Park’s recent historical study of The Pavilion Women’s Photography Center, founded in Leeds in 1983. This makes a welcome contribution to the histories of feminist and artist-led cultural practices in Britain. Gill Park, *The Pavilion Women’s Photography Center 1983-1993: Deciphering an ‘Incomplete’ Feminist Project*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2018.

⁹³ ‘About – History’, *Ikon Gallery* <<https://www.ikon-gallery.org/about/history/>> [accessed 9 June 2020].

⁹⁴ Jonathan Watkins and Diana Stevenson, *Some of the Best Things in Life Happen Accidentally: The Beginnings of Ikon* (Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, 2004), p. 35.

⁹⁵ For example, Helen Gorrill noted in the Guardian as recently as 2018 that, ‘While Tate appears to have a 30% cap on the collection of female artists, its allocation of annual budget

Stating only that ‘artists remain at the centre of everything we do,’ The Tetley’s organisational narrative now omits any specificities of the legacies and contributions of artist-led practice that are in its DNA. Its online exhibition archive records none of the projects prior to October 2016, and the tenth anniversary of PSL’s opening, in 2017, went unremarked upon. This effects a cultural erasure, like a dirty secret swept under the rug, and hints at the symbolic violence enacted under processes of institutionalisation. This erasure is echoed at the civic level: Leeds City Council’s official ‘South Bank Leeds’ website hosts a case study on the Tetley, which erroneously suggests:

The Tetley came from an artist-led background, but really started in the South Bank from scratch. It is now one of the Arts Council England’s National Portfolio Organisations, which means they’re one of just 800 organisations in England who receive regular funding from the Arts Council...⁹⁶

As I have already stated, PSL in fact secured NPO status with ACE in 2011, before leaving Whitehall Waterfront, and the early years of The Tetley were a conscious attempt to maintain a fidelity to the work of the earlier venue. I am no longer actively involved in the life of The Tetley. I am fortunate, however, to have maintained friendships with many who shared that journey, and can view it today, from a distance, as a significant development within the cultural infrastructure of Leeds, with wider regional and national relevance. However, as an attempt to break new ground in terms of an alternative trajectory towards the sustainability of artist-led practice, it is a failed project.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have revisited my personal history with artist-led practice through a brief history of PSL and The Tetley, viewing these projects through the lens of three concepts that are central to the first part of my thesis: *place, value and institution*. These become the ‘sensitizing concepts’ that inform my qualitative research and analysis in Part 2. I have examined here how both PSL and The Tetley were shaped

is even worse, with as little as 13% spent on works by female artists in recent years’. Helen Gorrill, ‘Are Female Artists Worth Collecting? Tate Doesn’t Seem to Think so’, *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/13/tate-female-artists-museum-diversity-acquisitions-art-collect>> [accessed 16 June 2020].

⁹⁶ ‘Case study: The Tetley’, *South Bank Leeds* <<https://southbankleeds.co.uk/case-studies/the-tetley>> [accessed 17 June 2020].

by their grounding in place – Leeds during the decade from 2006-15 – particularly during a period of economic crisis since 2008 and a subsequent turn to ‘culture-led regeneration’ as the dominant civic narrative. This narrative, which resurfaces in my case study of the ELP and its relationship with ‘Leeds2023’, provided both opportunities and threats to the establishment of The Tetley in particular. This jeopardy specifically relates to how *cultural value* (and accompanying financial resources) could be attached to the emerging institution as it began to provide a more prominent node carrying the weighty responsibilities of anchoring the emerging South Bank regeneration zone and providing continuity as the visible traces of its erased ‘cultural heritage’. I have further described the emergence of The Tetley from PSL as a process of ‘institutionalisation’ troubled by the existence of *a priori* (mis)understandings of both ‘artist-led’ and ‘institution’ as fixed categories associated with specific structural and behavioural traits. The persistence of this binary, and the apparent inevitability of linear progression from one to the other, is also to be found at work in my later analysis of Grand Union as an initiative poised on the brink of a similar transformation. Finally, I have discussed how PSL’s evolution into a more ‘institutional’ form challenged its foundational values based on collectivity, attempted erasure of received physical and conceptual boundaries between ‘artist’ and ‘audience’ and the creation of a community of *practice* that was ultimately displaced during its later development as The Tetley. In the following chapter I will widen my scope from a situated practitioner’s narrative to examine what I have described as a ‘field’ of artist-led practices across the UK and Ireland, in order to test *place, value and institution* on a larger stage and to establish the field as one of scale, breadth and longevity that render it worthy of substantive research.

CHAPTER 2 – THE RESEARCH CONTEXT: ARTIST-LED INITIATIVES IN THE UK AND IRELAND SINCE THE 1990s

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Figure 2.1, SPACE Studios at the former St Katherine Docks, London, with inflatables by Graham Stevens, 1969. Photograph by Andrew C. Tweedie. © GASACT.

The Case: Longevity, Logics, Values and Forms

I shall now broaden the picture and draw on research, such as it is, to identify the characteristics of artist-led initiatives as a much broader set of practices. My research has established this as a substantive and systematic field with longevity, logics, values and forms that counter more routine descriptions of them as merely anticipatory and/or amateur in nature. Although they produce physical spaces of the type I focus on in my thesis and introduced through the earlier discussions of *Womanhouse* and PSL/The Tetley, artist-led initiatives vary widely in actuality across diverse formats, platforms and agendas. As a body of artistic practices, they foster, *inter alia*, roving curatorial enterprises, forms of publishing, research initiatives, activism, socially-engaged practices, online projects hosted via websites and social media, alternative art schools and commercial initiatives such as art fairs. I use the term ‘artist-led initiatives’ to refer to this diverse terrain of practice throughout my thesis, but acknowledge and analyse the challenges for their definition in this chapter. In doing so, I aim to investigate whether it is possible to configure and thereby reevaluate a

trajectory of artist-led initiatives as a specific form with longevity, breadth and depth, and its own attendant histories, techniques, logics and discourses that are central to the very notion of artistic practice as it has been conceptualised since at least the 1960s.

The contemporary picture in the UK and Ireland mirrors a wider pattern across developed nations globally by which artist-led initiatives proliferate in large numbers primarily, but not exclusively, clustered in major urban developments. There, the presence of both formalised art education offered by higher education institutions, and a developed infrastructure for contemporary art in the shape of established institutions, combine to foster large concentrations of art students and artists – the raw material of artist-led initiatives. Some flourish beyond the major metropolitan areas, increasingly in rural and coastal locations, as well as the smaller towns, as digital connectivity coupled with the rising costs of studio space in major centres have made professional practice in these alternative sites both more appealing and viable. A survey of artist-led initiatives in Europe, published in 2016, found well over 500 active at that time across the territory alongside many more which had been so until 2010 or later.⁹⁷ The same directory lists 135 across the UK and Ireland, although a detailed consideration of organisations included here immediately raises the key challenge of seeking consensus on definitions of the ‘artist-led’.

While it is true that some of these initiatives are short-lived, either by design or default, large numbers still active today have achieved a longevity that has seen them celebrate significant milestones reached decades after their founding moments. The table that follows lists a selection of initiatives in the UK and Ireland founded by artists (sometimes working collaboratively with others) more than 10 years ago and still active, albeit often in transfigured forms, today.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ ‘The Artist-Run Index’, in *Artist-Run Europe: Practice/Projects/Spaces*, ed. by Gavin Murphy and Mark Cullen (Eindhoven: Onomatopée, 2016) pp. 160-198.

⁹⁸ The table combines data from several sources, as well as knowledge accumulated through my own experiences within the artist-led field. Published sources are ‘The Artist-Run Index’, in *Artist-Run Europe*; ‘Timeline’, *Archives of the Artist-led* <<https://archivesoftheartistled.org/the-directory/timeline>> [accessed 20 January 2020]; and self-authored histories of individual organisations.

Name of organisation in 2020 (Original name)	Location	Year founded	Duration (Years)
Institute of Contemporary Arts	London	1947	73
Arnolfini	Bristol	1961	59
Ikon Gallery	Birmingham	1964	56
Project Arts Centre	Dublin	1966	54
Collective	Edinburgh		
SPACE	London	1968	52
Amber Collective	London/Newcastle		
ACME	London	1972	48
Spike Island (Artspace Bristol)	Bristol	1976	44
Mission Gallery	Swansea	1977	43
Photofusion (Photo Co-op)	London	1979	41
Artspace Portsmouth	Portsmouth	1980	40
Aspex Gallery	Portsmouth	1981	39
Chisenhale Gallery	London	1982	38
Queen Street Studios	Belfast	1983	37
Transmission	Glasgow		
Temple Bar Gallery + Studios	Dublin		
Pavilion (The Pavilion)	Leeds		
Collective	Edinburgh		
Castlefield Gallery	Manchester	1984	36
The Showroom	London		
Glasgow Sculpture Studios	Glasgow	1985	35
Terrace Gallery	Harewood	1988	32
Cubitt	London	1989	31
Coventry Artspace	Coventry	1991	29
Catalyst Arts	Belfast		
East Street Arts	Leeds		
Locus+	Newcastle		
Studio Voltaire	London	1993	27
Bow Arts	London		
The Art House	Wakefield		
Somerset Art Works	Somerset		
S1 Artspace	Sheffield	1994	26
Rogue Studios	Manchester		
Generator Projects	Dundee	1995	25
Pallas Projects/Studios	Dublin		
RED (Red Gallery)	Hull	1996	24
Vane	Newcastle		
g39	Cardiff	1997	23
Static	Liverpool		
Islington Mill	Salford	1998	22
A Space Arts	Southampton		
Standpoint Gallery	London	2000	20
Bloc Projects	Sheffield	2001	19
Art Gene	Barrow-in-Furness		
		2002	18

In Certain Places	Preston	2003	17
Void	Derry		
Outpost	Norwich	2004	16
The Guesthouse	Cork		
Embassy Gallery	Edinburgh	2005	15
Workplace Gallery	Gateshead		
Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance	Rotherham		
126 Artist-run Gallery	Galway	2006	14
Limbo	Margate		
The Tetley (Project Space Leeds)	Leeds		
The Royal Standard	Liverpool		
Airspace Gallery	Stoke-on-Trent	2007	13
Auto Italia South East	London		
MAP (Music and Arts Production)	Leeds	2008	12
Backlit	Nottingham		
Eastside Projects	Birmingham	2009	11
Chapel Arts Studios	Andover		
Grand Union	Birmingham		
The NewBridge Project (PopUp Initiative CIC)	Newcastle	2010	10
Neon Workshops	Wakefield		

Figure 2.2, Chronology of organisations founded by artists since 1947 and still active in 2020.

This chronology, original research assembled for my thesis, is limited to initiatives that are still active today and is, therefore, non-representative of the scale of these practices, which also feature ephemerality as either a deliberate or accidental move. For every initiative listed here, there are dozens more that have come and gone on a far more temporary basis. The list does begin, however, to suggest several important factors for any historical analysis.

Firstly, that there is a consistency in the emergence of such projects since the early 1960s that goes beyond any conceptualisation of them as a merely opportunistic and therefore sporadic response to variations within the wider economic environment. There is a compelling causal link between their emergence and the availability of inexpensive or free spaces, such as those made available by the evacuation of city retail cores during periods of economic recession. This is, however, arguably not the sole or even major contributing factor in their continuing arrival with such regularity over an extended timeframe of several decades. In fact, my research demonstrates that artist-led initiatives have emerged consistently in the UK and Ireland year on year since the mid 1960s, a period of over half a century. Their arrival at such scale over time calls for a substantive analysis of their specificities, something which is denied

by the (mis)recognition encapsulated in the email from the Cultural Institute at the University of Leeds that I quoted in my introduction.

Depreciative analyses of artist-led initiatives can also be discerned from elsewhere within contemporary artistic practice. In his analysis of press releases distributed by artist-run spaces in Glasgow, London and Manchester in the mid-1990s, the artist, writer, curator and educator Mark Harris writes, ‘The artist-run shows in Britain are the artist community speaking to itself’.⁹⁹ This statement similarly denies artist-led initiatives any wider significance within the cultural sector while simultaneously undervaluing their importance to communities of artists for whom my research claims they represent essential support structures. Small-scale initiatives that make up the majority of contemporary arts venues might appear to offer supportive peers for those running artist-led spaces. In their essay *Smallness*, however, authors Abu EIDahab, Choi and Pethick, all Directors of small-scale venues in Europe at the time of its publication, are at pains to distinguish their initiatives from those that are artist-led:

Working intimately with artists, choosing the parameters of our relationship to the politics of representation, and being flexible yet professional, is what differentiates us from museums or artist-run spaces.¹⁰⁰

It is not clear which of these characteristics – working intimately with artists, or being political, flexible and/or professional – the authors dissociate with artist-led initiatives. What these examples convey, however, is that there is a problem at the level of establishing and articulating *what they are* - their value and contributions.

Secondly, it can be noted from the table above that such projects are widespread across the geographic area of the research and not limited primarily to London and Glasgow, commonly proposed as the two major centres for these forms of practice in the UK. For example, the 1997 project *life/live* at the Musée d’Art Moderne in Paris focused on contemporary practice in the UK. Alongside an exhibition of work by individual artists, an *Anthology* was published and this lists 49 ‘Artist-run and Independent Spaces’ thought worthy of examination among all those

⁹⁹ Mark Harris, ‘The Press Release and Alternative Spaces’, in *Who’s Afraid of Red White & Blue: Attitudes to Popular and Mass Culture, Celebrity, Alternative & Critical Practice & Identity Politics in Recent British Art*, ed. by David Burrows (Birmingham: Article Press, 1998), p. 63.

¹⁰⁰ Mai Abu EIDahab, Binna Choi and Emily Pethick, ‘Smallness’, in *Circular Facts* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011), pp. 86-93 (p. 87).

then active across the entire territory. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, an overwhelming 34 of these were based in London, with another four based in Glasgow.¹⁰¹ This perhaps says less about the distribution of artist-led practice in the UK and Ireland in 1996 than it does about what was visible at that point from this particular institutional perspective, the condition of visibility resting largely on having relationships with the centralisation of the UK's contemporary art market in London. As the table demonstrates, many other initiatives in alternative locations to the capital were active at that point and could have been represented.

Thirdly, the data contests the reductive notion that any narrative overview of the histories of these initiatives should necessarily look only to London for the earliest instances of their emergence. Projects by artists were being initiated in locations outside the capital – including Bristol, Birmingham, Dublin and Edinburgh – in the 1960s at least concurrently, if not earlier, than in London. This counters a characterisation of projects in London as the ‘ground zero’ of artist-led practice in the UK. *Archives of the Artist-led*, for example, an online project initiated by Michael Heilgemeir, lists SPACE (1968) and Dilston Studios (1969) as the earliest entries on its *Timeline*, followed by Butler's Wharf (1971), ACME Studios (1973) and Kingsgate Workshops (1978).¹⁰² Only Transmission in Glasgow (1983) is temporarily allowed to puncture this London-centric narrative of artistic innovation, before picking it up once more with City Racing (1988) and Lewisham Arthouse (1991) as the subsequent entries. Only from the mid-1990s onwards do regional examples make an appearance, starting with S1 Artspace in Sheffield and Rogue Studios in Manchester (both 1995). This omits the earlier example of East Street Arts, founded in Leeds in 1993. The example of *Archives of the Artist-led* illustrates the problems of

¹⁰¹ Alton, Edinburgh, Halifax, Liverpool, Manchester, Nailsworth (Gloucestershire), Newcastle upon Tyne, Reading and Smethwick (West Midlands) were all represented by one initiative, with Belfast's Catalyst Arts as the sole entry for Northern Ireland. In her preface to the exhibition catalogue, the Museum's Director, Suzanne Pagé painted a slightly contradictory picture of how these were selected: ‘This project was decided upon three years ago and was led by Laurence Bossé and Hans-Ulrich Obrist. Given the highly specific rules and issues that animate this scene, they were determined to get a first-hand impression of its many networks. Making repeated visits to Belfast, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Halifax, Leeds, London, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Nailsworth and elsewhere, they worked in the field, avoiding the usual circuits—and customary critical assumptions—in favour of the informal web of complicity woven by the artists themselves’. Suzanne Pagé, ‘Preface’, in *life/live: La Scène Artistique au Royaume-Uni en 1996 de Nouvelles Aventures* (Paris, Éditions des Musées de la Ville de Paris, 1996), pp. 8-9.

¹⁰² ‘Timeline’, *Archives of the Artist-led*.

historical accuracy and biased selectivity that characterise many such initiatives, posing challenges of reliability for research on this phenomenon.

Accepting that artist-led initiatives emerged at a greater collective *scale* in London than elsewhere, my research demonstrates a more complex and distributed picture than this familiar narrative would allow. There is a massing of these projects in the North and Midlands of England in particular that becomes important for their relationships with notions of ‘place’ considered as relations between a centre – of the art market in the UK – and its periphery, with its alternative realities of artistic practice. To draw a direct line, as I do here, between the artists’ projects of the 1960s and those occurring well into the Twenty-first Century is to suggest a teleology that constitutes them as indicative of an artistic *formation* – as a real product rather than merely a by-product of the fragile conditions experienced by young artists after graduation. The following statement reveals how confidently East Street Arts could express, in 1993, its sense of participating in a *movement* for artist-led practice:

East Street Arts was founded by Karen Watson and Jon Wakeman at East Street Mills (Leeds) in 1993. It took reference and inspiration from the history and current developments within the artist-led movement.¹⁰³

Watson and Wakeman were clearly conscious of other artist-led initiatives, perhaps operating internationally, with which the nascent initiative wished to align itself.

Megs Morley’s description of the artist-led scene in Ireland also configures this as a movement, its emergence linked to allied forms of social and political action:

Emerging from decades of cultural censorship, from the 1970s on... we can start to see the beginning of the development of a growing, more independent or self-organised art scene in Ireland, wherein artists began to collaborate and claim space for experimentation, cross-disciplinarity, and in solidarity with social and political aims and objectives. While not specifically a counter to institutions as such, these artist-led initiatives certainly attempted to secure space for alternative practices that, in the context of a post-revolution malaise and religious oppression, had become culturally insular and suffocating to artists...¹⁰⁴

Finally, what the chronological organisation of the data also begins to suggest is the longitudinal importance of artists’ contributions to the creation of nationally

¹⁰³ ‘History’, *East Street Arts* <<https://eaststreetarts.org.uk/fluxcapacitor/about/history/>> [accessed 20 January 2020].

¹⁰⁴ Megs Morley, ‘The Artist-led Archive: Sustainable Activism and the Embrace of Flux’, in *Artist-Run Europe: Practice/Projects/Spaces*, p. 76.

significant infrastructure for contemporary art. This history of artist-led contributions remains to be written, yet major institutions including Arnolfini, Aspex Gallery, the ICA, Ikon Gallery, Spike Island and The Tetley began life as projects initiated and led by artists. Examples of artist-led initiatives from across Europe that are still active can be traced to even earlier eras: the Association of Visual Artists Vienna Secession was founded by artists in 1897; Unge Kunstneres Samfund in Oslo in 1921; and PAC Gallery in Milan in 1947 for example. I argue that histories of the artist-led, as an under-researched area of artistic practice, are complex and contested. While PAC Gallery is listed in its *Index* of artist-led initiatives by the publication *Artist-Run Europe*, the ‘history’ section of the Gallery’s own website claims it instead as an initiative of the Municipality of Milan.¹⁰⁵ Although it is not the work of my thesis to assemble an historical overview of the emergence of artist-led spaces, I want to acknowledge here the unavailability of such histories as a major absence within our art historical understanding.

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Figure 2.3, *Double 6*, a one-night performance by Ashley Holmes and R.I.P Germain, hosted by Poor Image Projects in the disused courtroom of Leeds Town Hall, 9 August 2019. Photograph: Julian Lister. © The artists and Poor Image Projects.

¹⁰⁵ ‘History’, *PAC Padligione d’Arte Contemporanea*
<<http://www.pacmilano.it/en/about/history/>> [accessed 14 May 2020].

A Vibrant Contemporary Scene

The initiation of projects by artists is far from a solely historical phenomenon. Today, new artist-led initiatives continue to emerge across the UK and Ireland at scale and with regularity. In Leeds alone, formal Fine Art education is on offer at four institutions – Leeds Arts University, Leeds Beckett University, University Centre Leeds and the University of Leeds – creating a critical mass of art students and new graduates who continue to introduce self-organised projects into the city with regularity. Some of those which have emerged in Leeds in recent years are *Nocturne* (2016-) which creates a supportive, informal and discursive space for ideas and work in progress through events such as ‘crits’ and through publications; *Poor Image Projects* (2018-) a roving curatorial platform for audio visual and moving image art founded by Bethan Hughes and Anya Stewart; *Freehold Projects* (2019-) which is run on a co-operative, volunteer model, operating until recently from an unlet charity shop in the city centre; and *Threshold* (2020-) a project space for sculpture located in the front garden of a traditional back-to-back house in the students’ area of Burley.¹⁰⁶ Graduates of the city’s fine art education programmes have played key roles in the formation of these and many similar initiatives.

Further afield, this picture is mirrored in other locations. In 2013, Liverpool-based artist Kevin Hunt initiated the *Artist-led Hot100*, an artwork commissioned by artists’ support and advocacy organisation AN for their *Signpost* publication which sought to create a guide to the early years of professional practice for new fine art graduates.¹⁰⁷ The *Hot100* aimed to spotlight some of the ‘most superb activity being facilitated by emerging independent artists and curators right now in the UK,’ with a focus on young projects under four years old, admittedly formulated by Hunt on a ‘subjective scale of nonsensical proportions’.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, the list operates as a useful historical document in listing dozens of initiatives then active across the UK and Ireland in Belfast, Birmingham, Blackpool, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Coventry, Dundee, Edinburgh, Frome, Glasgow, Herefordshire, Leeds, Leicester,

¹⁰⁶ Other recent initiatives by artists in Leeds include Serf, Club, iam collective, Precious, Lame Studios, Paint by Number, Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun and &Model.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Signpost’, *a-n* <<https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/just-published-signpost-guide-for-new-artists/>> [accessed 21 January 2020]

¹⁰⁸ ‘Home’, *Kevin Hunt* <<http://www.kevin-hunt.co.uk/page3.htm>> [accessed 20 January 2020].

Lincoln, Liverpool, Llangadog, London, Manchester, Margate, Newcastle, Nottingham, Norwich, Oxfordshire, Penzance, Plymouth, Sheffield, Stoke on Trent, Swansea and Worcester, alongside roving and online projects. Hunt revisited the project in 2017, producing a new list, again commissioned by AN, this time to accompany their *Assembly* artists' gathering in Liverpool. This more recent listing aimed to 'celebrate some of the most exciting artist-led activity across the UK that has emerged in the last four years'.¹⁰⁹

A comparative analysis of the two lists, created four years apart as a snapshot of emerging artist-led practices, reveals a similar pattern of dispersal around the UK and Ireland, with 30 locations named in the 2013 list compared with 33 in the 2017 iteration. The number of London-based initiatives also remains constant (22 in 2013 compared to 23 in 2017) and consistently dominant with a far greater number of initiatives cited than other locations (Glasgow hosted nine of the selected initiatives in 2013, while Liverpool hosted eight in 2017). What differs markedly from one list to another however is the percentage of non-venue based projects (i.e. not primarily focused on the provision of a gallery or project space), due either to their deliberately peripatetic curatorial approach, or the fact that they exist online or have an alternative focus, for example art education or publishing. In 2013 the number of such non-venue based projects represented just 18% of those listed, while in 2017 this rose to 42%. Within this later figure, ten of the initiatives are listed as pedagogical, a form of activity entirely absent from the earlier list. While Hunt's 'subjective scale' must be taken into account here in his entirely personal selection of projects, this later emphasis in the 2017 list reflects the growing emergence of alternative modes of practice. One contributing factor is the obvious rise of digital and pedagogical projects that I have already noted. In *School*, Sam Thorne notes how the latter in particular have emerged with 'density and breadth' since the turn of the millennium.¹¹⁰ Accordingly, the list effects a diminishing presence for venue-based initiatives aiming to create more traditional spaces for art such as studios with galleries or project spaces.

¹⁰⁹ 'New Artist-led Hot 100 Launched at Assembly Liverpool', *a-n* <<https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/new-artist-led-hot-100-launched-assembly-liverpool/>> [accessed 11 December 2020].

¹¹⁰ Thorne, *School*, p. 25.

My narrative account of the genesis of PSL and The Tetley in Chapter 1, however, indicates how the emergence of artist-led *spaces* is constrained by both private commercial interests on the one hand and civic narratives of ‘culture-led regeneration’ on the other. While private ownership constricts the availability of appropriate and affordable spaces, particularly in the core of major urban centres, a tendency towards externally-driven processes of ‘masterplanning,’ initiated by local authorities, also delimits the potential of artists to colonise urban zones on any other terms than ‘meanwhile’ useage. Visual artists are commonly instrumentalised in such processes as the ‘go to’ creative practitioners, brought in to animate a disused space or to provide attractive decorations to construction site hoardings prior to and during redevelopment. Rarely do artists remain as stakeholders after the completion of such works, which routinely render these emerging urban sites as financially inaccessible to individual cultural workers. I argue, therefore, that the inclusion of fewer physical spaces in Hunt’s second list is less indicative of a lack of interest in developing artist-led spaces than it is of the difficulties associated with gaining access to centrally-located sites on a more permanent basis in the context of urban hyper-commercialisation and privatisation under neoliberalism. The challenges of maintaining a central presence for artists among fast-paced redevelopment in some of the UK’s largest cities came to the fore in interviews I conducted in Birmingham, Manchester and Salford. Cheryl Jones, Director of Grand Union in the Digbeth area of central Birmingham, noted the threat of gentrification as a foundational impulse in the organisation’s attempt to secure a more permanent base there:

We feel like it’s important that there’s contemporary visual artists and space for those people in the city centre, and that it’s seen as an important part of the city’s activity and that it’s not pushed to the fringes all the time.¹¹¹

Lucy Harvey, one of the Directors of Paradise Works in Salford, also noted this as a critical issue in discussions among artists forced to move out of Rogue Studios, their former base in central Manchester, in search of new accommodation: ‘We had quite a lot of animated discussions about how important it was to stay in the city and that artists shouldn’t be moved out’.¹¹² Despite the changes in artistic practice illuminated by Hunt’s *Hot100* and the increasing difficulties of accessing appropriate or

¹¹¹ Interview with Cheryl Jones, 18 October 2017.

¹¹² Interview with Lucy Harvey and Hilary Jack, 22 January 2018.

affordable sites, my research reaffirms the desire to create physical sites – as ‘creative hubs’ for artists – as an enduring and key tenet of artist-led practice.

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Figure 2.4 Still from *ARTSPACE*, dir. by Kypros Kyprianou (2016) showing artist Howard Silverman at McArthur’s Warehouse, the disused space that would become Artspace’s first home in Bristol, mid-1970s. © Spike Island.

Not all such initiatives founded by artists survive over time of course. Some have been short-lived but impactful. For example, City Racing (1988-1998), the London gallery of artists John Burgess, Keith Coventry, Matt Hale, Paul Noble and Pete Owen, has a quasi-legendary status today as the venue which gave first solo shows to artists including Sarah Lucas and Gillian Wearing during the ‘YBA’ (Young British Artist) era. Many others have come and gone relatively unremarked upon and we can only speculate on the quantity of those that are hardly documented at all, particularly from the pre-digital era. Some that were founded decades ago continue into the present moment and have achieved a level of visibility and influence as permanent fixtures within the sphere of contemporary art – we might think of the storied Glasgow gallery Transmission, founded in 1983, here. Of those that have endured over time, not all retain their founding imperatives and concerns: institutions that began as projects by artists litter the landscape of the visual arts in England. I do not want to return here to the redundant binary that forever locates ‘artist-led initiatives’ and ‘institutions’ on opposing sides of the fence. Rather, I suggest that the reasons for founding such initiatives often either fade over time, alongside changing priorities, or prove difficult to sustain for reasons to do with the systemic challenges

of arts funding, leaving initiatives caught in an ‘adapt or die’ situation and opting to professionalise in order to access financial resources. In such cases, artists rarely retain control. As Howard Silverman, a founding member of the artists’ collective behind Bristol’s Artspace (later Spike Island) stated:

We knew that we would be giving up control. We had swapped direct representation, direct voice, when we decided to set up a Trust in order to get money, in order to have studios in the future. It had the potential to significantly change what Artspace became, which I think has proved to be true.¹¹³

The circularity of this logic – that the artist’s voice must be traded away in order to secure the financial resources to go on being artists – is a critical issue for my thesis. It speaks directly to the differing *values* of artists and arts funders, and answers any uncertainties in responding to the question of why artists should instigate and lead initiatives and even institutions. Artists’ priorities, ethics and practices differ substantively from those of a managerial approach to culture, applied from above. Their approaches also differ from those directed by arts funders that model evaluation of quality and value for money on a set of criteria that vary fundamentally from the core values embraced within artist-led initiatives.

Whether retaining their original ethos or mutating over time to take other forms, I argue that any analysis of the development of contemporary art in the UK since at least the mid-twentieth century should pay attention to the legacies of artist-led practices, since even this brief overview conveys a sense of the enduring relevance of these formations, in terms of their breadth, numbers, dispersion and longevity. Artist-led initiatives create physical infrastructure for the visual arts sector as spatial alchemists capable of transforming the most unloved and neglected sites into viable spaces for art and community that are rich with potential. Alongside this, they create the intellectual spaces required for risk-taking and the cultivation of new artistic innovations not yet embraced by art’s institutions and its markets. As Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt stated in relation to Transmission, this gallery was initiated in order to address the exclusion of certain artworks and practices from Scotland’s mainstream art spaces:

A lack of massive public or commercial obligation exempted [Transmission] from responsibility for sterile overviews and enabled low cost but controversial work to be made. From 1985, there followed a series of projects

¹¹³ Howard Silverman in *ARTSPACE*, dir. by Kypros Kyprianou (2016).

which utilised time-based media and live art, involving well-known people working in the field. This deliberate circumvention of the commodifiable nature of mainstream activities acknowledged a certain ideology, that the self-empowering nature of artist-run spaces could be used to shape culture.¹¹⁴

Almost 20 year earlier, in 1966, the London Film-Makers' Co-operative was, 'an artist-led organisation, established to distribute and promote work that was considered too unconventional for the mainstream'.¹¹⁵ Indeed, the Co-operative's draft constitution of 1968 introduces its objects with the following statement:

Whereas hitherto cinematograph films have for the most part been produced professionally either for commercial exploitation or for sponsors or by amateurs for themselves or fellow ethusi[a]sts the Cooperative is created to promote the use of the film as a medium of artistic expression and to elevate the medium as one of cultural and educational importance.¹¹⁶

Where are the histories of the contributions to art form development by artist-led initiatives? Artist-led spaces also provide access, for artists and others, to practices, equipment, techniques and discourses that are otherwise beyond their reach. The Pavilion in Leeds, originated by artists in the same year as Transmission, created a physical and conceptual space for women to explore photography, teaching 'working women' to make photographs, 'when the technology and resources for making images was mostly unavailable to them'.¹¹⁷ I argue that artist-led initiatives form the critical backbone of support structures for artists, both professionally and personally, particularly those emerging from formal art education. As such, there is an obligation of society at large, and the cultural sector in particular, to recognise their importance and invest in their sustenance. I have experienced personally the crucial support they offer, as I have described through my personal narrative in Chapter One.

Proliferating in significant numbers across the UK today, artist-led initiatives continue to germinate wherever communities of artistic practice take hold. The realities of this outside of London and Glasgow, and the depth and breadth of investment by artists in self-organised practices that arise from these realities,

¹¹⁴ Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, 'Surprise Me', in *life/live*, ed. by Suzanne Pagé, pp. 143-151 (p. 147).

¹¹⁵ Mark Webber, 'The First Decade of the London Film-Makers' Co-operative', in *Shoot Shoot: The First Decade of the London Film-Makers' Co-operative 1966-1976*, ed. by Webber (London: LUX, 2016), pp. 7-15 (p. 7).

¹¹⁶ *Shoot, Shoot, Shoot*, pp. 100-101.

¹¹⁷ Gill Park, *The Pavilion Women's Photography Center 1983-1993: deciphering an [incomplete] feminist project*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2018, p. 1.

particularly beyond London as a major international centre for the global art market, are at times obscured by dominant narratives that continue to cite both City Racing and, more commonly, Transmission, as the UK's primary proponents of artist-led praxis.¹¹⁸ They are joined in this narrative by Eastside Projects, the gallery founded by artists in Birmingham's Digbeth quarter in 2008.¹¹⁹ One of the aims of this thesis is to seek and analyse new narratives beyond these 'usual suspects,' however valuable their contributions. This is manifest in my research through a particular emphasis on such initiatives across England's North and Midlands, situated geographically midway between the UK's twin centres for contemporary art in London and Glasgow. My own experiences since graduation provide meaningful entry points into this specific territory.

At the Margins of the 'Art World'

Before moving on, I will touch conceptually here on a thread that arguably unites these *practices* across physical and temporal space. I have discovered a founding and shared impetus among artists to seek self-representation and thereby an agency beyond their traditional position as the disposable, extraneous commodities within the field of 'contemporary art' from which many feel excluded. Writing in their introduction to *City Racing: The Life and Times of an Artist-run Gallery*, the co-founders describe their experiences, as young artists, of trying to get a foot through the door of established galleries, and the realisation that simply being in the orbit of the 'art world' that these represent – for example by attending private views of exhibitions – was not enough to ensure their fuller participation within it:

But whilst drinking the drinks, showing your face, standing outside on the pavement making up the numbers in someone else's scene, it hits you: this gallery will never show your work. This gallery has nothing to do with you. You've got nothing to do with this gallery. The recognition of these truths is critical. Out on the pavement you realise that you are surrounded by your own scene. There is only so much room inside, but the good thing is that outside the space is unlimited.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Both organisations were included in *life/live* at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris in 1997.

¹¹⁹ The founding Directors were Simon Bloor, Tom Bloor, Ruth Claxton, Céline Condorelli, James Langdon and Gavin Wade.

¹²⁰ Matt Hale, Paul Noble, Pete Owen and John Burgess, *City Racing: the Life and Times of an Artist-run Gallery* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2002), p. 1.

Written in 2002, these words neatly summarise the necessity for artists to create spaces of their own when facing the alternative and immovable priorities of the highly selective galleries at the centre of the financialised art world. Written before contemporary conversations and policy directives on inclusion and equality, and accompanying debates on careers in the arts for people of colour, working class people, women, disabled artists and artists who identify as LGBTQIA+, this sense of a gap between artists and those selected to be the players in international art worlds nevertheless remains acutely relevant and could have been written by the founders of SPACE in 1968, by Watson and Wakeman of East Street Arts in 1993, or by the founders of Threshold in 2020. The nature of the ‘critical truths’ that struck the co-founders of City Racing in fact transcends to some degree perceived boundaries between artists in London and across the rest of UK, between those practicing in the 1960s and 2020s. Here is an extract from a contemporary report on the founding of Transmission in 1983:

A group of young artists in Glasgow are planning to open an art gallery in Chisholm Street. Called Transmission, this new gallery in the Trongate area will provide motivation for artists who find themselves at present working in a vacuum – a state which faces too many talented painters leaving art school. The aims of the Transmission gallery will be to provide much needed exhibition space to these isolated artists...¹²¹

And here is artist Emma Geliot recalling the context of Cardiff prior to the arrival of artist-led gallery g39 in 1998:

In my memory Cardiff... seemed a harsh place for a newly emerged artist... The choices [of exhibition spaces] in the late 1980s were: Chapter Gallery (join the very long queue); Llanover Hall (join the queue); Ffotogallery on Charles St (photographers only please); The Welsh Arts Council’s Oriol gallery (get yourself a career track record first); the Andrew Knight Gallery and the Albany Gallery (are you saleable?); The National Museum (not for the likes of you) and um, that was about it.¹²²

These statements convey the critical centrality to artists of being able to access physical spaces beyond those that are already established. As the instigators of City Racing stated, ‘there is only so much room inside [the art world]’.

¹²¹ Frank McNab, ‘Transmission V. Critics’, *Streets Ahead*, Issue 2 (1983), p. 26.

¹²² Emma Geliot, ‘Making a Scene’, in *It Was Never Going to be Straightforward*, ed. by Geliot (Cardiff: Contemporary Temporary Artspace, 2013), pp. 8-9 (p. 8).

Figure 2.5, Event at OUTPUT Gallery, Liverpool, during a residency by Radical Womxn's Dance Party, *Against Immigration Detention*, 2018. Photographer unknown. © The artists and OUTPUT Gallery.

In the second decade of the new century, my research finds that the creation of artists-led spaces remains of critical importance to artists and artistic practice. In March 2018, artist Gabrielle de la Puente, one half of the artist duo *The White Pube* (with Zarina Muhammad), initiated OUTPUT Gallery. Returning to her home city of Liverpool following a BA Fine Art at Central St Martin's in London, de la Puente resolved to address the exclusion she had felt as a woman of colour trying to access an art world she experienced as exclusionary on many levels. The gallery was initiated when existing cultural venue Invisible Wind Factory [IWF] agreed to make an unused space available for de la Puente's project:

I took [IWF] up on the offer and they did the same to me. Everyone was lovely and good at their job, and after a few meetings we had decided OUTPUT would work exclusively with artists from Merseyside... We wanted OUTPUT to counterbalance the city's institutions only ever parachuting artists in for shows instead of hiring the ones already here.¹²³

¹²³ Gabrielle de la Puente, 'How I Got a Gallery', *The White Pube* <<https://www.thewhitepube.co.uk/how-i-got-a-gallery>> [accessed 14 January 2020].

De la Puente makes a critical point here about sustaining artistic practice in the regions, as well as raising the important issue of systems of validation for artists. In contemporary art, the ‘international’ has until very recently, amid the immediate threats of climate crisis on the one hand – that has begun to question its global expansionism – and severe restrictions on international travel during the global coronavirus pandemic on the other, carried far more weight than the ‘local,’ as all those labelled, somewhat pejoratively, as mere ‘local artists’ can attest. Self-organisation is a strategy that re-values the local, placing it at the vanguard of contemporary conversations on resetting economies as an urgent move needed to avert planetary catastrophe.

Throughout the opening section of this chapter, my purpose has been to show that these forms of practice are at large enough scale, of long enough endurance and of significant ongoing relevance not only to artists themselves, but to all those interested in the study of culture, cities, creative education and alternative economies, to render them worthy of attention. That is to say, they are *of value*. Yet that term is not without its own difficult history and political usages that indicate different, if not radically opposed, concepts of value at work in contemporary cultural policy and practice. I examine the specific challenges of the concept *cultural value* in my next chapter, whereas here I want to examine more closely the problems associated with naming this field of practice, through an analysis of some of the key literature, and the attendant challenges this poses for the researcher.

Naming: the Challenges of Defining ‘Artist-led’ Practice

In June 2017, AN published an online report responding to the latest round of Arts Council England’s ‘National Portfolio’ funding awards, which had just been announced.¹²⁴ The report listed some 17 organisations new to the Portfolio, which it gathered together under the term ‘artist-led’. They included Grand Union, an organisation whose status as such has been disputed by its own Director during my research:

We’re sort of in the artist-led field I guess. But I don’t like calling us artist-led because although we’ve got a couple of artists on our Board I feel like we’re more curator-led as an organisation.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ ‘ACE NPOs: Visual Arts Organisations 2018-22’, *a-n* <<https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/ace-npos-visual-arts-organisations-2018-22/>> [accessed 27 January 2020].

¹²⁵ Interview with Cheryl Jones, 18 October 2017.

A close reading of the list reveals further anomalies and assumptions: it includes Project Space Leeds, which, although founded by artists including myself, by 2017 had arguably ceased to operate on an artist-led ethos since it was no longer led directly by us, and which had been trading as ‘The Tetley’ since 2013. Open School East, also listed, was co-founded by artist Laurence Taylor and curator Anna Colin, and although previously led jointly by them it is now led solely by Colin, a graduate of the MA Curating Contemporary Art at the Royal College of Art and BA in Arts Management, as its current Director. As these examples demonstrate, there is no easy way to define what an artist-led initiative is, given that projects run by artists are often conflated in this way with those that were initiated by artists but no longer actually led by them, a distinction which may matter to some.

Some organisations confidently claim their status as artist-led without equivocation. Arriving at the home page of Transmission’s website, for example, the visitor is met by the bluntly assertive legend, ‘Transmission is an artist run space in Glasgow’.¹²⁶ Liverpool-based The Royal Standard also leads confidently with this on its website: ‘THE ROYAL STANDARD IS AN ARTIST-LED GALLERY, STUDIOS AND SOCIAL WORKSPACE IN LIVERPOOL’.¹²⁷ The capitalisation is original and reinforces this emphatic declaration. To return to Hunt’s *HOT100*, it is apparent that representation within this list facilitated validation among peer organisations, perhaps replacing that missing from an institutional perspective. Launched on 26 May 2017, the second iteration of the *Hot100*, made available as a free download, quickly went viral and was disseminated widely by artist-led organisations, particularly those that featured, through social media channels. An analysis of Hunt’s social media feeds on the launch date revealed that his Instagram post of the *Hot100* logo was ‘liked’ 233 times and his Twitter post re-tweeted 94 times.¹²⁸ AMINI, an artist-led initiative for the promotion and critical discussion of artists’ moving image in Northern Ireland, retweeted Hunt’s post with the words, ‘very excited to be included in the #ARTISTLEDHOT100 and looking forward to

¹²⁶ ‘Home page’, *Transmission Gallery* <<https://www.transmissiongallery.org>> [accessed 18 December 2020].

¹²⁷ ‘About’, *The Royal Standard* <<https://the-royal-standard.com/about/>> [accessed 18 December 2020].

¹²⁸ @sculptureartman, tweet, 26 May 2017.

today's event in Liverpool'.¹²⁹ The post was also retweeted by Pineapple Falls, the collective practice of Madeleine and Paul Hearn as an artist-led initiative making artists' books, collage and paper sundries, who added:

Phew what a scorcher! We're on the #ARTISTLEDHOT100. All eyes on #Assembly Liverpool. Thanks @sculptureartman [Kevin Hunt].¹³⁰

The buzz surrounding the launch of the *Hot100* revealed the strong and immediate connections between initiatives disparate in size, scope and geography, yet aligned through their identification with the nomenclature 'artist-led'.

Determining whether an organisation's status as artist-led merely depends upon having been founded by artists, whether or not they are still at the helm, or whether being directly led by artists in the here and now is the defining factor, is a complex business. The nature of the leading is also contested. As Charlotte Gregory, former Director of the NewBridge Project in Newcastle, told me:

I do think NewBridge is artist-led, I mean for me it's about [the fact that] artists are driving the organisation, it's responsive to artists, it's shaped by them, and... the direction is led by them. So that for me is artist-led. I know there will be some real sticklers [who say] it has to be artists working for free... there's many different models.¹³¹

Gregory refers here to those initiatives that operate on a purely volunteer-led basis, usually with a rolling committee made up of artists whose membership rotates regularly, most notably Transmission which has adopted it since the organisation's inception in 1983. This model was highly influential until recently and has been handed down to many other initiatives founded since then, including The Royal Standard along with Outpost (Norwich) and Catalyst Arts (Belfast). The wider adoption of this unpaid model has, however, been problematised by some recently, as it produces exclusions. Under conditions of extreme precarity for individual artists, created by the neoliberal political agenda, only those privileged enough to be able to work without remuneration are able to take part. As Jade French, a former Director of the Royal Standard in Liverpool, puts it:

I fervently don't believe that there is a place for unpaid roles at this scale any more. I think it's an outmoded and outdated model and I think it's dangerous.

¹²⁹ @AMINI__, 26 May 2017.

¹³⁰ @Pineapple_Falls, 26 May 2017.

¹³¹ Interview with Charlotte Gregory, 6 December 2017.

I think it's a bad thing to be honest, and I think that it also just further scaffolds an ecology in the arts where people with privilege get further, because who else can do unpaid roles?¹³²

What I want to foreground here is the fact that there is no easy consensus on what constitutes an artist-led initiative. As soon as we begin to examine their structures, activities, formations and ideologies, we find as many points of difference among them as there are commonalities. Regardless of the labels they seek to adopt or have placed upon them, and although widely embracing a not-for-profit ethos, in actuality artists' initiatives sustain a plurality of practices. What matters more perhaps is the question of how useful it is for artists to knowingly adopt the term themselves. As Charlotte Gregory notes, it was not a definition that concerned the founders of the NewBridge Project in its earliest days:

I'm not sure that [founders] Will and Will would have described it themselves as artist-led from the beginning. I think it was maybe a label given by other people... NewBridge was on one of those Artist-led Hot100 things that Kevin Hunt did... so it became like, 'Oh Yeah, maybe this is how we work,' and it wasn't necessarily an aversion to the term, it was more like not really knowing what we were, we were just doing what we were doing and [there were no] labels on us.¹³³

Some find this external definition problematic. Paul Stone, co-founder of Vane, a gallery in Newcastle, has commented on the negative connotations of the term:

...the term 'artist-led' can act as much as a ghettoising term as it can be a positive statement of self-determination, an argument for keeping you in your place as much as a springboard to greater things or further opportunities.¹³⁴

This speaks to the perceived *value* of self-organised activities elsewhere within the cultural sphere. The following table encapsulates some of the contested terminology that is at stake here, on both sides of the perceived divide that I shall seek to unpick. It takes 'DIY', the key term at play with the Cultural Institute statement quoted earlier, as a point of departure to arrive at a set of related synonyms and antonyms:

¹³² Interview with Emma Curd and Jade French, 23 January 2018.

¹³³ Interview with Charlotte Gregory, 6 December 2017.

¹³⁴ Paul Stone, 'The Artist-led and Multiple Hat-wearing in Newcastle', in *Midwest – Overview*, ed. by Jason E. Bowman, Rachel Bradley and Julie Crawshaw (2008), pp. 15-17 (p. 17).

DIY	done or made by others
artist-led/artist-run	run by others (non-artists)
self-organised	organised by others
alternative	mainstream/traditional/conventional
unofficial	official
emerging	established
provisional	consolidated
grass roots	institutional
self-governing	administrated
homemade/amateur	professional
unaccountable	accountable
peripheral/marginal	central
anticipatory	resolved/realised
temporary	permanent
invisible	visible
self-servicing	audited
small-scale	large-scale
unfunded/self-funded	funded/governed
closed	open
inaccessible	accessible
direct	representative
minor	major
local	international

Figure 2.6, List of synonyms associated with artist-led practice and their oppositional terms.

In effect, neither set of terms adequately describes the complexities of this element of contemporary artistic practice, nor the wider cultural sphere within which it operates. Using a model that derives from basic theories of binaries that structure the very formation of culture and in doing so create asymmetrical hierarchies of meaning, we can see that this table is much more than a glossary of terms. It already inscribes the differential field on which these terms operate in terms of power, recognition, and above all, *value*. By consciously adopting the term ‘artist-led’ or its equivalents, artists risk being defined as the ‘other’ to that which is centralised as proper and validated under the terms of the artist-led *versus* institutional divide that I have already commented upon. Alignment with the ‘artist-led’ potentially creates the basis of a position from which that centre can marginalise, misunderstand, undervalue and thereby under-resource artist-led initiatives, keeping them in their place as Stone suggests.

Figure 2.7 Still from *Ikon at 50* showing the exterior of the Gallery's first location in a disused kiosk at the Bullring open market, Birmingham (1965). Director unknown. © Ikon Gallery.

I noted above the continuation of projects begun by artists that take institutional forms today. Among them is Birmingham's Ikon Gallery which distances itself from its earlier incarnation by describing its history as a move from one distinct thing to another: visitors to its website can watch a short film about 'Ikon's development from a small artist-led space in the Bullring in the 1960s to its current position as an internationally renowned art gallery at the heart of Birmingham's cultural scene.'¹³⁵ I find this statement significant because it narrates a journey *from* 'artist-led space' *to* 'institution' and *from* the margins of Bristol *to* the national centre stage, *from* the small *to* the large, *from* the local *to* the international, all of which further signify *from* the insignificant *to* the important, and *from* the amateur *to* the expert ('world renowned'). I have emphasised what is embedded in this statement: a series of oppositions which involve a movement of advancing from the less valued to the highly valued, summed up in moving from being a space to being an institution, from an initiative to institutionalisation. What becomes invisible in the naturalisation of this hierarchy is the contribution of such activities to place making, art form development, artistic experimentation and expanding cultural discourse, the nurturing

¹³⁵ 'About – History', *Ikon Gallery* <<https://ikon-gallery.org/about/history/>> [accessed 03 April 2017].

of talent and the sustaining of artistic practices in localities. We can then identify these as the hallmarks of the artist-led sector, rescuing them from being folded out of sight within a logic that associates bigger with better and upholds the dominant voice of the long-term formal institution. We can detect, furthermore, an unspoken implication that artists are not professionals – this echoes the way in which Abu ElDahab *et al* sought to differentiate their small-scale initiatives from artist-run spaces in the essay *Smallness* that I quoted earlier. From artists *to...* is a narrative assuming that at some point the growing organisation must be given over to the pre-validated experts who will nurture its development into a *bona fide* institution. What does the centre assume, and these texts imply, would be the risk if artists retained control of, and agency within, their self-governed elective organisational specificities? Might they be forging new iterations of models for the future?

Existing Literature

What does this linguistic, discursive and historical evasiveness mean for the researcher? In this section I shall analyse what the existing literature reveals on attempts to define and name artist-led practice, its histories and contributions, and what material it offers in relation to the central focus of my thesis - the intersection of artist-led initiatives and *cultural value*. It must be noted, however, that the terrain is not an extensive one. There are no historiographies of this field of practice in the UK and Ireland, and an absence of substantive contemporary overviews. I must acknowledge, however, one major piece of research that was undertaken by Susan Jones nearly twenty-five years ago. *Measuring the Experience: A Study of the Scope and Value of Artist-led Organisations* was a research project supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, ACE, Arts Council of Wales and regional arts boards and conducted between 1995-1996.¹³⁶ I have had access to the full unpublished report, which was subsequently summarised into a much shorter supplement circulated via the journal *Artists' Newsletter* the following year and retitled *Roles and Reasons: The Scope and Value of Artist-led Organisations*.¹³⁷ *Measuring the Experience* sought to, 'examine the artist-led approach to the

¹³⁶ Susan Jones, *Measuring the Experience: A Study of the Scope and Value of Artist-led Organisations*, unpublished research report, 1996.

¹³⁷ Susan Jones, *Roles and Reasons: The Scope and Value of Artist-led Organisations* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Artists' Newsletter, 1997).

generation and presentation of the visual arts in the UK' and to determine whether such activities:

- have the potential of providing a wider range of people with a visual arts experience, and delivering tangible benefits to society and artists
- provide innovative examples of interpretation and presentation of the visual arts and provide indicators of the role of artist-led organisations within future arts planning and strategies
- are viable ways of enabling funding bodies to realise their stated aims and objectives¹³⁸

The focus of Jones' research is, therefore, wholly different from my own. I suggest that it sought to identify the 'value' and 'impact' of artist-led initiatives in given terms already established for visual arts in the UK and to insert such initiatives within an existing framework determined primarily from a funder-oriented and 'ecological' perspective. Under the heading 'Measurability', the report states:

In studying artist-led organisations, the intention was to define their value in terms of benefit to the artists in the group, benefit to other artists, benefits to audiences, their role in the arts environment and the part they played or might play in future in the delivery of the specific policies of arts bodies and local authorities.¹³⁹

Jones' methodology rested on the production of seventeen short case studies and quantitative analysis of the types of activity undertaken relatively by them.¹⁴⁰ My thesis works differently to challenge the concept of *cultural value* itself, seeking instead to identify new concepts for artist-led practice. The value of the very detailed coding and analysis of the Grounded Theory Method becomes clear here, in offering a means to develop theory *from the data* rather than applying existing concepts to it. Further, Jones' report was written almost twenty-five years ago and there have been dramatic shifts in the landscape for both cultural policy and practice in the intervening period. Nevertheless, *Measuring the Experience* is valuable as a snapshot of artist-led practice in the UK at that time. For example, Artspace Bristol was one of the organisations selected as a case study. Jones' research intersected with the initiative at a pivotal point in its evolution as it prepared to leave its existing space at the disused and increasingly diapidated McArthur's Warehouse in order to move to new

¹³⁸ Jones, *Measuring the Experience*, p. 1.

¹³⁹ Jones, *Measuring the Experience*, p. 49.

¹⁴⁰ For example, case studies were divided into 'Category A' (defined as 'studios, galleries, workshops') and 'Category B' (defined as 'community action, public art and environmental'). Jones, *Measuring the Experience*, p. 52.

premises at Spike Island. The challenges of institutionalisation that attended this move were not central to Jones's research, but are significant for the specific focus of my thesis.

Beyond Jones's study, the literature on artist-led practice is dominated by self-published accounts produced by such initiatives themselves. Typically, these celebrate an organisation reaching a significant milestone or are published to summarise and document an initiative at its end. Organisations including &Model (Leeds), Amber Film and Photography Collective (Newcastle), City Racing (London), Collective (Edinburgh), g39 (Cardiff), Locus+ (Newcastle), London Film-Makers' Co-operative, Project Space Leeds, SPACE (London), Transmission (Glasgow) and Workplace (Gateshead) have all engaged in this form of publishing. Fascinating as these documents are, they amount to no more than a handful of published texts. Typically, also, such publications are limited to inclusion of an exhibition timeline and reproductions of related documentation – photographs and exhibition ephemera – alongside self-authored or commissioned essays rather than academic analysis. These printed publications are joined by a tiny clutch of films that similarly document artist-led initiatives at significant moments in their histories. They include *72-82* (2014) William Raban's exploration of Acme Studios' first decade and Morgan Quaintance's *Cubitt 25 Years: An Artist-led History* (2016). Both concern practice in London, while Kypros Kyprianou's *ARTSPACE* (2016) focuses on the genesis of the space that later became Spike Island in Bristol, on its fortieth anniversary.

The existence and scope of published texts is governed by the constrained resources usually available to artist-led initiatives. As exercises in self-publishing, they are produced primarily for an audience of peers. Rarely do they encroach on rigorous analysis and thereby rest largely on the evidence of personal experience. This dependency produces additional challenges for the study of this area. In *The Evidence of Experience*, Joan Scott warns of the difficulties of the status of 'evidence' as a way to document the experiences of others. She writes:

When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured – about language (or discourse) and history – are left aside. The evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way

of exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world.¹⁴¹

Although Scott's text focuses upon a discussion of the making visible histories of certain homosexual practices, her critique of the uses of 'experience' to construct 'identit[ies] rooted in structural relations that predate politics' provides a useful tool for assessing constructions of the artist-led. Not only construed as an 'other', but predicated so heavily on the 'evidence' or 'testimony' of personal experience in the absence of other analyses, the artist-led is also constituted as a collective identity. As Scott argues, the privileging of one characteristic, ('race', 'class', 'gender') over others means that other subject positions are 'subsumed' by it.¹⁴² In this chapter I have raised the issue of how the adoption of the label 'artist-led' potentially obscures other readings of initiatives by artists – a potential recognised by Paul Stone – and their contributions to cities and culture, to individual and collective emergence and the sustenance of social relations that effect community.

Beyond the limited ventures into self-publishing mentioned above, the extensive histories of artist-led practice in the UK and Ireland remain undocumented and thereby evade analysis. Most are discernible, if at all, only as a residue glimpsed obliquely in the pages of unpublished catalogues and 'zines', or in passing reference on obscure websites. I will touch briefly here on three exceptions to what is offered through self-published work on specific artist-led initiatives, as these are relevant to my discussion of both naming and value, before moving on to look at some published overviews of these practices in Europe and North America.

Firstly, *Shoot Shoot Shoot*, which documents the first decade of the London Film-Makers' Co-operative, suggests how more meaningful analyses of artist-led initiatives might reclaim their substantive contributions to art form development. The publication's nearly 300 pages make clear the organisation's access to substantial resources well beyond many artist-led initiatives. This expansiveness creates space for contextualising essays that make a major contribution to understandings of the development of film as an artistic medium. One of the essays, *Suspended in Light*, by Federico Windhausen, opens by asking the question, 'Why does it seem that so few of the British artists films produced during the period covered by *Shoot Shoot Shoot*

¹⁴¹ Joan W. Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Enquiry*, Vol.17, No.4 (1991), 773-797 (p. 777).

¹⁴² Scott, *Evidence of Experience*, p. 785.

have been analysed in detail?’ before proceeding to specifically address this art historical oversight.¹⁴³ Secondly, *Artists in the City*, published in 2018 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of London-based studio provider SPACE, finds contemporary relevance for analyses of artists and cities by connecting its discussion of the organisation’s early years, inhabiting disused spaces at St Katharine Docks, with the conditions facing London’s artist population in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt’s essay thus considers how SPACE has negotiated the specific challenges associated with *place* during its fifty-year history, particularly processes of ‘urban regeneration’ such as that catalysed in parts of east London by the presence of the 2012 Olympics. These processes are characterised by Anna Harding, Chief Executive of SPACE, as the organisation’s ‘worst enemy’.¹⁴⁴ Setting SPACE’s activities within these wider critical debates creates material that is of relevance to cities across the UK and Ireland, particularly given the fact that London has represented a vanguard of ‘culture-led regeneration’ and experienced its effects on a scale not comparable elsewhere in the UK. These debates should be essential reading not solely for artists across and beyond the capital, but for all those working in the field of urban development, whether in the public or private sector.

Finally, a self-published review of work produced by the Newcastle-based initiative Locus+, during its first three years from 1993-96, provides a valuable example of self-reflexivity in artist-led practice. In their brief introduction, Directors Jon Bewley and Simon Herbert acknowledge the always-negotiated relationships between artists and institutions, and consider the challenges of validating – valuing – artistic practice beyond that which takes place in the gallery. Locus+, in their words, ‘recognises the partial incompatibility and imbalance in the relationship between contemporary artists and the exhibition mainstream’.¹⁴⁵ They further seek to dissociate the organisation’s work from others that work in similar territory, as ‘the majority [of these] are informed by the political and critical orthodoxies of the dominant exhibition structure’. Notwithstanding this political orientation, and while

¹⁴³ Federico Windhausen, ‘Suspended in Light: Eight Films Made in London Between 1970 and 1975’, in *Shoot Shoot Shoot*, pp. 31-44 (p. 31).

¹⁴⁴ Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, ‘The Growth of London and its Consequences for Artists’ Spaces’, in *Artists in the City: SPACE in '68 and Beyond*, ed. by Anna Harding (London: SPACE, 2018), pp. 203-212 (p. 203).

¹⁴⁵ Jon Bewley and Simon Herbert, ‘Introduction’, in *Locus+ 1993-1996*, ed. by Samantha Wilkinson (Newcastle upon Tyne, Locus+: 1996), p. 5.

aligning Locus+ with an ‘established history’ of work in the North that ‘places the artist at the centre of production’ Bewley and Herbert – themselves artists – decline to associate their initiative with the ‘artist-led,’ a term that is entirely missing from the publication. Locus+ is viewed, instead, as a ‘visual arts facility’ and it is left to the researcher to find its relevance for debates on artist-led practice.

An outlier to such single-initiative narratives is *Artist-Run Europe*, a recent (2016) publication by Dublin-based artist-led initiative Pallas Project/Studios [PP/S], edited by Mark Cullen, the organisation’s Co-Director, and Gavin Murphy, an artist and curator who has been a member of PP/S since its early days. *Artist-Run Europe* follows a familiar model in offering self-authored case studies on a number of artist-led initiatives alongside a handful of contextualising essays. These are accompanied by an extensive *Index* of artist-run initiatives across Europe, which I quoted earlier in the chapter as establishing the breadth and scale of contemporary artist-led practice. On the one hand, *Artist-Run Europe* decentres the usual London-Glasgow trajectory in the discourse on artist-led initiatives to foreground new perspectives on those in Belfast, Dublin and Limerick, alongside an exploration of Megs Morley’s *Artist-led Archive* that documents over 90 initiatives from the north and south of the country. On the other, it disappointingly retreads well-worn territory in selecting only Eastside Projects and Transmission – again – to represent these practices across the rest of the UK. In this, the publication echoes a tendency that troubles many such self-authored accounts, in that it neatly inserts PP/S – also represented through a case study by Cullen – into dominant narratives on artist-led practice in the UK and Ireland. As I have argued, these coalesce around a familiar power base formed by the geographic axis of Birmingham (Eastside Projects) and Glasgow (Transmission). This move troubles Murphy’s assertion that ‘The artist-run model and ethos is one which perpetuates alternative – and often non-hierarchical – modes of organisation and economies of exchange (knowledge and resources). Often, but perhaps not always.

Murphy’s introduction does not specifically seek to trouble the challenge of defining artist-led practice, offering only that it represents a ‘complex, heterogeneous, and necessary set of alternatives...’¹⁴⁶ It does, however, provide relevant material for my thesis on a number of issues. Firstly, this ‘alternative’ is conceived as a

¹⁴⁶ Gavin Murphy, ‘What Makes Artist-run Spaces Different? (And Why it’s Important to Have Different Art Spaces)’, in *Artist-Run Europe: Practice/Projects/Spaces* (Eindhoven: Onomatopoe, 2016), pp. 4-17 (p. 4).

counterpoint to ‘the art institution, museum and commercial gallery,’ demonstrating again the discursive endurance of this binary configuration. Secondly, Murphy subscribes to the notion of culture as an ‘ecology’ and consistently locates artist-led initiatives within the sphere of ‘contemporary art’. For example, he claims that ‘...artist-run spaces are a distinctive and central part of visual culture’. Later, he asks ‘What position do artist-run spaces occupy within the field of contemporary art today?’ and ‘What do artist-run spaces add to the ecology of the civil society?’ Later still he states, ‘...it is clear that artist-run spaces are still a largely undervalued “cog” within the field of contemporary art practice’. The articulation of culture as an *ecology* – which suggests a totality within which all actors have their allotted and proper place – is one that I will return to in my next chapter as I focus more closely on the concept of cultural value. The relevance of Murphy’s narrative for my discussion here, however, is that he consistently defines artist-led practice by situating it in relation to, and within, the wider sphere of ‘contemporary art’ before narrowing his focus to a specific area of practice that he identifies as ‘critically engaged’. This is problematic in a number of ways. Suhail Malik has mounted a compelling argument against what he terms the ‘doctrine of criticality’ as the new orthodoxy of formal fine art education.¹⁴⁷ Malik uses the term ‘criticality’ to refer to:

... forms of critique that now dominate discourses, artistic and socio-political fields, which is to say forms of critique that are central to the hegemonic formation of contemporary art – precisely the consolidation of currently dominant practices and their power mechanisms.¹⁴⁸

Malik argues that the ‘deepening marketisation’ of art has resulted in art students’ increasing interest in professionalisation. Within this process, ‘criticality’ has become attractive as a ‘professionally desirable trait’ that facilitates institutional validation and fast-tracked entry to the circulatory networks of major institutions – the meritocratic landscape described by Andrea Phillips as the structural condition of culture under neoliberalism. Malik, therefore, problematises the role of art schools, now reconfigured as ‘feeders’ for these circulatory mechanisms. For him, the art market’s reappropriation of so-called ‘critically engaged’ work evacuates its radical potential because it renders it as mere style: ‘Making critical claims in the way

¹⁴⁷ Suhail Malik, ‘Art Education and the Predicament of Professionalised Criticality’, in *Politics of Study* (London: Open Editions, 2015), pp. 49-68.

¹⁴⁸ Malik, ‘Art Education and the Predicament of Professionalised Criticality’, p. 52.

desired by the art field enables one to subsist and continue *operating* within the same power mechanisms that are condemned in the *content* of those claims'. Does Murphy's introduction to *Artist-Run Europe* seek to have it both ways? He raises questions about the value and contributions of artist-led practice, while problematically continuing to locate these practices within what is already established as a field of 'critically engaged' contemporary art. His text does little, therefore, to analyse or challenge the systemic power imbalances that produce the 'precarity' he associates with artist-led initiatives.

The predominance of self-authored narratives of the type exemplified by *Artist-Run Europe* poses a challenge to the researcher because they provide purely subjective accounts of artist-led practice and are replete with unsubstantiated claims.¹⁴⁹ It is this dominance in the literature that in part necessitated the production of the original interviews that I undertook for my thesis and their systematic analysis, through coding as the crucial element of the Grounded Theory Method. This has enabled me, as a researcher, to move beyond the face value of narrative accounts – what happened – to meaningful analysis of how participants understand, and produce subjective accounts of, their experiences.

Throughout *Artist-Run Europe* there is a consistent slippage between 'artist-led' and 'artist-run'. The choice of label is partly governed by geographic location, as 'artist-led' appears frequently, although not ubiquitously, in Britain, whereas 'artist-run' predominates in Ireland, Canada, the USA and Australia. In the latter, the acronym ARI (artist-run initiative) is in widespread usage.¹⁵⁰ The histories of the numerous galleries, spaces and other initiatives founded by artists in New York City

¹⁴⁹ Gabriele Detterer and Maurizio Nannucci's *Artist-Run Spaces* is another example. Positioned by the authors as an unbiased look at nine counter-cultural formations of the 1960s and 1970s in mainland Europe and North America, it illustrates the problems of romanticism and nostalgia that can cloud personal accounts seen through the eyes of participants, even when directly purporting to avoid such pitfalls. In their introduction Detterer and Nannucci state, 'We do not in any way want to glorify and idealize models of collective organisation from bygone decades in a nostalgic light', before proceeding to do just that.¹⁴⁹ Their introductory text and Detterer's opening chapter are replete with deterministic references to a 'founding generation' of 'influential' spaces and the way in which, as fellow 'combatants,' they were to 'pave the way for the triumphal progress of present-day art'. Gabriele Detterer and Maurizio Nannucci, 'Introduction', in *Artist-Run Spaces: Nonprofit Collective Organizations of the 1960s and 1970s* (Zurich: JRP | Ringier, 2012), pp. 4-49.

¹⁵⁰ The ARI Remix Project, for example, is 'an online community-based participatory resource representing the voices, records and hidden histories of the Australian artist-run continuum'. 'About', *ARI Remix Project* <<https://remix.org.au/pages/about-us/>> [accessed 18 September 2020].

since the 1950s form one of the more concentrated and extensively documented nodes on this wider trajectory. Publications including *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985* and *Alternative Histories: New York Art Spaces 1960 to 2010* convey a linguistic preference for the term ‘alternative’ as one which conceptually unites a disparate array of cultural formations. Writing for *Alternative Histories*, Mary Anne Staniszewski states:

[This publication] documents fifty years of galleries, publications, bookstores, projects, performance venues, and, most importantly, communities that were established to counter market-based limitations, societal prejudices, cultural conservatism, and [the] institutional restrictions of a mainstream art world. However wildly diverse these alternative spaces may be, they are affiliated in their organizational innovation, creative experimentation, and attempts to remedy systemic deficiencies that range from expanding aesthetic possibilities to taking direct political action. With such shared characteristics and goals, these vibrant enterprises can be seen as an ever-transforming social movement.¹⁵¹

This more expansive definition suggests an inclusivity that is difficult to locate in *Artist-Run Europe*’s potentially limiting identification with ‘critically engaged contemporary art’ or in the *HOT100*, with its original focus on artist-led initiatives under four years old and, therefore, predominantly managed by artists who are themselves young and graduates of formal Fine Art education. Staniszewski’s definition speaks to community (‘most importantly’) and a sense of participation in a wider social movement that erodes the boundaries between what can and cannot be claimed as ‘critically engaged contemporary art’ – in the context of the UK and Ireland – in a compelling way. The pages of *Alternative Histories* reproduce documentary material that further encourages a reading of many of the initiatives it gathers together as intergenerational, multiracial and encompassing a broad set of cultural practices that proliferate beyond the strict confines of ‘contemporary art’.¹⁵² I

¹⁵¹ Mary Anne Staniszewski, ‘On Creating Alternatives and “Alternative Histories”’, in *Alternative Histories* (New York: Exit Art and MIT Press, 2012), pp. 11-13, (p. 11).

¹⁵² The Abrons Arts Center, for example, was established in 1975 by the Henry Street Settlement, which was in turn founded in 1893 to provide a community resource for the immigrant population of Manhattan’s Lower East Side. While *Alternative Histories* describes how, since its inception, the Center has aimed to ‘consolidate dance, music, theater, visual arts programming, and free workshops for the local community in one site’,¹⁵² the organisation’s website goes further in recording its mission in 2020: ‘to [mobilize] communities through the transformative power of art’. ‘Abrons Art Center’, in *Alternative Histories*, p. 160, and ‘About’, *Abrons Art Center* <<https://www.abronsartcenter.org/about/>> [accessed 18 September 2020].

will return to the relationships between art and community in my final case study on the East Leeds Project, but want to bookmark here the attractive possibilities of the ‘alternative spaces’ of New York as a counterpoint to what I argue as the potentially restrictive category of ‘critically engaged contemporary art’.

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 2.8 Promotional poster for the exhibition *Unrecorded Truths* at the Elbow Room (1986) curated by Lubaina Himid. © Lubaina Himid.

Diversity and Difference

There have been no analyses of the artist-led sector in terms of race, class or gender, or analyses of the dominance of initiatives founded by white, middle-class, highly educated individuals. The collective identity ‘artist-led’ precludes meaningful engagement with issues of diversity that lie at the heart of current arts funding policy. How do such activities overlap or intersect with the activities of black British artists in the 1980s and 1990s, or the trajectories of activism initiated through the disability arts movement since at least the 1970s? While not unproblematic as categorisations in themselves, an analysis of initiatives founded by black British and/or disabled artists

reveals an absence of the label ‘artist-led’ from such projects. Thus, organisations such as the Black Audio Film Collective and Motiroti evade categorisation as, and association with, the ‘artist-led’. The Elbow Room, a gallery established by Lubaina Himid in 1986, is a case in point. In many ways it follows the familiar pattern by which artist-led spaces are established. Himid was able to gain access to a disused industrial warehouse, located in the Borough area of south-east London, partly because it was owned by a friend and partly because it was then awaiting commercial redevelopment. Several exhibitions took place in this first venue – beginning with *Unrecorded Truths* in April 1986 – before the venture moved to another east end location and ultimately closed in 1988.¹⁵³ Courtney J. Martin suggests that, ‘[Himid’s] choice of location was unusual’, given that Borough was then a largely industrial area not heavily frequented by gallery-goers.¹⁵⁴ In fact, what she proposes as this ‘less than ideal location’ simply aligns the Elbow Room with the pragmatism at the heart of so many artist-led spaces that must utilise whatever spaces are available and affordable. What differentiated Himid’s project from so many others, however, was her curatorial focus on showing the work of Black artists, an important moment in her seminal, decades-strong commitment to raising the visibility of their work. Tellingly, Martin’s essay on Himid’s curatorial practice completely omits the term ‘artist-led’, preferring instead to refer to Himid as an ‘artist-curator’. In turn, available resources on artist-led spaces, including Heilgemeir’s *Archives of the Artist-Led*, entirely omit any mention of the Elbow Room as a *de facto* artist-led space. Does this suggest that an unspoken, yet widely adopted, definition of artist-led practice is drawn at racial boundaries?

¹⁵³ Courtney J. Martin, ‘Lubaina Himid: Curator 1983-2012’, in *Lubaina Himid: Workshop Manual*, ed. by Lisa Panting and Malin Stahl (London: Koenig Books, 2018), pp. 55-69 (p. 67).

¹⁵⁴ Martin, ‘Lubaina Himid: Curator 1983-2012’, p. 67.

Figure 2.9, Opening of the exhibition *Shoddy* at Live Art Bistro, Leeds, April 2016. Photograph by Mat Dale. © The artists and Shoddy.

In a similar vein, the group exhibition *Shoddy*, organised by curator Gill Crawshaw and participating artists in central Leeds in 2016 and recurring in later iterations in Batley and elsewhere in Leeds, brought together work by disabled artists to challenge ‘assumptions that our work, and our-selves, are inferior, broken-down, second-rate, or badly made’, against a backdrop of government cuts to welfare benefits and social services.¹⁵⁵ Despite being organised and curated by artists, the exhibition and larger host project are located firmly in the realm of ‘disability art project’ by their instigators, rather than within narratives of the ‘artist-led’. Crawshaw later initiated *Piss On Pity*, an exhibition of work by disabled artists housed within an empty retail unit in Wakefield’s Ridings shopping centre, within the context of the inaugural Yorkshire Sculpture International [YSI] event in 2019. During this, Damien Hirst’s monumental sculpture *Charity* (2002-3) was sited at the nearby Yorkshire Sculpture Park, only seven miles from the centre of Wakefield. This proximity was a deliberate move on Crawshaw’s part. In a piece for *Disability Arts Online*, she recalled the moment when she became aware that the sculpture was to be included in the YSI presentation:

¹⁵⁵ ‘Home’, *Shoddy Exhibition* <<https://shoddyexhibition.wordpress.com>> [accessed 04 April 2017].

When I found out, I felt more weary than angry. Here we go again, another thoughtless, exclusionary sculpture to complain about. Another instance of highly-paid artists ignoring the views and needs of disabled people.¹⁵⁶

The sculpture is so unpalatable because it represents an enormously scaled up copy of a life-sized collection box produced by the Spastics Society in the 1960s. This depicts a young white girl with blonde hair and a blue dress, wearing a leg brace and clutching a teddy bear in one hand and a box bearing the words ‘PLEASE HELP SPASTICS’ in the other.¹⁵⁷ Crawshaw, encouraged by artist Jason Wilsher-Mills not to let *Charity*’s presence in Yorkshire go unchallenged, requested a meeting with the YSI organisers and representatives of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park to discuss her concerns.¹⁵⁸ In the face of a response which only sought to reassure them that both institutions aimed for better representation of disabled artists within their organisations, the impetus for the *Piss on Pity* exhibition was born and the project organised and staged within a mere two months. Meanwhile, running concurrently with the YSI was *Index*, a new visual arts festival conceived as its ‘fringe’.¹⁵⁹ *Piss on Pity* was included in the listings and promotional activities for *Index*, alongside numerous projects by artist-led initiatives in Leeds and Wakefield. What is interesting here is that *Index* was initiated under the direct auspices of the YSI, and with its financial support. As I have argued elsewhere, this placed *Index* in a problematic relationship with the YSI, to which it clung too politely, for example in its precise mirroring of the YSI dates, regardless of whether these offered a good ‘fit’ with the projects it sought to promote.¹⁶⁰ This relationship of dependency with the YSI, among one set of artists central to the genesis and visibility of *Index*, begins to open up a dynamic in relation to another set of artists, those represented in the *Piss on Pity* project, who sought, of necessity, an oppositional stance in relation to the YSI’s perceived indifference. This issue of institutional dependency, among some artists, and a potential complicity with its exclusionary behaviours, begins to unpick how

¹⁵⁶ Gill Crawshaw, ‘Opinion: Piss on Pity, Disabled Artists Versus Charity’, *Disability Arts Online* <<https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/piss-on-pity-disabled-artists-versus-charity/>> [accessed 30 June 2020].

¹⁵⁷ The charity changed its name to Scope in 1994. ‘History’, *Scope* <<https://www.scope.org.uk/about-us/history/>> [accessed 11 December 2020].

¹⁵⁸ Gill Crawshaw, ‘Opinion: Piss on Pity’.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Visual Arts Festival’, *Index* <<https://indexfestival.org/>> [accessed 30 June 2020].

¹⁶⁰ Kerry Harker, ‘Passing Through and Staying Put’, in *Summer Days Drifting Away*, ed. by Nocturne (Leeds: Nocturne, 2019), pp. 11-25.

some artist-led initiatives might be construed as occupying a relatively central position in the mainstream by those, for example disabled artists as I have argued here, whose marginalisation is more acute.

The absence of discourse on the subject of diversity within prevailing, dominant histories of the artist-led reinforces a disconnect between the sector and ACE, the major funding body focused on harnessing its clients to its *Creative Case for Diversity*.¹⁶¹ But the absence of other voices audible through recorded testimonies might indicate the dangers inherent in self-determination. Existing largely at one remove from an environment of audit and accountability commensurate with public subsidy, how is the space for self-reflexivity to be achieved within the structures of the artist-led? Under what terms can ‘evaluation’ take place? It is in response to these very questions, and a sense of the pervasive nature of the field’s more exclusionary behaviours, that *backend*, mentioned earlier, has sought to make its intervention. The organisation’s discursive events aim to open up a space for the holding to account of the traditionally white, middle-class and University educated artist-led orthodoxy:

The events are led by facilitators and contributors whose research, work and experiences are directly related to key issues in artist led organisations including inequality, structural racism, harassment, accessibility and transphobia. They lead discussion on actions that artist led org[anisations] can be accountable to, because outside of larger institutions, there are very few mechanisms to build this infrastructure. Cis, white, non-disabled people (who mostly dominate the artist led scene currently) need to be taking action rather than bystanding, together using the privilege, power and platforms available to support structural changes in the artist led scene.¹⁶²

As noted earlier in the quote from Jade French of the Royal Standard, these problematic structural conditions within the artist-led field have in part been created by an historical favouring of unremunerated labour, particularly through a practice of short-term, rotating directorships adopted from the Transmission model of the early 1980s.

If we are to map the artist-led sector against the terms of the cultural value debate, with its values of inclusivity, widening participation, and diversity of representation, not only of artists but of audiences and at the level of staffing and

¹⁶¹ ‘The Creative Case for Diversity’, *Arts Council England* <<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/diversity-and-equality/creative-case-diversity>> [accessed 03 April 2017].

¹⁶² ‘Intro to backend’, *backend* <<https://backend.org.uk>> [accessed 30 June 2020].

governance, the recent arrival of the *backend* project indicates that there will be much to discuss. Despite criticism of its bureaucratic processes, the value systems and evaluative mechanisms instituted by centralised funding do at the least create a shared framework within which publicly funded organisations operate and can benchmark their activities. Outside of these strictures, self-funded artist-led initiatives have a freedom to operate at will, their invisibility and frequent lack of the most basic incorporated status allowing them to stand even outside the regulatory framework of private commerce.

Conclusion

In summary, it is impossible to deliver a unified definition of the artist-led. Having established this as a substantive set of practices, however, I have argued in this chapter that they do add up to a historical form which has longevity, logics, values and formations that collectively form a major part of contemporary visual arts practice. In doing so, they are constantly negotiating what I have suggested are two axes – the vertical axis of the policy and funding landscape as well as the horizontal one that governs the conditions they must negotiate at the local level. The histories of the artist-led are partial and fragmented, too often unrecorded or troubled by the domination of purely subjective narrative accounts. The territory shifts so constantly that there are currently no meaningful overviews of this area of practice, and no reliable historiography on which to draw. No overviews of the curatorial strategies of the artist-led are available, nor of its key role in supporting what is more widely perceived as the arts ‘ecology’, although I will seek to unpick this concept shortly, nor of its innovations and legacies. As I have shown, there is even discomfort and disagreement about the terminology among those commonly regarded as engaged in its practice. My findings indicate, however, that in cultural policy formation and the publicly funded visual arts sector alike, the term ‘artist-led’ has currency in that it is understood to mark a particular mode of practice. Yet the *value* and *values* ascribed to it have real effects on its operation. In the following chapter, I will provide a necessary overview of contemporary debates on *cultural value* in order to establish the policy landscape and how this dominant discourse further impacts on the negotiated realities of artist-led initiatives.

CHAPTER 3 - DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: POLICY DOCUMENTS AND THE IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF CULTURAL VALUE AND CULTURAL ECOLOGY

Introduction

The debate on *cultural value*, i.e. why the arts and culture matter, is voiced through the shaping of cultural policy, for example by central government and major funding and art form development agencies such as ACE; in responses from cultural commentators and advocates (individuals and organisations); and through academic research. It is in itself an ambiguous concept, with no easy consensus on its definition. As Andrew Thompson, the former Chief Executive of the Arts and Humanities Research Council [AHRC], acknowledged in his Foreword to the final report of its major *Cultural Value Project*, ‘Now more than ever we need rigorous ways of understanding and measuring that elusive thing we call ‘cultural value’.¹⁶³ Equally commonplace today is the conceptualisation of the cultural sphere as an ‘ecology’. Rising to prominence particularly since John Holden’s *The Ecology of Culture* in 2015, this analogy can actually be seen to predate publication of Holden’s influential paper, itself written for the *Cultural Value Project* [CVP]. In 2014 ACE’s Chief Executive, Alan Davey, stated:

The Arts Council’s role in [creating the conditions for a thriving cultural sector] has been to direct its investment in considered and sustainable ways, to benefit the whole arts and cultural ecology – the living, evolving network of artists, cultural organisations and venues co-operating in many fruitful partnerships – artistic, structural and financial. The metaphor of an ecology, of a living, balanced environment, expresses how nothing happens within this system without its impact being felt widely.¹⁶⁴

Such thinking has become fully internalised within the language of cultural policy and demonstrates a remarkable discursive endurance. Most recently, in a blog post titled *Supporting the whole cultural ecology* and published on 28 July 2020, in advance of the UK’s Government’s announcement of a £1.57 billion rescue package for its cultural sector, Darren Henley, the funder’s CEO, stated:

¹⁶³ Andrew Thompson, ‘Foreword’, in *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture: The AHRC Cultural Value Project*, ed. by Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kaszynska (London: AHRC, 2016), p. 4.

¹⁶⁴ Alan Davey, ‘Introduction: Preserving and Enhancing a National Cultural Ecology in England’, in *This England: How Arts Council Uses its Investment to Shape a National Cultural Ecology* (London: Arts Council England, 2014), p. 4.

When we committed £160 million to our Emergency Response Package for the cultural sector in March, we sought to use the funds we had at our disposal to support every element of the cultural ecology in this country, in recognition of the rich interdependencies and relationships that exist between places, organisations, different cultural forms, and, of course, the thousands of freelance artists and cultural practitioners whose commitment and creativity are the lifeblood of our sector.¹⁶⁵

Cultural ecology has even migrated, to a significant degree, to permeate the everyday speech of artists and arts professionals, often in unexpected places. Tweeting about initial responses from the cultural sector to the deepening Coronavirus crisis in March 2020, the community artist and well-known writer on the value of participatory arts François Matarasso claimed, ‘Our cultural life - professional, voluntary, public and commercial – is a vast, interdependent ecosystem’.¹⁶⁶ My thesis is particularly concerned with the consequences of this ‘ecological’ approach to culture for artist-led initiatives. As an organising principle, does it require artists to maintain a position of complicity with the more damaging effects of their affective labour?

Taken together, the related concepts of *cultural value* and *cultural ecology* provide the contextual terrain of cultural policy against which artist-led initiatives must situate themselves. For my thesis it has, therefore, been vital to track important ‘moments’ in this debate, through, for example, the publication of major policy or research documents. In my analysis of the policy discourse, I have concentrated on instances in which these debates either impact directly on the position and possibilities of the artist-led sector – for example in relation to ACE as the funder upon whom they are most dependent when seeking the public investment necessary to securing sustainable futures – or where it provides highly relevant material and possibilities for advocacy and/or the sustainability of the field. In this chapter I will establish the major debates in the policy field through a critical analysis of two selected key texts on the subject that have become dominant in the cultural sphere in recent years. The first is ACE’s key policy document *Achieving Great Art for Everyone: A Strategic Framework For The Arts*, published in 2010 and revised as *Great Art and Culture for Everyone* in 2013 after ACE took over additional responsibility for museums and libraries. The second is the final report of the

¹⁶⁵ Darren Henley, ‘Supporting the Whole Cultural Ecology’, *Arts Council England* <<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/supporting-whole-cultural-ecology>> [accessed 17 August 2020].

¹⁶⁶ François Matarasso (@arestlessart), 21 March 2020.

AHRC's *Cultural Value Project* [CVP], published in 2016. Although the ACE strategy has specific relevance only within England, the AHRC report has wider significance in its focus on cultural value across the UK.

Cultural Value and Cultural Ecology: Challenges for Artist-led Initiatives

My thesis argues that the discourse of *cultural value* and its corollary *cultural ecology*—as the dominant ideological framework structuring investment in contemporary culture—present significant challenges for making visible what I claim as the critical importance and enduring relevance of artist-led initiatives for aspects of contemporary artistic practice. The determination of cultural value requires being able to measure the ‘impact’ of the arts and culture, thereby simultaneously necessitating assessment of the relative efficacy of cultural actors. Two key problems arise here for artist-led initiatives. One is a culture of audit and accountability, and with it a set of associated metrics, that have risen to contemporary prominence within the arts. The second is the accompanying reconfiguration of the arts landscape as one based on competition - for funding, people and visibility. On both counts, artist-led initiatives often find themselves either ill-equipped or unwilling to play by the established terms of engagement.

Marilyn Strathern has traced audit culture as a phenomenon migrating initially from finance to emerge recently as a widespread concept across the professional workplace. In *Audit Cultures: Anthropological studies in accountability, ethics and the academy*, Strathern demonstrates how practices of accountability,

...determine the allocation of resources and can seem crucial to the credibility of enterprises; people become devoted to their implementation; they evoke a common language of aspiration. They also evoke anxiety and small resistances, are held to be deleterious to certain goals, and as overdemanding if not outright damaging.¹⁶⁷

Audit culture has now become definitional of the relationships between funders and clients. In January 2020, in a polemic published in *Arts Professional*, Robert Hewison *et al* claimed that the work of ACE was so saturated by this approach as to create, ‘a system totally ensnared in a byzantine maze of targets, metrics, monitoring

¹⁶⁷ Marilyn Strathern, ‘Introduction’, in *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy*, p. 1.

and evaluations'.¹⁶⁸ How are artist-led initiatives to accommodate the weighty requirements of funders who impose onerous audit and evaluation procedures upon their clients? While an interest in stating the 'economic impact' of cultural activities might have given way more recently to a focus on their perceived value in terms of positive benefits for health and wellbeing, the issues remain: artist-led initiatives largely lack the capacity or skills to carry out these tasks which are surplus to their core purpose and activities. They are similarly often unable to play to a system of metrics based on visitor numbers—exhibition attendance levels or participants in educational workshops for example—given that their operating models often vary significantly from those of major institutions that occupy a central role in the visitor economy. Many artist-led venues occupy marginal spaces less likely to attract mainstream audiences, have limited opening hours or lack the resources to create the 'added value' of public engagement programmes. Their primary focus may simply be elsewhere, nurturing artists and curators through the provision of affordable workspaces or experimental programmes, for example.

ACE continues to institute new metrics at a rapid rate: the last few years have seen the arrival of specific monitoring requirements on diversity, environmental sustainability and 'quality', the latter trialled controversially by the funder since 2013.¹⁶⁹ More recently, ACE had planned – prior to the Coronavirus crisis – to introduce monitoring on the socio-economic background of the workforce within its NPOs, a move viewed as 'alien, intimate and intrusive' by many staff involved in focus groups during the scheme's pilot phase.¹⁷⁰ All of these measures add to the administrative burden of cultural workers, not to mention that of arts audiences, who must surely have developed, by now, a strong sense of 'survey fatigue' when clipboards and ipads await their every visit. Despite the varying priorities among the measures instituted by ACE over the last decade, Hewison *et al* claim that little has changed within the power dynamics of the arts sector:

¹⁶⁸ Robert Hewison, John Holden, John Newbigin, Shelagh Wright and John Kieffer, 'Three Reasons Why ACE's New Strategy Won't Cut it', *Arts Professional* <<https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/article/three-reasons-why-aces-new-strategy-wont-cut-it>> [accessed 18 August 2020].

¹⁶⁹ Liz Hill, 'Why Quality Metrics is a Really Bad Idea', *Arts Professional* <<https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/blog/why-quality-metrics-really-bad-idea>> [accessed 18 August 2020].

¹⁷⁰ Jonathan Knott, 'ACE Treads Carefully with 'Intrusive' New Social Class Metric', *Arts Professional* <<https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/ace-treads-carefully-intrusive-new-social-class-metric>> [accessed 18 August 2020].

By ACE's own admission, despite ten years of pursuing *Great Art and Culture for Everyone* through its last strategy, the arts and what ACE understands by culture remain the relatively exclusive reserve of a minority.¹⁷¹

I extend this claim to argue that little has changed for the wider evaluation of the work of artist-led initiatives over the same period, for whom the current set of metrics are too often inaccessible, irrelevant, or ethically unacceptable. Although my focus in this chapter is more specifically on ACE's policy documents, audit culture can be seen to have permeated many other facets of the cultural sector. As Sharon Gill, CEO of ROAR, complained while relaying her experiences of being invited to contribute to research on how the creative industries function as an 'engine of growth across the UK':¹⁷²

I was telephone interviewed by [the] Arts and Humanities Research Council on that *Creative Nation* report, and they walk you through all those charts, and it doesn't mean anything. So what's this little stack of blocks, what does it represent? Does that, you know... creative industries... does it just happen to be located there but all their work is overseas or are they exporting? Why are you using how many trademarks they have as a measure? It's like you know, absolutely no understanding of the sector whatsoever.¹⁷³

Secondly, a landscape wherein everything can be measured and quantified naturally gives rise to benchmarking and comparative analyses that effect a reconfiguration of what were once peers operating within and across networks of mutual support, as competitors. Andrea Phillips has described the competitive landscape for arts initiatives today as the signature of culture under the neoliberal logic of the market economy. Her critique of meritocracy as its dominant modality has specific relevance for the effects it has wrought upon arts venues over the last 40 years. In *Remaking the Arts Centre*, Phillips charts a transition from the 'locally-oriented, politically motivated and intellectually ambitious spaces of culture' that characterised the arts centres of the 1970s, towards a rapidly expanded and globalised landscape of arts organisations today as governments have increasingly adopted neoliberal politics. She states,

¹⁷¹ Hewison *et al.*, 'Three Reasons Why ACE's New Strategy Won't Cut it', *Arts Professional*.

¹⁷² Margot James, Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries, 'Foreword,' in *Creative Nation: How the Creative Industries are Powering the UK's Nations and Regions*, NESTA <https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/creative_nation-2018.pdf> [accessed 18 August 2020].

¹⁷³ Interview with Sharon Gill, 3 May 2018.

...desires of visibility, along with pressure of financial sustainability, has altered these spaces. We might now recognize many old arts centres in their transformed forms as the network of galleries and theatres that circulate exhibitions, concerts and producers of a sanctioned cohort of cultural producers in far more streamlined and well-publicized ways...

This has left arts institutions operating within a 'space of cultural competition'.¹⁷⁴ I argue that the basis upon which this competition is to be judged, its system of metrics that support an audit-based approach to investment, present significant challenges for the values and realities at work within many artist-led initiatives and their networks.

Cultural Value: ACE Documents

The publication in 2010 of *Achieving Great Art for Everyone: A Strategic Framework For The Arts*, by Arts Council England, was a key moment in what we can acknowledge as the continuing instrumentalisation of art.¹⁷⁵ The revised framework *Great Art and Culture for Everyone: 10-year Strategic Framework 2010-2020*, published in 2013, remains the primary guide to ACE policy formation for England. It also has significant impact on the support for culture given by local authorities and others who lean heavily on it as a framework for their own funding schemes.¹⁷⁶ A further report, *The Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society: An Evidence Review*, was published by Arts Council England in 2014. Both of these reports became public around the mid-point of the AHRC's *Cultural Value Project*. *Great Art and Culture for Everyone* governed ACE's investment in arts and culture during the period 2010-2020 and was recently superseded by *Let's Create*, the funder's new strategy document published in January 2020. As publication of an associated delivery plan has been delayed until Spring 2021 due to the coronavirus crisis, I confine my analysis here to the previous strategy that has been active during the period of research for my thesis.

Achieving Great Art for Everyone (2010) opens by grappling with notions of 'excellence' in the arts. In her Foreword, ACE's then-Chair, Dame Liz Forgan, acknowledges the shifting terrain of the contemporary arts arena in the 21st Century,

¹⁷⁴ Phillips, 'Remaking the Arts Centre', p. 215.

¹⁷⁵ Arts Council England, *Achieving Great Art for Everyone: A Strategic Framework for the Arts* (London: Arts Council England, 2010).

¹⁷⁶ For example, Leeds City Council has over recent years borrowed substantially from Arts Council England rhetoric in developing its own funding schemes, notably arts@leeds which provides annual core funding for successful applicants.

particularly in response to the digital revolution. This leads her to claim that definitions of excellence must also, ‘find room for participation in art, as well as the classical notion of creation’. She goes on to query notions of the ‘value’ in culture, asking why this concept is important for current and future generations. While attempting to retain notions of ‘mystery’ in relation to what art can achieve, this passage from her conclusion is worth quoting in full here, as it clearly signals a culture of instrumentalisation and audit as the definitional terms framing the accountability commensurate with ACE’s role as distributor of public funds:

[Is art important] because [it] is intrinsically valuable? Because it is necessary for a successful economy, to our national prestige, to our mental health, to our social cohesion, to our sense of identity, to our happiness and to our well-being? All of the above – as we and others have constantly sought to demonstrate as scientifically as it is possible to do. As people responsible for spending substantial amounts of public money, we are duty bound to account for the public value of art with all the data we can muster. Intrinsic and instrumental arguments all have their place. But art, like excellence, will always elude neat definition. We must be as clear as we can and then acknowledge that it simply has mysterious aspects that are immensely powerful and can never be anticipated or accounted for.¹⁷⁷

This approach was subsequently reiterated by ACE’s new Chair, Sir Peter Bazalgette, in his brief introduction to the revised 2013 edition. In this he states:

We are a custodian of public investment, and we are charged with getting the maximum value out of this: the enlightenment and entertainment arts and culture bring us; the enriching of our lives and the inspiring of our education; the vital contribution to our health and well-being and the powering of regional regeneration, tourism and our standing abroad.¹⁷⁸

While the tension between wanting to preserve space for unknowability on the one hand, and accountability on the other, is clearly articulated in Forgan’s piece, her concepts of ‘excellence’ and ‘mystery’ are entirely absent from Bazalgette’s much shorter, sharper statement which reflects a more hard-headed approach - a direct response to the becoming-chronic status of public funding just three years later under the impacts of the 2008 recession and the dire need to find more compelling arguments for continued support that extend far beyond ‘art for art’s sake’. The rhetoric instead adds notions of the nation-state and global cultural tourism to the

¹⁷⁷ Dame Liz Forgan, ‘Foreword’, in *Achieving Great Art for Everyone* (London: Arts Council England 2010), pp. 3-4.

¹⁷⁸ Sir Peter Bazalgette in *Great Art and Culture for Everyone* (London: Arts Council England 2013), p. 3.

already-instrumentalised approach to personal and social well being which it retains from the first edition. In the end, what ensues in the pages of both editions is an argument in favour of art distilled into five ‘Goals’ to which applicants for funding must ultimately respond. The goals, retained in the same form since 2010, play to notions of the pursuit of excellence, widening participation, achieving sustainability, diversifying the arts workforce, and ensuring the right of young people to experience ‘artistic lives’.¹⁷⁹ The document also sets out what it describes as a renewed (and collaborative) commitment to research in the work of ACE in the coming decade to 2020, stemming from the notion that, ‘Robust evidence will be important, both to inform effective policy making and to demonstrate the impact and value of the arts.’¹⁸⁰ The nature of this research and its collaborative intent evades further analysis, however, as it is not clear how it responds to, dovetails with, or feeds into significant research by bodies such as the AHRC who similarly have a long-standing engagement with these themes.

The AHRC *Cultural Value Project*

The AHRC’s *Cultural Value Project* has been the major recent investigation into the current debate on the social importance of the arts and culture, and is the largest such enquiry to date. Instigated by the AHRC in 2012, under its previous Chief Executive Professor Rick Rylance, the Project had two primary objectives: to ‘identify the various components of cultural value across a variety of contexts and within a unified approach’, and to ‘identify and develop methodologies that might be used to assess those dimensions of cultural value’.¹⁸¹ The project was led by Professor Geoffrey Crossick (as Director), Vice-Chancellor of the University of London (until 2012), former Chief Executive of the Arts and Humanities Research Board (2002-5) and holder of senior governance positions within established and nationally-significant cultural organisations (Chair, Crafts Council and Board member, Courtauld Institute and Horniman Museum); and Dr Patricia Kaszynska (as Project Researcher), with a background in political research organisations Demos and the Fabian Society, and research positions within Higher Education including University of the Arts

¹⁷⁹ Arts Council England, *Achieving Great Art for Everyone*, p.12.

¹⁸⁰ Arts Council England, *Achieving Great Art for Everyone*, p. 46.

¹⁸¹ Crossick and Kaszynska, *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture*, p. 6.

London.¹⁸² Over the course of three years, 72 awards were made, including 46 pieces of original research, 19 critical reviews of literature in specific areas, and a further 7 workshops that brought together experts in various fields. In addition, the AHRC itself produced symposia, workshops and talks staged with award holders, major cultural partners, and others. The CVP website archives the project and contains links to downloads of the majority of research reports, the project's blog, and a podcast about the project.

The Project's final report, *Understanding the value of arts & culture*, authored by Professor Crossick and Dr Kaszynska, was published in March 2016, brought together the findings of the three-year project. This document makes clear that the evasive nature of cultural value is far from its only attendant problem, however. Thompson's Foreword is also at pains to make clear the role of this 'needed' evidence in reinforcing the apparently symbiotic link between culture—now reconfigured as the 'cultural and creative industries'—and the UK's economic growth as the defining objective of its prevailing political ideology:

From the Prime Minister and the Chancellor down [David Cameron and George Osborne under the Conservative government at that time], there is widespread recognition that the UK is a place where culture meets commerce.¹⁸³

Thompson goes on to outline how culture is acknowledged to enhance economic growth and job creation, and to create a sense of national identity for international relations. But he argues that, despite some successes over the preceding decade in how the cultural sector has made its case for support, questions remain about the robustness of the methodologies that have been used to demonstrate this value, and how the distribution of public funding to these organisations contributes to social and economic goals. This is the point at which the CVP seeks to make its intervention. Thompson sets out the contemporary landscape in which, although the cultural and creative industries' rapid growth outpaces other economic sectors, at the same time the current state of 'austerity' poses serious challenges in making the case for their

¹⁸² Another 17 individuals constituted the project's Advisory Group, made up of senior researchers from Higher Education and large-scale cultural organisations (Tate, British Museum); Arts Council England's Director of Policy and Research; the Chief Executive of Voluntary Arts; NESTA's Director of Creative Industries, senior executives from cultural consultants Storythings and Carol Scott Associates, and a Special Advisor to independent investors Ingenious Media.

¹⁸³ Thompson, *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture*, p. 4.

continued investment. The expanding role of the AHRC as a Research Council also comes into play here, as what Thompson describes as an ‘engaged presence’ in the cultural arena. The *Introduction* concludes with a summary of how the report has been able to move past the restrictive binary nature at work within many current debates on cultural value (for example, what Thompson describes as the ‘divide between the intrinsic and instrumental camps’), which it does by placing a renewed emphasis on individual experience of culture, and the methodologies that might be required to evaluate this, as a starting point for working outwards towards wider concepts of benefit.¹⁸⁴

The report’s *Executive Summary* further elaborates on the stasis of argument about cultural value based on binaries - seen as also including concepts of elite versus popular, amateur versus professional, private versus public spaces for the consumption of culture, qualitative versus quantitative evidence, and publicly-funded versus commercial activities. It reiterates the importance of repositioning the individual at the centre of the debate, moving away from locating value in more abstract notions of economy, cities or health. Several key findings of the report coalesce around the notion that involvement in arts and culture can help to shape ‘reflective individuals’ and to produce ‘engaged citizens’, as well as having health and wellbeing-related benefits. Again, the report reiterates the need to start with personal experience and well-designed qualitative research to better understand the relationship between the individual and the potential impact upon wellbeing of the arts and culture. Other key findings include questioning the robustness and significance of economic impact assessments; challenging accepted notions of culture-led regeneration in cities; proposing the arts and culture as a ‘complex ecology of talent, finance, content and ideas’; questioning claims made for arts activity in relation to improving academic attainment in education; broadening the debate on participation to sites beyond purpose-built cultural buildings, especially the home; deepening consideration of how new technologies are changing where and how people interact with culture; and challenging the quality and appropriateness of methodologies and evaluation that have characterised the cultural value debate to date, as well as positing new models for these.

¹⁸⁴ Thompson, *Understanding the Value of Arts and Culture*, p. 4.

Of the report's key findings, several have relevance for my research as they potentially provide tools which the artist-led sector could harness better to articulate and argue for its importance and continued support within a frame of reference more likely to be recognised by key funders and stakeholders. These include using the analogy of culture as an 'ecology', which potentially allows for a fuller debate about the place and importance of artist-led organisations within the wider cultural sphere, although I return to the problematics of this approach later. There is potential also in the report's focus on individual experience as a starting point for evaluating larger claims for the impact of culture, which may have relevance for the smaller scale and more intimate relationships that many artist-led organisations may have with their constituents. Similarly, the report's emphasis on looking beyond purpose-built cultural facilities is promising, as many artist-led initiatives rely on the temporary inhabitation of 'meanwhile' spaces outside of the formal cultural infrastructure, as is its focus on the key role of smaller-scale cultural assets in regenerating *communities* as opposed to *places*. This is reiterated in the report's conclusion:

...in the urban sphere... large-scale, culture-led regeneration projects are more ambiguous in their effects on urban societies than small-scale, distributed arts assets, which are better embedded within their communities, rather than being disruptive of them.¹⁸⁵

This statement carries the potential to disrupt perceived understandings of 'participation' or 'engagement' activities relative to large- and small-scale arts organisations, and the report highlights that further research is needed on the role of small-scale spaces such as artists' studios, which of course many artist-led organisations provide. Finally, the report proposes that the AHRC consider establishing an 'Observatory for Cultural Value' within a University setting to continue the work of the CVP.¹⁸⁶ Finally, analysis of the works cited within the final report – outside of research commissioned specifically for the CVP – has been useful in signposting to other relevant texts on issues of cultural policy, cultural value, and the regeneration agenda. It is interesting to note, however, the absence of any cited research emanating from within the artist-led field, or any acknowledgement of the

¹⁸⁵ Crossick and Kaszynska, *Understanding the Value of Arts and Culture*, p. 153.

¹⁸⁶ Crossick and Kaszynska, *Understanding the value of arts and culture*, pp. 6-10. This 'observatory,' now renamed as the Centre for Cultural Value, has in fact been recently established at the University of Leeds, where I have been able to engage with its work.

work of the Common Practice group and Susan Jones' 1996 report *Measuring the Experience* that I analysed earlier.¹⁸⁷

Holden: *The Ecology of Culture*

A brief analysis of Holden's *Ecology of Culture* is included here as it is important in providing a backdrop to how the artist-led sector may be positioned, and may position itself, at the present time. As such it sets the scene for contemporary analyses of the sector. Holden's paper has also achieved some traction, and can be seen at work particularly in academic debates on cultural activity, for example in those associated with the Cultural Institute of the University of Leeds, where the terminology Holden developed for this paper has recently been mobilised in research workshops with the cultural sector.¹⁸⁸ In *The Ecology of Culture*, the cultural sphere is defined as 'the complex interdependencies that shape the demand for and production of arts and cultural offerings,' a definition Holden borrows from Markusen.¹⁸⁹ I am not alone in finding Holden's 'ecological' approach problematic. Indeed, at a symposium in London in 2012, representatives from small visual arts organisations around the UK questioned the use of the term within a major report, *Size Matters*, written for the Common Practice group by Sarah Thelwall the previous year:

This [ecological term] was problematised by some, on the basis that it naturalised the existing order, potentially delimiting critical analysis of a notionally stable system, and thereby inhibiting its disruption.¹⁹⁰

Holden proposes that the cultural ecology can be viewed as the three 'highly interactive spheres,' of publicly funded culture, commercial culture and homemade culture, which he views as having equal importance. To very briefly introduce each of Holden's spheres, 'publicly-funded culture' relies on subsidy from the state or philanthropy; 'commercial culture' operates directly through the marketplace without direct public subsidy, and 'home made culture' is used to refer to that which is 'made

¹⁸⁷ Common Practice is an advocacy network of small-scale visual arts organisations in London. Since 2009 the group has collectively commissioned research on the specific role and contributions of its members to the wider visual arts scene. 'About', *Common Practice* <<http://www.commonpractice.org.uk/home/>> [accessed 18 December 2020].

¹⁸⁸ For example, the *Creative Economy Workshop #2 – The Creative Workforce*, hosted by the Cultural Institute and held at the University of Leeds on 15 March 2017, at which I was present.

¹⁸⁹ John Holden, *The Ecology of Culture* (London: AHRC, 2015), p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, *Value, Measure, Sustainability* (London: Common Practice, 2012), p. 5.

and funded by people themselves'. In reality, as Holden notes, the three spheres thus described all operate as mixed-economy models, with each having diverse income streams.¹⁹¹

Holden's move away from the concept of culture as an economy towards an ecological model is an attempt to acknowledge non-monetary values in relation to culture and to emphasise the complex fluidity, interconnectedness and interdependence of the conditions under which culture can take place. However, much artist-led activity is difficult to locate within this framework and its specificities render Holden's three categories redundant as appropriate descriptors. For example, most exist on a mixed funding model that erodes the boundaries Holden seeks to institute between forms of cultural activity. While many artist-led initiatives are self-funded, they resist association with 'amateur' production by virtue of being founded most often by highly educated Fine Art graduates. Post-graduation, young artists who turn to self-organisation often do so as an elective distancing from institutional structures and the public subsidy that supports them. Neither are they always entirely self-funded, nor fully operating within commercial structures, even while generating what ACE qualifies as 'earned income' through studio rents. I argue that a consideration of the work of artist-led initiatives necessitates slippage across Holden's three spheres. His ecological analogy fails to illuminate the complex power dynamics and conditions of precarity, historically inscribed, which govern the contemporary conditions for much artist-led practice. Although Holden acknowledges that the boundaries between his three spheres are becoming more permeable, my thesis will demonstrate that artist-led activity blurs the boundaries so effectively as to render this analogy redundant.

Having established the policy framework of *cultural value* and *cultural ecology* that forms the contextual terrain for contemporary artist-led initiatives, in the second part of my thesis I shall present the original research that I undertook to test their appropriateness, through qualitative research and research-led curatorial practice.

¹⁹¹ Holden, *Ecology of Culture*, pp. 7-10.

CHAPTER 4 – METHODOLOGY AND PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I propose new understandings of artist-led initiatives and their complex interactions with the concept of *cultural value* that has become a widespread term in both institutional discourse and critical analysis.¹⁹² I demonstrate that, for many working in the artist-led field, these forms of practice make visible a desire for agency, even while they are constrained by a set of environmental factors—at work within the frameworks for arts funding and urban planning for example—which impact negatively upon them. These damaging effects may also impose a subjective cost on the individuals engaged in their production that even compromise the sustainability of this area of artistic organisation and practice. In order to investigate the specificities, contributions and jeopardy of artist-led practice, I have undertaken original qualitative research by creating a body of data through interviews with selected artist-led organisations in the UK. These were analysed following the methodologies of a widely used research method: Grounded Theory. What sociologist Antony Bryant has qualified as the *Grounded Theory Method* [GTM] draws on Kathy Charmaz’s Constructivist Grounded Theory to provide a flexible methodology for analysing the experiences, and accounts of and understanding of these experiences, solicited through interviews with individuals and groups managing and involved with artist-led initiatives. The data (six of the interviews) were coded (analysed) using GTM which I explore within this chapter. Moving from detailed coding of the transcribed texts (explained more fully shortly) I have identified four key theoretical codes *Doing*, *Negotiating*, *Lacking and Losing*, and *Feeling* that enable me to analyse artist-led initiatives as relational practices.

Doing signifies attempts to produce and sustain agency and to do so collectively. The creation of spaces, communities, networks, projects and opportunities, for example, can be understood as processes that incubate alternative—experiential—forms of knowledge production. In examining this phenomenon, I draw on educational theorist Neil Fleming’s concept of kinesthetic learning, which forms

¹⁹² See in particular Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kaszynska, *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture: The AHRC Cultural Value Project* (Swindon: Arts & Humanities Research Council, 2016) and Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value, *Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth* (Coventry: University of Warwick, 2015).

one of four modalities set out formally in his ‘VARK’ model of learning.¹⁹³ I find further resonance for these ideas in the work of American activist and art writer Lucy Lippard on the specific significance of artists’ relations to place, and return to this concept in my thesis conclusion.¹⁹⁴

The analysis of my data revealed a second major condition, *Negotiating*, that involves gatekeepers over the terms of access to the resources that would grant artist-led initiatives the agency for *Doing*. Such resources include access to physical spaces in which to create the material and relational conditions that support communities of practice, as well as the basic financial resources that are of fundamental necessity to their sustenance. They are thus caught in tension between a desire for self-determination—to be achieved primarily through these practices of *Doing*—and a reactive condition of constant (re)negotiation. This is externally imposed both by the world of planners, elected officials, private landlords and commercial developers and by ‘culture’ as it is managed by operatives including funders and those powerful figures posited by Gregory Sholette as the ‘denizens of the art world’.¹⁹⁵

As a consequence of the dialectic described above, I identified *Lacking* and *Losing* as a regular problem under such conditions of constant renegotiation. My interviewees revealed that there are chronic difficulties attached to the creation and maintenance of spaces in which to practice. These are withheld, both by the policies of local authorities acting from economic necessity under the politics of austerity and constrained within a national framework of planning legislation; and by landlords and developers operating within a logic of private profit governing the commercial sector. My data reveals many organisations caught in a damaging spiral of finding and attempting to retain—but too often losing—appropriate and affordable premises that would support the world building of artist-led imaginaries. The lack of physical spaces is compounded by a lack of practical and specialist knowledge and appropriate skills and training with which to manage and mitigate these multiple threats. The artists involved also lack capacity: the human, financial and temporal resources

¹⁹³ See, for example, Neil Fleming and Colleen Mills, ‘Not Another Inventory, Rather a Catalyst for Reflection’, *To Improve the Academy* (1992) 11, 137-155.

¹⁹⁴ See in particular Lippard’s *Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*, (New York: The New Press, 1997).

¹⁹⁵ ‘... those who lay claim to the management and interpretation of culture—the critics, art historians, collectors, dealers, museums, curators, and arts administrators’. Sholette, *Dark Matter*, p. 1.

necessary to stabilising precarious ventures. In the case of initiatives with rolling committee structures, organisations are at constant risk of losing whatever knowledge has accrued within each successive cohort of organisers. For practising artists, there are choices to be made. Do they dedicate time to nurturing organisations, even as these commitments inevitably reduce the time available for practice itself? In addition, there are questions around how negotiating with gatekeepers runs the risk of sacrificing much-valued independence and departing from the foundational and deeply held values that nurtured the initial instinct for self-organisation.

The final code, *Feeling*, identified the importance of what I shall define as the affective-subjective experiences of individuals engaged in artist-led production and collective organisation as a consequence of exposure to a set of pervasive and potentially damaging environmental conditions and external pressures such as those described above. My research reveals long-term effects on the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals experiencing a daily 360-degree environment of uncertainty. The physical conditions of spaces that are too often difficult to access, cold and damp, lacking security or basic health and safety provision, seep over time into the human bodies that inhabit them. My data exposes the profound challenges – the professional and personal choices – facing artists who elect to maintain a fidelity to artist-led values and forms of practice well into their thirties, forties, fifties and beyond. My research opens up questions about the impact of these conditions on artistic practice and innovation, and the significance of these types of organisation for the communities and cities in which these artists choose to base themselves.

Having given a brief outline of the major findings, I need now to explain the methodology that enabled me to arrive at these theoretical codes. Grounded Theory is a qualitative research method by which theories are constructed from the analysis of the research material, the data, rather than being applied to the data. This abductive-inductive approach was developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their foundational study *Awareness of Dying* (1965), in which they developed an understanding of two elements in medicine that were hitherto untheorised and hence lacked understanding and indeed training : death and dying (what we now recognize as ‘end of life’ care and processes) in American hospitals. In 1967 their foundational text, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* established the case for *qualitative* methodology in the social sciences. In the light of further critiques of residual positivism in the original methodology and developments in postcolonial and feminist

epistemology that identified knowledge production as ‘situated,’ hence necessitating reflexivity on the part of the researcher, from 2000 Kathy Charmaz proposed constructivist revision, resulting in her widely used book *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2006). In 2002, Antony Bryant simultaneously called for a re-grounding of the method in ways that resonated with Charmaz’s work. This led to their collaboration on two versions of *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*, published in 2007 and 2019. Bryant has argued that Grounded Theory is an adaptable *method* rather than a single orthodox system and so he proposes the concept of Grounded Theory in his books *Grounded Theory and Grounded Theorizing: Pragmatism in Research Practice* (2017) and *Varieties of Grounded Theory* (2019).

This chapter traces my research journey with the Grounded Theory Method from which these findings emerged. I describe in the chapter my use of this qualitative method—which is not yet widely employed in the field of culture—explaining the method itself, why I elected to use it, and how I drew upon it within my research. From the analysis of major arguments and texts on cultural value and cultural ecology in Chapter 3, that performed a literature review, the dominant concepts of *place*, *value* and *institution* emerged. I begin the chapter by testing these, treating them, in Charmaz’s terms as ‘sensitizing concepts,’ which enabled me to frame a series of questions regarding artist-led practice that subsequently informed the collection and analysis of my data through the process of interviews, transcription and coding.¹⁹⁶ This involved an iterative approach to identifying and inviting research participants, including theoretical sampling, which Charmaz describes as the process of ‘seeking and collecting pertinent data to elaborate and refine categories in your emerging theory,’ which reflexively informed the unfolding interview process.¹⁹⁷ GTM involves the generation of *discourse* (words, statements, affect) on the part of the participants in order to explore their experiences, their actions, their self-understanding of their actions and experiences in ways that are not yet fully known to either the participants or the interviewer. Only through the several levels of coding language in the interview transcriptions, reading closely for patterns of meaning and the imprint of affects, does a theoretical interpretation emerge. The interviews do not

¹⁹⁶ For Kathy Charmaz, a ‘sensitizing concept’ is a broad term which, ‘sparks your thinking about a topic,’ drawing on the work of Herbert Blumer. Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (London: Sage, 2014), p. 30.

¹⁹⁷ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 192.

gather information in a regular question and answer format. They take the form of solicitations to speak, and they retain their informal, conversational and dialogical character, acknowledging the role of the interviewing partner in constructing the analysis.

Working with Charmaz's constructivist process for grounding theory in the data, my analysis progressed from a stage of initial coding where I moved comparatively across the extensive pages of transcribed interviews, towards the emergence of the new categories via focused coding and beyond towards theoretical (i.e. larger) codes.¹⁹⁸ Along the way I provide commentary on what emerged from the data as well as the gaps that were revealed. Finally, I arrived at four codes that I term *Doing*, *Negotiating*, *Lacking and Losing* and *Feeling*. I shall explore the four theoretical propositions in depth, discussing their properties and dimensions. Finally, these discoveries informed my approach to the three case studies of artist-led initiatives that follow, so that I can return with these two major forms of research (GTM and case studies) to identify my findings and their implications for my original research questions.

The Grounded Theory Method and Appropriateness for My Research

This thesis emerged from my personal experiences as an active participant in artist-led practice. I have experienced the challenges and opportunities of working collectively within these forms of self-organisation, and the accompanying joys and frustrations, dead ends and new discoveries, friendships and parting of ways that are equally its rewards. The unexpected hiatus in my own trajectory that I have already described, in 2016, furnished an opportunity to pause and reflect. It was at this point that I was able to begin to work through the earlier experiences within a new frame of reference, consciously reconsidering these as a researcher, and not solely as a participant and instigator, for the first time. From the outset, one of the key challenges and opportunities of this project has been the knowledge that I am an insider within the phenomenon that I am seeking to study. My position as such brings specific insights only available to someone deeply embedded in these forms of practice over

¹⁹⁸ She notes, 'I chose the term "constructivist" to acknowledge subjectivity and the researcher's involvement in the construction and interpretation of data and to signal the differences between my approach and conventional social constructionism of the 1980s and early 1990s'. Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 14.

an extended timeframe of almost two decades. It also created complications and consequences for my methodological approach to the thesis. Questions naturally arose regarding my implication within the field of the artist-led and my ability to undertake analytical research given the often long-standing professional and personal relationships that I am privileged to enjoy with many of its practitioners. I cannot make any claim to be a neutral, disinterested observer. In acknowledging the situated nature of knowledge, Kathy Charmaz draws on feminist critiques of ‘objectivity,’ developed notably by Donna Haraway in her influential 1988 essay ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’.¹⁹⁹ Challenging what she describes as the ‘various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims,’ Haraway argues instead for a feminist objectivity that is about ‘...limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see.’²⁰⁰ In writing this thesis, and reflecting on my research over the past four years, I am mindful of how the process has necessitated an unpicking (or unseeing to follow Haraway’s correlation of vision and power – what she calls the ‘god trick of seeing everything from nowhere’) of what I thought I knew, as an ‘insider,’ about artist-led practice.²⁰¹ While taking an ethnographic approach to my research subject was an available option, experimenting with GTM held appeal as a way to mitigate my own implication within the field of study while mobilising my experiences to inform its shape. GTM has offered me a way to become answerable for what it is that I think I know, having worked through it, and the resulting claims that I make within this thesis. I have in any case effectively taken the role of participant observer within the field for many years. Alongside my curatorial practice, I have experienced multiple interactions with artist-led initiatives, firstly as an artist, then as fellow practitioner and colleague, and more recently as a consultant, commissioned writer and member of advisory panels for artist-led initiatives. As an audience member I regularly experience exhibitions and events produced by them, and I have

¹⁹⁹ Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No.3 (1988), 575-599.

²⁰⁰ Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges’, p. 583.

²⁰¹ Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges’, p. 581.

attended and been an occasional presenter at various symposia on the subject that have been convened both before and during the research period.²⁰²

GTM researchers aim to develop a theory or a theorisation of activities and experiences that are grounded in the data: what people say and do and experience. Antony Bryant refers to this as a method for, ‘enacting abstraction and abduction’.²⁰³ I regard the adoption of GTM within this thesis as an important way for me both to foreground the self that is a researcher and to work abductively from my data to avoid the potential pitfall of seeking responses that illustrate *a priori* assumptions I may have held based on my previous experiences. I simultaneously acknowledge that these same experiences have been foundational in formulating my original research proposal, and that they have influenced decisions taken along the way. Finally, Bryant reminds us that, ‘research has to be understood as a social activity—*doing research*—with constant reminders that it is almost always something done by more than just one investigator’.²⁰⁴ In learning to use a method unfamiliar to both arts researchers and artists, I attended workshops with other researchers using GTM at the University of Leeds and at Leeds Beckett University. We also supported each other in sharing the challenges and learning curve of deploying the method and indeed the language of the social sciences, such as data and coding. These conversations have made invaluable contributions to my developing understanding of the processes and practices of GTM.²⁰⁵

Constructivist Grounded Theory

For Kathy Charmaz, Grounded Theory methods ‘...consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves’.²⁰⁶ Her emphasis is on the gathering of rich data that ‘get[s] beneath the surface of social and subjective life’.²⁰⁷ My research is concerned here with an excavation of what is folded away beneath the surface of commonly held beliefs on

²⁰² I return to three of these events, held in Birmingham, Liverpool and Newcastle upon Tyne in my thesis conclusion.

²⁰³ Antony Bryant, *Grounded Theory and Grounded Theorizing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. xii.

²⁰⁴ Bryant, *Grounded Theory and Grounded Theorizing*, p. 10.

²⁰⁵ I have particularly valued conversations with Anna Douglas, Leandra Koenig-Visage, Professor Antony Bryant and Professor Griselda Pollock.

²⁰⁶ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 1.

²⁰⁷ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 22.

the nature and contributions of artist-led practice, from both within and without the field. Pioneering work on Grounded Theory by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss sought to counter what Charmaz describes as the ‘positivist paradigm’ dominant within mid-century quantitative studies that sought causal explanations of phenomena and privileged the notion of a passive, unbiased researcher who simply collected ‘facts’.²⁰⁸ Through their analytical innovations, Glaser and Strauss developed new methodologies that offered systematic approaches to qualitative research, which could also potentially be applied to research in other fields. These ideas found expression in their foundational 1967 text, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*.²⁰⁹ Migrating over recent years into the field of cultural studies, GTM has gained ground as a method for analysing cultural phenomena. Within the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds, the method has recently been used by doctoral researchers to approach subjects including audience responses to an exhibition of photographs by Shirley Baker; an examination of gender in the racialised landscape of contemporary art in South Africa; and the history and contested meanings of The Pavilion, a pioneering women’s photography centre which in itself began life as an artist-led initiative in Leeds in 1983. These studies have successfully mobilised GTM in analysing interviews with research participants.

Charmaz describes the general process of conducting GTM as one which, ‘...begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you interacting and involved with your data and emerging analysis’.²¹⁰ GTM, therefore, recognises that the researcher is deeply implicated in the research process and active as a co-producer of knowledge, rather than merely an impartial conduit in an apparently simple process of its extraction. While GTM and traditional ethnographic approaches share a desire to study ‘real life’ phenomena from the perspective of those who are experiencing them, the methods differ in significant respects. In their 2011 comparative analysis of GTM and ethnography, Aldibat and Le Navenec seek to clarify the fundamental variance of these methods:

²⁰⁸ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 6.

²⁰⁹ Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New Jersey: AdlineTransation, 2006).

²¹⁰ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 1.

Whereas the grounded theorist aims to generate theory that describes basic psychosocial phenomena and to understand how human beings use social interaction to define their reality, the ethnographers' primary goal is to provide a thick description of the cultural phenomenon under study.²¹¹

Advanced by advocates including Kathy Charmaz and Antony Bryant since the 1990s, Constructivist Ground Theory seeks to depart from the positivism of earliest iterations of the method, and to reject contemporary criticisms of the ways in which it was seen by some to have, 'fragmented the respondent's story, relied on the authoritative voice of the researcher, blurred difference, and uncritically accepted Enlightenment grand meta narratives about science, truth, universality, human nature, and world-views'.²¹² The constructivist approach foregrounds flexibility in the method, embraces an iterative logic, and reconnects with what Charmaz calls the, 'inductive, comparative, emergent and open-ended approach of Glaser and Strauss's original statement'.²¹³ Within this thesis, I follow the GTM process delineated by Charmaz in the 2014 second edition of her handbook *Constructing Grounded Theory*. I have chosen to work with this text based on the clarity of its approach, which I found useful when first engaging with the methodology.

Intensive Interviewing: Preparation and Process

To explore my research questions, I generated a series of interviews to form the basis of discourses that I would analyse using GTM. As Charmaz notes:

Discourses accomplish things. People not only invoke them to claim, explain, and maintain, or constrain viewpoints and actions, but also to define and understand what is happening in their worlds... Interviews offer one way of eliciting discourses, which may be multiple, fragmented and contradictory as well as coherent and consistent. And research participants can use interviews to find, piece together, or reconstruct a discourse to make sense of their situation.²¹⁴

Collecting new data in this way was a deliberate strategy deemed necessary on two fronts. Firstly, it worked to counter the self-authored accounts that constitute the

²¹¹ Khaldoun Aldibat and Carol-Lynne Le Navenec, 'Clarification of the Blurred Boundaries between Grounded Theory and Ethnography: Similarities and Differences', *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry* <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED537796.pdf>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

²¹² Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 13.

²¹³ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 12.

²¹⁴ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 85.

majority of the available material on these initiatives. As I have noted, existing work largely comprises anthologies and monographs concerned with narrative and geographically situated accounts of artist-led initiatives, written primarily by those directly involved as instigators and managers. Simply accepting these testimonies at face value—hearing only *what* people say about what they have done—would represent an inadequate foundation for deep research. The GTM researcher aims to get under the skin of *how* people describe their lived experiences, including what discourses they draw on, seeking emergence across a set of data rather than regarding individual accounts as self-enclosed or definitive. Secondly, as someone directly engaged with artist-led practice over an extended period of the last 20 years, I am deeply implicated in the field that I am studying. Creating new material for analysis was also deemed essential, therefore, in countering any *a priori* assumptions that I might hold about these forms of practice, arising from my personal experiences.

I have studied Kathy Charmaz' chapter on conducting 'intensive interviewing' as a technique that typically informs data collection for GTM analysis. In particular, she focuses on the creation of an 'interactional climate' within the interview setting, wherein the researcher's aim is to create a 'gently-guided, one-sided' conversation that allows the participant's substantial experiences to emerge in depth and detail. The researcher, 'encourages, listens and learns,' and aims to elicit extended responses through the use of supportive, non-judgmental but brief verbal and physical cues such as nods, smiles and gentle vocal murmurs that keep the conversation flowing. The accurate recording of these incidentals in the interview transcription is essential for capturing in textual form the affective, non-verbal dimensions of responses to the questions. Hesitation for instance, being lost for words, or difficulty in saying certain things are all critical to this relay of the social and subjective experience being studied. Charmaz recognises that interviews are situated within specific socio-cultural settings, and this underpins an approach to the interview process that combines structure with flexibility by allowing for emergence and adaptation. Further, she acknowledges that interviews take place within already-established frameworks, as both researcher and participant carry pre-existing, yet different and potentially conflicting, agendas, interests, opinions and assumptions. The interactional space of the intensive interview is, therefore, highly charged, and within it the researcher aims

to study the ‘language, meanings and actions, emotions and body language’ of the participants.²¹⁵

Without any prior experience or training in interview techniques, following a process set out by Charmaz provided helpful guidelines and a structure for a first foray into this mode of data collection. My status as an active participant within my field of study shaped the research in several ways: firstly, I was already known to the majority of my research participants, either personally or through networks of peers, or by professional reputation. In fact these existing relationships, with peers, colleagues and occasionally with personal friends, were instrumental in enabling me to engage participants with my study. This was effectively demonstrated during the invitation process, where attempts to contact potential participants not already known to me, for example with the incumbent organising committee at Transmission in Glasgow, went unanswered. While sparse resources and restrictions on time imposed by participation in the ‘gig economy’ can partially account for this, the lack of response perhaps also speaks volumes about the networks of personal relations that underpin such activities and govern its discursive and critical boundaries. As Charmaz notes, researchers who pursue ‘less charged topics’ may experience access problems: ‘In short, how your status as a researcher appears to gatekeepers and prospective research participants affects your effectiveness in finding suitable people and conducting the interviews’.²¹⁶ My perceived status as an ‘insider,’ and particularly as Co-founder of The Tetley, undoubtedly enabled a privileged level of access to potential participants. The familiarity of existing relationships also potentially elicited less guarded comments than might have been the case with a stranger, although the inherent challenge for me as an interviewer was to try to maintain a critical distance while conducting the interviews themselves. I must admit that occasionally I fell short and spoke too much or slipped into a more conversational mode over a shared joke or anecdote for example. My intention at all times, however, was to limit these lapses as much as possible. In any case, Charmaz reminds us that all conversations take place in a socially constructed and, therefore, non-neutral space.

During the first year of study and in advance of undertaking my GTM interviews and analysis, my initial step was to carry out an extensive analysis of the dominant discourses shaping the overall field of policy, governance and funding for

²¹⁵ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, pp. 55-82.

²¹⁶ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 61.

artist-led initiatives in the UK and Ireland. This might be considered a literature review. Charmaz outlines how avoidance of literature review forms a ‘common dictum’ about undertaking Grounded Theory research. But, as she crucially acknowledges, such avoidance may represent a ‘luxury’ that not all researchers can afford, and this clearly resonates with my own prior experiences. Charmaz insists that the researcher must, ‘be current about the experience or situation that [she] will be studying’. She also notes that, ‘Learning the language [of a particular discipline]... may help to avoid mistakes’ during the interview conversation.²¹⁷ My previous experiences within the contemporary art sector, and artist-led practice in particular, enabled me to access the field of study armed with certain insights. It enabled me to bring experiential knowledge to bear on the study. However, my reading of the current documents and dominant discourses on the ‘ecology’ of art and the notion of cultural value became critical in establishing a parallel terrain wherein artist-led initiatives were constructed as carriers of other or contested symbolic meanings in respect of contemporary debates on cultural value. I needed to review the existing literature not only on artist-led initiatives and on cultural value, but to seek intersections between these discourses and to identify corresponding silences. As I have already stated, this yielded little substantive material on the *value* of artist-led organisations, which encouraged me to further excavate this territory as a clearly identified gap in existing knowledge and as an opportunity for my thesis to make an original contribution. From my study of the dominant discourses, I identified the three concepts of *place*, *value* and *institution* that then functioned as ‘sensitizing concepts’ that, for Charmaz, properly inform the researcher’s approach to conducting intensive interviews. As she notes, ‘A researcher has topics to pursue’, and these concepts gave shape to conversations which otherwise might have faced too broad a topic based on ‘artist-led initiatives’ as a generic field of enquiry. Finally, my research has sought to tread a path that weaves together the benefits of extensive personal experience combined with analysis of the existing literature and careful observation of GTM. As Charmaz notes, ‘The combination of insider knowledge and detailed study can yield profound analyses when researchers are able to subject their experiences, interview

²¹⁷ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 59.

guides, and subsequent data to rigorous analytic scrutiny'.²¹⁸ Such was the aim of my initial forays into GTM.

The Process

Between October 2017 and March 2019 I carried out 25 interviews, creating a substantial oral archive of personal accounts of the lived experiences of 35 individuals who were active as instigators and managers, or as part of governance structures, within artist-led initiatives.²¹⁹ Exceptions included a representative of Arts Council England, in the role of Visual Arts Relationship Manager for the Yorkshire region, and a small handful of artists working within the context of such initiatives, for example as studio holders or members. Ethical approval was sought, and granted by the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures Research Ethics Committee, in advance of the interview process commencing. The interviews took place almost entirely within the organisations' workplaces, but in the case of non-venue based initiatives they were conducted in an appropriate location most convenient for the interviewee (often their home town or city). Limitations including the cost of travel and my responsibilities as a parent governed the number of places that it was feasible to visit as well as their distance from Leeds. This restricted interviews to 12 locations within England, primarily across the North and Midlands, in Birmingham, Coventry, Hull, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Preston, Rotherham and Salford. Due to proximity I was able to interview nine separate initiatives within Leeds. One interview took place in London. Participants were selected due to my prior professional knowledge of their activities. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the strong networks of artist-led practice in the North, and the relatively small pool of initiatives with the resources to participate in the research, I had previous connections with nearly all of the interviewees. As already noted, capacity within many artist-led initiatives is severely limited, and attempts to reach out to some organisations drew no response. On other occasions, interviews were organised but then cancelled when prospective participants needed to grab opportunities for paid work, or their plans changed at the last minute. However, through participation in and instigation of a number of discursive events on the subject over the course of the research period, I have been able to meet and interact with, and hear first-hand testimony from, other

²¹⁸ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 63.

²¹⁹ Interview dates, locations and participants are listed in Appendix 1.

initiatives based elsewhere in the UK and Ireland that I have not had the resources to visit in person.

Charmaz advocates the development of an interview guide that addresses the purpose of the research while mitigating against pitfalls in the process, particularly for those new to intensive interviewing. She further advises beginning a GTM study with broad, open-ended questions. Thus, in advance of conducting the interviews, I developed a set of questions organised around the broad themes of what, who, why, where, when and so on. I typically began by asking participants to simply tell me about the organisation or initiative with which they were involved, allowing them to decide how to begin their description, where the entry points lay, and what to prioritise. Beginning with asking about the organisation rather than interviewees' personal experiences was also designed to provide a relaxed introduction to the conversation, followed up by later prompts around their personal experiences if necessary. Subsequent prompts elicited thoughts on aspects of place, value and institution if these had not already arisen, and I followed up with more specific questions on the detail of, for example, initiatives' relationships with gatekeepers including ACE and landlords.

In practice, the majority of participants spoke freely and conversations hovered between following the structure of the interview guide and the tumbling nature of human discourse. The interviews took place over 15 months but were not evenly spaced due to various limitations including participants' availability and the constraints of family life. Some were grouped closely together, and a rhythm of consistency developed through the period April to August 2018 when most of the interviews took place. Transcription and analysis of the interviews continued in parallel during the gaps between data collection, and informed this in a number of ways. Firstly, the constant comparative method that is the hallmark of GTM not only enables the development of theory but also encourages reflexive thinking on the researcher's own performance in how she conducts the interviews and frames the questions. From listening to the recordings I noted the occasions on which I either spoke too much or too little, framed questions in too specific or leading a way, or missed opportunities to elicit deeper and more detailed responses from participants. Thus my technique as an interviewer developed over time as I gained confidence. My developing familiarity with the GTM process and absorption in transcription also began to provide insights into the likely recurrence of certain responses, and this both

aided the development of initial theoretical ideas, and informed decisions on sampling and saturation, as I describe below. Transcription took place as soon as possible after conducting the interviews, with each lasting around one to one-and-a-half hours. I opted to transcribe the interviews myself, as although laborious this provided an invaluable opportunity to listen and re-listen to each conversation. In this way, I was able to pay attention to the slight hesitations, long pauses, traces of nervousness and so on that enliven the spoken word and which cannot be discerned from the typed transcripts alone.

Beginning the Coding Journey: Sensitizing Concepts, Initial Codes and Memo Writing

As noted, GTM encourages constant comparison between data. Thus the period from October 2017 to March 2019 was characterised by simultaneous data collection, transcription, listening and re-listening, and analysis through a process of coding.

According to Charmaz,

Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data. Through coding, you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means.²²⁰

During analysis, the codes become ‘transitional objects’ that connect the raw data with the significance that we abstract from them. Charmaz identifies the two main phases of coding as:

- 1) an initial phase involving naming each word, line, or segment of data followed by
- 2) a focused, selective phase that uses the most frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data.²²¹

During initial coding, researchers are encouraged not to stray from the data nor attach pre-conceived concepts to them. Rather, Charmaz advises an approach to initial coding that seeks to identify actions within each segment of data rather than themes or topics.²²² However, ‘sensitizing concepts’ are useful stimulants for beginning coding:

Sensitizing concepts can help you start to code your data. These concepts give you starting points for initiating your analysis but do not determine its content. Sensitizing concepts from symbolic interactionism include action, meaning,

²²⁰ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 113.

²²¹ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 113.

²²² Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 116.

process, agency, situation, identity, and self. Social justice inquiry may lead to sensitizing concepts such as ideology, power, privilege, equity, and oppression, and to remaining alert to variation and difference.²²³

I began my foray into initial coding accompanied by the sensitizing concepts *place*, *value* and *institution* that arose from my first chapter's analysis of the dominant discourses on cultural value and the arts 'ecology'. However, initial codes are 'provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data'.²²⁴ While opening the door to analysis, the role of sensitizing concepts is not to imprison the researcher, who is free to pursue them or not, as the analysis unfolds.²²⁵ The key is to be led by the data, remaining open to other possibilities. In my research journey, the process of coding became two-fold, finding entry points through the doorway of the sensitizing concepts while remaining open to the emergence of other ideas. This to and fro between the sensitizing concepts and the data allowed me to 'test' the concepts and their fit with the data. I return to these emergent findings below in my description of the second stage of focused coding.

My early analytical steps attempted to utilise post-it notes to jot down ideas on initial coding in the belief that this might keep them mobile and therefore easy to move around and gather with other similar codes when moving to the second stage of coding. However, after generating hundreds of such notes in analysing the first three interviews, it became apparent that this method was not appropriate for me. The physical constraints of a small and busy family home without a private office meant that in practice there was no space which could adequately harbour these notes on a basis that would have allowed me to keep returning to them over such an extended period of time. Attempts to collect the notes on a wall at home soon also met with frustration, as the glue dried quickly and the notes simply fell off. While such details are mundane, they are also important pragmatic findings for the realities of constructing GTM analyses. Instead, I returned to the original transcripts that I had collected as Word documents. These became the site of enquiry, gathering together within each document not only my initial coding, but also the 'memos' or 'informal analytic notes' that form, for Charmaz, the, 'pivotal intermediate step between data

²²³ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 117.

²²⁴ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 117.

²²⁵ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, pp. 30-31.

collection and writing drafts of papers'.²²⁶ Writing memos exploring my observations actually within the transcripts allowed me to stay close to the data while writing reflexively about them. I initially also colour-coded my memos corresponding to statements on *place*, *value* and *institution* but this quickly became too visually overloaded. I also found that as theoretical ideas began to emerge, I wrote fewer memos formally within the documents in this way, as familiarity with the method freed them up to become less mechanical jottings in notebooks and on post-it notes.

Working within each transcript, and using the 'Comments' tool, I began to identify and code pieces of data, giving names to these and in effect creating a right-hand column in the document where these were recorded. As an example of this initial coding process, my interview with the (now) former Director of an artist-led initiative in a northern city began with an open invitation to simply describe what the organisation was for her, following Charmaz's prompt to focus on open-ended questions. This elicited a lengthy response which began with the following statement:

Yeah, er so the NewBridge Project is, um, an artist-led organisation. Er, it was established in 2010 by two Fine Art graduates from Newcastle University. Um, and we set out trying to, er, provide affordable studio space to artists, especially early career [artists], as well as opportunities.²²⁷

I attached 11 initial codes to this statement, as follows:

Data	Initial Codes
Yeah, er so the NewBridge Project is, um, an artist-led organisation.	Identifying as artist-led Hesitating
Er, it was established in 2010...	Going back to the beginning
...by two Fine Art graduates from Newcastle University.	Asserting the role of artists Grounding the organisation in place
Um, and we set out trying to, er, provide affordable studio space to artists, especially early career [artists], as well as opportunities.	Prioritising artists Providing Being affordable Creating spaces Creating opportunities Defining 'artist-led'

Figure 4.1, Example of initial coding of interview data.

²²⁶ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 162.

²²⁷ Interview with Charlotte Gregory, 6 December 2017.

Similarly, in my interview with the Creative Director of another artist-led initiative based in a northern city, the opening invitation to simply tell me something about the organisation elicited the following statement:

In a nutshell. er, what is East Street Arts? East Street Arts... let's... I'll do the official stuff as it were.... So East Street Arts is a charity, er, a visual arts charity set up as... it is also a company limited by guarantee, so it has a set of Trustees, Directors within the company. It was founded by myself and Karen Watson in 1993, and... and has grown from being two artists with two thousand square foot in a mill in Leeds to being, er, an organisation that now deals with half a million square foot of building space across the country.²²⁸

My analysis identified the following open codes:

Data	Initial Codes
In a nutshell. er, what is East Street Arts?	Hesitating
East Street Arts... let's... I'll do the official stuff as it were...	Prioritising 'official' status
So East Street Arts is a charity, er, a visual arts charity set up as... it is also a company limited by guarantee, so it has a set of Trustees, Directors within the company.	Describing the organisation's legal status Identifying with 'visual arts' Not saying 'artist-led'
It was founded by myself and Karen Watson in 1993...	Going back to the beginning
...and has grown from being two artists with two thousand square foot in a mill in Leeds...	Growing Asserting the role of artists Grounding the organisation in place
...to being, er, an organisation that now deals with half a million square foot of building space across the country.	Changing Becoming an organisation Quantifying by scale Constructing value Feeling proud

Figure 4.2, Example of initial coding of interview data.

In this initial coding stage, it was important to identify as many codes as possible, without placing limitations on the number of these that could be mined from the data. Charmaz advocates working 'quickly and spontaneously' to develop short, compelling codes that 'capture the phenomenon and grab the reader'.²²⁹ In doing so, she makes use of Glaser's 1978 text *Theoretical Sensitivity* which promotes the use of gerunds as codes. Gerunds are verb forms that function as nouns. In English, they end

²²⁸ Interview with Jon Wakeman, 23 March 2018.

²²⁹ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 118.

in ‘ing’ and these can be seen at work in the examples of initial coding given above. Initial codes are provisional because they remain fluid during analysis, and in practice my initial codes constantly shifted and were reworded during this first stage of the process. The GTM researcher moves constantly back and forth between large amounts of data in this way to produce a comparative analysis, refining the wording of initial codes and identifying gaps in the data. This informs the ongoing data collection which proceeds simultaneously through ‘theoretical sampling’ that I discuss in the following section on focused coding. The process of initial coding eventually encompassed ten interview transcripts and hundreds of codes were identified.

Focused Coding, Theoretical Sampling and Saturation

Through the GT method of constant comparison, the researcher advances their analytical thinking on the large number of initial codes they have generated, and begins to sift these, identifying patterns in them and gathering them into more conceptual ‘focused codes’. Charmaz states that focused coding, ‘requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytical sense to categorize your data incisively and completely’.²³⁰ This stage builds on the analytical directions emerging from the initial coding stage, and through memo-writing, ‘advance[s] the theoretical direction of your work’.²³¹ As Charmaz reminds us, the researcher is an active participant in the construction of meaning from the data:

Granted, what you define the codes as implying or revealing might represent widely shared definitions. But your definitions might represent a unique view that you bring to the analysis. And perhaps your codes lead you to make a phenomenon explicit that many people experience or witness but had not yet conceptualized.²³²

Working across my initial codes, I began to analyse them and to look for patterns and gaps. What struck me immediately was the large volume of codes that related to a basic impetus to ‘do’ that could be seen to be at work within artist-led initiatives. The data spoke to proactive forms of organising, making, providing, collectivising and facilitating. The creation of spaces, dialogue, opportunities, communities and

²³⁰ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 138.

²³¹ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 138.

²³² Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 140.

networks arose frequently, as did practices of hosting, inviting and exchanging, illustrated by the following extracts:

We are renting a space to Modern Clay, which is an artist-led ceramic facility.

We hope to be able to have space [in our new venue] to invite in other artist-led organisations to inhabit that, so that might be galleries...

And I guess... in terms of the roots of Grand Union, it's always been about building a community and building a space that a community can work in.

I guess it's about, um, supporting artistic practice... so whether that be through providing space that's affordable and useful to those people or providing a space that's freeing other artists here to work and to connect with and be in dialogue with, um, yeah and to provide events and exhibitions where conversation can happen on contemporary visual art.²³³

We set out trying to, er, provide affordable studio space to artists, especially early career [artists], as well as opportunities.²³⁴

Erm since January 2016 we've been a CIC, Community Interest Company, and our mission is to provide affordable studio space for artists based in the North West.²³⁵

We're most definitely artist-focused because that is commissioning, providing space, making opportunities.²³⁶

And [ROAR's founders] wanted to stop the skills drain [from Rotherham] and they wanted to provide support, and should you go and then come back that there would be opportunity. So, the idea was to have an arts centre, which would be a one-stop shop of support, provision, workspace, everything that was needed.²³⁷

Equally populated were codes about being passive, reacting and responding, negotiating, losing and changing. Interviewees made frequent and compelling statements about 'having' to do certain things—relocating, formalising, accepting, responding, reacting, compromising, conforming, accommodating and so on—revealing the exertion of external forces upon them, as the following examples demonstrate [my italics]:

²³³ Interview with Cheryl Jones, 18 October 2017.

²³⁴ Interview with Charlotte Gregory, 6 December 2017.

²³⁵ Interview with David Gledhill and Martin Nash, 20 March 2018.

²³⁶ Interview with Jon Wakeman, 23 March 2018.

²³⁷ Interview with Sharon Gill, 3 May 2018.

I guess what we're trying to do is stake out our claim in this area, like we don't want to just *have to move on* because we can't afford to be here any more, when we've spent seven years investing our time and our money.

Yeah but also why should... why should the artists *have to keep going and finding* the next space and investing all of our time in creating a community here, just to get moved on by the developers?²³⁸

So it all... you know, there were a lot of things that *had to happen* before [the founders of the organisation] could move in and occupy it. So... setting up as a Community Interest Company so that they could sign this meanwhile lease.

So we actually *have to pay* the twenty percent of the business rates, for the space that we occupy, because I mean [the developers] were like... 'You can go in,' eventually, 'You can go in but it's cost-neutral'.

So yeah, you know, it was a great deal that they were almost paying us to be in [the building] really, but I mean with that comes the kind of... I guess the pay back really. So we, um, the lease was... it had a clause in it that [we] would *have to move out* with one month's notice.²³⁹

Every building that we've ever stayed in, we've been kicked out by developers. We've been treated badly by landlords. We've been hit with ridiculous bills that *we haven't had an option but to pay*.

We'll have to be doing training. And the recruitment, the way that we recruit, will be different as well.²⁴⁰

Well, when we were looking for a new building, we started having meetings with Manchester City Council and the Arts Council and it became clear very quickly that we would *have to kind of rationalise*.

But, er, during the conversation we've had... nothing's on paper... but during the conversations that we've had with the Council they've, um, impressed upon us that *we need to be making a large capital funding bid* to preferably the Heritage Lottery Fund, of around two million [pounds], er, at the least, to fully renovate the building going forwards.

And there were all sorts of other things *we had to comply with*, like rubbish collection and providing bicycle storage, and you know we've also *got to pay* for the burning off of the road markings outside the School. Those sort of things, sort of mounting up as *jobs we have to do*.²⁴¹

²³⁸ Interview with Cheryl Jones, 18 October 2017.

²³⁹ Interview with Charlotte Gregory, 6 December 2017.

²⁴⁰ Interview with Emma Curd and Jade French, 23 January 2018.

²⁴¹ Interview with David Gledhill and Martin Nash, 20 March 2018.

[Developing a Neighbourhood Plan is] a good ambition, but the reality is that we've got to *shift the organisation* to try to fit something slightly different.²⁴²

If aspects of 'doing' and 'reacting' represented the most populated codes, I was surprised to some extent by the relatively small number of codes relating to 'curating', particularly in relation to exhibition making. In fact the term was used very infrequently to describe the activities of the initiatives I engaged with, with the exception of Grand Union. Although commonly understood as an 'artist-led' initiative,²⁴³ its Director Cheryl Jones told me, '... I feel like we're more curator-led as an organisation', and she further elucidated the ways in which the organisation supports emerging curators.²⁴⁴ Other interviewees troubled the notion of 'curating' itself, preferring the term 'programming' and using this to describe a discursive approach to developing relationships between organisations and their immediate environment, as opposed to a potentially narrower focus on exhibition-making. Jade French, who at the time of the interview was an Artistic Director at The Royal Standard in Liverpool, told me:

So initially I actually applied to be an Artistic Director... except when I sort of got in my interview I fessed up that actually I wasn't that bothered about curating any exhibitions, which is probably a bit bizarre to say in an interview which I suppose was looking for people to do shows. My interest for wanting to get more involved with the organisation was I feel that TRS [sic] is viewed as somewhere that's very cliquy, it's very white, it's very able-bodied, it's not very accessible or inclusive, and in my practice that's what I'm very interested in. So I wanted to get involved to see if I could help in some way or contribute something.²⁴⁵

For The Royal Standard at that time, and French in particular, a move towards what could be seen as a more socially-engaged practice, or a form of curatorial activism, was deemed necessary to counter the organisation's past approach to curating:

I think that curatorially in the past, it has been that uber-traditional approach of an individual having a vision or artist they wish to work with and executing

²⁴² Interview with Jon Wakeman, 23 March 2018.

²⁴³ For example, in June 2017, AN's [formerly Artists' Newslettter] website listed 17 organisations that had just entered Arts Council England's 'National Portfolio' for the funding period 2018-22 and which it understood to be 'artist-led'. Grand Union was among them. 'ACE NPOs: Visual Arts Organisations 2018-22', *a-n* < <https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/ace-npos-visual-arts-organisations-2018-22/> > [accessed 20 March 2020].

²⁴⁴ Interview with Cheryl Jones, 18 October 2017.

²⁴⁵ Interview with Emma Curd and Jade French, 23 January 2018.

that vision within a space. And I guess that part of my role here at TRS is to look at how else we might programme, what else can we offer?²⁴⁶

My interview with Jon Wakeman, Creative Director at East Street Arts in Leeds, also revealed an uneasy relationship between the organisation and more formal, possibly institutionally-sanctioned and therefore more familiar, forms of curating:

Um, there's a realisation that we have to... we want to up our game in terms of our programme. We've taken our eye off the ball with that over the last few years, year or two, and that's hurting us at the moment. Hurting us personally because we're frustrated that it's slipped, and hurting us as an organisation because you can do all [these other things] but I still think that we need to be producing and... putting stuff out there that we feel is art, that should be... challenging ourselves and challenging the city and our environment.²⁴⁷

And later in the same interview:

I think that we probably... and that's where we've hit some art world stuff, because we've not... The white wall gallery stuff has fallen by the wayside. It's become much more a kind of active... activating... I don't want to say "activist" because I don't think that's right.²⁴⁸

These statements offer a fascinating window into the complex, negotiated relationships that many artist-led initiatives arguably have with a 'contemporary art world' that is constructed through a discourse of curating and practiced by trans-national networks of major institutions and biennial formats. There are questions here for the relative value attached by artist-led initiatives to what Griselda Pollock has termed the 'exhibitionary',²⁴⁹ as opposed to alternative forms of socially-engaged artistic production understood as community building manifest in activities such as East Street Arts' recent creation of an artist-led hostel or their role within a developing Neighbourhood Plan for the Mabgate and Lincoln Green area of Leeds.²⁵⁰ While exhibitions are indeed often produced within the context of artist-led initiatives – many spaces I encountered during my research deploy the classic formation of

²⁴⁶ Interview with Emma Curd and Jade French.

²⁴⁷ Interview with Jon Wakeman, 23 March 2018.

²⁴⁸ Interview with Jon Wakeman.

²⁴⁹ This is drawn from discussions in Griselda Pollock's MA Seminar on *Documenta since 1989* at the University of Leeds, and the analysis of the role of the temporary exhibition in the conditions of artistic practice since 1955 by Mary Kelly, 'Re-viewing Modernist Criticism', *Screen*, 22:3 (1981), 41-52.

²⁵⁰ 'Our Neighbourhood Plan', *East Street Arts*

<<https://eaststreetarts.org.uk/fluxcapacitor/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Neighbourhood-Plan-Artist-Brief-Document.pdf>> [accessed 20 March 2020].

studios spaces and showing space(s) aligned under one roof – my data illustrate the parallel production of conversations, social relationships, communities and networks as artistic outputs regarded as having an equitable status to that of exhibitions. This becomes important for my later case study and analysis of the East Leeds Project in terms of how it generates social value that goes beyond its mis-recognition as a merely inferior agent of an exhibitionary modality.

Working across my initial codes in this way, noting concentrations of ideas as well as gaps, considering what they revealed or concealed, and identifying similarities among them, I began to synthesise them into a smaller number of twelve categories. I selected the names for them that are listed below, labels which reflect a two-way coding process. Through this, I was able to compare my data to identify patterns and emergent concepts, writing memos about them, while also keeping in mind the ‘sensitizing concepts’ of *place, value, institution* and the way in which these arose from my early research questions:

- Being Artist-led
- Being in control/not being in control
- Changing
- Creating communities
- Curating
- Experiencing loss or lack
- Feeling
- Going back to the beginning
- Having a sense of their place in things
- Having value/s
- Institutionalising
- Not knowing

How did these categories emerge from the initial codes? The example below lists some of the initial codes that I began to gather under the category ‘Being in control/not being in control’. The data in this sample is drawn from seven different interviews:

Data	Initial codes
Yes, so the conversation with the LEP and the Council...I guess what we’re trying to do is stake out our claim in this area, like we don’t want to just have to move on because we can’t afford to be here any more, when we’ve spent seven years investing our time and our money.	Negotiating Staking a claim Wanting to stay Fearing losing their space Losing progress

<p>So yeah you know it as a great deal that they were almost paying us to be in there really, um but I mean with that comes the kind of, the I guess the pay back really, so the lease was... it had a clause in that you would have to move out with one month's notice...</p>	<p>Compromising Being vulnerable Lacking security</p>
<p>We're both Artistic Directors and we run it, and we lead it, and we say what happens. So we've done a great big kind of dip at one point, of having un-ownership, and now we're back to ownership.</p>	<p>Taking back ownership Desiring control</p>
<p>We'd like our own building. We don't want to rent. [...] Every building we've ever stayed in, we've been kicked out by developers, we've been treated badly by landlords, we've been hit with ridiculous bills that we had no option but to pay.</p>	<p>Desiring autonomy Being constantly moved on Having damaging relationships Being on the receiving end</p>
<p>Well, when we were looking for a new building, we started having meetings with Manchester City Council, and the Arts Council, and it became clear very quickly that we would have to kind of rationalise...</p>	<p>Being told what to do Having to adapt Fitting in</p>
<p>So from the beginning er, we were advised that it would be a good idea if we could accommodate a dance troupe based in central Manchester...</p>	<p>Accommodating Responding to external agendas</p>
<p>The rent was reasonable, there was going to be a ten-year lease. Erm, lots of promise you know, we had plans of each floor, allocated studios spaces, we'd got down to that level of detail. But then it just sort of evaporated. It's hard to describe.</p>	<p>Planning for the future Losing direction Feeling abandoned</p>
<p>And also, we firmly believed from the beginning that we needed to have impact and profile raise so that we would be difficult to move on, so it was you who was kind of, I was a bit more cautious about that floor, but you were kind of saying, we have more clout, we have more weight, we'll be better able to cement ourselves quickly within the kind of landscape of the city.</p>	<p>Making themselves indispensable Resisting Taking the lead Ecologising</p>
<p>I won't go down that route. But get some basic respect from the world out here, where we're not just a nice little add on, if we've done well this year we can afford to keep some kids educated, or we can hang some art on the walls, or go out and paint the fence with the profit. We want day-to-day respect, we want to be a part of society, on a meaningful level, every single day, every single week. Not just if things are nice, not just if, 'oh look Tony Blair's here, we can afford to spend loads of money on funded projects and now the Tories are here, ooh now we can't afford it'.</p>	<p>Respecting self Being independent Finding alternatives Rejecting public funding</p>

Figure 4.3, Example of emergence of categories from initial coding.

What began to emerge here through comparison across the data was a strong sense of the way in which artist-led initiatives are caught in a constant cycle of managing disruption from numerous external factors. Excited by the emergence of this condition, I revisited earlier interview transcripts to look for additional data that elucidated facets of the concept. This had consequences for the way in which my interview process continued, proceeding by ‘theoretical sampling,’ that is the process of expanding data collection with the explicit intention to, ‘develop the properties of your categories until no new properties emerge’.²⁵¹ Rather than regarding the challenges for artist-led initiatives as a simplistic matter of finding, keeping or losing physical spaces in which to work and exhibit, the comparative analysis enabled me to develop a wider and more compelling concept: ‘control’. My data reveal that artist-led initiatives are engaged in a daily struggle for agency, and this extends not only to their immediate physical environment, but to other potential facets of ‘control’ in their negotiated relationships with external stakeholders including funders, city planners, local and regional authorities and individual gatekeepers who might equally be prominent cultural personalities or elected officials.

A series of pressing questions arose: What does it mean to operate under such pervasive conditions of uncertainty? What damaging effects might such conditions impose on individuals on the receiving end of these uneven relations of control? What would the cumulative effects of this be over many years? What progress, advances, innovations, and rich cultural production are stifled or go unrealised due to the constant need to revise, shift, begin again, rethink and relocate over and over again in response to these external stimuli? What does such an environment foster on its most vulnerable participants and their imagined futures? What strategies do and could artist-led initiatives develop to mitigate these factors and develop a stronger sense of their own agency? Conceptualising this as the focused code ‘Being in control/Not being in control’ moves my reading of the data from a purely narrative account of which cities and particular spaces artists inhabit, a mode that was seen to dominate much of the literature on artist-led initiatives’ relationships with *place*, into a more analytical space which begins to consider the politics of these relationships and artists’ construction within the social fabric of contemporary cities. Refocusing the

²⁵¹ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 192.

analysis on this issue opens the door to further discussion of what is at stake for artist-led initiatives and individual practitioners in pursuing these forms of self-organisation, a question I return to in my discussion of the final, theoretical, stage of coding below.

Similarly, I noticed during initial coding that participants often responded to my open question of ‘tell me something about the organisation’ by beginning with a narrative description of why, where and how the initiative started. I gathered together initial codes allocated to these statements in the focused code ‘Going back to the beginning’. This pattern is illustrated in opening statements by Charlotte Gregory (NewBridge Project) and Jon Wakeman (East Street Arts) that I quote again here, as well as in the following extracts which arose in direct response to my opening invitation, ‘Tell me something about the organisation’:

When we set up... Maybe if I go back to the beginning... When we set up we were a big collective of artists and curators and really wanted to kind of fill a gap in Birmingham that... that yeah... [to] create a facility that didn’t exist at the time...²⁵²

Okay, well Lucy and I were both members of Rogue [artists’ studios] before, and I guess that’s how we both met.²⁵³

So it was started by three graduates from [Liverpool John Moores University] in Toxteth just up the road from here, in an old pub, and then, um, it quickly outgrew that and became like a cohort of ten to twelve artists...²⁵⁴

This passage from my interview with Stephen Rogers, Chair of the Board of ROAR, and a co-founder of the organisation, is worth quoting at length as it neatly illustrates the tangle of artistic production, friendship, networks, creative education and the absence of ‘official’ provision in a particular place which foment and give rise to practices of self-organisation. It builds on Sharon Gill’s summary of ROAR’s founding quoted earlier, and it also begins with beginnings:

Well I’ll tell you about the beginning, because the beginning is always easy. Um, basically, um, Catherine, who... er I was a teacher, I came out of education because I fell out with it because of the way it was developing and changing, becoming so un-child centred and it was awful, um and decided to set up a theatre company with Catherine who was an ex-student of mine who’d just finished her degree, and also one of my closest friends, like another daughter. And so we set up Open Minds Theatre Company in 2003 [...] And

²⁵² Interview with Cheryl Jones, 18 October 2017.

²⁵³ Interview with Lucy Harvey and Hilary Jack, 22 January 2018.

²⁵⁴ Interview with Charlotte Gregory, 6 December 2017.

that coincided with... Rotherham used to have a very, quite a big community arts team in the Council... and so Lizzie who actually managed that team used to set up network meetings for artists, and I had a conversation with Nick Harder, who was the bloke who ran the framing and arts supply shop in Rotherham. And he was saying, 'I hate the fact that there is no studio space in Rotherham, I hate the fact there is no structure to actually support artists in Rotherham, that what we've got is an artistic drain where people go away and do a fine arts degree in Manchester, Sheffield, and they stay there. They come back wanting space and then they haven't got space and so they move away again'. And I was saying, 'I hate the fact that you know, Rotherham doesn't support their own arts organisations'. And that's really what ROAR came out of, is that conversation. And it was started with three aims in mind: one, to support professional and emerging artists living and working in Rotherham; two, to act as a one-stop shop for, um, providing access to artists for people who wanted to have workshops and things like that; and three to set up an independent arts centre with studio space, so there were those three clear aims. And really, actually I can show you the picture on my fridge... there was a sort of gathering together of a group of artists who were interested in, you know, from a singer-songwriter to a visual artist... um to Nick, to um Sandria who's a visual artist, me, Tim who's a circus artist, and it was just basically a group of artists who got together and said, 'We are going to set up an organisation,' and we set it up as a company...²⁵⁵

The significance attached to recounting the origins of the various initiatives is closely tied to the invocation of 'we' in many of these statements: 'When we set up...' and so on. The individuals involved in running an artist-led initiative are very frequently, in my data set, the same people who were instrumental in its initiation, or who took part from its very early days. As these statements also reveal, such initiatives are routinely nurtured among friendship groups generated by studying together within the context of formal education - most frequently on Fine Art courses. The emergence of such initiatives from pre-existing social networks is clearly diametrically opposed to processes of recruitment and professional advancement inscribed elsewhere within the cultural sector. This presents challenges not only for perceptions of artist-led initiatives as 'closed loops,' impenetrable to those not already within the circle of friends, but also for their later intersection with funders when access to greater financial resources becomes necessary. Alternative models based on friendship are anathema to the mechanisms of arts funding which require the establishment of formal organisational structures based on allotted roles to be carried out, which are then 'back filled' with individuals deemed appropriate, usually by virtue of their validating experiences within similar settings. There are also questions for the relative

²⁵⁵ Interview with Stephen Rogers, 13 March 2019.

merits of demonstrations of initiative by individuals or groups – *Doing* – within the cultural sector, compared to the high value placed on the ‘entrepreneurial’ qualities of instigators and innovators within the commercial sector. While vast fortunes clearly separate the activities of artists-founders from those elsewhere within the ‘creative industries’ – in the tech industry we might think of Steve Jobs, Bill Gates or Mark Zuckerberg for example, men either lauded or notorious as ‘mavericks’ – we currently lack comparative analyses of what ‘founding’ means in the differing contexts of the arts and commercial sectors. No meaningful analysis has yet been brought to bear on the phenomenon of ‘founding’ which emerges with such urgency and clarity from my data set, nor of the major role played by women as founders and leaders within artist-led initiatives, even as the act of founding so often represents the only viable move for early career practitioners faced with an impenetrable ‘art world’ after graduation.

As my deep dive into my data progressed, prompting questions and the developing theoretical avenues explored above, and as my familiarity with GTM increased, so did my ability to move at speed back and forth across them, populating the emergent focused codes. Data relating to each focused code were gathered as they emerged into a separate document that is presented within my thesis as Appendix 2. As this process continued I became more confident in selecting or rejecting pieces of data and began to focus on those that had, as Charmaz puts it, ‘more theoretical reach, direction and centrality’.²⁵⁶ As she also acknowledges, moving through coding is not quite the linear process suggested within the pages of a textbook. Living with the data over the last three years has been an intense process of reading and listening, comparing and coding before revisiting later on to read and listen again, and to refine my analysis. Charmaz writes that grounded theorists aim for ‘theoretical saturation’ i.e. that data collection ceases, ‘when the properties of your theoretical categories are “saturated” with data’.²⁵⁷ She also notes that there is not necessarily consensus about what this means in practice. Here I must acknowledge that my analysis rests partly on a confidence in the theoretical ideas that I put forward within the thesis, and on the knowledge that it is constrained by limitations of time and resources within the framework of the PhD that required me to finally bring the interview process to an end in March 2019.

²⁵⁶ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 141.

²⁵⁷ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 213.

Conclusion: Theoretical Coding

Charmaz acknowledges that developing initial and focused coding will satisfy the needs of many research projects. However, a third, more advanced stage of coding is theoretical coding, which is concerned with how the focused codes ‘may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into a theory’.²⁵⁸ Theory is developed through a process of integration that gives form to the focused codes, helping the researcher to tell a coherent analytical story and moving the analysis in the direction of theory.²⁵⁹ What Charmaz terms ‘theoretical sensitivity’ is required:

Theoretical sensitivity is the ability to understand and define phenomena in abstract terms and to demonstrate abstract relationships between studied phenomena. With this type of sensitivity, grounded theorists discern meanings in their emergent patterns and define the distinctive properties of their constructed categories concerning these patterns.²⁶⁰

Keen to push my analysis as far as possible, I worked with the focused codes to group these before developing four new theoretical codes that I named as follows:

Focused codes	Theoretical codes
Being artist-led Being in control Creating communities Curating Having value/s Having a sense of their place in things (rootedness) Going back to the beginning	Doing
Not being in control Changing Experiencing loss Institutionalising Having a sense of their place in things (ecologising)	Negotiating

²⁵⁸ Barney Glaser, quoted in Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 150.

²⁵⁹ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, pp. 160-161.

²⁶⁰ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 161.

Experiencing lack Not knowing	Lacking and Losing
Feeling	Feeling

Figure 4.4 Construction of theoretical codes from focused coding.

As the table demonstrates, I was able to group together some focused codes to advance their theoretical direction: in this way, proactive creative practices nurtured within artist-led initiatives were aligned under the simple code, '*Doing*'. Their corollary, reactive practices of daily renegotiation, were grouped together under '*Negotiating*'. Two focused codes were split across these theoretical categories: the question of being or not being in control, and the notion of situatedness. This earlier focused code comprised the idea that artist-led initiatives often needed or attempted to locate their activities within received ideas of 'cultural ecology,' and the concept of an alternative, more embedded relationship with places that is to some extent a natural consequence of their impulse to create physical sites that can support practice. A third focused code, '*Lacking and Losing*' aligns gaps and absences within such initiatives, including access to appropriate resources and relevant specialist knowledge, as well as what they lose in the processes of their daily negotiations. The final code, '*Feeling*,' speaks to the effects of these forms of practice on individual human beings, experiences normally folded away and left mute, unarticulated. I argue that this conspiracy of silence needs to be broken.

In this chapter I have traced my analytical journey using the Grounded Theory Method and described the emergence of new theoretical categories. These provide a corrective to the potentially reductive concepts of *place*, *value* and *institution* that arose earlier in the study. In the following chapter I test the new categories through analysis of three case studies: Grand Union in Birmingham, Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance [ROAR], and the East Leeds Project [ELP] of which I am a Co-director. In doing so, I seek to examine how revisiting Grand Union and ROAR, organisations I thought I knew, armed with the discoveries of the GTM process, enables new insights into their complex interactions within the cultural sphere. I also consider the implications for the future development of the ELP as an evolving project.

CHAPTER 5 – CASE STUDY: GRAND UNION, BIRMINGHAM

We are institutionalising.²⁶¹

Introduction

These words, spoken by Grand Union’s Director, Cheryl Jones, to introduce her talk that I attended at Liverpool’s Bluecoat Gallery in 2016, first alerted me to how the Birmingham-based initiative was poised at a pivotal moment. The sense of ‘becoming institutionalised’ potentially echoed challenges I had experienced in negotiating the earlier institutionalisation of Project Space Leeds during the emergence of The Tetley. I was keen to interview Cheryl Jones – which I did in October 2017 – and have as a result developed this case study to analyse how she understood and articulated this process as it related to Grand Union and the challenges they were then facing, by researching and analysing Jones’ account of her organisation’s engagement with, and understanding of, artist-led practice.

Although widely accepted as an artist-led initiative, my case study will examine the appropriateness of this classification for Grand Union and its potential to delimit broader readings of the organisation’s activities and important contributions. The challenge of naming what Grand Union is has specific significance for its immediate future. In 2020, on its tenth anniversary, the organisation has progressed its ambition to move from its current base in the Digbeth area, to the east of Birmingham city centre, to an alternative site nearby where it plans to create a new home: ‘Junction Works’. This relocation has been proposed as a direct response to the very real threat of the HS2 high-speed rail project that will ultimately displace Grand Union from its current home at Minerva Works, a complex of light industrial workspaces that houses numerous other cultural initiatives. At the time of my interview with Cheryl Jones in October 2017, the HS2 major national infrastructure project was advancing despite conditions of economic uncertainty that marked the UK’s protracted withdrawal from the European Union and which predated the further financial and societal challenges of the global Coronavirus pandemic. In late 2017,

²⁶¹ Cheryl Jones, 30 September 2016. ‘Symposium: Emerging Practices: Ensuring Development and Sustainability’, *New Contemporaries* <<https://www.newcontemporaries.org.uk/exhibitions-and-events/events/-emerging-practices-ensuring-development-and-sustainability>> [accessed 11 December 2020].

however, the narrative at the local level in the Digbeth and Eastside areas of the city, which have traditionally supported an agglomeration of cultural micro-initiatives, was one of economic expansionism. This was catalysed by the prospect of a new terminus for HS2 at Curzon Street and the accompanying transformation of the surrounding area. The potential of these developments to contribute towards the local authority's policy of economic growth is embedded in Birmingham's *Big City Plan*. Its *Masterplan for Growth*, produced to promote the Curzon HS2 development, states:

The arrival of HS2 to Birmingham will provide a catalyst for regeneration and growth unparalleled in recent times... Birmingham is ready to capitalise on the opportunities that HS2 will bring, with our Big City Plan's vision of a growing City Centre and a wide range of development and investment opportunities... This Masterplan maximises the regeneration and development potential of HS2 in the City Centre, in particular the Eastside, Digbeth and eastern side of the City Centre core.²⁶²

The *Masterplan* goes on to detail how HS2 in Birmingham promises to deliver 36,000 jobs; 4,000 new homes; 600,000 square metres of employment space; and a £1.4 billion economic uplift. What is at stake for Digbeth's creative community in the face of a perceived economic benefit of such magnitude? The immediate effect has already been an escalation of local land values and accelerating commercial redevelopment of Digbeth's former industrial properties that had previously offered affordable premises for these independent initiatives. Grand Union's response is its ambition to develop Junction Works as a sustainable home for its creative *community*, a term repeatedly drawn upon by Cheryl Jones during the interview. The capital project to create Junction Works was seen to necessitate growth and transformation at the level of Grand Union's organisational structure and business model - understood by Jones, in the quote that opens this case study, as a process of 'institutionalisation'.

My case study thus examines the organisation at a critical juncture in its evolution when it was experiencing changes accelerated by its recent absorption into ACE's 'National Portfolio' of regularly funded organisations. Grand Union was, in effect, facing issues similar to those I had needed to negotiate personally in the interstice between Project Space Leeds and The Tetley. The challenges of this critical moment also provide extensive material relevant to my discussion of the values at

²⁶² 'Birmingham Curzon HS2: Masterplan for Growth', *Birmingham City Council* <https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/730/birmingham_curzon_hs2_masterplan> [accessed 11 December 2020].

work within artist-led initiatives. These values can be seen to be played out in Grand Union's negotiation of the relationships between artists and cities amid the further instrumentalisation of culture in the service of 'regeneration' and economic growth.

What are the consequences of Grand Union's 'institutionalisation' for its self-representation and sense of its own *value and values* in the context of the relative value attached to the given categories 'artist-led' and 'institution'? If these terms are inadequate on both counts, as my analysis suggests, what other terms might be available, and/or might Grand Union inhabit a middle ground between the two? What are the threats and opportunities of making changes to its organisational status and structure in the move from social enterprise to charity, in order to secure the financial investment necessary to establish Junction Works? What jeopardy do these changes pose for an artistic community formed and nurtured over a long decade of practice? How does Grand Union negotiate the complex relationships of small-scale cultural initiatives to cities, places, spaces and their economic redevelopment? Equally, does the arrival of HS2 present a unique opportunity to secure Grand Union's long-term sustainability by presenting an investment-ready and familiar model of cultural development as an attractive proposition within the context of the flagship Curzon HS2 regeneration zone? This case study provides an analysis of these and related issues, and offers material relevant to wider discourse on creative cities in the second decade of the twenty-first century. I will return here to the concepts of *place, value* and *institution* that arose earlier in my research as sensitising concepts for the interview process, testing them against my initial findings and the categories *Doing, Negotiating, Lacking and Losing, and Feeling* that arose during the subsequent coding and analysis of the interviews using the Grounded Theory Method.

I must acknowledge here the difficulty of bounding this case study, since as an active participant within the contemporary art scene and networks of artist-led practice, I have been aware of Grand Union's activities since its earliest days and have interacted with it over the years both as an audience member and through dialogue primarily with its Chief Executive, Cheryl Jones and Artistic Director, Kim McAleese. As a result, a mixed methodology is at work here, combining elements of tacit knowledge with the more focused process of the GTM analysis, based on my coding of the interview with Jones during the timeframe of my formal doctoral study. The interview was conducted at Grand Union and my physical journey to Digbeth became important in observing the present conditions in the local area and Grand

Union's position at Minerva Works within it. I have also drawn on Grand Union's public communications via its website, social media and documents made publicly available for download. These include annual reviews, publications accompanying the organisation's artistic programme and plans relating to its proposed development of Junction Works. Although I have consulted these publicly accessible texts while writing up the case study, my analysis here draws primarily on the contextual conditions for Grand Union that were contemporaneous with the interview in late 2017. Unless otherwise stated, Cheryl Jones' statements throughout are drawn from this interview.

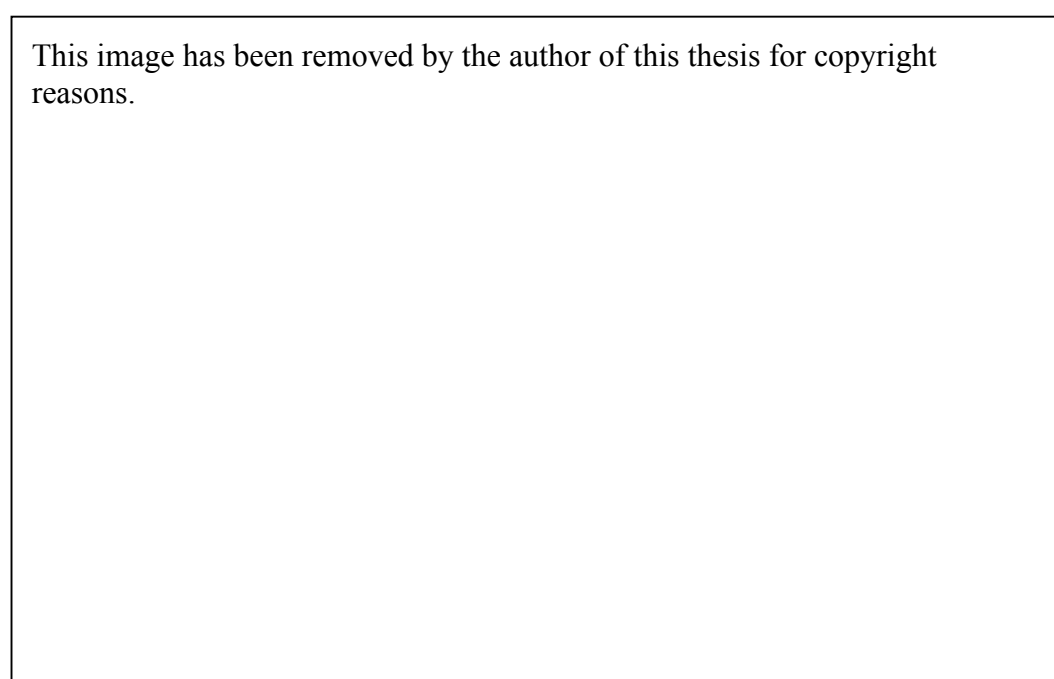


Figure 5.1, Participants in Grand Union's *Curatorial Curriculum*, 2017. Photographer unknown. © Grand Union.

Artist-led or Curator-led? Articulating *Value and Values* at Grand Union

In Chapter 2, I quoted a June 2017 online news item by AN in which it published a list of organisations that had just entered ACE's newly announced National Portfolio of organisations selected to receive regular funding during the period 2018-22.²⁶³ AN understood these to be a list of specifically artist-led initiatives. As I have argued, however, the article raised questions about the appropriateness of the term as an apt descriptor for the activities of several of those listed. Grand Union was among them. As an active participant in the field, I had previously understood the organisation to

²⁶³ 'ACE NPOs: Visual Arts Organisations', *a-n*.

be part of a specifically artist-led scene in the UK on the basis of my knowledge that it had initially been founded by artists. Kevin Hunt's *Artist-led HOT100* reinforced this categorisation by including the organisation in its inaugural list of young artist-led initiatives to watch, in 2013. In contrast, here is Cheryl Jones' first response to my invitation, at the beginning of the interview, to describe the organisation that she leads:

So we're, um, a gallery and studios based in Birmingham. Erm, we're sort of in the artist-led...er...field, I guess. But I don't like calling us artist-led because although we've got a couple of artists on our Board I feel like we're more curator-led as an organisation.

What I draw attention to in this statement, which deliberately retains the hesitations and stumbles from the original transcript, is a sense of discomfort and uncertainty. I suggest that this arises from an absence of appropriate terms that enable Jones, herself a founder member of Grand Union, confidently to articulate how she understands the organisation's role and function. She further explained that the impetus to form Grand Union originally arose in response to having identified an absence in the existing infrastructure for contemporary art in Birmingham:

When we set up we were a big collective of artists and curators and really wanted to kind of fill a gap in Birmingham that... [to] create a facility that didn't exist at that time, which was kind of decent studio space that was affordable, so somewhere that was like dry and heatable. But also to provide a space where curators that were just starting out could try out their practice. So it was almost like an extension of the studios, the gallery, like a studio for curators. Emerging curators.

A number of decisive factors and characteristics emerge from this statement – the pre-existence of friendship networks; occupation and repurposing of an industrial space; provision of facilities and activities that were not available to the founders through the existing infrastructure – that arguably align Grand Union with a familiar pattern in the emergence of artist-led spaces elsewhere. In common with many other founding collectives, Grand Union was created through networks initially formed by graduates from Birmingham City University. In the interview, Cheryl Jones conceded that, having been formed in this way by practitioners, the concept of being 'artist-led' still informs the way that Grand Union operates:

Yeah, totally. And you know, I trained as an artist, and so I feel like the way that I approach everything is sort of in that, in that way, is in quite a hands on and practical way. So it doesn't feel like we're an institution. It feels like

we're quite independent of that and yeah, I guess that's... yeah it's very tricky. I never quite know how to describe ourselves, and when people put us in that artist-led bracket, I think that's right. I think yeah, the way that we operate, it feels like we fit there. And that yeah, we're run by practitioners, but I think that some people would go, 'Well, actually you're not artists... that are leading that organisation, so it's a different thing'. I guess there are other places that describe themselves as 'artist run', [be]cause the artists are running the place, which feels like it's slightly different.

The hesitancy of Jones' responses is again telling, as is the apparent inadequacy of both 'artist-led' and 'institution' as descriptors. The presence of curators in the organisation's founding gives Grand Union a different grounding to other artist-led spaces, yet it potentially further complicates attempts to determine the organisation's specific focus. Using a search engine to interrogate the term 'curator-led' yields little beyond routine uses of it to describe activities such as curator-led tours of exhibitions, which are a commonplace of gallery engagement programmes. Few other initiatives utilise this term to describe what they are and do at the organisational level.²⁶⁴ Indeed, Grand Union's website claims that it is the 'only organisation outside of London to have the learning and development of curators at its heart'.²⁶⁵ In the absence of 'curator-led' as a widely used and understood category within contemporary or art-historical discourse, however, Jones' description of Grand Union is forced back to a pre-existing binary that I have already identified in the discourse on artist-led initiatives – one that seeks to identify certain practices as either 'institutional' or 'independent' and to dissociate these from each other. This divide re-emerges in Cheryl Jones' attempts to describe how the wider visual arts scene in Birmingham is constituted, in which a separation based on *scale* of organisation – determined by access to financial resources and number of employees – again serves to locate Grand Union alongside other initiatives more confident of their status as artist-led:

If we talk about it in this city, in Birmingham, so I guess you've got... it feels wrong to talk about sizes of organisation, but you've got an organisation like Ikon that is much bigger than anyone else, because they get a million pounds a year or whatever. Funding wise they're much bigger and they employ more

²⁶⁴ A search on the website *Artist-run Alliance* returns a small handful of initiatives tagged as 'curator-run spaces'. They are Big Shop Friday (Milton Keynes), David Dale Gallery (Glasgow), Dwell Time (Huddersfield), General Practice (Lincoln) and System Art Gallery (Newcastle upon Tyne). 'Curator-run Space', *Artist-run Alliance* <<https://artistrunalliance.org/initiative-category/curator-run-space/>> [accessed 11 December 2020].

²⁶⁵ 'Junction Works – Vision', *Grand Union* <<https://grand-union.org.uk/junction-works/vision/>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

people... and then you have kind of BMAC [Midlands Arts Centre], so they're like the big institutions and then it feels like in Birmingham, all of the other visual arts things are in the artist-led kind of sector, even though they're at different stages.

Later, however, Jones offers a slightly different understanding of the city's visual arts initiatives, one that refutes categorisation based on scale alone:

And I guess what [the term 'cultural ecology'] perhaps then doesn't describe is how all of those things are connected horizontally, so there's people that work here and are involved here that might have a job at Ikon. I think yeah, if you think about a city and its artistic scene... or community, network or ecology... it needs to support lots of different things at the same time doesn't it, so... like we're providing studio space that people pay for, but there needs to be jobs in the city for those people to do, because often visual artists can't survive just through their practice. [...] I think maybe like 'network' and 'community' are better terms, because they feel a bit more horizontal, it doesn't feel like there's a hierarchy so it's not about Ikon being at the top because it gets more money, it just has a different role... and needs money to provide the twenty-five jobs that it has, and the building that it has, in a way that we don't.

There are several issues of significance for my argument here, specifically relating to the problem of naming and the persistence of a binary that divides the *artist-led* from the *institutional*. In the first two statements, Jones seeks to foreground her uneasiness at aligning Grand Union with the artist-led 'field,' while simultaneously acknowledging the presence of the 'artist-led' as an established set of practices within which it is commonly enclosed within the discourse. On the one hand, there is an identification with some of the practices and values associated with artist-led initiatives: originating through networks of creative graduates (including fine art), maintaining artists in decisive governance roles as Trustees and valuing a perceived independence from institutional forms. This subjective alignment extends as far as hosting other artist-led initiatives within Grand Union's building and devising programmes of work in collaboration with others based outside of Birmingham, for example The Royal Standard, the determinedly artist-led initiative based in Liverpool.²⁶⁶ Of this partnership, Cheryl Jones stated:

[Recently] the Royal Standard came up and did a studio exchange and they were looking for organisations that have similar operations to them so that

²⁶⁶ Modern Clay is an artist-led cooperative and ceramics facility that rents a workspace within Grand Union's building. 'Who We Are', *Modern Clay* <<https://modernclay.org/who-we-are/>> [accessed 29 September 2020].

they could have that exchange in an equitable way I suppose. So yeah it does feel useful, being part of that network and community.

This example demonstrates how the term ‘artist-led’ becomes useful in establishing affinities among certain initiatives based on a subjective sense of shared values. To some degree, Grand Union values being part of this network. On the other hand, Jones acknowledges tensions within the artist-led field that concern the status of the individuals in management roles and whether or not they are actually practising as artists. This difficulty, I propose, arises from the inherited model of the rolling management committee, where practising artists serve for a short, temporary term before moving on and being replaced by others. Based most frequently on unpaid labour, this model cascaded from Glasgow’s Transmission to have much wider influence on initiatives in the UK and Ireland. It has, however, been increasingly problematised, for example during my interview with Emma Curd and Jade French of The Royal Standard. For Cheryl Jones, these tensions result in an inability to confidently identify terms that resonate both internally within Grand Union and for a wider audience. What is central to this is the changing status, over a period of ten years, of the artists who initiated Grand Union:

Also at the beginning, like the artists were very much, the studio artists were very much involved with the setting up of the organisation, but as soon as the studios were sort of built and that facility was there, it didn’t feel like they needed to be involved with the running of the organisation so much.

What causes Jones to feel uncomfortable, then, is in part founded on the reality that practising artists no longer directly lead the organisation. Despite this, Grand Union still creates opportunities to amplify the voices of artists by making sure they are heard at the level of governance:

Yeah, I think [the term artist-led] describes quite well the sort of organisation that we are and that we’re independent and that we’ve been set up by practitioners. I guess it feels uncomfortable because it doesn’t necessarily feel like artists are at the front of leading where it’s going. Plenty of artists have a say in what happens, we always have two studio artists on our Board for example, so there’s representation from the artists in the organisation, but it doesn’t feel like they’re necessarily leading it or suggesting where it goes. It feels like that’s very much coming from me and my staff team, who would all call ourselves curators, I think.

Statements from other stakeholders, made in support of the Junction Works development, further exacerbate attempts to define Grand Union. The organisation’s

website quotes Ian Hyde, Deputy Director of Birmingham's established Ikon Gallery, who makes the following statement in support of the proposed move to new premises:

[Grand Union's] work as an important provider of affordable studio space for artists in the city forms an integral part of Birmingham's continually growing and vibrant arts ecology.²⁶⁷

Returning to my critique of *cultural ecology* from Chapter 3, I find this statement, issued from the 'institutional' perspective of Ikon gallery, revealing - not least because it reinforces how widespread the adoption of *cultural ecology* is as a totalising concept at work within an increasingly centralised definition of the creative industries. In this way, the statement reinforces Cheryl Jones' acknowledgment of the interconnected nature of smaller-scale initiatives like Grand Union – in supporting artistic practice at the level of production – while larger, more established institutions such as Ikon support artists by providing the paid work that enables their practice to continue. What Hyde's description fails to acknowledge, however, is Grand Union's occupation of the artistic territory of the 'curatorial,' thereby erasing its major contributions to curatorial practice and returning it to more routine understandings of artist-led initiatives as 'only' providing studio space. The suggestion is that Grand Union's focus is exclusively on artists and the production, rather than the public dissemination, of art. This suggests that within an ecological model, viewed from the institutional perspective, artist-led initiatives are excluded from laying claim to the professionalised domain of the curator. Yet internally within Grand Union, there is a considered focus on the need to provide opportunities for discourse and development within communities of emerging curators – again responding to a perceived lack. Alongside a basic necessity to provide appropriate and affordable studio spaces for artists, from its inception the organisation also sought to provide:

...a space where curators that were just starting out could try out their practice. So it was almost like an extension of the studios, the gallery, like a studio for curators. Emerging curators.

In evidence of this claim, Cheryl Jones described how Grand Union supports 'emerging curatorial practice' through initiatives that include an Associate Curator role. At the time of my visit to Digbeth to interview Jones, this role was held by Seán Elder. In an interview with *New Art West Midlands*, Elder revealed how he valued the

²⁶⁷ 'Junction Works – Supporters', *Grand Union* <<https://grand-union.org.uk/junction-works/supporters/>> [accessed 11 December 2020].

mentoring opportunities that accompanied his tenure, along with Grand Union's approach to developing its curatorial programme over an extended timeframe:

I'm not really interested in short-form exchanges between artists and curators so [the Associate Curator role] is a real opportunity to invest and nourish those relationships that are so central to developing towards something fully formed. Grand Union's track record of commissions acting at an important intersection in an artist's career is a reassurance that this long-form of curatorial dialogue is relevant and necessary.²⁶⁸

This statement encourages a reading of Grand Union as an environment in which collaboration and dialogic relations are valued and central. Alongside the Associate Curator position, Grand Union hosts a *Curatorial Curriculum*. This alternative education programme seeks to examine specific aspects of curatorial practice, through the lens of, for example, curating as performance, activism or publishing. Grand Union provides bursaries for prospective participants from the West Midlands, while building networks with those from further afield across the UK. In addition, there are occasional opportunities for guest curators within Grand Union's exhibition programme. This curatorial focus, combined with the provision of studio spaces, provides what Cheryl Jones proposes as Grand Union's unique selling point:

And it feels like we're perhaps one of the only organisations that have that studio and presentation space next to each other, in terms of like contemporary visual arts [in Birmingham]... I think in terms of having a profile in that artist-led network, we're the only people in the city that do that, have those two things side by side.

It is significant that Jones placed Grand Union's gallery up front in her response to my initial invitation to describe the organisation. This is an emphasis reinforced by the organisation's website, where the 'About Us' section leads with the statement, 'Grand Union is a gallery and artists' studio complex based in Digbeth, Birmingham'.²⁶⁹ For Jones, the gallery acts as a central node that brings together the various strands of the organisation's discourse:

...there's something about that dynamic [of combining production and presentation spaces in one place] that means that... Like we're looking for

²⁶⁸ 'Q&A with Seán Elder', *New Art West Midlands*

<<http://newartwestmidlands.co.uk/editorial/qa-with-sean-elder-associate-curator-at-grand-union/>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

²⁶⁹ 'About Us', *Grand Union* <<https://grand-union.org.uk/about/>> [accessed 11 December 2020].

opportunities to involve our studio holders as well as being connected to the gallery in dialogue.

In this model, the gallery becomes a relational and discursive space, a connecting point for artists, curators and publics. This is not a formal strategy allied to an art-historical style or a set of institutional practices that maintain a relationship with art's marketisation, for which the curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud coined the term *Relational Aesthetics* in the late 1990s.²⁷⁰ It is, rather, an effect of the way in which Grand Union facilitates the creation of a place that is endlessly made and remade by the daily interactions of all those who take part in it. It is the product of a collective spatial and temporal practice quite distinct from the authorial hierarchy of the established institution. This practice reconnects us to processes of *Doing* that emerged so forcefully from my GTM analysis of the interview data – the production of dialogue and networks among individuals. In this respect, whether or not Grand Union can be identified as artist-led, or indeed curator-led, is of lesser consequence than its ability to stimulate these exchanges and in doing so to create and sustain its multiple communities.

Doing Community in Digbeth: Grand Union as Relational Practice

Throughout my interview with Cheryl Jones, she returned again and again to the *communities* that lie at the heart of Grand Union, drawn together through practice and dialogue. In a number of statements, she told me:

And I guess like, in terms of the roots of Grand Union, it's always been about building a community and building a space that a community can work in, can come to, can exist in, have dialogue in and find ways to connect with people outside of this building I guess.

...an important part of being in this building is that there's other arts organisations here and we're sharing audiences and our activities are different but similar and that that creates a wider community...

And I feel like maybe actually it's the artistic community [in Birmingham] that we feel very much part of.

I guess, like for ourselves and to ourselves we talk a lot about community and what that is and who that's made up of, and that's... There's lots of different

²⁷⁰ Bourriaud defines Relational Aesthetics as, 'Aesthetic theory consisting in judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations that they represent, produce or prompt'. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: les presses du réel, 1998), p. 112.

communities that are able to operate from and with here, that I think is really valuable and that our immediate kind of community think is valuable.

These statements reveal how Grand Union facilitates the emergence of communities as well as how it sustains them through provision of a physical space in which they can develop. They are multiple, constituted both internally – among practitioners – as well as externally among the wider cultural sector and audiences, based locally in the immediate vicinity and further afield. This gives a sense of Grand Union as a discursive and porous environment rich with the potentiality of new interpersonal networks and connections. In my introduction I quoted Andrea Phillips’ essay *Remaking the Arts Centre*, in which she traces the loss of the community-orientated arts centres of the 1970s, arguing that, in the 2010s, ‘Neo-liberal culture is so hard. People’s bodies need to find places to take care of themselves and their communities in this hard culture’.²⁷¹ Is it possible to refocus the discourse on artist-led spaces to consider their major contributions to generating and sustaining communities? Does this offer a radically different orientation to the potentially narrower debates on ‘criticality’ proposed by Suhail Malik as a new orthodoxy of art education oriented towards individuation and marketisation?²⁷²

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 5.2, Exterior of Minerva Works. Photographer unknown. © Workshop Birmingham.

²⁷¹ Phillips, ‘Remaking the Arts Centre’, p. 230.

²⁷² Suhail Malik, ‘Art Education and the Predicament of Professionalised Criticality’.

The Digbeth and East Side areas of Birmingham foster a much wider creative community, encouraged in part by the availability of affordable workspaces in former industrial-era buildings. Minerva Works itself hosts a number of cultural organisations that include visual arts initiatives Centrala, Stryx and Vivid Projects, alongside Grand Union and Modern Clay.²⁷³ Within easy walking distance are BOM (Birmingham Open Media), the artist-led initiatives A3 Project Space and Eastside Projects, along with STEAMHouse – a maker space and centre for innovation and creation brought to life through a partnership between Eastside Projects and Birmingham City University. Beyond these spaces that are of particular relevance to visual artists, the area is home to a multitude of other arts and cultural initiatives. As Cheryl Jones said of Digbeth: ‘What [planners] haven’t been talking about is how to retain affordable space here, which is why we’re all here – it’s because it’s cheap’. The emergence of artists’ districts such as these convey the importance of agglomeration in sustaining creative communities where artistic innovation and careers can flourish.

In research published in 2011, Todd Gabe and Jaison R. Abel looked at the effects of agglomeration on people working in jobs with similar knowledge requirements, ranging from groups of artists and scientists to service providers and low-skilled labourers. Although conducted in the United States and concerned primarily with a regional perspective, their findings are transferable to the context of city development in the UK and Ireland and are of significance in resisting the promotion of ‘pop-up’ or meanwhile spaces that have dominated discourse on visual artists and cities here since 2008. Drawing on the work of urban theorist Richard Florida and economist Robert E. Lucas, among others, Gabe and Abel note that,

...it is not just industries that are geographically concentrated. People, especially the college educated and those with particular creative talents, tend to congregate *en masse* to capitalise from the benefits of agglomeration.²⁷⁴

They also note the persistence of this tendency in the digital age:

²⁷³ Centrala’s focus is on art, artists and communities from Central and Eastern Europe, while Stryx is itself an ‘artist led studio and exhibition space... formed by Fine Art graduates from Birmingham Institute of Art & Design’ (@StryxArts). Vivid Projects supports the development of media arts practice and along with Centrala, joined ACE’s national Portfolio in the same round as Grand Union.

²⁷⁴ Todd Gabe and Jaison R. Abel, ‘Agglomeration of Knowledge’, *Urban Studies*, Vol.48, No.7 (2011), 1353-1371 (1353).

Despite the low costs of transmitting information long distances via advanced telecommunications technologies, face-to-face contact is an important mechanism for co-ordinating economic activities, particularly those embedded in tacit knowledge and creativity.²⁷⁵

The appeal of clustering in this way, they argue, stems in part from the opportunity to benefit from what they term ‘knowledge spillovers’. This becomes important for my thesis as it is of particular relevance to the values of collectivity and collaboration that underline the artist-led initiatives I have researched. Gabe and Abel further state that,

Scientists and artists...often collaborate and co-operate on projects and exhibitions. Knowledge in these fields is largely tacit (i.e. people learn by doing and being around others) and scientific innovations and citations are highly localised.²⁷⁶

They argue that these defining characteristics distinguish such professions from the work undertaken by labourers in roles that have been de-skilled or ‘de-creafified’ (following Florida) over time and as a result, every action and word is directed at a distance by corporate managers.

We can see how these ideas relate to the value that Cheryl Jones attaches to the creation and sustenance of communities within and through Grand Union. The critical nature of in-person interactions, to its constituency of artists as well as its publics, emerges through a number of statements such as this one, Jones’ response to my question about what characteristics the organisation shares with other artist-led initiatives:

I guess it’s about supporting artistic practice... so whether that [is] through providing space that’s affordable and useful to those people or providing a space that’s freeing other artists to work here and to *connect* with and be in *dialogue* with [others] and to provide events and exhibitions where *conversations* on contemporary visual art... Where artists can *meet* each other... and curators. [my italics]

Grand Union is, then, the physical manifestation of a relational practice far removed from the popular art-historical vision of the singular artist-genius alone and isolated in ‘his’ garret. The need to form *communities of practice* is a reality of artistic production. But the agglomeration of artists and other creative practitioners in Digbeth produces additional effects, for example the accessibility of specialist

²⁷⁵ Gabe and Abel, ‘Agglomeration of Knowledge’, p. 1354.

²⁷⁶ Gabe and Abel, ‘Agglomeration of Knowledge’, p. 1354.

fabrication facilities that are in turn sustained by a mutual dependence on the creative community that surrounds them. Explaining how the commercial regeneration of Digbeth threatens to displace much of this creative community, Jones told me:

The great thing about this area at the moment is, you know, there are so many kind of like industrial businesses around here, so you can get things fabricated on the doorstep, so what does that mean for our future studio holders? Like, is it actually an attractive place to have a studio, if you haven't got that ecology around you, to produce those things?

This sense of participation in a wider community has become a defining issue in my analysis in relation to the perceived threat from the commercial development of Digbeth and the potential impacts of the various mitigating options available to Grand Union in its attempts to secure the future of its communities, both internally and across the local area. What I want to highlight here, is the potential significance of further research on the phenomenon of agglomeration in relation to small-scale, artist-led and other independent initiatives. This research is lacking, particularly in the context of the UK and Ireland. As my literature review revealed, work on artist-led initiatives is dominated to a large degree by histories of singular initiatives that generally do not contextualise their activities within wider analyses of the emergence or displacement of specific geographic clusters. I suggest that research from outside the cultural sector, such as that by Gabe and Todd, provides compelling arguments in favour of policy development to support the longer-term sustainability of communities such as that which currently exists in Digbeth. As their research identifies, agglomeration is an important factor in the sustenance of healthy creative communities, with specific benefits for those involved. This may have wider significance for narratives of economic growth, as their research findings suggest that higher productivity and earnings are also associated with the close geographic proximity that enables knowledge spillover from one individual to another:

Of particular note, we find that agglomeration is an important determinant of earnings in innovation- and creative-based occupations such as scientists, IT specialists and artistic and media workers.²⁷⁷

Again, this resists the notion of artists as merely the foot soldiers of commercial development *proper*, typically brought in for their use value in making economically unviable properties more attractive to developers in the short term. The activities that

²⁷⁷ Gabe and Abel, 'Agglomeration of Knowledge', p. 1362.

Jones describes are a compelling argument in favour of enabling and supporting artist-led initiatives to take on and develop physical spaces over the longer term. The networks, relations and dialogues that Grand Union effects, and their role in sustaining local economies in Digbeth, cannot take root when artists are only able to access spaces on a ‘meanwhile’ basis. Displacement may uproot many of Digbeth’s creative organisations, as Jones claimed, but can they be relocated elsewhere in the City in a manner that replicates the agglomeration that was nurtured there over many years? What Gabe and Todd also discovered, in their work on the concentration of artistic clusters in US cities (in 2011) is that this agglomeration cannot be easily manufactured in other locations. They conclude:

Finally, building a cluster of scientists, information technology workers, engineers or artists may be quite difficult if a critical mass of these workers is not already present in the region. Regions starting from a low level of agglomeration in these occupations face an uphill struggle considering that workers have a built-in advantage from locating in places with an already established cluster and that a cluster located elsewhere can disseminate knowledge and information to other places.²⁷⁸

In June 2017, Centrala and Vivid Projects, both located at Minerva Works, also became NPO clients of ACE. NPOs Eastside Projects and BOM (Birmingham Open Media) can be found a few minutes’ walk away. Alongside this astonishing concentration in its inner east, Birmingham boasts two others – Ikon Gallery and the Midlands Arts Centre – bringing its total visual arts NPOs to eight, an unrivalled strength of visual arts outside London.²⁷⁹ Civic planners, including in Birmingham, should be appraised of this research and the potential loss of cultural capital that could accompany the disruption of Digbeth’s creative community. What is at stake for Birmingham’s status as a leading international ‘creative city’ if it does not prevent the substantive displacement of this important creative cluster?²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ Gabe and Abel, ‘Agglomeration of Knowledge’, p. 1367.

²⁷⁹ ‘The Data 2018-22’, *Arts Council England* <<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/national-portfolio-2018-22/more-data-2018-22>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

²⁸⁰ For example, Birmingham was named by the *Rough Guide* as one of the ‘Top Ten Cities in the World’ in 2014, the only UK city to make the list. This definition rested to a large degree on the city’s culture: ‘[Birmingham’s] “creative hotspots” get a particular namecheck – from the old industrial district of Digbeth, where vintage shops and street food stalls have begun to appear alongside Victorian buildings, to the Bird’s Custard Factory, with its vintage kilo sales and live music performances’. Victoria Richards, ‘Birmingham is Named ‘one of the Top 10 Cities in the World’, *The Independent*

What I have described here is Grand Union as an organisation rich in practices of *Doing* – the generative mode that emerged from my GTM analysis. The organisation creates spaces for artists and other small-scale initiatives, providing them with opportunities to produce, exhibit and sell work and to engage in dialogue with the public; it hosts and exchanges with like-minded organisations; it supports and enables emerging curatorial practices through multiple linked initiatives; and it contributes to the sustenance of creative communities in Digbeth. But on multiple levels, we can also begin to see Grand Union as an organisation facing the mounting challenges of *Negotiating* with gatekeepers to sustain its approaches to *Doing*. These gatekeepers take the form of Birmingham City Council, as author of a *Masterplan* governing the future of the Digbeth area; commercial developers attracted by the prospect of economic gain; and ACE, through a relationship now reconfigured by Grand Union’s attainment of NPO status. I will examine these negotiations, along with the potential impacts of the proposed development of Junction Works, through the strategies adopted by Grand Union. Firstly, however, it is necessary to set out the immediate context of Digbeth in more detail, so as to convey and analyse the scale of the threat that the area’s redevelopment poses and thus the immediate necessity for Grand Union to act in order to secure its own future and that of its community.

Manufacturing Digbeth: ‘Our Font is Cooler than Your Font’

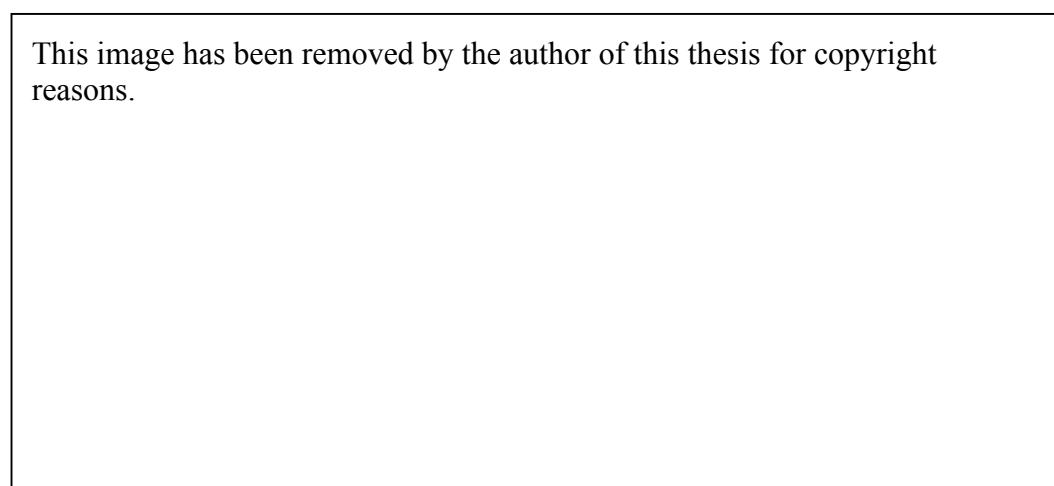


Figure 5.3, Home page of the website *Digbeth.com*. © Oval Real Estate.

Against a mustard-toned photograph of Devonshire Works, the famous former premises of Alfred Bird (1811-78), known today as the ‘Custard Factory’, the words ‘INDUSTRIOUS. INDIVIDUAL. IN IT TOGETHER’ stand out on the website home page in bold capitals. This statement uses ‘Digbeth Sans’, a custom font designed by London and Los Angeles-based type foundry Colophon²⁸¹ and commissioned in 2018 by DN&CO, a brand and design consultancy ‘inspired by culture and place’ and also based in London.²⁸² Colophon’s approach to the commission was to devise a typeface that would ‘inherently communicate the geographical, manufacturing and cultural heritage of Digbeth’ through forms which ‘evoke a painterly warmth’ by drawing inspiration from the area’s canal boats and the typography of its industrial ruins. ‘Digbeth’ thus exists as five typographic forms designed to be combined through layering to create multiple variables, a strategy designed to encourage adoption and customisation of the font by local businesses, thereby allowing it to be ‘applied democratically through the Digbeth community’.²⁸³

The photo acts as the centerpiece of the home page of Digbeth.com, a website which at first sight appears to promote the creative community that has long called this part of the city home.²⁸⁴ Adopting contemporary graphic design which cleverly aligns itself with the output of many smaller, local design studios, the website combines a ‘What’s On’ guide to local events with a directory of ‘eating drinking and doing’ in Digbeth, information on local transport networks and a carelessly brief timeline of the area’s history. This in itself is deterministic, pitching the purchase of local land and assets by property company Oval, in 2017, as the logical culmination of the fourteen centuries of history that predated this event. The stated purpose of this acquisition is ‘some much-needed investment to revitalise the neighbourhood’. So overloaded with significance is this short sentence that it almost completes a slight of hand and disappears under the radar, unnoticed and unremarked upon, so accustomed have urban dwellers become to the language of renewal and regeneration.

Only on deeper examination does it become apparent that the website is actually managed entirely on behalf of Oval, who we learn have offices in London

²⁸¹ ‘Home Page’, *Colophon Foundry* <<https://www.colophon-foundry.org/about/>> [accessed 11 December 2020].

²⁸² ‘Studio’, *DNCO* <<https://dnco.com/studio>> [accessed 11 December 2020].

²⁸³ ‘Digbeth’, *Colophon Foundry* <<https://www.colophon-foundry.org/custom/digbeth/>> [accessed 11 December 2020].

²⁸⁴ ‘Home Page’, *Digbeth.com* <<https://digbeth.com>> [accessed 11 December 2020].

and Birmingham (in that order). A click through from their tiny logo buried at the foot of the page transports the visitor to the Company's own website and into a parallel universe focused on 'investment, asset management and urban regeneration'.²⁸⁵ A plug-in pulls pictures posted on Oval's instagram feed through to the website. They depict street scenes from the creative districts of European cities, images of culture-led regeneration, post-industrial spaces bedecked with festoon lighting and street art, many repurposed as sleek creative industries work-spaces. Images also proliferate of the 'Peaky Blinders', a phenomenon that I will return to shortly. Clicking back through to *Digbeth.com*, we can now appreciate how the site works primarily to promote commercial workspaces owned and managed by Oval, directing online traffic to enquiry forms for properties the company owns in Digbeth. Some nine developments are already listed, including the prestigious 'Custard Factory' development that is regarded as 'An exemplar of urban regeneration today'.²⁸⁶

Bennie Gray, described as a 'former antiques dealer,' is credited as the visionary behind the original scheme to repurpose the Factory, the former Devonshire Works, as a creative hub in 1993.²⁸⁷ Behind the building's ornate red brick and stone Victorian façade lie 100,000 square feet of creative industries workspaces. By 2010 a new wing, known as Zellig and constructed at a cost of £10 million, was officially opened in a ceremony performed by Ed Vaizey, Culture Minister in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government. Making time for the ceremony during the Conservative conference, which took place in the city that year, the Minister was reportedly impressed by this confident statement of the power of the creative industries to facilitate economic growth, stating, 'Entrepreneurism is the bedrock of this country and start-up businesses the foundation of our economy'.²⁸⁸ Five years later, local press reported disagreement over the (mis)management of the Custard Factory and Zellig by Gray and his son Lucan.²⁸⁹ By 2017 the site had passed into

²⁸⁵ Oval Real Estate, 'Oval', *Oval Real Estate* <<https://ovalrealestate.com>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

²⁸⁶ 'Custard Factory', *The Time and Space Company* <<https://www.timeandspace.co/projects/custard-factory>> [accessed 22 September 2020].

²⁸⁷ 'Custard Factory Boss Lucan Gray Angered by Contract Scrapped by His Father', *Business Live* <<https://www.business-live.co.uk/business/creative/custard-factory-boss-lucan-gray-10246113>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

²⁸⁸ 'Custard Factory: the Art of Regeneration', *BBC Birmingham* <http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/birmingham/hi/people_and_places/arts_and_culture/newsid_9066000/9066558.stm> [accessed 4 December 2020].

²⁸⁹ 'Custard Factory Boss Lucan Gray', *Business Live*.

Oval's ownership for an undisclosed sum. The company continued to make new acquisitions in Digbeth, adding workspaces at The Bond, opposite Fazeley Studios purchased as part of the Custard Factory deal, to its estate. By October 2018, Oval's holdings in the area were estimated to total 'nearly 1 million sq ft of office, entertainment and leisure space'.²⁹⁰ This is indicative of a wider process of transformation that began in Digbeth in the early 1990s. This has seen it rise to prominence as the City's 'Creative Quarter'²⁹¹ and the 'coolest neighbourhood in Britain' according to the *Sunday Times*' list of 'places where the cool cats hang: our guide to the most happening neighbourhoods' published in October 2018.²⁹² 'Cool' is the currency of Digbeth: a post on Oval's instagram feed on 17 June 2019 carried the typeface with the strapline, 'Custom Digbeth font – our font is cooler than yours!'.²⁹³

Digbeth's present is synonymous with a specific image of its 'heritage' from which it is now indivisible. This area to the east of what is now Birmingham city centre is where the city is understood to have begun, when fertile ground in proximity to the River Rea fostered early settlement by the 7th Century.²⁹⁴ Later, in 1156, the award of a market charter by Henry II enabled trading to flourish. Rebellion fomented too and during the English Civil War the city sided with Cromwell and the same industry produced thousands of swords for Parliament's armies. Retribution came in the form of Henry's nephew Prince Rupert, who marched on Digbeth on Easter Monday, 1643 with 2,000 men, killing 17 townspeople and burning 80 properties.²⁹⁵ Victorian Digbeth expanded as a major centre of industrialisation, contributing to Birmingham's status as the 'workshop of the world' and propelling an influx of peoples from across and beyond the city, including notable Italian, Chinese and Irish populations.²⁹⁶ Trams were introduced in 1872 and by 1889 the extensive network

²⁹⁰ 'Welcome to Oval', *Events 500* <<https://www.events500.co.uk/news/welcome-to-oval-digbeth-ltd>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

²⁹¹ 'Birmingham Eastside Extension', *Metro Alliance* <<http://metroalliance.co.uk/projects/birmingham-eastside-extension/a-history-of-digbeth/>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

²⁹² 'This Birmingham Neighbourhood Has Been Named the Coolest Area in Britain', *Birmingham Live* <<https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/birmingham-neighbourhood-been-named-one-15254789>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

²⁹³ @ovalrealestate, Instagram post 17 June 2019 <https://www.instagram.com/p/Byz_zI4j8bd/> [accessed 17 December 2020].

²⁹⁴ 'Birmingham Eastside Extension', *Metro Alliance*.

²⁹⁵ 'Birmingham Eastside Extension', *Metro Alliance*.

²⁹⁶ Carl Chinn and Malcolm Dick, eds., *Birmingham: The Workshop of the World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016).

connected Digbeth to many parts of the city. Following mid-twentieth century decline, the tram network in Birmingham is resurgent and a proposed Eastside Extension, servicing the HS2 station at Curzon Street, will bring passengers along New Canal Street within five minutes' walk of Grand Union's front door.²⁹⁷

By the late 1890s, Digbeth was characterised by large manufacturing premises such as Devonshire Works, but in the following century post-war industrial decline resulted in an evacuation of this manufacturing base and an influx of creative individuals and micro-initiatives attracted by the affordability of its expansive spaces. As the *Times* noted, 'The digital revolution has been largely responsible for getting Digbeth's post-industrial heart pumping again, with creative types setting up in the former manufacturing buildings'.²⁹⁸ For what is produced in Digbeth today is culture, through its massed independent creative spaces, a parallel food and drink scene and its 'permission walls' that render Digbeth a natural centre for street artists.²⁹⁹

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 5.4, Attendees at the *Legitimate Peaky Blinders Festival* in Digbeth, September 2019. © Birmingham Mail.

²⁹⁷ 'Birmingham Eastside Extension', *Metro Alliance*.

²⁹⁸ 'The Coolest Places to Live in the UK: From Birmingham's Digbeth to Manchester's Green Quarter and London's New East End', *The Times* <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-coolest-places-to-live-in-the-uk-from-birminghams-digbeth-to-manchesters-green-quarter-and-londons-new-east-end-vn0x7shw7>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

²⁹⁹ 'How Digbeth Gave a Home to Graffiti and Street Art', *BBC News* <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-45790672>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

Digbeth has also become infamous as the home of the real-life ‘Peaky Blinders’, the name given to the mainly young, working-class men involved in street violence in the area from the 1890s onwards. This gang warfare allegedly originated from a disagreement in a Digbeth pub and a subsequent violent assault that saw victim George Eastwood hospitalised for three weeks and trepanned. Digbeth’s history of violence was romanticised through the BBC television series *Peaky Blinders*, which first aired in 2013 and has run for five series to date. This fictionalised account of Digbeth’s past effects a further blurring between its historical realities and its present role in Birmingham’s ‘heritage’ industry that supports civic attempts to attract inward investment and cultural tourism alike. The massive global popularity of the series, which is now streamed via Netflix in 183 countries, is credited with an increase in screen tourism to Birmingham and the wider West Midlands area. As the *Guardian* reported in 2019, ‘A record 42.8 million tourists visited Birmingham last year as the city cashed in on its status as the home of the real-life Peaky Blinders criminal gang, which operated from the 1890s to the 1930s’.³⁰⁰ This statement, which erroneously suggests that there was a real-life gang called the Peaky Blinders - in actuality the collective name for all those engaged in the historical violence – demonstrates how easily life and art can blur in the popular imagination.

During the five years preceding 2019, international visits to Birmingham rose by 19% to 1.1 million, with an estimated 50% of visitors coming from the US where the TV series enjoys huge popularity. The impact is felt outside the city itself, across the Midlands, taking in locations including the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley, where scenes for the show have regularly been filmed and where visitor numbers were up by a third in 2018. Despite the fact that *Peaky Blinders* is not actually filmed in Birmingham – rather in Liverpool and London – Digbeth is so closely associated with the series that this interest has given rise to the new *Legitimate Peaky Blinders Festival* which made its first appearance over a weekend in September 2019. The event, ‘co-curated’ by Steve Knight, creator of the TV series, offered live music, a cinema, a museum, food and drink, poetry, a specially-commissioned performance by Ballet Rambert and over 200 actors dressed in period costume. In

³⁰⁰ Mark Sweney, ‘Peaky Blinders Mania Puts Birmingham on Global “Screen Tourism” Map’, *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/sep/02/peaky-blinders-mania-birmingham-screen-tourism-boom>> [accessed 22 September 2020].

Digbeth today, tourists can visit locations associated with the history of the rival gangs courtesy of *Peaky Tours*, or marvel at a 60ft high mural on the side of the Custard Factory depicting Cillian Murphy as Thomas Shelby in the TV series, courtesy of the BBC. In May 2019, entertainment company Escape Live announced that ‘the world’s first official Peaky Blinders escape rooms’ were to be unveiled in Birmingham before expansion of the franchise across the UK.³⁰¹ Summing up the phenomenon, Joe Godwin, Director of BBC Midlands, stated: ‘Peaky Blinders has had such a positive effect on the local economy, but the full cultural impact is immeasurable... [the TV series] has been a game-changer for Birmingham’.³⁰²

Towards a Sustainable Future at Junction Works?

This ‘game-changing’ moment in the history of Digbeth carries a double meaning for Grand Union and the peer initiatives based there. How might this agglomeration of artists and artist-led initiatives evade the forced displacement that is threatened at this pivotal moment in the history of the area that they call home? An unnamed interviewer from *Birmingham Living* magazine spoke to James Craig, Co-founder of Oval, in 2015 and asked him whether broadening Digbeth’s appeal to a wider demographic might ‘change the soul of the place?’ It is not too far a leap to suggest that these changes might include the displacement of artists. Craig’s response was:

That would be an unintended consequence and it can happen. I don’t have a solution for it, except we’re making it better in a sympathetic way’.³⁰³

In this statement, the developer seeks to deflect responsibility for a process in which he is directly implicated, suggesting that such displacement is an almost *natural*, and therefore inevitable, effect. For Grand Union, however, finding a solution to the challenges posed by this fusing of Digbeth’s ‘cultural heritage’ – reinterpreted and popularised by *Peaky Blinders* – with a policy of economic expansionism at the civic level, poses an immediate and urgent imperative. Cultural micro-initiatives in Digbeth

³⁰¹ ‘Peaky Blinders the Live Escape Game’, *Escape Live*
<<https://www.escapelive.co.uk/peaky-blinders-live-escape-game/>> [accessed 29 September 2020].

³⁰² Mark Sweney, ‘Peaky Blinders Mania’.

³⁰³ ‘Eclectic Dreams – Digbeth’, *Birmingham Living*
<https://birmingham.livingmag.co.uk/eclectic-dreams-digbeth/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=eclectic-dreams-digbeth> [accessed 29 September 2020].

are facing multiple threats, from the imminent arrival of HS2, a coterminous ‘masterplanning’ exercise by the local authority, the area’s new status as an internationally recognised centre for ‘urban cool’ and an abundance of attractive former industrial premises that catch the eye of commercial developers. This is a high-stakes environment for Grand Union as an artist-led initiative attempting to carve out a vision of a sustainable future. As Cheryl Jones told me, ‘...over the next 10 years things are radically going to change around here’.

In response, Grand Union has developed a number of strategies, from securing regular funding as a member of ACE’s National Portfolio, to changing its organisational status and the make-up of its Board of Trustees. In this section, I shall examine how these moves relate to its most publicly visible statement of intent – an imagined future at ‘Junction Works,’ announced as ‘A new £3.25m contemporary art gallery and artist studios’.³⁰⁴ This new development will be housed in a industrial buildings constructed in the mid-Nineteenth Century, located on the corner of Fazeley Street in Digbeth, at the intersection of the Grand Union and Digbeth Branch canals and just a stone’s throw from the organisation’s current home at Minerva Works.

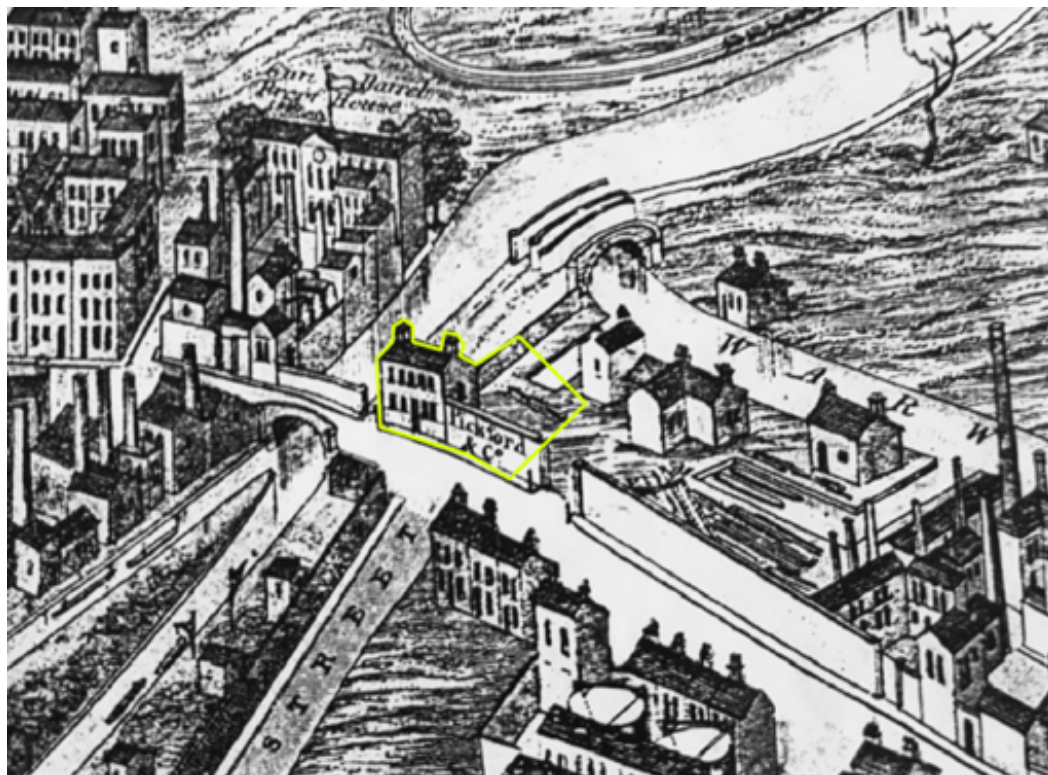


Figure 5.5, *Panoramic View of Birmingham* (1847) published by Ackermann and Co., showing buildings on the proposed site of Junction Works.

³⁰⁴ ‘Junction Works’, *Grand Union*.

Visible on a *Panoramic View of Birmingham* (1847), the collection of three connected buildings that form the proposed Junction Works have served as a canal office and manufactory. Having fallen into disuse and dereliction from the 1970s onwards, the buildings were purchased by Homes England in 2017 and are now Grade II listed, falling within the Warwick Bar conservation area.³⁰⁵ In 2018, Grand Union formally launched its fundraising campaign to restore and repurpose the buildings. Working in partnership with BPN Architects, a Birmingham-based practice, Junction Works will provide a gallery, offices, studios and event spaces over three floors.³⁰⁶

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 5.6, Proposed site of Junction Works on Fazeley Street, Digbeth. © Grand Union.

³⁰⁵ 'Junction Works', *Grand Union*.

³⁰⁶ Plans for Junction Works, available to download from the 'Vision' section of Grand Union website < <https://grand-union.org.uk/junction-works/vision/> > [accessed 29 September 2020].

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 5.7, Visualisation of Junction Works by BPN Architects. © Grand Union.

Several renders of the proposed development are included in Grand Union’s planning document for Junction Works, available to download from its website.³⁰⁷ They show figures situated in relation to a suite of newly articulated cultural spaces – a courtyard café, a gallery, a studio-office type space replete with Apple computers. The people that populate this vision are predominantly young and white, representing the ‘creative class’ identified by Richard Florida in 2002 and controversially promoted by him as the new vanguard of economic prosperity. Critiques of Florida’s theories cite how they have fuelled urban inequality³⁰⁸ and the way in which visual artists are enfolded within his categorisation of ‘knowledge workers’ that includes businesses such as marketing agencies and technology start-ups.³⁰⁹ As Martha Rosler has stated,

³⁰⁷ Sam Weatherall, for example, states, ‘The rise of [Florida’s] creative class in places like New York, London, and San Francisco created economic growth only for the already rich, displacing the poor and working classes’. Sam Weatherall, ‘Richard Florida is Sorry’, *Jacobin* <<https://jacobinmag.com/2017/08/new-urban-crisis-review-richard-florida>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

³⁰⁸ Oliver Wainwright, “‘Everything is gentrification now’: But Richard Florida isn’t Sorry”, *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/oct/26/gentrification-richard-florida-interview-creative-class-new-urban-crisis>> [accessed 6 October 2020].

³⁰⁹ Martha Rosler, *Culture Class* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), p. 247.

...the concept of the creative class put forward by the urbanist Richard Florida [is] an idea that has provided a concise and flamboyant organizing principle for municipal powers-that-be wishing to bring success and prominence to their city. According to this thesis... artists are to be permitted, even encouraged, by city planners to transform blighted neighbourhoods into safe and attractive places for the consuming classes and thus promote municipal growth.³¹⁰

As she further notes, the gentrifying effect of this ‘organizing principle’ is often the eviction of visual artists from the places that have previously sheltered them. BPN’s visualisations of the repurposed Junction Works contrast sharply with the current realities of visiting Minerva Works. Navigating to Grand Union’s space there is not easy for the uninitiated, requiring visitors to cross a courtyard of uncertain public/private status before arriving at an unmarked door. Only a small sign placed inside an upstairs window alerts the visitor to the organisation’s presence. Once inside the building, he or she must ascend the stairs as there is no lift, to arrive finally at Grand Union’s front door. How are the daily realities of artistic practice to be successfully incorporated into the altered vision proposed by BPN’s visuals, as one built on principles of enhanced visibility and public access? Cheryl Jones described to me the organisation’s vision for Junction Works that requires a radically different approach to business modelling:

...it’s a Grade II listed building and we’re hoping to move Grand Union into that building, but also have other organisations there as well. It’s quite a large building, we don’t need it all. We’re thinking about the business model and how we make that work, so we want to rent some of the office space out at a more commercial rate, however we want that to be cultural businesses and organisations. We’ll have gallery space, we’ll have more studio space than we have here, that we hope will be a bit more flexible as well, so we can change the size of it and the pricing of it. And we hope to be able to have space to invite other artist-led organisations to inhabit [the building], so that might be galleries...

What I foreground here is a sense of aspiration that must be balanced with harsh economic reality. This creates a tentative desire that is expressed only as ‘hoping’ and ‘wanting to’ in Jones’ response rather than anything more concrete. The ambition to host other artist-led initiatives, for example, is tempered by the injection of the word ‘hope’ in the final sentence. This is not a definitive ‘we will’ and it clouds any greater certainty about Grand Union’s ability to navigate by its foundational values in the

³¹⁰ Rosler, *Culture Class*, p. 247.

future. The future that Jones imagines and desires is expressed in other statements that attained significance through my GTM analysis of the interview with her [my italics]:

I guess like our ethos, the core of it is like supporting artists and curators and what they do and yeah my *hope* is that we can move that into the new building and that will continue.

...my *hope* is that we can create that structure [at Junction Works] but still have the same things happening. We've still got the affordable studio spaces, we've still got the opportunities for emerging curators and they are the key reasons for Grand Union existing and that continues throughout. And the idea is not taking on that whole building as Grand Union and becoming a mega place, and that it is still a place where lots of different things happen as part of that really. And that yeah, an important part of being in this building is that there's other arts organisations here and we're sharing audiences and our activities are different but similar and that that creates a wider community and yeah that's the *hope* for the new building, that we can retain some of that which is sort of the reason for not growing in that huge way.

I think that we'll probably end up having a different Board for [Grand Union's proposed trading company] but where's there some crossover so that there's Trustees from the charity on that Board and there's Board members from that on the charity so that there is a shared understanding... the charity can concentrate on the programme and the artistic community that it's supporting and the other Board can focus on the business model and the capital building. I *hope* that that's the right thing to do.

I argue, based on personal experience, that hope is a blunt tool in the face of the rigid framework for public funding of the arts, however sincerely and deeply it is felt. I propose that what is revealed by these statements speaks more to a lack of appropriate models for the long-term sustainability of artist-led initiatives, specifically those that would enable development while foregrounding their founding ethos and values.

In addition to Cheryl Jones' description of the vision for Junction Works, proposed floor plans indicate the presence of a reception and public circulation areas, along with event spaces. This reveals an organisation pulled in potentially competing directions. On the one hand, Grand Union wants to retain a fidelity to a set of values that have historically aligned it with an 'artist-led' field of practice. This is evident in the desire to host other artist-led initiatives within the new development and to continue to provide affordable studios spaces for artists. On the other, there is a new economic imperative – the need to make the business plan 'work' – that requires Grand Union to think commercially, for example by renting spaces out at the market rate. Is there a tension in attempting to bring together commercial workspaces of the

type typically rented to the digital industries, for example, with the provision of affordable studio spaces for artists, all under the same roof? How might Junction Works successfully unite the quite different types of spaces that these constituents need and are drawn to? Then there is the implication of growth, the move to a larger building and all the potential consequences of this for Grand Union's small team. If the organisation's ambition is to build a more prominent contemporary art space, what other staff with specialist skills – in visitor experience, catering, event management or facilities maintenance for example – might it need to recruit? There is an unavoidable circularity to the logic that escalating staffing costs are accompanied by a need to generate higher levels of income in order to sustain the status quo, precisely the challenge that troubled the early years of The Tetley and its ambition to achieve self-sustainability by generating commercial income from its bar, restaurant and corporate events offer.

Throughout my interview with her, Cheryl Jones acknowledged that change itself has been a constant in negotiating Grand Union's future since its earliest days. Initially, a major change in the status of the artists involved came at the point where the founding collective were able to move from a purely voluntary to a paid organisational model:

I guess since then, like we opened in 2010 and being a completely voluntary organisation, things have like developed over the years and when we've got more funding we've been able to create job positions and I guess that's changed the way that the organisation is led.

Subsequent changes were associated with the development of individual studio spaces and then the pivotal moment of being accepted into ACE's National Portfolio:

And so this year [2017], we've changed again and we've expanded our studio provision, so now we provide individual studios that artists rent out, we provide a co-working space for BCU graduates that they can use for twelve months, for free, and that's really about encouraging collaboration between disciplines. And we are renting a space to Modern Clay, which is an artist-led ceramics facility... and we've just gained NPO status, so that will sort of change us again.

More recent changes concern the potential impact of the move to Junction Works on the roles and relationships within Grand Union's staff team. These are effects of changes in its organisational status, moving from being a company limited by guarantee to one with charitable status:

And [moving to Junction Works] might mean that my job role changes, and there are new job roles that mean that the building works as it does and that that level of institutionalising works and you know we need to become a charity in order to do the fundraising. So that sort of changes that set-up slightly...

Grand Union Arts CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation) was formally registered in July 2019. The Charity Commission website records its objects as:

The promotion of the contemporary visual arts and the understanding and appreciation of the arts in general for the public benefit, by providing: (A) An arts centre and an exhibitions and arts events programme to enable the public to access, explore and enjoy high quality artistic experiences; (B) Arts education programmes and activities for the wider public and to build capacity in the arts sector.³¹¹

There is a highly significant omission from this statement, which does not mention artists, or indeed curators. This is due to the fact that charitable status, something Cheryl Jones argued Grand Union ‘needed’ to have in order to fundraise to create Junction Works, is predicated upon foregrounding ‘public benefit’.³¹² This is a statutory requirement and has posed challenges to artist-led initiatives before. I experienced these first hand at Project Space Leeds, where the move from limited company to registered charity involved endless negotiations with the Charity Commission as we sought to retain something of the initiative’s founding vision and values in the new charity’s objects. The perceived ‘need’ that Jones expressed in her statement – ‘we need to become a charity in order to do the fundraising’ – is significant because it demonstrates the extent to which Grand Union’s course as an organisation is directed by external forces. They include the requirements of the framework for public funding of the arts, in relation to which Grand Union finds itself in a catch-22 situation. It must raise more than three million pounds to realise its vision for Junction Works, which the organisation deems necessary to its future sustainability. Yet the very sustainability of the values that Grand Union represents is under threat since the organisation cannot access capital funding at the required level

³¹¹ ‘Grand Union Arts CIO’, *Charity Commission for England and Wales* <<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk>> [accessed 29 September 2020].

³¹² The Charity Commission website states, ‘To be a charity, an organisation must have purposes (or ‘aims’) all of which are exclusively charitable. A charity must also operate for the public benefit’. ‘Charitable Purposes’, *UK Government* <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charitable-purposes>> [accessed 16 November 2020].

without making substantive changes to its organisational model and the articulation of its vision and values.

Several other statements by Cheryl Jones reveal Grand Union caught in a need to be reactive to external stimuli. In the following example, the notion of progression *from* the artist-led *to* the institution resurfaces:

It's sort of thinking that we're going beyond being a collective of people trying to address quite an immediate problem and that we're trying to think more long term and how we provide those things that we wanted to at the start immediately, into the future and it feels like becoming an 'institution' or one of the big players is *what we need to do*. [my italics]

In my analysis of the terminology that is frequently used to define artist-led practice (such as DIY or grass roots) I argued that these terms serve to reinscribe a perceived binary that separates self-organised practices from those that are said to be 'institutional' in nature. To what extent is Grand Union acting here on received notions of cultural development, in making what it accepts as a move from one thing to another at the structural level? Is what Jones regards as a process of 'institutionalisation' one that Grand Union approaches electively, or do external pressures – to conform to accepted models in the cultural sector – force the organisation to fall back on charitable status? Is there simply an absence of other viable models that might better suit Grand Union's purpose and ethos? Jones also explained how Grand Union planned to establish a trading arm to work in tandem with the new charity to manage the commercial aspects of the proposed activities at Junction Works:

I guess the next step is thinking about how like we'll need a kind of trading company so we're sorting that out at the moment.

This move also echoes the familiar model adopted on a widespread basis by larger and more established cultural initiatives, but which again represents a major leap for Grand Union since it means adding further to the organisation's staff team, administrative and statutory workload and its requirements at the level of governance. That Cheryl Jones is aware of the jeopardy of the route Grand Union is electing to follow is clear from the statements quoted above, in which she expressed her 'hopes' for various outcomes related to the creation of Junction Works. She also revealed her wariness about narratives of 'growth' in the cultural sector:

We can be a bit more fleet of foot because we're not this hulking organisation that has to go through all of these different things to make changes and to be able to respond to anything.

What is of note here is that Jones values the responsiveness that Grand Union's relatively small scale affords it. Will this flexibility be eroded by processes of growth and institutionalisation (in Jones' words) that the organisation has set in motion? Grand Union is balancing a desire to secure its future at Junction Works – by fronting a necessarily bold and highly visible public fundraising campaign deemed necessary to realising this ambition – while attempting to resist the potential consequences that may attend such transformations. It is also attempting to balance the demands of its new charity, focused on supporting Grand Union's communities, with those of its new trading arm that must of necessity navigate by an alternate, commercial imperative. Cheryl Jones described this move as 'trying to just grab hold of a little bit of the nightmare of capitalism' in order to repurpose it in the service of the organisation's founding purpose to support emerging artists and curators. It will become, in effect, a developer although Jones states, 'I'm trying to be really mindful that we don't sort of just get taken down a developer route...' since displacement of existing communities, including artists, habitually accompanies processes of economic 'regeneration'.

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Figure 5.8, Performance by Alex Cecchetti during *Hand and Mind* at Grand Union, 2017.
© The artist and Grand Union.

Conclusion

My case study has analysed Grand Union as an initiative rich in its facilitation of *Doing*. It fosters critical spatial-relational practices that are central to the survival of the individuals that it supports as well as to the wider agglomeration of creative communities in Digbeth. I argue that these represent major contributions to artistic practice that outweigh the semantics of its potential definition as either artist-led or curator-led, independent or institutional. Grand Union's near neighbour in Digbeth, Eastside Projects, claims its simultaneous status as both artist-led initiative *and* institution. Its Director, Gavin Wade, has stated:

We feel like we're on the edge of [debates about the institutionalisation of artist-led spaces], because we're interested in being an institution. We're interested in being institutionalised, but on our terms.³¹³

My interview with Jones reveals that Grand Union cannot yet as confidently articulate its position, leading to wider uncertainty about its role and the possible erasure of its major, sustained contributions to supporting emerging curatorial practice.

Grand Union faces difficult choices as it seeks to protect what it has established over a ten-year period, balancing various perceived *needs* – to become a charity, to establish a trading arm, to grow in scale, to develop Junction Works – with its desire to retain a fidelity to its foundational values and to its core constituents. In my thesis I have described how processes of what Jones understands as 'institutionalisation' have wrought deep-seated change for the founding individuals of organisations including The Tetley, Spike Island and Ikon Gallery. How does Grand Union propose to wield the apparatus of accepted modes of cultural development – the structure and language of the arts institution based on principles of economic growth and hierarchical formalisation through the structure of the registered charity with trading subsidiary? The development at Junction Works seeks to repurpose this structure for alternative ends, with specific outcomes emerging from my analysis of the interview with Cheryl Jones as 'hopes' or aspirations for the future. I have suggested that there is an inevitable tension in this model for maintaining the sense of community that Jones revealed as so foundational to Grand Union's system of values. Can these values be preserved while utilising the language of *cultural value* to secure the resources necessary to fulfilling this vision? How does the organisation propose to

³¹³ Gavin Murphy, 'Artist-run Space as Public Gallery: Edited Conversation Between PP/s and Gavin Wade', in *Artist-Run Europe*, p. 103.

mitigate against the multiple threats of this elective transformation in order to create Junction Works as a new model for the sustainability of artist-led initiatives? Jones acknowledged that a desire to formulate new possibilities for others in the field forms a part of the high-stakes experiment that Grand Union is embarking on [my italics]:

... maybe we're setting up a model for other artist-led communities that are in similar situations to us, or you know, that maybe we can open up a model of working or a way of trying to harness some of that development for our community, you know if everything goes well, and I *hope* that there is a sort of case study there that other people can use.

Throughout the interview, Cheryl Jones demonstrated that the organisation is alert to the risks inherent in the strategy it is pursuing. This self-awareness manifests itself in the various mitigating actions that Grand Union is taking. These range from education – Jones and her team visited and spoke to comparable initiatives with experience of large-scale capital developments – to instituting a proposed ‘asset lock’ on its new commercial arm to ensure that its primary asset, Junction Works, can never be repurposed for private commercial gain. Jones also stated that the buildings that will become Junction Works are owned by Homes England, Grand Union’s existing landlord at Minerva Works. She described this as a positive relationship established on the basis of shared values around generating and sustaining communities:

... the opportunity is that we've managed to strike up a conversation with our landlord, who at the moment is a government agency landlord, and although profit-making, is... some of what they're about is creating homes and they're about creating communities. So it feels like there's an opportunity there to have a developer that's going to listen to us in the first place.

This synergy provides a contextual basis for the positive development of Junction Works. The potential remains, however, for the emergence of a radically altered Grand Union that has had to grow and adapt in order to secure its vision of a more sustainable future.

Yet the alternative of not acting poses an arguably greater threat to the organisation’s community. As Cheryl Jones recognised, the changes beginning to affect the Digbeth area are equally ‘radical’. Grand Union is attempting to secure space for its creative community in a city centre location, something that traditionally becomes difficult as artists are displaced to the margins by processes of ‘gentrification’. There are several reasons why Grand Union seeks to challenge this process. Jones stated:

...having somewhere city centre-based means that people from the whole of that residential spread can travel to one place and be working in that same place together. So there's that in terms of like where the studio holders come from and what their make-up is. I think in terms of the gallery space and the profile of that, it's really important that that's in the city centre because it means that more people visit us, not only from the city but from outside the city. I also think there's like an ideological thing with the city and that so often artists get kind of looked over, or are completely invisible, and I think it's really important that we're not, cause we're a vital part of the city's make-up... but also why should the artists have to keep going and finding the next space, and investing all of our time in creating a community here, just to get moved on by the developers? And I think something needs to change, even if it's in a very small way.

Cheryl Jones asks an important question here about how the values of the creative city under neoliberalism and the specific value of artists to places. Central to this is the protection of the communities that Grand Union has generated during its first decade. This represents a major investment of physical, artistic and emotional labour by all those who have shaped Grand Union since it was founded in 2010, including founder members such as Jones. This poses critical questions about how the wider visual arts sector supports artists as they begin to age beyond their twenties and thirties, and about the possibilities of ageing within artist-led practice:

And you know now, many of us are in our forties, or nearing our forties, and loads of us have got kids and yeah, stability is really important – stability and visibility is massively important, cause it's really hard to even just go to different cities and make yourself visible in that way. When you've got a two-year old you can do it to an extent, but not to the extent I used to, just like going to those openings and having the network in that way.

On many levels, Grand Union's proposed expansion at Junction Works presents an important test case for the future sustainability of artist-led practice and the future value of artists to major urban centres. If Digbeth provides a high-stakes context for these debates, at the core of Birmingham's neoliberal vision of economic expansion, how do the issues facing artist-led initiatives today play out beyond the major centres for contemporary art in the UK and Ireland? For my second case study, I shall now take a detour to Rotherham in South Yorkshire in order to examine these questions in the radically different context of a northern town marked by multiple economic, cultural and societal crises.

CHAPTER 6 – CASE STUDY: ROTHERHAM OPEN ARTS RENAISSANCE

ROAR can and will demonstrate to Rotherham the value of the arts.³¹⁴

Introduction

On multiple fronts, Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance [ROAR] offers a great deal through which to explore the major concepts of *place*, *value* and *institution* that I identified in my analysis of the discourses framing contemporary cultural policy and contemporary cultural challenges faced by artist-led operations. This second case study provides a necessary and fine-grained analysis of the challenges for artist-led initiatives away from the major centres for contemporary art. Although ROAR shares with Grand Union its troubled relationship with definitions of artist-led practice, it operates in a very different context to that experienced by the Birmingham-based initiative. There, the creative community of Digbeth produces an urban ‘cool’ that enables it to be valued for its visible contributions to economic regeneration and growth. Rotherham, on the other hand, provides a very specific context as a northern town – not yet a city – at the margins of regional visibility and recognition. ROAR operates in a post-industrial landscape where austerity is experienced not only as an economic and social devastation but also as a cultural one. Where a thriving local culture once existed – of musicians and comedians supported by the working men’s clubs for example – there is now a chronic absence of local initiatives and infrastructure for the arts.³¹⁵

Amid these challenges, ROAR seeks to sustain an authentic presence and visibility for locally based artists and makers. It must do so while contending with centralised and instrumentalised policy and discourse and while balancing its support of artists with a need to secure its own sustainability – all to be achieved on acutely constrained resources. Central to achieving this longevity has been the organisation’s long-held desire to develop a more visible and accessible permanent creative hub for the town of Rotherham. This ambition remains elusively beyond its reach as it is met

³¹⁴ ROAR, *Business Plan 2018-2020* (2018), n.p.

³¹⁵ Stephen Rogers, ROAR’s Chair, told me: ‘...when I first moved here thirty years ago there was a thriving amateur arts scene, very much based around music and poetry. Back then we lived in St. Ann’s Road, which is over the other side of the Park. Behind us was the Labour Club and every Friday night or Saturday night there was a big sort of social in the Labour Club where you had amateur poets, and you know, incredibly good musicians...’ Interview with Stephen Rogers, 13 March 2019.

locally with offers that are limited to ‘meanwhile’ use, presenting a major barrier to the organisation’s current visibility and long-term viability. ROAR is further impacted by its own attempts to centre itself within debates on a nascent cultural strategy for the borough that was in the early stages of development at the time of the interviews on which my case study is based. I argue that this contextual environment creates even deeper invisibility of such projects from the perspective of metropolitan policy makers. It is critical that this radical unevenness is made visible as a means to test out in concrete conditions and, as a result, perhaps to resist on the basis of evidence the meta-theories of cultural value and cultural ecology disseminated from the centre.

My analysis of two interviews with Sharon Gill, ROAR’s CEO, in particular reveals the realities of what is at stake *affectively* for cultural workers tasked with implementing centralised policy in the most challenging of local conditions. This comes at great cost, producing a psychological exhaustion experienced by Gill as a ‘war of attrition’. The realities of artist-led practice in Rotherham are that it exists in the marginal spaces of mouldy and inaccessible buildings, redundant warehouses and murky corridors. These are the only spaces that can be secured in the context of a stranglehold on vacant town centre properties that are now owned by arm’s length commercial developers. This presents a radically different environment for culture to that experienced within the bespoke, architect-designed spaces for culture that exist elsewhere in the region. It is, for example, less than nine miles from ROAR’s base in the centre of Rotherham to the beautiful and newly expanded home of Site Gallery in the centre of Sheffield.³¹⁶ Local conditions in Rotherham are damaging in a triple sense: they erode both individual wellbeing and organisational stability, while occluding ROAR’s major contributions to culture in the town and surrounding borough. Nonetheless, my GTM analysis enables me to claim ROAR as an artist-led initiative rich in practices of *Doing* and *Negotiating* according to its own values. I show that it continues to push back and to resist the challenges that it faces and to

³¹⁶ Site reopened in Autumn 2018 after a £1.7 million pound renovation and expansion designed by London-based architectural practice DRDH. This tripled the size of the original venue, creating additional gallery space and improving Site’s visibility and entrance on Brown Street in the city centre. The redevelopment was funded by Arts Council England, Sheffield City Council, Sheffield City Region Infrastructure Fund and numerous trusts and foundations. ‘Site Gallery Announces Reopening Following a £1.7million Development’, *Welcome to Sheffield* <<http://www.welcometosheffield.co.uk/visit/news/2018/aug/30/site-gallery-announces-reopening-following-a-1-7million-development>> [accessed 9 November 2020].

question the logic of centralised policy making. These challenges concern the inappropriateness of existing metrics for cultural value in capturing ROAR's specific achievements and contributions. The organisation produces positive effects for its constituency of artists that are of critical importance and experienced by them as care, community and even as family. It further creates opportunities for the residents of Rotherham to access and experience culture in a locality that has been devastated by the successive crises of de-industrialisation and austerity. There is, therefore, a critical need for new and decentralised modes of support that fully recognise and appropriately resource ROAR, as an artist-led initiative, to deliver authentic, locally generated and embedded culture in Rotherham.³¹⁷

As with my first case study, I possess tacit knowledge of ROAR's work that has a bearing on my research. I have worked alongside Sharon Gill, ROAR's Chief Executive, in the professional contexts of Culture Forum North [CFN] and Yorkshire and Humber Visual Arts Network [YVAN] after we originally met at a CFN event in 2016. As a move to mitigate any bias that this creates in my analysis and in order to hold preconceptions and anecdotal evidence in check, the case study is based primarily on a series of original interviews that I conducted between February 2018 and March 2019. I first interviewed Sharon Gill in May 2018 and then again ten months later, followed by an interview with Stephen Rogers, a co-founder of ROAR and the standing Chair of the organisation's Board of Trustees. These interviews were then analysed using the Grounded Theory Method that provides the methodological framework for my thesis. Prior to this, I also interviewed two artists supported by ROAR, whose anonymity I have preserved due to sensitivities in their personal circumstances. I refer to these individuals in my text as 'Artist A' and 'Artist B'. The interviews took place as an iterative series of conversations held in person in Rotherham and unless indicated otherwise, all quotations in the case study are drawn from them.

I have also had access to documents that form ROAR's organisational framework for the purposes of business planning and its relationship with ACE as an NPO. These documents include ROAR's *Business Plan and Strategic Goals* (2018-2020) and annual feedback from ACE on ROAR's progress against targets identified

³¹⁷ I propose 'authenticity' here not as an essentialism but as a sense of both being based in and responsive to specific communities and localities, populations and their histories in specific places.

in its funding agreement. Sharon Gill also provided access to ROAR's *Creative Space Consultation* report (2018) that it undertook as part of an intended capital development; and to *The Development of the Arts in Rotherham* (2015), a report prepared by consultants Culture Partners and not currently in the public realm. In addition to these sources, ethnographic research has included attendance at events held by ROAR within its artistic programme – artists' talks and exhibitions – and the associated time spent in Rotherham becoming familiar with its town centre by exploring it on foot. I have engaged with the organisation's marketing and communications via its website, social media and monthly e-newsletter, the *Roaring Times*.

A major element in understanding the artist-led initiatives that inhabit the post-industrial, and increasingly post-retail, margins of our towns and cities is, I suggest, the actual journey that the researcher takes to what are frequently their rather obscure, yet revealing and impactful, locations, overlooked, understudied and rendered invisible in the official and centric analyses. As a result, I think it is important to include here an almost phenomenological description of the journey that I took across Rotherham to ROAR's base at Westgate Chambers in the town centre, which is, at the same time, a geo-political and sociological analysis of a specific situation. I experienced my going to Rotherham as much more than the physical and cultural journey *from* the major economic and cultural centres of cities where I live and where I have carried out my research *to* the perceptual margins of economy and culture in Rotherham. This descriptive narrative teases out what is different in and specific to the conditions for artistic practice across this divide— an issue that ROAR's work explicitly seeks to address: 'We need to help lobby and advocate for the cultural offering in Rotherham in the wider sector, regionally, nationally and internationally, shouting about the needs of our Towns against the urban conurbations'.³¹⁸

Since observations I have made along the route of my journey to Rotherham are important for my analysis, I shall use two fonts to identify a situated observation and personal reflection and alternately the more analytical narrative that follows to create the contextual conditions for ROAR. One aspect, which I have identified in italics, utilises thick description and is written in the first person to enrich the journey

³¹⁸ ROAR, *Business Plan 2018-2020*, n.p.

from my home in Leeds to the organisation's front door.³¹⁹ The second employs historical research from several sources further to ground these observations in place. Together, these two perspectives on how ROAR is uniquely situated open out a number of questions and avenues that further elucidate critical issues in the contemporary conditions for artist-led practice in Rotherham. Such attention to the researcher's entry into a site of research and the resources for understanding provide both further support for and reconfiguration of the concept of *place* as it is conceived in documents and negotiated in practice.

The chapter opens with this 'journey' before moving to the challenges of defining what ROAR is and does, particularly in light of its interdisciplinary beginnings and close relationship with Open Minds Theatre Company. This is followed by an analysis of how ROAR has built an inclusive community of practice in Rotherham, through the lens of how two artists involved with the organisation in recent years understand the subjective experiences brought about through this relationship. I then offer an analysis of what is at stake for ROAR in balancing the major threads of its work: its support of individual artists and a community that coalesces around the space at Westgate Chambers, and its elective role within developing debates on cultural value in Rotherham. Finally, I consider what role the creation of a more permanent, visible and accessible space for art might play in the fulfillment of ROAR's mission, as an ambition advanced by the organisation since its inception, and how attempts to negotiate this are consistently frustrated.

³¹⁹ I am drawing here on the work of Clifford Geertz on ethnographic description. Geertz argues that even at the most 'elemental' level, such description is extraordinarily 'thick'. He states: 'In finished anthropological writings... this fact – that what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to – is obscured because most of what we need to comprehend a particular event, ritual, custom, idea, or whatever is insinuated as background information before the thing itself is directly examined. [...] There is nothing particularly wrong with this, and it is in any case inevitable. But it does lead to a view of anthropological research as rather more of an observational and rather less of an interpretive activity than it really is. Right down at the factual base, the hard rock, insofar as there is any, of the whole enterprise, we are already explicating: and worse, explicating explications.' My description of my journey across Rotherham is, therefore, a partial and subjective one that is already situated within the particular focus of my research. I must acknowledge that this conditions what I saw and have elected to draw out within my thesis. Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,' in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 9.

On the Margins: Finding ROAR

Travelling from Leeds to Rotherham by train is a journey that brings into sharp focus the deficiencies of the northern rail network. Even a direct train takes just under an hour from the centre of Leeds, as opposed to the 45 minute drive from my front door in the east of the city to the ample, cheap parking in Rotherham town centre. The M1 motorway is conveniently direct and fast: to access it I head south from home, skirting Leeds city centre with its ever-present cranes, their towering presence a constant reminder that commercial development here has hardly drawn breath even through the worst impacts of the last decade. Once free of the city, the open motorway is before me. En route to Rotherham I pass a sequence of brown tourist signs - for the National Coal Mining Museum, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Cannon Hall and Wentworth Castle and finally Elsecar Heritage Centre, a visitor attraction on the site of former industrial-era workshops.

I fly across the overpass at Sheffield, high above the green faux-classical domes and colonnades of the sprawling Meadowhall shopping centre on the right, the largest in Yorkshire and threatening to expand again to become the fourth largest in the UK.³²⁰ From this high vantage point I marvel at the thrilling architecture of the Blackburn Meadows biomass plant to the left, with its dramatic angularities in black and orange designed by international architectural practice BDP. By night, the monumental polycarbonate cube is set aglow as if some giant's forge stirred back to life within. Together, these architectural monuments to retail and industry effect a sense of the ambition of the city down below. As the motorway briefly returns to open country beyond Sheffield, I finally take the exit to Rotherham at Junction 34.

Rotherham is one of four metropolitan boroughs, along with those of Barnsley, Doncaster and Sheffield, which together make up the county of South Yorkshire. Bradford, Derby, Hull, Leeds, Nottingham and York are all within an hour's reach by car, as is the Peak District National Park. Local public transport links in South Yorkshire, particularly the Bus Rapid Transit Scheme which now traverses the brief six miles between the centre of Rotherham and the centre of Sheffield in under half an hour, have improved in recent years. Despite this geographic proximity, however, there is a deeper sense of division that leaves Rotherham visibly out of step with burgeoning development in its larger urban neighbour. The Office for National Statistics estimates that in 2018 the population of Sheffield (582,506) was more than double that of Rotherham (264,671).³²¹ The dominance of the larger city can be felt everywhere across the county, including in the centre of Rotherham: ROAR's postcode is not 'R1' but 'S60'.

³²⁰ 'Meadowhall Site Set for Major Expansion', *BBC News* <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-47557436>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

³²¹ 'UK population pyramid interactive', *Office for National Statistics* <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationnestimates/articles/ukpopulationpyramidinteractive/2020-01-08>> [accessed 26 October 2020].

From the motorway exit, it is just a few minutes' drive into Rotherham town centre, passing the town's single brown tourist sign, for Magna - the 'Science Adventure Centre' located in the disused steel mills at Templeborough. The mills closed in 1993 but at their height employed 10,000 people and produced over a million tonnes of steel every year.³²² Unlike the approach to Yorkshire's major cities, there is no tourist sign for Rotherham's civic gallery or contemporary art space, since the town possesses neither.

Industrial expansion in Rotherham brought a clutch of civic institutions in the second half of the Nineteenth Century. After the town attained the status of 'Borough' in 1871, replete with its own Mayor and Corporation, there followed a hospital (1872), public parks - Boston Park (1876) and Clifton Park (1891), a public library (1887) and the Clifton Park Museum (1893) with collections of items donated by local people and societies.³²³ But while the Industrialists of so many other northern towns and cities were busy raising civic art galleries by subscription and Corporations increasingly added these to the local landscape as markers of civic pride and refinement, this was not the case in either Rotherham, Barnsley or Doncaster.³²⁴ As Sharon Gill told me, 'There's no statutory art gallery [in Rotherham] and we've got a couple of display exhibition options, but there's nothing in a committed way really'. The local authority has been unmoved or unable to advance the project of a major art gallery for Rotherham, unlike Barnsley and Wakefield that have invested in The Civic (reopened 2009 after major refurbishment) and The Hepworth (2011) respectively.

Arriving in the town centre, I park on Drummond Street next to the Tesco supermarket, thankful that a full day's parking costs a fraction of what I am accustomed to paying in Leeds, and then walk the short ten minutes across town to ROAR's base at Westgate Chambers. The route that I take on foot is always the same: through the indoor market halls, along past the façade of the Rotherham College building, established as the Rotherham School of Science and Art in the Nineteenth

³²² 'Visit Magna', *Magna* <<https://www.visitmagna.co.uk/science-adventure>> [accessed 26 October 2020].

³²³ 'History of Clifton Park Museum', *Clifton Park and Museum* <<http://www.cliftonpark.org.uk/homepage/30/history-of-clifton-park-museum>>. On the history of Boston Park, see <http://cliftonpark.org.uk/cpm/homepage/83/history_of_clifton_park_museum> and for the history of Rotherham see <<http://www.localhistories.org/rotherham.html>> [accessed 15 October 2020].

³²⁴ For example, the Harris Library, Museum & Art Gallery opened in Preston in 1893, through local fundraising and the philanthropy of Edmund Harris. 'Harris Museum History', *Visit Preston* <<https://www.visitpreston.com/welcome/preston-s-history/buildings-and-heritage/harris-museum-history>> [accessed 17 December 2020].

Century, past Grimm & Co, the only other NPO in Rotherham³²⁵ and through, when its gates are open, the arcade of the exquisite Imperial Buildings.



Figure 6.1, Rotherham's newly opened Imperial Buildings in 1908.



Figure 6.2, Interior courtyard of the Imperial Buildings today, with vacant retail kiosk. Photograph by the author.

³²⁵ Grimm & Co. is a literacy organisation that 'champions the writer in every child'. 'About', *Grimm and Co.* <<https://grimmandco.co.uk/our-story/>> [accessed 26 October 2020].

Constructed on the site of the old meat shambles, the building was designed by Joseph Platts of Rotherham, architect of the town's Theatre Royal that stood from 1894 to 1957 when it was demolished for local redevelopment plans.³²⁶ Today, the elegant retail units that comprise the Imperial Buildings' ground floor are almost entirely devoid of tenants. Small in scale, they do not meet the requirements of the modern retail sector, which has taken its custom elsewhere, and independents struggle to make a viable living due to the lack of footfall. As I walk through the town, the failure of its high-street retail at both ends of the scale is writ large everywhere. While many buildings have attractive upper floors belying an earlier, more successful era, at street level it is another story. What shops remain open are predominantly pound shops and charity stores, desperate messages capitalised for emphasis in whitewash on the inside of their windows. A reporter for The Economist recently noted the disparity between Grimm and Co's 'wonderful vision' – its space is realised as a magical apothecary – and its view of Rotherham town centre:

[This] wonderful illusion dissolves when you look out of the front window. The view from Grimm and Co is of a charity shop, a closed bank, a closed electrical goods store and a closed clothes shop.³²⁷

Primark and other high-street staples have recently exited the centre and opted instead for the safety-in-numbers of the purpose-built, and car-friendly, Parkgate shopping centre a mile and a half out to the north east of the town. One former retail premise, a 1960s cube on stilts, always catches my eye. I notice a sign in the window of this now abandoned retail premises, for the established artist-led initiative East Street Arts. The building forms part of the Leeds-based organisation's 'Temporary Spaces' programme.³²⁸ This programme seeks to connect artists with the spaces they need on a short-term basis while generating income from private landlords through offsetting the rates liabilities applied to empty properties. I peer through the window but the space is dark and there are no signs of life.

This picture of decline in Rotherham's town centre, where empty properties now appear to outweigh those that are occupied, was not always the case. For Sharon Gill, 'Rotherham... has an amazing heritage, it's older than Sheffield, its history is completely unexplored really'. Settled since Roman times, the 'ham' (village) by the River Rother grew steadily through the medieval period into a small market town of a few hundred souls.³²⁹ By the mid-to-late 18th Century an iron industry was thriving, and both it and Rotherham grew rapidly following the catalysing effects of connection to the canal in 1740 and the railway in 1838. The local iron and steel industries boomed through the Nineteenth Century along with the exploitation of rich coal

³²⁶ 'Theatres in Rotherham', *Arthur Lloyd*

<<http://www.arthurlloyd.co.uk/RotherhamTheatres.htm#royal>> [accessed 26 October 2020].

³²⁷ 'The National Tilt', *The Economist*, Volume 436 No. 9205 (2020), 18-20 (p. 19).

³²⁸ 'About Us and What We Do', East Street Arts <<https://www.eaststreetarts.org.uk/about-us/>> [accessed 15 October 2020].

³²⁹ Tim Lambert, 'A Brief History of Rotherham', *Local Histories*

<<http://www.localhistories.org/rotherham.html>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

seams across South Yorkshire, a familiar if unsustainable tale of growth across England's north. Rotherham is known as the location of the infamous 'Battle of Orgreave' of 1984. At the time of the National Union of Mineworkers [NUM] strike in 1984-5, eleven collieries existed in the Rotherham area including Orgreave Coking Plant, now demolished, which supplied coke to Scunthorpe power station twenty miles away. The extensive South Yorkshire Coalfield was known for its rich bituminous coal used in the production of coal gas and coke, the latter used in the steel industry. The NUM strike was called in response to the National Coal Board's ambition to close 20 pits, a move feared as the first wave in a planned massive closure of pits across the country. On 18th June 1984, a mass picket line at Orgreave, designed to disrupt this flow of coke, was violently put down by dozens of mounted police in a notorious event dubbed the 'Battle of Orgreave' and later the subject of a reconstruction by the artist Jeremy Deller.³³⁰ Altogether, 55 miners were charged with 'riot' and a further 40 with 'unlawful assembly,' charges that the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign regards as 'one of the most serious miscarriages of justice in this country's history'.³³¹ This unhealed wound, and the after-effects of the mining industry in Rotherham, are still felt in the town: *BreathingSpace*, part of Rotherham Foundation NHS Trust, treats hundreds of individuals every year suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, many of them former miners.³³²

The local cast iron industry expanded rapidly through the Nineteenth Century and Rotherham became an international centre for the production of stove grates. Other successful industries included glass, pottery and brass. Stephen Rogers has observed the vanishing of these traces of industry since his arrival in the town:

Rotherham is a very run down, deprived place and it's got worse. When I moved here thirty years ago and there were still some pits and the steelworks were still working and things like that, it was a very different place.

Measures indicate that the economic and human health of the area has worsened over recent years. Indices of Multiple Deprivation [IMD] data collated for Rotherham

³³⁰ 'About', *Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign* <<https://otjc.org.uk/about/>> [accessed 23 November 2020]. For Deller's artwork, see 'The Battle of Orgreave 2001', *Jeremy Deller* <https://www.jeremydeller.org/TheBattleOfOrgreave/TheBattleOfOrgreave_Video.php> [accessed 4 December 2020].

³³¹ 'About', *Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign*.

³³² 'Rotherham Lung Disease Centre Treats 8,500 Patients in Former Coal-Mining Area', *BBC News* <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-40542386>> [accessed 23 November 2020].

Metropolitan Borough Council show that in 2015, 19.5% of deciles within the Borough fell within the 10% most deprived in England: this was up from 17% five years earlier, and a much lower 12% at pre-recession levels in 2007, a figure that had been stable for at least three years prior.³³³ From its reading of this latest IMD data, the Council's report concluded that Rotherham moved from 53rd most deprived district in England in 2010 (out of a total 326 districts) to 52nd most deprived in 2015. Employment and education deprivation were deemed the most severe challenges and although there were some improvements in terms of health, crime and environment, the most deprived areas within the Borough were worsening. Particular challenges concerned mental health, barriers to housing on the basis of affordability, the accelerating effects of welfare reform on deprivation, and the failure of earlier initiatives to tackle these inequalities. I return to challenges associated with the IMD measure in my final case study on the East Leeds Project.

But it is for the shocking scale and nature of the systematic and sustained sexual abuse of children that took place in Rotherham from 1997 onwards that the town has more frequently made the news since the *Times* newspaper broke the story in 2013. *Operation Stovewood* continues, 'a unique and unprecedented investigation, challenging in its scale and complexity,' with 34 distinct ongoing investigations. Figures from 2018 estimate that there are 1,510 victims, the vast majority of whom are white British girls aged 11 to 18. Their abusers, 110 of them, are predominantly of Pakistani heritage.³³⁴ A 2015 independent report into the scandal ordered by then-Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles (the latest in a line of such reports dating back to 2002 and including Alexis Jay's 2014 report which first made public the scale of the abuse), found the local authority to be 'not fit for purpose.'³³⁵ Its publication led to the immediate resignation of Rotherham's Cabinet and the Council being placed under the control of five Government Commissioners pending new elections in 2016. Powers were gradually returned to local decision-makers with the exception of

³³³ 'Indices of Deprivation 2015', *Rotherham Clinical Commissioning Group* <<http://www.rotherhamccg.nhs.uk/Downloads/Governing%20Body%20Papers/March%202016/Enc%206%20-%20Indices%20of%20Deprivation%202015%20CCG.pdf>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

³³⁴ Josh Halliday, 'Number of Child Sex Abuse Victims in Rotherham Raised to 1,510', *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/feb/20/rotherham-sexual-abuse-victims-rises-to-1510-operation-stovewood>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

³³⁵ Helen Pidd, 'Failures in Rotherham Led to Sexual Abuse of 1,400 Children', *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/aug/26/rotherham-sexual-abuse-children>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

Children's Services, the last to remain under Commissioners' control. Full democratic control of all services finally returned to elected Councillors as of 24 September 2018.³³⁶ The abuse scandal continues to have unpredictable and far-reaching consequences. On 15 March 2019, a lone gunman, a twenty-eight year old white Australian, made his way into two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, and shot dead 49 worshippers.³³⁷ Among images that he posted on social media prior to the attack is one of his ammunition daubed with the words, 'For Rotherham'. Amid this toxic cocktail of economic and societal decline, Rotherham voted convincingly to leave the European Union in the 2017 referendum, by almost 68%. This figure was mirrored in Rotherham's near neighbours Barnsley (68.3%) and Doncaster (69%).



Figure 6.3, A Gallerytown site in Rotherham town centre. Photograph by the author.

As I walk across Rotherham, I pass several of the 'Gallerytown' installations. The project was founded by the Chair of Rotherham's Economy Board and is designed to 'regenerate and encourage more shoppers and visitors into Rotherham,

³³⁶ 'Government Commissioners to be Removed from Council', *Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council*

<https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/news/article/1600/government_commissioners_to_be_removed_from_council> [accessed 23 November 2020].

³³⁷ Zamira Rahim, 'New Zealand attacks: Rotherham Victim says Christchurch Mosque Attacks 'Not in my Name'', *The Independent* <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/new-zealand-attack-rotherham-gun-mosque-a8826271.html>> [accessed 26 October 2020].

in order to drive the local economy'.³³⁸ The billboard sites host reproductions of figurative works by artists from Rotherham and major art historical figures. There are over 35 sites around the town centre – on the exterior of public buildings and along major thoroughfares as well as its many snickets – but some of the art works are missing or have been vandalised. I wonder what the value of this initiative is to the town and what values it articulates through its engagements with artists who live there?

Finally, I arrive at ROAR's entrance on Westgate, near the centrally located Minster and its gardens, a short walk from the River Rother and a pocket park that hosts Heart of Steel, a public artwork by artist Steve Mehdi. This is a replica of a sculpture located at Meadowhall, relating to the artist's proposed work The Steel Man, a thirty-two metre tall parallel to Antony Gormley's Angel of the North at Gateshead, to be installed locally. The project, which commemorates steel production in the area, aims to 'create a landmark artwork and visitor centre that [will] act as a beacon for the Yorkshire region and a catalyst for change'.³³⁹ The sculpture will, the artist proposes, create '...a destination for visitors, adding significant economic and cultural capital to the region'.³⁴⁰ For Stephen Rogers, the history of the steel industry in Rotherham is poorly understood and in need of revision:

You know, Sheffield didn't make steel, we did, and they made it into knives and forks. But all the steelworks were here and in the Don Valley, so there were bits in Sheffield, but largely the steelworks were here.



Figure 6.4, Entrance to ROAR's space at Westgate Chambers, Rotherham. Photograph by the author.

³³⁸ 'About', *Gallery Town* <<http://archives.gallerytown.org.uk/about/index.html>> [accessed 23 November 2020].

³³⁹ 'Home Page', *The Steel Man* <<http://www.thesteelman.co.uk>> [accessed 13 October 2020].

³⁴⁰ 'News: Heart of Steel for Rotherham Town Centre', *Rotherham Business News* <<http://www.rothbiz.co.uk/2015/04/news-4177-heart-of-steel-for-rotherham.html>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

In contrast to Mehdi's gleaming vision of a man of steel, the upper floors of Westgate Chambers' façade are stone, with carved details borrowed from the classical idiom and stained glass windows - material evidence of a belief in solidity that characterised an earlier, industrial chapter in Rotherham's story. At ground floor level the exterior is tired and the entrance to the arts organisation is incongruously situated adjacent to Elliott's, a 3am bar that promotes itself as the 'ultimate party venue'.³⁴¹ In response to this somewhat unpromising location, ROAR's strategy for visibility is to adorn the unremarkable doorway and surrounds with the organisation's signature red and white branding. The pediment above the door, also painted bright red, boldly announces, 'ROAR ART SPACE' in declarative white capitals. The repetition of 'ROAR' on the tiles above the door itself becomes sonorously alliterative, playing on the acronym's double meaning. A vitrine-like window space next to the door is used to promote ROAR's changing programme of events and exhibitions.



Figure 6.5, Stained-glass window, Westgate Chambers. Photograph by the author.

Although this main entrance is at street level, there is no public access on a daily basis: entry can only be granted by members of ROAR's team after visitors press the button on an intercom. Once inside, I can only ascend to the organisation's space on the upper floor by mounting several flights of stairs on foot. As with Grand Union's home at Minerva Works, there is no lift. Half way through my ascent up the unremarkable staircase, there is a brief moment of loveliness: a two-panelled leaded glass window that survives to connect us to the building's former use. In the left-hand panel is a shield with hands clasping each other in a gesture of solidarity. The banner below reads, THE ROTHERHAM CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY LTD.³⁴² The shield

³⁴¹ 'About', Elliott's <<http://www.elliotsrotherham.co.uk>> [accessed 13 October 2020].

³⁴² Established in 1925, the Rotherham Co-operative Society was extant until 1971 when it relinquished its independence by transferring its engagements to the Co-operative Retail

to the right-hand side is the coat of arms of the Borough of Rotherham. Divided into two vertically, the shield's left-hand panel depicts three cannon against a blue background, mirrored by three white stags against a green background on the right. The banner below carries the Latin inscription, SIC VIRESKIT INDUSTRIA, often translated as 'Thus industry flourishes'.³⁴³ As Raymond Williams reminds us, there are two senses to the word 'industry'.³⁴⁴ Most obviously, the use of the word is as a reference to 'an institution or set of institutions for production or trade,' which gave a name to what we now know as the Industrial Revolution, its infrastructure of sites, buildings, machines and productions. But the root of the word is in the Latin 'industria,' meaning 'diligence' and it came into English in the Fifteenth Century as a derivative of the French 'industrie.' From this original Latin meaning it can also refer to, 'the human quality of sustained application or effort'. It is in this sense that we can best connect the presence of this literal window into the past with the work of the organisation ROAR that lies beyond the door now in front of me, at the top of this otherwise unremarkable stairwell in Westgate Chambers, Rotherham.

Defining ROAR: Multidisciplinary Beginnings

My deeper engagement with ROAR began with an event held by Culture Forum North [CFN] in May 2016, when I first heard Sharon Gill speak about its work in detail.³⁴⁵ Prior to this, I was only peripherally aware of ROAR's existence. I understood it be *artist-focused* as opposed to *artist-led* and not particularly engaged with the networks of artist-led practice across the north that I was familiar with – those highlighted by Kevin Hunt's *Artist-led HOT100* for example. ROAR is to some extent an atypical feature on the landscape of artist-led initiatives. It does not utilise the label 'artist-led' within its internal or external communications. Nor does it exclusively support contemporary visual arts practice in the manner of S1 Artspace, its near neighbour and potential comparator in Sheffield. That organisation far more confidently asserts both its status as artist-led and its self-identification with the contemporary visual arts. The home page of the S1's website states:

Services, indicating either that the local branch was struggling and saw no independent future, or that local members identified that future with being part of a centralised movement with greater trading power and potential for expansion into new markets. At its height in 1966 the Rotherham branch had 51,765 members. 'Rotherham Co-operative Society', *Jisc Archives Hub* <<https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/2f23085e-cb54-39f2-b6bd-78a683d06522?component=98dd256b-174d-38d0-b239-6fc0939b1f96>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

³⁴³ 'Rotherham County Borough Council', *Civic Heraldry*

<http://www.civicheraldry.co.uk/wridding_ob.html> [accessed 26 October 2020].

³⁴⁴ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Harper Collins, 1983), p. 165.

³⁴⁵ Culture Forum North is an 'open network of partnerships between Higher Education and the cultural sector across the North'. 'Home Page', *Culture Forum North* <<https://www.cultureforumnorth.co.uk>> [accessed 19 October 2020].

S1 Artspace is an artist-led organisation providing studio space for over twenty Sheffield based artists and a project space, which presents an annual programme of contemporary exhibitions, screenings and events.³⁴⁶

By contrast, the ‘About Us’ section of ROAR’s website leads with this:

ROAR are an Arts Council funded National Portfolio Organisation. We are an infrastructure body, with an ever increasing membership of 224 artists and organisations, all of whom live and/or work in and around Rotherham. We are a volunteer led organisation with our Board of Directors representing different areas of the creative sector.³⁴⁷

The language at work here is that of the ‘creative industries’ and concepts of growth understood as an escalation in quantitative terms. The statement seeks to insert ROAR and to establish its central position – as an NPO client of ACE – within what is perceived as a cultural *sector*. The use of the term ‘infrastructure body’ further creates a sense of ROAR as a development agency. Indeed, this strategic mission was inscribed within its work from inception, at the instigation of its co-founders.

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 6.6, Co-founders of Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance, circa 2005. Stephen Rogers, ROAR’s current Chair, is on the right of the group. © Stephen Rogers.

³⁴⁶ ‘Home Page’, *S1 Artspace Sheffield* <<https://www.s1artspace.org>> [accessed 13 October 2020].

³⁴⁷ ‘About Us’, *Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance* <<http://www.rotherhamroar.com/about/>> [accessed 13 October 2020].

The group that collectively founded ROAR in 2005 and of which Stephen Rogers was part, comprised practitioners from music, theatre and circus as well as the visual arts. In Chapter Four I quoted at length from Stephen Rogers' description of their shared impetus to initiate a structure that could respond to major absences within existing provision for the arts in Rotherham. The identification of such gaps is a commonplace catalyst for collectivisation among many of the initiatives that I have interviewed for my thesis. What differentiates ROAR from the majority of them is the fact that the instigators had not previously studied together in formal art education and this led to a wider remit in the nascent initiative's work as each contributor brought different specialisms to the table. Despite this broad base, the group further identified a particular and pressing need to support Rotherham's visual artists. This was in part due to the presence of local businessman Nick Harder in the founding group and his interactions with artists who frequented the local framing and art materials shop that he managed. Harder's conversations with artists highlighted the chronic absence of infrastructure for the visual arts in the town – studio spaces, showing spaces and fine art education – resulting in a constant drain to Sheffield, Manchester and other major urban centres where such provision existed. As Stephen Rogers explained:

...the visual arts thing was always a very big focus because it's lonely, and particularly in a place like Rotherham where there's no studio space, visual artists worked at home, in their kitchen, with the tolerance of husbands or wives or their family and so on. And their ability to actually apply for grants from the Arts Council was very limited.

This focus in ROAR's work conditioned the three priorities that it initially adopted. Stephen Rogers listed these as: supporting artists living and working in Rotherham; acting as a 'one-stop shop' for linking artists with paid work opportunities; and setting up an 'independent arts centre'. In its early years, ROAR was able to secure what Rogers described as 'bits and pieces [of funding] which kept us going,' before achieving a level of stability – not without its own challenges – as an NPO client of ACE from 2012 onwards. It was at this point that Sharon Gill joined ROAR as Chief Executive. She found an organisation that was:

...still very new, very chaotic. It didn't really have any stability in terms of governance and structure and systems. It was a lot of passionate people, operating in a reasonably ad hoc fashion and muddling along...

What Gill opens up here is a sense of an initiative in its early stages prior to institutionalisation. There is a sense of ROAR operating on principles of collectivity that mark the genesis of other artist-led initiatives in my research, rather than the hierarchical distribution of roles and responsibilities that are a requisite of securing public funding.

The visual arts are today an identifiable specialism in ROAR's work, manifest through its communications, artistic programme and the facilities that it offers. This bias towards supporting visual artists endures, 'because of the staffing, and actually that's where the need is,' according to Sharon Gill, who cited the more significant levels of support that exist in Rotherham for other art forms including dance, theatre and poetry. Sharon Gill is herself a visual artist working in textiles and photography among other media, having graduated from Leeds Polytechnic (now Leeds Beckett University) with a specialism in sculpture and from Manchester Metropolitan University with an MA in Art as Environment.³⁴⁸ This lends further weight to my positioning of ROAR as an artist-led initiative. It is also significant that the signage above the street-level entrance to ROAR describes it as an 'Art Space' and not an 'Arts' space. Behind the unpromising doorway at the top of the stairs in Westgate Chambers lie nine artists' studios and a gallery, a project space, production facilities including a darkroom and administrative spaces for both ROAR and Open Minds Theatre Company [OMTC], their largest tenant at the time of the interviews.³⁴⁹ ROAR has, however, been classified most recently by ACE as a 'Combined Arts' organisation for the purposes of making public the latest round of its NPO funding.³⁵⁰ There is, evidently, a problem for ROAR at the level of naming and the clear articulation of its mission. What is the resonance of terminology such as

³⁴⁸ Sharon Gill's roles prior to running ROAR have included ten years as Arts Coordinator for Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, six years as Project Manager of the city-wide open studios event Open Up Sheffield, six years as Art Director of Art in the Gardens, and more recently four years as Director of Voluntary Action Sheffield and six years as Manager and Development Worker at the Broomhall Community Centre, also in Sheffield. In January 2017, Gill also took up the post of Chair of the Board of Trustees of Beam (formerly Public Arts), in Wakefield.

³⁴⁹ OMTC was dissolved on 3 March 2020 and the large office it once occupied within ROAR's space was available to let as of October that year. 'Open Minds Theatre Company', *Companies House* < <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/05005481> > [accessed 26 October 2020].

³⁵⁰ 'National Portfolio 2018-22', *Arts Council England* < <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/national-portfolio-2018-22/more-data-2018-22> > [accessed 20 October 2020].

‘infrastructure body’ for the visual artists who demonstrably form ROAR’s core constituency? What tensions arise from the desire to balance a strategic role envisioned as necessary to ROAR’s founding purpose, with the slow, time-consuming work of nurturing individuals?

My interview with Stephen Rogers suggested that ROAR’s relationship with OMTC has had a major impact upon its development. This includes at the level of finances, given that OMTC’s presence at Westgate Chambers, as an anchor tenant, generated substantial income for ROAR. According to Rogers, the theatre company, which experienced significant growth in ROAR’s early days having secured major investment from a range of funders, was also able to provide financial stability and continuity at precarious moments in ROAR’s past, without which it may have been forced to close. This model of cooperation between arts initiatives, across the divide of art form specificity that characterises much artist-led practice, presents a potentially transformative model for their future sustainability.

My ‘journey’ leads me to draw some conclusions in the form of the following questions that speak back to the official policy discourse from the actuality of places, communities and initiatives such as I have explored in Rotherham with ROAR: How might such mutually beneficial arrangements be more fully explored as a way to nurture fragile initiatives, particularly through their early instabilities? Might such partnerships offer a way to mitigate against the multiple threats of financial hardship, an inability to secure other than ‘meanwhile’ space and the individual burnout that devastate many small-scale initiatives and those who manage them?

‘Exhibiting’s Just for People Who Can Paint’ – Building an Inclusive Community of Practice in Rotherham

The way in which ROAR gathers and sustains an artistic community, as a membership organisation, is the facet of its work that most closely aligns it with other artist-led initiatives that I have interviewed for my research. Although my interviews with Sharon Gill did not specifically elicit the use of the term ‘community’ in a way that parallels its use by Cheryl Jones to describe what Grand Union does in Birmingham, it is clear from my analysis of the interview that I conducted with two artists supported by ROAR that this is in fact its major contribution to *Doing*. I shall give a brief description of how Artists A and B have engaged with ROAR before

offering an analysis of the value that they experience subjectively through this relationship.

Artist A grew up in Rotherham. Yet despite having lived there for 30 years, ‘I didn’t actually know about ROAR... I didn’t even know that an art space existed’. Having studied computing at sixth-form college, Artist A then found himself disconnected from the potential career paths available to him. He elected to take a Higher National Diploma in performing arts at Rotherham College of Art & Technology, focusing on music with the intention to work ‘behind the scenes’ in the industry. When this new period of study proved to be just another ‘stop gap’ (‘I never thought I’d be able to do it, to be honest. I had the capabilities, but never thought I’d go anywhere with it’) he left the College and worked outside of the creative sector for a number of years. An inescapable desire to maintain a creative practice lingered, however, and Artist A took up photography:

I suppose my creative mind just went, ‘I need to do something with what I’m thinking or what I’m feeling’. So I picked a camera up and I got a good camera and started taking pictures of the town, just decay and close up stuff...

This new development in Artist A’s practice led to a serendipitous meeting outside ROAR’s premises one day in 2016:

I found [ROAR] on the off chance really, because a fellow ROAR member was outside and I was taking pictures, cause I was interested in photography at the time, and he said, ‘Well come and see this brilliant art space’. I were like, ‘What’s an art space?’ And I came up and I joined. I had an interview and I joined.

Involvement as a member provided the opportunity to explore other media and ultimately to develop a practice in sound art. At the time of the interview, Artist A was utilising a software package to convert financial information, contained in a series of discarded floppy disks, into sound and then to Morse code. The resulting hybrid work was then released via an independent record label. Through opportunities organised by ROAR, he had also been able to exhibit sound work and graphic design in a series of exchanges with similar initiatives in the region, including the Art House in Wakefield. At the time of the interview, Artist A was planning to give up the studio space that he maintained elsewhere in Rotherham, because: ‘I spend too much time [at ROAR] anyway’.

Artist B, meanwhile, had been a member of ROAR since the organisation was established. His route into a more sustained relationship with artistic practice was similarly indirect. Having studied A-level Art at Rotherham College he then made the necessary journey to complete a BA in Fine Art at Sheffield. Family life and financial necessity intervened to estrange him from his artistic practice for an extended period of time, but when his children became teenagers he decided to reconnect with it and is now a prolific painter of landscapes produced *en plein air*. Over the last decade, Artist B has continued to produce work and to exhibit regularly, including group shows at London's Mall Galleries, usually selected through open submission.

How do these two artists understand the qualitative value of their involvement with ROAR and what are its affective dimensions? Several concepts emerged forcefully from my interview with them. Firstly, both artists value the connections to other practitioners that ROAR enables – the sense of *community* that it generates through its space at Westgate Chambers and through its artistic programme – and the ways in which this aids in the development of their practice while supporting them as *feeling* individuals. Both cited ROAR's programme of events, which includes visits, artists' talks and exchanges with like-minded organisations in the region, as important in enabling connections to develop among artists. Artist A stated, '...it's a wonderful place with some very talented and brilliant people, and yeah, [I] learn a lot from ROAR really'. For Artist B, '...it's a brilliant place I think, for getting together with other artists of all forms, and you know they really do help you,' and later, 'I think what's good about this organisation is that there's room for all types of art and everybody's willing to collaborate, aren't they? You know, to support each other'. What emerges here is not only how ROAR facilitates essential peer-led support networks, but also the provision of an open and inclusive environment. Artist A told me, 'It's always open isn't it? Anyone can come in, most days, most times'. This produces a sense of ROAR as supporting a broad church of practices, a partial consequence of the plurality of voices and art forms that were central to its founding. This arguably differentiates ROAR's work from a narrower focus within artist-led initiatives that are founded by the peer groups that commonly emerge during formal Fine Art study within the context of Higher Education.

ROAR's approach has additional value for both Artist A and Artist B as subjects. My invitation to describe what ROAR is, for them, elicited an immediate response from Artist B: 'A family'. For him, ROAR is important for '...fetching

people together... because you can be isolated in your own world, can't you?' For Artist A, involvement with ROAR has had specific impacts upon his sense of himself as a creative practitioner. Joining the organisation, 'opened my eyes to what art could be, or what I could do'. Prior to this, 'I never saw myself as an artist. I still don't really,' although the developmental aspects of connecting to ROAR have acted as a confirmation, encouraging in him a sense of confidence in his own work that was previously lacking:

But now I know what I can do and what... that my art is exhibitable, if you know what I mean. I'm willing to put it out there now and before, I didn't think it was worth putting out there if you know what I mean... If I didn't find ROAR I'd think, 'Well, exhibiting's just for people who can paint'.

Categories that emerge here are to do with lacking confidence, feeling isolated and unworthy and being given permission to think and act as artists. These statements by both artists suggest that ROAR makes major contributions to the affective dimensions of artistic practice as it exists at a remove from the major urban centres for contemporary art. One of the key issues here is about permission to think of oneself as an artist, and about determining the *value* of individual practitioners and what they produce beyond the mainstream circuits of contemporary art and their value systems based upon curatorial selectivity and market taste. Sharon Gill further described how the creation of an inclusive environment within ROAR is nothing less than critical in the face of Rotherham's multiple challenges for the emergence and sustainability of artistic careers:

Rotherham is incredibly challenging because we don't have the graduates, we don't have the people who have been through art college. We've got people with very messy lives, very challenging existence[s], who want to be creative, desperately want to pursue a career but actually life does everything to stop them doing that.

Consequently, Sharon Gill understands ROAR's role as 'quite pastoral'. She further elaborated how the organisation had provided tailored one-to-one professional development support to Artist A, culminating in a successful application to study Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam University:

And he was going and he was saying, 'This is amazing, but to be honest they do all the same things [at University] that we do here'. And it made me think, 'Oh my gosh, we've actually prepared him really well for Art College'. So when he got there he just flew, because he understood what was being asked of him.

Here, Sharon Gill seeks to reinforce the value of ROAR's work in supporting individual artists. She is also connecting the work of ROAR, and aligning it with, wider discourse within the arts sector as well as feeling pride in Artist A's success. There are critical issues here for ROAR's work in the context of Rotherham where, for Gill, 'Art's not a thing, never mind contemporary art'. Developing the creative practice of individuals who have not emerged through the traditional route of formal creative education necessitates supporting them along alternative paths that do not necessarily echo what Sharon Gill described as, '...taking them from being a graduate to being Grayson Perry'. These questions gain even greater significance given the absence of formal creative education in Rotherham, delimiting the emergence of clear progression routes into creative careers and indeed out of the town. A recent report for *The Economist* quoted data obtained by the Office for National Statistics by tracking the tax records of individuals living in Rotherham.³⁵¹ Analysis revealed that between 2011 and 2015 some 94% of young people stayed in the town, or moved only within the Sheffield area. Only 1% of those studied moved to London. This reveals a larger pattern of inequality across the UK, whereby, 'People who move to affluent areas tend to be from affluent areas'. The same report revealed how the UK Government's Social Mobility Commission divides places into: '...“hot spots” with lots of opportunities (mostly in London and the south-east), “cool spots” that lack them, and “medium spots” in between'. Its findings: that movement between hot spots is 'seven times greater' than movement from cool spots to hot spots. This casts new light on the traditional emergence of artist-led initiatives from the context of Higher Education in the UK and Ireland's major cities and the ability of individuals in possession of certain skill sets to establish new initiatives while migrating from one 'hot' or 'medium' spot to another. This is evidently not a possibility within Rotherham if the town is viewed externally as a 'cool spot' for culture: ROAR's *Creative Space Consultation* reports, 'While there remains demand for studios in Sheffield it has been very difficult to attract those waiting [i.e. artists on waiting lists for studio spaces] when we have available space in Rotherham'.³⁵²

How might ROAR represent its developmental work with individuals in Rotherham, where the advancement of creative careers is troubled by this double

³⁵¹ 'The National Tilt', *The Economist*, p. 19.

³⁵² ROAR, *Creative Space Consultation 2018*, p. 3.

absence of formal fine art education and established routes into creative careers? ROAR's investment in individual practitioners in Rotherham establishes trust, social relations and intimate knowledge slowly and carefully over an extended timeframe. How might the organisation account for the *value* – to individuals and to culture in Rotherham – that this work generates? Sharon Gill commented on the time consuming nature of mapping these relationships and the challenges of measuring their 'impact' in non-anecdotal terms that resonate with arts funders and policy makers, particularly in the context of ROAR's very limited resources:³⁵³

...even as part of our core objective [of supporting artists] we don't map very well the development of our own members, so it's like, 'How do we know the impact we're having?' and we're really bad at that.

I can connect this statement with codes that emerged for '*Lacking*' in my GTM analysis of other artist-led initiatives. Here, Gill reveals that ROAR *lacks* the resources—primarily time, human capacity and systems—to maintain a dialogue with their membership at a level that would enable deeper understandings of members' needs and the value of the organisation's work with them. This conceivably results in ROAR *missing* or *losing* opportunities to better articulate its value in the given terms of the dominant cultural discourse. These pressures also perhaps account for the quantitative framing of ROAR's membership scheme on its website, which states that the organisation has '...an ever increasing membership of 224 artists and organisations'.³⁵⁴ This presents a major challenge in terms of ROAR's capacity to manage the pastoral aspects of its role. It arguably also indicates a lack of available terms to appropriately describe the work that ROAR does qualitatively. This cannot be encapsulated within a dominant narrative that posits artistic careers as a linear progression, a logic that moves *from* the artist-led *to* the mainstream institution ('from

³⁵³ Alongside Sharon Gill, ROAR's team comprises an Artistic Director and a Buildings Manager. 'About Us,' *Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance* < <http://www.rotherhamroar.com> > [accessed 15 October 2020]. ROAR's funding awards as an NPO in the 2012-18 and 2018-22 rounds make for a revealing comparative analysis with peer organisations in the region that provide a similar offer for visual artists. ROAR was awarded a total of £201,237 in total for the period 2015-18 (three years) and £281,756 for 2018-22 (four years). In the same funding periods, The Art House in Wakefield received £395,061 and £988,348, while Leeds-based East Street Arts received £554,880 and £619,840, plus a further £720,000 in 2018-22 as a new Sector Support Organisation [SSO]. 'National Portfolio', *Arts Council England* <<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/national-portfolio-2018-22/more-data-2018-22>> [accessed 20 October 2020].

³⁵⁴ 'About Us,' *Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance*.

graduate to Grayson Perry’). In Rotherham, where mainstream institutions are entirely absent, how else might an artistic career be sustained and what other role might an artist-led initiative play beyond the provisional one that it is commonly accorded?

Demonstrating the multi-faceted value of ROAR’s work qualitatively also presents challenges given the limitations of standard metrics, based traditionally on footfall, economic and environmental impact and ‘artistic quality’ at play within the arts sector and more specifically deployed by ACE to assess the work of its NPO clients. As Sharon Gill stated:

Not currently, but in recent years we’ve had incredibly delicate situations with some of our more active members where we’re not at liberty to demonstrate our impact, you know, because of their personal circumstances... which have been challenging for us actually in all sorts of safeguarding and procedural issues.

A new category arises from the GTM analysis here: that of *protecting* or *sheltering* artists and this further reinforces the sense of ROAR as having a pastoral or almost familial role in relation to the artists it work with. ROAR, then, finds itself unable to adequately articulate the nature of its work, which is critically important, within the dominant rubric of *cultural value* as it is currently being framed across the creative sector. Despite the demanding nature of ROAR’s support for artists attempting to carve out a creative career in Rotherham, Sharon Gill suggested that it is only worth developing creative individuals if there is a wider artistic scene locally to which they can ultimately be directed and which might sustain them in the longer term:

We’re a membership... professional development [organisation] and we’re nurturing our members, but then what? So you’ve also got to nurture the sector so that you’ve got purpose and [artists] are valued and paid properly.

Gill’s statement reveals ROAR caught in a catch twenty-two situation. In order to advance the careers of artists based locally, it must also work to ensure the emergence of a wider cultural sector in Rotherham that can support them in the longer term. This adds considerably to the burden of *doing* that ROAR carries: *supporting, developing* and *nurturing* artists while simultaneously *creating, generating, promoting* and *sustaining* culture in the town. This structuring principle has meant that, alongside ROAR’s major commitments to its artist members, a wider strategic role has been embedded within its work since inception. I shall next consider the challenges for ROAR in taking up a central position within debates on culture in Rotherham.

Demonstrating the Value of the Arts: A Civic Role for ROAR?

Within its foundational imperatives, ROAR was concerned with promoting the arts in Rotherham in the face of an indifference to culture that its founders perceived within the local authority. Stephen Rogers recalled the collective feeling within the group that the importance of the arts was not being recognised in Rotherham:

...there was a lot of support from individual Councillors for the arts and they were interested and wanted it to work and wanted it to happen, but generally the Council's perception of the arts was pretty limited.

This perception was not challenged when, upon setting up OMTC, Rogers asked one particular Councillor if he could see a copy of the cultural strategy for Rotherham. The reply: 'I don't know where it is. It's in a drawer somewhere'. For Stephen Rogers, the basis on which to then demonstrate the importance of the arts was to argue that they could play a central, if instrumentalised, role in the 'whole regeneration of Rotherham'. As the organisation's Chair at the time of my interview with him, Rogers continued to attach a centrality to this strategic role, telling me that '...the importance of ROAR as a political force is very important'. This emphasis in ROAR's work is reflected in the statement from its business plan that opens my case study: 'ROAR can and will demonstrate to Rotherham the value of the arts'.

As ROAR's Chief Executive, Sharon Gill is tasked with delivery of this mission alongside other facets of its work. For her, the organisation's purpose is to, 'create some gravitas in Rotherham'. She particularly stressed how the proximity of Sheffield, as a major centre for culture, acts to delimit potential in Rotherham, rather than as a stimulus to cultural growth or collaboration:

Sheffield don't want to know. Sheffield independent press don't want to know. They're busy with themselves... I live there you know and obviously cut my teeth in Sheffield really. My Artistic Director lives there, in fact we all live there, apart from one of us who half lives there, half lives here. So that tells you it all really.

Here, we find Gill *feeling isolated and ignored or rejected* by the larger city and its cultural sector, in terms of her professional role, while *admitting* that in reality she and her team also live in Sheffield. Gill further states that an effect of Sheffield's dominance is that, 'it's really easy to be sucked into the city and actually we do have to resist and say, 'No, this is Rotherham'. She is, therefore, *feeling conflicted* about

the relationship between the town and the city. In the face of Sheffield's perceived indifference, it was necessary for ROAR to become engaged in a bid to create a new cultural strategy for the town. This culminated in the publication of a draft document, titled *Things To Do, Places To Go*, that advanced the aims of the strategy from 2019-2026.³⁵⁵ Focusing largely on improving the health and wellbeing of Rotherham's population, as well as the economic regeneration of the town and borough, the strategy's 'key goal' is presented as 'enabl[ing] everyone to get active, get creative and get outdoors, more often'.³⁵⁶ One of its seven areas of focus is titled *Turning Passion into a Profession*. It states:

We want Rotherham residents to contribute to the success of our economy and our nation... We will work with schools, colleges and RNN Group to increase the numbers of young people progressing to higher level qualifications in culture, leisure and sport based programmes and work through ROAR to grow our creative community – giving artists more reasons to stay and work in Rotherham. By 2026, we will create 1500 new volunteering opportunities, 100 new apprenticeships and 1500 new jobs in the creative, digital, cultural, leisure and tourism sectors.

This statement conceivably places ROAR at the centre of cultural development in Rotherham in the immediate term, potentially generating much needed resource to secure its own future. However, as Sharon Gill stated, the strategy's ambitions were yet to be matched with a detailed and adequately resourced delivery plan:

So in theory [the Cultural Partnership Board is] a partnership of independent people that take ownership of delivering the strategy. We haven't got to the point of who's going to deliver which bits of it because there's no additional resource... the fact is that putting an actual delivery plan around it and allocating resource to it is really challenging at the best of times, isn't it?

Gill's statement reveals what she experiences as a gap between the theory of cultural development and the reality of achieving transformative change for those tasked with delivery of these ambitions. I suggest that what is exposed here are *feelings of weariness* or *exasperation* at a set of challenges and absence of resources that she already experiences at the local level. This gap is arguably even more acute under conditions of austerity and more recently the Coronavirus pandemic. How is ROAR to balance the triple challenges of realising its own sustainability while advancing this

³⁵⁵ 'Things to Do, Places to Go', *Like Rotherham*
 <<https://moderngov.rotherham.gov.uk/documents/s121229/Appendix%201%20-%20Cultural%20Strategy%202019%20-%202025.pdf>> [accessed 20 October 2020].

³⁵⁶ 'Things to Do, Places to Go', *Like Rotherham*.

civic role *and* its crucial work supporting individual artists? In my interviews with her, Sharon Gill described other initiatives that the organisation was then involved with. They included a successful consortium bid by cultural initiatives based in and around Rotherham to ACE's *Creative People and Places* scheme.³⁵⁷ It was simultaneously proactively extending its networks in the neighbouring South Yorkshire towns of Barnsley and Doncaster and in the early stages of discussions with the local authority about its plans to relocate Rotherham's library into the market site and to combine this with a maker space that ROAR would operate.

My case study thus reveals ROAR as a micro-initiative attempting to address an absence at the civic level in Rotherham by adding strategic cultural development to its already extensive list of responsibilities. This factor potentially distinguishes its work from that of Grand Union, where the environmental conditions and existence of major institutions that have national and international reach already place culture at the very centre of local development, valued albeit as an instrument of economic growth. This frees Grand Union to some degree to direct its resources towards its primary purpose of supporting artistic and curatorial practice. What are the consequences of taking up this additional civic role for ROAR, whose workload is managed on already sparse resources? What is at stake for its support of artistic practice in Rotherham? How does ROAR work to sustain artistic practice in Rotherham, and its own future, when the *agglomeration* that I proposed as a decisive factor for the creative community in Digbeth, is all but impossible? This is due to a chronic lack of initiatives, networks and opportunities exacerbated by operating in a town that is full of empty spaces and yet perversely so few of them are accessible for ROAR's purpose due to the indifference of arm's length private ownership.

Needing and Negotiating, Lacking and Losing Space(s) in Rotherham

To return to ROAR's founding moment once more, I now need to bring into consideration a third aspect of its work that has been embedded within its mission

³⁵⁷ The project partners for *Flux Capacitor* are: Voluntary Action Rotherham, Rotherham Ethnic Minority Alliance, ROAR, Grimm & Co, Wentworth Woodhouse Preservation Trust, Rotherham Council's Culture Sport and Tourism Department. The consortium was awarded £2 million over the period 2019-23 to deliver an 'action-research programme designed to engage Rotherham's communities in arts and culture'. 'CPP Projects: North', *Arts Council England* <<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/creative-people-and-places-projects/cpp-projects-north>> [accessed 20 October 2020].

since inception, alongside its support of individual artists and its desire to ‘demonstrate to Rotherham the value of the arts’. Indeed, this final focus – the establishment of a permanent home for artistic practice in Rotherham – may be critical to the very sustainability of ROAR itself.

My research has focussed upon the physical spaces for art that artist-led initiatives so frequently seek to establish. ROAR is no exception. As a member of the founding collective, Stephen Rogers described how their vision included the establishment of an ‘independent arts centre’ that would in particular cater to the needs of visual artists in Rotherham through the provision of studio spaces that were absent at that time. Sharon Gill described how this was intended to be, ‘...a one-stop shop of support, provision, work space, everything that was needed’.

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 6.7, The former St. Ann’s Boys School. © Pugh Auctions.

From the beginning, the founders of ROAR had identified the former St. Ann’s Boys School, which opened in 1893 on St Leonard’s Road on the north eastern fringes of the town centre, as their preferred venue for the establishment of such a space. The building later served as an annex of Rotherham College of Art & Technology from the late 1970s, but had more recently been leased to the Unity Centre, which occupied the school’s already converted girls and infants building, before falling into disrepair. This preference, which arose in part from OMTC’s tenure within the Unity Centre,

was further confirmed by an options appraisal exercise carried out by external consultants. However, ROAR's first Chief Executive was not as keen on developing a 'draughty big building' according to Stephen Rogers and the project was shelved until Sharon Gill's arrival in April 2012. Then, reignited with the ambition to create a permanent art space in the town, ROAR commenced negotiations with Rotherham Ethnic Minority Alliance [REMA] who utilised the local-authority owned building at the time and with the Arts Council about submitting a major funding bid. The social enterprise architectural practice Studio Polpo – based in Sheffield – were engaged to undertake a feasibility study and to sketch initial proposals for ROAR's repurposing of the site. Major obstacles to progressing the project arose, however, in the shape of a breakdown in communications with REMA and the Unity Centre, alongside ROAR's inability to raise the required match funding for a bid to ACE on terms acceptable to the funder. At the time of my interviews with Sharon Gill and Stephen Rogers, the project had once again been shelved.

In November 2018, the *Rotherham Business News* reported that the Council was to dispose of part of the building – not including that already converted for the Unity Centre – by private treaty.³⁵⁸ This appeared to bring to an end a particularly bruising encounter for ROAR and with it the possibility of any further attempts to convert the building for cultural use.³⁵⁹ According to Sharon Gill, the inability to secure this space, identified as fit for conversion to ROAR's purpose and the subject of a long-held ambition, represented a major loss for the organisation with material impacts upon its future viability:

That was a lot of time, a lot of resource, [a] lot of energy and without that it kind of knocked the whole direction and vision [of ROAR] sideways.

Gill reveals here the *feelings of deep disappointment and loss* that accompanied these events and their material impacts upon the whole organisation. This speaks to the affective dimensions of precarious practice that emerged from my GTM analysis. The effects of constantly losing or needing to move spaces impact much more deeply upon

³⁵⁸ 'Council approves land sales for redevelopment', *Rotherham Business News* <<http://www.rothbiz.co.uk/2018/11/news-6705-council-approves-land-sales.html>> [accessed 23 October 2020].

³⁵⁹ The building was eventually sold to a private buyer at auction in December 2019, for £91,000. 'Former St. Anns Building, St. Leonard's Road, Rotherham, South Yorkshire, S65 1PD', *Pugh Auctions* <<https://www.pugh-auctions.com/property/8855>> [accessed 23 October 2020].

artist-led initiatives and the individuals who manage them than their apparently transactional relationships with the local environment initially appear. There is much more at stake here than the merely logistical aspects of moving from one place to another, a reality that unpicks an easy misrecognition of artist-led initiatives as enterprises that can easily and quickly colonise one ‘meanwhile’ space after another.

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 6.8, ROAR’s temporary space at Keppel Wharf during exhibition by James Brunt, February 2019. Photograph by the author. © The artist and ROAR.

While attempting to advance its plans for the former school, however, ROAR had generated extensive experience of working with properties elsewhere across Rotherham town centre on a temporary basis. This experience has proved critical in advancing the organisation’s mission while unable to secure more permanent premises. Previous episodes included a period managing five empty units within the Imperial Buildings, from 2010-15, as retail outlets for ROAR’s artist members alongside the use of the internal courtyard for events such as *petcha kutch*a and craft markets.³⁶⁰ A vacant unit within a new development at nearby Keppel Wharf had also provided a temporary venue for exhibitions and events, but lacked an accessible

³⁶⁰ Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance, *Creative Space Consultation 2018*, p. 4.

entrance and heating. More recently it had been using a large warehouse space, which it dubbed *The Factory*, provided by the arts organisation Axisweb as part of their *Vacant Space* initiative. This seeks to provide artists and creative initiatives with access to empty commercial properties across the UK.³⁶¹ ROAR utilised The Factory for exhibitions and events from late 2017 to July 2018, when it was let to a commercial tenant, ending ROAR's occupancy.³⁶² As Sharon Gill explained, this space also came with serious limitations:

It's a little bit awkward because we don't have control or autonomy over that building... the communication's got to be good because we don't want to be... I guess what we need is for them to tell us what they're agreeing with people, because we'll be making plans for it and if they haven't told us what they're doing it could go horribly wrong I guess. [The building is] out of the way. It's not on a bus route. It's up a dark street on an industrial estate, so it has its challenges. Yeah, it's a very strange landscape to be working in.

This statement reveals what Gill experiences subjectively as *a lack of clarity, certainty and security* in the use of this meanwhile space, something that causes her concern and potentially poses a risk for ROAR in its relationship with artists. According to Stephen Rogers, ROAR's habitation of temporary spaces such as these served in part to satisfy ACE's insistence that ROAR demonstrate its ability to successfully manage a physical art space before applying to the funder's capital scheme for the conversion of St. Ann's. The organisation's tenure at the Imperial Buildings was, however, a 'nightmare' in Rogers' words, due in part to the 'incompetence' of the commercial landlord as well as the challenges of focusing ROAR's artist-members on the management of the space:

[The developers] had refurbished the building but it was still left with dry rot and all sorts of things, and leaking units... Also, getting artists to recognise that you can't just turn up when you feel like it was hard work... And so it was a really difficult time actually. It was good because we proved we could do it, we proved we could manage it, so when in fact we talked to the Council about taking on the present ROAR art space and we went through all those negotiations, we could say we'd been managing this for a couple of years.

ROAR's Creative Space Consultation report confirms, 'It was only problems arising from black mould, damp and the lack of communication from the landlords resulting

³⁶¹ 'Vacant Space', *Axisweb* <<https://www.axisweb.org/thinking-and-ideas/2016/04/vacant-space/>> [accessed 26 October 2020].

³⁶² Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance, *Creative Space Consultation 2018*, p. 4.

in a loss of income that caused ROAR to terminate the lease'.³⁶³ The jeopardy of these temporary arrangements, for individuals associated with ROAR and for the organisation's professional standing, need to be communicated back to funders. They are so different to the realities of managing more permanent spaces that they render comparison meaningless. What is worse, while purportedly moving an initiative closer to securing space on a longer-term basis, they may do the opposite by inflicting serious damage at the level of individual wellbeing and organisational reputation. After temporarily managing a number of spaces at the Imperial Buildings, ROAR subsequently moved to a larger space directly opposite, something again facilitated by the local authority. This newly accessible space for ROAR was important because 'it began to attract artists'. For Stephen Rogers the 'real shift in pace' was the organisation's next move, to its current base at the nearby Westgate Chambers, shortly after securing NPO status with ACE and just before Sharon Gill joined as Chief Executive. There, aided by the anchor tenancy of OMTC, which provided additional financial stability, 'We quickly had enough tenants to make [ROAR] viable'.

ROAR has now inhabited these premises for almost a decade. At the time of my first interview with Sharon Gill, however, Westgate Chambers had 'just been sold from under us'. Formerly in the possession of the local authority, the building was sold in 2014 to a Sheffield-based developer planning an £11m 'reinvention' of the buildings for leisure, retail and residential use.³⁶⁴ ROAR's exchanges with their new landlord had reassured them that sitting tenants were unlikely to be asked to leave, and to some extent Sharon Gill felt that this left the organisation '...just sitting here quite happily'. The greater challenges for ROAR are the limitations of the space that was not designed for cultural use, including its lack of accessibility, as there is no lift in the building, and the critical issue of visibility. As Stephen Rogers put it, 'the point about ROAR is we're, you know, up a staircase'. This is a point echoed by Sharon Gill:

We have had some security issues here, because we have tenants and studios... if there was someone in the office we used to have the street door

³⁶³ ROAR, *Creative Space Consultation 2018*, p.4.

³⁶⁴ '£11 Million Plans in for Redevelopment of Westgate Chambers', *Rotherham Advertiser* <https://www.rotherhamadvertiser.co.uk/news/view,11-million-plans-in-for-redevelopment-of-westgate-chambers_23595.htm> [accessed 4 December 2020].

open to give that impression [of accessibility]. But it's still just a murky corridor. It's not enticing.

The accommodation at Westgate Chambers also presents challenges for ROAR's future growth. Sharon Gill indicated that although secure in its tenancy there, the organisation was seeking ways to take on additional properties that would allow it to expand its provision, partly through economic imperative:

There is a desire within the Board and the whole organisation to develop spaces that generate resource, so that is your maker spaces and your print room and your exhibition [spaces]... but we also need to expand the types of studios that we've got in the portfolio to offer so that we can attract different types of makers, really.

Gill indicates here that there is an organisational need for ROAR to diversify its income streams by attracting a wider range of artists and makers. This financial imperative is hindered by the limitations of the space at Westgate Chambers. In order to pursue this new goal of distributed infrastructure across the town, as opposed to wholesale relocation to one centralised site, ROAR had recently undertaken a consultation exercise to determine the spatial needs of its artists. This was carried out from May to July 2018 through a broad consultation open to their 'membership, stakeholders, other arts organisations and the general public'. The research uncovered three key findings: that multiple locations were preferred to the creation of one centralised 'hub' and that the repurposing of existing buildings was preferred to new builds; the importance of accessibility in terms of transport links; and that respondents particularly valued the creation of communal space for interaction. The report's conclusion notes, 'It seems that [access to] this communal space is as important to artists as a well equipped studio is.'³⁶⁵ This reinforces an emphasis within my thesis on the production of community as a major contribution of artist-led initiatives, and thus on the necessity of creating physical spaces within which these social relations can emerge. The report on ROAR's consultation confirms another observation from my research - that artists gravitate towards existing spaces, particularly characterful historic sites: 'What came out [from the consultation] is that nobody wanted new builds, everybody wanted to occupy existing buildings'. Sharon Gill further suggested that this results, at least in part, from the practical dimensions of making:

³⁶⁵ Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance, *Creative Space Consultation 2018*, p. 8.

I think if you have a new space, you feel that you've got to look after it and be clean and I think if you have an old building you can knock it about a bit, actually. So I think actually it's about artistic freedom and head space and it not being an institution or corporate-type thing, which new builds inevitably are.

The context of Rotherham ought then to provide rich possibilities for artists in the sheer volume of empty spaces, including numerous historic properties such as the Imperial Buildings, standing empty within its town centre. The issue for Sharon Gill is that 'you can't get your hands on it'. Stephen Rogers confirmed, 'A lot of Rotherham is owned by property developers in London, Liverpool and Manchester who are quite difficult to get to'.³⁶⁶

Through her local networks, Sharon Gill was continuing to pursue a number of conversations regarding these vacant spaces. In a wider context where visual artists have become the go-to cultural producers for every corporate-initiated 'pop up,' securing a viable longer-term tenancy was proving problematic, however. Gill stated:

What's interesting at the moment is I'm going around saying I want a print room and people are offering me spaces and I'm going, 'No, but I'm not going to move a printing press again'. And that's really interesting, because again it comes back to do [developers] understand the difficulty of moving a printing press? You're not going to want to do that every six months. So it's like, 'No. I need it for five years. If you're going to offer me a space it has to be for five years'.

As the interview period came to a close, a new private owner for Imperial Buildings and other central properties had emerged and Sharon Gill was engaged in discussions with him regarding access to them. This was, however, to be strictly on ROAR's terms:

[The landlord] got in touch and said, you know, 'Do you want [the properties] back? I won't charge you rent, there'll just be a service charge and you can have them'. And I said, 'Okay, but I need a lease. I'm not prepared to do this on a meanwhile [basis]. I need to know'. So he said, 'Okay, how long do you want them for?' and I said, 'Let's just say two years for now'. So I'm waiting for his counter offer.

³⁶⁶ For example, Liverpool-based developer Iliad sold three buildings in its ownership – including the Imperial Buildings – to Leeds-based Modernistiq Developments in January 2019. 'Imperial Buildings Sold in £4 Million Rotherham Town Centre Property Deal, *Rotherham Advertiser* <https://www.rotherhamadvertiser.co.uk/news/view,imperial-buildings-sold-in-4-million-rotherham-town-centre-property-deal_30379.htm> [accessed 9 November 2020].

These statements bring into play some of the realities associated with ‘meanwhile’ use of spaces by creative tenants. Studios and production facilities require time to establish and are highly individuated environments refined through daily practice. The constant threat of relocation, a commonplace feature of ‘meanwhile’ use, is therefore a major barrier to individual practice and to the greater sustainability of artist-led initiatives in the longer term. What I draw attention to, however, is a new category that emerges from these statements. This is to do with resisting and pushing back on lazy characterisations of artists and artists’ initiatives as the go-to group for meanwhile occupancy. Sharon Gill’s statements work to counter such thinking as she articulates alternative values and insists upon terms that work for ROAR as well as developers.

More Than Meanwhile Spaces was a collaborative research project carried out in two phases, from March 2018 to March 2020, by a consortium of partners including researchers at the Universities of Newcastle and Northumbria alongside Newcastle City Council and the NewBridge Project, one of the artist-led initiatives that I interviewed for my thesis. Part 1 consisted of three strategic conversations that aimed to open out and debate issues arising from meanwhile-use for artist-led practice, while Part 2 focused on the feasibility of establishing a Creative Enterprise Zone in the North East of England. While not arguing against the existence of all or any ‘meanwhile space’ *per se*, as this was seen to play an important role by offering stepping stones to the development and advancement of ideas, one of the report’s key observations was that, ‘...artist-run initiatives and workspaces were often “invisible” when it came to longer-term support’.³⁶⁷ In other words, the provision of meanwhile space is not, in itself, a sufficient response from civic or commercial gatekeepers to the question of how to support and sustain artist-led practice in places over the long term. Negative impacts associated with meanwhile space were found to include the exhausting nature of constant relocation and the drain on time, energy and financial resources that this effects; an inability to invest in or grow programmes of work; and an inability to invest in buildings and equipment - as Sharon Gill noted, the prospect of constantly moving a heavy printing press is a barrier to development. To what extent, then, does ROAR’s long history of working with meanwhile spaces in Rotherham obscure its wider visibility and the value that its numerous contributions

³⁶⁷ Newcastle University, *More Than Meanwhile Space II: Feasibility Report* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Newcastle University, 2020) p. 6.

create, at both the individual and civic level, while also delimiting its real potential for future development and sustainability? As Sharon Gill stated, there is much at stake for ROAR in its continued habitation of temporary spaces that are not bespoke to its needs and those of its artist-constituency:

I think there's a little bit of criticism that comes towards us, in that we're not as visible as we should be so that we can give that opportunity [to engage creatively] to more people.

This suggests that Gill *feels vulnerable* about ROAR's inability to meet all of its stated ambitions. A critical issue for Rotherham's nascent cultural strategy, therefore, must be a focus on making the spatial assets of its town centre available to ROAR and others. It is interesting to note that Rotherham's other NPO, Grimm and Co, has recently been able to secure larger premises in a former Methodist Church, located not far from its previous base in the town centre.³⁶⁸ While this is a major accomplishment for that particular organisation, the local authority in Rotherham should not see this as a sufficient step in cementing the future of its cultural sector: as my analysis of Digbeth has shown, agglomeration is an important facet of sustaining creative communities in the longer term and securing a permanent base for ROAR should remain a priority.

Conclusion

My case study has revealed ROAR as an artist-led initiative making rich contributions to *doing* in Rotherham. The organisation nurtures individuals – who at times experience its effects as producing social relations akin to family – and communities that are brought together through its work. These contributions, particularly at the level of individual development, are critical within the context of Rotherham that lacks formal fine art education and identifiable progression routes for sustainable creative careers. They are also difficult to quantify given the additional sensitivities and confidential nature of ROAR's support for artists amid multiple local challenges. There are issues here for the standard metrics used to assess cultural value and their inappropriateness in capturing the value and values of ROAR's work. As Sharon Gill argued, 'Don't use standard business measures [to measure culture] because it's not a standard business'. These metrics, for her, demonstrate 'absolutely no understanding

³⁶⁸ 'News', *Grimm and Co*. <<https://grimmandco.co.uk/grimm-co-move-to-expand-their-enchanted-offer/>> [accessed 26 October 2020].

of the sector whatsoever'. ROAR's contributions are further obscured by the apparent indifference of Sheffield as a major cultural city on the doorstep that is not yet minded to build strategic alliances with Rotherham as a neighbouring town, even as the development of these networks may potentially benefit artist-led and independent practice – and all those supported by it – across the wider region.

What is of note is that ROAR experiences multiple barriers to progression in all three major areas of its work. Firstly, it supports individual artists as a core function, yet it is lacking the resources and capacity to maintain the time-consuming relationships with its expanding membership, or to adequately map these subjective experiences and quantify their value in terms that resonate for funders. Secondly, it has carved out a central role for itself within debates on cultural value and development in Rotherham. This major civic commitment is, as yet, unmatched by adequate resources needed for the delivery of the town's nascent cultural strategy. This arguably adds to, rather than alleviates, ROAR's vulnerabilities since it draws resource away from delivery of its core functions and adds significantly to the administrative burden of its small team of staff. Thirdly, central to ROAR's project since inception has been the establishment of a permanent art space in Rotherham. Due to an accretion of environmental factors, however, it was unable to prevent the loss of a major opportunity to realise this ambition at the St. Ann's site. In exploring alternative avenues to sustain a visible presence in the city centre – deemed necessary to drawing artists in – ROAR is further constrained by a set of negotiated relationships with gatekeepers. These take the form of a local authority needing to divest itself of historic properties in its portfolio in the context of austerity; the immutable requirements of ACE's framework for capital funding; and a power base of arms-length commercial developers who monopolise centrally located properties, even as these stand vacant across the town. These negotiations collectively represent major challenges for ROAR's stability and future sustainability, although I have shown how Gill pushes back against these pressures in negotiating with developers for better terms on which ROAR might agree to occupy their vacant premises.

What I have set out within the case study demonstrates ROAR's commitment to the development of artistic practice in Rotherham. These contributions and the toll that they extract from Sharon Gill as ROAR's Chief Executive in particular, have not escaped ACE as its primary funder. According to Gill, the Relationship Manager appointed to liaise with ROAR on ACE's behalf is of the opinion that, 'we're doing

too much and that we should probably do less'. This additional workload is, for Gill, a symptom of the historical lacuna for culture within Rotherham: '...we end up doing everything, because there isn't anybody else'. If, as I have argued, ROAR generates value for individuals through relationships that create the bonds of community and even family, granting permission to self-identify and act *as artists*, what are the corresponding impacts on ROAR's small team of staff? I quote the following passage in full as it reveals how Sharon Gill in particular experiences the impacts of delivering ROAR's many commitments while operating in an environment of constant uncertainty:

Ultimately [losing St. Ann's] will be for the better, but it's navigating your way through that. And then of course you've got your own personal journey in all of that and you just think, 'Oh, maybe I've been here too long. Oh, I've had enough of this,' you know. You're fighting for every inch and you just... It's like a war of attrition at times, to get recognition. And you think you're getting somewhere and then it all topples back down again. And then you've got the uncertainty of applying for NPO and all that and then you don't quite get enough money to exist as you do, which then puts pressure on you to become an income-generating business. And then you think, 'Well, if we've got to make money to stand still, then that means there's less resource for members actually,' and then we are competing with members, because realistically getting paid to deliver creative and artistic projects in Rotherham is a challenge.

This statement is critical to an understanding of the precarious realities of artist-led initiatives and the deep impacts of these realities upon individuals involved in them. This is not about art at the level of centralised cultural policy and discourse, but about the actualities of maintaining artistic practice at the cultural margins and the subjective cost of this struggle. It is obviously critical that at the local, civic level and at the national level of arts funding, policy makers are appraised of these factors as they condition the daily-lived realities of the feeling individuals within ROAR and other artist-led initiatives like it. What further contributions might ROAR make if it was able to surmount the hurdle of what it currently lacks and what is constantly negotiated away? What role might the eventual establishment of its much-desired permanent art space for Rotherham – an ambition held for nearly fifteen years – play in further nurturing community and creativity in this challenging and highly specific context? How might the local authority lever more meaningful access to the ample vacant spaces across the town, if it was armed with the knowledge that achieving greater stability within ROAR would enable the organisation to refocus on its core

mission of nurturing creative individuals? These issues should be central to policy development in the town as it now looks to culture as a regenerative force.

From the centre of Rotherham, my third case study takes me back to Leeds and the East Leeds Project, which forms part of the practice dimension of my research. Although situated in a culturally powerful city, I shall argue that the East Leeds Project in fact shares far more in common with the work of ROAR than it does with initiatives practising within the city's core less than two miles away. I shall now, therefore, pivot my enquiry on artist-led spaces from the margins of the 'art world' in the centre of Rotherham to the cultural and geographic margins of one locality, Gipton in East Leeds.

CHAPTER 7 – CASE STUDY: EAST LEEDS PROJECT

There is only so much room inside, but the good thing is that outside the space is unlimited.³⁶⁹

Introduction

This third case study focuses on an artist-led project in one small area of the city of Leeds. The East Leeds Project [ELP] was initiated during the course of this research and contributes a curatorial element of practice to my research project. The first two case studies deepened the major research undertaken by interviews across the sector. By means of further detailed research, contextualisation and analysis of the specific interplay of value and values in terms of place and institutionalisation, this third case study self-critically and reflexively charts the founding and managing of a project that takes the research to the level of a specific community and locality within the city where I earlier co-founded the centrally-located projects PSL and The Tetley. In this chapter I am not analysing an already existing project but tracing the emergence of a new form. I am not an outside observer but the initiator of a located project that may radically exceed the definition of ‘artist-led’ because of its being founded on very different aims and directions from those studied in the cases of Grand Union and ROAR. What follows is an account of the process of forming the ELP in relation to the cultural policy landscape of the city of Leeds. The project indexes the synergy between the theoretical, textual and primary research I have undertaken and the critically- and research-informed evolution of my practice represented by the ELP. The issues of place, institution and value that I identified as core concepts through my reading of the official policies are activated in this case study of my practice with radical re-orientations of their official meanings.

From the macro-perspective of my expanded viewpoint on Digbeth and then the closer phenomenological reading of Rotherham through my journey to and across its town centre, I am moving now to a micro level of my focus on art in one specific community in East Leeds. Pivoting away from Leeds’ city centre as the locus of established and internationally renowned infrastructure for arts and culture, to consider the conditions for artist-led practice at the margins of cultural and economic participation in its eastern wards, I propose to offer a fine-grained analysis of the ELP

³⁶⁹ Matt Hale, Paul Noble, Pete Owen and John Burgess, *City Racing*, p. 1.

in which I am a key protagonist and that I founded in 2017 in the community of Gipton, where I have lived for over twenty years. This case study demonstrates both my practice and necessarily detailed scholarly research, enabling me to speak back to the documentary analysis of the policies in macro-management of culture offered at the start of the thesis from a situated practice in and perspective on local specificity and practical embeddedness.

East Leeds: The Context

East Leeds offers a radically different context from my previous case studies, where the community experiences mis-recognition at best from within its own city and at worst a level of invisibility. There is a chronic absence of resources and factors that would have historically enabled artist-led practice to flourish at the local level, such as vacant properties, studio spaces and production facilities alongside the professional networks and social interactions that such spaces engender. Such lacks delimit the emergence of a sense of community among practitioners living or work in this locality. Any sense of creative agglomeration is rendered impossible.

How do debates on artist-led practice and cultural value find resonance under these conditions? At this micro-level, culture cannot be valued for economic impact or as a regenerative force as it is understood within a model of commercial development that dominates the city centre. What other approaches to culture are necessary to sustain creative communities that exist beyond elite, city-centre institutions connected to increasingly centralised circuits for validation and marketisation? What are the affective impacts of these conditions on individual artists and makers working in isolation across East Leeds? What other value and values might the ELP enact? By posing these questions I aim to analyse the concepts of *place*, *value* and *institution* that are central to my thesis from this third, literally grounded research perspective.

The ELP is an expression of my curatorial practice that has been evolving in new directions away from an earlier focus on the formal mechanisms of the gallery and the exhibition, towards the possibilities of art as a *social action*. To define what I mean by this, I draw on the work of the artist and activist Gregory Sholette, who proposes social action art as ‘...a collaborative, collective and participatory social

method for bringing about real-world instances of progressive justice, community building, and transformation’.³⁷⁰

Working with Sholette’s definition I shall open up lines of enquiry about the ELP’s role and contributions in the context of Gipton through my analysis of the interrelation of the ELP and the civic project *Leeds2023* as it has played out in two distinct phases between 2014 and the present. The first of these was a formal bid by the city to host the European Union’s *Capital of Culture* [ECOC] title in 2023; the second is the more recent continuation of this conversation independently of that framework. The ELP has been engaged in dialogue with both phases of the bid, most recently through an ambition to co-produce the first ‘maker space’ anywhere in East Leeds. Known as the *East Leeds Pavilion*, I refer to this space as the *Pavilion* throughout the chapter.

The first major question is how could I develop a shape for the ELP through the given terms of the ECOC competition. The dominant discourse on *cultural value*, and the allied *cultural ecology* that found expression through the first iteration of *Leeds2023* as an instrumentalised approach to culture presented major challenges for understandings of the ELP as an artist-led initiative. An enforced halt to the first phase of the bid enabled me to pause, rethink and ultimately set out on a very different direction for its development. Central to this new departure has been the concept of *social value*, migrating into the ELP’s work from the discipline of architecture through a partnership with the Leeds-based architectural practice Bauman Lyons [BLA]. Through this partnership, the ELP has been progressing the co-production of the *Pavilion*, working collaboratively with BLA, artists and local residents.³⁷¹ I am proposing that the Pavilion as an artist-led space can make major contributions to *Doing* in East Leeds, even as it finds itself also *Negotiating* multiple

³⁷⁰ Gregory Sholette, Chloë Bass and Social Practice Queens, *Art as Social Action: An Introduction to the Principles and Practices of Teaching Social Practice Art* (New York: Allworth Press, 2018), p.xiii.

³⁷¹ A report for NESTA (2015) acknowledged the challenges of defining maker spaces, given the fact that this cultural phenomenon is still emerging and the breadth of agendas, priorities, operating models and forms of creative production that they support. The report does, however, offer the following qualified definition: ‘Recognising the challenge of finding an accurate yet inclusive definition, we have selected to use the term makerspace to broadly apply to an open workshop with different tools and equipment, where people can go independently to make something’. ‘Open Dataset of UK Makerspaces: A User’s Guide’, NESTA
<https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/open_dataset_of_uk_makerspaces_users_guide.pdf> [accessed 4 December 2020].

barriers to progression while navigating by alternative values to those articulated by *Leeds2023* in its earliest iteration.

I initiated the ELP during, and as part of, the research for my thesis. I thus understand it as having the status both of an experiment within it and as a critical form of research in itself. This chapter's return to autoethnography as a reflexive practice also enables a direct connection back to the challenges of institutionalisation for artist-led initiatives that I analysed in Chapter 1 using a reflexive narrative on PSL and The Tetley. This chapter has been further enriched through dialogic relations with two key actors: Claire Irving, my ELP Co-director since July 2018 and Irena Bauman, a founding Director of BLA. Unlike the previous case studies, this chapter is not a critical elaboration of the analysis using Grounded Theory Method on interview data. It draws, however, on the discoveries I made during the interview processes and as a result of the intense coding of the interview texts with other agents in the field. The analytical practices of GTM can, however, be applied to the reading of other texts. In this chapter, I have drawn upon it for my reading and analysis of *Weaving Us Together*, the 'bid book' and key text that encapsulated *Leeds2023*'s aims and ambitions in its first phase.

Firstly, I present a situated analysis of the histories and contemporary realities of life in Gipton, a place that I have experienced as a long-term resident. This is necessary to a meaningful appreciation of conditions at the local level under which the ELP works. I then analyse the two distinct phases of *Leeds2023* and the emergence of the *Pavilion*. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection on the possibilities and challenges for understandings of the *Pavilion* as an artist-led initiative. My analysis confronts the impact of the dominant policy directions towards institutionalisation and the resulting challenges of sustainability that this thesis has been primarily researching while also providing concrete material for the future of my curatorial practice.

Finding Gipton

I arrived in Gipton in 1998, having returned to Leeds after working in Cheshire and attracted to the east of the city by its affordable housing stock. I share my status as an immigrant with the other fourteen thousand or so residents who make up the area's

current population and indeed successive waves of migration since the Bronze Age.³⁷² Prior to the 1930s, Gipton was predominantly open farmland. Local history was recorded from Anglo-Saxon times and place names still recall this heritage: ‘Gipton’ itself is a derivative of the Anglo-Saxon ‘Cipeton’, meaning ‘Cippa’s farm’.³⁷³ In 1086, the Domesday Book records Gipton’s location on the western edge of the Manor of Kippax and Ledston, and the names of Anglo-Danish landowners in Seacroft, Halton, Gipton and Colton, areas that were then settlements in their own right. Only later did the township of Leeds begin its rise to prominence, expanding rapidly through the industrial era when these settlements became its eastern satellites. Historical circumstances thus give rise to a changing definition of Gipton as a once-central place that was pushed to the margins by processes of urbanisation and development.

The challenges of locating, or centering, Gipton persist today. The area, unlike its near neighbours Harehills and Seacroft, lacks anything resembling a local centre that is animated with shops, places to eat and other amenities where people might congregate, forming a sense of community. There are no visible concentrations of people on Gipton’s streets, save for at the local branch of the supermarket Lidl. No sign or statement, such as the public art that marks a key gateway into nearby Cross Gates for example, declares the visitor’s arrival in Gipton. Even its name has been erased from directional road signs by which motorists navigate the east side of the city. While they point to numerous other places in East Leeds, Gipton’s name is nowhere included on any of them. It has been ‘invisibled’.³⁷⁴ This marginal status as non-place clearly distinguishes the conditions for culture in Gipton as altogether different from those in the centre of Birmingham and Rotherham.

³⁷² The earliest human settlers arrived in East Leeds during the Bronze Age almost 3,000 years ago when the area consisted of vast and remote forests and moorland. Archaeological evidence points to continuous settlement through the Iron Age, continuing under the influence of Romans, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings. David Owens, *The Heritage of East Leeds: From the Bronze Age to the Industrial Age* (Leeds: East Leeds Historical Society, 2001).

³⁷³ Owens, *The Heritage of East Leeds*, p. 20.

³⁷⁴ A term I am borrowing from the artist Lubaina Himid, who uses it to refer to the process by which black women artists have hitherto been rendered invisible in mainstream art historical accounts.



Figure 7.1, Fearnville Fields in East Leeds. The Gipton estate lies to the east, at the top of the picture. Courtesy the East Leeds Project.

Seeing Gipton: A Social History

Gipton now largely comprises an estate constructed from the mid-1930s as a mass experiment in social housing. It lies on the edge of the Wyke Beck Valley, an expansive corridor of green space that runs for several miles through East Leeds, bookended by the formal parks of Roundhay in the north and Temple Newsam in the south. The Valley's central section, a hinterland patchwork of playing fields, allotments and semi-wild meadows and woodlands, is bordered by the local authority wards of Killingbeck and Seacroft to its east and Gipton and Harehills to its west. Socio-economic measures show these to be some of the most challenged areas of Leeds.³⁷⁵ This is a far cry from the founding vision of the Gipton Estate. Along with those at Belle Isle, Halton, Middleton and Seacroft, the Estate was designed to house migrant populations displaced by the clearance of 'slum' housing in the inner city. Catalysed by the 1930 Slum Clearance Act, some 30,000 such properties were identified for demolition during 1934-39 in line with the progressive housing policy of Leeds' newly installed Labour administration:

The position occupied by the majority party of the City Council can be stated unequivocally. In our opinion, all houses of the type in question are totally unfit for human habitation by reason of the nature of the accommodation they afford, the necessary and reasonable amenities they lack, and the general

³⁷⁵ Throughout the case study I draw on the most recent data available through Leeds City Council's Communities and Environment. Leeds City Council, *Gipton*, unpublished dataset.

environment of the areas resulting from their existence; and were it possible to erect exact replicas of such dwellings to-day, we should maintain they were fit only for demolition to-morrow.³⁷⁶

This programme reached its peak under the pioneering vision of the Reverend Charles Jenkinson. He had been appalled by the living conditions he observed in the back-to-back houses of central Leeds after arriving in the city as the new vicar of Holbeck in 1927.³⁷⁷ Elected as a Labour Councillor in 1930, Jenkinson agitated for large-scale and systematic housing reform, publishing a report calling for the rehousing of some 110,000 inhabitants in ‘garden suburbs with fresh air, green space, local amenities and good transport’.³⁷⁸ Labour narrowly took control of the Council three years later and Jenkinson’s opportunity arose when he was appointed Chairman of the administration’s newly established Housing Committee. Instituting a Housing Department alongside this, Jenkinson recruited Richard Livett as its Director, a man who would bring ‘talent, originality and enthusiasm to the immense task [of housing reform] in front of him’.³⁷⁹ Livett is famed as the architect of Quarry Hill Flats, the monolithic city-centre social housing experiment that was occupied from 1938 but never fully completed and finally demolished from the mid 1970s. The city announced its intention to build the new ‘model estate’ at Quarry Hill in 1934 along with plans for a ‘vast new garden suburb estate’ at Gipton, also to be designed by Livett.³⁸⁰ The Garden City movement had begun at Letchworth in 1903 and its influence, along with that of the Town Planning Act of 1909, provided a new framework for suburban development, one that the Labour administration in Leeds evidently embraced.³⁸¹

³⁷⁶ Charles Jenkinson, *The Leeds Housing Policy* (Leeds: City of Leeds Labour Party, 1934), p. 19.

³⁷⁷ ‘Charles Jenkinson (1887-1949) Priest, Socialist, Housing Reformer’, *Thoresby Society* <<https://www.thoresby.org.uk/content/people/jenkinson.php>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

³⁷⁸ Thoresby Society, ‘Charles Jenkinson (1887-1949) Priest, Socialist, Housing Reformer’.

³⁷⁹ Alison Ravetz, *Model Estate: Planned Housing at Quarry Hill, Leeds* (Croom Helm, London: 1974), p. 29.

³⁸⁰ Ravetz, *Model Estate*, p. 34.

³⁸¹ ‘Letchworth Garden City’, *Garden Cities Institute* <<https://www.gardencitiesinstitute.com/resources/garden-cities/lethworth-garden-city>> [accessed 17 November 2020].

Figure 7.2, The Gipton estate in the 1930s. John Barrett Collection. © Mary Evans Picture Library.

The Gipton estate was thus founded on the paternalistic vision of a garden estate in the city's east, one that has withered over the intervening period through stagnation in public investment followed by the catastrophic austerity measures of the last decade. In the 1930s, former 'slum' occupants who moved into the estate benefitted from newly completed houses that came with modern sanitary and kitchen facilities, large individual gardens and generous communal green spaces. In addition, houses were designed with healthier living in mind. One former resident whose family moved into a 'sunshine house' on St. Wilfrid's Drive upon its completion in July 1937 recalls,

Our house and the neighbours were known as 'sunshine houses'. This was because they were the only ones in the street that were built with a bay window. This window faced due south... It also had the unique facility of being on metal runners. This enabled the householders to open up the whole window space to the open air. We were apparently allocated this particular property because my sister at that time was convalescing from TB in the Hollies Sanatorium at Weetwood.³⁸²

³⁸² 'Gipton Estate, Aerial View', *Leodis*

<http://www.leodis.net/display.aspx?resourceIdentifier=20051011_61352176&DISPLAY=FULL> [accessed 20 November 2020].

The administration's provision of accommodation carefully planned to suit a range of needs – considered in terms of health conditions, varying sizes of family group and age of prospective inhabitants – represents nothing less than a belief in architecture as social prescription. A footnote in Jenkinson's *Leeds Housing Policy* makes clear the correlation between the Labour administration's intent to provide high quality accommodation built on principles of fit-for-purpose design and an understanding of the implications this could have on other areas of the public purse:

The attention of any pseudo-economists who may be worried by the extra cost of these houses may be drawn to the fact that the treatment of Tuberculosis alone is costing Leeds a 41/2d. rate per year.³⁸³

The Gipton estate was 'significant for its size, scale and ambition'.³⁸⁴ It offered nearly 3,000 houses, flats and shops with accommodation for around 13,000 people.³⁸⁵ The pioneering social housing experiment was accompanied by a vision of local life replete with amenities including a large shopping centre, a cinema, doctors' and dentists' surgeries and more. In reality, few of these were ever constructed and some road and tram links, particularly those that would have connected the estate to the city centre, never materialised.³⁸⁶ The writer Keith Waterhouse grew up in a house on the nearby Halton Moor estate in East Leeds – also designed by Livett – after his family was displaced from inner city Hunslet where he was born and subsequently from the overcrowded estate at Middleton. In his 1994 memoir *City Lights*, Waterhouse gives a recollection of life in Halton Moor that serves very well as an impression of what life in Gipton must have been like in the early days of the new estate. Waterhouse remembers roads that were still mud tracks, as tarmac had not yet been laid, and new houses still under construction. The result was a neighbourhood that smelled of '...raw wood, paint and putty'.³⁸⁷ Worse than that, the new eastern suburbs were '...at the end of the Earth':

If the planners had got it wrong in Middleton [in South Leeds] they had got Halton Moor even more wrong. It was half a mile to anywhere anyone wanted to go: half a mile to the tram stop, half a mile to the shops, half a mile to school which was in fact on a Middleton-vintage estate across the wasteland.

³⁸³ Jenkinson, *The Leeds Housing Policy*, p. 25.

³⁸⁴ Leeds Civic Trust, *R.A.H. Livett OBE 1898-1959: Blue Plaque Unveiling, Saturday 21 September 2019* (Leeds: Leeds Civic Trust, 2019), n.p.

³⁸⁵ Leeds Civic Trust, *R.A.H. Livett*, n.p.

³⁸⁶ Leeds Civic Trust, *R.A.H. Livett*, n.p.

³⁸⁷ Keith Waterhouse, *City Lights: A Street Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994) p. 92.

The fish and chip shop was so far away that the five pieces and sixpennorth were cold before we got them home. There was no public library, no church, no scout hut, no park, no cinema. How would I get to Hunslet? How would I get to town?³⁸⁸

This vision of a vast estate lacking facilities for community and culture that are essentials of human life would have resonated in 1930s Gipton. It still does so, where churches and green spaces are the only features that distinguish themselves against a topography characterised by a massed uniformity of houses and high-rise apartments. The Burton's clothing factory at nearby Compton, for over thirty years the largest such facility in the world, did however offer opportunities for employment close to home:

At its peak, the Hudson Road factory employed 10,000 workers in three great halls. Most of the workforce was local. 'Everyone in the area worked at Burton's – fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers – whole families'. Ultimately, however, labour was sought from further afield.³⁸⁹

To compete with accelerating changes in the clothing market, the business diversified towards retailing during the post-war decades and production finally ceased in Leeds in 1981. The local workforce in Gipton may have felt a double sense of abandonment, both by successive city administrations that failed to ever fully realise the founding vision for the new neighbourhood and by the withdrawal of the protection hitherto afforded to them by Montague Burton as embodiment of the 'archetypal paternalist employer'.³⁹⁰ But by then Gipton was regarded as a district in decline.

A doctoral thesis completed in 2016 on politics and planning in residential Leeds from 1954-79 outlines how social housing tenants prioritised some areas over others when seeking to locate to more modern accommodation during the 1970s. Gipton is mentioned only once in the thesis, in relation to a local authority Housing Department report in 1978. This highlights diminishing demand for housing in Gipton, 'a factor that was attributed to its many pre-war houses and declining

³⁸⁸ Waterhouse, *City Lights*, p. 92.

³⁸⁹ Katrina Honeyman, 'Montague Burton Ltd: the creators of well-dressed men,' in Chartres, J. Katrina Honeyman, 'Montague Burton Ltd: The Creators of Well-dressed Men', in *Leeds City Business*, ed. by John Chartres and Katrina Honeyman (Leeds: Leeds University Press, 1993), pp. 186-216 (p. 203).

³⁹⁰ Honeyman, 'Montague Burton Ltd', p. 204.

reputation'.³⁹¹ That reputation, not improved by press reports of anti-social behaviour, high crime rates and even murder, is yet to recover, with Gipton regarded by some as a 'no-go' area.³⁹² A freedom of information request made by the Yorkshire Evening Post in 2018 elicited comparative information on the numbers of crimes reported across wards in Leeds between April 2016 and March 2017. While it is perhaps unsurprising that the central City and Hunslet ward led with some 12,533 instances, the Gipton and Harehills ward followed with 5,009 crimes, a relatively high number in comparison with the third-placed ward Armley, in west Leeds, with 4,806.³⁹³

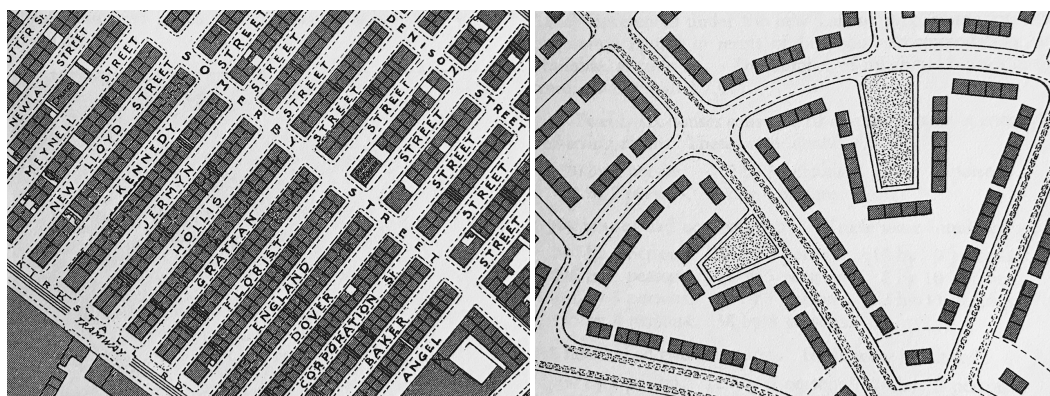


Figure 7.3, Contrasting street patterns in 1930s Leeds: terraced houses in the Kirkstall Road area similar to those in Harehills (left) and the proposed layout of the Gipton estate, drawn to the same scale. From Charles Jenkinson's *The Leeds Housing Policy*, 1934.

Such figures, while indicative to a point, highlight an additional challenge facing the researcher wishing to focus her attention on Gipton: the amalgamation of two significantly different inner city neighbourhoods within the one administrative boundary of Gipton and Harehills. A study at the University of Birmingham (2015) into the potential of multilingualism as a resource for 'community, creativity and civic

³⁹¹ Ben Philliskirk, "*Bogged Down in Housing*": *Politics and Planning in Residential Leeds, 1954-1979*, PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2016, p.150.

³⁹² For example, a respondent to an online discussion in 2004 about potentially dangerous areas of Leeds for students to live in listed Gipton as third for 'areas to avoid'. 'Leeds City, Dangerous?', *The Student Room* <<https://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/showthread.php?t=33266>> [accessed 10 November 2020].

³⁹³ 'Top 10 Crimes Hotspots in Leeds', *Yorkshire Evening Post* <<https://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/news/latest/top-10-crime-hotspots-in-leeds-revealed-how-does-your-area-compare-1-8946424>> [accessed 27 November 2020].

participation’ focused on Gipton and Harehills as one of four superdiverse inner-city wards across the UK.³⁹⁴ Of his findings in Leeds, the report’s author noted:

The most distinctive feature of Gipton and Harehills... is that [the electoral ward] binds together two urban areas which could hardly be more different, except in their levels of deprivation. As is apparent from the map or even the most cursory visit to the ward, the two areas represent utterly antithetical approaches to the creation of built environments for working class communities.³⁹⁵

Callaghan aligns Gipton and Harehills here solely on the basis of their equitable status as what he understands as ‘deprived’ communities. The problem of *seeing* Gipton beyond this categorisation is further exacerbated by the negative quantification of the area within official place-based measures such as the Indices of Multiple Deprivation [IMD].³⁹⁶ Such measures make visible instances of – and aim to quantify – what is perceived centrally as ‘lack’. The resulting identification of high levels of ‘deprivation’ in Gipton and across East Leeds more widely serves to perpetuate negative misrecognitions of this community as marked *only* by deficiencies and vulnerabilities. In a report prepared for social change organisation *Power to Change*, Smith *et al* describe the English IMD measure as ‘...a set of indicators to enable central government to target specific funding programmes at the most disadvantaged areas in response to *a particular idea of area-based disadvantage*’ [my italics].³⁹⁷ They quote earlier research that questions underlying assumptions within the IMD measure about the automatic relativity of phenomena such as high crime or unemployment when they occur in the same place at the same time. This is known as

³⁹⁴ John Callaghan, ‘Changing Landscapes: Gipton and Harehills (Leeds): A superdiverse Inner City Ward’, *Working Papers in Translanguaging and Translation*, <<https://tlang754703143.files.wordpress.com/2018/08/changing-landscapes.pdf>> [accessed 23 November 2020].

³⁹⁵ Callaghan, ‘Changing Landscapes’, p. 2.

³⁹⁶ The most recent (2011) census data available from Leeds City Council indicated that 88% of Lower Super Output Areas in Gipton – small areas of a similar population size - fell within the ‘most deprived’ category for the purposes of IMDs. The figure across the entire city was 22%. Gipton ranked significantly higher than the citywide average for fuel poverty, ill health, low educational attainment, crime, low income, benefit dependency, unemployment and quality of living environment. Leeds City Council, *Gipton*, unpublished dataset.

³⁹⁷ Ian Smith, Elizabeth Green, Damian Whittard and Felix Ritchie, *Re-thinking the English Indices of Multiple Deprivation: A Review and Exploration of Alternative and Complementary Area-based Indicator Systems* (London: Power to Change, 2018), p. 8.

the ‘ecological fallacy,’ producing a specific idea of a place that may not resonate with those who experience it as a daily reality.³⁹⁸

To question the quantification of Gipton through the IMD matrix is not to erode the significance of the severe societal challenges that the community has experienced over the last eighty years and the impacts of these on individuals. It is, rather, to argue that the IMD measure produces one account of local life that is biased towards a concept of governmentality based on audit. The quantification of ‘deprivation’ is a measure imposed centrally with little understanding of lived realities at the local level. This pervasive focus works to erode nuanced understandings of the challenges and possibilities of life in Gipton. I argue from a situated perspective that there are local assets of *value* that are not visible or recognised within these given measures. Such assets are both tangible – particularly an abundance of green spaces – and intangible, constituting the interrelationships of local actors, often through women-led initiatives and networks.³⁹⁹ The ELP seeks to identify and work with these assets as a point of departure and this distinguishes its work from the institutional ‘outreach’ of major arts organisations based centrally, and equally the arrival of top-down civic ‘place making’ initiatives. In doing so, it draws on the work of Cormac Russell and others on what has come to be known as Asset-Based Community Development [ABCD]:

ABCD challenges the deficit-based approach that tries to solve urban and rural development problems by focusing on the needs and deficiencies of individuals, neighbourhoods, towns, villages etc. ABCD demonstrates that assets (people, physical assets etc.) and individual strengths are key to ensur[ing] sustainable community development, and that people have a life of their own choosing.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ Smith *et al*, *Re-thinking the English Indices of Multiple Deprivation*, p. 10.

³⁹⁹ The Church of the Epiphany, East Leeds Project, Gipton Together, Space2 and The Old Fire Station and Feel Good Café are all women-led initiatives in Gipton. These initiatives work collectively as the Gipton Neighbourhood Improvement Partnership, seeking, in partnership with the local authority, to address local issues.

⁴⁰⁰ ‘About ABCD’, *Nurture Development* <<https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/about-abcd/>> [accessed 20 November 2020].



Figure 7.4, Exterior, Gipton Methodist Church. Figure 7.5, The former Prayer Chapel, one of three rooms at the Church rented by the ELP. Photographs by the author. Courtesy the East Leeds Project.

The absence of a local centre and amenities that I described earlier combine to effect a deeper dislocation of Gipton from discourse on regeneration - cultural, economic or otherwise. The challenges for artistic practice at the local level relate once again to the availability of spaces where it might take hold and this connects my final case study to the chronic challenges of accessing affordable and appropriate spaces that I have revealed as a key challenge for artistic practice across the UK and Ireland. Within East Leeds there is a near-total absence of venues, initiatives and networks for the arts. This extends to the formal, institutional venues typical of the city core and smaller-scale parallels that are found in other local centres across Leeds – cinemas, music venues, arts centres – *and* the self-organised and artist-led spaces that my thesis is concerned with.⁴⁰¹ There are no dedicated spaces for creative practice: no artists’ studios, maker spaces, hack spaces, co-working spaces, or specialist facilities for production and fabrication. As a result, the ELP has found accommodation in one of the very few available spaces in Gipton - three rooms above the local Methodist Church. Decades ago, an authentic local culture was supported by local venues such as this. Prior to demolition of most of the building in the 1980s, Gipton Methodist Church formed a focal point for local children, who flocked to take

⁴⁰¹ Only one other arts organisation exists in Gipton - Space2, an organisation based in the converted 1930s former Gipton Fire Station. It is classified by ACE as a ‘combined arts’ organisation and does not have a specialism in visual arts.

part in Sunday School, choir practice and the Boys' Brigade.⁴⁰² In 1936 the Chapel hosted a performance of Handel's Messiah, and through the 1950s and 60s provided a base for the flourishing Gipton Musical Society. At their invitation, renowned performers were drawn to Gipton, among them Geraint Evans, the celebrated Welsh bass-baritone. The shrinking number of the congregation through the 1970s, however, brought an inevitable conclusion:

By 1982 it became wholly clear that the Main Hall was no longer needed for worship. It was offered to the City Council for conversion into training workshops for the growing number of Gipton unemployed, but the offer was refused.⁴⁰³

Lacking any viable alternatives, the Main Hall was demolished and a smaller chapel created in the North Wing, the only part of the building that is now extant and where the ELP is based. Through a failure of the civic vision that had once provided the impetus for the estate, Gipton had lost one of its very few community assets of any scale or ambition, leaving a gap that is yet to be filled.

Elsewhere, arts venues and initiatives act as nodes for what Holden and others have increasingly conceptualised as a *cultural ecology*, the interrelationships of a broad array of cultural initiatives and actors. Interaction of cultural actors in this way is rendered all but impossible in Gipton, an area marked by such huge cultural absences. This removes the possibility of agglomeration among artists, makers and other creative practitioners in East Leeds, the contextual basis that I proposed as central to the longevity of Digbeth's creative community, drawing on Gabe and Abel's *Agglomeration of Knowledge*. This absence appears especially acute when set in relief against the very visible investment that continues to be directed at Leeds city centre and the expanding educational campuses on its fringes. I suggest that recent developments such as the relocation of Channel 4's national headquarters to a prominent central site mean little in Gipton where the failure of trickle-down economics is plain to see.⁴⁰⁴ Interaction between city-centre infrastructure and initiatives in East Leeds is further impeded by the absence of visible nodes in the east

⁴⁰² Charles Yelland, *The Gipton Story: from 655A.D. to 1990A.D.* (Leeds: Gipton History Group, 1990) p. 58.

⁴⁰³ Yelland, *The Gipton Story*, p. 62.

⁴⁰⁴ 'First Look Inside Channel Four's New HQ The Majestic as Work is Completed', *Yorkshire Post* <<https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/business/first-look-inside-channel-fours-new-leeds-hq-majestic-work-completed-3033426>> [accessed 17 November 2020].

that act as entry points to a local conversation. Gipton thus presents a challenging environment in which to introduce the nominally ‘city-wide’ conversation on culture as it began in 2014 under the rubric of *Leeds2023*.

Leeds2023, Part 1

My founding curatorial idea for the ELP was conceptually to link locations along the Wyke Beck Valley to constitute these as one space for visual arts programming.⁴⁰⁵ Early thinking on this owed a debt to the large-scale place-based initiatives that have proliferated in recent years. Some of these, such as the Folkestone Triennial on the coast of Kent in southern England, I have experienced personally as a visitor.⁴⁰⁶ As a potentially annual or bi-annual event of this type, the ELP almost found expression through Leeds’ bid to host the ECOC title in 2023. Leeds City Council initiated a conversation on bidding for the competition in January 2014, when 300 stakeholders – myself among them – gathered at Leeds Town Hall to hear the city put forward its case for support. A year later in March 2015, following wider public consultation, the Council’s Executive Board unanimously supported a recommendation to formally announce its intention to bid.⁴⁰⁷ When Leeds awoke on 23 June 2016, the morning after the UK referendum on membership of the European Union, a bidding process that had been proceeding rapidly was suddenly thrown into doubt. By mid-December of that year, however, DCMS had announced its decision to continue the process for the competing UK cities - Belfast and Derry, Dundee, Leeds, Milton Keynes, and Nottingham.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁵ This was a curatorial strategy that I had utilised earlier in the artist-led project *Vitrine*, which I co-founded and directed with Pippa Hale from 2004-6. The project conceptually united a disparate collection of unused found spaces around Leeds city centre, mainly free-standing vitrines and vacant shop windows, as one space for artistic programming in response to the unavailability of larger spaces where we could establish a more permanent base.

⁴⁰⁶ Folkestone Triennial is the ‘largest exhibition of newly commissioned work presented in the UK’. I visited the 2011 iteration, *A Million Miles from Home*. ‘About’, *Folkestone Triennial* <<https://www.creativefolkestone.org.uk/folkestone-triennial/about/>> [accessed 15 December 2020].

⁴⁰⁷ ‘Decision Details: Leeds 2023 Update’, *Leeds City Council* <<https://democracy.leeds.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?AIId=67790>> [accessed 7 December 2020].

⁴⁰⁸ ‘European Capital of Culture 2023 UK Competition’, *UK Government* <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/european-capital-of-culture-2023-uk-competition>> [accessed 7 December 2020].

It was with a renewed sense of purpose that *Leeds2023* then published an open call for ideas and projects in February 2017. My initial proposal for the ELP evolved through conversation with the bid's Programme Team. This helped shape thinking about how the project might address some of the questions being raised within the bid, including the relationship between it and East Leeds as an area almost entirely lacking in cultural infrastructure. In collaboration with Burman, we long listed artists working on a European or international stage whose practices addressed issues of sustainability and place and subsequently opened a dialogue with the studio of Dutch artist and innovator Daan Roosegaarde. Roosegaarde had already expressed an interest in the work of Leeds Climate Commission and was at that time working on *Waterlicht*, a large-scale digital installation for *Abandon Normal Devices* festival, staged within the Peak District National Park later that year.⁴⁰⁹ Footage of the event documents how the work utilised LED technology, software and lenses to conjure a visualisation of the water levels that could be reached due to climate change without immediate human intervention, filling the remote valley of Winnats Pass with a 'virtual flood' of blue light experienced after dark.⁴¹⁰ Such dramatic representations of the climate emergency could undoubtedly have been staged in the Wyke Beck Valley given favourable funding conditions and civic support: the *Leeds2023* bid potentially provided such a vehicle given its high-level political backing and intention to raise a total of £35 million for the event's delivery.⁴¹¹ Further, spectacular events such as *Waterlicht* had the potential to draw significant live audience numbers into the City.⁴¹²

Alongside these developments, my research into the concept of 'east' led me to look at challenges historically associated with the east side of cities since the industrial era. My research focused on narratives of historic displacement and contemporary disenfranchisement in other European cities including Glasgow, Helsinki, London and Paris. Research carried out at the Universities of Bristol and St. Andrews in 2016 sought to question why the eastern districts of former industrial

⁴⁰⁹ 'Event: Waterlicht/Dan Roosegaarde (2017)', *Abandon Normal Devices* <<https://www.andfestival.org.uk/events/waterlicht/>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

⁴¹⁰ 'Waterlicht', *Studio Roosegaarde* <<https://www.studioroosegaarde.net/project/waterlicht>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

⁴¹¹ 'Decision Details: Leeds 2023 Update', *Leeds City Council*.

⁴¹² *Waterlicht* has been staged in many cities globally, attracting visitor numbers of up to 60,000 in one night. 'Waterlicht', *Studio Roosegaarde*.

cities are historically ‘poorer and more deprived,’ to quote the report’s authors.⁴¹³ They concluded that this is arguably ‘the most visible consequence of the historically unequal distribution of air pollutants across neighbourhoods’. Their methodology was to geolocate nearly 5,000 industrial chimneys known to exist in 1880 in 70 cities across the UK, including Leeds, and to apply an atmospheric dispersion model in order to recreate the spatial distribution of pollution emanating from these. They concluded that pollution not only induced neighbourhood sorting during the Nineteenth Century, explaining up to 15% of within-city deprivation in 1881, but also – crucially for East Leeds – that such tendencies ‘persist to this day even though the pollution that initially caused them has waned’.⁴¹⁴ Of the eight larger social housing estates built in Leeds during the inter-war period, accounting for 70% of all Council housing in the city, it is therefore not surprising to learn that the City Council was merely following historical precedent in locating four of these – Halton Moor, Seacroft, York Road and Gipton – in the City’s east.⁴¹⁵ Gipton was merely the earliest and largest. The east sides of cities evidently linger in the collective imagination by association with pollution and poverty.

The twin curatorial concerns of the ‘problem’ of East Leeds and the simultaneous potential to stage a large-scale event there as part of the *Leeds2023* programme, became articulated within *Weaving Us Together* in response to questions around its approaches to involving local initiatives within the programme. Concrete examples of such involvement were required by the template of questions to be answered by all cities bidding within the ECOC competition and the ELP, therefore, was seen to have value by demonstrating how a part of the city seen as culturally disengaged might be involved:

The ELP will be a major new visual art and public realm programme that will occupy green spaces in a wide corridor of land and space in East Leeds. The project will be led by international and Leeds-based curator Kerry Harker. The ELP is a way to think through the issue of deprived ‘east ends’ that many cities across Europe have in common. The ambition is to enhance the aspiration and skills of those who live in East Leeds and to create a stronger sense of collective ownership over how this area might develop. [...] The ELP

⁴¹³ Stephan Heblich, Alex Trew and Yanos Zylbergberg, *East Side Story: Historical Pollution and Persistent Neighbourhood Sorting* (London: London School of Economics, 2016), p. 1.

⁴¹⁴ Heblich *et al*, *East Side Story*, p. 1.

⁴¹⁵ M.J. Daunton, *Councillors and Tenants: Local Authority Housing in English Cities, 1919-1939* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1984), p. 134.

is also building links with Rotterdam-based, internationally-renowned artist and innovator Daan Roosegaarde.⁴¹⁶

What I wish to draw attention to in this statement, which was authored by the Programme Team based on my conversations with Burman, is how it reveals conflicts within the bid's attempt to be grounded in local communities in Leeds while simultaneously addressing the 'international' ambitions of the ECOC framework. A tension arises through the juxtaposition of the terms 'Leeds-based' with 'international' and 'internationally renowned'. The language used to describe East Leeds again turns to notions of deprivation and lack of aspiration. There are different value systems at work here: there is no recognition of a local culture, but rather 'Culture' as instrument, an externally administered stimulus for social mobility. By what assessments and values might art be defined as 'international' and under what conditions might it address deep-seated social inequalities? *Weaving Us Together* does not elucidate on how the tensions in this local-international mission might be resolved. The ELP's inclusion saw it brought under the banner of *Fabric*, one of four key themes identified for the *Leeds2023* programme. Under this theme, the strand *Fabric of the City* prompted questions around defining the city and its culture from different vantage points:

This strand describes a series of projects that seek to redress cultural imbalance in Leeds and across Europe... Where cultural leaders, artists and communities have been marginalised, we will look to shift the centre of gravity and change our focus... Our programme is bound to a commitment to represent a new sense of a complex, multifaceted European identity, and to fill this city with an international cultural programme that connects with communities outside of our city centre in ways that have not previously been possible.⁴¹⁷

Specific details of what might constitute 'ways that have not previously been possible' are not supplied within the text.

The Leeds bid was not alone in attempting to balance the many challenges of a bidding process that sought to instrumentalise culture in the service of multiple, often competing aims. A report produced in 2013 for the European Parliament's Directorate General of Internal Policies looked at the success strategies and long-term effects of the capital of culture programme since its inception in 1985. The report's authors

⁴¹⁶ Leeds 2023, *Weaving Us Together* (Leeds: Leeds City Council, 2017), p. 43.

⁴¹⁷ Leeds 2023, *Weaving Us Together*, p. 30.

found evidence of positive impacts on cities that included improved image, increases in tourism and the development of new physical infrastructure, although there were questions around the longer-term sustainability of the latter.⁴¹⁸ These impacts related primarily to cities' existing cultural systems. In terms of social impacts, however, a different picture emerged. The report found an 'absence of real evidence' and queried the ECOC framework as a vehicle for more meaningful and longer-lasting change:

Whilst there is evidence that, for some host cities, ECOC designation and activity has helped to increase pride in the city (and encouraged residents to feel that the city is viewed positively externally), there are also negative perceptions of some ECOCs from local communities. This is a complex and difficult area, which would benefit from further research.⁴¹⁹

The specific challenges for the interrelationship of ECOCs and communities were further seen to exist at the level of local ownership, addressing social inequalities by ensuring that all city neighbourhoods were involved, and 'balancing cultural, social and economic agendas'.⁴²⁰ While *Weaving Us Together* demonstrates, to some extent, an awareness of these issues, I argue that it remains unclear how the Leeds bid specifically proposed to address them. Nor is it clear, on reflection, how the proposed partnership with Daan Roosegarde, whose practice prioritises mass participation and spectacle, would have done so.

A further issue with *Weaving Us Together* was its failure to mention the artist-led status of the ELP. This was also problematic given that its status as such was central to my thinking from the project's inception, as a continuation of my previous work in the field and fidelity to a set of values with which I associated this form of practice. Elsewhere within the bid book, the terms 'artist-led' or 'artist-run,' appear only occasionally. Beneath the headline 'The Independent Scene', East Street Arts are the sole Leeds-based organisation identified as artist-led, suggesting a pervasive condition of invisibility, at the civic level, for the city's numerous other micro-initiatives.⁴²¹ The mention of East Street Arts occurs within a section that corrals together projects as diverse as Belgrave Music Hall (an entirely commercial venue comprising bars and event spaces) and Basement Arts Project (a small-scale artist-led

⁴¹⁸ Beatriz Garcia and Tamsin Cox, *European Capitals of Culture: Success Strategies and Long-term Effects* (Brussels: European Parliament, 2013), p. 113.

⁴¹⁹ Garcia and Cox, *European Capitals of Culture*, p. 113.

⁴²⁰ Garcia and Cox, *European Capitals of Culture*, p. 159.

⁴²¹ Leeds 2023, *Weaving Us Together*, p. 6.

venue in South Leeds operating on a largely self-funded basis) in a bid to construct Leeds as a city that enables and nurtures independent cultural activity. These are seen as somehow allied across commercial and non-commercial sectors, a notion that was, I suggest, problematic for the specificities of the city's artist-led scene and the increasingly acute challenges of securing appropriate and affordable spaces. Basement Arts Project, although self-identifying as artist-led, is not identified as such within *Weaving Us Together* and indeed the specific strength and breadth of Leeds' artist-led activity escapes recognition generally within its pages.⁴²² This erasure is at odds within a narrative that states a desire to emphasise aspects of the city's cultural activity regarded as specific strengths. These are identified, instead, as Leeds' offering of museums, sculpture, dance, music and festivals.⁴²³ Where self-organised projects are acknowledged, it is in the service of constructing a narrative of growth:

Leeds is home to world-class arts organisations like Opera North and Northern Ballet. Yet a common feature is how many began as small independents or individuals.⁴²⁴

What is implied here is that the value of small-scale, self-organised initiatives lies in their potential to generate the institutions of tomorrow. This is a major challenge that I have researched – and contested on the basis of considerable evidence – in my thesis in terms of the difficulties of instituting sustainable models for artist-led initiatives in the longer term that do not assume a model of growth and necessarily linear progression *from* artist-led *to* institution. The concept of the 'international' is again foregrounded in the statement, suggesting that initiatives working locally are less highly valued than those whose reach extends far beyond the UK.

Weaving Us Together was submitted to the ECOC competition at the end of October 2017 with an event billed as the *Big Send Off*: 'Leeds is to mark the official submission of its 2023 European Capital of Culture bid by throwing a day-long party extravaganza to which all the city's residents are invited'.⁴²⁵ This event in itself

⁴²² Basement Arts Project, 'About', Basement Arts Project
<<https://www.basementartsproject.com/about>> [accessed 4 December 2020].

⁴²³ Leeds 2023, *Weaving Us Together*, p. 5.

⁴²⁴ This section goes on to name West Yorkshire Playhouse, Northern School of Contemporary Dance, The Leeds International Piano Competition, and Leeds West Indian Carnival as examples. Leeds 2023, *Weaving Us Together*, p. 5.

⁴²⁵ 'Leeds 2023 Invites the City to Celebrate the Bid's Big Send Off', *Leeds2023*
<http://leeds2023.co.uk/press_release/leeds-2023-invites-city-celebrate-bids-big-send-off/> [accessed 20 November 2020].

illustrated some of the tensions inherent in the bidding process. It was staged at Quarry Hill in the city centre, an area that is home to several cultural venues including small-scale independents The Gallery at 164 and Colours May Vary. Only major institutions – West Yorkshire Playhouse, Northern Ballet, Phoenix Dance and Leeds College of Music – were mentioned in the event’s official press release, however. Although nominally ‘free’ to attend as there was no admission charge and free entertainment was on offer in the shape of music and other performances, it is difficult to envisage how this event encapsulated values of inclusivity purportedly central to the Leeds bid. Firstly, the city-centre location immediately created barriers to participation for many communities beyond it, particularly those without the means to cover the significant costs of travel, parking and refreshments in the hyper-financialised city centre. Secondly, the focus on formal arts institutions such as those listed above, who were deemed to be ‘throw[ing] open their doors’ for the event, also arguably excluded those not already engaged as active participants.

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 7.6, Press image of the *Big Send Off*, October 2017. Photograph by Chris Payne. © Leeds2023.

Although performances during the day included a diverse range of acts and performers, such as Chapel FM’s jazz collective made up of young people from Seacroft in East Leeds, this arguably only *represented* the notion of cultural inclusion rather than enacting a genuine move to decentre culture in Leeds. This could arguably

have been achieved either by locating the event outside of the city centre or by handing its curation over to a consortium of organisations with deep roots in the city's marginalised communities. Such a move was ultimately rendered impossible by the event's sponsorship by developers Caddick and the Leeds Business Improvement District [BID].⁴²⁶ This problematically blurred the boundaries between *Leeds2023*'s ambitions for social change, the financial necessity for private sponsorship, and the economic imperatives of commercial entities. Ultimately, the umbilical cord that binds culture and commerce seemed too difficult to sever at this stage in the bid.

Just a few weeks later, Leeds' official bid came to an abrupt halt following publication of leaked details contained in a letter from Martine Reicherts, Director-General in the European Commission's Department of Education and Culture, to the UK's Department of Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS]. In it, Reicherts stated that 'the British application for the title of European Capital of Culture should be discontinued in light of BREXIT and the ongoing negotiations'.⁴²⁷ With the exclusion of UK cities subsequently confirmed, Leeds City Council came under pressure to reveal the level of financial resources already committed over a near four-year process.⁴²⁸ Its investment of approximately one million pounds brought additional threat in terms of its pact with communities who may conceivably have benefitted from investment drawn into areas through a successful bid, the challenge being how to mitigate the damage potentially done to already fragile relations with some of the City's most disenfranchised communities. Leeds' formal response to the halting of the competition reiterated its intention to place culture at the heart of city development:

In Leeds we believe in a future where our culture in all its forms is valued and experienced by the broadest set of people, and for it to be central to the city's identity and to its future – both economically and socially.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁶ Caddick were listed as sponsors under the banner of 'SOYO,' the new name given by the developers to the historic area of Quarry Hill, the city-centre location of the *Big Send Off*. SOYO (an acronym for 'South of York Road') is a reworking of the one million square foot site as a new £300m mixed-use development comprising residential, work, leisure and 'public' spaces. 'About', *SOYO Leeds* <<https://soyoleeds.com>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

⁴²⁷ 'Press Statement: European Commission', *Leeds2023* <http://leeds2023.co.uk/press_release/press-statement-european-commission/> [accessed 20 November 2020].

⁴²⁸ 'This is How Much has Been Spent on Leeds' European Capital of Culture Bid so Far', *LeedsLive* <<https://www.leeds-live.co.uk/news/leeds-news/how-much-been-spent-leeds-13944917>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

⁴²⁹ 'Press Statement: European Commission', *Leeds2023*.

It is revealing that this statement further reinforces an alignment of culture and economy at the civic level, one that continues in the present. In November 2020, Eve Roodhouse was appointed to the most senior role within Leeds City Council with responsibility for culture, on the retirement of the previous incumbent who occupied the role of Chief Officer for Culture and Sport. The new title created for Roodhouse's tenure is 'Chief Office, Culture and Economy'.⁴³⁰ She takes up this new post in the context of a local authority facing unprecedented financial pressures and a shortfall of £118 million in 2021-22 due to austerity and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.⁴³¹

By late 2017, events in Europe had caused the progress of *Leeds2023*, in its first iteration, to come to an enforced halt. At the personal level, this interregnum provided an opportunity to pause and reflect on the challenges that the bid had raised for development of the ELP. I began to rethink the possibilities of the project before setting out again on a substantially different path that has generated deeper meaning for me personally and, I argue, at the community level in Gipton. Freed from the requirements of the City's official bid and its focus on the large-scale spectacle associated with the ECOC festival format, I was able to reorientate the project towards a more deeply embedded relationship with its immediate environment. I shall examine now how this alternative direction brought new partnerships into play and generated new thinking on the *social value* of the ELP.

Leeds2023, Part 2

In January 2018, Leeds City Council's Executive Board approved plans to progress with a year of culture in Leeds in 2023 outside of the ECOC framework. By November, media executive Ruth Pitt was appointed to chair the new *Leeds Culture Trust*, an independent body that took up responsibility for delivery of the initiative.⁴³² She took up her role in April of the following year, followed by the recruitment of

⁴³⁰ 'Eve Roodhouse – Chief Office, Culture and Economy at Leeds City Council', *LinkedIn* <<https://www.linkedin.com/in/eve-roodhouse-10711b10/?originalSubdomain=uk>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

⁴³¹ '480 Leeds Council Job Losses Expected Next Year as Leeds Faces 'Unprecedented' £118 Budget Gap', *Yorkshire Evening Post* <<https://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/news/politics/480-leeds-council-job-losses-expected-next-year-leeds-faces-unprecedented-ps118m-budget-gap-2974224>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

⁴³² 'New Cultural Chief of Leeds 2023 Revealed', *Yorkshire Evening Post* <<https://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/news/people/new-cultural-chief-leeds-2023-revealed-479930?r=5242>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

theatre director Kully Thiarai as its Creative Director.⁴³³ Prior to Thiarai's appointment, the still-evolving narrative around the purpose and direction of *Leeds2023* continued to encapsulate some of the tensions illuminated through the official ECOC bid process and the *Big Send Off*:

The festival itself in 2023 will shine an unprecedented light on cultural life in Leeds as well as bringing the best global arts to the city and providing a catalyst for attracting visitors, jobs, new skills and economic growth.⁴³⁴

This statement continues to situate the 'local' and the 'international' in a binary relationship with one another while harnessing culture to concepts of economic growth through inward investment, cultural tourism and increased productivity. It also raises questions about value systems that support judgments of artistic quality, articulated here through a desire to bring the 'best' arts to Leeds by 'global' standards.

I have set out above the narrative arc of the first *Leeds2023* conversation in some detail as important backdrop for the evolution of the ELP. I do not want to suggest that nothing of value emerged from this process in the city. I need to highlight, however, the challenges of participation in the ECOC initiative and the contradictions, tensions and possible exclusions that were created by attempting to mould local specificity to an externally imposed framework for cultural value. On the one hand, cessation of the formal *Leeds2023* bid raised questions about the financial viability of the ELP outside of the ECOC's institutional framework and the resources that inclusion in the bid could have drawn into the project. On the other, however, it freed the new initiative from further instrumentalisation through the problematic rhetoric of the centre, particularly at a point in the ELP's evolution where it began to be specifically informed by the primary research undertaken for this thesis.

The issues of *Leeds2023*'s concern its ambitious attempt to balance the inclusivity of a purportedly 'whole city bid' alongside an instrumentalised approach to culture entangled with an economic imperative to view the bid as a route to economic regeneration and growth. I propose that this led to curatorial decisions that

⁴³³ Yorkshire Evening Post, 'New cultural chief of Leeds2023 revealed' <<https://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/news/people/new-cultural-chief-leeds-2023-revealed-479930?r=5242>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

⁴³⁴ Leeds2023, 'New Creative Director Returns to Yorkshire to Kickstart the Next Phase of Leeds 2023' <http://leeds2023.co.uk/press_release/new-creative-director-returns-to-yorkshire-to-kickstart-the-next-phase-of-leeds-2023/> [accessed 20 November 2020].

prioritised programme elements with the potential to resonate on an international stage, primarily focused on large-scale spectacle, mass participation and capacity for dissemination via the mass media. The jeopardy of this approach for the ELP was the prospect of producing a short-term event that arrived and departed rapidly, leaving no discernible legacy within the Gipton community, a risk identified by Garcia and Cox.

As a long-term participant in the *Leeds2023* conversation since inception, I propose that one of the most culturally valuable legacies of its first phase was its encouragement of new discourses and networks in the City during the period leading up to submission of the bid book. Events staged by *Leeds2023* from 2014-18 produced opportunities for new dialogues and relationships among individuals and locally based initiatives that may otherwise have remained siloed within discreet networks based on art form specificity, geographic location or existing friendship networks. In this respect, *Leeds2023* positively disrupted business as usual within Leeds' existing arts and culture sector. At one such event in late 2017, curated by the *Leeds2023* Programme Team, I found myself seated at a table with individuals working within peripheral communities across Leeds. Among them was Irena Bauman, a founder and Director of the architectural practice Bauman Lyons, whom I had met some years earlier through artist-led initiative East Street Arts.⁴³⁵

Bauman had introduced into *Leeds2023* her concept of locating a network of experimental structures conceived as 'common rooms' in neighbourhoods that form part of the outer rim beyond the nucleus of Leeds city centre. The structures were to be designed by leading European architects accessible to BLA through their international networks, and constructed in partnership with the communities within which they were built. The proposed method for realising these structures was *MassBespoke*, an innovative parametric, digitised construction system designed by BLA in Leeds.⁴³⁶ Although initially envisaged for the housing market, *MassBespoke*

⁴³⁵ Bauman Lyons were the architects of East Street Arts' flagship centre for artists, Patrick Studios, where I rented a studio from its opening in 2004. 'Patrick Studios, Leeds', *Bauman Lyons* <<https://baumanlyons.co.uk/projects/patrick-studios>> [accessed 23 November 2020].

⁴³⁶ *MassBespoke* was conceived as an accessible, affordable and environmentally sustainable mode of construction that could develop agency among local communities by bringing community-led building within the purview of those normally excluded from the early stages of decision-making and design. In contrast to many alternative systems for modular construction which are now proliferating within the UK's construction industry, *MassBespoke* allows for the entire process of design and build to take place with and within the community by erecting a 'flying factory' within a shipping container on site. Responding to genuine local need and led by the community, the system requires a computer to receive digital design files,

can in theory be utilised to design any type of structure. During discussions with Bauman, we began to find common ground around a shared interest in modes of community-led development as alternatives to top-down ‘place making’ initiatives. In a 2010 article for *The Guardian*, Bauman questioned the competitive landscape of architecture that is dominated by initiatives such as the Stirling Prize, resulting in the dominance of apparently ‘iconic’ architectural forms. Asking why architects were not more open to collaborations that might result in something ‘truly radical,’ she wrote:

Could the creativity wasted in competition be harnessed to work together with the local people and university partners, to devise a regeneration strategy that builds on local skills, and social capital?⁴³⁷

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Figure 7.7, Visualisation of MassBespoke affordable housing in Doncaster. © Bauman Lyons.

Identifying shared values around collaboration and principles of embedding decision-making in local communities, a conversation began to emerge about utilising *MassBespoke* to address the absence of creative spaces in East Leeds that the ELP had earlier identified. A joint proposal to repurpose the technology in this way, to create

which are then translated by the software into plans that are cut from any planeable material using a CNC router. These are assembled into small-scale timber ‘cassettes’ which are manoeuvrable by two people, negating the need to bring heavy lifting equipment to site. Once the cassettes are produced, the entire structure can be erected quickly within a matter of weeks. ‘How it Works’, MassBespoke <<http://www.massbespoke.com/how-it-works.html>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

⁴³⁷ Irena Bauman, ‘The Real Iconic Architecture’, *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/oct/01/architecture-iconic-competition-prize>> [accessed 8 December 2020].

cultural infrastructure rather than housing, arose in tandem with early thinking that such a structure could be located adjacent to Fearnville Leisure Centre in Gipton, on land owned by the local authority and at a major entry point to the green spaces of the Wyke Beck Valley. The vision for a potentially temporary structure pending longer-term solutions and located liminally between the Gipton estate and the nearby green spaces of the Wyke Beck Valley, gave rise to consideration of it as a notional ‘pavilion,’ that also sought reconnection to the original vision of the estate as a garden suburb. The purpose of the structure would be to house a maker space created by, with and for the local community, thereby beginning to address the chronic absence of cultural infrastructure locally. This structure would be self-built as a necessary response to the absence of existing spaces locally, including the post-industrial units usually repurposed by artists. No such spaces exist in Gipton, where prior to the 1930s the land was still open farmland outside of the city boundary.

Utilising *MassBespoke* to construct the *Pavilion* opened up the potential of co-producing it with local people and even to establish a community-owned construction company that would utilise the technology to address other local needs. This introduced the notion of a radically different relationship between the community and the usually extractive economies of the construction sector, largely focused on producing private profit for commercial developers. The possibilities for co-production, and participatory governance of the *Pavilion* post-opening, were augmented by the arrival of Claire Irving, who joined the ELP as Communities Director in July 2018. Irving brought with her significant experience of co-production with communities in East Leeds and access to local networks as a fellow long-term resident of the Gipton and Harehills ward.⁴³⁸ We began to invite local residents in East Leeds, alongside artists, to join us in forming a ‘Project Team’ that would deliver the *Pavilion*, utilising a snowballing technique that moved outwards from known individuals to others in their networks.⁴³⁹ The self-organised nature of the *Pavilion*, by

⁴³⁸ Irving has extensive experience of co-production with residents in the Gipton and Seacroft areas of East Leeds, in partnership with local organisations Space2 and LS14 Trust.

⁴³⁹ The ‘snowballing’ research technique was introduced into the project by Irena Bauman. Bauman had utilised the method in a previous collaborative research project in the Richmond Hill area of inner East Leeds, that sought to, ‘...develop and test new methodologies for understanding how an inner suburban neighbourhood might be strengthened’. The technique involved beginning with a list of potential participants in Richmond Hill provided by an agency worker who was also a local resident. Through interviews with these initial contacts, further rounds of potential participants were identified, moving further away from the original

a group that includes practitioners, enables me to propose it as an artist-led space. I can connect it to the characteristics of artist-led spaces that I have discovered through my research: the *lack* of available and affordable spaces and the turn to self-organisation in order to address this lack and to constitute a particular group *as a community*; *values* of collectivity and collaboration; the need to *negotiate* with gatekeepers for space and funding while not capitulating to requirements that coerce institutionalisation.



Figure 7.8, *What Makes Gipton?* a participatory project and proto-pavilion designed by artist Andy Abbott, commissioned by the East Leeds Project for the Gipton Gala, July 2019. Photograph by Julian Lister. © The artist and the East Leeds Project. Courtesy the East Leeds Project.

The *Pavilion* is now nearing the end of its research and development phase, and will soon need to begin the process of business planning and capital fundraising. It aims to generate and sustain a community of practice, but through a different paradigm that is not a process of initiation and subsequent integration within a framework for culture as it relates to established institutions operating in the city centre. It proposes a different model to venues such as the Tetley that exists within an

contact with each subsequent round. Rachael Unsworth, ed., *Margins with the City: Social Networks, Under-utilised Space and Under-valued Enterprise* (Leeds: Leeds Love It Share It CIC, 2011), pp. 11 and 39.

assumed progression from art school to artist-led spaces and then to The Tetley as a space that introduces emerging artists into exhibitionary circuits of galleries operating nationally and internationally. Within this logic, The Tetley occupies the role of ‘feeder’ for work that is assessed critically in relation to issues in the discourse of contemporary art.

The *Pavilion*, on the other hand, proposes a different relationship between artists and communities that is not premised on concepts of progression or advancement, resulting in the emergence of a proto-institution. Instead, the Pavilion aims to create a safe and accessible space that will be owned and operated by the local community in perpetuity, and wherein local people can take part in a wide range of processes for making. This relates to the processes of *Doing* that I have identified among artist-led initiatives. It will enable interactions and practices through which a community can be generated and sustained and through which local people can understand themselves as such in the face of Gipton’s wider invisibility.

The nomenclature of the *Pavilion* – the English word ‘pavilion’ derives from the Latin *papilio* for ‘butterfly’ and then the Old French *paveillon* for ‘tent’ that elides the flapping of butterfly wings and canvas tent flaps⁴⁴⁰ – makes reference to architectural forms that have traditionally been associated with garden settings and with pleasure.⁴⁴¹ The pavilion as a structure has a rich history and contemporary resonance beyond its original function as a decorative garden shelter. There are art historical references in the form of pavilions that blur the boundaries between sculpture and architecture by artists including Dan Graham, Heather and Ivan Morison and Bert Theis;⁴⁴² the national pavilions that are a central feature of the

⁴⁴⁰ ‘Pavilion’, Online Etymological Dictionary <<https://www.etymonline.com/word/pavilion>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

⁴⁴¹ The Encyclopedia Britannica defines ‘pavilion’ as a ‘light temporary or semipermanent structure used in gardens and pleasure grounds. Although there are many variations, the basic type is a large, light, airy garden room with a high-peaked roof resembling a canopy. It was originally erected, like the modern canvas marquee, for special occasions such as fêtes, garden banquets, and balls, but it became more permanent, and by the late 17th century the word was used for any garden building deigned for use on special occasions’. ‘Pavilion’, Encyclopedia Britannica <<https://www.britannica.com/art/pavilion-architecture>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

⁴⁴² See, for example, ‘Dan Graham Pavilions’, *Lisson Gallery* <<https://www.lissongallery.com/exhibitions/dan-graham-pavilions>> [accessed 15 December 2020]; ‘The Black Cloud’, *Studio Morison* <<http://www.morison.info/black-cloud>> [accessed 15 December 2020]; Christoph Gallois and Marion Vergin, eds., *Bert Theis: Building Philosophy – Cultivating Utopia* (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2019).

Venice Biennale;⁴⁴³ and the interdisciplinary structures that have become commonplace features of contemporary art commissioning. In *Pavilion Propositions*, MacArthur *et al* describe the growth of a phenomenon of ‘...the high-art pavilion[s], those non-permanent yet often flamboyant architectural appendages to visual arts institutions, designed in the main by high-profile architects’.⁴⁴⁴ Perhaps the best known of these is the annual *Serpentine Pavilion* commissioned for London’s Kensington Gardens.⁴⁴⁵ The Serpentine Galleries’ website suggests:

A Pavilion is a flexible architectural open space that invites people to come in and spend time in it. It could be temporary or permanent and might even change its form and function. A Pavilion might be used as: a shelter, seating, meeting point, cafe, theatre, or for lectures, events, exhibitions, sports, play, relaxation, work and much much more.⁴⁴⁶

The selection of the term ‘pavilion’ was thus a deliberate curatorial provocation with the potential to unpick a series of issues around culture and value in Gipton. It raises questions about identity, ownership and belonging - issues I earlier identified as particularly problematic in the local context. This move finds resonance in earlier curatorial precedents such as the *Sheffield Pavilion*, launched at Venice in 2007.⁴⁴⁷ I also wanted to expose assumptions about Gipton that might query the appropriateness of something as extravagant as a pavilion in an area externally

⁴⁴³ The Giardini della Biennale, located on the eastern fringes of Venice, were the traditional site of the event since its inception in 1895. The existing Central Pavilion was accompanied, from 1907, by national pavilions of other nations, which now number twenty-nine. ‘Giardini della Biennale’, *La Biennale* <<https://www.labiennale.org/en/venues/giardini-della-biennale>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

⁴⁴⁴ John MacArthur, Susan Holden, Ashley Paine and Wouter Davidts, *Pavilion Propositions: Nine Points on an Architectural Phenomenon*, (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2018), p. 8.

⁴⁴⁵ ‘Serpentine Pavilion 2020/21 Designed by Counterspace’, *Serpentine Galleries* <<https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/whats-on/serpentine-pavilion-202021-designed-by-counterspace/>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

⁴⁴⁶ ‘What is a Pavilion?’, *Serpentine Galleries* <<http://buildyourownpavilion.serpentinegalleries.org/what-is-a-pavilion/>> [accessed 15 December 2020].

⁴⁴⁷ In June 2007 the advocacy initiative Art Sheffield utilised the once in a decade convergence of the Venice Biennale, Documenta and Skulptur Projekte Münster to launch the *Sheffield Pavilion*, a book that promoted the work of Sheffield-based artists on an international stage. The book was launched in Venice before being distributed in Kassel and Münster. ‘A pavilion in book form is a structure curiously attentive to the roots of the word, in the Latin for butterfly, and in its subsequent usage to signify a tent or temporary structure used for leisure, entertainment or exhibition. The Sheffield pavilion is similarly airborne, nomadic, a moveable feast, an exhibition in book form or a paper based architecture for art’. ‘Projects: The Sheffield Pavilion 07’, *Art Sheffield* <<http://www.artsheffield.org/projects/test-projects/>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

associated, as I have shown, with ‘deprivation’. Finally, I was aware of more recent pavilions created through participatory initiatives involving artists, arts organisations and communities. They include *Ecology of Colour*, produced collaboratively in 2013 by architectural practice Studio Weave, artists’ collective Nous Vous and local residents for a park in East London, and *Makers of the Multiverse*, commissioned from artists’ collective Juneau Projects by Exeter’s Spacex Gallery.⁴⁴⁸

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 7.9, *Ecology of Colour* by Studio Weave in Central Park, Dartford, 2013. Photograph by Jim Stephenson. © Studio Weave.

The first of these, commissioned by Artlands, the art in the public realm programme for North Kent, located a colourful but simple timber pavilion within a site known as *Ecology Island* within Central Park in Dartford. Seeking to bring a public function to a neglected site, Studio Weave conceived and designed the timber-clad structure as ‘an outdoor classroom, dyeing workshop, art studio, bird watching hide, tree house and park shelter all rolled into one’.⁴⁴⁹ Community engagement and the creation of ‘meaningful educational resource’ lay at the centre of the project, producing a set of values and behaviours focused around the creation of social space, collaboration and shared ownership. The designers’ vision was united with a

⁴⁴⁸ ‘Ecology of Colour’, *Studio Weave* <<https://www.studioweave.com/projects/ecology-colour/>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

⁴⁴⁹ ‘Ecology of Colour’, *Studio Weave*.

collaborative approach that saw artists and the local community becoming joint stakeholders in the pavilion's form, function and future stewardship. The planting was designed in partnership with a horticulturalist to yield natural dyes; the pavilion's bold surface pattern design, christened *JOY*, was realised by Nous Vous in collaboration with local people; and Studio Weave acted as a catalyst to facilitate the founding of a Friends' group in order to ensure local stewardship of the project into the future.⁴⁵⁰ The pavilion created by Juneau Projects in Exeter similarly aimed to create democratic space, in this case disrupting formal art world structures for the sale of art works by creating a temporary space for the exhibition and sale of affordable multiples by a wide range of local makers. *Makers of the Multiverse* existed for four weeks in the summer of 2017 during Exeter Art Week:

Makers of the Multiverse has been developed with Spacex as a project that aims to expand the way artists and makers can show and sell affordable multiples. It proposes alternatives to more traditional art world structures and hierarchies by considering artists' engagement with the role of distribution, pricing and accessibility of artwork.⁴⁵¹

What unites both projects is a desire to differently orientate the pavilion form, wresting it away from traditional associations with institutional and aristocratic power – exemplified by the Serpentine Pavilion commission or the French Pavilion of the Petit Trianon at Versailles, for example – towards its redeployment as a form of critical spatial practice differently configured by new co-productive alliances between artists and communities. I propose that *Ecology of Colour* and *Makers of the Multiverse* represent projects created by artists and publics as democratic spaces that kept open the potentiality for self-determination, participatory governance, collective ownership and commoning.

The potentially disruptive power of the pavilion format, repurposed as a 'readymade' and combined with the possibilities for community-led building offered by *MassBespoke*, provided conceptual and practical tools for constructing a maker space in Gipton. The *Pavilion* also began to move the ELP into the realm of art as a social action. Fortunately, the evolving aims of the project, which in November 2020 is nearing the end of its research and development phase after which it will move into

⁴⁵⁰ 'Ecology of Colour', *Studio Weave*.

⁴⁵¹ 'Juneau Projects: Makers of the Multiverse', *Exeter Daily*

<<https://www.theexeterdaily.co.uk/whats-on/events/juneau-projects-makers-multiverse>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

a capital phase of feasibility, business planning and fundraising, have found resonance in the newly configured approach to *Leeds2023*. Only after Thiarai's appointment as Creative Director and her arrival in Leeds to take up the role in January 2020 did an alternative narrative for the proposed year of culture begin to emerge. This has demonstrably placed greater emphasis on valuing and resourcing initiatives that already exist in the city rather than focusing on importing work that has originated, and been validated, outside of the UK. For example, the *R&D Challenge Fund*, the first major initiative announced under Thiarai's leadership, has made financial resources available to six existing initiatives already underway and embedded in communities beyond Leeds city centre. They include the *Pavilion*. Announcing this investment, Thiarai stated:

Our ambition is for creativity to fuel opportunities for everyone to thrive in our great city. We want to connect with everyone and every part of our city to showcase the creative talent of our communities and our artists. Building towards a year-long event of the scale and ambition of Leeds 2023 will take time, and it's fantastic to see these projects begin to grow and take shape, when they could so easily have been derailed by the pandemic... Culture binds us together, has the power to transform lives, and offer hope for a better future which is why it's important that we continue to support our artists and organisations to develop their ideas and relationships with local people.⁴⁵²

What I want to establish here is a clear sense that *Leeds2023* has needed to shift its thinking in response to the cultural emergency of Covid-19. This is a shift in emphasis from the language to be found in the *Weaving Us Together* bid book – promoting a narrative based on a perceived deficit in communities such as Gipton – to a narrative recognising assets that already exist within them. This acknowledges that the role of *Leeds2023* is to *highlight, support and facilitate* the work that has been done and continues to be done by dedicated individuals and initiatives *not already implicated in a centralised narrative of economic growth*. Thiarai's statement works to articulate an alternative set of values for *Leeds2023*, resting on the social value of arts and culture. Debates on the social function of art are central to what the ELP is and does and I shall now analyse how the concept of *social value* that potentially offers a distinctive framework for articulating its aims and contributions.

⁴⁵² 'Leeds 2023 Invests in Artists' Projects as Landmark Year of Culture Begins to Take Shape', *Leeds2023* <<https://leeds2023.co.uk/leeds-2023-invests-in-artists-projects-as-landmark-year-of-culture-begins-to-take-shape/>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

Validation Beyond the Gallery: Articulating the ELP through *Social Value*

Social value is not a new concept. In her report *Size Matters* of 2011, commissioned by advocacy organisation Common Practice to address questions of value in relation to a cluster of London's small-scale visual arts organisations, Sarah Thelwall considers how the individual initiatives generate artistic, fiscal, social and societal value. She defines *social value* as:

...the processes through which art is evaluated and through which individuals and organisations 'subscribe' to the art, ideas and artists in the [art] ecosystem; this process may result in artworks entering the established canon and in organisations changing place within a hierarchy, depending on the quality of the outputs they produce.⁴⁵³

In contrast, *societal value* is understood in the report as 'broader social value, as made tangible through audiences, education and participation'.⁴⁵⁴ Thelwall proposes the performance work *The Walk to Dover* (2005), by artist Spartacus Chetwynd, as an application of all four types of value.⁴⁵⁵ Thelwall understands the specific societal value of this work as its contribution to 'growth in audience figures'.⁴⁵⁶ What is problematic for my analysis of value is that all four types proposed by Thelwall – artistic (intrinsic value or 'quality'), social value (within the 'art ecosystem'), societal (for audiences) and fiscal (monetary) – emanate from a specific understanding of the visual arts that rests primarily on the production of artworks for circulation within a gallery system and associated art markets. From this perspective, artwork is given value through the authorial voice of the curator who selects and promotes the work, and by association the artist, within and through the formal spaces of the gallery and the exhibition. The audience, in this relationship, is a passive receptor of what has already been validated. This approach to value poses challenges for all those working beyond the gallery system.

An alternative approach to *social value* has gained traction in architectural praxis over recent years, for practitioners interested in moving beyond quantitative measures such as gross domestic product [GDP] and gross national product [GNP] in

⁴⁵³ Sarah Thelwall, *Size Matters: Notes towards a better understanding of the value, operation and potential of small visual arts organisations* (London: Common Practice, 2011), p.24.

⁴⁵⁴ Thelwall, *Size Matters*, p. 24.

⁴⁵⁵ The work was commissioned in 2005 by Studio Voltaire, a member of the Common Practice network. Thelwall, *Size Matters*, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁵⁶ Thelwall, *Size Matters*, p. 25.

determining the success of societies.⁴⁵⁷ The organisation Social Value UK defines social value as:

...the quantification of the relative value that people place on the changes they experience in their lives... Examples of social value might be the value we experience from increasing our confidence, or from living next to a community park. These things are important to us, but are not commonly expressed or measured in the same way that financial value is.⁴⁵⁸

For Flora Samuel and Eli Hatleskog, social value in architecture is understood to relate to ‘the wellbeing generated through the procurement of buildings and places, sometimes quantified’. As Thelwall points out in *Size Matters*, her research ‘exposes the inapplicability of current metrics’ at work in the cultural sector for assessing the value generated by small-scale visual arts initiatives.⁴⁵⁹ I propose that social value, instead, offers a compelling new way to think through the ELP’s role and contributions. Its appeal rests on social value (‘the relative value that people place on the changes they experience in their lives’) as a qualitative measure that can only be determined by individuals who experience such changes subjectively and who articulate them in their own terms. This marks a departure from standard metrics, centrally designed and externally imposed, that have hitherto been applied in assessing the value of arts and culture, whether this is understood quantitatively as an economic ‘impact’ or growth in audience figures, or indeed qualitatively as a value judgement on artistic merit decided by curatorial selectivity and marketability.

What are the implications of social value for the *Pavilion*? As a co-produced and interdisciplinary initiative, the project is progressing through collaboration between members of a ‘project team’ comprising representatives of the ELP and BLA alongside local residents, some of whom already self-identify as artists and makers. As such, they represent a much wider population of creative people across East Leeds, a hidden proto-community identified through a survey that was conducted in the early stages of the *Pavilion*’s development. This piece of research, conducted via an online and hard copy survey, revealed the existence of many individual makers across the city’s eastern wards, working largely from repurposed domestic spaces (kitchens,

⁴⁵⁷ Irena Bauman and Kerry Harker, ‘New Infrastructure for Communities Who Want to Build’, *Architectural Design: Social Value in Architecture* (2020), 38-45 (p. 40).

⁴⁵⁸ ‘What is Social Value?’, *Social Value UK* <<http://www.socialvalueuk.org/what-is-social-value/>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

⁴⁵⁹ Thelwall, *Size Matters* p. 7.

garages, garden sheds) in a diverse set of practices but with identifiable concentrations in textiles, fine art and three-dimensional forms.⁴⁶⁰ The research is leading development of the *Pavilion* by governing what tools and equipment it should offer in response to a local culture that already exists. The Wakefield-based organisation Axis has conducted research over a number of years aiming to analyse how artists working beyond the gallery system approach questions of value and validation. Their qualitative report *Validation Beyond the Gallery* (2015), based on research conducted in partnership with Manchester School of Art, found that despite wide variation in artistic practices outside of a gallery setting, a commonality occurred through the way that artists differentiated between their values and those at work within the gallery system:

Many believe that public gallery commissions command higher status than the majority of ‘community’ commissions; several experience ‘second class citizenship’ in the mainstream art world, finding their practices side-lined when positioned in gallery and museum education contexts; most do not view gallery validation as a good fit for their values and practices.⁴⁶¹

This returns us to Gregory Sholette’s notion of an ‘obscure mass of “failed” artists’, all those that cannot be accommodated with the narrow selectivity of established institutions and international circuits for contemporary art.⁴⁶² The ELP’s indicates that many practitioners in East Leeds have practices and micro-businesses that are excluded from such circuits.

Survey respondents were, however, almost exclusively positive regarding the proposal to construct a maker space in East Leeds.⁴⁶³ The role of the ELP is to facilitate its realisation by providing an administrative and financial framework alongside a safe and open space where the project team can meet on an egalitarian basis. Co-production of this type is challenging. It requires proceeding slowly, allowing for an extended timeframe and taking time to create an open, equal and safe space for the dozen or so members of the project team, who are drawn from diverse

⁴⁶⁰ East Leeds Project, *East Leeds Makers Survey*, unpublished dataset, 2019-20.

⁴⁶¹ Amanda Ravetz and Lucy Wright, *Validation Beyond the Gallery: How do Artists Working Outside of the Gallery System Receive Validation of Their Practice?* (Manchester: Axisweb and Manchester Metropolitan University, 2015), p. 1.

⁴⁶² Sholette, *Dark Matter*, p. 3.

⁴⁶³ Fifty-eight people responded via the online survey. Of these, only one responded negatively to the question ‘Do you think East Leeds would benefit from having maker spaces?’. East Leeds Project, *East Leeds Makers Survey*.

socio-economic backgrounds. Attention to the use of language plays a key role in ensuring that the collective space created within the project is accessible and that unnecessary barriers to participation are not instituted. The team is kept relatively, and deliberately, small. It currently has fourteen members, allowing for the evolution of meaningful interpersonal relationships and quality of dialogue rather than the mass participation proposed by the narrative of *Weaving Us Together*.⁴⁶⁴ The *Pavilion* is also not intended as a participatory *artwork* of the type critiqued by Claire Bishop. In *Artificial Hells*, Bishop introduces a range of such projects initiated by artists over recent years, stating:

These projects are just a sample of the surge of artistic interest in participation and collaboration that has taken place since the early 1990s, and in a multitude of global locations. This expanded field of post-studio practices currently goes under a variety of names: socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, interventionist art, participatory art, collaborative art, contextual art and (most recently) social practice.⁴⁶⁵

Bishop proposes that a legacy of Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* was to render participatory art 'more amenable to the museum and the gallery,' moving it from the periphery of the art world to a more central position where it is now the subject of discourse through, for example, MA programmes in social practice.⁴⁶⁶ One of the aims of Bishop's text is to demonstrate what she regards as the 'inadequacy of a positivist sociological approach to participatory art... that focus[es] on demonstrable outcomes'. She argues, instead, for a need to 'keep alive the constitutively undefinitive reflections on quality that characterise the humanities'.⁴⁶⁷ Bishop does not wish here to reinstitute a notion of artistic 'quality' that is uniquely determined by elite institutions and the art market. Rather, she argues that

...value judgments are necessary, not as a means to reinforce elite culture and police the boundaries of art and non-art, but as a way to understand and clarify our shared values at any given historical moment... There is an urgent need to restore attention to the modes of conceptual and affective complexity generated by socially oriented art projects, particularly to those that lay claim

⁴⁶⁴ The project team at present comprises artist Emma Hardaker, architectural assistant Choon Yuan Wang and Director Irena Bauman (BLA) alongside eleven residents of East Leeds, including Irving and me.

⁴⁶⁵ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 1.

⁴⁶⁶ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 2.

⁴⁶⁷ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, pp. 7-8.

to reject aesthetic quality, in order to render them more powerful and grant them a place in history.⁴⁶⁸

There are critical issues here for the ELP and the *Pavilion* project. Bishop is rightly wary of a logic that uncritically decrees artistic production by individuals as ‘bad’ and that done collectively as ‘good’. The ELP must negotiate the risks of this too-easy assumption, balancing acknowledgement of its own and BLA’s role as catalysts and possessors of specialist knowledges that are valuable to realising the *Pavilion*, with the desire to make visible the different, but equally valuable, knowledges held by all individual members of the project team. I propose that Bishop’s argument on ‘quality’ is useful if aligned to the concept of *social value* as I have introduced it through this case study. I argue that, within the *Pavilion* initiative, quality should be understood as a measure relating to the subjective experiences individuals and how they are able to quantify, on their own terms, the relative value of the changes that they experience through participation in it. It is only through being attentive in this way to the social value generated by the project that the *Pavilion* will achieve the shared ownership that is ultimately central to its success and long-term sustainability as a locally owned and managed enterprise.

Conclusion

I have argued that the ELP and the *Pavilion* project aim to navigate by an alternative set of values that distinguish it from the centralised discourse of contemporary art and its circulation through the gallery system. This raises questions for understanding the *Pavilion* as an artist-led space, although I argue that on the basis of its self-organisation and approaches to value and values, it can legitimately claim this status. In terms of its relationship with place, there are challenges at the local level in Gipton that align the *Pavilion* with artist-led initiatives that I have analysed elsewhere and that arise as similar responses to an identified lack at the local level. As an autonomous space that is not provided for within civic policy and the dominant approaches to cultural development, it finds resonance with self-organised spaces further afield. The *Pavilion* simultaneously departs, however, from a dependency within many artist-led initiatives on the traditional structures of the gallery and project space. It is oriented, instead, towards interdisciplinary working with BLA, co-

⁴⁶⁸ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 8.

production with local residents and a broad focus on ‘making’. This is also a move away from contemporary art’s problematic systems of validation and towards the greater accessibility of alternative definitions and practices. This is a necessary move within the context of Gipton and East Leeds, where the concept of contemporary visual art finds no ready-made resonance, meaning or value. There is, instead, an already existing local culture made of up diverse approaches to making that the Pavilion seeks to make visible and to sustain. By adopting this broader focus, the *Pavilion* is progressing as an initiative with local relevance and specificity. In doing so, its conception and emerging practice draw directly on what I have discovered through my research regarding the critical character of attempts to generate and nurture self-organised spaces and places that sustain individual practitioners working beyond art’s centralised institutions, and through which communities of practice can constitute themselves.

While negotiating the challenges of places and spaces, the ELP has also needed to develop a relationship with arts funders, without which the project cannot become financially sustainable. I have analysed the issues that arose in the early days of the ELP’s association with *Leeds2023*’s bid to host the ECOC title. There are also issues to navigate around its relationship with ACE and what I have argued in my thesis is a process of coerced institutionalisation imposed upon artist-led initiatives by the restrictive framework of funding that dominates the arts sector in England and which cannot see or will not recognise non-institutional forms. On this issue, my earlier experiences of developing PSL and The Tetley provide extremely valuable insights that have been enhanced by the process of undertaking the research and analysis for my thesis. This has had direct consequences for the ELP.

We have, for example, rejected the status of registered charity, electing instead to become a Community Interest Company [CIC]. This enables Claire Irving and me, as the ELP Directors, to retain a greater degree of control than that which is afforded by the institution of a Board of Directors within registered charities. It also introduces an alternative mindset based on the principle of trading that seeks to lessen, over time, the ELP’s dependence on public subsidy.⁴⁶⁹ This is also to attach value to the CIC format as a more flexible structure that is not predicated upon the same processes of

⁴⁶⁹ Alongside Irving and me, the ELP has two additional Directors, Aidan Moesby and Jason Hird. Both are practitioners. Their status is as Non-executive Directors [NEDs] with a maximum tenure of two years, after which new NEDs will be invited and appointed.

formalisation and inevitable institutionalisation that my analysis has revealed as major challenges for artist-led initiatives in relation to change, growth and sustainability.

Finally, the process of developing my research since 2017 has had major consequences for the future of my curatorial practice. Before beginning the research for my thesis, I had worked largely within the context of galleries and programmes of temporary exhibitions, specifically in a city-centre context. The process of researching and analysing included reflexivity on my earlier experiences of developing The Tetley and what were, for me, problematic processes of formalisation and institutionalisation. This has led to my renewed interest in the possibilities of art as a social action and the creation of autonomous communities such as that I had been part of at PSL. The ELP has arisen as a direct response to these challenges and interests. Within it, the *Pavilion* is an attempt to maintain fidelity to the value and values that my research has identified as key characteristics of artist-led spaces, but to manifest these values in a radically different form than those which I have studied in the collection of the data for this thesis. The *Pavilion* is an attempt to return to the arts centres of the 1970s that Andrea Phillips has argued were, ‘...premiered, ideologically, on the idea of cultural provision for everyone...’.⁴⁷⁰ She further describes such spaces as ‘...locally-oriented, politically motivated and intellectually ambitious...’ and this provides a framework for how the *Pavilion* seeks to make its contribution to *Doing* in East Leeds.⁴⁷¹

The ELP and the *Pavilion* are still-unfolding experiments within my curatorial practice. In a 2019 interview, Martha Rosler was asked how she felt about being habitually introduced as ‘artist and activist’. Rosler replied:

I am not alone in thinking that, especially when you’re an artist, it’s a bit crude to call yourself an activist. You have to earn that title. You don’t get to designate yourself an activist.⁴⁷²

In what way does my initiation of the ELP, and my role within the *Pavilion* project, reconfigure my relationship with what I have previously understood as the discipline of curating? Rosler goes on to offer her thoughts on what an activist is:

⁴⁷⁰ Phillips, ‘Remaking the Arts Centre’, p. 215.

⁴⁷¹ Phillips, ‘Remaking the Arts Centre’, p. 215.

⁴⁷² ‘Martha Rosler: Art as Activism, Democratic Socialism, and the Changing Role of Women Artists as They Age’, *BMoreArt* <<https://bmoreart.com/2019/07/martha-rosler-on-art-as-activism-democratic-socialism-and-the-changing-role-of-women-artists-as-they-age.html>> [accessed 27 November 2020].

To be an activist you probably have to be working intensively with a specific community and a specific issue or set of issues, specific outcomes. And if not, you're something else... Activism is an on-going process... but one thing is certain: activists don't expect intractable problems to be solved by an exhibition or a political campaign and certainly not in six months.⁴⁷³

Rosler's words provide a framework for the ELP's existence at the nexus of the multiple entanglements and contested territories of the artist-led, the curatorial and art as a social action as they relate to cultural value and values, place as locality and community, and forming, working with, and making possible instead of institutionalising in East Leeds.

⁴⁷³ 'Martha Rosler: Art as Activism', *BMoreArt*.

CONCLUSION

Since 2016 when I began this research project, there has been another of the periodic expansions of discourse about artist-led practice, instigated by participants in the field.⁴⁷⁴ As a researcher and practitioner, I have taken part in a number of these recent events, including the *Artist-Run Multiverse Summit* hosted by Eastside Projects in Digbeth over two days in November 2018. Staged in partnership with a small group of invited artist-led initiatives, the summit created a space in which attendees could, ‘think, talk, eat and sleep together and consider what artist run space is today, what artist run space might once have been, but no longer is, and what it might be in the future.’⁴⁷⁵ I also attended events as part of the two-year *More Than Meanwhile Spaces* programme held in Newcastle upon Tyne between 2018 and 2020. These events brought together individuals working within and beyond the artist-led field through a collaborative initiative of The NewBridge Project with Newcastle City Council and the Universities of Newcastle and Northumbria. *More Than Meanwhile Spaces* facilitated debate on the subject of artists and temporary spaces and sought to advocate for models of longer-term support in the specific context of Newcastle and Gateshead.⁴⁷⁶ More recently, in January 2020, *What We Don’t Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led* was a one-day symposium staged by the Exhibition Research Lab at John Moores University in Liverpool. Proposing that those involved in artist-led practice have found themselves, ‘routinely co-opted, exploited and appropriated by external actors and institutions’ under conditions imposed by ideological austerity, the event claimed to open up a ‘neutral space’ in which to ‘freely and publicly’ challenge the affect of these conditions.⁴⁷⁷ While generating

⁴⁷⁴ They also include *Ecologies and Economies of the Artist-Led*, a symposium organised by me and fellow PhD candidate, John Wright. The event took place over two days in October 2018, across the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds and the artist-led initiative MAP in Leeds’ city centre.

⁴⁷⁵ ‘Artist Run Multiverse Summit, 9 to 10 November 2018’, *Eastside Projects* <<https://eastsideprojects.org/events/artist-led-multiverse-summit/>> [accessed 1 December 2020].

⁴⁷⁶ Emma Coffield, Paul Richter et al, *More Than Meanwhile Spaces II: Creative Enterprise/Action Zones – Exploring the Scope for Artist-run Initiatives and Cultural Workspaces in North East England, Feasibility Report 2019/20* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Newcastle University, 2020), pp. 6-7.

⁴⁷⁷ ‘What We Don’t Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led’, *Exhibition Research Lab* <<https://www.exhibition-research-lab.co.uk/events/what-we-dont-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-the-artist-led/>> [accessed 1 December 2020].

informative debates – again, primarily through case studies on individual initiatives presented by those involved – and reinforcing existing networks among practitioners in the artist-led field, *What We Don't Talk About* arguably frustrated its own ambitions. As the presentations were filmed – perhaps due to the University's need to demonstrate the *impact* of its relationships with the cultural sector – and are freely available online, it is difficult to imagine how such a format could have created the conditions under which conspiracies of silence, particularly on the affective dimensions of artist-led practice and their impacts on *Feeling* individuals, could be broken.

Taking part in these events, occasionally as a presenter as well as an audience member, has been important for my research. A key observation, however, has been the extent to which these separate initiatives have circulated largely among the same networks of participants, effecting the sense that a pre-existing set of individuals and initiatives constitute a closed loop at the core of sanctioned discourse on artist-led practice in the UK and Ireland. Emma Coffield identified this challenge to artist-led practice – about whom and what is excluded as much as included in the discourse – during her keynote presentation for the event in Liverpool. Coffield noted the enormous range of practices that were once aligned under the nomenclature of an 'alternative' art field, such as those in the USA archived in *Alternative Histories*.⁴⁷⁸ Initiatives listed in this publication, which I analysed in my literature review, range widely across a diverse set of spaces and practices that include workshops, factories, community centres, restaurants, health centres and office spaces – all run by artists – alongside artist-run galleries that more closely borrowed from institutional forms. It is significant for my thesis that in her essay for *Alternative Histories*, Mary Anne Staniszewski aligns these heterogeneous 'alternatives' around a shared ideology:

However wildly diverse these alternative spaces may be, they are affiliated in their organizational innovation, creative experimentation, and attempts to remedy systemic deficiencies that range from expanding aesthetic possibilities to taking direct political action. With such shared characteristics and goals, these vibrant enterprises can be seen as an ever-transforming social movement.⁴⁷⁹

Staniszewski's statement has relevance for the social value that my research has identified as a key contribution of artist-led spaces, through the formation and

⁴⁷⁸ Rosati and Staniszewski, *Alternative Histories*.

⁴⁷⁹ Rosati and Staniszewski, *Alternative Histories*, p.11.

sustenance of communities of practice. In her keynote for *More Than Meanwhile Spaces*, however, Emma Coffield identified a reductive tendency in the creation of more recent artist-led spaces in the UK:

But when I talk to my students [at Newcastle University], they tell me they want an empty shop with the walls painted white, run by a presumably unpaid committee that will most likely last for a couple of years. And I wonder, how has that single mode of practice come to dominate, and what have we lost?⁴⁸⁰

This is a worrying development, suggesting the emergence of an aesthetic dogma within the thinking of young practitioners. It can, I suggest, be attributed to the rise to prominence of the ‘meanwhile space’ during the last decade and the effects of ideological austerity. It is also symptomatic of a condition that I likened in my introduction to the forces of magnetism, that binds artists’ desire for autonomy and self-determination to the governing discourses of ‘culture’ that can paradoxically grant the means to achieve this status. These multiple challenges have arguably further normalised temporariness and precarity as the determining contemporary conditions for artist-led practice. The potential emergence of a new orthodoxy of the ‘artist-led’ is, nonetheless, troubling as it suggests a narrowing and misrecognition of the fuller potentiality for spaces and places shaped by artists. My analysis of the interview data has, contrarily, indicated that many in the artist-led field, including mature practitioners as well as new graduates, are proactively seeking spaces of longevity where the roots of community can take hold on sustainable foundations. My analysis has led me to argue that across the UK and Ireland, this desire is routinely frustrated. There is a crisis of availability and affordability of sustainable space for artists in urban places across this territory. Coffield’s question about the inclusivity and sustainability of artist-led practice has ongoing significance for my own research and the decisions I have taken in relation to both it and my curatorial practice. Through my involvement in the field, and continuing evolution of the East Leeds Project, my research discoveries and the values that I have identified as central to artist-led practice, can be enacted.

In my introduction, I asked what the phenomenon of artist-led initiatives is, and how it could be studied? Through the examination of *Womanhouse*, the GTM coding and analysis of my interview data and the subsequent selection of three major

⁴⁸⁰ Emma Coffield, keynote presentation, ‘What We Don’t Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led’, *Exhibition Research Lab*.

case studies, I narrowed my focus to a specific consideration of spaces created by artists, within what I have acknowledged as a very broadly defined set of artist-led practices. Moving through a topography that begins with a relatively well-known initiative – Grand Union – located in the most visible of city centre sites, to ROAR operating in the centre of Rotherham and finally to the ELP, a new project taking root in Gipton, at the city margins, I have used case studies to develop and deepen my argument, by a micro-analysis of these practices. What I have discovered and analysed are varying approaches to artistic practice within these initiatives that are situated, at the same time, in radically differing timelines and socio-political contexts.

I have argued, however, that what emerged from my use of the qualitative GTM analysis are shared values of community and self-determination through *Doing* that unite them conceptually. My ‘journeys’ through the differing landscapes of Digbeth, Rotherham and Gipton, among other places that I have researched and analysed throughout the thesis, enable me to argue that the challenges of accessibility and affordability of space within the contemporary urban landscape are chronic and pervasive. My research has opened out key questions about how the urban social conditions of specific sites effect a structural framework for artistic practice that necessitates singular strategies for survival and sustainability in response. Further challenges concern the inapplicability of systems for measurement and validation at play within a system of arts funding and policy that is based on an instrumentalised ideology of audit and impact. I have argued that alternative systems of validation govern artist-led initiatives and their approaches to value that do not presuppose a mono-directional progression towards formalisation and institutionalisation.

As Coffield noted, the circulation of certain vocabularies for and within artist-led practice creates exclusions even as it constructs a meaningful frame of reference for those already involved. I argued early in my thesis that the existing literature indicates an absence of longitudinal studies that go beyond the self-authored narrative accounts of a relatively small sample of well-known actors in the field. Such accounts are written for different purposes and do little to advance understandings of this widespread and critically important cultural phenomenon among the makers of cultural policy, in part due to a general lack of academic rigour. It was, therefore, important for my research to cast the net beyond these ‘usual suspects’ that are already visible and relatively well documented in order to make substantive new contributions to the discourse.

My thesis contributes to the critical questions of *how we know* what artist-led practice is and does, and what its affects are for and upon those all who participate. It is at once a study of a specific problem and a methodology for studying it. I have worked with a well-known qualitative research method in a recent formulation – the Grounded Theory Method (Bryant). I used GTM as a method to produce a series of concepts from the analysis of participants’ experiences and actions as spoken to me. This is an intensive person-to-person research process, through which I conducted 25 interviews with 35 participants working within 21 separate organisations. I generated data in 12 different locations over a period of 18 months. I then transcribed and carefully analysed ten of the interview statements, by which participants do not simply speak their ‘knowledge’ but deposit unspoken and unconscious understandings in language that can then be coded. This methodology was important in discovering new terms and concepts that go beyond routine statements characterising artist-led practice as a precarity and/or provisionality *and* the terms of the existing literature, that is largely limited to individual histories and participant accounts. I have challenged the concept of *cultural ecology* as a theory of interrelation among cultural actors seen from only one perspective – from above – and the instrumentalisation of artists through the dominant policy framework of *cultural value*. These terms issue an ideological challenge to artist-led practice. They occlude more finely grained analyses and understandings and ignore the necessity for new models of support. Partial views leave the field stranded within the ‘stagnated discourse’ that places artist-led initiatives and institutions in a binary opposition.⁴⁸¹ We cannot deny that those who practice in the field experience the very real *affects* of precarious labour: my analysis has shown that artist-led organisers often find themselves in positions of real personal jeopardy as a result of exhaustion, physical and mental health issues, and financial precarity.

I have sought to create a substantive body of research and analysis that seeks to specify and expand upon these realities and uncover the major contributions of, and challenges to, these forms of artistic practice. In doing so, I produced a latitudinal analysis across the group of interviews that generated the following concepts: *Doing*, *Negotiating*, *Lacking and Losing*, and *Feeling*. These were then tested in depth through the deep dive of the case studies that revealed how these dimensions of artist-

⁴⁸¹ Khonsary and Podesva, *Institutions by Artists*, p. 13.

led practice relate to the concepts *place*, *value* and *institution*: the theoretical framework for my thesis derived from a comparable coding of policy and other documents in my literature review. I return to the major categories that emerged from my research here in order to thicken my description of their properties and to propose ways in which my discoveries about artist-led *spaces* in particular have wider relevance for the future of cities, culture and art education.

Doing signifies attempts to produce and sustain agency and to do so collectively through the creation of spaces, communities, networks, relationships, discourses, projects and opportunities. I extend my analysis of *Doing* now, to propose that the creation of artist-led spaces that my thesis specifically focuses on can be understood as a critical spatial practice that incubates alternative – experiential – forms of knowledge production. In doing so, I draw on educational theorist Neil Fleming’s concept of kinesthetic learning, which forms one of four modalities set out formally in his ‘VARK’ model. Fleming’s acronym stands for *visual*, *aural*, *read/write* and *kinesthetic* modalities that he defines to differentiate between the sensory preferences of different learners.⁴⁸² He further defines the kinaesthetic as a ‘perceptual preference related to the use of experience and practice (simulated or real)’.⁴⁸³ People with a kinaesthetic preference prefer, *inter alia*:

- applications before theories
- demonstrations followed by applying what they have learned
- doing things with others; action; making things happen
- physicality
- practical problems and problem solving techniques
- being part of a team
- people who can apply their ideas⁴⁸⁴

Kinaesthesia [kinesthesia in American English] is ‘the sensation that is stimulated by movements of the body or parts of the body and is mediated by proprioceptors [receptors] in the vestibular system and in the muscles, tendons, and joints’.⁴⁸⁵ The vestibular system is a set of organs in the inner ear that ‘[provide] us with our

⁴⁸² See, for example, Neil Fleming and Colleen Mills, ‘Not Another Inventory, Rather a Catalyst for Reflection’, *To Improve the Academy*, Vol. 11, (1992) 137-141 (p. 137).

⁴⁸³ Fleming and Mills, ‘Not Another Inventory, Rather a Catalyst for Reflection’.

⁴⁸⁴ ‘Kinaesthetic Strategies’, *VARK Learning* <<https://vark-learn.com/strategies/kinesthetic-strategies/>> [accessed 1 December 2020].

⁴⁸⁵ ‘Kinaesthesia’, *Oxford Reference* <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100037216>> [accessed 1 December 2020].

subjective sense of movement and orientation in space'.⁴⁸⁶ The etymology of the word *kinaesthesia* stems from the Greek *kineein* (to move) and *aisthesis* (sensation).⁴⁸⁷ I find these concepts extremely relevant for thinking through the contributions of artist-led spaces that are made and remade everyday through a set of physical tasks and practices undertaken by practitioners collectively and collaboratively. I find further resonance for these ideas in the work of American activist and art writer Lucy Lippard on the specific significance of artists' relations to place. In *The Lure of the Local*, Lippard writes:

The potential of an activist art practice that raises consciousness about land, history, culture, and place and is a catalyst for social change cannot be underestimated, even though this promise is yet to be fulfilled. Artists can make the connections visible. They can guide us through sensuous *kinesthetic responses* to topography, lead us from archaeology and landbased social history into alternative relationships to place. They can expose the social agendas that have formed the land, bring out multiple readings of places that mean different things to different people at different times rather than merely reflecting some of their beauty back into the marketplace or the living room [my italics].⁴⁸⁸

Later, she suggests, 'The land, and even the spirit of the place, can be experienced kinetically, even *kinesthetically*, as well as visually' [my italics].⁴⁸⁹ Lippard suggests here that the relations between artists and places have unique properties and I further propose that this premise can be extended to the formation of the artist-led spaces that my thesis attends to. My research, in itself a kinaesthetic process of discovery, has revealed a specific set of practices that have identifiable properties, logics and effects. This claim moves the discourse on culture and cities beyond contemporary misunderstandings of artists and artist-led activities as provisional or anticipatory of institutional forms, *or* as trinkets within urban development: merely expedient animators of meanwhile spaces in the fallow periods between commercial profitability.

⁴⁸⁶ 'Vestibular System', *Scholarpedia*

<http://www.scholarpedia.org/article/Vestibular_system> [accessed 11 December 2020].

⁴⁸⁷ 'Kinaesthesia', Oxford Reference.

⁴⁸⁸ Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997), p. 4.

⁴⁸⁹ Lippard, *The Lure of the Local*, p. 34.

Through my research I have defined places made by artists as a ‘locus of desire,’ borrowing from Lippard.⁴⁹⁰ Their existence is critical to supporting artists’ exploratory and generative modes of making and unmaking – seeking and identifying spaces in the urban fabric; making decisions about spatial organisation; clearing, cleaning, preparing, painting; constructing partitions to create discreet areas for studios, workshops and other spaces; the iterative processes of installing and de-installing projects only to start over again; welcoming and hosting others; coming together for debate. These activities – forms of artist-led *Doing* that connect back to my case studies and the vignette on *Womanhouse* that opened my thesis – can be understood as a form of learning and, I suggest, as forms of specifically *kinaesthetic learning* in practice. The repeated movements of artists’ bodies, and indeed of the ‘body’ of the artist-led community, through the spaces they inhabit, are forms of collective knowledge production. If artist-led spaces create the conditions for ‘learn[ing] from the experience of doing something’ (Fleming’s kinaesthetic modality), I can also connect this back to the ‘knowledge spillovers’ that Gabe and Abel suggested as a key benefit of agglomeration among communities of scientists and artists.⁴⁹¹ In these groups, tacit knowledge is produced through collaboration and co-operation as a result of close, peer-to-peer working.

What artists know about making and remaking spaces that hold and sustain communities has hardly begun to be articulated. I have argued that this knowledge cannot be heard or framed within dominant approaches to culture that (mis)recognise artist-led practice as mere mimesis of institutional forms based on the dominant paradigm of the exhibition. From these comparative analyses based on inequitable terms stem pejorative readings of what and how they curate or the deficiencies of a press release, and critiques based on metrics for footfall or economic impact. Nor should their value be restricted to the supply of a ‘talent pipeline’ for commercial art markets and major institutions. Deeper understandings of the spatial and social politics of artist-led spaces are critical when these practices are assessed against a backdrop of urban and cultural policy. The policy landscape requires them to exist in a constant state of *Negotiating* with gatekeepers over the terms of access to the resources that would grant them the agency for *Doing*. Such resources include access to physical spaces in which to create the material and relational conditions that

⁴⁹⁰ Lippard writes, ‘Place, for me, is the locus of desire’. *The Lure of the Local*, p. 4.

⁴⁹¹ Gabe and Abel, ‘Agglomeration of Knowledge’, p. 1354.

support communities of practice, as well as the basic financial resources that are of fundamental necessity to their sustenance. The price of access to these resources is often high, for organisations and for individuals. I have shown that artist-led initiatives continue to be subsumed in processes of coerced institutionalisation and accommodation to audit as key traits of culture under neoliberalism, a forcing that accompanies the ever more tightly regulated framework for arts funding. What is lost in this forcing is the choking of creativity and the value of artist-led initiatives to artistic practice and to places, as critical support structures for artists working beyond a global art market and to cities as the locus of creative experimentation and innovation. Artist-led initiatives are thus caught in tension between a desire for self-determination – to be achieved primarily through practices of *Doing* – and a reactive condition of constant (re)negotiation. This is externally imposed both by the world of planners, elected officials, private landlords and commercial developers *and* by ‘culture’ as it is managed by operatives including funders and those powerful figures posited by Gregory Sholette as the ‘denizens of the art world’.⁴⁹²

As a consequence of the *Doing-Negotiating* dialectic, I identified *Lacking* and *Losing* as a regular problem under such conditions of constant renegotiation and uncertainty. My analysis of the interviews I conducted revealed that there are chronic difficulties attached to the creation and maintenance of spaces in which to practice. Access to sustainable spaces is withheld by the policies of local authorities acting from economic necessity under the politics of austerity and further constrained within a national framework of planning legislation, as well as by landlords and developers operating within the logic of private profit that governs the commercial sector. Artist-led communities continue to be displaced due to the invisibility of their value and effects from the perspective of civic and commercial planners. My research has identified this as a pervasive and chronic issue across the UK and Ireland, from the centre of major cities to smaller towns and the urban margins. My data reveals many organisations caught in a damaging spiral of finding and attempting to retain – but too often losing – appropriate and affordable premises that would support the world building of artist-led imaginaries. This lack of physical spaces is compounded by a lack of practical and specialist knowledge and appropriate skills and training with

⁴⁹² ‘... those who lay claim to the management and interpretation of culture—the critics, art historians, collectors, dealers, museums, curators, and arts administrators.’ Sholette, *Dark Matter*, p. 1.

which to manage and mitigate these multiple threats. The artists involved also lack capacity, the human, financial and temporal resources necessary to stabilise precarious ventures. In the case of initiatives with rolling committee structures, organisations are at constant risk of losing whatever knowledge has accrued within each successive cohort of organisers. For practising artists, there are choices to be made. Do they dedicate time to nurturing organisations, even as these commitments inevitably reduce the time available for practice itself? In addition, there are questions around how negotiating with gatekeepers runs the risk of sacrificing much-valued independence and departing from the foundational and deeply held values that nurtured the initial instinct for self-organisation.

My final code, *Feeling*, identified the importance of what I shall define as the affective-subjective experiences of individuals engaged in artist-led production and collective organisation as a consequence of exposure to a set of pervasive and potentially damaging environmental conditions and external pressures such as those described above. My research reveals long-term effects on the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals experiencing a daily 360-degree environment of uncertainty. The physical conditions of spaces that are too often difficult to access, cold and damp, mouldy even or lacking security and basic controls for health and safety, seep over time into the human bodies that inhabit them. My data exposes the profound challenges – the professional and personal choices – facing artists who elect to maintain a fidelity to artist-led values and forms of practice as they age into their thirties, forties, fifties and even beyond. My research opens up questions about the impact of these conditions on artistic practice and innovation, and the significance of these types of organisation for the communities and cities in which artists choose to base themselves. This is important research for contemporary debates on affective labour and the transition in conditions of labour in general which rely on the subjective resources of the work beyond the physical time and labour for which they are paid. Is what I termed a conspiracy of silence on these issues a fundamental condition accepted by participants in artist-led initiatives that are exploited by the society to which they contribute? Through my research I have identified how the affective labour of artists sustains what is viewed from above as a *cultural ecology*, creating a resource for processes of institutionalisation and the next generation of managed institutions in the regions, based on meeting funding criteria. What other forms and values may be nurtured if the environment of uncertainty for artist-led

initiatives was not so emotionally exhausting and requiring constant *Doing* just to keep going?

My discoveries have implications for centralised policy-making and will be of direct relevance to arts funders, local authorities, planners and commercial developers and all those working within formal art education. They further offer a ‘mirroring back’ of the experiences of this area of artistic practice to its dispersed practitioners. I anticipate that my research, as it relates to the realities of contemporary practice, can be adapted for practical application in the work of art students, artists, artist-led initiatives and visual arts professionals. I have also generated a substantial body of data that is available for further development and analysis. In my thesis I have indicated areas for future exploration that I have not been able to address here. They include the major and disproportionate contributions of women artists to initiating and sustaining artist-led practices. Other critical issues that require deeper analyses are the intersections of artist-led practices with other social movements since the 1960s, including disability arts, feminist art practices and black British arts since the 1980s. There is a further lack of attention to historical and contemporary constructions of a distinctive visual lexicon for artist-led practice through film, photography and graphic design.

If, as I have argued, artist-led initiatives create and sustain critical support structures for the realities of artistic practice beyond the increasingly centralised and financialised circuits of elite institutions, consequences then arise for how these initiatives are, and ought to be, supported to become sustainable by the dominant forms of culture. It is critical that artists are supported to practice in local areas in ways that are sustainable, beyond the governing meritocratic art world model that recognises a select few for circulation through international orbits. New ways to retain and support dynamic communities of practice that recognise the value and values of artist-led initiatives must be found as, despite the multiple challenges that they face, they continue to make major contributions to urban places and to represent a ‘locus of desire’ for reimagining communities.

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APPENDIX 1 – RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Between October 2017 and March 2019 I interviewed 35 people in 21 organisations across 12 locations. Each interview was audio recorded. I transcribed ten of the interviews that I analysed using the Grounded Theory Method (see Chapter 4). Below is a chronology of the interviews, listing the names of the participants, the organisation with which they were involved and the date and place of the interview.

18 October 2017	Cheryl Jones, Grand Union (Birmingham)
6 December 2017	Charlotte Gregory, NewBridge Project (Newcastle upon Tyne)
22 January 2018	Hilary Jack and Lucy Harvey, Paradise Works (Salford)
23 January 2018	Emma Curd and Jade French, The Royal Standard (Liverpool)
21 February 2018	Artist A and Artist B, ROAR (Rotherham)
14 March 2018	Ryan Hughes, Coventry Biennial (Coventry)
20 March 2018	David Gledhill and Martin Nash, Rogue Studios (Manchester)
20 March 2018	Magnus Quaipe, Rogue Studios (Manchester)
23 March 2018	Jon Wakeman, East Street Arts (Leeds)
23 March 2018	Yvonne Baines, Ella Cronk, Michaela Cullen and Charlotte Cullen, Serf (Leeds)
26 March 2018	Tom Smith and Charlie Stobbart, MAP (Leeds)
19 April 2018	Bruce Davies, BasementArtsProject (Leeds)
30 April 2018	Derek Horton, &Model (Leeds)
3 May 2018	Sharon Gill, ROAR (Rotherham)
4 May 2018	Eleanor Rambellas Roche and Emii Alrai, Nocturne (Leeds)
15 May 2018	Karl England, Sluice (London)
7 June 2018	Daniel Cutmore, Arts Council England (Leeds)
18 June 2018	Stephanie Fletcher and Ben Rutherford, The Birley (Preston)
22 June 2018	Niki Russell, Primary (Nottingham)
26 June 2018	Lou Hazelwood and Michael Barnes-Wynters, Red (Hull)
12 July 2018	Gill Crawshaw, Shoddy/Piss on Pity (Leeds)
16 July 2018	Louise Atkinson, CuratorSpace (Leeds)
8 August 2018	Sarah-Joy Ford, SEIZE/School of the Damned (Leeds)
13 February 2019	Sharon Gill, ROAR (Rotherham)
13 March 2019	Stephen Rogers, ROAR (Rotherham)

APPENDIX 2 – FOCUSED CODING

Codes

Being ‘artist-led’
 Being in control/Not being in control
 Changing
 Creating communities
 Curating
 Experiencing loss or lack
 Feeling
 Going back to the beginning
 Having a sense of their place in things
 Having value/s
 Institutionalising
 Not knowing

Being artist-led

Being unsure, questioning the definition and/or proposing alternatives, feeling that it is a label imposed by others, identifying with others, placing artists at the forefront, supporting artists, creating spaces for artists, questioning the value of artist-led, having freedom and flexibility, doing things differently, offering alternatives.

Being in control/Not being in control

Being active, being passive, being impacted by external factors and actors, being caught in the dynamics of city planning, developing organically or accidentally, negotiating systems devised by others, being unable to plan, not having security, being precarious, having agency, not having agency, being used, being manipulated or exploited, being opportunistic, being excluded, not having a voice, being naïve.

Changing

Acknowledging change, worrying about changing, wanting to stay the same, encountering systems, responding to external factors, being responsive, growing up, imagining, visioning the future, planning for the future, organising, professionalising, being caught up in rapidly changing environments

Creating communities

Getting together, collectivizing, being friends, supporting, protecting, creating spaces, creating networks, enabling exchange, having peers, being inclusive.

Curating

Curating as a form of activism, questioning, connecting, proposing alternatives, trialling new forms, progressing.

Experiencing loss or lack

Losing access (facilities, space, equipment), being separated, lacking certainty, leaving things behind, being evicted, resisting, not having time, no being able to maintain an artistic practice, feeling the loss of peers, losing spaces, lacking capacity, losing autonomy, losing knowledge.

Going back to the beginning

Storying, remembering, recalling, explaining, meeting, forming, constituting, addressing an immediate problem, taking a long-term view.

Having a sense of their place in things

Filling a gap, providing spaces, supporting graduates, being part of an artistic community, inviting in, connecting outside, reaching out, being part of a visual arts scene, perceiving a hierarchy, questioning status, 'ecologising,' entering into new conversations and new sectors, negotiating capitalism, being caught up in urban planning, intersecting with cultural strategy, finding safety in numbers, having influence, having a place at the table, being displaced, being excluded, dropping names.

Having value/s

Creating affordable spaces, encouraging collaboration, being independent, being practical, exchanging, supporting artistic practices, being useful, involving, inviting, placing artists at the centre, being invisible, questioning traditional models, redefining values, being shaped by artists' needs, creating opportunities, being experimental, taking risks, being misunderstood, being undervalued, finding alternatives, working in partnership, being outward-looking, learning together.

Institutionalising

Having security, mucking in, restructuring, going full time, lacking experience, being paid, being taken seriously, needing help, consulting, representing, responding quickly, organising, professionalising, going beyond, becoming, staying the same, protecting, creating new models, growing up, desiring consistency, handing it over, going through a process, expanding, growing, constituting, developing.

Not knowing

Struggling, learning, being unsure, finding things tricky or difficult, not thinking about things, being uncomfortable, hoping, feeling, not having security, dithering, needing to decide, waiting, not having knowledge or information, needing to find out, accessing support, being unprepared.

Being 'artist-led'		
Interview	Statement	Page/Line
CJ_01	We're sort of in the artist-led...er...field, I guess. But I don't like calling us artist-led because although we've got a couple of artists on our Board I feel like we're more curator-led as an organisation.	1/6-8
CJ_01	And we are renting a space to Modern Clay, which is an artist-led ceramics facility...	2/33-34
CJ_01	I never quite know how to describe ourselves, and when people put us in that artist-led bracket, I think that's right, I think yeah, the way that we operate, it feels like we fit there. And that yeah, we're run by practitioners, but I think that some people would go, well actually you're not artists... that are leading that organisation, so it's a different thing. I guess there are other places that describe themselves as 'artist run', cause the artists are running the place, which feels like it's slightly different.	3/59-65
CJ_01	We'll have gallery space, we'll have more studio space than we have here, that we hope will be a bit more flexible as well, so we can change the size of it and the pricing of it. And we hope to be able to have space to invite other artist-led organisations to inhabit that, so that might be galleries or...	10-11/318-322
CJ_01	Erm, but whether this process is something that can help those people as well in some way, or that you know, maybe we're setting up a model for other artist-led communities that are in similar situations to us, or you know, that maybe we can open up a model of working or a way of trying to harness some of that development for our community, you know if everything goes well, and I hope that there is a sort of case study there that other people can use.	12/385-391
CJ_01	I also think there's like an ideological thing with the city and that so often artists get kind of looked over, or are completely invisible, and I think it's really important that we're not, cause we're a vital part of the city's make-up and then, you know, the reason that I want to go to other cities is to go and see other artist-led spaces often, and galleries and shows, or studios even, that kind of thing.	13/426-431
CG_01	Yeah, er, so the NewBridge Project is, um, an artist-led organisation, er, it was established in 2010 by two Fine Art graduates from Newcastle University, um, and we set out trying to, er, provide affordable studio space to artists, especially early career, as well as opportunities.	1/7-10
CG_01	Yeah, I mean, I think from... just going back to like the very beginning, I'm not sure that Will and Will would have described it themselves as artist-led from the beginning. I think that it was maybe a label given by... other people, um... I mean like you know it, NB was on one of those Artist-led Hot100 thing that Kevin Hunt did, from the first one, so then it became like 'Oh yeah maybe this is what, how we work,' and it... it wasn't necessarily an aversion to the term, it was more like not really knowing what we were, we were just doing what we were doing and it was not, no labels on us...	10/313-320
CG_01	I think I, it was just because there is so much um... debate over what it is, um you know and I do think NewBridge is artist-led, I mean for me it's about, artists are driving the organisation, um it's	10/321-327

	responsive to artists, it's like shaped by them, and it's like you know the direction is led by them, so that is for me artist-led. I know there is like, there will be some kind of real sticklers of like you, well... it has to be artists working for free, or like, you know there's many different models...	
CG_01	Within the artist-led sector, and I mean you look at... I think what's interesting is you look at models like Transmission, and Generator, and RS, where it's... the Directors are like... Yeah and you do, like one to two years, and you do it voluntarily, um... and you take on, you assume the responsibilities of everything, so not just the programming, but then you know, building management, if you have studios, managing studios, like all of the kind of legalities, all of the fundraising, all of the accounting, tax... and for me I'm... I've... I've got a bit of a problem with... with people being expected to do all of that for free really.	10/333-338
CG_01	I guess we've kind of put different things in place that we hope that will allow us to kind of retain that artist-led approach and that kind of being responsive to artists and being shaped by you know, their needs and their requirements.	11/366-369
CG_01	Yeah, so we have the programme committee, and then, so it was important for us that our public programme is artist-led, and that it is reflective of artists' current interests, instead of us sitting thinking, 'Oh, we will choose this artist to have the opportunity...'	12/395-398
CG_01	So, 'We ensure an artist-led ethos is embedded in all elements of our organisation, generating a programme and vision that is responsive to and shaped by artists' needs and interests, promoting a culture of self-organisation, ownership and autonomy across our artist community.'	13/443-446
CG_01	Erm yeah, and one thing, you know, obviously it's more easy I think to see how the artist-led approach fits in with, in terms of kind of programming, with the Programme Committee and the Practice Makes Practice steering group...	13/446-449
HJLH_01	...coming from artist-led spaces where it just looks like you've thrown some ramshackle thing up...	4/140-142
HJLH_01	That was the nice thing about a fresh start, going OK, so what was wrong with the old model, or, and actually it was some boards thrown up and it had all your mates in it.	22/847-849
HJLH_01	...when I used to run Apartment, we had an idea that you know we would actually do a manual, you know, that was going to be one of our shows, we'll have a manual, 'How to run an artist-led exhibition and project space,' and um, you know, in a funny space, and you know it was just again one of those things. And we wanted to have a book, but again you know we got to our five years of running Apartment and then we were just like, OK we've done it.	24/916-922
ECJF_01	...the huge issue, that nobody talks about, is how inaccessible physically, intellectually, artist-led spaces are, and why... Have you ever met a disabled person at an artist-led...? I've not, very rarely. [...] And I've done lots of projects in Liverpool where I've worked with people with lots of different additional needs and not been able to take them to any artist-led spaces.	9/333-348
ECJF_01	...that is because by nature they're obviously in spaces that are cheap...	9/340-341
ECJF_01	I think one of the really delicious things about artist-led, and why I really like the term, is when we're programming or thinking about	16-17/613-624

	<p>maybe what we want to do, we always love to say out loud and reaffirm that you know what, we don't have to replicate any model we see. We are permitted, we are able to, within the confines of money and time, but we are permitted to do it our own way. We don't have to have a 'participation programme', we can call it something else, we can do it a different way, we don't even have... You know I think an artist-led space to me is somewhere that is able to define how it works, and change it at will. And this is the thing like I, if something doesn't work here, we ain't just gonna not do it, do it differently, very quickly, and that responsiveness is something very definitive in artist-led space. The ability to respond very quickly and change...</p>	
ECJF_01	<p>That to me is something really important about an artist-led, or artist-run space is that... its responsiveness and its ability to... you know it doesn't have to replicate something that a HEI does. Just because Tate and Bluecoat and Walker all have an exhibition programme and a separate participation programme, doesn't mean we have to.</p>	17/634-640
ECJF_01	<p>I went to a talk, I think it's Gavin Wade who says it, like why institutions are always, why is it that institutions are always the end place, and why isn't it like the other way round, and I always think of it that way, like the end point for me is not an institution, it's just developing and progressing, what the artist-led is.</p>	17/650-654
ECJF_01	<p>I guess one of the other things that, I'm not sure when an artist-led space becomes a non-artist-led space any more. I mean one of my worries is that by developing our organisation further, we become further and further away from the artist-led...</p>	18/670-673
JW_01	<p>So kind of a rambling kind of description of what the organisation is, and I suppose it's, cause this is another thing that's come up recently that we've been talking about, we are artist-led, artist-focused...</p>	3/92-95
JW_01	<p>Yeah, artist-focused and then we had an interesting discussion with Ella who runs Serf, was involved in Serf, cause they've been... exactly this. She said well we thought... it was something, a social which was for artist-led organisations to go and have a... said well are we not included then in that, and she said oh well, well yes, but... East Street isn't artist-led is it? And we're kind of like no, probably not, but how do you take it... what is that definition nowadays?</p>	3/97-103

Being in control/Not being in control		
Interview	Statement	Page/Line
CG_01	So, and they almost got a shop unit actually, to deliver this project in, in an old shopping centre, the Newgate Centre, and then the landlords pulled out at the last minute, just as they were about to sign. Erm, and then another... the property agents turned around and said actually we've got another property that we're interested in you occupying, um it's quite different um but we, the landlord... we're acting on behalf of the landlord and we think it would be mutually beneficial.	4/94-100
CG_01	Yeah right in the city centre and it did have also a kind of street-level space as well on the corner, um... so obviously this was a lot, a massive undertaking really, much bigger than anticipated, but they decided oh you know it's such an amazing opportunity we've got to go for it.	4/105-108
CG_01	So it all, you know, there were a lot of things that had to happen um before they could move in and occupy it, so... setting up as a Community Interest Company, um so that they could sign this meanwhile lease...	4/108-111
CG_01	Yeah, so just this year we've been going through all of that, um so now we've got a Board of Trustees, and I guess a big part of deciding to do that was the situation with the business rates and kind of knowing that actually ultimately the Council had granted us in very good will, and continue to grant us, discretionary rate relief on that site, cause we don't... we wouldn't qualify for mandatory relief as a Community Interest Company...	6/159-164
CG_01	And I mean, but because we were established under this kind of scheme that was initiated by the Council, all of those projects were granted the discretionary relief and we'd kind of continued to be granted that. But I mean with everything that's happening in local authority and all of the cuts and all of the devolution, it's you know, the Council are expecting to be generating more and more through the business rates...	6/167-172
CG_01	I think it's less and less likely that they would be granting discretionary relief and I think we felt, you know if, well, when the time comes that we will have to leave that building, will they continue to grant discretionary relief, so I think that was a big part of becoming a charity.	6/175-178
CG_01	Erm, in some ways I mean I kind of feel like it...they, Will and Will viewed it as an organisation from the beginning because they had to set up this, they had to go through a lot of...setting up a company in order to sign the lease, um and then they became Directors of that company obviously, like legally, and Companies House, and then that afforded them like a certain sort of legal responsibility over, um, over the company, the building, what was happening in there, so I think you know, from quite early on they felt that, like the pressure of that responsibility.	7/193-200
CG_01	So by having us occupy it as a kind of Community Interest Company, under this kind of empty shop scheme, it meant that the Council would grant the eighty percent discretionary rate relief and then the agreement was the landlord would pay the	5/123-128

	remaining twenty percent and then also give us a contribution of the net saving, which would help us with you know covering utilities and things like that.	
CG_01	So yeah you know it as a great deal that they were almost paying us to be in there really, um but I mean with that comes the kind of, the I guess the pay back really, so we um...the lease was... it had a clause in that you would have to move out with one month's notice...	5/130-134
CG_01	If they wanted it back. Initially we had the lease for a year, and then it... and I mean they'd said oh it probably won't even be a year you know, um and then it kind of just kept getting renewed and we were there nearly seven years in the end. So a lot longer than anyone initially thought.	5/136-139
CG_01	Yeah and they have changed their structure haven't they, so we're a Band 1 organisation, we only have to put a business plan in for the next year, we don't have to do the Business Plan for the whole NPO period, with just a kind of indicative, erm, idea of what we'll do in the following years.	17/592-595
CG_01	Yeah, and I think that it's different because it's a listed building, so we... there was no incentive for them to let us come in here because we wouldn't be saving them any money because they don't pay any rates on it anyway. Erm, so we actually have to pay the 20 percent of the business rates, for the space that we occupy, because I mean they were like, you can go in, eventually, you can go in but it's cost-neutral.	18/613-618
CG_01	Well, we had support actually, from Newcastle City Council, so from the, someone who was working directly with the landlords on this whole site, in terms of the regeneration strategy, erm so they kind of, we developed a relationship with them, and they kind of... and you know the Council had said, you know, we want NB to have a space, if you can help them, I mean you know I don't, you know, I wouldn't like to put words into their mouths...	18/623-628
CG_01	Yeah, and I think their support was probably quite invaluable, erm, and you know we sold it to them as in, like, we, we're in the process of kind of figuring out a more permanent space, and trying to kind of sort something out and create... partnerships for that and whatever's necessary, but we just need a bit more time, so can we come in here as a kind of a stepping stone, so then they, I think they wanted us to get out of that building...quietly and quickly, and this was a way for that to happen, cause they wanted to get that all demolished before anyone could...	18/630-637
CG_01	The Council have done a, er, masterplan... of what they imagine could be here, erm, but currently there's going to be, where our building was, and the Odeon cinema, which have now both been demolished, they've got a teepee there at the moment and then for the next four five years they're gonna have some kind of like shipping container, trendy, Shoreditch-esque box park, like stack of shipping containers, for like creative businesses...	19/649-656
CG_01	I mean when we kind of first got notice from Norham House, we were just looking here there and everywhere because we were like shit! You know, we managed to negotiate a six months notice, cause we still had the one month's notice period in our lease, um so they kind of gave us six months notice, so we had a	20/683-688

	very short time to think about how we could relocate over eighty artists.	
CG_01	...I think when we were negotiating this space we realised quite quickly it wasn't going to have that kind of public presence and accessibility that we kind of had all in one place in our old building.	20/701-703
CG_01	It's owned by the Council yes, so it was purchased by the Council because, because that area is a designated redevelopment zone. So again it's another kind of meanwhile situation, erm, but we have a lease for five years, so it's a bit more security...	20/726-729
CG_01	I mean... we are funded by the City Council, so we get actual grants from them now. In the past it's just been kind of in-kind through the business rates, but we get, we were granted a kind of three years of funding from April.	22/760-763
CG_01	So I guess what we were looking for from that didn't quite materialise.	23/810-811
HJLH_01	I had a programme of exhibitions and events that were called 'Place of Production' and they were responding directly to Rogue's, um yeah, imminent move from a building they'd been in there for fifteen years, and so it was being bought by property developers and was due to be developed into flats and the, um, so through a series of different exhibitions responded to the landscape that we were leaving behind...	1/14-19
HJLH_01	I guess it was coming up to... we'd been given a twelve-month period from I think it was December 2015 to 2016, Christmas 2016, um, when we were supposed to move out of Rogue. And so it was coming up to that point when we had our open studios, which was the 21 st anniversary of the studio group, it was also the last open studios in that building before we were kicked out...	2/50-55
HJLH_01	...and at that meeting he sort of pledged his support to artists, um and had a few suggestions as to what could happen, um and then it was very shortly after that that Rogue were offered the move to Gorton...	2/62-64
HJLH_01	They were from other studios that were getting evicted... So it wasn't just Rogue... we kind of gathered people from Hotspur House who'd all been kicked out, NY Space... They were imminently about to... Cherry was from Stockport Studios, a thing that was very small, short lived thing, but that was East Street Arts that facilitated that, and originally she had been at Rogue. There was Free Space that were kicked out... One of the artists here, one of the young artists, had helped to set up, it had lasted twelve weeks, it was an absolute tragedy.	2-3/74-88
HJLH_01	And also, we firmly believed from the beginning that we needed to have impact and profile raise so that we would be difficult to move on, so it was you who was kind of, I was a bit more cautious about that floor, but you were kind of saying, we have more clout, we have more weight, we'll be better able to cement ourselves quickly within the kind of landscape of the city.	3-4/116-120
HJLH_01	Which we were keen to tap into, from even quite early days, when meeting people from Salford Council who were very kind of forthcoming with information about the cultural strategy and how we might tie into it, so...	6/218-220
HJLH_01	And so... when we initially had our meeting with Urban Splash and the Estates Manager, um she said that you know, we could	7/234-243

	<p>potentially take on the whole building if we wanted to in the future, that's why they want to bring all these leases into line. Erm and then these issues with the roof arose, um because it kind of became obvious quite early on that you know, they'd, they had a survey done on the building, and I think you know the survey came back with a kind of fairly damning erm long-term view of the flat roof, and there was a kind of slight wobbling of Urban Splash kind of thinking well maybe we don't want to give a long lease or whatever, er maybe it's not worth having the roof repaired, blah blah blah...</p>	
HJLH_01	<p>Yeah I think it was September. So we had this, quite a big meeting with the Arts Council and Urban Splash, and I think that sort of tipped things a little bit. And anyway, they basically started to repair the roof.</p>	7/260-263
HJLH_01	<p>I think the bits that really were worrying them, i.e. death traps, and then they've just done some patch ups...</p>	8/272-273
HJLH_01	<p>I think it's a tricky conversation, this thing about artists working with developers and everything, but I guess our feeling is that you know it depends on who the developer is and we know, we're not naïve about the motives that Urban Splash would like, um want to work with artists cause it raises their profile, and... But also it's also about asserting your power in that dialogue rather than being passive and I guess that's coming out of that situation we'd seen at Rogue, that they'd been passive and been [used there?].</p>	9/308-315
HJLH_01	<p>...we're not naïve about Urban Splash's involvement but we do feel that um through that contact with Tom that he has got a vested interest in art, and we're hoping to draw that out.</p>	9/324-326
HJLH_01	<p>Well initially there were talking you can have that building for as long as you like, but when it, the issues with the roof, you know, maintaining the building for that length of time, it would cost them more than it was worth, so... So where we're up to now is that that's kind of, through verbal agreement he's saying you know, these rolling leases with him, verbal agreement, likely last between five and 10 years, so you know he's saying you know, there was a timeframe discussed of three to five years for coming up with a plan for what we want to do, and so out of that meeting that we did have with Arts Council, he sort of rather flippantly said, well you can buy the building, or you know, you can, we'll knock it down and we'll create a new development and do a bit of an S1-style development here, between here and the ground out the front, which we know he's kind of pursuing, cause obviously it's next to the river and has fantastic views for flats, but um it's whether...</p>	10/336-350
HJLH_01	<p>So, the Adelphi building was the Salford School of Art, and Rogue was involved in that in the early stages when we started to be kicked, or when we got our marching order from Capital and Centric, they, um, Salford University, Lindsey Taylor came forward and said well you know, why don't you move into the Adelphi, so it seemed like a really good option, um, but the further down the line we got with them, you know it was like six months or more, eight months, um the further we got down the line with the negotiations, the higher up it got in Salford University and I think it came to the Dean and the, you know, people who deal with the land, erm and they basically, I think,</p>	13/489-498

	were against handing the keys over to an artists' studio.	
HJLH_01	They didn't have any artists on the steering committee.	15/566-567
HJLH_01	And she was thinking about using us as a case study, within this consultancy, so... But I've not heard any more, but they've got a very short deadline for this, so I think they started in July and they are presenting their findings in March, so...	16/576-579
HJLH_01	Greater Manchester have suddenly mobilised and said oh, we need a rapid response studio consultancy group, which is kind of made up of, yeah, arts organisations, people from the various ones, so Manchester Art Gallery, Castlefield, Lindsey Taylor from Salford University art collection, and various other people, but again there's no artists on that, kind of expressedly I think because I think they had a bad track record with um, artists being involved before, so...	16/583-589
HJLH_01	I think so, because you know The Penthouse were a case in point, you know they were in the middle of their Arts Council-funded programme of events and they get like two week's notice to move, and the same with NY Space. And everyone else is still... Of the two that are still existing in Manchester city centre, so that's Phoenix House and um Mirabel, er Mirabel, the landlord is again private, has been sat on that as a nest egg for how many years, and then Phoenix House is... It's just surrounded by cranes. It's constantly being built up around, so... They're like ticking time bombs, and you know we've put, we've been in contact with people from Phoenix House repeatedly because we feel like that's a real on the risk list, isn't it? Yeah, they just keep getting their lease extended by six months. [Is that privately owned as well?] It is[...] it's just surrounded by cranes, and opposite them is another, Talbot Mill, which Capital and Centric have bought, which was also full of artists and creative workshops.	16-17/599-619
HJLH_01	...the bit at the end which is the artists' kind of, the Q and A, they lopped off because the artists didn't feel comfortable, because some of them were, well reading between the lines, someone from Rogue would have been talking about Capital and Centric, and they've been kind of silenced, they've entered a kind of agreement with Capital and Centric they won't say anything publicly that... Yeah that was one of the things that we were really uncomfortable about, which I wasn't, I'm not really sure, well we're free to say what we like, but you know, Capital and Centric, you know they, if there was any slight murmuring of criticism they were straight on you...	17/628-637
HJLH_01	I don't know what the agreement was in the end, but erm it seems that Capital and Centric have publicly said they want to have a long-term relationship with Rogue, and we know not how much or whatever, but we know they are giving them some money. So whether that was part of that statutory... it seems that what that had led to is the artists being told they cannot say anything publicly.	18/650-655
HJLH_01	And then the public discussions that happened on Twitter were often, sort of, got slightly out of hand in terms of the public wading in and going, 'Capitalist bastards! Kicking out the	19/697-701

	artists!' and stuff, but that wasn't from us, that was from the general public that obviously, they didn't lap that up very well, so we got kind of slapped for that, rather unfairly.	
HJLH_01	And now they're kind of encouraging us to put in for a larger grant for programming essentially, but also that we should also encourage our membership to be putting in for smaller Grants for the Arts.	20/794-796
HJLH_01	...yeah that endorsement of artists going for it, and just challenging what they're doing, and not keeping things ticking over, and being victims of circumstances.	20-21/799-801
HJLH_01	And whether we do have any say in the way that the city develops as well, can we have, what position do we have, you know, kind of, with any agency to help stop, you know, kind of the homogenisation of the city, you know.	21/813-816
HJLH_01	So how do we, um, create sustainable creative community, um, creative careers for ourselves you know, how could we develop and create opportunities outside of you know, relying on the galleries in Manchester, because you know that's been another thorn in the side of artists in Manchester hasn't it, that there's a bit of a glass ceiling and those opportunities stop at a certain level. So rather than whingeing about it, what can we do?	22/849-855
ECJF_01	I didn't know anybody and I'd just started a Masters and I had my first interaction with people from TRS. I did not... yeah, we didn't get on and I came away from that incident, um which was in collaboration with Liverpool Biennial, thinking I did not want to be involved with the organisation at all. Since then, um, I began to produce some of my own stuff in the city...	2/50-55
ECJF_01	...so previously TRS was first developed and first started as a, um, as a reaction to the fact that there wasn't much space in the city for students to be showing their work, or graduates to be showing their work, outside of, um larger institutions that monopolised the city.	2/67-70
ECJF_01	Er... we moved back here, um, because we were on the edge of being pushed out by gentrification there, but now we seem, we are caught up right in the centre of it here...	2/74-77
ECJF_01	...when we first moved we had a property developer called Place First, who um, came to us to, um I guess propositioned us to have a space in the Welsh Streets, to take on a domestic building as part of a kind of like studio development.	3/93-96
ECJF_01	We'd like our own building. We don't want to rent. [...] Because, property in Liverpool is... well, property developers, um, and the, I guess the property ecology in Liverpool, is so competitive and transient and really difficult at the moment. Every building that we've ever stayed in, we've been kicked out by developers, we've been treated badly by landlords, we've been hit with ridiculous bills that we haven't had an option but to pay.	8/287-297
ECJF_01	We want to be financially self-sufficient...	8/300-301
ECJF_01	I was brought in to have a meeting with this guy that I didn't know, with another Director who had been there longer than me. And we were told that there had been some conversations with somebody from TRS about moving TRS to the Baltic area.	8/310-314
ECJF_01	...so that conversation developed, and that was Mark Lawler from Baltic Creative, and basically they needed a charity to work with so that they could win, I think it was one thousand five...	8/315-323

	no... one hundred and fifty thousand pounds, to create creative space that suited artists, and that suited their portfolio, because they were helping out a charity, and that's, they had to tick that box in their, yeah, in their idea of how to go forwards, so they had to tick the charity box, but also at the same time, we were in a position where we were about to be forced out of our previous home.	
ECJF_01	And we knew that because we had previously had a five-year lease there, and then when that finished we had a one-year lease, and then the landlord that we had wouldn't renew a new one, and so we were literally, we were on the edge of being chucked out, we were going to be given a month to leave. We weren't really, we didn't really have any other options, apart from, well, we could have stayed put and crossed our fingers...	8-9/323-328
ECJF_01	So I guess it was a good offer for us in the sense that it was purpose built space that was accessible. I mean really think about that, that's a big thing.	9/352-354
ECJF_01	We share a space now where before we could do whatever we want. We could have... yeah we were able to use that space however we wished without anybody really questioning us. Um... which was great, but, since coming here, which has had major major benefits, we have, er, now, a building manager that we meet with, well we're supposed to meet with every week, which doesn't necessarily happen, er, there are decisions made without us being informed, which, like was only going to be natural when moving into a site like this, but um... Yeah, that was like a huge, it was basically one of the main issues that we had before moving in here, that we were going to lose, um, we were going to lose our autonomy.	11/401-410
ECJF_01	...some manage to break through, but as a whole I don't feel that they engage, I think it's on their terms when it suits them.	14/539-541
ECJF_01	Rather than coming to us at the beginning and saying, 'We're planning this...' it's, they've planned all of it and it's gone right, what else can we squeeze in. And it's usually for very little money and it becomes quite stressful for us then to try to propose anything.	14/543-546
DGMN_01	Er, and when we became a CIC we had to make a formal statement of what we exist to do...	1/15-16
DGMN_01	Um, obviously when that building was sold, it's the old story, erm and we moved here.	2/55-56
DGMN_01	Well, when we were looking for a new building, er we started having meetings with Manchester City Council, and the Arts Council, and it became clear very quickly that we would have to kind of rationalise...	3/106-108
DGMN_01	So when a lucrative offer came along from the property developer, he sold out... [...] Well we were reassured, I think and other tenants were reassured, a matter of about a week before he actually sold it, that he wouldn't be selling out. [...] So the landlord had reassured the tenants that we wouldn't have to relocate, wasn't being sold and then it was, and we found out very quickly, um and then obviously it was an emergency. We had a number of months to vacate the premises.	6/189-207
DGMN_01	So we had a, very quickly had a visit from the City Council,	7-8/259-

	<p>round about the same time that Capital and Centric came to see us, and they mentioned that they had this building. [...]</p> <p>I think probably January 2016, couple of months after we'd got the news. Erm, and two, two or three Council officers in particular were clearly very enthusiastic about the idea of us moving in.</p>	267
DGMN_01	<p>And I think they saw, I mean this building, what were they going to do with it? It's listed so they couldn't knock it down. I think various free schools had looked at it and realised it just wouldn't work.</p> <p>It doesn't have a field attached which apparently is a minimum requirement for a school.</p> <p>Not enough parking space. Not enough playground area, um, enormous heating costs.</p> <p>And of course the heating for this building is defunct. So that would be...</p> <p>So to that extent we seemed like a really good solution to them, didn't we?</p>	8/269-280
DGMN_01	<p>So from the beginning er, we were advised that it would be a good idea if we could accommodate a dance troupe, called Company Chameleon, who are based in central Manchester...</p>	8/295-297
DGMN_01	<p>I think Maria had a very strong vision of where she felt Manchester should go, you know in the immediate future.</p>	10/345-346
DGMN_01	<p>And I think you know, encouraging us to take on this building is part of that vision.</p>	10/356-357
DGMN_01	<p>What we did though was for the next year, you know we negotiated with the Council, um and we looked extensively at other options.</p>	11/401-402
DGMN_01	<p>The rent was reasonable, there was going to be a ten-year lease. Erm, lots of promise you know, we had plans of each floor, allocated studios spaces, we'd got down to that level of detail. But then it just sort of evaporated. It's hard to describe.</p>	11/413-416
DGMN_01	<p>But I think realistically, and judging by what's happened since, there isn't a great surplus of huge buildings that are publicly owned that could quickly be turned over to groups.</p>	12/448-450
DGMN_01	<p>But I think in the end, I mean the Council were offering us this at a peppercorn rent.</p>	13/475-476
DGMN_01	<p>So we've got a five-year lease with the Council, and incorporated within that is a two-year get-out clause where either they, or we, can terminate the lease.</p>	13/488-490
DGMN_01	<p>But er, during the conversations we've had, nothing's on paper, but during the conversations that we've had with the Council they've um, impressed upon us that we need to be making a large capital funding bid to preferably the Heritage Lottery Fund, of around about two million, er, at the least, to fully renovate the building going forwards.</p>	14/497-501
DGMN_01	<p>So Capital and Centric have provided us with a consultant, free of charge, that they work with, an independent consultant, who's used to, or has experience in, putting forward large-scale heritage lottery fund bids. So we've had a meeting with him, and he's, he's, he's informed us that you know with two million pounds we can, we can at least sustain the building in the long term.</p>	14/516-521
DGMN_01	<p>But I think getting back to the... when we were originally approached by the Council, there was a suggestion that it would</p>	15/547-553

	be... effectively we would be gifted the building, erm... I think they sort of backed away from that a little bit, and the idea behind the five-year lease was that, you know, it would see... to test whether it was a right fit for us, but obviously from their point of view as well, you know they wanted to, you know, they don't want to be... it to fail.	
DGMN_01	And there were all sorts of other things we had to comply with like rubbish collection and providing bicycle storage, and you know we've also got to pay for the burning off of the road markings outside the School, those sort of things, sort of mounting up as jobs we have to do.	15-16/565-569
DGMN_01	But we met with, initially, the visionaries... the people at the Council you know had a certain amount of authority, below the Council leader, but their vision of what could happen, was built on personal enthusiasm. So when we ran into the thicket of the Council's backroom staff, you know, no slight intended, it did hit the quicksand, and we had to, we'd have had to engage a solicitor anyway, but the negotiations between the solicitor and the Council's solicitor over the lease were long and protracted, over the details of the lease.	16/585-592
DGMN_01	But then when I was sent that document I was also accidentally sent the memo of an internal Council meeting where they'd convened to address how they were going to realise the targets she'd set, so. And this internal meeting, er... amongst the minutes of that, where they'd addressed each point on the cultural vision, erm there was some material about Rogue Studios as an exemplar of their addressing the issue of nurturing artistic production in the region, encouraging artistic production. So we are their, one of their key examples of how they're addressing that, the need to nurture creativity and artistic production.	18/658-664
DGMN_01	And when Sir Richard Lees and the Council team came to our Open Studio, our last Open Studio at Crusader Mill in 2016, I think he could see that there was something genuinely of international significance, in artistic terms, happening in that building in the middle of the city. And I think he realised then that he needed to act and to save it.	20/732-737
JW_01	There was kind of an imperative in the sense that we needed... we got into debt and we needed to get out of debt.	2/44-46
JW_01	Cause we went to their space, we went to various spaces to look around but nothing suited us so that's why we set up another one.	2/67-69
JW_01	...so that's why we ended up creating this space, Patrick Studio, and that was just because we kept talking to people and we were taken on a journey then to create a space, which then gave us a whole new start to what the organisation was and could be.	2-3/75-79
JW_01	Most, I think, Karen might say something different, slightly different, about us being artists. But I, I, we went, I'll... we went in and out of a phase with that, and partly, it was around when we had a particular issue with our Board around ownership of the organisation, and whose IP it belonged to. Now was it Karen and Jon or was it the company?	4/126-131
JW_01	And then who did, who then did everything belong to, if we were... I imagine Universities are very similar in terms of, you work for, or if you're a lecturer for a University, your IP belongs to the University.	4/138-141

JW_01	We're both Artistic Directors... and we run it, and we lead it, and we say what happens. So we've done a kind of, great big kind of dip at one point, of having un-ownership, and now we're back to ownership.	4/153-155
JW_01	Tried to exit, yeah, at various points tried to exit and relinquish it, but that, just went on to the next stage...	5/174-175
JW_01	...it's something about you can always be the punk on the outside, but you can still be the punk on the inside and it's go and take control of that.	6/252-254
JW_01	...cause there's a lot of talk about resilience, within what they talk about. And, and being successful and looking for other avenues of input or fundraising, and it's kind of like, well, that's fair enough and we're trying to do that, we're trying to address it now, and even last week I was talking about it, and it was that we want to come out of the NPO.	7/289-294
JW_01	So there as very much a consciousness of what's next for this area has come about gradually, um, and reacting to the opportunities around us and knowing that we'd wanted to do something else, and we'd started to look at this idea of the Hostel, was the first thing that kind of took that on. And always at the back of our heads thinking we need another building because we know, that will give us, you potentially income and resilience and ability to grow and build a bigger community.	11/421-427
JW_01	So it's going to be rapid, so being able to secure Mary Studios next door is really crucial, hopefully working with MAP so they can secure something there, and I think that's it.	12/487-489
JW_01	But the things that won't go are this church community centre, the blocks of flats over there, the school over there, um... Emmaus, deaf and blind society here, we'll all be here. Because they own their buildings, and that is, that's where we see now our kind of focus is.	12/495-498
JW_01	It's about being able to say, 'because you have your building, you've got long-termism'. You can actually start to project some things from...	13/472-474
JW_01	And now we're understanding... now we've realised that we can do it on our own terms, we're ready. We feel like we actually have an infrastructure in place that will enable us to actually direct some resources there, meaningfully, over a period of time.	13/483-486
JW_01	But it's only now we're in a position to really feel like... yeah... we've gone through another growing phase and we've got a really strong... corporate engagement side that we can grow, it allows us to think, 'right, now we can do that bit'. Because the funding was so fragile.	13-14/490-494
JW_01	Yeah, and we... cause they came and talked to us, sort of really late on, and that's when we were added in. And we've just been asked if we wanted to talk and give an interview in the newspaper, and we've said no, we don't want to be associated with it now, it's just... it just feels dirty.	14/528-531

Changing		
Interview	Statement	Page/Line
CJ_01	Erm and I guess since then, like we opened in 2010, and being a completely voluntary organisation, erm things have like developed over the years and when we've got more funding we've been able to create job positions and I guess that's changed the way that the organisation is led.	1/18-21
CJ_01	So yeah, and, so this year, we've changed again and we've expanded our studio provision... and we've just gained NPO status, so that will sort of change us again.	2/28-34
CJ_01	Erm, and of course there are pros and cons to that – we can be a bit more fleet of foot because we're not this hulking organisation that has to go through all of these different things to make changes and to be able to respond to anything.	8/228-231
CJ_01	I don't know whether that's good or not, but I guess... I... yeah... maybe 'institutionalising' is the wrong word and it's more about... becoming more organised, and professionalised... I'm not sure about that term either. But yeah, it's sort of thinking that we're going beyond being a collective of people, erm, trying to address quite an immediate problem and that we're trying to think more long term and how we provide those things that we wanted to at the start immediately, into the future and, and it feels like becoming an 'institution' or one of the big players is what we need to do.	9/258-265
CJ_01	Because at heart I think we're still the same.	9/270-271
CJ_01	What's happening in Digbeth at the moment, to give you a bit of context, is that things are... over the next 10 years things are radically going to change around here.	9/275-277
CJ_01	What they haven't been talking about is how to retain affordable space here, which is why we're all here – it's because it's cheap.	10/302-303
CJ_01	Erm, its... yeah it's a Grade II listed building and we're hoping to move Grand Union into that building, but also have other organisations there as well. It's quite a large building, we don't need it all, we're thinking about the business model and how we make that work, so we want to rent some of the office space out at a more commercial rate, erm however want that to be cultural businesses and organisations. We'll have gallery space, we'll have more studio space than we have here, that we hope will be a bit more flexible as well, so we can change the size of it and the pricing of it. And we hope to be able to have space to invite other artist-led organisations to inhabit that, so that might be galleries or...	10/313-322
CJ_01	I guess what we're trying to do is stake out our claim in this area, like we don't want to just have to move on because we can't afford to be here any more, when we've spent seven years investing, and time and our money...	11/323-326
CJ_01	Erm, it feels like, you know, I've been talking about this area radically changing, that we can stop part of it from radically changing...	11/367-369
CJ_01	Erm, yeah, I guess at the moment I'm trying to be really mindful that we don't sort of just get taken down a developer route,	12/391-396

	because we will become a developer essentially, but you know that we are doing it in a thoughtful way, and in a way that isn't displacing anybody. It's hard, because there are lots of people that will get displaced, there's no doubt about it...	
CJ_01	Yeah but also why should, why should the artists have to keep going and finding the next space, and investing all of our time in creating a community here, just to get moved on by the developers, and I think something needs to change, even if it's in a very small way.	13/431-434
CJ_01	And I think when we set Grand Union up actually, almost everybody was, if not in their early to mid-thirties, they were in their late twenties, so we're all thinking about, OK, we've done our time in these cold warehouse spaces and they're not working for us, how do we change that?	14/462-465
CJ_01	But I kind of feel like with the way that things are changing, with the way that property prices are rising and all of that, it's really hard if there's no consistency in those organisations...	14/510-513
CJ_01	Yes, so I guess like our ethos, the core of it is like supporting artists and curators and what they do, and yeah my hope is that we can move that into the new building and that will continue.	16/542-544
CJ_01	And it might mean that my job role changes, and there are new job roles that mean that the building works as it does, and that that level of institutionalising works, and you know we need to become a charity in order to do the fundraising so that sort of changes that set-up slightly, but yeah, my hope is that we can create that structure but still have the same things happening.	16/544-549
CJ_01	Erm at the moment, like technically the studio holders are Members of the organisation, so I guess that that changes with the charity as well, you don't have Members.	17/590-592
CJ_01	But I guess as we got more funding and created like a paid position, for me and for others, yeah I sort of stepped out of that Director role.	18/604-605
CJ_01	Yeah, I guess it's less about that and more about places that we can go and visit that have gone through this shift in what they're doing...	19/667-668
CJ_01	I want to go and speak to Spike Island as well, cause they have gone through the sort of shift of being really run by the community and the studio holders and then... Yeah, in fact I want to go and see Lucy Byatt who was the Director at that time and saw that change.	19/674-678
CJ_01	Erm, S1 I think is an interesting one as well, who are going through radical change at the moment...	20/680
CG_01	Yeah, so that was done I believe because Will and Will thought we were only going to be in there for less than a year, so we'll set it up as 'Pop-up Initiative'... Now we've actually set up a company called the NewBridge Project, which has got charitable status, so were just in the process of actually transferring everything from the Community Interest...	5/147-155
CG_01	Yeah, so just this year we've been going through all of that, um so now we've got a Board of Trustees, and I guess a big part of deciding to do that was the situation with the business rates and kind of knowing that actually ultimately the Council had granted us in very good will, and continue to grant us, discretionary rate relief on that site, cause we don't... we wouldn't qualify for	6/159-164

	mandatory relief as a Community Interest Company...	
CG_01	And it was quite a difficult transition actually, I think because Will and Will had set this up and actually Will and Will had always collaborated at University so they kind of like had this unspoken understanding of like their roles and how they worked together and what they did within NewBridge...	8/253-257
CG_01	...so I'd applied and then they said, oh we want to offer you the job but you, but on the proviso that you come and start in three weeks... so I was like 'fuck,' I was like you know, this wasn't the deal, and actually I only work part time... um, feel like you're abandoning me a little bit, er, so yeah so that was quite difficult also.	9/266-270
ECJF_01	...and then became involved in the organisation from like an outsider and then was invited in to be a Director, and obviously since then tried to do my best to change the dynamic, and I guess that has been, um, done that through moving sites, I mean that wasn't the core reason for moving sites obviously, but I feel that by moving that has been a kind of, maybe not a breakthrough for TRS, but it's definitely changed how people perceive us.	2/56-62
ECJF_01	I mean the landscape here has changed so much from when we moved in, in November 2016 to now, it's unrecognisable I would say.	2/79-81
ECJF_01	But my Directorship has always revolved around how we can think about how we can rethink these roles, how we can do better, um and I mean... I think these roles, the paid roles at the moment, we've basically given ourselves the tasks of rethinking and work shopping how we can move forward in the future without...	5/183-187
ECJF_01	So we're trying to retain that transitory nature...	6/226-227
ECJF_01	We share a space now where before we could do whatever we want. We could have... yeah we were able to use that space however we wished without anybody really questioning us. Um... which was great, but, since coming here, which has had major major benefits, we have, er, now, a building manager that we meet with, well we're supposed to meet with every week, which doesn't necessarily happen, er, there are decisions made without us being informed, which, like was only going to be natural when moving into a site like this, but um...	11/401-408
ECJF_01	Yeah so obviously we have our own health and safety policies and documents, um but we also have to adhere to the health and safety and fire restrictions from Baltic Creative as well, which is maybe not, we're not used to functioning in that way... um... it's been...okay, but um, and actually to be honest it's kind of benefitted us quite a lot because, um we've never had to think about it in that way, and now we feel more responsible as an organisation, to protect studio members and visitors.	11/414-420
ECJF_01	And this is the thing like I, if something doesn't work here, we ain't just gonna not do it, do it differently, very quickly, and that responsiveness is something very definitive in artist-led space. The ability to respond very quickly and change...	17/621-624
ECJF_01	'We can do whatever we like'. We don't, if we can see that isn't working, as people, as artists in the field, we're going to do something else.	17/632-634
ECJF_01	I guess one of the other things that, I'm not sure when an artist-	18/670-673

	led space becomes a non-artist-led space any more. I mean one of my worries is that by developing our organisation further, we become further and further away from the artist-led...	
ECJF_01	We'll have to be doing training, and the recruitment, the way that we recruit will be different as well.	19/713-714
DGMN_01	Um, obviously when that building was sold, it's the old story, erm and we moved here, I suppose again that's when we talk about the shift, again a shift away from the way things were done in old Rogue, which had this sort of underlying, er, democratic ethos, to a more business-like structure I think. Hence the change to a CIC and us becoming Co-directors, rather than administrators.	2/55-60
DGMN_01	All the members, as they were called then, because we had to clarify the relationship of the artists to us as the managers, since the CIC.	3/91-92
DGMN_01	...there's certain things we can't do. We can't host, you know, concerts, we can't host musical performances... We're immediately surrounded by housing, so... we have opening hours. It was twenty-four seven access at Crusader Mill, we now have stated opening hours to avoid noise disturbance.	15/560-565
JW_01	And then... in... part of us being that wasn't just... we were artists but then we changed... we carried on being artists but we didn't make.	2/46-47
JW_01	Um, and then there's a great big filler in bit about what the organisation is, in between '93 and 2004 moving into this building, which is around projects and development and blah blah blah, and that's a whole thing. There is a lot in there. Um, 2004 we moved into this building, but that was after a process of say four years of us, me and Karen, saying we wanted to come out of it, of running East Street, and started to look for another space, so that's why we ended up creating this space, Patrick Studio, and that was just because we kept talking to people and we were taken on a journey then to create a space, which then gave us a whole new start to what the organisation was and could be. So, it's now in a position where it's come out of that whole other... fourteen years, yes I'll get that, another fourteen years of being in this building, and of learning and expanding what an artists' organisation could be.	2-3/69-82
JW_01	...and... um... the organisation is... is still run by us, the same people.	3/85-86
JW_01	And I think perhaps, both mine and Karen's attitude is that you've got to be in it to change it. So it's about changing things from the inside rather than being on the outside hitting things with a stick...	6/249-252
JW_01	So 2004, and then, so our relationship to the area then was... you know it's been stood still for, since you know, quite literally, things have changed around us but quite literally it has stood still for ten years at least, twelve years, everything has stood rock solid. Nothing changed because nothing changed on Quarry Hill and that's how fundamental, you just felt like oh we're in a, we're static here.	10/409-414
JW_01	And then our anything became something else.	11/420-421
	It's a good ambition but the reality is that we've got to shift the organisation to try to fit something slightly different.	12/481-482

Creating communities		
Interview	Statement	Page/Line
CJ_01	...when we set up we were a big collective of artists and curators...	1/11-12
CJ_01	And I feel like maybe actually it's the artistic community that we feel very much part of.	3/78-79
CJ_01	And I guess, like, an example of that happening is last week or the week before, the Royal Standard came up and did a studio exchange and they were looking for organisations that have similar operations to them so that they could have that exchange in an equitable way I suppose, so yeah it does feel useful, being part of that network and community.	4/83-87
CJ_01	And I guess like, in terms of the roots of Grand Union, it's always been about building a community and building a space that a community can work in, can come to, can exist in, have dialogue in and find ways to connect with people outside of this building I guess.	4/88-91
CJ_01	I guess it's about, um, supporting artistic practice, erm, so whether that be through providing space that's affordable and useful to those people or providing a space that's freeing other artists here to work and to connect with and be in dialogue with, um yeah, and to provide events and exhibitions where conversation can happen on contemporary visual art. Where artists can meet each other, curators... and curators.	4/97-102
CJ_01	So it feels like we sort of brought a little network of emerging curators together as well, which will hopefully have impact beyond that course.	5/123-125
CJ_01	Yeah, I guess so. Like, not exclusively, but I think that perhaps there's something about that dynamic [studios and showing space together] that means that... like we're looking for opportunities to involve our studio holders as well as being connected to the gallery in dialogue, yeah it sort of lends itself quite well to that I think.	7/171-174
CJ_01	I think yeah, if you think about a city and its artistic scene... or community... network or ecology... erm, it needs to support lots of different things at the same time doesn't it...	8/214-217
CJ_01	I think maybe like 'network' and 'community' are better terms [than ecology], because they feel a bit more horizontal, it doesn't feel like there's a hierarchy so it's not about Ikon being at the top because it gets more money, it just has a different role... and needs money to provide the 25 jobs that it has, and the building that it has, in a way that we don't.	8/224-228
CJ_01	But yeah, it's sort of thinking that we're going beyond being a collective of people...	9/261-262
CJ_01	It's just that we're putting... I guess there's a layer of bureaucracy in a way that we're putting around ourselves that protects ourselves. I don't feel like it's a bad thing, er I think it's a necessary thing and I think that we're doing it so that we can protect our community.	9/271-274
CJ_01	It's quite a large building, we don't need it all, we're thinking	10/315-318

	about the business model and how we make that work, so we want to rent some of the office space out at a more commercial rate, erm however want that to be cultural businesses and organisations.	
CJ_01	And we hope to be able to have space to invite other artist-led organisations to inhabit that, so that might be galleries or...	10/321-322
CJ_01	Like, literally, people are paying rents and investing money as well into creating a community here that's recognised not just by us, but people are coming to visit us as well, so we want to retain that.	11/327-329
CJ_01	So yeah, I guess like, the opportunity is that we've managed to strike up a conversation with our landlord, who at the moment is a government agency landlord, and although profit-making, is... some of what they're about is creating homes and they're about creating communities. So it feels like there's an opportunity there to have a developer that's going to listen to us in the first place which means that, you know, this whole thing's come about in the first place.	11/361-367
CJ_01	Erm, it feels like, you know, I've been talking about this area radically changing, that we can stop part of it from radically changing and make sure that the community, our immediate community, have this space that they can use, and that it's a space that other people can come in and use as well.	11/367-371
CJ_01	And I guess we're thinking through what that means, and who uses it besides the people that inhabit the building day to day. So we're trying to do work to really reach out to our immediate communities that are in the area as well, and try and... find out what we are to them, or what we could be to them, and how we can continue to be that to them... for the next hundred years, if we get that lease.	12/371-377
CJ_01	Erm, but whether this process is something that can help those people as well in some way, or that you know, maybe we're setting up a model for other artist-led communities that are in similar situations to use, or you know, that maybe we can open up a model of working or a way of trying to harness some of that development for our community, you know if everything goes well, and I hope that there is a sort of case study there that other people can use.	12/385-391
CJ_01	So I think like, having somewhere city centre-based means that people from the whole of that residential spread can travel to one place and be working in that same place together...	13/420-422
CJ_01	And you know now, many of us are in our forties, or nearing our forties, and loads of us have got kids and yeah, stability is really important – stability and visibility is massively important, cause it's really hard to even, just go to different cities and make yourself visible in that way, when you've got a two-year old you can do it to an extent, but not to the extent I used to, just like going to those openings and having the network in that way. And it's something to be visible from here.	14/466-472
CJ_01	And the idea is not taking on that whole building as Grand Union and becoming a mega place, and that it is still a place where lots of different things happen as part of that really. And that yeah, an important part of being in this building is that there's other arts organisations here and we're sharing audiences and our activities	16/552-558

	are different but similar and that that creates a wider community and yeah that's the hope for the new building...	
CJ_01	So with... I want to put something in our memorandums that means there has to be a certain number of artists on the Board and that it just means that there will be artists from outside the organisation that have the same needs at heart, so they can represent the artists in the organisation.	17/586-590
CJ_01	I want to go and speak to Spike Island as well, cause they have gone through the sort of shift of being really run by the community and the studio holders and then...	19/674-676
CJ_01	I guess, um, like for ourselves and to ourselves we talk a lot about community and what that is and who that's made up of, and that's... there's lots of different communities that are able to operate from and with here, that I think is really valuable and that our immediate kind of community think is valuable.	22/754-758
CJ_01	Erm it's really valuable, and I think you know you could say that it wouldn't be happening unless we had this community here and studios here, and you could make that argument I think.	22/775-777
CJ_01	Erm, so at the moment like a lot of our programme is focused on gender, LGBTQI, erm so we've talked about that a lot with the Arts Council and we're connecting like directly with different community groups in those areas as well, so engaging people who wouldn't necessarily come to a space like this.	23/790-794
CJ_01	Also thinking about the job opportunities that we offer, in particular the Associate Curator post, we want to be able to offer more of those, so we'd offer at least two of those, and that maybe one of them is aimed at a specific kind of community, or it's about giving people in Birmingham...	23/798-802
CG_01	Practice Makes Practice is our kind of, erm, rolling kind of programme that's open to our studio members and the wider kind of community through an associate programme.	1/15-17
CG_01	Erm they, we all studied together at Newcastle University, we studied Fine Art, the BA there, and when we graduated erm, it erm you know, it's very difficult, you know you instantly lose access to your erm, to your studio, to the workshop facilities, access to the kind of criticality, your like tutors and kind of crits, but also that loss of your peers around you and that supportive network and community...	2/32-37
CG_01	Erm, and that was addressing I guess some of those needs so it would be using a kind of empty shop unit which would become a kind of um, a studio, a shared studio for a number of recent graduates, and they would produce work over a period of months together, not necessarily collaborative work but you know just working in the same space and creating that community again...	4/87-92
CG_01	...so we obviously have our quarterly Board meetings, or we may have them more often, but we also have um a studio member meeting before each Board meeting, um to go through you know the agenda, so artists can directly say, 'well, this is what I would say', you know, so then it's also taking that kind of wider, er, collective voice to the Board meeting.	13/428-432
CG_01	So, 'We ensure an artist-led ethos is embedded in all elements of our organisation, generating a programme and vision that is responsive to and shaped by artists' needs and interests, promoting a culture of self-organisation, ownership and	13/443-446

	autonomy across our artist community.’	
CG_01	...but then in terms of this business plan that we’ve been doing, that we have to do for the Arts Council, that, that isn’t just kind of me sitting writing it, that is... the kind of contents of that and these values and our main five strategic goals, have been kind of formed from a massive amount of consultation that we did with our members.	13/449-454
CG_01	Yeah, so we were just looking at smaller spaces and thinking about the potential of splitting what we do, we were looking at spaces further outside of the city centre, erm and I mean we did a lot of consultation with studio members in terms of like you know price range, location, of how far out would you go, would you go far out if it’s much cheaper, and like what are the parameters of the space that we’re looking for.	20/690-695
CG_01	Um so actually the space in Gateshead is home to our gallery space, um it’s also home to some more studios, so we’ve got 16 individual studios there, and we’ve got a co-work space a bit like this, and then we’ve got er a large shared graduate studio, so that’s for the kind of graduates that are doing the collective studio programme for the year...	20/703-708
ECJF_01	I think up until recently it’s been very much the artist community, so, um, starting with the Directors, I guess I think quite a lot of our art audiences revolve around, or did revolve around the Directors who were in, who were directing at any particular time.	3/113-116
ECJF_01	So it’s almost like I’ve tried to flip it on its head, rather than kind of saying well what’s my vision, or our curatorial vision, actually we have a responsibility to, coming back to this new area, to ask, invite community members.	4/148-151
ECJF_01	I’m not sure but, I don’t think that any other Directors before, or, not, not just pinning it on Directors, but I guess if that had happened previously, in the old site, we probably would have gone into that space and not really thought about our responsibility to the community there. But because we’re now in this kind of like super-politicised area, we’ve got to be reflexive to, to asking like community artists, which I think we would have completely missed before.	4/156-162
ECJF_01	And we have obviously a steering committee for studio members, so there’s many discreet groups that would have a really important say around what the future of TRS looks like...	5/192-194
ECJF_01	Because we, so, at the old space we had probably like about thirty to thirty-five artists, so everybody always said it was like forty, but it was definitely like thirty to thirty-five artists that were always coming and going, coming and going, but now we have enough to hold fifty so...	6/246-249
ECJF_01	Yeah, they’re like, cause they were actually born out of the, so when LJMU first set up the space, when they paid for the studio, it became like a kind of, that was the first time that Joe, Theo, Liam, who are all graduates from LJMU, came and used that studio in TRS back at the old site. They then went away and set up their own space, so we have this kind of, I would say, I don’t know, comradeship between us...	13/489-494
ECJF_01	I think all of the dialogue we have with those, so with CBS it’s completely self-motivated and we’re like all friends anyway...	14/508-509
DGMN_01	Er, the idea being that um I suppose we started quite small and at	3/78-87

	that stage it was that people would... effectively all the studio holders were sharing the cost of running the place and we'd generate a small surplus. Not a profit, technically, which would then be used for things like open studios. Um, and I suppose at that time the, that's when in a way we sort of formulated the idea that we would keep Rogue as simple as possible, almost sort of like an umbrella organisation, um, under which all sorts of exciting things could happen, like the project space, the recent graduate space... We had a gallery that was run there by Magnus Quaife. So, and I think it worked very well didn't it?	
DGMN_01	Yeah, it was run on an amicable basis, there was a lot of trust, a lot of mutual respect, a lot of cooperation.	4/136-137
JW_01	So it started off with me and Karen and with initially eight artists' spaces in the mill which, eight artists' spaces which also had a social space and a shared resource space and also a space potentially which grew into a space where artists could exhibit...	1/20-23
JW_01	There's probably more, yeah... I've never used this before but it probably for me and Karen feels more like a family, we've built a family rather than an institution.	9/374-376
JW_01	And always at the back of our heads thinking we need another building because we know, that will give us, you potentially income and resilience and ability to grow and build a bigger community. So it's kind of several pronged in that, having another building is income generating, it grows the community of artists that are here...	11/425-429
JW_01	Um, so this area, it's what we're not focused on and we're really trying to say we can do all this national and big stuff, but we've got to translate that back into our neighbourhood. A Neighbourhood Plan is one of the things we're looking at.	12/472-475
JW_01	I think it is, it is, it's really being involved in stuff and you know, if people come to work, do you go and sit on the school board over there, um... is there... are there other bits out there that you can go and be involved with, the community group... can they come and sit on our board, so do they come and sit on our board, equally? What's that relationship?	13/464-468

Curating		
Interview	Statement	Page/Line
ECJF_01	So initially I actually applied to be an Artistic Director, when they had their last open call, erm except when I sort of got in my interview I sort of fessed up that actually I wasn't that bothered about curating any exhibitions, which is probably a bit bizarre to say in an interview which I suppose was looking for people to do shows, erm my interest for wanting to get more involved with the organisation was I feel that TRS is viewed as somewhere that's very cliquey, it's very white, it's very able-bodied, it's not very accessible or inclusive, and in my practice that's what I'm very interested in, so I wanted to get involved to see if I could help in some way or contribute something.	1/23-32
ECJF_01	Yeah, it's kind of... it's really difficult because we're trying to be responsive to, um, criticism outside of um, people saying that we're definitely part of the gentrification of this area, which we are, but we're trying to, with our programme and the way that we're going, we're trying to steer the organisation, trying to be responsive to that, and trying to be a little bit more responsible in the way that we project ourselves in the area.	3/84-89
ECJF_01	But also like beforehand as well I think, especially in the artist community, especially community-based artists and artists who have more socially-engaged practices, because that's not something that TRS has been... has been part of TRS's output.	3/104-108
ECJF_01	...we've also been trying hard to develop, um, our audiences in, so, with Notes on Queerness, um, which was, um, curated by Joe Cotgrave who you met earlier, so we're trying to develop audiences that would give voices to minority, minority groups...	3-4/124-127
ECJF_01	I think that curatorially in the past, it has been that uber-traditional curatorial approach of an individual having a vision or artist they wish to work with. And executing that vision within a space. And I guess that part of my role here at TRS is to look at how else we might programme, what else can we offer? So I'm currently developing a programme where I have asked community groups to devise proposals, so asked them what would they want to see, to do, how can they use the resources we have here at TRS, and I've almost commissioned them like artists. They get a commissioning fee like they would an artist.	4/130-139
ECJF_01	...so part of my journey as a Director I guess, I programmed an artist called Liv Wynter, and she is very much an advocate for standing up to unpaid work. Um, and that was part of I guess the curatorial move forward.	5/180-183
JW_01	Um... there's a realisation that we have to... we want to up our game in terms of our programme. We've taken our eye off the ball with that over the last few years, year or two, and that's hurting us at the moment. [pause] Hurting us personally because we're frustrated that it's slipped, and hurting us as an organisation because you can do all this but I still think that we need to be producing and... putting stuff out there that we feel is art, that should be being... challenging ourselves and challenging the city and our environment.	19/767-774

JW_01	But, and I think that we probably, and that's where we've hit some art world stuff, because we've not... the white wall gallery stuff has fallen by the wayside. Artists that want to do, perhaps has fallen by the wayside. It's become much more a kind of active... activating... I don't want to say 'activist' because I don't think that's right. But anyway, that's that.	14/508-513
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Experiencing loss or lack		
Interview	Statement	Page/Line
CG_01	...it's very difficult, you know you instantly lose access to your erm, to your studio, to the workshop facilities, access to the kind of criticality, your like tutors and kind of crits, but also that loss of your peers around you and that supportive network and community...	2/34-37
CG_01	and I think because of that kind of lack of definition as well, there needed to be a little bit more thinking around what the roles of different Directors might be.	9/275-277
CG_01	...and everyone kind of moves in and sets up their studios, builds walls, put shelves up you know and makes it their home from home, and then having to kind of transplant that elsewhere is really hard.	16/568-569
CG_01	...and then that kind of happened just as we got the notice on the last building, so it became something a little bit different in a way, it became a project, like this rescue archaeology of like creating this archive and these feelings about leaving that building and going to a new building, and it became a little bit more about that – whether or not, it just naturally became that I guess.	23/805-810
HJLH_01	...a series of different exhibitions responded to the landscape that we were leaving behind...	1/18-19
HJLH_01	One of the artists here, one of the young artists, had helped to set up, it had lasted twelve weeks, it was an absolute tragedy.	3/87-88
HJLH_01	And a lot of the artists had been evicted so quickly from their spaces as well that they were in the middle of projects, or had Arts Council funding for things they had to complete, or you know were about to show work somewhere or, so you know it was, it felt like a crisis...	3/106-109
HJLH_01	It led me to barricading my studio off so they couldn't access it. I had a sign and corrugated metal sheeting up so no-one could go in it, saying 'We are not for sale'.	19/680-682
HJLH_01	Yeah, it's difficult because we haven't got any money at the moment...	21/804-805
HJLH_01	So I think that's what we want to do, kind of invite people to come, but then that also has its issues, cause it means we're spending loads of time, you know, and then you don't have any time to make any work.	22/871-873
HJLH_01	So we need to kind of work out a way as to how we can, er continue, and how I can maintain my practice as an artist... And how Lucy can hold down her job, and also you know, maintain her practice.	23/888-892
HJLH_01	Yeah I mean we'd initially said you know, over the summer, last summer, we would do some travelling and go up and see you know various different studio groups, but we've just not had the time you know.	23-24/911-913
HJLH_01	And I also think the landscape in Manchester has changed quite radically with the loss of International3.	25/986-987
ECJF_01	...the kind of remit I gave them was ideally it would be local, obviously to do with the arts or creative in some way, and also	4/144-147

	where do you think that we're lacking? Where are our blind spots? How can you help, you know, how can you help us out I suppose?	
ECJF_01	Because obviously as well like our capacity as, um, or previously the capacity of, um, voluntary Directors was so, um, yeah, so low because there is just so much to do.	4/162-164
ECJF_01	...I guess we have to blame the capacity of the Directorship at the time, um we were not in a position where we were able to chase up money that we had lost.	8/298-300
ECJF_01	We also yeah, so when talking about autonomy as well, we've lost quite a lot since coming into this building, um, that's something that we want to grab. We want to grasp back.	10/395-397
ECJF_01	Yeah, that was like a huge, it was basically one of the main issues that we had before moving in here, that we were going to lose, um, we were going to lose our autonomy.	11/408-410
ECJF_01	And I feel like they're a lot of work, and a lot of the thing with here is around like capacity...	13/478-480
ECJF_01	Because obviously a Director can be fantastic, for example Joe, who did Notes on Queerness, he worked with Gyro, which is an LGBTQ+ young people's organisation, Homotopia, a city-wide festival but you know, if Joe left tomorrow, potentially those partnerships leave with him.	18/691-694
ECJF_01	It's notoriously terrible, which is kind of why, so Maggie and I were writing the bid together for 2017 to 2018, and we could see that if her and I left when we were supposed to, that all of the knowledge that had been accrued whilst moving here, and all of that, um, all of that development that we'd done, was just going to be completely lost.	19/703-707
DGMN_01	We had a number of months to vacate the premises.	6/206-207
DGMN_01	...the notion that we would move to Gorton, I mean most people were pretty horrified by that weren't they, being realistic, most of the studio holders? Erm, ideally they wanted to stay city centre.	10/375-378
DGMN_01	But I think if we, I think what we need to do is get the consultant to start to make approaches on our behalf, because I think if something's packaged right, and if someone's got a lot of experience in that field, you know we're complete beginners... you know, ah... grants for the arts is our level at the moment, in terms of getting funding.	15/541-545
DGMN_01	Which has mean effectively that anything within the inner ring road has just, whereas in the past you could always find somewhere cheap, now that's completely disappeared.	19/686-688
DGMN_01	Um... I mean a number of smaller studio groups have gone over the past ten years, erm... SIGMA, Sculptors in Greater Manchester Association, they went, they were a sister organisation of MASA. Um, Bankley Studios in Levenshulme have survived, they're a little bit too far out to be... they're in an old knitting factory. And er, Paper Gallery is in a small studio complex just across the border into Salford, in the centre of Manchester at the bottom of Deansgate, so they've survived. Er, International3, the gallery and agency, they've folded, not necessarily because of property speculation.	19/708-715
JW_01	That's where they... they were in a mill there that got knocked down. So that was just, we set up just as they were closing down.	2/65-67

Feeling		
Interview	Statement	Page/Line
CJ_01	Yeah, I think it like, it describes quite well the sort of organisation that we are and that we're independent and that we've been set up by practitioners. Erm, I guess it feels uncomfortable because it doesn't necessarily feel like artists are at the front of leading where it's going.	2/44-47
CJ_01	Which I think is useful when you're talking, which is sort of useful when you're talking to people about money and funding... erm yeah, whether or not I'm comfortable about it, I'm not entirely sure.	9/268-270
CJ_01	Erm yeah, it can be a slightly hostile place to navigate I guess, as a pedestrian, unless you're sort of used to it.	10/295-296
CJ_01	And I think when we set Grand Union up actually, almost everybody was, if not in their early to mid-thirties, they were in their late twenties, so we're all thinking about, OK, we've done our time in these cold warehouse spaces and they're not working for us, how do we change that? And you know now, many of us are in our forties, or nearing our forties, and loads of us have got kids and yeah, stability is really important – stability and visibility is massively important, cause it's really hard to even, just go to different cities and make yourself visible in that way, when you've got a two-year old you can do it to an extent, but not to the extent I used to, just like going to those openings and having the network in that way. And it's something to be visible from here.	14/462-472
CJ_01	We do try and argue it in a way that, although the numbers aren't huge, the quality of that interaction is deep, so it's not like... like Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery have thousands and thousands of people moving through, but they don't necessarily all have a deep engagement with what's happening, whereas you know, people who come through the door here... you've made a journey, so you engage in a much deeper way.	22/761-767
CG_01	Erm they, we all studied together at Newcastle University, we studied Fine Art, the BA there, and when we graduated erm, it erm you know, it's very difficult, you know you instantly lose access to your erm, to your studio, to the workshop facilities, access to the kind of criticality, your like tutors and kind of crits, but also that loss of your peers around you and that supportive network and community.	2/32-37
CG_01	...and then again that kind of not having that space, whether its physical or not, to kind of meet other artists and other peers, and you, you know find out what they're doing, and kind of I guess spark off it really so you get that kind of, you know, in University you would get that kind of practical support, 'Oh I need to move this piece of wood, help me carry this heavy sculpture...' or just to bounce ideas off and kind of chat through... Oh I read this amazing philosophy book, or something like that. But erm so we felt like that was really lacking.	2/50-57
CG_01	And I think you know they wanted to be taken seriously in what	7/208-209

	they, as well in some respects...	
CG_01	Um, so Will Marshall left in, I think, 2013, er to go and do an MA in London, um I think maybe he was getting frustrated with... you know I think the thing with it is because it's a, like a massive undertaking, and it does take, it does consume a lot of your life...	7/220-223
CG_01	Because you know, there's not, there's not enough capacity, there's not ever really enough money, um but there's loads of kind of energy and ambition and desire to like to do all of this stuff...	7/225-227
CG_01	I find it quite interesting actually because he's like, 'I will never work in the arts again, I don't want anything to do with the arts'...	8/236-237
CG_01	...so I'd applied and then they said, oh we want to offer you the job but you, but on the proviso that you come and start in three weeks... so I was like 'fuck,' I was like you know, 'this wasn't the deal, and actually I only work part time... um, feel like you're abandoning me a little bit,' er, so yeah so that was quite difficult also.	9/266-270
CG_01	Like, so everyone really mucks in and gets involved...	9/292
CG_01	Yeah and I think you know, it takes, it's a full-time job really, and for artists who are you know, the time that they have to practice is so precious and it's in between so many other kind of paid and unpaid jobs and responsibilities, that actually when you're asking them to come in and do you know, tax returns, all of this, massive fundraising applications, it becomes very difficult, and I think it can actually harm the, what the project, the organisation, the collective, however you might define it, is trying to do.	11/349-355
CG_01	I mean at the moment, you know it's, I'm very positive about it, because obviously it's four years of confirmed funding, erm, which is, erm, an amazing vote of confidence from the Arts Council in what we do.	15/518-520
CG_01	Because it's very difficult when we've got this building for two years, we might have to move out, we don't know, it might be longer, we're not sure, and everyone kind of moves in and sets up their studios, builds walls, put shelves up you know and makes it their home from home, and then having to kind of transplant that elsewhere is really hard.	16/565-569
CG_01	...and then that kind of happened just as we got the notice on the last building, so it became something a little bit different in a way, it became a project, like this rescue archaeology of like creating this archive and these feelings about leaving that building and going to a new building, and it became a little bit more about that – whether or not, it just naturally became that I guess.	23/805-810
CG_01	...you get kind of, you know you see from each year, more and more graduates deciding to stay, and then you see those graduates setting up their own kind of projects and initiatives and collectives, which is really exciting, erm because they're like, Oh I can you know, this grew out of something from two graduates from University, we can do our own things and we can respond to actually what's needed by our peer group now, and I think that's really exciting. But I think you know there is also like the way in	24/839-849

	which other organisations are working does feel different and there is a bigger drive towards like supporting early career artists, supporting artist development, and I think that is in response to actually seeing that there is a real desire and need for that, erm yeah.	
CG_01	Yeah and I think you know the great thing about the partnership we have with Newcastle University is that they really understand us on our terms, so erm you know there's always the worry really when you enter into a partnership with a big institution, that that snowballs really and they are the owner and they swallow everything up...	25/890-894
HJLH_01	Yeah, I had a programme of exhibitions and events that were called 'Place of Production' and they were responding directly to Rogue's, um yeah, imminent move from a building they'd been in there for fifteen years, and so it was being bought by property developers and was due to be developed into flats and the, um, so through a series of different exhibitions responded to the landscape that we were leaving behind.	1/14-19
HJLH_01	And so it was coming up to that point when we had our open studios, which was the 21 st anniversary of the studio group, it was also the last open studios in that building before we were kicked out, which was supposed to be at Christmas.	2/53-56
HJLH_01	I don't know, it was a small project that kind of grew and it was almost that people came to us, and out of a discussion, and with you know real integrity about what it means to take the city, we kind of gathered people from Hotspur House who'd all been kicked out, NY Space...	2/76-80
HJLH_01	There was Free Space that were kicked out... Oh of course... One of the artists here, one of the young artists, had helped to set up, it had lasted twelve weeks, it was an absolute tragedy.	3/85-88
HJLH_01	And a lot of the artists had been evicted so quickly from their spaces as well that they were in the middle of projects, or had Arts Council funding for things they had to complete, or you know were about to show work somewhere or, so you know it was, it felt like a crisis and it felt like we were on this mission that we had to kind of keep on with it, it had its own momentum if you like.	3/106-111
HJLH_01	It really was extraordinary and you know, we didn't stop really, um, until about a week after the launch when we both ended up with the flu.	5/189-190
HJLH_01	I think the bits that really were worrying them, i.e. death traps, and then they've just done some patch ups...	8/272-273
HJLH_01	But then every building that we've all been in as artists has had leaks in it, you know, or has been this sort of warehouse-type space, erm you know, no heating and various issues, so I don't think it kind of phased any of us in particular. But um I think Urban Splash, there was one area that was you know, like Lucy says, quite dangerous, so you know once we were in here, I think, and I think to be truthful they would probably have left this building to just be warehouse, and just decay, and then knock it down.	8/285-291
HJLH_01	Yeah and I think our initial sort of plans are that we just make ourselves, you know, one of the best studios in Manchester, and	10/365-368

	erm or you know further afield and just sort of make ourselves known and then, you know, hopefully we will be able to build on that and work out our future.	
HJLH_01	So, the Adelphi building was the Salford School of Art, and Rogue was involved in that in the early stages when we started to be kicked, or when we got our marching order from Capital and Centric...	13/489-491
HJLH_01	Anyway, so it's a bit disturbing, these kind of discussions that occur in a sort of hypothetical way when there's on, at grass roots, we are doing it, and we're struggling to do it, because we don't have the expertise in terms of, like Lucy and I, you know it's a really steep learning curve, setting up the studio group, erm, and then, you know, the possibility that somebody's going to come in and bypass all that and just go, 'Oh well, we'll just have this building', and then put the rent up, and the actual artists who've been working hard to get this going are sidelined.	14/525-532
HJLH_01	No exactly, so some of those meetings would be, you know, chaotic, unreasonable, you know, egotistic, so...	16/594-595
HJLH_01	I think so, because you know The Penthouse were a case in point, you know they were in the middle of their Arts Council-funded programme of events and they get like two week's notice to move, and the same with NY Space.	16/599-602
HJLH_01	...and then Phoenix House is... It's just surrounded by cranes. It's constantly being built up around, so... They're like ticking time bombs, and you know we've put, we've been in contact with people from Phoenix House repeatedly because we feel like that's a real on the risk list, isn't it? Yeah, they just keep getting their lease extended by six months.	16-17/606-612
HJLH_01	...the bit at the end which is the artists' kind of, the Q and A, they lopped off because the artists didn't feel comfortable, because some of them were, well reading between the lines, someone from Rogue would have been talking about Capital and Centric, and they've been kind of silenced, they've entered a kind of agreement with Capital and Centric they won't say anything publicly that...	17/628-632
HJLH_01	Yeah that was one of the things that we were really uncomfortable about, which I wasn't, I'm not really sure, well we're free to say what we like, but you know, Capital and Centric, you know they, if there was any slight murmuring of criticism they were straight on you...	17/634-637
HJLH_01	But you know that was something that we were really uncomfortable with, and the way that Capital and Centric had also tried to sort of hijack our open studios by putting up their signs all over the place.	18/661-663
HJLH_01	It led me to barricading my studio off so they couldn't access it.	19/680
HJLH_01	Yeah and then proceeded to meet three people in there and then talk about how fantastic the view was, and how much money... and they were people who were putting money into the development, um I was sat there, kind of I'd turned my radio off and was like listening, but still also horrified. And I know that you know, we're just talking different languages and that is their modus operandi and it's very different to ours but it was a bit unpalatable.	19/689-695

HJLH_01	And then the public discussions that happened on Twitter were often, sort of, got slightly out of hand in terms of the public wading in and going, 'Capitalist bastards! Kicking out the artists!' and stuff, but that wasn't from us, that was from the general public that obviously, they didn't lap that up very well, so we got kind of slapped for that, rather unfairly.	19/697-701
HJLH_01	Yeah, we've had a very good relationship with the Arts Council so far, they've been very supportive.	19/706-707
HJLH_01	Yes, very quickly in succession actually, because, um, and they kind of understood that we needed that, so yeah that was brilliant.	20/719-720
HJLH_01	With the City Council. I'm not altogether sure what that means, but...	20/727-723
HJLH_01	So again that's great, because you know you're getting that kind of... yeah that endorsement of artists going for it, and just challenging what they're doing, and not keeping things ticking over, and being victims of circumstances.	20-21/798-801
HJLH_01	Yeah, it's difficult because we haven't got any money at the moment.	21/804-805
HJLH_01	So how do we, um, create a sustainable creative community, um, creative careers for ourselves you know, how could we develop and create opportunities outside of you know, relying on the galleries in Manchester, because you know that's been another thorn in the side of artists in Manchester hasn't it, that there's a bit of a glass ceiling and those opportunities stop at a certain level.	22/849-854
HJLH_01	Yeah, and you know we do have this loose kind of core group who are supportive, and most people in the studios are supportive, but I think that support was something that was very key to us getting off the ground and started, and I sense that that support will just, you know, now dissipate as everyone goes back into their own worlds and you know, carries on with what they need to do.	23/882-887
HJLH_01	We've made a massive amount of progress in the first [inaudible] months but I feel the next twelve months is kind of really quite tricky.	23/902-903
HJLH_01	I think you know we are, it's just such a steep learning curve and the, you know, for me as well you know, the kind of pull is to go back and just do the artist... just go back into my studio and shut the door and carry on.	25/973-975
HJLH_01	And I also think the landscape in Manchester has changed quite radically with the loss of International3.	25/986-987
HJLH_01	You know, there is nobody now who is actually looking after artists and I think we could do that here, you know, it's like, we could be that go-to place that International3 was, um, because quite a few of the artists they represent are here.	26/989-992
ECJF_01	So initially I actually applied to be an Artistic Director, when they had their last open call, erm except when I sort of got in my interview I sort of fessed up that actually I wasn't that bothered about curating any exhibitions, which is probably a bit bizarre to say in an interview which I suppose was looking for people to do shows, erm my interest for wanting to get more involved with the organisation was I feel that TRS is viewed as somewhere that's very cliquey, it's very white, it's very able-bodied, it's not very accessible or inclusive, and in my practice that's what I'm very	1/23-32

	interested in, so I wanted to get involved to see if I could help in some way or contribute something.	
ECJF_01	...so we recently had a property developer, I guess this wasn't that recent, but when we first moved we had a property developer called Place First, who um, came to us to, um I guess propositioned us to have a space in the Welsh Streets, to take on a domestic building as part of a kind of like studio development.	3/92-96
ECJF_01	I don't believe, I fervently don't believe that there is a place for unpaid roles at this scale any more. I think it's an outmoded and outdated model and I think it's dangerous.	5/172-174
ECJF_01	People defend the model of the unpaid martyr, but it doesn't actually work and it's really damaging.	5/194-196
ECJF_01	Maggie and I really strongly felt this, and so this is when we started developing and writing, um, an Arts Council um bid that would develop these roles so that in the future we won't have to ask people to work for free.	5/200-203
ECJF_01	And the other part, or maybe the Trustees completely recognise that it borders sometimes on exploitative, it can be damaging to people's wellbeing...	6/216-217
ECJF_01	Every building that we've ever stayed in, we've been kicked out by developers, we've been treated badly by landlords, we've been hit with ridiculous bills that we haven't had an option but to pay.	8/294-297
ECJF_01	So the way this whole move happened, it was my first day of being a Director, in 2015, and I was brought in to have a meeting with this guy that I didn't know, with another Director who had been there longer than me. And we were told that there had been some conversations with somebody from TRS about moving TRS to the Baltic area. And we were like err... I mean I was scared, I was really scared, I didn't know what to do.	8/309-315
ECJF_01	...we were on the edge of being chucked out, we were going to be given a month to leave. We weren't really, we didn't really have any other options, apart from, well, we could have stayed put and crossed our fingers.	9/326-328
ECJF_01	Even the part of town that we were in was inaccessible. It wasn't just the building, it was everything about it. And it was in kind of like, I wouldn't say it was a dangerous part of town, but um, there was like a lot of squatters around the area that we were in, well maybe yeah, people, people, it wasn't a welcoming area at all.	9-10/357-361
ECJF_01	You know, we don't have to create everything from scratch. We do have things in place. So, it's meant yeah, sometimes it's frustrating, but sometimes actually it's enabled.	11/431-433
ECJF_01	I very much have felt that... larger institutions such as Liverpool Biennial, um, maybe even Tate Liverpool, kind of like sweep in and out when they want something done cheaply.	12/447-450
ECJF_01	I think it's a tense relationship.	14/536-537
ECJF_01	Rather than coming to us at the beginning and saying, 'We're planning this...' it's, they've planned all of it and it's gone right, what else can we squeeze in. And it's usually for very little money and it becomes quite stressful for us then to try to propose anything.	14/543-546
ECJF_01	I mean one of my worries is that by developing our organisation further, we become further and further away from the artist-led.	18/671-673
ECJF_01	But I guess to make that all work, and make people not be completely stressed out and wanting to leave, it just needs people	18/687-689

	in place to be like you know what, I know how all the finance works, or you know what, I have relationships with all these people in the city and I can get a meeting.	
DGMN_01	Our names were on the lease for the three floors of Crusader Mill that we rented from a private landlord. So really you know, beneath the internal governance structure of the voluntary steering and selection committees, the hard tack... the hard brass tacks were that you know Martin and I took all the, full financial responsibility for the studios, payment of rent, and we er, er organised, with help from studios members, organised the annual open studios event, um and you know, managed the day-to-day running of the studios. So it had the appearance of a, of a participatory democracy, but really most, or, if not all of the responsibility fell to Martin and I. Legally. Realistically, it fell to us. If anything went wrong, you know.	2-3/64-74
DGMN_01	And you know, we'd demonstrated financial responsibility by surviving that long...	4/117-118
DGMN_01	Up to the point when we were a CIC Martin had to do a lot of chasing with some people to get the rent paid, as you can imagine. So because our houses, our financial well-being was dependent on that rent being paid, so although everyone had agreed in writing, I don't think that document was legally binding.	4/127-131
DGMN_01	And you know, I think they were trying to set up a, establish an amicable working relationship. Which they did do, you know, they were very responsible really, and very supportive, and we had regular fortnightly meetings with them.	7/227-230
DGMN_01	But the personal enthusiasm of the Council officers we dealt with, for us as an organisation, and for the building, was clear. It was demonstrable. It wasn't just a case of, 'let's get these people in to save this building.' There was genuine enthusiasm, and real concern that you know, the Council should be seen to be supporting artistic production...	8/289-294
DGMN_01	Erm, the idea being that if we shouted loud enough the Council, or someone, would provide us with um... and that was certainly, Dave and I received quite a bit of pressure that that's what we should be doing.	10/381-383
DGMN_01	I think they felt we were being fobbed off, pushed out to the margins.	11/387-388
	There's also... a certain number of studio members were concerned, rightly, about their own personal safety at night between here and the station which is directly next door.	12/437-439
DGMN_01	So there was a whole host of perceptions about you know, safety, convenience... you know... some people were upset and slightly resentful that the Council appeared to be giving us short change in that they probably had nicer buildings or bigger schools even closer to the middle.	12/441-445
DGMN_01	But we got through it you know, we did get through it.	16/592
DGMN_01	And then yeah, dropped. 2008, 2009 those plans disappeared, those plots remained car parks, temporary car parks, and we were safe, you know, at Rogue.	19/694-695
JW_01	And we've talked about this quite a bit recently, about what that meant, for us, having come from the outside and not being educated in the Universities here, or the Colleges. So we were	1/27-30

	complete outsiders.	
JW_01	There's been additions such as Nicola [Greenan] coming and joining us, um and very much, have gone through quite, a kind of very difficult growth, it feels like it to us.	3/86-88
JW_01	And there was this bit where it was kind of, well we, we were getting frustrated with our job roles and it was how we were becoming employed by essentially our art practice.	4/136-138
JW_01	Yeah and so that's kind of, we were very clear that this was our IP. And we did offer up a cut-off point, but it was, it was just a tricky sit[uation], it was a point at which we were struggling with the Board and where our roles were.	4/143-146
JW_01	And I think that's allowed us to maintain the ethos, where we at times almost thrown it away, right we're off cause we can't deal with that.	6/243-254
JW_01	Of everything else, and of the Arts Council, and we've allowed ourselves to be... we've seen them be completely inept, and fantastic.	7/257-259
JW_01	I think... we've carried on regardless, Karen and me, whatever the void we've been existing in, and you occasionally get people saying 'that's been great, you've done really well.' You also get people saying, 'what the hell are you doing? You shouldn't be doing that', so it's quite hard to... you're always in that balance.	7/269-273
JW_01	I suppose because I kind of feel that we've challenged things, I think the hardest points have been being listened to. Sometimes it's as basic as that.	7/279-281
JW_01	I've never used this before but it probably for me and Karen feels more like a family,	9/374-375
JW_01	Outside of the city centre, did great things in the building, and then perhaps because mine and Karen's energies had dropped, um, energies drop, there are shifts, the people are doing other things in the city, things move around so you get new things setting up, new organisations setting up and that first flush of oh you can do anything.	10-11/416-420
JW_01	It'd be crazy, we'd just feel so vulnerable. The amount of stress that that alleviates, or takes away, by owning the building. We don't have to think about it.	13/450-452
JW_01	Because the funding was so fragile.	14/493-494
JW_01	And just one thing we were saying, and this is an example of where we really get frustrated, and we have, and we were quite angry last week, which is that we'd said yes to a... I can't remember what it was and who it was with, but it was an Arts Council thing working with another company and it was to, for organisations to take a disabled person, whatever, into the organisation, and for those organisations to try and then work out what they needed to make it so we could do that...	20/750-759
JW_01	So we came in as an outsider. I think... I think we're challenging our own chip on our shoulder really hard at the moment, to try and feel like, to say that we're not outsiders. We know that we were always perceived as outsiders because we didn't have any of the connections when we arrived, and... The example I was thinking of was Sheffield, where S1 was set up by University...	20-21/777-782
JW_01	It's like, so in that sense I still do, but I think we... for ourselves we've probably come to terms that we're outsiders, but we er... but we are enjoying being... because what's that given us? A	21/790-793

	freedom to go anywhere, which is what we're doing.	
JW_01	We... people now come to us, and I will, it's kind of, I'm proud. I'm not arrogant about it, but I'm proud.	21/802-803

Going back to the beginning		
Interview	Statement	Page/Line
CJ_01	When we set up, maybe if I go back to the beginning... When we set up we were a big collective of artists and curators and really wanted to kind of fill a gap in Birmingham that... that... yeah... create a facility that didn't exist at that time: which was kind of decent studio space that was affordable, so somewhere that was like dry and heatable, erm, but also to provide a space where curators that were just starting out could try out their practice.	1/9-15
CJ_01	Also at the beginning, like the artists were very much, the studio artists were very much involved with the setting up of the organisation, but as soon as the studios were sort of built and that facility was there, it didn't feel like they needed to be involved with the running of the organisation so much.	1/22-25
CJ_01	And I guess like, in terms of the roots of Grand Union, it's always been about building a community and building a space that a community can work in, can come to, can exist in, have dialogue in and find ways to connect with people outside of this building I guess.	4/88-91
CJ_01	But yeah, it's sort of thinking that we're going beyond being a collective of people, erm, trying to address quite an immediate problem...	9/261-262
CJ_01	And I think when we set Grand Union up actually, almost everybody was, if not in their early to mid-thirties, they were in their late twenties...	14/462-464
CJ_01	Yeah and I guess, I think that from the start that's how we set up as well. We didn't set up with a short-termist view really, it was always about the long term and how we can make things a bit more steady.	15/487-490
CJ_01	Er no, we were a company from the start. There were five of us as Directors on the company and then a couple of extra sort of advisory people that weren't like legally Directors, but were directly involved with the organisation.	18/601-604
CG_01	Yeah, er, so the NewBridge Project is, um, an artist-led organisation, er, it was established in 2010 by two Fine Art graduates from Newcastle University, /// um, and we set out trying to, er, provide affordable studio space to artists, especially early career, as well as opportunities.	1/7-10
CG_01	And although they were occupying, they had studios in that building also, and it was, the other studios were um, were occupied by all of their peers really, from Newcastle University, different universities, um and it was kind of led by that group at the beginning, so I think there were around 15-20 artists at the beginning...	7/200-204
CG_01	...and in the beginning they did it voluntary, because there was no money for an artist to be paid...	7/209-210
HJLH_01	Okay, well erm Lucy and I were both members at Rogue before, and I guess that's how we both met...	1/10-11
ECJF_01	So it was started up by three graduates from LJMU in Toxteth, just up the road from here, in an old pub, and then um it quickly outgrew that and became like a cohort of ten to twelve artists...	2/70-73

DGMN_01	Yeah well, Rogue was formed in 1995 erm, and we're an artists' studios provider.	1/12-13
DGMN_01	Well, I suppose just going way back, Rogue was set up by a man called Colin Sinclair, in association with a textile company called Diane Harrison, a textile design company.	1/23-25
JW_01	In a nutshell. er, what is East Street Arts? East Street Arts... let's... I'll do the official stuff as it were.... So East Street Arts is a charity, er, a visual arts charity set up as... it is also a company limited by guarantee, so it has a set of Trustees, Directors within the company. It was founded by myself and Karen Watson in 1993, and... and has grown from being two artists with two thousand square foot in a mill in Leeds to being, er an organisation that now deals with half a million square foot of building space across the country.	1/8-15
JW_01	So it started off with me and Karen and with initially eight artists' spaces in the mill which, eight artists' spaces which also had a social space and a shared resource space and also a space potentially which grew into a space where artists could exhibit, but it wasn't ideal. [...] And, so that started off in 2000 and then it just... it grew... myself and Karen as artists doing ceramics arrived in Leeds.	1/20-30

Having a sense of their place in things		
Interview	Statement	Page/Line
CJ_01	When we set up, maybe if I go back to the beginning, when we set up we were a big collective of artists and curators and really wanted to kind of fill a gap in Birmingham that... that... yeah... create a facility that didn't exist at that time, which was kind of decent studio space that was affordable, so somewhere that was like dry and heatable, erm, but also to provide a space where curators that were just starting out could try out their practice.	1/10-16
CJ_01	...we provide a co-working space for BCU graduates that they can use for twelve months, for free...	2/30-31
CJ_01	I guess there are other places that describe themselves as 'artist run', cause the artists are running the place, which feels like it's slightly different.	3/63-65
CJ_01	Yeah, totally. And I feel like maybe actually it's the artistic community that we feel very much part of. Whereas bigger institutions, for instance the Ikon, wouldn't sit within that in quite the same way.	3/78-80
CJ_01	Erm, so for that we're, there's like bursary spaces for West Midlands emerging curators and, but then we're inviting people from all over the country, so our participants came from Aberdeen, Middlesbrough and Wales and all over the place.	5/120-123
CJ_01	Yeah, it's funny that term gets bandied around so much, I guess it's thinking about, thinking about the 'artist-led' isn't it and that position within the wider visual art scene.	6/147-149
CJ_01	If we talk about it in this city, in Birmingham, so I guess you've got... it feels wrong to talk about sizes of organisation, but you've got an organisation like Ikon that is, is much bigger, than anyone else, because they get a million pounds a year or whatever, funding wise they're much bigger and they employ more people, erm... and then you have kind of BMAC, so they're like the big institutions and then it feels like in Birmingham, all of the other visual arts things are in the artist-led kind of sector, even though they're at different stages.	6/149-156
CJ_01	Yeah, and a hierarchy.	7/205
CJ_01	And I guess what it perhaps then doesn't describe is how all of those things are connected horizontally, so there's people that work here and are involved here that might have a job at Ikon. I think yeah, if you think about a city and its artistic scene... or community..., network or ecology... erm, it needs to support lots of different things at the same time doesn't it, so... like we're providing studio space that people pay for, but there needs to be jobs in the city for those people to do, because often visual artists can't survive just through their practice. Erm... which I think in cities particularly outside of London... it's often a tricky thing isn't it because there's often not enough institutions or places that provide paid work for those people to work in, erm it sort of puts a bit of a cap on how big the scene can get in a way.	8/212-223
CJ_01	It sort of feels like that description [becoming an institution]... there's a status thing there isn't there?	9/265-266
CJ_01	So yeah, what those planners mean when they say 'keeping the	10/296-302

	character' is a difficult thing to define. There are quite a few listed buildings around here, so in some ways a lot of the character will stay, um, they're talking about wanting to retain the area as a cultural quarter or hub, or whatever terminology they're using, so there are artistic and creative types here, using the place.	
CJ_01	So we're entering into conversation with them about that, actually through... one of our Board members is a property developer and has been able to, er, hook us up with people that we wouldn't have contact with usually.	10/303-305
CJ_01	We feel like it's important that there's contemporary visual artists and space for those people in the city centre, and that it's seen as an important part of the city's activity and that it's not pushed to the fringes all the time. So yeah, we're trying to make those arguments at the moment, and that 'affordable space' doesn't mean affordable to film and TV, or graphic designers, but that's a different level of affordability, and obviously we're trying to make that work, day to day, for our business model, but we're trying to get funding from people like the LEP and from HS2 as well as Arts Council and HLF in order to make that feasible.	11/329-338
CJ_01	It's something that I'm really thinking through at the moment, not only because we're trying to create arguments to get hold of this building, but I'm also thinking about, you know, our position within the arts community and how we're seen, and what we're... I feel like we're really trying to just grab hold of a little bit of the nightmare of capitalism.	11/355-359
CJ_01	It's hard, because there are lots of people that will get displaced, there's no doubt about it, and the great thing about this area at the moment, is you know, there are so many erm, kind of like industrial business around here, so you can get things fabricated on the doorstep, so what does that mean for our future studio holders, like is it actually an attractive place to have a studio, if you haven't got that ecology around you, to produce those things...	12/395-401
CJ_01	I think in terms of the gallery space and the profile of that, it's really important that that's in the city centre because it means that more people visit us, not only from the city but from outside the city. I also think there's like an ideological thing with the city and that so often artists get kind of looked over, or are completely invisible, and I think it's really important that we're not, cause we're a vital part of the city's make-up and then, you know, the reason that I want to go to other cities is to go and see other artist-led spaces often, and galleries and shows, or studios even, that kind of thing.	13/423-431
CJ_01	Yeah, or want to be, and I think the tricky thing with that is a lot of the outputs associated with that are, is economic and its about quite big numbers in terms of contribution to the economy and jobs and that kind of thing, which is very different from us, and the core organisation we still have a small number of jobs but we'll be providing jobs for self-employed people and that that has a different economy around it. And then we've got this like visitor economy of people coming to see the space and interacting with that, but again it's not huge numbers, so that's where the tension is.	21/728-735
CJ_01	We do try and argue it in a way that, although the numbers aren't	22/761-769

	huge, the quality of that interaction is deep, so it's not like... like Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery have thousands and thousands of people moving through, but they don't necessarily all have a deep engagement with what's happening, whereas you know, people who come through the door here... you've made a journey, so you engage in a much deeper way. So that's something that we're grappling with, trying to put into a figure that can be understood by those people.	
CG_01	So... er interestingly in the master plan there is no mention of culture.	21/741-742
CG_01	Er I think they're open to looking at culture in the redevelopment, erm, but I think it's like a type of culture that they might understand, erm so you know like the Seven Stories, er children's book organisation, or you know something like that I imagine is what they might imagine as the culture that they might want.	22/751-755
CG_01	I mean yeah that says something to me about the importance of erm of these space to the Council, and I think there is starting to be a massive recognition of not just like us, but you've got buildings – Commercial Union House, Bamburgh House, that are also full of kind of artists, arts organisations, community organisations, and groups, er, of what a loss it would be. I still don't think they quite understand the extent of that loss, because I don't think they understand the actual value.	22/770-776
CG_01	But it's also about that choice to come as well, I want to come and study in Newcastle. Because of an amazing kind of independent culture. Loads of independent shops, cafés, and like an amazing kind of creative community that's feeding into you know your music scene, your like theatre, performance, like visual arts, you know, digital, all of those things...	22/784-788
CG_01	But I mean I think it has changed the whole landscape of the city in a way, you kind of get more graduates that are staying here to kind of create careers in the north east instead of automatically moving to London or Glasgow or Berlin. You get kind of, you know you see from each year, more and more graduates deciding to stay, and then you see those graduates setting up their own kind of projects and initiatives and collectives, which is really exciting, erm because they're like, Oh I can you know, this grew out of something from two graduates from University, we can do our own things and we can respond to actually what's needed by our peer group now, and I think that's really exciting.	23-24/836-845
HJLH_01	But yeah, through that we had quite a lot of animated discussions about how important it was to stay in the city and that artists shouldn't be moved out.	1/22-24
HJLH_01	I was reasonably happy to stay in Rogue but didn't want to move out of the city and I think it was fair to say that a lot of artists didn't want to move to Gorton either, but erm, and there was this kind of um proposal that the production would move to Salford, because there was also discussion going on about the Adelphi, and how Islington Mill was here, there was this ribbon of sort of creativity on the Salford Manchester border, Caustic Coastal... a cultural ecology that you could join and actually have strength in numbers rather than um this idea of going it alone...	1/30-36
HJLH_01	Richard Lees and Maria Balshaw all came down to the open studios, and Tom Bloxham as well, and after that Tom Bloxham	2/56-60

	got in touch and said would we like to go and have a meeting with him to discuss the crisis in studio provision in Manchester...	
HJLH_01	... we'll be better able to cement ourselves quickly within the kind of landscape of the city.	4/119-120
HJLH_01	Yeah, they're all working in the Lowry, and Manchester Art Gallery and the Whitworth and so on, so um they sort of, when they weren't working in those places, were building and...	4/153-155
HJLH_01	And we worked towards that through the summer, and that was a kind of pretty much an ambitious idea, erm, we decided we'd take, we'd have the open studio launch during the Manchester Contemporary at the end of October, but we'd also take a booth at the Manchester Contemporary which we'd self fund, and we would have the open studios and a party and an inaugural show.	5/166-171
HJLH_01	And it was also the quality of the people who came, so we had um quite a lot of people from the local area who had heard about, you know, what we were doing. So a few people from the tower blocks there, and that we met over the course of the evening, but um we also had a really good contingency from the Manchester Contemporary [...] I'm struggling to think of anybody else now but lots of the galleries came, oh um, Copperfield – I can't remember his name. But you know, they were all here, so they all sort of came after the Manchester Contemporary to here, erm which was fantastic and kind of immediately... Oh Vane came... and then we had Tom Bloxham giving a speech where he sort of pledged his support and spoke about the importance of artists in cities, and erm the Mayor of Salford came along.	6/195-207
HJLH_01	We thought he wasn't going to come because he hadn't responded and we wanted him to speak, but um he just did, spontaneously, so that was fantastic and he was really good, he kind of spoke very passionately about the importance of grass roots, sort of, creative things happening.	6/210-213
HJLH_01	Yes, and this kind of cultural strategy programme, cultural strategy plan that they have in Salford, which he's part of pushing forward... Which we were keen to tap into, from even quite early days, when meeting people from Salford Council who were very kind of forthcoming with information about the cultural strategy and how we might tie into it, so...	6/216-220
HJLH_01	I guess as well partially the reason why we just put that aside and pursued was because we wanted to have a relationship with Urban Splash so that we would have, be partnered with someone with a bit more clout, whether that is something we continue to do in the long term I don't know but at that time it felt like, something you know... Seemed like the right thing to do.	8/292-297
HJLH_01	I think it's a tricky conversation, this thing about artists working with developers and everything, but I guess our feeling is that you know it depends on who the developer is and we know, we're not naïve about the motives that Urban Splash would like, um want to work with artists cause it raises their profile...	9/308-312
HJLH_01	And there's been a lot of debate around Capital and Centric and how they are working with artists and how their sort of um, their motives... Their marketing campaign and the way that they try to manage their public image.	9/318-321
HJLH_01	And you the fact that you know we do want this space to be, you know, kind of used by groups and we have the gallery and that	12/427-432

	will be hireable, so you know we've had the University of Salford photography show before Christmas, and it felt like, really, we feel like you're relevant in the city, you're kind of creating those dialogues and therefore, a bit more of a case to stay, you know, rather than having a closed door policy.	
HJLH_01	Yes, we've had the Head of Development from Salford City Council come down to see us... I guess we feel better able, at least she understands our activity, she's been down, and you know, she's a good ally to have really.	13/466-471
HJLH_01	Oh that was part of it, that you know, they were talking about these migratory artists from London, who you could say couldn't afford to live in London any more, they were moving to Manchester.	14/509-511
HJLH_01	Helen Wewiora, when we last saw her, was talking about an artist who's in London, who's using a studio in Bolton, and coming up, making work and going back home at the weekends, because it's cheaper.	14/516-518
HJLH_01	...and then, you know, the possibility that somebody's going to come in and bypass all that and just go, 'Oh well, we'll just have this building', and then put the rent up, and the actual artists who've been working hard to get this going are sidelined.	14/529-532
HJLH_01	But I do know that Tom is working with the cultural strategy team with Salford, because they've appointed a consultancy group, which are an international consultancy group... this sort of consultancy group that have worked in other cities, so they've worked in New York, with Brooklyn and Dumbo, you know, and so they managed to kind of ring-fence an area for artists' studios and creative industries...	15/554-561
HJLH_01	They didn't have any artists on the steering committee.	15/566-567
HJLH_01	Greater Manchester have suddenly mobilised and said oh, we need a rapid response studio consultancy group, which is kind of made up of, yeah, arts organisations, people from the various ones, so Manchester Art Gallery, Castlefield, Lindsey Taylor from Salford University art collection, and various other people, but again there's no artists on that, kind of expressedly I think because I think they had a bad track record with um, artists being involved before, so...	16/583-589
HJLH_01	But you know that was something that we were really uncomfortable with, and the way that Capital and Centric had also tried to sort of hijack our open studios by putting up their signs all over the place. [...] So that last open studios, there was well, Sam called it 'hipster board', and it had like you know, stencils of 'Crusader', they'd come up with some new branding for it, so they tried to brand the opens studios [inaudible]. And they had this kind of Hollywood sign saying 'Capital and Centric', and they also had loads of sort of artisan coffee shops outside and stuff. Yeah, street food vendors and um...	18/661-672
HJLH_01	...and that is to do with the politics of our location in terms of this actual space. And also, our position politically in Manchester, as artists and studios. And whether we do have any say in the way that the city	21/810-816

	develops as well, can we have, what position do we have, you know, kind of, with any agency to help stop, you know, kind of the homogenisation of the city, you know.	
ECJF_01	...and then we moved to, like er, northern Liverpool and we were there for like eight years, nine years maybe. Er... we moved back here, um, because we were on the edge of being pushed out by gentrification there, but now we seem, we are caught up right in the centre of it here...	2/73-77
ECJF_01	I don't believe, I fervently don't believe that there is a place for unpaid roles at this scale any more. I think it's an outmoded and outdated model and I think it's dangerous. I think it's a bad thing to be honest, and I think that it also just further scaffolds an ecology in the arts where people with privilege get further, because who else can do unpaid roles?	5/172-177
DGMN_01	Yes, and we'd become... we'd slowly become a major civic asset for Manchester Council you know, even without trying you know. Our Open Studios particularly attracted a lot of attention, press attention. We were mentioned in guides to Manchester and we were you know, when we'd have exhibitions we would have a lot of students, undergraduate, postgraduate, you know, members of the public coming in, and there was a real sense of something happening you know, at grass roots level, at the studio.	7/248-254
DGMN_01	So we want a kind of mix of fine artists in the main building here and community based arts organisations in the front building, which is a bit more, a little bit more comfortable, so that we can create this ecology on the site, involving fine artists who may or may not want to work in a community setting, but with dedicated community arts organisations who can freely collaborate with the artists on the basis of sort of spontaneous... combustion if you like. So we're trying to create a sort of mini-ecology that can benefit the local residents but also the sort of wider region.	8-9/301-309
DGMN_01	Well, we talked to Maria in various settings you know, she's been a friend to the studio for quite a long time, she's come to the Open Studios event, we've been to conferences and participated in discussions, and I think her vision is very much... you know the emphasis is very much international, bringing the best international talent to the city, through the Manchester Art Gallery and the Whitworth, and also through the Manchester International Festival, and that's fantastic but her cultural vision for the development of the region up to, er, 2020, also involves nurturing talent closer to home. So developing the talent base in the area. And I think you know, encouraging us to take on this building is part of that vision.	10/348-357
DGMN_01	But we talked to Maria, you know I talked to Maria about this and she said well, artists have got to get used to, you know, conceiving of their orbit as a broader thing. You know when they look at a city map, artists in London would commute from one side to the other to find studio space.	11/388-392
DGMN_01	I mean we're at the edge of a redevelopment corridor here, due east from the city centre. [...] So it's not as though the redevelopment isn't heading in this direction.	12/425-433
DGMN_01	But then when I was sent that document I was also accidentally sent the memo of an internal Council meeting where they'd convened to address how they were going to realise the targets	18/658-668

	she'd set, so. And this internal meeting, er... amongst the minutes of that, where they'd addressed each point on the cultural vision, erm there was some material about Rogue Studios as an exemplar of their addressing the issue of nurturing artistic production in the region, encouraging artistic production. So we are their, one of their key examples of how they're addressing that, the need to nurture creativity and artistic production. And we would have hoped that and expected that really, because we are the biggest studio in the region and one of the longest standing.	
DGMN_01	I think rightly or wrongly there was a general understanding that Salford was more supportive of production, and Manchester as a city was more supportive of presentation.	20/721-723
JW_01	And we took on a role within the city of being an advocate as well as this kind of very grounded route. There was an advocacy role in terms of there wasn't any sort of visual arts culture in the city.	2/50-52
JW_01	I think... I think there's always been, right from sort of day one, the sense because we'd set it up, or we started it... we'd always, I think there's something about spotting the gap, and that's one thing I often talk about, is where are the gaps, and where can you go and be in, where can artists go and be in and it's spotting those gaps and going and filling them and putting art in those spaces.	5/189-194
JW_01	I think that's the bit about the psychological work that's been done in terms of the advocacy in a city, where you've seen something... if we'd have come to a city that had a fully-formed visual arts scene would we have done the same thing, and I don't know whether we would.	5/197-201
JW_01	...with the Arts Council I think it is the being listened... it is the being listened to and the bigger picture that they are, and were set up for performance, opera, that's their history, and have never detached themselves from that. Whatever they say, whatever they do, they have never detached themselves from that.	7/282-286
JW_01	I think we found that at the beginning, I think definitely we felt that from the early days, being able to put Leeds City Council's logo on things, and putting the Arts Council's logo on things, but we pay, I think we pay very little lip service to it, and so we kind of like... right we got that... I don't know, maybe we felt that we'd earned it, we'd deserved it in a way.	8/312-316
JW_01	So I think that our round of people who have gone through it, who have set, have now come to fruition as it were, fifteen years later, that we've actually shown that you can do it and that you can sustain it, and you become quite, and whether that's felt like then to other younger organ... it's been quite a gap I think, that's quite a gap, that's been fifteen years let's say before anyone else has really started to think about it, that actually that's a possibility again. And I don't know what that... but perhaps there's more self-awareness, either because we've become the ones who've achieved it, have become much more self-aware how special it is. Or that academia has caught up and actually they're being taught that finally, and that's taken so long to kind of catch up with where we were back then, but that is actually a thing and is a possibility. And I think that's what perhaps what it is, because over the last five years that's what's been coming, it's been people coming and visiting us, coming and seeing what we're	9/339-353

	doing, and talking to us.	
JW_01	Um, so this area, it's what we're not focused on and we're really trying to say we can do all this national and big stuff, but we've got to translate that back into our neighbourhood. A Neighbourhood Plan is one of the things we're looking at.	12/472-476
JW_01	And it's waited, everything's waited for so long down there, there have been empty plots, everything gets knocked down and they've started building. So it's going to be rapid, so being able to secure Mary Studios next door is really crucial, hopefully working with MAP so they can secure something there, and I think that's it. You... the reality that's it. You're not going to get more than that in this area.	12/485-490
JW_01	...we learnt this from Rotterdam, Janna and er Camille, who we know over there... so Janna van Huiswick and Camille Bugen-Bad, and their approach, and their appropriation of funds, and the different way that art can go and be something to deliver what art needs to deliver to answer something else within society. So important.	14/504-508
JW_01	Yeah, and that's where it's been fantastic with Nicola [Greenan], and the long-term relationships that we've developed over the years have started to... not come out in er, not come out in anything yet, but and you don't know where they're going to come out and partly you have to feel like... it's about building trust with the developer, and the art-washing syndrome that might happen... that's SOYO, it's an artwash, culture... culture crap. And er, and it's trying to get those relationships with developers, and our whole temporary space thing has brought that understanding and knowledge about how they work and what goes on, and actually a reality check of what have you got that they can use, and that is the term, they can use to benefit them, but you've got to be realistic about that and understand that.	15/560-570
JW_01	So thinking about that, and thinking about the artists in the city, I think there's an opportunity for more organisations, more artist groups, to develop, set up, to make their groupings... whether there's a desire from those individuals to see it, I don't know from the current crop of artists coming out of universities, cause I don't know what's being funnelled at them to say, 'You can do this'. [...] I think the city... or perhaps it's my wish, I want there to be a different side which is actually, you know, artists live and work here. And that, that I think is something I'd like to see.	17/648-659
JW_01	Yeah, we're the third biggest village in the country.	18/671
JW_01	So I always say, so I say the visual arts has collapsed in Manchester, I think they'd probably chase me through the streets because of that. But it feels like it never lived up to its expectations, or it's never lived up to its potential, from a... I suppose you go back to this independent viewpoint, cause I'm always looking... whereas you... where's your driving... where's the drive... where do you want to get to, eventually? Is it just a colony of artists, and what does that do for a city? Because what will that do?	18/674-678
JW_01	And so I think there's... with the council, with the city, I think things are coming up. I think the Sculpture Triangle International, some of the things they are saying about how they want to attract sculptors to the region is all good, but where? Particularly within	18/692-698

	that triangle, and yeah, I'd love to be part of that. And... but I am, it's kind of, where? Cause that's... yeah, it's how you run those things, and who's going to run them and how much is that going to cost?	
JW_01	You know, we've become an SSO now, so that's, there's a national remit to go and help and support organisations around the country.	19/715-717
JW_01	Oh yeah, what was the other thing, 2023? I think it's something again, they're top-down things. Whatever it said about it being a... it became about the big boys with their, or big girls with their...	20/741-744
JW_01	And it's the Arts Council are just saying it's the big voices, it's the big characters that go to... some are really interesting but overall it's just business as usual, I have to say.	20/750-752
JW_01	I'm pleased that Nicola is able to go and talk to Chief Execs around the region. She just goes and arranges meetings with them now, couldn't get through the door before. /// And that... and part of that is just trying to build the relationships with the universities. We feel like it was one of the things that have... it's not held us back, we've just weren't part of them. We were never from them so we never had the connections with them, so I think the connections that could have (810)grown and happened never did.	21/803-810
JW_01	I think there is loads to be done there about how the University engage fully... in the same locality as we're trying to do, and how we then keep artists in the city. And attract other artists from outside of the city, to make it a really bonkers place.	21/814-817

Having value/s		
Interview	Statement	Page/Line
CJ_01	Erm, we're sort of in the artist-led...er...field, I guess. But I don't like calling us artist-led because although we've got a couple of artists on our Board I feel like we're more curator-led as an organisation.	1/6-8
CJ_01	When we set up we were a big collective of artists and curators and really wanted to kind of fill a gap in Birmingham that... that... yeah... create a facility that didn't exist at that time, which was kind of decent studio space that was affordable, so somewhere that was like dry and heatable, erm, but also to provide a space where curators that were just starting out could try out their practice.	1/11-16
CJ_01	...we provide a co-working space for BCU graduates that they can use for twelve months, for free, /// and that's really about encouraging collaboration between disciplines.	2/30-32
CJ_01	Yeah, I think it like, it describes quite well the sort of organisation that we are and that we're independent and that we've been set up by practitioners.	2/44-46
CJ_01	And you know, I trained as an artist, and so I feel like the way that I approach everything is sort of in that, in that way, is in quite a hands on and practical way.	3/55-57
CJ_01	And I guess, like, an example of that happening is last week or the week before, the Royal Standard came up and did a studio exchange and they were looking for organisations that have similar operations to them so that they could have that exchange in an equitable way I suppose.	4/83-86
CJ_01	I guess it's about, um, supporting artistic practice, erm, so whether that be through providing space that's affordable and useful to those people or providing a space that's freeing other artists here to work and to connect with and be in dialogue with, um yeah, and to provide events and exhibitions where conversation can happen on contemporary visual art.	4/97-101
CJ_01	Like, not exclusively, but I think that perhaps there's something about that dynamic that means that... like we're looking for opportunities to involve our studio holders as well as being connected to the gallery in dialogue, yeah it sort of lends itself quite well to that I think.	7/171-174
CJ_01	I think maybe like 'network' and 'community' are better terms, because they feel a bit more horizontal, it doesn't feel like there's a hierarchy so it's not about Ikon being at the top because it gets more money, it just has a different role...	8/224-227
CJ_01	And we hope to be able to have space to invite other artist-led organisations to inhabit that...	10/321-322
CJ_01	We feel like it's important that there's contemporary visual artists and space for those people in the city centre, and that it's seen as an important part of the city's activity and that it's not pushed to the fringes all the time.	11/329-332
CJ_01	I also think there's like an ideological thing with the city and that so often artists get kind of looked over, or are completely invisible, and I think it's really important that we're not, cause	13/426-429

	we're a vital part of the city's make-up...	
CJ_01	Yeah and I guess thinking about 'institutionalising' and going back to that, it is about being seen as a 'grown up' organisation that's in it for the long term and it isn't just about a group of artists in their early twenties putting on a few shows for a couple of years and then going off to do something else.	14/458-462
CJ_01	And you know now, many of us are in our forties, or nearing our forties, and loads of us have got kids and yeah, stability is really important – stability and visibility is massively important, cause it's really hard to even, just go to different cities and make yourself visible in that way, when you've got a two-year old you can do it to an extent, but not to the extent I used to, just like going to those openings and having the network in that way.	14/468-471
CJ_01	But this is really thinking about the long term, and if all goes to plan we'll have a hundred-year lease and it will be a Community Interest Company which means that that building, unless Grand Union decides to sell it, has to be used for the purposes of the artistic community. I think that's really important.	15/490-494
CJ_01	...it's unfair to expect a group of graduates to be on a committee for two years and even be thinking about anything beyond the programme...	15/513-515
CJ_01	I know at Royal Standard they've, they now have a paid position that's a coordinator, that does a lot of that administrative, background work, and that somebody's paid to do that, and I think that's very reasonable. It's completely reasonable and it's something that should happen.	16/527-530
CJ_01	Yes, so I guess like our ethos, the core of it is like supporting artists and curators and what they do...	16/542-543
CJ_01	We've still got the affordable studio spaces, we've still got the opportunities for emerging curators and they are the key reasons for Grand Union existing and that continues throughout.	16/549-552
CJ_01	I want to put something in our memorandums that means there has to be a certain number of artists on the Board...	17/586-588
CJ_01	We're also having conversations with people like you that have been through this process and try and learn from people as well and what they're doing and how things are working...	18/638-641
CJ_01	Erm, but then I guess you're always asked to put things in output terms, for whatever money you're trying to go for.	22/758-759
CJ_01	Erm, the outputs of everybody in the organisation, so all of the kind of shows and the projects that everybody here is engaged in is quite a big... so we're supporting that happening. Erm it's really valuable, and I think you know you could say that it wouldn't be happening unless we had this community here and studios here, and you could make that argument I think.	22/775-777
CG_01	Yeah, and I mean we're very, like, mindful, of... wanting to stay true to our kind of ethos... and I guess we've kind of put different things in place that we hope that will allow us to kind of retain that artist-led approach and that kind of being responsive to artists and being shaped by you know, their needs and their requirements.	11/365-369
CG_01	...so that our programme, our public programme, is reflective of artists' current, you know, what artists are interested in, the artists they might want to bring to the region, the themes they might want to explore, erm, that they think are important...	11/379-382

CG_01	Yeah, so we have the programme committee, and then, so it was important for us that our public programme is artist-led, and that it is reflective of artists' current interests, instead of us sitting thinking, 'Oh, we will choose this artist to have the opportunity...'	12/395-398
CG_01	...and then we also have an Artist Steering Group, which is a different group, for 'Practice Makes Practice', so that's a group that we work with on our artist development programme, and that's open to studio members and associate members, and that's about very much shaping the artist-development offer, so what opportunities do artists need right now, you know what kind of, where is there a skills gap, what do we want to really tackle and who do we want to bring, so that's about kind of shaping that programme with that group.	12/401-408
CG_01	...and we've also done a whole kind of ethics thing as well, erm, of how we operate as well in terms of ethics, and that's something that the ethics of artists can be very different to the ethics of people that work in business or you know, more commercial ways.	12/420-423
CG_01	Erm yeah, and one thing, you know, obviously it's more easy I think to see how the artist-led approach fits in with, in terms of kind of programming, with the Programme Committee and the Practice Makes Practice steering group, but then in terms of this business plan that we've been doing, that we have to do for the Arts Council, that, that isn't just kind of me sitting writing it, that is... the kind of contents of that and these values and our main five strategic goals, have been kind of formed from a massive amount of consultation that we did with our members.	13/446-454
CG_01	Um so it was you know through a whole series of different um approaches from kind of questionnaires and then we had a kind of lot of stakeholder sessions, or kind of, come and chat to us, from interviews as well and workshops to kind of figure out using that, you know, what is essential, what is immovable, what do we always need to keep hold of, what is you know, 'nice', but maybe you know we don't need that and what actually do we need to lose. But um, and through that we have kind of created the four, the five, strategic goals, which are the main focus of what our organisation does, and will be doing in the future.	14/454-462
CG_01	But um, and through that we have kind of created the four, the five, strategic goals, which are the main focus of what our organisation does, and will be doing in the future. So that's developing artistic talent through artist development programmes; providing opportunities for career development, employment and training within the visual arts; providing space, facilities and resources for artists in the north of England; supporting the production and presentation of ambitious and pioneering new artwork outside of a traditional institutional framework... Yeah, and increase the number of people who are experiencing, engaging and participating in contemporary visual art.	14/460-470
CG_01	Erm, so the 'artist-led' one I mentioned, and another is 'experimental in our approach', so we provide artists with the flexibility to test out ideas, experiment and be radical, allowing groundbreaking work and alternative approaches to practice to	14/472-489

	<p>develop... Er, 'aware and responsive to the social, political and civic landscape that we exist in', so championing the production and presentation of artwork that is responsive to the social, political and civic landscape, reactive to location, situation and time from which it emerges. We believe that art has the power to introduce new ideas and alternative thinking and to change convention, and can be used as a tool to deliver incremental change. Er, another value, 'development of artists at its heart', so we position artist development at the core of everything we do, creating formal and informal opportunities for artistic practice and talent to develop, support artists to progress to the next stage of their career. And then, 'focus on collaboration and community', so we believe in a supportive network, being a key instigator to continued creativity, we install a spirit of collaboration, collectivity and community in our activity to generate peer-led learning, critical conversation and social interaction.</p>	
CG_01	<p>Yeah, I think so. I think it's... it's... I mean it's a risk isn't it, generally, really, the Arts Council don't like too many risks.</p>	16/536-537
CG_01	<p>And then we kind of, we were all, we were going through the negotiation, we were fairly confident we could move into this building, Carliol House, erm, yeah so it, I mean I don't know if that the fact that we could move on and secure a building was like Oh, that is actually, that has been acknowledged as a model, that you don't need to have these massive capital developments and that's where all of our cultural institutions are based, but there is a different way that we can deliver these services you know and approach it in different ways.</p>	16/542-549
CG_01	<p>Yeah, we were very kind of clear when we applied that those are our values and this is how we work, we're not going to, you know we can't say this is our confirmed programme for 2018-19 because we work with a committee of artists to develop it, that's responsive to that moment and that time, so we can't say here's all of our artists... and we're giving a big commission to someone in 2020, because we don't know that, we don't work in that way.</p>	17/575-581
CG_01	<p>...they are, um, supportive in wanting to relocate us in the city centre, um, and seem to understand the difference in our model, that it must remain affordable and that actually if we create some kind of high-spec development, the rents will just be massive and no artist will be able to afford that so it becomes a very different thing.</p>	19/666-670
CG_01	<p>I think they're probably ... if not the cheapest, very near to the cheapest and that came out as you know an essential criteria for the artists.</p>	20/720-721
CG_01	<p>I mean yeah that says something to me about the importance of erm of these space to the Council, and I think there is starting to be a massive recognition of not just like us, but you've got buildings – Commercial Union House, Bamburgh House, that are also full of kind of artists, arts organisations, community organisations, and groups, er, of what a loss it would be. I still don't think they quite understand the extent of that loss, because I don't think they understand the actual value.</p>	22/770-776
CG_01	<p>I think there is a little bit of a missing link in terms of that like</p>	23/789-795

	understanding of that real value, because it tends to be economic value doesn't it, the land value, the rates, how many jobs, and you when they're like proposing for example a massive shopping centre development on the site, how, you know, there's no way you can compete with their figures in an economic sense, so then you have to try and demonstrate, you have to try and convince of your value culturally, socially, erm...	
CG_01	I think we have a... and I think it's amazing what we have from that project and that research, and we do have a lot of raw data that I think... interviews and more qualitative data, but we, if that even is data I don't know, but we have a lot of material that we could use, to tell that story because I think it's important to tell that narrative and tell that story. But um we're also doing a new bit of work with a researcher from Durham University to try and look at the impact on artists' careers, so we've developed this, we're developing this thing with them to hopefully got some actual like facts and figures that then we can put with that more narrative stuff and tell the whole story, so if people want a pie chart, then we can supply that but then we can tell the story as well so we've got the whole package.	23/811-822
CG_01	I mean, you mentioned before in the previous question, about like what is, do people value NewBridge, and I mean I think a lot of people do, and I think actually it has really changed the city, um, like you know it's an easy, not a 'sell', but it's easy to see the value to artists and there's tangible actual things of like, I can have a space because of this, I can have an opportunity, you know develop my practice through these talks and mentoring sessions.	23/830-836
CG_01	But I think you know there is also like the way in which other organisations are working does feel different and there is a bigger drive towards like supporting early career artists, supporting artist development, and I think that is in response to actually seeing that there is a real desire and need for that, erm yeah.	24/845-849
CG_01	Well, I mean we work with Newcastle University on delivering a graduate programme, so in a way it's directly impacting that because they are directly responding by saying hey, actually, you're right, this is what, NB and these types of initiatives, they are what graduates need, and actually a lot of our graduates and alumni are benefitting from that, so we want to actually support that.	24-25/868-873
CG_01	Now yeah, maybe those things should be within the University curriculum, but then I think there's things that actually you probably need to be in a different environment and erm be getting out of, you know, different peer exchange and networks that perhaps maybe you can't really generate in a University.	25/880-884
CG_01	Yeah and I think you know the great thing about the partnership we have with Newcastle University is that they really understand us on our terms, so erm you know there's always the worry really when you enter into a partnership with a big institution, that that snowballs really and they are the owner and they swallow everything up... Yeah, and like this is how we do things, and so we have to do it, you know, that's how we'll have to do it within the partnership, cause these are our kind of formal systems and structures and policies, but actually there is a real understanding	25-26/890-917

	<p>of our ethos and the way we work and our approach and a real respect for that and a value of that, so the idea of setting up this programme in the Gateshead space and making that almost, having a dedicated space for the graduate programme there, it wasn't like, 'let's brand the hell out of that with Newcastle University'... Yeah, because they were like, if we set up an incubator, or whatever they might call it in the University which is like 'Newcastle University Incubator, Visual Arts' no-one would go to that really, and it's a kind of, like you are best-placed to deliver this because you're working on the ground with artists and with students and with graduates, you know what they need and actually we respect that and we respect that also, again that artist-led approach of that kind of the whole graduate programme and the development will be developed throughout the year with the kind of cohort of graduates, so it's not just about well this is our formal structure of like, you know, two events every second Tuesday of the month, it'll be these certain professional development objectives, it's very organic and fluid and they really are on board with that so I think that's really positive that they're on board with that and see the value of it.</p>	
HJLH_01	<p>...and you know we've had a lot of sort of discussions on the steering committee about what the choices would be and where the artists would prefer to go...</p>	2/40-42
HJLH_01	<p>I don't know, it was a small project that kind of grew and it was almost that people came to us, and out of a discussion, and with you know real integrity about what it means to take the city, we kind of gathered people...</p>	2/77-80
HJLH_01	<p>OK, well if we are setting up something new, well that gives an opportunity to set something up on our own terms. And it was like to have a strong identity, and also to be ambitious and raise the bar a little bit in what's been going on. And when you talk about the gallery, that was like, part of that brief was we didn't want it to look like it was some bits of board thrown up, with some timber, because that's what we're used to, actually, and coming from artist-led spaces where it just looks like you've thrown some ramshackle thing up that can hold a few [possibly 'pieces of work']... Yeah, paint a few boards white and we'll just do it on the cheap sort of thing.</p>	4/135-144
HJLH_01	<p>Yeah, and we did a kind of you know deal with them, so they got free spaces while they were building the space.</p>	5/157-158
HJLH_01	<p>...we'd also take a booth at the Manchester Contemporary which we'd self fund...</p>	5/169-170
HJLH_01	<p>And it was also the quality of the people who came...</p>	6/195
HJLH_01	<p>But then every building that we've all been in as artists has had leaks in it, you know, or has been this sort of warehouse-type space, erm you know, no heating and various issues, so I don't think it kind of phased any of us in particular.</p>	8/285-288
HJLH_01	<p>Yeah and I think our initial sort of plans are that we just make ourselves, you know, one of the best studios in Manchester, and erm or you know further afield and just sort of make ourselves known and then, you know, hopefully we will be able to build on that and work out our future.</p>	10/365-368
HJLH_01	<p>And also how it was going to be managed, you know, they needed an umbrella organisation for it to be managed properly...</p>	14/501-502

HJLH_01	They didn't have any artists on the steering committee.	15/566-567
HJLH_01	...but again there's no artists on that, kind of expressedly I think because I think they had a bad track record with um, artists being involved before, so... Badly behaved artists, so... Not all of them. I can remember some of those meetings. No exactly, so some of those meetings would be, you know, chaotic, unreasonable, you know, egotistic, so...	16/587-595
HJLH_01	To be fair though, we also, I mean cause I had gone and tried to initiate that conversation with them, so it was about facilitating that dialogue, but it's just the way that they didn't really respond in, with any level of integrity.	18/676-678
HJLH_01	Yeah and then proceeded to meet three people in there and then talk about how fantastic the view was, and how much money... and they were people who were putting money into the development, um I was sat there, kind of I'd turned my radio off and was like listening, but still also horrified. And I know that you know, we're just talking different languages and that is their modus operandi and it's very different to ours but it was a bit unpalatable.	19/689-695
HJLH_01	...I think really what we want to focus on in terms of the overall programme and the kind of, not the theme, but you know the kind of issues that we want people to address when they apply to show in the space, or submit proposals to show in the space, and that is to do with the politics of our location in terms of this actual space. And also, our position politically in Manchester, as artists and studios.	21/807-812
HJLH_01	...Kieran curated the booth at the Manchester Contemporary. He also worked on the Politics of Paradise show, with me and Kwong, and he also was selected for a Launch Pad show by Patricia Fleming from Glasgow, so he's, he's a really you know, he's got a very particular eye and a clear curatorial vision I think, which is what we need.	21/823-828
HJLH_01	...I think the first twelve months is going to be us, really programming, so it's more like we're exhibition programmers rather than curators. And then potentially, we would like to have a sort of curator for the space,	21/836-839
HJLH_01	You had a lot of initial ideas about having these kind of exchanges, or bringing external... Because again when we talk about our mission statement, it was about kind of raising the bar wasn't it, and being, um, regional, national and international and just being able to facilitate... so we're not just showing our mates. You know and I guess... Which is often what happens... That was the nice thing about a fresh start, going OK, so what was wrong with the old model, or, and actually it was some boards thrown up and it had all your mates in it.	22/840-849
HJLH_01	I think um, one of the things I felt very strongly about was to bring in curators from somewhere else...	22/864-865
HJLH_01	You know, there is nobody now who is actually looking after artists and I think we could do that here, you know, it's like, we could be that go-to place that International3 was...	26/989-991
HJLH_01	I think there's a lot of artists here that would benefit from a solo show, um you know, and that's something we want to do here,	26/1001-1004

	but again, you don't want to look like you're looking inward, you have to look outward, so that's going to take time, and you know it's got to be quality, so...	
ECJF_01	I feel that TRS is viewed as somewhere that's very cliquy, it's very white, it's very able-bodied, it's not very accessible or inclusive...	1/29-30
ECJF_01	...so how do we kind of tackle this reputation? Cause actually when we're, it's really a bit of a bizarre thing to think about outside and inside of TRS, I'm not sure if that's a useful way to talk about it, but... Inside TRS it doesn't feel as exclusive, but that's surely what everywhere feels like, doesn't it, when you're in it?	2/41-45
ECJF_01	...some Trustees feel that actually there's a lot of value and rich learning through having a two-year rolling Directorship that is unpaid. You do everything, you get involved, you're stuck in, you're immersed...	5-6/209-211
ECJF_01	I think somebody once said, somebody once said a long time ago, it's like doing an MA that you don't have to pay for.	6/212-213
ECJF_01	...the huge issue, that nobody talks about, is how inaccessible physically, intellectually, artist-led spaces are, and why... Have you ever met a disabled person at an artist-led...? I've not, very rarely.	9/333-335
ECJF_01	I think it's more around having, it's retaining our autonomy as an organisation...	10/388-389
ECJF_01	And I think it's all well and good us saying that we really want to work with local communities, and have, um, to address our access and inclusivity issues, but, you know, we really need to be able to meaningfully support these people in a space.	11/422-425
ECJF_01	And I think it's all well and good us saying that we really want to work with local communities, and have, um, to address our access and inclusivity issues, but, you know, we really need to be able to meaningfully support these people in a space.	11/431-433
ECJF_01	I very much have felt that... larger institutions such as Liverpool Biennial, um, maybe even Tate Liverpool, kind of like sweep in and out when they want something done cheaply.	12/447-450
ECJF_01	I think we're now changing the conversation to quality rather than overstretching.	13/480-481
ECJF_01	...so we have this kind of, I would say, I don't know, comradeship between us where they scratch our back and we scratch theirs. I'd always go to their openings and vice versa. I'm going to be helping with a funding application. Yeah we've both helped them with funding applications... They lend us tools, they... Frame stuff. Like you know, more of a mate's rate. They support us in kind, we support them in kind.	13/493-503
ECJF_01	One of the things that I hear from artist-led spaces and people who are advocates for the artist-led scene is that quite a lot of the time, people like Liverpool Biennial... invite people to do things as part of a fringe, and they don't particularly like that, mainly because there was, there was like a, there was kind of like a, an actual fringe, how many years ago was that? Oh yeah there was an actual fringe programme that was way better than anything Biennial did.	14/526-533

ECJF_01	Rather than coming to us at the beginning and saying, 'We're planning this...' it's, they've planned all of it and it's gone right, what else can we squeeze in. And it's usually for very little money...	14/543-545
ECJF_01	And I don't think Biennial do that in their own city, let alone supporting others from outside the city. [...] I'm not sure what their purpose is. I'm assuming that their purpose is to bring outside artists to the city, that's what I kind of feel their purpose is. I mean that's their remit.	15/569-578
ECJF_01	We are permitted, we are able to, within the confines of money and time, but we are permitted to do it our own way. [...] And this is the thing like I, if something doesn't work here, we ain't just gonna not do it, do it differently, very quickly, and that responsiveness is something very definitive in artist-led space. The ability to respond very quickly and change...	16-17/616-624
ECJF_01	I think an end goal for me would just be if, I'd be really pleased if TRS had as much autonomy as it could do, i.e. its own building, a sustainable funding model, and a model that meant that people working with us, whether that be an artist exhibiting with us or a programme or the staff itself, are all remunerated... in a fair way. And that, you know, it's open.	17-18/655-661
ECJF_01	Yeah and I guess, but we also know that people who come away from TRS after doing a Directorship feel very positively, well, maybe not feel very positively, some people don't, but they have their skills have completely, um you learn without even thinking about it, which I think is one of the key benefits of the Directorship.	18/682-686
DGMN_01	Erm since January 2016 we've been a CIC, Community Interest Company, and our mission is to provide affordable studio space for artists based in the north west.	1/13-15
DGMN_01	Er, the idea being that um I suppose we started quite small and at that stage it was that people would... effectively all the studio holders were sharing the cost of running the place and we'd generate a small surplus. Not a profit, technically, which would then be used for things like open studios. Um, and I suppose at that time the, that's when in a way we sort of formulated the idea that we would keep Rogue as simple as possible, almost sort of like an umbrella organisation, um, under which all sorts of exciting things could happen...	3/78-85
DGMN_01	Within that, you know, it was light touch administration I think, wasn't it really?	3/89-90
DGMN_01	And it made things much simpler when it came to hiring a solicitor to scrutinise the Council's lease, and to deal... and to convince really, in the early days, convince the Council that we were a serious organisation, even though we'd existed for twenty-two years.	4/114-117
DGMN_01	Yeah, it was run on an amicable basis, there was a lot of trust, a lot of mutual respect, a lot of cooperation.	4/136-137
DGMN_01	And certainly our philosophy in that respect was very much that it's much better that people stayed and paid, rather than left and they'd have to be chased legally.	4/139-141
DGMN_01	A new young breed of property developer. And they're conscious of culture, and they do sponsor and subsidise you know, groups of artists here and there, and art events and art projects. So I think	7/

	you know it quickly became apparent that they genuinely wanted to find a, a new home for Rogue, and they wanted to be associated with Rogue, you know and it made good sense, for them and for us, to work together. I think some of the studio membership, you know, probably felt conflicted about that. Or skeptical.	
DGMN_01	Yes, and we'd become... we'd slowly become a major civic asset for Manchester Council you know, even without trying you know. [...] So I think Capital and Centric were conscious of that.	7/248-255
DGMN_01	I think from the start it had to be a neutral cost implication for the City Council. They couldn't really, in the climate we're in, be seen to be paying artists to be in one of their buildings.	8/281-283
DGMN_01	I think generally in the UK, regional authorities are starting to understand that an active creative scene draws cultural tourism, enhances you know the reputation of the city to outsiders... er, and retaining creative talent you know in the region is going to stimulate tourism, it's going to stimulate interest in the city, in this country and abroad, and it's going to reflect well on them as you know, as Council leaders.	9/322-328
DGMN_01	That you know Manchester should, as you know arguably the nation's second city, should be seen to be supporting creativity, er, across the board you know...	10/357-359
DGMN_01	I think there's a regeneration aspect as well, given, you know, the area, Gorton, has a poor reputation.	10/369-370
DGMN_01	And what was really interesting was they were just two people who came to us and told us about this building, and the relationship we built with them was on the basis of them as individual human beings, not as agents of some vast organisation, public organisation. So it was all built on trust and, you know, mutual trust between us and them, and what turned out to be a really good working relationship, based on you know friendship really.	17/621-626
DGMN_01	And we've had visits from other senior Council members, and Sir Richard Lees, the Head of the Council, has come here, and um, very happy occasion, we toured around the building, lots of artists were in and working, and I think we convinced him, if he needed convincing, that you know, this was a worthwhile use of the building.	17/6310636
DGMN_01	Yeah and I think we've had our part to play in convincing Manchester that there's enough, there's a critical mass of artists in Manchester, not just in Salford, that need to be supported. You know, and we weren't under any illusions that the public sector was going to solve all our problems, we understand there's a recession on, we've worked with string budgets all our careers you know, so we understand it, we're not, we weren't asking for money, but just asking for acknowledgment that we'd been and built something that was, that was exciting. And when Sir Richard Lees and the Council team came to our Open Studio, our last Open Studio at Crusader Mill in 2016, I think he could see that there was something genuinely of international significance, in artistic terms, happening in that building in the middle of the city. And I think he realised then that he needed to act and to save it.	20/725-737
JW_01	But that was one bit, so it was artists' spaces there, and we	2/42-44

	took... we sort of took anyone, so, er of any kind of artistic practice. We weren't too... we didn't choose.	
JW_01	We're most definitely artist-focused because that is commissioning, providing space, making opportunities.	3/103-104
JW_01	...it's because we've always felt like we're learning something new, we're again pushing the boundaries, we've never sat, and I think I will always still, that's why I'll equate it to an arts practice, we've never stayed in the same place, churning out the same paintings, as it were, cause they sell. We've always grown it, or let's push the boundary, oh we're interested in this now, how do we go and do this.	5/176-181
JW_01	So I think in many ways, it has been through myself and Karen pushing it.	5/195-196
JW_01	Felt like just wanted to... we've pushed out, had opinions and pushed out.	5/208-209
JW_01	So I did that, which is pretty intensive kind of er, MBA without the written part, and they, just, you enter another phase of like how do you grow something, got a good idea, let's push it, but try and hold onto that, the ethos of the organisation which has always been the thing.	6/218-221
JW_01	I think if we'd have been separate we wouldn't have done it and I think that has been really important. I think it's, it's, it's allowed us to bounce so much between us about what we believe in... [...] And I think that's allowed us to maintain the ethos, where we at times almost thrown it away, right we're off cause we can't deal with that.	6/237-245
JW_01	I think there was something about the philosophy that we've always said 'yes' and then worry about the consequences afterwards, or negotiate the consequences afterwards, and then bring back in what we believe into that.	6/246-249
JW_01	And so I think there's something that... we have various different challenges in our head, that we want to get to, and there is a sense of independence. I think that's something that is about our ethos, that we've maintained our independence.	8/302-305
JW_01	So it's kind of several pronged in that, having another building is income generating, it grows the community of artists that are here and enables you to then think about what is next off the back of that, in terms of what do artists need and how do they want to work next.	11/427-431
JW_01	Because you, we, we are... I don't think it's arrogant to say, we are the coal face and we won't even realise we're at the coal face, and, and everything will come about this afterwards.	11/431-433
JW_01	And every step forward we're growing it, and a lot of the time it's been me, Karen and Nicola doing it. We were there painting and decorating the Art Hostel... So there's still a real hands-on because there was no money in it, we had to do that. And because we like it and it keeps you grounded. And it keeps that ethos, bang on. Attention to detail is the ethos.	11-12/459-465
JW_01	It's ingrained in you in a sense, and it's, it can also be a problem, it can be... it can hold you back, but it also... I think it's a strength. You might not go as fast as you could have gone because you've not been so gung-ho, but the attention to detail maintains that.	12/469-472
JW_01	But that, this neighbourhood, this area, I think is where we see,	13/455-456

	let's pick a stomping ground as it were, and how do we fully invest...	
JW_01	And cause you can... and I think it's that whole inside out, I think we've always... we have always wanted to do it, but I think it's really now, how do we make the organisation more porous and people more able to come at it from different directions, whatever that is?	13/486-489
JW_01	...it's trying to get those relationships with developers, and our whole temporary space thing has brought that understanding and knowledge about how they work and what goes on, and actually a reality check of what have you got that they can use, and that is the term, they can use to benefit them, but you've got to be realistic about that and understand that.	15/566-570
JW_01	And Mary Studios came up as that... building for sale, we saw it came for sale, said we wanted to buy it, had no idea where the funds were going to come from, and then just again the Leeds Tech money came up, I suggested to Nicola, 'Can we go for this?', Nic's like, 'well no, but we'll have a go', and built the project to built our interest with what the funder was wanting.	16/586-591
JW_01	Well that's... well at the top, the top is going to be residential space, but like er residency spaces, so we can invite artists in... they're tiny, the nuns, they're nuns' cells because that was the convent. So there's going to be beds for ten, so um... and artists who are invited... we haven't worked out the detail yet... invited in, come in, can be in residence for up to a year... [...] And it's that, looking at that cross-working that we're going to try to achieve in there. So rather than being a fab lab, it is back to a testing space. So it's kind of artists [and] others coming in, talking about stuff, having... being able to have a go at stuff, work at something, be able to stay there, be completely immersed in it, and... and see what the outputs come out of that. There's a certain amount of engagement, we're having an extra bit, a thin little bit built on it that gives it a little bit more space for sort of classroom, educational, um... and yeah, residency, studio-y, workshop-y... IT heavy... that's basically the split of the building.	16/595-612
JW_01	Er yeah, so we're looking for space again, a big space, where can we go? We know we might be going to a shed somewhere. You know, we haven't... these are all brand new thoughts and it's... obviously Art Hostel two, three and four. There is an international kind of ambition for that, to be able to do that and where we take it to other cities.	19/711-715
JW_01	So there's loads going on, still... yeah, just going out and pushing a lot of things all the time and it, it's again I think there's another...	19/729-731
JW_01	...there is something else, because that drive it's given us, because we're not comfortable, has driven us forward to always be, 'What do we do next?' And the same with Nicola, completely driven... to be on... it's incredible, it's just to see how far you can get. It's literally, it's just that. It's just pushing it, pushing it, push, push, push. How far can we actually get with this? And we'll carry on going until we've seen, until we either run out of a desire to do it...	21/794-801

Institutionalising		
Interview	Statement	Page/Line
CJ_01	Plenty of artists have, um, a say in what happens, we always have two studio artists on our Board for example, so there's representation from the artists in the organisation.	2/48-50
CJ_01	... we can be a bit more fleet of foot because we're not this hulking organisation that has to go through all of these different things to make changes and to be able to respond to anything.	8/229-231
CJ_01	I don't know whether that's good or not, but I guess... I... yeah... maybe 'institutionalising' is the wrong word and it's more about... becoming more organised, and professionalised...	9/258-260
CJ_01	But yeah, it's sort of thinking that we're going beyond being a collective of people, erm, trying to address quite an immediate problem and that we're trying to think more long term and how we provide those things that we wanted to at the start immediately, into the future and, and it feels like becoming an 'institution' or one of the big players is what we need to do. It sort of feels like that description... there's a status thing there isn't there?	9/261-266
CJ_01	Because at heart I think we're still the same, it's just that we're putting... I guess there's a layer of bureaucracy in a way that we're putting around ourselves that protects ourselves. I don't feel like it's a bad thing, er I think it's a necessary thing and I think that we're doing it so that we can protect our community.	9/270-274
CJ_01	So we're entering into conversation with them about that, actually through... one of our Board members is a property developer and has been able to, er, hook us up with people that we wouldn't have contact with usually.	10/303-305
CJ_01	I feel like we're really trying to just grab hold of a little bit of the nightmare of capitalism. How did our Board member term it? Yeah, like we're trying to harness a little part of that and keep it for ourselves.	11/358-361
CJ_01	... maybe we're setting up a model for other artist-led communities that are in similar situations to us, or you know, that maybe we can open up a model of working or a way of trying to harness some of that development for our community, you know if everything goes well, and I hope that there is a sort of case study there that other people can use.	12/387-391
CJ_01	Yeah and I guess thinking about 'institutionalising' and going back to that, it is about being seen as a 'grown up' organisation that's in it for the long term...	14/458-460
CJ_01	And you know now, many of us are in our forties, or nearing our forties, and loads of us have got kids and yeah, stability is really important – stability and visibility is massively important, cause it's really hard to even, just go to different cities and make yourself visible in that way, when you've got a two-year old you can do it to an extent, but not to the extent I used to, just like going to those openings and having the network in that way. And it's something to be visible from here.	14/466-472
CJ_01	But I kind of feel like with the way that things are changing, with the way that property prices are rising and all of that, it's really	15/510-517

	hard if there's no consistency in those organisations... you can't... it's unfair to expect a group of graduates to be on a committee for two years and even be thinking about anything beyond the programme [laughs], but in order for those things to survive you need to have somebody else thinking about how that place is going to stay in one place, or where it's going to be inhabiting.	
CJ_01	...and you know we need to become a charity in order to do the fundraising.	16/546-547
CJ_01	So when we change into a charity, it will be a Board of Trustees, which I think is much clearer actually, it defines things in a clearer way.	17/578-580
CJ_01	So yeah, it doesn't feel like a scary shift in the way that it probably would if you were a group of artists that were Directors and then you felt like you were handing it over to somebody else. And I guess the thing that we'll need to be careful of is who's appointed as a Trustee.	18/606-609
CJ_01	Erm I guess the next step is thinking about how like we'll need a kind of trading company so we're sorting that out at the moment.	18/619-621
CJ_01	...the charity can concentrate on the programme and the artistic community that it's supporting and the other Board can focus on the business model and the capital building.	18/630-633
CJ_01	At the moment we've got a lawyer that's helping us with the sort of structure and making sure that we do things that we want to do.	18/637-638
CJ_01	We have got a bit of money to take on somebody to help us work through that business model as well, a consultant, erm we haven't worked out who that is yet, but so that we can sit down and actually do the, like we've done some number crunching but we need to do more.	20/706-709
CJ_01	I mean it's a challenge, because in this building you know we're in an industrial space so you've got to make the walk over the threshold of the courtyard to find the door that we're at and then you've got to press the buzzer to get up two flights of stairs, so we're not accessible to wheelchairs at the minute, which the new building will be something that that's addressed, and obviously that's part of the argument for doing that, that we'll be more visible to more people as well, and hopefully more people will be comfortable with coming to see what we're doing as well.	23/807-814
CG_01	And I think you know they wanted to be taken seriously in what they, as well in some respects, um, and in the beginning they did it voluntary, because there was no money for an artist to be paid, and then quite quickly they did an Arts Council application which I think was under ten grand, it was a very small amount, um the first Arts Council application... and then I think maybe as it began to build they got, they managed to get paid a very small wage perhaps, like...	7/208-214
CG_01	Um, so Will Marshall left in, I think, 2013, er to go and do an MA in London, um I think maybe he was getting frustrated with... you know I think the thing with it is because it's a, like a massive undertaking, and it does take, it does consume a lot of your life [...] Because you know, there's not, there's not enough capacity, there's not ever really enough money, um but there's loads of kind of energy and ambition and desire to like do all of this stuff, um, so I think maybe he wanted to kind of go away and	7/220-231

	get some... cause I mean Will and Will had done it nearly straight out of a BA, they didn't have any kind of business experience, um, or any experience of working in any other kind of arts organisations or institutions, or anything like that really...	
CG_01	and then I came on when he left, so they did a recruitment for a co-Director to work with Will Strong, um, and, um... I applied, was successful, so then I started working on a part-time basis, because I still had another role that I wanted to keep on, in another arts organisation in Newcastle, so I did um, I started doing three days a week with Will. And it was quite a difficult transition actually, I think because Will and Will had set this up and actually Will and Will had always collaborated at University so they kind of like had this unspoken understanding of like their roles and how they worked together and what they did within NB, um, and none of it was like written down anywhere, but actually coming in I was like, 'what am I doing?' you know, like 'what am I doing? What are you doing?' you know, what are we all... And so that was quite difficult you know, there was no like, no-one had any contracts, there was no like archive of any of the, like, images from exhibitions or there was no kind of shared calendar, so there was a lot of... so it was very much like figuring it out as we went along really...	8/249-263
CG_01	So I went full time, I left my other job, and um we felt that there wasn't really enough time to go through the recruitment of another Director at that point, and actually we just quickly need to, you know, more quickly needed to put some other support in place, um and I think because of that kind of lack of definition as well, there needed to be a little bit more thinking around what the roles of different Directors might be. Um so, we recruited for a Studio and Programme Coordinator, er... and that's when Rebecca came on board, and then in the end actually we decided... not to recruit for another Co-director and to actually, erm... just think about it a bit more clearly, I guess... restructure would be the word. And so now we have... I'm the Director full time, Rebecca is the Programme Director full time, and then we have a Studio Coordinator part time and an Artist Development Coordinator part time, so it's about trying to kind of, instead of two people doing everything, or one person doing everything, how do we try and... I mean inevitably, in such a small team, everyone does end up chipping in and doing a bit of everything... cleaning the toilets [...] Like, so everyone really mucks in and gets involved, but it's trying to kind of, um, make it a bit more clear on what the roles are, I think for the sake of the people doing them as much as anything really.	9/272-234
CG_01	Yeah and I think you know, it takes, it's a full-time job really, and for artists who are you know, the time that they have to practice is so precious and it's in between so many other kind of paid and unpaid jobs and responsibilities, that actually when you're asking them to come in and do you know, tax returns, all of this, massive fundraising applications, it becomes very difficult, and I think it can actually harm the, what the project, the organisation, the collective, however you might define it, is trying to do...	11/349-357
CG_01	...and then we also have er, written into our articles of	12/408-413

	association for the charity, that there's a minimum percentage of studio, NB artists, on the Board of Trustees, so at the moment we've got six Trustees in total and two of them are studio members, Julia Heslop and Alana Mitchell, and you know that's very important that we have those voices around that table and driving the decision-making really.	
CG_01	We also have worked kind of um, to develop a kind of, er a letter almost, I don't know what you'd call it, of understanding, that's from NB, from studio members, from the artists to Trustees, that kind of outlines who, what we are and what we expect from the Trustees, erm that kind of sets out our stall, and that's something that we would give to anyone before they ever would consider them becoming a Trustee, to say 'this is us', you are signing up to this, and just being really clear about that...	12/413-420
CG_01	I mean at the moment, you know it's, I'm very positive about it, because obviously it's four years of confirmed funding, erm, which is, erm, an amazing vote of confidence from the Arts Council in what we do.	15/518-520
CG_01	Er, just in terms of the organisation, it's great to know that we have the security of four years of funding...	15/526-527
CG_01	And so I mean that is encouraging, and for us it means that we don't have to kind of every 12 months or 18 months, reapply to Grants for the Arts, which is obviously you know, we've gradually kind of increased the amounts that we were going for, because of I guess growing in what we were doing and wanting to work with and support more artists, erm, but perhaps that you know, we were getting to a point where maybe you know how much longer would that, how much longer would we have been able to continue doing that, and kind of reinventing our kind of activity every time, um and trying to kind of build on what we were doing, and was that the right kind of, er, er, system for us to be in. Erm you know, so it gives us that real security in terms of knowing from year to year that we can actually have members of staff, and hopefully that will then allow us more time to spend on, er, thinking about space and kind of securing something that is kind of, more permanent and more secure for the artists actually, not just because, not for the organisation, but because the artists that we're working with and that we're supporting.	16/549-564
CG_01	So, um, we hope that, yeah that vote of confidence from the Arts Council will then also kind of make people like the city council, or, or you know, it's a way to be taken a little bit more seriously by other kind of bodies that we might need to work with I think...	16/570-573
CG_01	...I think it's been helpful to go through the process of actually trying to write down what, erm, what is important and what the studio members as well, and what are we, what do we want to do actually.	17/596-599
HJLH_01	And then Lucy and I had lots of more discussion about how it could possibly work, and obviously I need, I couldn't do this on my own and so we got together a kind of group, a core group who, um and we kind of spearheaded it.	2/70-73
HJLH_01	And then it was all very complicated and boring and lots of problems with the lease, which was in someone else's hands, and you know there were various times where we nearly had to just call it a day because we couldn't afford a solicitor, so in the end	3/93-98

	someone I know did that for us for free. Erm, and we did manage to get the lease in April, but by that time we'd already moved in.	
HJLH_01	And a lot of the artists had been evicted so quickly from their spaces as well that they were in the middle of projects, or had Arts Council funding for things they had to complete, or you know were about to show work somewhere or, so you know it was, it felt like a crisis and it felt like we were on this mission that we had to kind of keep on with it, it had its own momentum if you like.	3/106-111
HJLH_01	...taking on another space downstairs meant that we could have a gallery, an exhibition space, we could have a programme, whereas up here we would have had a, as you can see, the meeting room, that would initially have been our exhibition space, which would not have been as impressive... And we've done it in a kind of professionally.	4/121-128
HJLH_01	Yeah, I mean we set up as a Community Interest Company, which we, if I haven't said, but hopefully that will have some bearing on it.	11/415-416
HJLH_01	So you know, it's the whole kind of thing, so we're trying to sort of appoint roles and have a chain of command, and I think it's going to take us another twelve months before we sort those.	22/875-877
HJLH_01	So we need to kind of work out a way as to how we can, er continue, and how I can maintain my practice as an artist... and how Lucy can hold down her job, and also you know, maintain her practice.	23/888-892
HJLH_01	I guess one thing in terms of, that's been you know refreshing in our experience so far is how quickly you make decisions, because there's two of you.	24/925-927
HJLH_01	So that's not going to happen forever because [inaudible] we need to build an organisational structure and we also need to be able to shift responsibility and also not be the four people at the end when people do kick off for various reasons.	24/935-938
HJLH_01	I feel, I think I had envisaged much more of a cooperative effort in terms of the long term, and I don't think that is realistic at all now.	24/939-941
HJLH_01	I'm a little bit more optimistic about Co-ops, but I mean over at Bankley they are set up as a Co-op but I saw that from the other extreme, of kind of extreme bureaucracy, unnecessary training and unnecessary [inaudible] but it was incredibly, um, well organised and I suppose yes there's elements of that to bring, but again there's things like not sitting around in a circle for AGMs where most people just stare at the floor and want it to end, because they don't, they want a space to work in, they don't want to be involved in... And I think that was, in a sense, Rogue's problem, you know, was that it ended up as just Dave and Martin, and they then had to make lots of decisions.	24-25/945-955
HJLH_01	But then that's what I absolutely don't want is that, um, that heavy sense of authorship and ownership as well, that you know it's our baby and I think it would be very healthy to be able to pass over you know at some point.	25/956-957
ECJF_01	I guess developed a role within TRS as part of my Directorship, to see the continued organisational development, um from how it was before to how it is now. And so I've kind of, I've developed	1/12-18

	into a role which is more around finance, and restructuring the organisation, um, and so my job title now is 'Facilitation and Management Director', but I will be finishing in March to hand over to somebody else in a more permanent position.	
ECJF_01	And then, since we've moved here, our audience figures have actually like trebled, um, and now we're seeing people who may not have stumbled across us in the past, who are finding their way into, into TRS now.	3/121-124
ECJF_01	It's been clear for years that it doesn't work, but because of the nature of the Directorship nobody's in here long enough to do anything about it, which is why when Maggie and I, Maggie was another Director who was here for about a year, Maggie and I really strongly felt this, and so this is when we started developing and writing, um, an Arts Council um bid that would develop these roles so that in the future we won't have to ask people to work for free.	5/197-203
ECJF_01	I think where we're at as an organisation is we all now believe that we're moving towards having paid roles, but we want to retain what is good about the model.	6/220-222
ECJF_01	And then we'd have permanent staff, like Admin, Development, to keep the other stuff moving, because we have nearly fifty studio members, we have a lot of finance, a lot of safeguarding... And actually, you know, we need people in place all the time to keep that moving.	6/231-236
ECJF_01	...we are now developing two paid positions with, well hopefully with the help of Esmée Fairbairn and then also a Studio Manager as well because that's one of the issues that we really have at TRS, is just keeping on top of how many people come and go out of the space.	6/242-246
ECJF_01	The Arts Council, I think, well obviously they funded two paid positions, I mean temporary paid positions already, so they are certainly I think supportive, I feel, of people being paid. Because it's becoming a beast now, like, and also I think... And putting my critical hat on you know, if you're asking for large, our programmes are getting bigger, we're working with more people, putting your kind of critical hat on, you know, you don't want lots of unpaid, transitory people managing fifty thousand pounds. You need somebody who is going to be accountable.	7/258-267
ECJF_01	...we've shown that we can do paid roles, and we've shown actually, our funding went up massively, because I could just sit there and write them. The policy Emma's developed, and the HR, are so much better.	7/278-281
ECJF_01	Ups... I don't know if the word is upscale? I don't think what we, we don't want to make anything bigger necessarily. Yeah, I think it's more around having, it's retaining our autonomy as an organisation, hence why actually the NPO status isn't very attractive to us, actually.	10/385-390
ECJF_01	I feel like our partnerships are becoming stronger now that we have these roles...	12/445-446
ECJF_01	I went to a talk, I think it's Gavin Wade who says it, like why institutions are always, why is it that institutions are always the end place, and why isn't it like the other way round, and I always think of it that way, like the end point for me is not an institution, it's just developing and progressing, what the artist-led is.	17/650-654

ECJF_01	So I think by having some permanent staff, or maybe more steady staff, those partnerships can be handed over and nurtured and continued.	18/696-697
ECJF_01	We'll have to be doing training, and the recruitment, the way that we recruit will be different as well. So we're going to be looking for people with a certain set of skills, and for a certain... Rather than just a good idea for a show.	19/713-716
DGMN_01	Well, when we were looking for a new building, er we started having meetings with Manchester City Council, and the Arts Council, and it became clear very quickly that we would have to kind of rationalise... We'd have to have a much more formal structure... Or incorporate ourselves. Well the Arts Council I think require you to be, if you're an organisation they require you to have a company number and to be properly constituted.	3-4/106-114
DGMN_01	And I suppose from a personal point of view as well, just financial protection for us, so that we had limited liability.	4/121-122
DGMN_01	So we're getting a crash course in running, or managing, you know an art...	16/569-570
JW_01	Grew across the mill because there was empty space becoming available, because of the shift in manufacturing. Er, various recessions, I can't remember what we were actually in at that point, whether we were in a recession or not, or whether we were coming out of it. But definitely a shift in manufacturing so it was a handbag firm that was next door to us that moved out and we just spread across the whole of the top of this mill. So went from eight to fifty artists over the next few years...	2/34-41
JW_01	Starting off with three coming into this building there are now twenty-three staff, and it is... we're now working with, like I say, probably a hundred temporary spaces around the country. There's probably three hundred and fifty artists, at any one time, in a space...	3/82-85
JW_01	Yeah, and so there was a point, and I think it's when we became... it was when we were looking at our job roles, so this would have been about 2006-ish, 2008-ish... And there was this bit where it was kind of, well we, we were getting frustrated with our job roles and it was how we were becoming employed by essentially our art practice.	4/133-138
JW_01	And it was the first steps of growth, because we were then saying, they were suggesting that we needed to have a CEO. We said; "no, we are the people who run this organisation, rightly or wrongly, skills or not, but we are the Artistic Directors."	4/146-149
JW_01	And it was just getting over that growth problem of just, it was how do we... what really sorted it. And it was perhaps the Board not understanding what it is that we were trying to achieve, and them seeing things in a very linear way, that actually the Board wasn't growing with us. We were growing, and, and, the people on it came from an old school world of what art should be, and what artists should be, and the relationship and the hierarchies that should be in place to run an organisation and how it should be. That's really, and you as artist-directors don't have the place to lead the organisation.	4-5/160-169
JW_01	It became very much about their own careers, and Castlefield	5/206-208

	kind of hung on but has never... had that spark of growth about it, and I think, I think that's where we've always wanted to go.	
JW_01	I think there's something about the round of buildings we went through in, in that 1999, 2000, cohort of capital projects, which were the second lot of capital projects, um, and this, the round we went through were people like Stroud Valley Artspace, was one of them, Wysing were on that as well, so these were quite low level organisations who were invested in. That wouldn't happen now, for where we were all at, we didn't have a member of staff, but we were going for half a million pounds.	8/322-328
JW_01	I've never used this before but it probably for me and Karen feels more like a family, we've built a family rather than an institution. And I've tried to keep it like that, and yeah we know people say that we're institution... and I don't, I don't know, it's just a word. It doesn't mean anything. It's like oh well, great, I'll have that.	9/374-379
JW_01	Nicola started to go out to talk to businesses, because we went I think a slightly different route to everyone else and it was kind of, we need to go and get a bit of money to match that and make something happen.	11/439-441
JW_01	And eventually, yeah housing association, Nicola had connections with people over there, but they are, they're a community development association so they run houses, they run shops, they run... social centre over there, and that's, but they basically have an estate. And it's right next to the city centre, and we're kind of like yes, that's what we want. That's what we would like to be, how do we get there?	11/441-447
JW_01	I think within it all you can deal with all of that, but the you know, one... the massive challenge is staff, and managing staff, and everything you have to do as an organisation is another thing altogether, and I think we've been waiting to get the right people in place to look after the staff and do that.	19-20/735-739

Not knowing		
Interview	Statement	Page/Line
CJ_01	So we're, um, a gallery and studios based in Birmingham. Erm, we're sort of in the artist-led...er...field, I guess. But I don't like calling us artist-led because although we've got a couple of artists on our Board I feel like we're more curator-led as an organisation.	1/5-8
CJ_01	Erm, yeah, it's tricky that isn't it?	1/9
CJ_01	Erm, I guess it ['artist-led'] feels uncomfortable because it doesn't necessarily feel like artists are at the front of leading where it's going.	2/46-47
CJ_01	Erm, so it doesn't feel like we're an institution. It feels like we're quite independent of that... and... yeah, I guess that's... yeah, it's very tricky.	2/57-59
CJ_01	I never quite know how to describe ourselves, and when people put us in that artist-led bracket, I think that's right, I think yeah, the way that we operate, it feels like we fit there. And that yeah, we're run by practitioners, but I think that some people would go, well actually you're not artists... that are leading that organisation, so it's a different thing.	2/59-63
CJ_01	Yeah, I think we do, um, I think that maybe we're quite unusual in that we're trying to find different ways to support emerging curatorial practice.	5/107-108
CJ_01	I don't know, it feels tricky to define it in those terms in a way.	7/176-7
CJ_01	Erm... yeah, I just hadn't ever really thought about it in depth in that way I suppose.	8/223-224
CJ_01	Oh god. I don't know whether that's good or not, but I guess... I... yeah... maybe 'institutionalising' is the wrong word and it's more about... becoming more organised, and professionalised...I'm not sure about that term either.	9-258-261
CJ_01	Which I think is useful when you're talking, which is sort of useful when you're talking to people about money and funding... erm yeah, whether or not I'm comfortable about it, I'm not entirely sure.	9/268-270
CJ_01	Hmmm, I think it's tricky. I think it's like, I think it's a good thing for the people taking part in it, I think it's a useful exercise...	15/509-510
CJ_01	Erm so yeah, it feels like a bit of a shift, but it doesn't feel like a huge shift, I don't think, just in terms of how we've been running and how involved people are...	17/592-594
CJ_01	I hope that that's the right thing to do.	18/633
CJ_01	Yeah it's really hard. That is something we've been finding quite difficult is to find the model that we can go, 'Oh yeah, it's like that'.	19/663-664
CG_01	So were kind of you know were the same or more as what we were paying in rent and when you kind of aren't sure you know what to do with your art degree, erm, you're not making any money off your work, erm you know the likelihood is you don't even have a job, you know it's hard to justify that.	2/41-45
CG_01	...it wasn't necessarily an aversion to the term, it was more like not really knowing what we were, we were just doing what we	10/318-320

	were doing and it was not, no labels on us...	
CG_01	Er, just in terms of the organisation, it's great to know that we have the security of four years of funding, erm, which is interesting because we don't necessarily have the security of a building for that long...	15/526-528
CG_01	I think because we've, I mean interestingly, when we were going through the NPO application, er, I think the deadline was the end of January last year, this year rather, we'd got our notice on our previous building at the end of October, so then we were like oh, well we can't really apply for NPO because we don't have, we don't even know if we're going to have a space.	16/537-542
CG_01	Because it's very difficult when we've got this building for two years, we might have to move out, we don't know, it might be longer, we're not sure...	16/565-576
HJLH_01	So, um, and then there was an opportunity to take the second, the first floor of this building as well, and we sort of dithered about that a bit cause it seemed like a lot to take on, seen as we were, literally didn't know how we were gonna manage it.	3/111-113
HJLH_01	So where we're up to now is that that's kind of, through verbal agreement he's saying you know, these rolling leases with him, verbal agreement, likely last between five and ten years...	10/340-342
HJLH_01	Yeah we need to decide what we want to do actually.	10/352
HJLH_01	...so even if this was a temporary space, then it would allow us to fortify, figure out what it is and where we wanted to take it.	10/363-364
HJLH_01	I think that we need to have something confirmed, go back to Urban Splash in the... I was going to say the 'new year', um well we are in the new year, but um fairly soon and just sort of make sure you know we, I don't know if we need to have another meeting or what but we need to sort of work out what happens in April... We want to sign another lease with them, which is a rolling lease that we both have get-out clauses in I think. I don't think, you know, they've, I do believe them when they say they have no plans for this building, and the fact that they've just spent probably twenty grand on the roof, um you know, they want that money back from our rent, or some part of it...	10-11/373-382
HJLH_01	Yeah, we pay a peppercorn rent, it's like, is it eight grand? Well, it's not quite, but I mean it's before service charges etc, it's, well, we pay about eight hundred pounds a month for two floors and two offices, and that includes our service charge, it doesn't include our insurance, but... It's the insurance, the electrics and things like that, which are on top of that so... I think it's basically a pound a square foot or something, this building, the flat rate for it. I can't remember. It's on an Excel spreadsheet somewhere. I remember that was the thing that we kind of initially worked out all of our stuff on, but we forgot about all the other things that you have to pay for. Well it's the, er, rates and stuff like that, you know of, it's really hard to get any sense out of anyone as to how much those things...	11/385-412
HJLH_01	Well, we're behind with it, but essentially last week I've only just filed our units, as our claim, because again I just did not know that that was a thing that you needed to do...	11-12/420-422

HJLH_01	This is partially the reason actually, why the context, why we felt we need to act now and even if circumstances were not perfect here then it could be a stopgap...	13/485-487
HJLH_01	Anyway, so it's a bit disturbing, these kind of discussions that occur in a sort of hypothetical way when there's on, at grass roots, we are doing it, and we're struggling to do it, because we don't have the expertise in terms of, like Lucy and I, you know it's a really steep learning curve, setting up the studio group...	14/525-529
HJLH_01	I think they're hearsay at the moment, as far as we're concerned.	15/553
HJLH_01	And he's negotiated a memorandum of understanding with Salford, which is unusual apparently... With the City Council. I'm not altogether sure what that means, but...	20/724-728
HJLH_01	...I think the first twelve months is going to be us, really programming, so it's more like we're exhibition programmers rather than curators. And then potentially, we would like to have a sort of curator for the space, I don't know how realistic that is.	21/836-839
HJLH_01	I suppose that's where we're at really isn't it? We need to do research visits... Yeah I mean we'd initially said you know, over the summer, last summer, we would do some travelling and go up and see you know various different studio groups, but we've just not had the time you know.	23-24/909-913
HJLH_01	Erm, because I realise, I mean I have no experience of running an artists' studio except as being an artist in that studio, in a studio group and you know I think it's um, yeah you're kind of having new experiences all the time.	24/941-944
HJLH_01	I think you know we are, it's just such a steep learning curve and the, you know, for me as well you know, the kind of pull is to go back and just do the artist... just go back into my studio and shut the door and carry on...	25/972-975
ECJF_01	I feel that by moving that has been a kind of, maybe not a breakthrough for TRS, but it's definitely changed how people perceive us. I don't know if that's for better or for worse though.	2/60-62
ECJF_01	I mean I was scared, I was really scared, I didn't know what to do.	8/314-315
ECJF_01	I mean, there are conversations that I've had with Bluecoat around this, I don't know if Bluecoat are in the position that they will, I don't think they are in the position that they were in when they were offering support and advice, and maybe a future endeavour together.	10/370-373
ECJF_01	...we've also talked about capital funding, we've also talked about, very briefly about NPO status, but that is very much, I don't know, it just seems like a very long time away before we can even consider that kind of... we're still trying to make sure that we're covering the costs here, let alone proving to other people that we're able to...	10/380-384
ECJF_01	Um, but that's not to say that our relationship with Bluecoat is really great. They support us in many different ways... I feel like I can ring them up, do you know what I mean? Like 'I've got a problem and I don't know what to do'.	12/450-453
DGMN_01	No, we were, erm... I took some advice on this, and how legitimate it is I don't know.	3/77-78
DGMN_01	But then it just sort of evaporated. It's hard to describe.	11/415-416
DGMN_01	I mean we knew, we weren't naïve, we knew that there would be	13/482-484

	matching and mending to do, and it would probably take most of our cash reserves.	
DGMN_01	We've done some initial... I've done some initial calculations. Erm, just based on my own experience and knowledge around the building process. Um, and for two million you could... I mean obviously you could spend ten.	14/510-513
DGMN_01	We've been to meetings where they've spoken, we've introduced ourselves, we've, there's been an email exchange. A couple of people left their posts in the midst of negotiating meetings. So at the moment it's a bit grey and a bit woolly.	15/538-541
DGMN_01	So we're getting a crash course in running, or managing, you know an art...	16/569-570
DGMN_01	I mean that, I mean I think it will turn out to be a, a, very long lease, I don't know, twenty-five, fifty, maybe even a hundred years, which effectively does mean you've been gifted building.	16/597-599
DGMN_01	No, I mean Sarah Elderkin is... she's got this very long title and the only two words I can remember is, um, she was Head of, Head of, Head of Policy Development, something like that.	17/611-613
DGMN_01	There is... I think there's a cultural vision document. I mean these are internal Council documents, I don't think they're publicised widely, so I don't want to say too much about how I know about them, but you know, there is a Council... cultural vision.	18/641-644
JW_01	Not knowing what the hell we were doing really.	2/69
JW_01	Where partly people expect, had expected us to leave in 2004, when we'd achieved Patrick Studios, we would go back into a studio, actually for me and Karen that was only the start of it, even though we didn't know what we, again, really were doing, which was a bit odd.	3/88-92
JW_01	We have been backfilling like crazy.	8/358
JW_01	And then over the last few months, well it's not been months it's been years, toying with how do we develop to our direct neighbourhood and how do we engage with this. And that's been quite hard, it's been quite hard to find a way to actually ignite that, again cause we're still growing the organisation.	11/455-459
JW_01	It's going really slowly, it's going really slowly and just because it's such a complicated thing and we might not have the right staff in place to be able to do it.	12/479-481
JW_01	And because of, you know, Arts Council's let's say, Creative Case stuff... which is... now that's one of the things... I've hated the process. Let's say we've resisted the process and we've not been particularly good at it. And we've winged it, but we've probably winged it like everywhere else has winged it.	13/476-480
JW_01	...and you sometimes think this is all planned. It's not, it's completely... if enough people are talking about stuff, consistently enough, things will start to slot into place, and that was that.	15/537-540
JW_01	And Mary Studios came up as that... building for sale, we saw it came for sale, said we wanted to buy it, had no idea where the funds were going to come from, and then just again the Leeds Tech money came up, I suggested to Nicola, 'Can we go for this?', Nic's like, 'well no, but we'll have a go', and built the project to built our interest with what the funder was wanting.	16/586-591