The Artist-Led Condition:
Reframing Self-Organisation in the Visual Arts in the UK Post-2007

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Abstract

The term 'artist-led' has become commonly used as shorthand to describe cultural forms grounded in principles of self-organisation, largely as part of the 'second economy' of the globalised art system. The thesis critically explores this self-organisation by visual arts practitioners in the UK following the Financial Crisis (2007), arguing that the terminology itself is defunct. It proposes the 'artist-led condition' as a way to re-frame those self-organised practices, enabling a social and productive benefit to practitioners through a framework of collectivisation. One that acts as a composition of individuals acting in common rather than flattening differences into a homogenous mass, supporting them to be politically active in their own circumstances.

Situated within a broader discourse on self-organisation in the visual arts and cultural resistance to neoliberal hegemony in times of austerity, the research addresses key questions relating to socio-economic conditions of practice; resistance to systems of social organisation and governance; and the impact of increased internet connectivity. Outlining how artist-led self-organisation has become established as *the* methodology for the majority of practitioners in the period post-2007, it explores how neoliberal power structures have shaped its development, perception and function, creating a paradoxical interdependence between two sides that inherently oppose one another. Through this paradoxical relationship critique is often recuperated by that system, with a small number of practitioners able to stage meaningful critique through utilising dynamic organisational forms. When viewing practitioners as a whole the subsequent need for further dynamic forms of resistance shows the complex and modulated potential to help bring about social change artist-led self-organisation possesses. The artist-led condition specifically supports this potential, allowing for the formation of networked and localised forms of resistance to neoliberal governance in solidarity with one another.

Embracing the paradox of its own existence, the artist-led condition makes public the potential it holds as a site of both problems and opportunities to potentially utilise neoliberal hegemony as a tool to support self-organised resistance to it. The research outlines the practical and ideological parameters of it to demonstrate how it can be understood and function as a catalyst for new models of self-organisation and organisational structures to be created, or existing ones to be reformatted and repurposed for continued use. Re-framing the understanding of artist-led self-organisation to provide practitioners with a new framework of practice presenting new possibilities for social change.

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Acknowledgements

This thesis acts as the culmination of my own research and practice to date, shaped by my experiences and the relationships I have formed since starting a Fine Art degree in 2008. It is written from the perspective of what I would like to have known when I graduated about the art system I was making tentative steps into, with the hope it can be useful for other practitioners and researchers at all stages of their careers. Acting as a love/hate/exasperation letter to a particular articulation of self-organised practice, the intention is for it to create departure points for others to build upon, or disagree with, to formulate new understandings. Helping further strengthen solidarity between practitioners as they do so.

I am extremely grateful to my supervisory team of Joasia Krysa, Michael Birchall and Geoff Cox, who throughout have trusted me with the freedom to experiment, organise, connect and make mistakes, whilst always providing an uncompromisingly critical eye alongside personal and academic guidance. Thanks must also go to my colleagues at the Exhibition Research Lab and the wider School of Art and Design at Liverpool John Moores University, with whom I have shared hours of debate, exploration and made lasting friendships.

Throughout this process my friends and family have all been there to provide support and encouragement in what has been an exciting and particularly challenging personal period of my life. Special thanks must also go to my dog. She has patiently waited for walks during the writing up phase, and has heard me talk about all things 'artist-led' for years – arguably she now knows more about artist-led self-organisation than most. The support of everyone close to me, my colleagues, peers and those I have met along the way has allowed me to complete the thesis. Exploring and attempting to make sense of the beautiful, experimental, communal, baffling and often frustrating processes of artist-led self-organisation in which I, like so many others, have come to reside. To anyone that has had any input, I am forever grateful and humbled for your time and enthusiasm.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the memories of Joseph Cook and Simon 'Mac' Mackenzie, who both began that Fine Art degree with myself over a decade ago. Your lives have had great influence on my practice, and you will live long in the memories of your friends and families.

<u>Introduction</u>

Increasingly in contemporary society artists self-organise to counteract perceived failings by institutions of power; creating new and reformatting existing social structures into forms they feel would better suit current and future needs of practice and social life. This process of artistic self-organisation is now commonly described in the UK as being 'artist-led'. With clear links to notions of 'artist-run' practices – the term widely used in continental Europe, North America and historically in the UK to describe similar self-organised activity by artists – there is a geographic and temporal specificity to the popularity of the 'artist-led' descriptor in the UK post-2007[1] not apparent elsewhere globally.

With both 'artist-run' and 'artist-led' prefixes rooted in historical genealogies of self-organised theory and practice they take inherently 'alternative' approaches to art, culture and social power structures, denoting some form of socially oppositional stance grounded in self-organisation. In Western countries this approach arguably stems from earlier recorded examples such as Joseph Wright of Derby renting a room opposite the Royal Academy in 1785 to display his 'View of Gibraltar during the destruction of the Spanish Floating Batteries, 13 September 1782' (1782) in rebuke to the Academy distancing themselves from him two years earlier.[2] Or more widely known, Gustave Courbet's self-organised exhibition of some forty pieces of his own work at his constructed *Pavilion du Réalisme* directly opposite the *Exposition Universelle*, as a rebuke to the rejection of his painting 'The Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory Summing up a Seven-Year

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[1] Referring to the period of time following the Global Financial Crisis and Great Recession that changed the shape of everyday life and cultural provision, in the UK and beyond, and is still felt today.
[2] John Bonehill, "Laying siege to the Royal Academy: Wright of Derby's 'View of Gibraltar' at Robin's Rooms, Covent Garden, April 1785," *Art History*, 30(04), (2007): 521-44; Jason E. Bowman, "Valuing the Artist-Led: Do We Still Want to Lead, Run, Centralise and Initiate?" *FOOTFALL Symposium*, from TULCA Festival of the Visual Arts 2014, 21 November, 2014; Dave Beech, "Keynote: Dave Beech," *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led,* from Exhibition Research Lab, Liverpool School of Art and Design, 31 January, 2020.

Phase of My Artistic Life' (1855) from the 1855 exhibition.[3] Routinely used since the 18th century as a way to regain some form of personal autonomy[4] outside of the art market and the perceived exclusionary confines of institutions as capitalism became more entwined with artistic practice, these strategies of self-organisation developed and employed by artists have recently been largely shaped by neoliberal ideology of the free market, growing independence from public subsidy, and an increased entrepreneurial ethos. It is this starting point of practitioners basing their alternative stances on values propagated by the socio-economic regime they generally oppose, whilst implicitly being trapped within its machinations, that creates a paradox central to artist-led self-organisation and regularly causes tension along political and ideological lines between those that enact it.

As a piece of terminology the use of the 'artist-led' prefix has notably grown in popularity in recent years in the UK post-Global Financial Crisis and Great Recession (2007 – 2009) alongside the impacts those events had on the provision for visual arts in the UK, and it is here the research is located. The overwhelming predisposition of contemporary artistic practices now come under its umbrella, occupying a generally non-commercial space of practice

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[3] Mary Morton, "To Create a Living Art. Rethinking Courbet's Landscape painting," in: *Courbet and the Modern Landscape* ed. Mary Morton & Charlotte Eyerman (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006), 1-19.

[4] By 'autonomy' here and throughout the thesis it refers to the idea of increased self-governing. In context of the research breaking free of, or adapting, art system structures relating to the creation, display and reception of artworks ultimately perceived to serve the commercial art market. This position is drawn from the neoliberal shift of society charted by sociologists Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, outlined in Chapter 1 alongside debates on the role of art and the artist. For an overview of perspectives on contemporary art and autonomy (including the autonomy of the art object and practitioners' relations to the commercial market), see Paul Crowther, "Art and Autonomy," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Volume 21, Issue 1, (Winter 1981): 12-21; Hans Abbing, "The autonomous artist still rules the world of culture," in: *A portrait of the artist in 2015: Artistic careers and higher arts education in Europe* ed. Ineke van Hamersveld, Ingrid Janssen, Cas Smithuijsen & Janneke Weijermars (Amsterdam: Boekmanstichting, 2004), 55-66; Katherine Du, "Some Thoughts on Artistic (and Economic) Autonomy | Katherine Du," YouTube Video, 12:41, November 25, 2018, accessed August 18, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGbqFixjkAQ

commonly known as the 'second economy'. In *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*, art historian and philosopher John Roberts outlines the second economy as the:

> sphere of artistic and cultural activity that has little or no relationship to the primary economy of art: salesrooms, auction houses, museums and large public galleries. But – and here is the significance of its emergence and expansion – it is where the majority of artists now labour, and produce their ideas and cultivate their models, templates and networks. This is not to say that these artists do not have any kind of economic or critical relationship to the primary economy…but their work and the work's relationship to the social world is not *governed* by this relationship.[5]

The ethos of artist-led self-organisation and the practitioners that enact it – that I understand as being part of the second economy as outlined by Roberts – were given an attemptive definition by the ongoing independent journal *Doggerland* as:

> Oppositional; independent; nomads; pseudo-institutional; conflicted; collective; breeding grounds; devolved; social-clubs; mortgaging their way towards the means of production. And also none of the above. All absurd in their inadequacy. And yet, in spite – or perhaps because of – its elasticity, the term persists, effectively defined by the specificity of each user. A site with unclear boundaries.[6]

It is this elasticity, in the spirit of self-organisation, allowing practitioners to define the specific parameters of the term on a personal level that means there is currently no way to effectively and holistically define it for universal application. It is unclear just what that term refers to more precisely – a social grouping, a method of individual self-identification, a way of working and enacting practice, a movement or collection of movements, or all of the above and more? Similarly, this issue is apparent for the terms 'artist', 'practitioner' and 'practice' at a

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[5] John Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 2015), 22.
[6] Samuel Playford-Greenwell & Tom Prater, "Notes from the Middle Stone," *Doggerland*, Issue #1 (2016): 7.

broader level within the visual arts.[7] When viewed together they serve to help reinforce the contested nature of artistic existence. For the purpose of this thesis I use artist and practitioner interchangeably to describe any person creating 'artworks' using any method of production. This creation of artwork is the output I refer to as their practice. The intention is to reinforce the contestable and similarly elastic nature of each term and people's understandings of them (and others), whilst showing my own predisposition in relation to the boundaries of definition for contemporary archetypes and methodologies of practice.

Because of this broad lack of definition within the visual arts, and in particular the 'artist-led' moniker, it opens those enacting artist-led self-organisation to misunderstandings between one another and from those practicing or existing outside of its spatio-temporal confines. With artist-led self-organisation increasingly becoming *the* orthodoxy for practitioners in the UK,[8] this visible increase in activity with no universally held structure has opened practitioners to routine co-optation and exploitation by external forces. Profiting on their productive, unproductive and useful labour[9] through processes such as

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[7] See Aileen Burns, Johan Lundh & Tara McDowell, eds., *The Artist As Producer, Quarry, Thread, Director, Writer, Orchestrator, Ethnographer, Choreographer, Poet, Archivist, Forger, Curator, and Many Other Things First* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2018); Bojana Kunst, *Artist at Work, Proximity of Art and Capitalism* (Alresford: Zer0 Books, 2015); Mika Hannula, Jan Kaila, Roger Palmer & Kimmo Sarje, eds., *Artists as Researchers – A New Paradigm for Art Education in Europe* (Helsinki: University of the Arts Helsinki, 2013); Clara Bodenmann-Ritter, ed., *Jeder Mensch ein Künstler: Gespräche an der Documenta V* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1972), 5-20.

[8] "Artists' Strategies," a-n, March 11, 2008, accessed November 16, 2018, https://www.a-n.co.uk/resource/artists-strategies/

[9] Following the traditional Marxist understandings of productive, unproductive and useful labour. Productive and unproductive are waged forms of labour. However productive labour produces surplus value for an employer to profit from; unproductive labour produces no surplus value to be extracted, but instead material wealth (a non-monetary form) to sustain people/organisations with. Useful labour is unwaged and produces material wealth. As artist Dave Beech states, the grants, stipends and fees artists receive from state funding for their practices are usually one-off and non-recurring, rarely do private organisations employ artists full-time, and rarer still are practitioners that earn a full-time living from their output (as sales are usually one-off and irregular, like

artwashing[10] and gentrification, and through 'professional development' schemes that amount to free labour gained under the guise of unpaid internships. Subsequently through profiting on all forms of practitioners' labour, much of the critique enacted by them in varying forms is also recuperated back into the institutions and other power structures of society, effectively nullifying it, further undermining the potential artist-led self-organisation holds for resistance.

Throughout the thesis I use this lack of definition, and the confusion and negative impacts caused as a result to argue for the need of a new understanding of artist-led self-organisation. The research critically analyses artistic self-organisation in the UK to define and propose the 'artist-led condition' as that new understanding specific to post-2007 socio-economic conditions. This re-framing is intended to specifically help increase knowledge and solidarity between practitioners and their organisational structures. Providing a platform from which they could potentially mobilise to counter the negative post-2007 conditions and ensuing austerity measures in relation to public spending and provision on culture, in

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state funding). So the majority of artist-led practices would be understood as useful labour. This is in addition to the majority of practitioners (outside of a privileged few) having waged jobs usually in the arts or hospitality industries to support themselves. In this context both their unwaged and waged labour is easily exploited by external parties. Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value: Volume IV of Capital*, Part 1-3, trans. Emile Burns, ed. S. Ryazanskaya (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1963); Dave Beech, *Art and Postcapitalism: Aesthetic Labour, Automation and Value Production* (London: Pluto Press, 2019), 58-61.

[10] When artists become co-opted into or consciously enter the gentrification process whereby they occupy certain spaces and inadvertently or advertently help to regenerate them through their practice; leaving them ripe for further development by other external parties such as construction firms or private landlords looking to profit from those same spaces. Feargus O'Sullivan, "The Pernicious Realities of 'Artwashing,'" *CityLab*, June 24, 2014, accessed March 04, 2020,
https://www.citylab.com/equity/2014/06/the-pernicious-realities-of-artwashing/373289/
Fauziya Johnson, Co-Founder of *ROOT-ed Zine* (a zine platforming artists of colour and their concerns in the North West of England) also raised the point of artwashing in relation to the L8 postcode in Liverpool at *Open Forum 2*, organised by myself alongside a number of other events as part of the research. See the Methods and Methodology sub-section below and Appendix 2 for further information.

parallel to the changing art market and broader discussions around autonomy within the art system. Focusing on artist-led self-organisation, the research explores its rise to prominence in relation to the hegemonic dominance that neoliberalism, globalisation and network culture have developed and continue to hold over contemporary existence. Here hegemonic is understood as the idea of a cultural hegemony outlined by the Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci:

> the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.[11]

Following on from this, in order to define the three terms that have worked to develop the neoliberal hegemony I draw on the work of activist writer George Monbiot, sociologists David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton, and new media activist and theorist Tiziana Terranova. Monbiot states:

> Neoliberalism sees competition as the defining characteristic of human relations. It redefines citizens as consumers, whose democratic choices are best exercised by buying and selling, a process that rewards merit and punishes inefficiency. It maintains that "the market" delivers benefits that could never be achieved by planning…Inequality is recast as virtuous: a reward for utility and a generator of wealth, which trickles down to enrich everyone, efforts to create a more equal society are both counterproductive and morally corrosive. The market ensures that everyone gets what they deserve.[12]

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[11] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. & trans. Geoffrey Nowell Smith & Quintin Hoare (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1971), 12.
[12] George Monbiot, "Neoliberalism – the ideology at the root of all our problems," *The Guardian*, April 15, 2016, accessed March 04, 2020,

Helping drive the dominance of the neoliberal system – and historically linked to colonial and imperial exploitation often leveraged against countries in the Global South to maintain a Western hegemony that has recently been challenged by new world superpowers such as China – globalisation is characterised by Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton as:

> located on a continuum with the local, national and regional…Globalization can be taken to refer to those spatio-temporal processes of change which underpin a transformation in the organization of human affairs by linking together and expanding human activity across regions and continents.[13]

As globalisation has developed in contemporary society alongside the rise of digital communications technology, that same technology and globalised outlook has fostered new modes of relations through ever-expanding networks to form distinct network cultures. As Terranova outlines:

> To think of something like a 'network culture' at all…is to try to think *simultaneously* the singular and the multiple, the common and the unique…they appear to us as a meshwork of overlapping cultural formations, of hybrid reinventions, cross-pollinations and singular variations. It is a tendency of informational flows to spill over from whatever network they are circulating in and hence to escape the narrowness of the channel and to open up to a larger milieu.[14]

https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot

[13] David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt & Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 15.

[14] Tiziana Terranova, *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 1-2.

Context and Research Problem

As outlined, much of the artistic practice in the UK is now commonly described under the umbrella of artist-led self-organisation. Within this grouping three key facets of contemporary life – neoliberalism, globalisation and network culture – have shaped and continue to shape how artistic practice is developed and conceptualised within the wider art system. Within the art system globally, self-organised practices form the basis for much of its functioning, with artist-led self-organisation performing this role in the UK.

Traditionally the art system has been defined and widely understood from the 20th century onwards as the 'art world', or following art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto's definition in 1964, the 'artworld'.[15] However moving onwards from the 1960s there was a focus on systemic structures within art, and often rebellion against them. The general view of the art world came to be one of top-down structural and systematic control by the institutions and actors involved in the commercial art market.[16] Despite opposition from large numbers of both artists and curators that would self-organise to show their dissent through their experimental practices,[17] the focus shifted primarily from the creation of works and their potential subsequent sale to one mirroring the structure of the capitalist system of the time. Outrightly favouring the commercial market trading art as a commodity that quickly became an investment tool for the global financial elite.

Describing this holistic environment in which both commercial and non-commercial practices co-exist in regular opposition, art historian and activist Yates McKee outlines the art system in *Strike Art* as not meaning:

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[15] Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.61 No.19 (1964): 571-584.
[16] Lane Relyea, *Your Everyday Art World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013).
[17] Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012).

a monolithic entity with all of its elements working in equilibrium, but rather an unstable assemblage or meshwork with an ever-present potential for antagonism between what Pierre Bourdieu would call the dominant and dominated elements thereof.[18]

Within this 'unstable assemblage or meshwork' artist-led self-organisation is positioned as a dominated element, with the commercial and institutional aspects of the art system functioning as dominant over all others. This shift toward an art system dominated by institutional structures and economic investment privileging the wealthy, and instrumentalising certain practitioners at the expense of others, will be explored in detail in subsequent chapters. But throughout is used as the backdrop to frame the context of contemporary artist-led self-organisation and the key facets of contemporary life of neoliberalism, globalisation and network culture.

This institutional dominance in the art system and beyond is the key site of argument in relation to practices of artist-led self-organisation. The thesis challenges the current status quo of precarity for practitioners brought about by the neoliberal system and those institutions, showing how paradoxical the socio-economic basis of their self-organisation is, and in turn how insidiously entwined that same system has become in their 'oppositional' practices. With no universal understanding of what the 'artist-led' moniker entails neoliberal power structures have been able to maintain the status quo through exploiting their practices, leading to the regular recuperation and nullifying of critique into, and by, dominant social institutions. The thesis argues more dynamic forms of organisation and critique – that some practitioners are beginning to utilise – are required on a broader level to counteract this.

In light of this context, the central problem for the research is: How can processes of artist-led self-organisation be re-framed in order to achieve greater solidarity and understanding between practitioners, and allow for meaningful,

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[18] Yates McKee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition* (New York: Verso, 2016), 11-12.

effective, and sustained processes of social critique and resistance to develop to counteract neoliberal hegemony?

Alongside addressing this central problem, the research also addresses the following related key questions:

1. What are the social and economic conditions of artistic practice that emerged post-2007, and how have they impacted upon current forms of artistic self-organisation?

2. How has increased globalised connectivity impacted artist-led self-organisation?

3. What is distinctive about new forms of contemporary self-organisation that emerged post-2007, and what do they offer as models for future practitioners to draw from and further develop?

4. What perceived and actual forms of resistance does artist-led self-organisation offer wider systems of social organisation?

<u>Contribution to Knowledge</u>

In order to address the research problem and related key questions the thesis proposes and defines a new conceptual framework to re-frame and broaden the understanding of self-organisation within the visual arts as part of contemporary UK society: the 'artist-led condition'. It provides practitioners in the UK with a clearer definition of who and what constitutes the 'artist-led' prefix. Outlining the complex, and modulated potential for social change inherent to processes of artist-led self-organisation, their existence within the identification of a UK-specific, post-2007, social condition allows for the formation of effective and meaningful networked and localised resistance in solidarity with one another.

The artist-led condition can be understood as:

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- *Paradoxical and pluriversal.* It continues the genealogy of artist-led self-organisation in existing paradoxically; an example of and counterpoint to existing neoliberal hegemony. It uses this hybrid state to the benefit of those subject to it, providing opportunities for the creation of meaningful critique and resistance. Within this paradoxical nature the condition exists uniquely for each individual, their own experiences of precarity shaping their specific understanding.

- *Providing a form of collective identity.* It allows people to unite as being subject to the same general conditioning and condition(s) of existence. Providing a sense of belonging and fostering a bond between those that identify as such to help potentially guide, advise or mobilise practitioners. They are able to question how they *are* in relation to one another in an interdependent community.

- *'Artist-'centred and open to all.* There is equality between all that does not and should not negatively take into account race, identity, knowledge, experience, class or privilege. Focused on the development of those that identify as being subject to the condition, mainly based in the second economy. Acting as a vehicle to unite a temporally and spatially varied peer group together against the vicissitudes of neoliberal governance, revelling in their differences as a site of strength.

- *Evolving from a lineage of self-organised practices and movements.* Here the inherent opposition to social hegemony embedded within practices, whether acknowledged or not, is highlighted. This inherent opposition is based on the desire to provide an alternative to current offerings, thus *implying* some form of social and/or institutional critique, regardless of how conscious the practitioner is of enacting it or not.

- *Dynamic and critically attentive.* The borders of the condition are always in flux, not only allowing for greater inclusion of those subject to it, but

also ensuring its organisational structures are always sites of becoming. Allowing them to institutionalise critical knowledge and practices as dynamic forms without ever becoming static, constituted, sites of power that could be easily recuperated.

- *Fostering various concerns and movements*. The condition is the framework that provides the online/offline space and relations through networked relations for other concerns and movements to develop from. An incubator from which broadened understandings of artist-led self-organisation, methodologies of practice and social movements can develop from within to addresses specific concerns.

Making a direct intervention into existing knowledge of contemporary art in relation to self-organisation by artists, the research offers a new conceptualisation, providing structure to an often fleeting and ephemerally perceived subject area. Previously the use of the 'artist-led' prefix to describe the myriad of self-organised practices by artists was ill-defined and as such unfit for purpose. Creating confusion between practitioners, a lack of structure for meaningful discourse within and outside of its confines, and leaving them open to routine co-optation and exploitation by external forces and agents. The artist-led condition re-frames post-2007 self-organised practices in the UK, enabling a social and productive benefit to practitioners through a framework of collectivisation. One acting as a composition of individuals acting in common rather than flattening differences into a homogenous mass, supporting them to be politically active in their own circumstances.

The research positions this new framework external to the established public and private institutions of the art system and its commercial market, within the generally non-commercial second economy of the art system. In doing so it creates a new perspective on artist-led self-organisation, repositioning the practices and practitioners that are subject to it in a wider historical discourse between Western art and capitalism. Furthermore it creates a significant body of critical research on the artist-led condition, for use by any practitioners and

researchers. In doing so broadening understanding of this newly defined framework whilst contributing published research to wider discussions of self-organisation by artists to counteract the current lack of available information.

Literature Review

Alongside the lack of definition on what the 'artist-led' moniker stands for, there also exists a lack of published literature specifically on artist-led self-organisation outside of a small number of books principally providing empirical research on specific organisations sharing similar organisational models, and a small number of digitally and independently published, critically engaged, texts that have a relatively scant readership and reach. To date the existing information on artist-led self-organisation in the UK is not represented in any meaningful capacity in published materials and has so far been broadly overlooked for detailed research at academic level. Instead it is seemingly accepted as part of everyday life and generally ignored for in-depth critical exploration. Instead information on issues stemming from or relating to artist-led self-organisation is generally shared and disseminated informally between practitioners through word of mouth or digital means. Not only does this risk excluding certain demographics of practitioners and researchers from vital knowledge, but it also risks creating homogenous networks where practitioners encounter the same problems and pitfalls stemming from previous practitioners' experiences through operating in a certain manner. Aside from this scant literature specifically on artist-led self-organisation, throughout the research draws on literature from other secondary sources covering artist-run and self-organised artistic practices globally,[19] alongside key theoretical bodies of work covering the subjects of neoliberalism, globalisation and network culture.

The literature available on artist-led self-organisation can generally be separated into categories of either history or theory. Within these categories the content

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[19] Their inclusion is based on their influence on subsequent artist-led practices, or the interchangeability between the two terms if published post-2007.

can range from case studies on specific organisations, overviews of historical time periods, or critical appraisals, interviews and opinion pieces.

Examples of published historical material include *Caustic Caustic*,[20] *Artists in the City: SPACE in '68 and beyond*,[21] *It Was Never Going To Be Straightforward*,[22] *Leaving Las Vegas*,[23] *City Racing: The Life and Times of an Artist-Run Gallery*,[24] and *Transmission: Committee for the Visual Arts*,[25] that cover the operation of the organisations Caustic Coastal, SPACE, g39, Project Space Leeds (PSL), City Racing and Transmission respectively. Although from this list City Racing closed after a decade of activity in 1998, and PSL was institutionally transformed into The Tetley in 2013, the other organisations still remain active across online and offline spaces. Despite Transmission and g39 calling themselves artist-run organisations (after being founded during the UK heyday of the use of the 'artist-run' moniker in 1988 and 1997 respectively) they regularly group themselves together with those identifying as being 'artist-led'. If viewed chronologically there is a clear shift in the literature that occurs between identifying as 'artist-run' from SPACE in 1968 to 'artist-led' (as a potential outlier) by PSL in 2006, with regular instances of revisionism over the terms used to describe organisations during this period.[26] That is not to say the two are not and cannot be interchangeable to a certain degree, but rather nostalgia for organisations and their histories risks blurring the boundaries of already elastic terminologies even further. This category of literature reinforces the general conditions artist-led organisations and practices develop under; namely responding to a perceived lack in cultural provision and self-organising in varying capacities to counteract

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[20] Caustic Coastal, *Caustic Caustic* (Manchester: Caustic Coastal, 2020).
[21] Anna Harding, ed., *Artists in the City: SPACE in '68 and beyond* (London: SPACE, 2018).
[22] Emma Geliot, ed., *It Was Never Going To Be Straightforward* (Cardiff: CTA, 2013).
[23] Project Space Leeds, *Leaving Las Vegas* (Leeds: Project Space Leeds, 2012).
[24] John Burgess et. al, eds., *City Racing: The Life and Times of an Artist-Run Gallery* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2002).
[25] Transmission, *Transmission: Committee for the Visual Arts* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2002).
[26] This point will be explored further in Chapter 1.

it, all whilst negotiating the dynamics of further institutionalising in an attempt to safeguard their futures.

Published material on the theory of artist-led self-organisation generally serves to expand upon the historic material published whilst contextualising the content with more critical rigour, often through a variety of platforms. Examples here include *Self-Organised*[27] edited by curator and art historian Stine Hebert and curator Anne Szefer Karlsen, "DIY • DIWO • DIA"[28] by artist Louise Ashcroft published in *Art Monthly*, and "People like us"[29] by artist Kevin Hunt published digitally through the artists' information company, a-n. I would argue these texts outline the theoretical issues that drive artist-led self-organisation outside of responding to a lack of provision, and expand upon the implications of that lack of provision through socio-political and economic viewpoints. The arguments and case studies put forward – broadly for the need of autonomy and self-determination, self-organised methodologies, and embedding adaptability within organisational structures and practices – expand on the rise of self-organisation in the visual arts in contemporary neoliberal society.

With the relationship between neoliberalism and the visual arts crucial to artist-led self-organisation on a number of levels (and explored throughout the thesis), examples of pertinent literature to help understand and contextualise this dynamic in contemporary society include *The New Spirit of Capitalism*[30] by sociologists Luc Boltanski and Éve Chiapello, *Spectre at the Feast*[31] by political economist Andrew Gamble, and *Dark Matter*[32] by art activist Gregory Sholette.

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[27] Stine Hebert & Anne Szefer Karlsen, eds., *Self-Organised* (London: Open Editions/Occasional Table, 2013).
[28] Louise Ashcroft, "DIY • DIWO • DIA." *Art Monthly*, No.424, (March 2019): 11-15.
[29] Kevin Hunt, "People Like Us," *a-n*, May 26, 2017, accessed November 15, 2017, https://static.a-n.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/People-like-us.pdf
[30] Luc Boltanski & Éve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism,* trans. Gregory Elliott, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2018).
[31] Andrew Gamble. *The Spectre at the Feast. Capitalist Crisis and the Politics of Recession,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
[32] Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011).

Although seemingly disparate, these texts help to chart the course of how the neoliberal orthodoxy has shifted since its inception to its current form, including the unwieldy nature of the free market and the system's propensity for recessions. Within this Boltanski and Chiapello map how a network-based managerial dogma was instilled within the neoliberal system that changed how the global free market was approached and managed, and effects that had on labour, production and consumption globally. Gamble takes up many of the threads from Boltanski and Chiapello to further this line of thought by showing how the Financial Crisis manifested in 2007, and how other such crises have occurred as an inherent mechanism within the capitalist system.

Sholette can be seen to then show how that same capitalist system under the guise of neoliberalism has marginalised and exploited visual artists from its inception, particularly from the Great Recession onwards. Using the astrophysics term dark matter (describing the unseen matter supporting the universe allowing it to continue functioning and expanding), Sholette applies this to the art system to describe all of the 'unseen' roles allowing the system to function on a daily basis (including processes of artist-led self-organisation). In doing so it rationalises the vast swathes of practitioners that will ultimately 'fail' to achieve the status of a recognised and profitable artist, but who increasingly come to work in socially engaged and non-commercial environments. Through this interpretation it allows for artist-led self-organisation to be viewed alongside other self-organised and non-commercial visual and socially engaged arts practices globally as part of a wider discourse on the vicissitudes of neoliberal governance and inequalities it produces for practitioners.

With globalisation growing exponentially in the 1980s it is no surprise its rise is tied to the same time period in which neoliberalism gained supremacy as the dominant world economic system. Acting in tandem, the push toward wider globalisation would allow new economic markets to be opened up to the

Western world. Examples here include *Globalization and Its Discontents*[33] by economist Joseph Stiglitz, *The Globalization Paradox*[34] by economist Dani Rodrik, *Art and Globalization*[35] edited by art historian and critic James Elkins, sociologist Zhivka Valiavicharska and writer and academic Alice Kim, and *Globalization and Contemporary Art*[36] edited by art and social historian Jonathan Harris.

Stiglitz sets out his case for globalisation as fundamentally flawed, driven by a neoliberal zeal for the free market that serves to impoverish developing nations for the profit of others (in a continuation of the historic colonial origins of globalisation itself). This seemingly imbalanced process is further critiqued by Rodrik who argues that even for developed nations globalisation presents a serious issue in that democracy, national self-determination and economic development are all vying for control but have to exist in equilibrium to avoid negative outcomes for a particular state, which they rarely do. This turbulent melting pot of a process seen by many as aiding to connect the world and develop economic growth, but which is actually constantly contested from all sides, is where contemporary art finds itself often used as a pawn. Both *Art and Globalization* and *Globalization and Contemporary Art* argue this case, citing the rise of biennale culture as indicative of art's co-optation into this process, becoming part of a global experience economy marketed through the lens of cultural tourism. As part of this rise of biennales they also argue for globalisation as having aided the circulation of art into galleries and exhibition spaces throughout the world like never before in history, creating new art scenes, movements and subjects. Artist-led self-organisation fits within this wider global discourse as occupying a specific moment and niche within the visual arts makeup of the UK.

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[33] Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books, 2002).
[34] Dani Rodrik, *The Globalization Paradox: Why Global Markets, States and Democracy Can't Coexist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
[35] James Elkins, Zhivka Valiavicharska & Alice Kim, eds., *Art and Globalization* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2010).
[36] Jonathan Harris, ed., *Globalization and Contemporary Art* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

As part of this moment and niche in UK art history artist-led self-organisation –
like much of contemporary society – relies heavily on network culture and digital
communications technology to function and share information and examples of
practice and organisational structures. Key examples include *Organized
Networks*[37] by media theorist Ned Rossiter, *Organization after Social Media*[38] by
Rossiter and fellow media theorist Geert Lovink, and *Also-Space, From Hot to
Something Else*[39] by artist Reeinart Vanhoe.

In both texts Rossiter and Lovink attempt to reconcile how increased internet
access and interactivity alongside neoliberalism and globalisation has prompted
the emergence of new forms of social organisational and power structures, often
at odds with previous understandings of social relations. Although bringing
about lasting social change is on the one hand more difficult than ever before, as
Rossiter and Lovink convey, there is a potential for change innate to new
network forms that are increasingly being utilised globally. Vanhoe provides an
example of just how such networking between artists operates using Indonesian
artist collective ruangrupa as a case study. Although not defining themselves as
'artist-led' ruangrupa fall into the same self-organising methodology of practice,
and parallels can be drawn between UK practitioners. Here Vanhoe's research
points toward a collective model and dynamic of practice as opposed to the
traditional, generally individual, Western one. He shows how ruangrupa use
their networks (in online/offline spaces) to their advantage and arguably shows
examples of what artist-led organisations and practitioners could utilise for their
own benefit.

In selecting the material above for inclusion as central to guiding the research
and the arguments developed within it, other bodies of work, theories and

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[37] Ned Rossiter, *Organized Networks: Media Theory, Creative Labour, New
Institutions* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, Amsterdam: Institute of Network
Cultures, 2006).
[38] Geert Lovink & Ned Rossiter, *Organization after Social Media* (New York:
Autonomedia, 2018).
[39] Reinaart Vanhoe, *Also-Space, From Hot to Something Else: How Indonesian Art
Initiatives Have Reinvented Networking*, Onomatopee #136 (Eindhoven:
Onomatopee, 2016).

practices relating to artist-led self-organisation were overlooked. This is due to both theoretical and practical concerns and limitations.

Firstly, with regards to contemporary self-organisation by artists the decision was made to focus on material from the UK wherever possible given the subject matter of the research. With the various monikers used to describe these processes globally, even in a Western or Western European context, the literature often worked to reinforce historical trends that were already apparent. Examples here are *Artist-Run Spaces. Nonprofit Collective Organizations in the 1960s and 1970s* edited by journalist Gabriele Detterer and artist Maurizio Nannucci,[40] and *Inventing Downtown: Artist-Run Galleries in New York City, 1952 – 1965,* by curator Melissa Rachleff.[41] Although both are from a key period in the genealogy of what would become artist-led self-organisation in the UK, and provide detailed examples of organisations, there is other material that provides better theoretical contextualisation to the practices and ideologies of the self-organisation during that period. Secondly, there were practical limitations relating to documentation of recent and current practices and organisations. Here examples such as the UK-based online/offline platforms *Doggerland*,[42] *MAP*[43] and *Sluice*[44] provide critical engagement and documentation of practice, but it is often sporadic and can become contingent not long after publication. Although this very much reinforces the realities of artist-led practices and maintaining organisations alongside other forms of labour, it means to date there has been sporadic and esoteric information that often cannot keep pace with what is happening, or that acts to document those situations. Acting as a record of recent history in the same way as the two example publications above do for

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[40] Gabriele Detterer & Maurizio Nannucci, eds., *Artist-Run Spaces. Nonprofit Collective Organizations in the 1960s and 1970s* (Zurich: JRP|Ringier & Les presses du réel, 2012).
[41] Melissa Rachleff, *Inventing Downtown: Artist-Run Galleries in New York City, 1952 – 1965* (New York: Prestel, 2017).
[42] "About," Doggerland, accessed August 10, 2020, https://www.doggerland.info/about/
[43] "About," MAP, accessed August 10, 2020, https://mapmagazine.co.uk/about
[44] "About," Sluice, accessed August 10, 2020, http://sluice.info/#about

1950 – 1970. Despite not being wholly relevant to shape the main arguments put forward throughout the thesis, the information does provide broad overviews and instances of critical insight into specific issues, and where relevant has been included for contextual reference.

Methodology and Methods

The research combines the critical analysis of literature with a form of autoethnographic approach to provide its methodology.

In any detailed enquiry into alternative forms of social organisation there are a number of figures that recur as key to establishing an understanding of the dynamics (and challenging) of social structures. In order to theoretically contextualise the research I draw upon the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, philosopher Jacques Rancière and political theorist Chantal Mouffe to structure a base framework from which to create arguments outlining the development and possible future effectiveness of artist-led self-organisation, in line with wider debates surrounding social power structures in neoliberal contexts. Bourdieu outlines how power is culturally inscribed in citizens through institutions and their agents that then continue the established social hierarchy; his concepts of *habitus* and *fields*[45] are central to describing this socially constructed nature of power. Following this, Rancière's writings on, and interpretation of, *dissensus*[46] are key to understanding the role of artist-led self-organisation as a vehicle for developing and enacting critique, and creating new social organisational structures and methodologies. Rancière makes the case for needing social spaces of free thought, subversion and resistance in order to evaluate existing structures and develop new ones. Artist-led self-organisation – part of a genealogy of self-organised artistic and cultural practices – offers the emancipatory potential for creating just such spaces. Although it undoubtedly runs the risk of being recuperated and instrumentalised by agents and

[45] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (London: Routledge, 1984).
[46] Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2010).

institutions in power, becoming stuck in a state of *consensus*, there exists the potential for practitioners to create instances of dissensus against the pervading status quo. Although dissensus acts as the methodology of critique for practitioners it is Mouffe's concepts of *agonism* and *pluralism*[47] that help speculate as to how it could be applied in contemporary society. Agonism describes the relationship between adversaries, rather than enemies, who occupy the same space and have different ideas for how it should be governed, with pluralism providing the structure within which dissensus can help bring about a new socio-political consensus with critique continually occurring, ensuring consensus is always challenged in an ongoing democratic process. This framework then allows artist-led self-organisation to be positioned within wider global discourses on critique, social organisational structures, art system hierarchies and neoliberal society, and more detailed arguments made on the efficacy of those organisational processes.

Within this framework the research utilises a paradoxically semi-autoethnographic approach drawing on my own experiences to date to develop arguments around the role, necessity and potential of artist-led self-organisation. Sociologists Tony Adams, Stacy Holman Jones and Carolyn Ellis describe autoethnography as a research method that:

- Uses a researcher's personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences.
- Acknowledges and values a researcher's relationships with others.
- Shows people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles.
- Balances intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity.
- Strives for social justice and to make life better.[48]

Autoethnography links explicitly to the underlying goal of the research to highlight the inequalities, repression and exploitation faced by those enacting

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[47] Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2009).
[48] Tony E. Adams, Stacey Holman Jones & Carolyn Ellis, *Autoethnography (Understanding Qualitative research)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-2.

artist-led self-organisation in order to argue for the need to re-frame those practices. To fulfil this goal a mixed-method approach to collecting data was used from both primary and secondary sources, through fieldwork in my own involvement and embeddedness in the field of artist-led self-organisation, exploratory observation, and critical argumentation. Although the flow of the argument throughout the thesis is relatively linear, in using this mixed-methods approach to address the research problem and answer the research questions the process was decidedly non-linear; arguably in keeping with broader processes of artist-led self-organisation and my own practice. Questions were regularly answered concurrently or in non-sequential order to ensure the arguments being made remained cohesive, despite any tension this may have caused.

Having been embedded in processes of artist-led self-organisation since 2010 I have gained an in-depth knowledge of the subject area and developed an extensive global network of peers, with my research being presented in the UK, Italy, Japan and Australia over the course of the research project. My embeddedness was treated as existing 'experiential data' following the work of sociologist Anselm Strauss, who stated such data essential because "they not only give added theoretical sensitivity but provide a wealth of provisional suggestions for making comparisons, finding variations, and sampling widely on theoretical grounds."[49] In working and practicing in both artistic and curatorial capacities in artist-led contexts as part of my practice, the research can be understood to exist in relative tension between ethnographic and practical approaches. It can be seen to move away from the myth of ethnographic objectivity, using my own practical subjectivity (and that of other practitioners) alongside ethnographic methods to inform it.

Observation was also selected in order to draw on primary sources of data. This allowed me to spend time in different artist-led environments to observe subjects first-hand. Building relationships and trust with them, and in turn

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[49] Anselm L. Strauss, *Qualitative analysis for social scientists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 11.

participating in and experiencing the activities of their groups, collectives or organisations.[50] Notes were made during periods of informal observation during visits and conversations to contribute to a general contextualisation of artist-led self-organisation to inform the project. Given the nature of artist-led activity a 'traditional' observational approach of spending relatively long periods of time in one location or with one social group was not possible. This was due to the very nature of practitioners and their organisations as they had regular turnover of staff or stakeholders compared to larger institutional organisations, operated on an ad-hoc basis around other working commitments and social needs, or were only intended to be accessible for finite periods at any given time e.g. around events. I attended as wide a variety of specific events and conducted as many site visits as was feasible in the research period to broaden my knowledge of commonalities in the field. Copies of notes, along with a full list of research visits, can be found in Appendix 1.

The tension between ethnographic and practical methodologies was intentionally exploited in order to reflect on my findings and make them public using critical argumentation as a method throughout. Although this may seem counterintuitive to autoethnography it was in keeping with the paradoxical nature of artist-led self-organisation on a broad level (which will be outlined throughout the thesis), forming a paradoxical auto-ethnographic methodology. Critical argumentation was developed from field notes taken during informal observation and from my own experiences and served to form the main points of discourse in the thesis, with a number of public events serving to reflect on those notes, experiences, and arguments with the input of other practitioners and leaders in the field.

There was always the desire to make the ethnography of the research public, principally to begin discourse on certain subjects accepted as part of artist-led self-organisation that had been previously overlooked, and to add salient critical points to other established discourses. In making it public wherever possible, the

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[50] Piergiorgio Corbetta, *Social Research: Theory, Methods and Techniques* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2003), 235-263.

ethnography began to reinforce the need for a new understanding of artist-led self-organisation to practitioners in the broader field of practice. It allowed the research to prove the need for itself in both reflecting on the practical fieldwork and in part answering the research problem and key questions through a further method of practice. To do this I developed and staged three strands of events – the *Open Forum* discussion series, researcher/practitioner roundtables, and the *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led* symposium, all held at the Exhibition Research Lab (ERL) at Liverpool John Moores University at various points throughout the final two years of the research period.[51] Alongside the benefits to critical discourse and public reflection on fieldwork the events also served to platform all of the practitioners and organisations involved within an academic context. Legitimising them within Liverpool John Moores University at a level that had not previously been achieved. A level that was new for any larger scale arts institution within the city, with the hope that this interaction would set an example for other organisations in the local arts community to follow in the future after the research project was concluded.

The *Open Forum* series acted to explicitly platform practitioners from underrepresented backgrounds from a group of local organisations giving a broad cross-section of artist-led activity in the city. It highlighted issues they were encountering or had encountered, whilst allowing their representatives to receive direct feedback from audiences about those issues, and their organisational structures, programming and outputs. There were three of these events held 18:00 – 20:00 on 11 March, 17 June, and 09 December 2019. The setup for each was intentionally simple: a laptop, projector, PA system, and chair, alongside refreshments for attendees. The idea was to keep an informal atmosphere to encourage open and frank discussion, whilst making the speakers feel comfortable, as artist-led organisations had not previously been given such a platform that was open to staff, students and the general public to attend within the university.

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[51] All of which are fully referenced in Appendix 2.

The organisations selected were OUTPUT gallery, represented by Gallery Manager Gabrielle de la Puente; *ROOT-ed Zine*, represented by *ROOT-ed Zine* Co-Founder Fauziya Johnson; and The Royal Standard, represented by outgoing Director Sufea Mohamad Noor with contributions from then current Directors Benjamin Lunt and Benjamin Nuttall. The organisations were selected as they were broadly concerned with using different models to realise public exhibition programmes representing artists from or based in Merseyside, promoting artists of colour and their concerns in the wider North West region, and studio provision and professional development for practitioners alongside public exhibition and event programmes. The discussions worked to provide a brief overview of practice in the city from key artist-led organisations.

The roundtables comprised of past and present academic researchers and practitioners from around the UK focusing on self-organisation in the visual arts. They were held on 22 February and 22 May 2019, 10:00 – 17:00 and 10:30 – 17:00, and were attended in person/via video call by Dan Howard Birt, Jenny Cavanagh, Emma Coffield, Martin Cox, Jacqui Hallam, Katy Morrison, Jonathan Orlek, Filippo Romanello, Emilia Telesse, Sevie Tsampalla and John Wright. Subsequently a number of the other invitees were involved in follow up discussions via email and in a shared Google Doc. It was this ongoing conversation (fed into by the group) that would further reinforce the need for a larger-scale public gathering and discussion of artist-led self-organisation.

Contextualising issues on a local level and broader issues on a national and international level through the two strands of events informed the development process of the larger-scale *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led* symposium. Held on 31 January 2020 10:30 – 19:00 and with an audience capacity of circa 140, it was the largest event the ERL has staged in its history and garnered global attention. There were keynotes from 12ø Collective (Eva Duerden, Kelly Lloyd and Lou Macnamara), Dave Beech and *More Than Meanwhile Spaces* (Emma Coffield, Rebecca Huggan, Rebecca Prescott and Paul Richter), and following an open call contributions from Dean Casper, Emma Coffield, Michael D'Este, Juliet Davis-Dufayard, Dan Goodman, Susan Jones, Rory

Macbeth, Katy Morrison, Sufea Mohamad Noor, Jonathan Orlek, Lauren Velvick and John Wright. The symposium was groundbreaking in both its size and scope, and served as a real-time critical reflection on the fieldwork staged until that point, reaffirming the arguments made in the thesis and helping to provide external perspectives in answering the research problem and key questions.

Overview of Chapters

The thesis is structured into five chapters supplemented by appendices.

The first chapter 'Artist-Led Self-Organisation' focuses on the conception and development of artist-led modes of self-organisation, paying special attention to the post-2007 period. It details how self-organised visual arts practices understood collectively as being 'artist-led' developed in the UK from the post-war period onwards following the fall of the original avant-garde. It expands the understanding of the history of artist-led self-organisation, and contextualises it in relation to other self-organised movements. Focusing on the socio-economic and political conditions instrumental in its emergence, the chapter establishes a timeframe for its inception and rise to prominence. In doing so it shows the influence other recent global self-organised movements in the visual arts, and culture at large, have had on artist-led self-organisation, including examples such as the DIY movement, the alternative space movement, and processes of artist-run self-organisation. The chapter is informed by a mixture of socio-economic theorists, historians and visual arts theorists including Andrew Gamble, Sarah Lowndes, Melissa Rachleff, Gabriel Gee, and John Roberts in order to show the complex and interconnected development of contemporary self-organisation by artists. Crucially, the chapter acts to frame the observations and arguments that will be made in the rest of the thesis.

Building upon this, Chapter 2, 'Online/Offline Structural Concerns of Self-Organisation' explores the organisational components of artist-led practices. This is achieved through focusing on the field of practice and power dynamics with the rest of the art system, and practitioners' utilisation of digital

communications technology in relation to self-organisation, networks and network theory. The chapter specifically addresses how such technology has been employed by practitioners to form a wider network. One that plays a central role in information dissemination and the application and development of organisational forms across online/offline spaces. Key references in this chapter are drawn from philosophers, sociologists and media theorists including Pierre Bourdieu, Manuel Castells, Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter, covering subject areas of social fields, the exploitative nature of the art system, and media theory.

The third chapter, 'Organising in Precarity', focuses on the question of how practitioners function in a wider state of global precarity. It specifically explores issues relating to sustainability, safeguarding, representation and accountability in relation to artist-led practices, with new operational models utilising online/offline spaces and means outlined within the overarching conditions of contemporary precarity. The use of these forms to create and enact critique is then explored as a key part of artist-led self-organisation. The chapter analyses how they offer the opportunity and potential for practitioners to help bring about meaningful social change through dissensual and agonistic processes. Key references in this chapter come from sociologists, philosophers and political theorists including Ursula Pasero, Chantal Mouffe, Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Rancière and Ned Rossiter, relating to issues of (artistic) precarity, and the potential for critique through artist-led self-organisation utilising dissensus and agonism.

The following chapter 'The Artist-Led Paradox' makes explicit the paradoxical elements of artist-led self-organisation that have been exposed throughout the thesis. It outlines how a multitude of smaller paradoxical elements, often taken for granted by practitioners, are indicative of a larger paradoxical whole that could bring the future use of 'artist-led' into question as a moniker for oppositional visual arts practices. Here the closely entwined relationship between artist-led self-organisation and neoliberalism is critically explored, raising questions of using it to practitioners' advantage in future for further

mobilisation, and developing and enacting dissensual critique. These impacts are explored throughout the chapter in relation to institutional critique and the back-and-forth agonistic relationship between artist-led practitioners and institutions. Charting how practitioners' roles have become increasingly structuralised within the art system, and how that has led many to accept the neoliberal hegemony of wider society, culminating in artist-led self-organisation acting as a neoliberal exemplar. Key references in this chapter are drawn from sociologists and psychologists including Jacques Rancière, Gerald Raunig and Martin Seligman, focusing on subjects such as the recuperation of critique, instituent practices and a third wave of institutional critique, and the psychological underpinnings of current social power dynamics for artists.

Building on the arguments set out in the previous chapters, Chapter 5, 'The Artist-Led Condition', takes the paradoxical nature of artist-led self-organisation as a starting point from which to argue that a new understanding of it and what roles it can perform is urgently needed. In doing so the 'artist-led condition' is defined for the first time, moving away from understanding the 'artist-led' moniker as a piece of terminology or social movement, and instead as a pluriversal combination of external factors and processes unique to the contemporary era. The chapter outlines the artist-led condition as acting as a way for practitioners to potentially reconcile the ideological underpinnings of their self-organisation with the neoliberal reality they and their practice exist in. Analysing how they could enact institutional and social critique through their practices to offer more possibilities as a site of potential to catalyse future action for change in a wider social totality with other members of society. Key references are drawn from sociologists, academics and artists including Paul van Seters, Paul James, Emma Coffield and Dave Beech, concerned with the limitations faced by contemporary social movements and self-organised practices, the paradoxical importance of naming and defining a universally applicable term to re-frame artist-led self-organisation, and using dissensus to achieve social change.

Chapter 1: Artist-Led Self-Organisation

Self-organisation has over time become increasingly utilised by artists as a way to counteract perceived failings by governing social structures and institutions, creating alternatives to them to present and enact different methodologies of social existence and creative practice. This self-organisation, recently described as being 'artist-led' in context of the UK, has quickly become the default approach for the majority of practitioners in the visual arts.

This chapter outlines for the first time specifically how artist-led self-organisation came to be in the UK, paying special attention to the socio-economic and political conditions instrumental in facilitating its rapid rise as a dominant methodology of contemporary practice. After analysing the differences in and implications of the terms used to define self-organised practices, the chapter shows an historical lineage between the DIY, avant-garde and counterculture movements spanning 1950s – 1970s, and Thatcherism and New Labour spanning 1980s – 2000s. This is in order to ground the pre-history of artist-led self-organisation. Summarising general trends in a partial history, informing the specific discussion of its rise concurrently with the Global Financial Crisis of 2007 – 2009.

Exploring ideas of cultural and artistic self-organisation, neoliberal hegemony, and capitalist crises that are central to artist-led self-organisation, key references include political economist Andrew Gamble, writer and curator Sarah Lowndes, curator Melissa Rachleff, art historian Gabriel Gee, and art historian and philosopher John Roberts, used to outline the social, political and economic conditions that created such fertile ground for artist-led self-organisation to flourish in.

The chapter seeks to answer the following research sub-questions:
- What is the historical genealogy of artist-led self-organisation in the UK?
- How has the capitalist economic system impacted those processes of self-organisation?

- How could processes of artist-led self-organisation be contextualised in relation to wider socio-economic trends of the contemporary era?

Genealogies

The lack of fixed definition for what exactly constitutes the 'artist-led' moniker or artist-led self-organisation means its broad similarities to a host of other terms leads to a number of complications and contentious issues arising. Although the historical development of the term itself will be examined throughout this chapter and the resultant paradoxes produced by it specifically addressed in Chapter 4, here it would initially be remiss not to make clear its close relation to the terminology of 'DIY', 'self-organisation' and 'artist-run' which further muddy the water of just what artist-led self-organisation is. With DIY, artist-run and self-organisation in contemporary society stemming from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s a clear lineage of progression is established leading to the 'artist-led' moniker beginning at an indeterminate point later in time, with each movement or piece of terminology drawing upon those that have gone before in varying degrees to orient itself. Throughout this chapter I demonstrate how this indeterminacy has come about and propose a new date for the 'beginning' of artist-led self-organisation, in line with its wider acknowledgement and rise in popular usage around the turn of the Global Financial Crisis in 2007.

Within this lineage DIY and self-organisation can be seen as the basis of the approaches and practices constituting both artist-run and artist-led practices. In her book *The DIY Movement in Art, Music and Publishing,* Lowndes outlines the historical DIY movement and its ethos by saying:

> Do-It-Yourself grew out of the desire for both thrift and self-reliance in the post-war years that presaged a wider shift in the 1950s and 1960s— from the dominant 'top-down' cultural model toward self-directed and self-realized modes of expression…Since the 1960s the DIY movement has developed and diversified as participants across the world worked

collaboratively to redress the feelings of alienation and mystification engendered by late capitalism.[52]

Thematically developing from this starting point of learning-by-doing, self-organisation in an artistic context, according to writer and curator Barnaby Drabble, has come to mean:

> both a process of self-determined organising (as opposed to being organised by someone else) and an entity, an organisation of subjects created by the participants on their own terms (as opposed to one created for them to operate within).[53]

Undeniably there are obvious links between ideas of DIY and self-organisation, and it is clear they both feed into the development of the 'artist-run' and 'artist-led' monikers and their implicit opposition to social hegemony. As art historian Lane Relyea states in context of DIY and artists:

> DIY serves as the honorific term for the kind of subject required by the constant just-in-time turmoil of our networked world. It has come to stand for a potent mix of entrepreneurial agency and networked sociality, proclaiming itself heir to both punk autonomy, the notion of living by your wits as an outsider, and to a subcultural basis for authentic artistic production, the assumption that truly creative individuals exist in spontaneously formed social undergrounds. [54]

Like the DIY/self-organisation dynamic there are also clear similarities between the two 'artist-' terms with a tangibly similar ethos shared between them. As artist and curator Gavin Murphy states in "What makes artist-run spaces different?":

> 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). A non-commercial approach to producing art and culture, it supports and develops experimental or unrepresented forms of practice and discourse, and proposes a model of

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[52] Sarah Lowndes, *The DIY Movement in Art, Music and Publishing* (London: Routledge, 2018), xiii.
[53] Barnaby Drabble, "On De-Organisation," in: *Self-Organised*, ed. Stine Hebert & Anne Szefer Karlsen (London: Open Editions/Occasional Table, 2013), 19.
[54] Relyea, *Your Everyday Art World*, 5.

social and cultural interaction that could be seen to eschew the roles of producer and consumer.[55]

Although the 'artist-run' moniker is more popular on a global scale and originated earlier, in the UK 'artist-led' has overtaken it to become more synonymous with contemporary practitioners. This is a case specific to the UK, with 'artist-run' clearly informing the basis for 'artist-led' as a piece of terminology and methodology describing self-organised practices (as evidenced by *Doggerland*'s attemptive artist-led definition[56] outlined in the Introduction), appropriated into its makeup in many respects. Because of this influential relationship and the perceived interchangeability of the terms by practitioners and commentators there is a certain level of confusion between them. As outlined by academic Emma Coffield, confusion in vocabulary leads to confusion in engagement with the self-organised ideas and practices of others, and a homogenising of them by practitioners and gatekeepers of resources alike.[57] Here distinctions between the terms can be drawn from the definitions of the words on the right of the hyphenation that creates the compound. In both instances the meaning of 'artist' as the compound modifier is fairly explicit, but inferences drawn from the verbs that form 'led' and 'run' as the head of the compound give two subtle but altogether different meanings.

Although there is a common link of the artist as a figure being in charge to both terms, they begin to take on slight nuances shaping what the term can be understood to represent. Of course, as per Coffield, individuals' understanding of each piece of terminology (and others describing self-organisation) often overlap or are distorted, meaning these boundaries can become further confused.[58] In my understanding, 'artist-run' takes on a more managerial and processual

[55] Gavin Murphy, "What makes artist-run spaces different? (And why it's important to have different spaces)," in: *Artist-Run Europe: Practice/Projects/Spaces*, ed. Gavin Murphy & Mark Cullen (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2017), 5.
[56] Playford-Greenwell & Prater, "Notes from the Middle Stone": 7.
[57] Emma Coffield, "The problem with naming," *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led*, from Exhibition Research Lab, Liverpool School of Art and Design, 31 January, 2020.
[58] Ibid.

underpinning, with 'artist-led' a slightly more wistful and arguably somewhat romanticised one. It could be inferred 'artist-run' is more didactic and 'artist-led' slightly more enigmatic within the pair; 'artist-run' (communally) managing outputs and production whereas 'artist-led' – in a distorted channeling of the spirit of the avant-garde – positioned at the forefront of experimental or underrepresented cultural production setting a trail for others to follow.[59] This positioning of artists in the UK at the vanguard of culture, somehow leading society forward from a privileged position, is dubious at best given the reality for practitioners is often wholly different (and will be explored in subsequent chapters). Both prefixes are also problematic in relation to self-organisation as their compounds of run and lead are inherently centralised and hierarchical in their organisational logic, further confusing their supposed definitions and potential applications.

Given those who constitute artist-led or artist-run practices often do so with the primary focus of self-organising to control their autonomy, these nuances often escape detailed scrutiny and instead, following Coffield, become accepted as an assumption of uniformity and interchangeability between the two terms. This is arguably reinforced in the specific geographic areas they find popular usage; the UK has (recently) incubated 'artist-led' whilst the rest of the (mainly Western)[60]

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[59] My understanding is somewhat similar to that put forward by the *More Than Meanwhile Spaces* collaborative research project, initially organised by Newcastle University and The NewBridge Project, in defining an artist-led initiative: "we know that 'artist-run' suggests an initiative managed day-to-day by artists – which can leave little time for a creative practice. 'Artist-led', on the other hand, suggests an initiative driven by artists (i.e. via a board), where responsibility for running the initiative day-to-day is given to a dedicated team." More Than Meanwhile Spaces, *More Than Meanwhile Spaces 2018/19* (Newcastle: Newcastle University & The NewBridge Project, 2019), 2.
[60] For examples of literature on artist-run practices and organisation in North America, Europe, and parts of South East Asia see Detterer & Nannucci, *Artist-Run Spaces;* Rachleff, *Inventing Downtown*; Jeff Khonsary & Kristina Lee Podesva, eds., *Institutions by Artists: Volume One*, (Vancouver: Fillip Editions/Pacific Association of Artist Run Centres, 2012); Gavin Murphy & Mark Cullen, eds., *Artist-Run Europe: Practice/Projects/Spaces*, Onomatopee #127 (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2017).

world has favoured 'artist-run'. Cultural attitudes towards the figure of the artist also play a role in this popularity with practitioners. Broadly, in other countries the practitioner will usually have confidence in their ability to recoup some level of remuneration (usually correlating with the level of philanthropy or public subsidy present in the relevant country), and so associate more with the business sense or acumen relating to self-organisation seemingly implied in artist-run practices. This is particularly apparent in areas of Northern Europe, where artist-run organisations are often state supported and highly institutionalised to provide (amongst other things) more security for practitioners, with many aping the German Kunstverein model.[61] In the UK however, a more commercially minded and remunerated practice is usually an unattainable goal for most, and so the terminology shifts. This stems from specific socio-economic conditions imposed upon practitioners through the provision of state support, combined with the recognition of the status of the artist in wider society. These themes will be explored later in this chapter and throughout the thesis, but here it is prescient to note how it has helped move UK practitioners towards the 'artist-led' moniker.

Although there is a relative ease with which both terms can be understood in relation to, or indeed in certain instances stand-in for, one another doing so serves only to undermine the potential effectiveness of each. This assumed uniformity by practitioners and external commentators extends to other terms and definitions of practice regarded as 'alternative' (and grounded in self-organisation). Ones associated with, and subsumed by, both artist-run and artist-led practices. These include but are not limited to models and practices such as: artist-run initiatives, artist-led initiatives, artist-initiated, artist-focused, self-led, institutions by artists, artist collectives, artist co-operatives, alternative galleries, alternative spaces, grassroots organisations, DIY organisations, independent art

For a comprehensive map of global artist-run organisations see "Indie Art Guide," Artist Run Alliance, accessed November 12, 2019, https://artistrunalliance.org/indie-art-guide/

[61] Francesca Gavin, "What the World Can Learn from Germany's Small-Scale Institutions," *Artsy,* April 08, 2015, accessed January 08, 2020, https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-what-the-world-can-learn-from-germany-s

spaces, parallel spaces, meanwhile spaces, self-instituting, raw spaces and self-organised art initiatives. Generally these terms are also associated with a grouping of phrases and keywords that provide a framework of connected subjects, further blurring boundaries, including but not limited to: alternative, oppositional, marginal, countercultural, independent, DIY, not-for-profit, parallel and networked.[62]

In using 'artist-led' and 'artist-run' as umbrella terms under which others are grouped it presents problems not just for the definition of artist-led self-organisation, but its history. Given the nature of DIY and self-organised activity within the visual arts there often doesn't exist a lasting historical record of practice and so history becomes known contingently through word of mouth, or passed on by those that have survived longest. This allows a certain degree of historical revisionism, or even intentional/unintentional forgetfulness to occur. Regardless of the intention, it serves only to destabilise the timeline of the 'artist-led' moniker; allowing practitioners or organisations to effectively rewrite their own history and change their status or definitions alongside that of their peers. This means a starting point for historicised artist-led self-organisation cannot be universally agreed upon or is dubious at best, and falls in line with other much-contested definitions of terms in the art system (as mentioned in the Introduction) such as 'artist' or 'practice'. A prime example of this is the publication *Artists in the City* by SPACE.[63] It charts the inception and development of SPACE as an organisation, but at various points the texts throughout refer to it as being both 'artist-run' and 'artist-led'; even the blurb on the back cover makes this oversight. Although it may seem a minor issue, when coupled with no universal definition of the term, and its overlaps with other similar pieces of terminology and historical movements, it significantly contributes to maintaining an air of confusion.

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[62] Coffield raised a similar grouping of terms in her presentation at the *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led* symposium. Coffield, "The problem with naming."
[63] Harding, *Artists in the City*.

As outwardly artist-led self-organisation is not a site of definitive boundaries it seems the problem will persist of no definition existing to cater to all of its constituents, maintaining a certain sense of confusion and leaving practitioners open to potential co-optation. But how did this come about? The influence of the social and artistic movements that preceded its inception are critical to understanding its makeup and relationship with the key social developments of recent capitalist society: neoliberalism, globalisation and network culture. The remainder of this chapter focuses upon the key points in time and cultural shifts that allowed this to happen, taking in an 'artist-led' pre-history spanning from the 1950s post-war years through to the 2007 Global Financial Crisis, before arriving at the form of artist-led self-organisation we know today.

DIY/Avant-Garde/Counterculture

The early development and use of the term artist-run – that would ultimately become the 'artist-led' moniker in the UK – was formed from a milieu of social movements that emerged following the Second World War. These included the neo-avant-garde and counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, which will be shown to have stemmed from the DIY movement of the 1950s that first grew to prominence in North America. In its infancy the DIY movement broadly sought to empower people with the skills, knowledge and resources to be able to tackle minor renovation and cosmetic construction work to improve aspects of their homes through creative tendencies in a networked form of learning and experimentation. Although initially these networks would be relatively informal, over time they would be harnessed as useful tools within capitalism and spawn mass advertising campaigns and businesses solely focused on DIY enthusiasts.

Shortly after the DIY movement began to gain popularity in North America the 1951 Festival of Britain would introduce this concept of accessible DIY (without the need for specialist training) to the British public, building on the 'make do and mend' ethos conditioned into the wider national psyche during the war years. The Festival (amongst other things) showcased new pieces of moderately

priced textile and furniture design available to the general public[64] alongside new prefabricated architectural designs, all of which were intended to help in the wider regeneration of the country following the end of the war. Although the upsurge in DIY after the Festival cannot be framed as the genesis for artist-run practices, it is the wholesale change in mindset it engendered in the British public that is of critical importance. Without this shift in thinking toward self-reliance, dependability and adapting to shortages of materials and commodities, self-organisation and countercultural practices would not have had the fertile space to grow in the following decades. In this way DIY can be seen as a key attitudinal shift toward the eventual creation of artist-led self-organisation arising from the social uncertainty of the post-war years.

After living under the restrictions imposed by rationing the sudden availability of new resources to improve living conditions and the ease with which they could be used, constructed and installed in home environments cannot be underestimated. During this decade new power tools, paint, wallpaper and plastics were developed, and coupled with home technological advances meant most homes in the country could be transformed for little cost. Many of those same advances would go on to be utilised by practitioners to create works and spaces as part of artist-run and artist-led self-organisation decades later. Whilst the DIY movement would begin with weekend craftspeople and hobbyists, as time went on this ethos would splinter into a variety of creative approaches to the aesthetics and mindset of cultural practices. In context of the research particular importance is placed upon how this ethos was combined with self-organisation by artists to give rise to the 'artist-run' and 'artist-led' monikers on practical and ideological levels.

In America this combination would take hold almost immediately, and gave rise to artist-run practices as we understand them today. From roughly 1952 onwards artists – notably in New York – would group together to form co-

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[64] Suzanne Reimer & Philip Pinch, "Geographies of the British government's wartime Utility furniture scheme, 1940-1945," *Journal of Historical Geography*, Vol.39 (January 2013): 99-112.

operative gallery and project spaces in vacant property in the downtown area of the city. In these newly repurposed spaces they could regain varying degrees of autonomy by controlling the production and display of their practice, experimenting with new forms of art making away from the overtly commercial gaze of their uptown counterparts. In doing so it would begin to challenge and shift the traditional division of labour within the art system and set in motion artists occupying less-than-desirable spaces in urban centres. Increasingly, new mediums were incubated in those spaces making use of performance, audience participation, political sensibilities and temporality to define new modes of creation. The co-operative models during this period shared the administrative decisions, expenses and acclaim garnered through their public programmes and continued until roughly the mid-1960s. During this period the co-operative model would begin to be replaced in many instances by other artist-run organisational models, some of which were decidedly more commercial than others.[65]

Alongside the DIY movement and rise in popularity of the artist-run co-operative gallery model émigré artists and the latest line of the avant-garde in Europe and North America – propagated from earlier in the twentieth century by groups such as Dada, the surrealists and the constructivists – were also fomenting a shift in attitudes against the dominant art and social systems. Émigré artists, understood to be processing the traumas of war, would help catalyse new approaches to artmaking, and help in part to drive the new avant-garde groups. From the post-war years and beyond the avant-garde were understood by a variety of monikers: neo-avant-garde, post-avant-garde, post-war avant-garde or even simply by their original avant-garde title. These monikers were arbitrary, used to designate the movement at a specific point in time after the Second World War following its supposed 'death' and ultimate failure. The movement was seeking, in broad terms, to attack the institution of art and revolutionise everyday life through merging it with art itself with no distinction between

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[65] Rachleff, *Inventing Downtown*.

them.[66] Whereas pre-war the groups had been unsuccessful in their attempts to sublate art into the everyday fabric of life, post-war those that took up the avant-garde cause did so (in the eyes of art critic Peter Bürger in "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde") mistakenly, with their forebears' methodologies for revolution having been incorporated within the institution of art, and nullified, in the intervening years:

> While the historical avant-gardes could rightly consider the social context of their actions to be one of crisis, if not revolution, and could draw from this realization the energy to design the utopian project of sublating the institution of art, this no longer applied to the neo-avant-gardes of the 1950s and 1960s…While the historical avant-gardes could still connect their practices with a claim to transgression, this is no longer the case for the neo-avant-gardes, given that avant-garde practices had in the meantime been incorporated by the institution.[67]

This position is crucial in understanding the formation of artist-run practices at the same time, and later artist-led self-organisation, and can be seen as a deeply problematic starting point for many paradoxes inherent to both. In trying to take up the mantle of a movement once aiming for revolution that had been co-opted by the economic system and recuperated by the cultural institutions it opposed, the groups understood as the neo-avant-garde were unable to connect experimental art and politics to create a continuation of the original movement's reason for being.[68] As such they began to follow the example of artistic experimentation set out by their predecessors and probed the idea of what the very concept of art could be, often eschewing political associations in doing so. During this time artist-run, and years later artist-led, practices would continue this process of experimentation whilst being similarly institutionalised. In trying to avoid that institutionalisation they would attempt to reconnect with politics as

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[66] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

[67] Peter Bürger, "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of "Theory of the Avant-Garde"," trans. Bettina Brandt & Daniel Purdy, *New Literary History*, Vol.41, No.4, What is an Avant-Garde? (Autumn 2010): 712.

[68] Artist Jason Bowman's description of artist-run and artist-led practices moving from radicalism to self-aggrandisement can be seen to be drawn from this avant-garde impulse. Bowman, *Valuing the Artist-Led*.

the original avant-garde had done. Art historian Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen states in "The Self-Destruction of the Avant-Garde" that through this experimentation these contemporaneous avant-garde practices:

> made possible a continuous process of inquiry where art should no longer seek to destroy or create the world anew. The idea of the avant-garde played a limited role in this process of expansion: Artistic practice and political reflection was not united into one text but was kept separate. The avant-garde synthesis of artwork and world was replaced with more moderate approaches that on the one hand continue the radical and coherent critique of the avant-garde wager, but on the other hand does not degenerate into megalomania and redundant stylistics.[69]

As this process of neo-avant-garde artistic experimentation guided by Fluxus (arguably an artist-run initiative)[70] and conceptualism developed, it would lead into a period that would prove fertile for further self-organisational and anti-institutional tendencies to become a mainstream societal norm. A perfect storm of social conditions gave rise to the countercultures of the 1960s and 1970s globally which were markedly influenced by the birth of the Civil Rights Movement in America, opposition to the Vietnam War, the emergence of the hippie lifestyle and the threat of nuclear conflict. Arguably the catalyst for these influences was the Second World War and the subsequent 1944 G.I. Bill introduced in America granting ex-service personnel access to free university education. Because there was such a high number of veterans following the Second World War often educational institutions simply didn't have the capacity to teach the volume of students, meaning they would often congregate in other social spaces such as coffee shops. It was in these spaces students that had travelled the world with the armed forces would share their life experiences with others, essentially creating a large-scale network of DIY, alternative, informal education. These educational networks quickly took root in liberally inclined West Coast cities, with the main centres developing in Los Angeles and San Francisco. As part of these gatherings students would begin to mix with local

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[69] Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, "The Self-Destruction of the Avant-Garde," in: *The Idea of the Avant-Garde*, ed. Marc James Léger (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 123.
[70] Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

artists, regularly write poetry, and begin experimenting making assemblage and performance art, influenced by both the Beat Poets of the 1950s and the neo-avant-garde themselves.[71]

These beginnings of American counterculture informed by the G.I. Bill would give rise to the hippies, and alongside the social action taken during the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement (in part directed by this access to education) would instill a sense of social responsibility and direct action in the left of the American populace. During the Vietnam War this process of self-organised mobilisation would continue, with a protest movement taking hold of much of the country, particularly prevalent among the artistic community.[72] The newly educated veterans helped to inform people what the vicissitudes of the Second World War and subsequent conflicts were actually like outside of nationally sanctioned propaganda, leading to a widespread questioning and rejection of social authority and institutions which would consequently spread to Europe.[73]

As these events played out in America and filtered across the Atlantic the UK would be heavily influenced by them (particularly alongside the actions of the earlier Beat Poets). Developing a unique 'UK underground' counterculture scene beginning in London in the 1950s and later spreading around the country. Although concerned with an anti-nuclear sentiment and wish to create an alternate lifestyle, the UK counterculture was initially not as fervently mobilised and confrontational as its American counterpart. However it would develop further under the influence of the hippies in the 1960s and sustained anti-war sentiments of the ensuing decade to continue the overarching anti-authoritarian narrative based on the broad communally held values of equality, compassion and peace.

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[71] Lowndes, *The DIY Movement in Art*, 1-5.
[72] Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers. Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2011).
[73] Lowndes, *The DIY Movement in Art*, 1-5.

During the 1960s the newly formed National Advisory Council on Art Education would restructure arts-based teaching in the UK, which would have ramifications for artist-run practices and the development of artist-led self-organisation. Following the publication of its first report in 1960 known as *The Coldstream Report*[74] it recommended combining art and design histories, theories and other 'complementary studies' with practical studio components through all levels of education to better engage students. This moved from a craft-oriented focus on production to a broader education in art and culture.[75] This shift would not only create a wave of interest in art and design in higher education from a variety of class backgrounds, but arguably acted to integrate avant-garde approaches to art and life within the educational system, further institutionalising the movement away from its original revolutionary goals. The renewed interest in art and design education and its evolution to a holistic form of cultural education would only prove a temporary resolution however. As the 1960s drove on, this new format of arts education, coupled with the increasingly vocal and mobile nature of young people, would lead to students airing their grievances in public. With the new educational format initially seen as a positive, students increasingly questioned the need for knowledge of (often) sporadic complementary studies and art history. This was particularly because it came at the expense of knowledge of current experimental practices like those being developed by artist-run methodologies on both sides of the Atlantic, alongside concerns over the state of the facilities they were being taught in.

Many of these grievances in relation to educational provision and structure came to a head in May 1968, particularly influenced by the student protests seen in Paris and the student sit-in at the London School of Economics in 1967. Whereas the action in Paris was in direct opposition to the growing influence of capitalism and the institutions that propagated it, realised in a confrontational and sometimes violent manner, the art school protests in the UK were decidedly more 'British' in their approach. The first – and most notable – protest would

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[74] After the Council's leader William Coldstream.
[75] Fiona Candlin, "A Dual Inheritance: The Politics of Educational Reform and PhDs in Art and Design," in: *Research in Art and Design Education: Issues and Exemplars*, ed. Richard Hickman (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2008), 100-101.

occur at Hornsey College of Art, begun initially as a 24-hour teach-in to protest the decision on how to spend student union funds being taken away from the students and given to the college's administration. Whilst confronting the removal of power from a union and transferring it back to a larger governmental institution, the protest quickly spiralled from 24 hours to last for 6 weeks. During that time students, teachers and visiting artists sought to democratically outline how to restructure the makeup of the college and its courses to make them egalitarian for all students, with a wider focus on the social role of art.[76] This seemingly mild-mannered, but revolutionary, approach[77] received widespread press coverage and raised the profile of the students' actions in the national and international consciousness, inspiring other protests in the UK later that year such as at Brighton College of Art[78] and Guildford School of Art.[79]

What is crucial to the development of artist-run and artist-led practices is what this collective body of students did in 1968 to communicate their problems. Gone was the unchallenged socio-political acceptance of previous generations in the UK, replaced with a self-organisational impulse realised in a spirit of protest as a direct consequence of the combination of the DIY ethos, anti-war movements, and Civil Rights activism.[80] Alongside the protests of the 1960s many students and graduates began to follow the artist-run example to look for and occupy spaces outside of educational institutions where they could practice and display

[76] Lisa Tickner, *Hornsey 1968: The Art School Revolution* (London: Francis Lincoln Ltd., 2008).
[77] Art historian Tom Holert furthers discussion on the relationship between power and spaces of knowledge production focusing on the politics of space and the studio in art schools, using Hornsey as an example and showing how these protests reflected a shift towards neoliberal educational reform. Tom Holert, "Art in the Knowledge-based Polis," *e-flux*, Journal #3, February 2009, accessed August 17, 2020, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/03/68537/art-in-the-knowledge-based-polis/
[78] Philippa Lyon, "1968: the student revolution" *University of Brighton*, accessed September 09, 2019, http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/arts/alumni-and-associates/the-history-of-arts-education-in-brighton/1968-the-student-revolution
[79] John Walmsley, *Sit-in. Guildford School of Art 1968* (Southport: Café Royal Books, 2017).
[80] For a recent example following this genealogy see Arts Against Cuts, *Bad Feelings* (London: Book Works, 2015).

their work. Increasingly in the UK during this time professional artists began to follow their artist-run counterparts in America and Europe to inhabit vacant larger-scale spaces in order to address the lack of available studios and galleries suitable for current methodologies of experimental practice by overlooked members of the art system.

This move toward finding and occupying new spaces and localities in which to practice and display work was undoubtedly catalysed by the rise of artist co-operatives in the 1950s and reinforced by the alternative space movement in America throughout the 1960s. Following the first wave of co-operative artist-run galleries, New York was the epicentre of the alternative space movement. Those artist-run practices would arguably give rise to the widespread recognition of self-organisation creating 'alternatives' to existing cultural provision from the institutions of the art system for the world to take note of. They were seen as an expression of cultural dissent in order to express their own increasingly experimental practices from those involved, with little regard for the established orthodoxy of the wider art system. As curator Bernice Murphy states in "Alternative Spaces: Part One":

> These were spaces born of a sense of occasion and sharpened perceptions about nurturing new art in new situations, spaces no longer indexed to the exhibition functions of art galleries and museums but identified and supported wholly by processes of peer-group validation.[81]

As such the spaces created by practitioners:

> supported the growth of many kinds of art that were not compatible with – even fundamentally oppositional to – the life of art museums and commercial galleries. Much of this new work challenged the homogenising white cube that had come to represent the ideal modernist exhibition space...powered by a changing, more politicised consciousness that had grown out of the 1960s.[82]

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[81] Bernice Murphy, "Alternative Spaces: Part One," in: *Permanent Recession: a Handbook on Art, Labour and Circumstance*, Onomatopee #169, ed. Channon Goodwin (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2019), 322.
[82] Ibid, 323.

The movement and spaces would offer practitioners a sense of community and belonging, finding likeminded peers in the margins of an otherwise homogenous system. Initially there was a consensus of focus in the movement, with the philosophical underpinning of practitioners and their spaces "rooted in diverse countercultures that questioned and rebelled against the values and priorities of established institutions on all fronts."[83] Although this would wane over time as practitioners' motivations began to differ and the institutions of the art system began to try and replicate the aesthetics, energy, vibrancy and experimental nature fostered in those spaces, they had a profound impact for nearly two decades until the end of the movement in 1985. Alongside the alternative space movement the Art Workers Coalition (AWC), inspired by the protest and resistance of the same period, would specifically call for dissociating art making from capitalism. As outlined by art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson in *Art Workers. Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era*, an anonymous open letter in 1969 called for fundamental change:

> A nameless, self-described art worker issues a utopian call, implying that how art is made and circulated is of consequence within the political sphere. The urgent plea suggests that *art work* is no longer confined to describing aesthetic methods, acts of making, or art objects—the traditional referents of the term—but is implicated in artists' collective working conditions, the demolition of the capitalist art market, and even revolution.[84]

From this letter attitudes shifted. They coalesced to approaching the artist and subsequently all who work *in* the arts from a perspective of varied labour processes that held an equal position with a 'complete' work of tangible art. This held vital implications for the course of the art system at large alongside the experimental practical nature of the alternative space movement. Following the publication of the letter the AWC was founded in New York in the same year. They sought to continue redefining artists as workers outside of a capacity to produce tangible works of art and bring about meaningful change to institutional

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[83] Jacki Apple, "Alternatives Reconsidered," in: Lauren Rosati and Mary Anne Staniszweski, eds., *Alternative Histories: New York Art Spaces 1960 to 2010.* (London: Exit Art and the MIT Press, 2012), 18.
[84] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 1.

functions and representation. Notably it presented a list of 13 demands to the head of the Museum of Modern Art shortly after its formation to argue for change along those lines, but achieved none of them before its dissolution in 1971. It is unsurprising this coincided with the rise of minimalism, conceptualism and other process, concept and socially based and engaged practices that didn't adhere to the binaries of what art had historically been understood as. As Bryan-Wilson charts, during this period "the notion of the art worker offered artists an up-to-date, politically relevant model of identity."[85]

Under that identity they were actively attempting to ensure they were offering an 'alternative' to the mainstream, conscious of how their own outputs could be instrumentalised by the commercial market on a broader social scale. They "understood the social and political, not just economic, value of their art. They became aware of how their art circulated, its symbolic and ideological "use" that challenged previous claims of its autonomy."[86]

This period of the alternative space movement and the rise of the AWC from the beginning of the 1960s catalysed by earlier artist co-operatives can be understood as the beginnings of the 'artist-run' moniker globally. It is here increasingly artists began to self-organise and network with their peers to create new possibilities for practice. Spurred on by an undercurrent of youth disaffected by the governing cultural institutions that were not in-line with their own worldview. Moving into the 1970s this artist-run methodology of developing new spaces through inhabiting cheap and/or unused physical spaces would continue to gain strength. Other, more anarchist-inspired, artist-run organisations also originated from this period in history. Catalysed by the AWC succeeding in closing a number of commercial galleries for a day in protest against the Vietnam War and drawing from earlier calls and examples, notable examples include one of the most publicly acknowledged Art Strike movements where Gustav Metzger in 1974 would call for artists to give up their work for three years, followed in 1990 by *The Art Strike* campaign launched by Stewart

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[85] Ibid, 16.
[86] Ibid, 17.

Home following Meztger's call. The late 1970s would also give rise to the Neoists – the so-called last avant-garde – in Canada.[87]

Given the often-fleeting nature of many of the spaces and organisations during this period there are few that remain or remain the same in the UK today, with SPACE being a prime example. Founded in 1968, over time it has developed and changed its remit from an artist-run studios and gallery to a generalised studio provider and artist development organisation. SPACE is also recognised as having played a leading role in the move toward artists occupying meanwhile – particularly postindustrial – spaces in urban centres in the UK. Their time at St. Katharine Docks is seen as the catalyst that the working methodology grew from, which other notable artist-run and artist-led organisations such as East Street Arts have subsequently taken up.[88] However aside from the increasing occupation of vacant spaces as sites for developing practice, the sentiment of artist-run practices throughout the 1960s and 1970s can undoubtedly be seen as following the example set by the counterculture of the same period. As Gavin Murphy states, it was:

> anti-establishment in its rejection of dominant structures, which either ignored cutting-edge contemporary art, new-media art, female artists, experimental and performance art, or were commercial and driven primarily by sales. Crucially, rather than just acting as a *movement* of individuals, the proponents of this culture of self-determination and collectivisation opted to locate themselves as *groups* in *spaces*: spaces for production, thought, exhibition, and debate, and spaces which lay outside prescribed commercial or cultural zones…The common denominator among all of these groups and spaces is that they arose out of a deficit – i.e. there was something missing in the cultural landscape; artists were dissatisfied with, or unable to access, the established venues, forums, or

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[87] See Stewart Home, *The Assault On Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (London: Aporia Press/Unpopular Books, 1988), 87-94; Stewart Martin, "Art Strikes: An Inventory," *Mute*, May 01, 2020, accessed August 19, 2020, https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/art-strikes-inventory.
[88] "About us," East Street Arts, accessed September 09, 2019. https://www.eaststreetarts.org.uk/about-us/
More Than Meanwhile Spaces also specifically focuses on this occupancy of meanwhile space in the North East of England. "About the project," More Than Meanwhile Spaces, accessed February 16, 2019, https://morethanmeanwhile.wordpress.com/

modes of presentation, and convened to create a new kind of space that addressed their needs.[89]

Thatcher and the Rise of Neoliberalism

As this method of self-organised artistic activity continued it would find a new catalyst for a wider number of practitioners in the conditions produced by the recessions following the stagflation crisis and decline of British industry beginning in the middle of the 1970s. Ironically those same conditions produced in the periods during and immediately following the recessions would also give rise to Margaret Thatcher, who would set in motion a brand of neoliberal dogma and contribute to the development of globalisation and network culture we are still beholden to and exist within today.[90] As such, the period of Thatcher's time in power as Prime Minister (1979 – 1990) can be seen as crucial to the formation of contemporary artist-led self-organisation, developing from the artist-run practices of the 1960s and 1970s in the UK.

Key to this period of history was the 'new spirit of capitalism' beginning in the 1970s as outlined by sociologists Luc Boltanski and Éve Chiapello.[91] They argued since the hierarchical Fordist production line was abandoned in favour of an increasingly network-based organisational structure, capitalism was evolving to become more subtly exploitative. By giving workers more freedom in the workplace (either by relaxing rules or allowing them to become freelance) they were able to have more 'control' over their working lives, all while having less security over pay, healthcare, etc. than previous generations. The transition toward this new working approach wasn't a smooth one, but would present Thatcher with a route into power. It is here contemporary debates on, and approaches to, the autonomy of workers took shape that are still contentiously argued today and form the basis for the framing of artistic autonomy (outlined in the Introduction) throughout the research. During this time period, according to

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[89] Murphy, "What makes artist-run spaces different?," 6.
[90] Rodrik, *The Globalization Paradox*.
[91] Boltanski & Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.

Boltanski and Chiapello, autonomy was constructed for global society neoliberally:

> in the sense of both autonomy of persons (less directly hierarchically controlled in their work) and autonomy of organizations (departments treated as independent units and autonomous profit-centres, or the development of subcontracting). The world of work now contained only individual instances connected in a network.[92]

Thatcher came to power following the Winter of Discontent – a period of breakdown between industrial trade unions and the then Labour government over capping pay increases that led to industrial labour strikes. This contributed to the already stagnating British industries following years of high inflation and under-investment from central government. The Conservative manifesto at the time of her election promised (amongst other things) to restrict the power and influence of those trade unions. This strategy of disrupting the status quo to achieve a political consensus would be inadvertently – and paradoxically – echoed by much artist-led self-organisation years later. Her viability as a break from the established order contributed to her landslide election victory in 1979. From that point on Thatcher began to usher in a new era of British society that would contribute to dictating the socio-economic makeup of the world. Whilst Thatcher's premiership can be viewed as a tale of patriotic decisiveness or one of coldblooded and callous treatment of the working classes and minorities, depending on your political vantage point, there are specific moments crucial to both artist-run and artist-led self-organisation.

Critically, alongside the American president Ronald Reagan, Thatcher would usher in a new neoliberal age of capitalism in the West that would irrevocably shape the world, with their own brands of politics (Reaganism/Thatcherism) seen as synonyms for neoliberalism itself. Although neoliberal monetary policies were arguably initially begun by both of their predecessors (Jimmy Carter and James Callaghan), they were baby steps compared to those Thatcher and Reagan took. In a departure of the post-war laissez-faire liberal capitalist ideology of

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[92] Ibid, 191.

John Maynard Keynes[93] the pair saw competition as the innate characteristic of humanity, best governed by a free economic market (following the Chicago School line of thought),[94] with little state intervention outside providing conditions for the market to flourish. Influenced by the economic theory and practices of Ludwig von Mises,[95] Friedrich Hayek[96] and Milton Friedman,[97] the system held the free market as above all else in its importance to provide 'freedom' for citizens. It would allow people to access levels of wealth, prosperity and security to provide social mobility the liberal capitalist system could never hope to achieve. Thatcher sought to enact this vision through the dismantling of the welfare state, decreasing taxes, increasing the national interest rate, disempowerment of trade unions, deregulation of financial markets, and deregulation and privatisation of state assets in transport, communication, industry, and utilities. The conditions produced through these processes generally did little to provide 'freedom' for the majority of people, with inequality intensified in many aspects of society. Those that were wealthy were able to make significant financial gains through investment, those at the opposite end of the spectrum were priced out, and the middle classes had social mobility as an aspirational goal if they could find the disposable income to achieve it. Simply put, the rich became richer and those at the bottom of the social hierarchy became further ostracised. The socio-economic system in place in the UK was one predicated on entrepreneurialism, competition, isolation and inequality (with those same qualities still in place, acting as the preconditions for much contemporary artistic practice today).

Alongside these reforms of British society, during Thatcher's tenure globalisation as we understand it today was expanding on the world stage. After the Second

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[93] John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (London: Macmillan, 1936).
[94] Johan Van Overtveldt, *The Chicago School: how the University of Chicago assembled the thinkers who revolutionized economics and business* (Chicago: Agate Publishing, 2007).
[95] Ludwig von Mises, *Bureaucracy* (Glasgow: William Hodge & Co., 1944).
[96] Friedrich A Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1944).
[97] Milton Friedman, *A Theory of the Consumption Function* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957).

World War as tensions between nations outside of the Communist Bloc[98] had subsided trade in material goods and the movement of people became a regular fixture in most countries. The connectedness and cooperation of nation states coupled with increasingly affordable travel allowed for regular and large movements of people and goods throughout the world. In many ways this would lead to creating a similarity between workforces that would begin to spread to national cultures: "globalization homogenizes culture as it evacuates difference and distance."[99] As part of this movement the UK, through its neoliberal underpinnings of the free market, was in an ongoing race to position itself and businesses based there at the forefront of this new and evolving global society. Many businesses moved production out of the country to locations with cheaper labour and material costs in a process of deindustrialisation.[100] This, along with Thatcher's war on trade unions, would see unemployment in the UK rise to its highest level since the 1930s (at 12% of the workforce), which was particularly concentrated in the industrial bases of the North of England, before lowering from the mid-1980s (to 7% of the workforce).[101]

In relation to the visual arts in the UK Thatcher would relay a neoliberal dogma onto the provision and support offered by the state. In 1980 she sought to shift the funding model offered by the government through the Arts Council of Great

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[98] There is also a strong study of self-organisation by artists in Eastern Europe, particularly Russia, but for the purpose of this thesis the focus is on the UK supplemented by the post-war influence of other capitalist countries. See "APTART Exhibition Histories" Event page, Whitechapel Gallery, accessed April 23, 2019,
https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/events/exhibition-histories-aptart/
Katya Beyaeva, "Interview: The Moscow Triennale Curators share Their Vision For the Russian Contemporary Art, Its Major Trends And Future," *Russian Art & Culture*, March 23, 2017, accessed April 23, 2019,
https://www.russianartandculture.com/interview-the-moscow-triennale-curators-share-their-vision-for-the-russian-contemporary-art-its-major-trends-and-future-by-katya-belyaeva/
[99] Pamela M. Lee, *Forgetting The Art World* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012), 16.
[100] Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents.*
[101] "Thatcher's Economic Policies" Economics Help, accessed June 20, 2019,
https://www.economicshelp.org/blog/glossary/thatcher-economic-policies/

Britain, creating a mixed state and private funding template[102] similar to how the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in America, begun in 1965, operated.[103] In 1984 the Arts Council published *The Glory of the Garden*. The report and strategy outlined the concerns over funding for the arts using England as a case study on how a mixed public/private model could be implemented over the coming decade, marketed as a way to restore funding imbalances between London and the rest of the country.[104] Match funding as understood today would be implemented under the name of 'challenge funding', where Arts Council grants were conditional on local authorities providing the same amount, pushing practitioners to private funding as authorities had reduced budgets for arts and culture spending.[105] This shift away from state support as the main source of funding for the arts overseen by former Prime Minister Clement Attlee in the post-war years – with art seen as a 'social good' – was largely railed against by practitioners. Gone was the notion of art being well supported by the taxpayer in order to better society for all; instead art was characterised as a waste of public subsidy that should be re-financed as such. In 1986 Thatcher would strengthen this new funding strategy and approach by abolishing the Greater London Council and all Metropolitan County Councils. This meant increased budgetary control for the centralised state, cutting local council budgets for the arts and forcing artists to rely solely on the now overstretched Arts Council or private sources for financial support. As a caveat to this process a 'value for money' ethos was developed at the Arts Council by the Prime Minister, with key members of staff appointed from the Conservative government in order to maintain this economically oriented operating mentality in line with the rest of society.[106] During this time the Conservatives also capped the overall budget of the Arts Council, meaning there was a finite amount of funding that became

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[102] Gabriel N. Gee, *Art in the North of England, 1979-2008* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[103] Josephine Livingstone, "Why Are Americans So hostile to State-Funded Art?" *The New Republic*, May 26, 2017, accessed June 08, 2019, https://newrepublic.com/article/142925/americans-hostile-state-funded-art

[104] Arts Council England, *The Glory of the Garden: The Development of the Arts in England, a Strategy for a Decade* (London: Art Council England, 1984).

[105] Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus. England, Art and Politics since 1940*, 3rd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 255.

[106] Gee, *Art in the North*.

increasingly distant from the amount practitioners required. This forced practitioners and organisations vying for the same funding to become increasingly competitive with one another to secure public funds. Setting in motion a 'box checking' mentality in order to prove their value for money that is still prevalent, and much maligned, today. Cultural historian Robert Hewison states in *Culture and Consensus*:

> Everywhere, the accountants were taking over, and the values of the market had penetrated so deeply that it seemed impossible, or futile, to discuss the merits of the arts in anything but economic terms…The language of the arts had changed; productions had indeed become "product", audiences "consumers", public patronage "investment".[107]

This competitive mentality would be shown to have an (obviously) adverse effect on the majority of practitioners, arguably carrying through to the present. Instead of ensuring the best artists received funding – as was the supposed intention of the broader neoliberal dogma of social competition – it meant those who could structure an application, document their work and operate how the Arts Council wanted them to were most likely to receive it, often regardless of their artistic quality or merit. As such during Thatcher's government because of the large and sustained spike in unemployment many artists found themselves with no option but to live on social security payments, with little hope of quickly finding new sources of paid work. For artists living and working during this period self-organisation was the only way to maintain a semblance of practice. The commercial scene in the country (mainly based in London) was relatively small and unable to support a meaningful number of artists, and larger institutions became increasingly distant as sites to display work. This would force artists toward self-organisation to maintain a form of 'professionalism' and to be able to continue their practice.

Although Thatcher's war on trade unions and the spike in unemployment crippled many sections of society, arguably artists found a way to subvert this to their advantage and set a precedent for future generations to follow. Even with

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[107] Hewison, *Culture and Consensus*, 285.

the meager income from state security payments, practitioners were increasingly able to afford rent on part or whole former industrial spaces from which to base their studios and create sites to display works.[108] This was particularly evident in the former industrial powerhouses of the North. Gabriel Gee states in *Art in the North*:

> Amid the grime and dust of recession and socio-political tensions, there also emerged…a set of interstitial spaces to occupy; spaces that had lost their original functions and that stood in an in-between, providing apertures for a possible fruitful reinvention of the city's fabric…In the traditional state of the northern city—no longer the busy industrious site of old, not yet some revamped other brought about by changing fortunes—there emerged at the turn of the 1980s a notable trend of self-led artistic initiatives that took advantage of urban spatial availability. Studios and art collectives grew in the interstices of structural decay.[109]

This move to the widespread utilisation of interstitial spaces would be a continuation from the small-scale version of the practice in the 1970s which was in turn a continuation of the methodology developed by the alternative space movement and earlier artist co-operatives and squats. With social security payments acting in effect as startup funding, practitioners were able to group together and pool resources to secure larger 'in-between' spaces for varying lengths of time, again mirroring many of the structures utilised by those early co-operatives. It can be observed during this time the studio/gallery model that is a mainstay of artist-led and artist-run organisations globally first gained widespread traction in the UK. Manchester Artists Studio Association (which would go on to found Castlefield Gallery),[110] and City Racing[111] provide examples of such resource pooling to realise spaces and facilities that were otherwise largely unavailable during the decade, in turn reinvigorating the arts community[112] where they were located. As in the 1970s students too would

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[108] Unfortunately this would arguably also inadvertently set in motion artists becoming co-opted in processes of art-washing and gentrification, labelled as 'regeneration' by property developers and councils.

[109] Gee, *Art in the North,* 59.

[110] Ibid*,* 62.

[111] John Burgess et. al, *City Racing.*

[112] Community rather than ecology, as ecology only serves to create a false appearance of homogeneity, whereas community represents complex and

benefit from this spatial recycling and reformatting, providing larger spaces than the polytechnics at the time were able to provide and offering affordable options for provision after graduation. Here the difference between the 1970s and 1980s was the widespread – and cheap – availability of industrial spaces, directly attributed to Thatcher's policies. In many ways through attempting to force society into entrepreneurial roles via neoliberalism Thatcher helped to inadvertently create a (relatively) sustainable method for individual and collective self-organised spaces and organisations to develop throughout the country. The widespread reformatting of postindustrial architecture so prevalent with artist-led self-organisation today can be seen as a byproduct of Thatcher's brand of callous neoliberal conservatism.

Her government would also begin to encourage and support the arts being used as a tool for urban 'regeneration', increasing tourism and job opportunities – borrowing a trope from American cultural and economic policy. Arguably the most evident example of this 'regeneration' – termed 'enterprise culture' – was Tate Liverpool, opened in 1988, using £5 million of funds from the Merseyside Development Corporation (a corporation set up by the government with the sole interest to redevelop the dockland areas[113] of the city to promote tourism and economic spending).[114] With Tate acting as a large-scale case study, this new

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diverse networks of relations between people. Kerry Harker, "Seeing beyond a false 'ecology' for visual arts in the North," in: *Resilience is Futile*, ed. Lara Eggleton (Leeds: Corridor8, 2019), 67-82. Jason Bowman provides a corollary to this argument relevant for the remainder of the research, saying in relation to describing artist-led organisations that 'independent' should be abandoned in favour of 'interdependent' in order to better reflect them as they aren't singular entities. Bowman, *Valuing the Artist-Led.* In tandem an interdependent community could be the best way to describe the relations, connections and shared values between practitioners and organisations part of broad processes of artistic self-organisation.

[113] The waterside regeneration model was popular throughout Northern Europe along with North America at this time, and is still popular globally. See Edwin Heathcote, "The pros and cons of waterside developments," *Financial Times*, September 15, 2017, accessed January 18, 2020, https://www.ft.com/content/c2b2948c-93ce-11e7-83ab-f4624cccbabe

[114] Emma Barker, "The museum in the community: the new Tates'," in: *Contemporary Cultures of Display*, ed. Emma Barker (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1999), 181.

approach to gentrification[115] under the guise of regeneration would help set a precedent that would extend to the present. The process would act to prompt property developers to begin to force artists from their buildings and redevelop them into luxury housing in moves to create new, desirable, locations within cities and reap increasingly large profits. A year later following the opening of Tate Liverpool the revolutionary events of 1989 and end of the Cold War would unfold. This would impact the rapid expansion of globalisation, opening the West to interaction with the former Eastern Bloc countries in Europe. Seemingly the push towards cultural tourism as an investment and profit-making venture was well timed by chance; this would help lay the foundations for further development of international relations for trade and cultural exchange that would only increase throughout the 1990s and beyond.

When Thatcher was ousted from power and replaced in 1990 by John Major following a short leadership contest within her party – in an ironic neoliberally competitive move she would characterise as a betrayal[116] – she can be seen to have laid the foundations for the neoliberal orthodoxy we now inhabit, and helped to consolidate the further expansion of globalisation. The increasing drive of self-organisation against the backdrop of a seemingly closed-loop commercial art market and socio-political tensions would continue throughout Thatcher's time in power; her policies creating precarity for those in greatest need. Although collectively artists would undoubtedly struggle during her time in office, collaborative and creative approaches to problems were utilised to strengthen their collective resolve in spite of this, reinforcing the role of self-organisation as central to the wider artistic community of the country.

New Labour and Blatcherism

Under Major the Conservatives would continue in government – and the trajectory of neoliberal social reform begun by Thatcher – most notably

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[115] The term was first used in the way understood today by Ruth Glass. Ruth Glass, *London: aspects of change* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1964).
[116] Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain*. (London: Pan Books, 2009), 474.

privatising British Rail from 1994 – 1997. Before this privatisation took place there was the early 1990s recession that affected many Western countries globally. Fuelled in the UK by paying to maintain membership of the Exchange Rate Mechanism in Europe,[117] the recession would spark riots in areas of the country that suffered already high levels of unemployment. Similarly to the 1980s the conditions produced would allow artists that had been squeezed out of postindustrial properties to make way for luxury accommodation to briefly return as the country's economy slowed and stagnated; welcomed when times were hard and then once again removed as undesirable for business once it began to return to normalcy. Once the recession finished in 1993 and even though there were signs of economic improvement (bracketed by high unemployment figures) Major found himself and the Conservatives at the end of an opinion poll slump, continuing until the end of his tenure and the party's government in 1997.

At the 1997 general election the New Labour party won a landslide victory, with Tony Blair elected Prime Minister. Portrayed as a brand rather than a political party, New Labour was unveiled by Blair at the 1994 annual party conference after he was elected leader. Seeking to distance the party from its perceived recent failings, Blair would lead the re-brand driven by spin doctor Peter Mandleson and aide Alastair Campbell. As part of this re-brand they would change the party's constitution to (amongst other things) allow it to focus policy on market economics at the expense of focusing solely on nationalisation of public services and increasing workers' rights, all under the slogan 'New Labour, New Britain'.[118] Blair's personal approach to government was outlined in his text *The Third Way*.[119] Aligning with the political theory of sociologist Anthony Giddens,[120] he sought to unite people from all political persuasions and classes by combining various aspects of left, right and centrist approaches to socio-

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[117] To ensure stable exchange rates with other European countries.
[118] Stephen Driver & Luke Martell, *New Labour*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).
[119] Tony Blair, *The Third Way: New Politics for a New Century*. Pamphlet 588. London: Fabian Society, 1998.
[120] Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

economic issues to create a general consensus between citizens. This approach had worked recently in other countries such as Australia and Holland before Blair took power. However when put into practice by his government it would seem to favour the neoliberal dogma instilled by Thatcher in a hybrid neoliberal and social democratic model. This would lead many to rail against the 'Blatcherism' of the government, seemingly continuing many of Thatcher's approaches to policy favouring supporting the free market and privatisation, increasingly making policy judgements on overtly economic rather than moral grounds.

As part of their election campaign designed to appeal to all class backgrounds as a means to introduce the third way approach, the party would increasingly involve pop-cultural figures in their marketing and events. Celebrity endorsement of a new approach to governing the country was intended to build on the key global cultural exports emanating from the UK at the time that drew tourism into the country: namely music, fashion, art and design, with London as its cosmopolitan creative centre. Dubbed 'Cool Britannia',[121] this wave of British culture sweeping the world was capitalised upon by New Labour in order to shape its approach to cultural policy. During the election the party would profess seeking to have the arts and creative practices as key to the 'core script' of their government (as part of a shift toward a knowledge-based economy); a move welcomed by many.[122]

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[121] Tom Campbell & Homa Khaleeli, "Cool Britannia symbolized hope – but all it delivered was a culture of inequality," *The Guardian*, July 05, 2017, accessed June 11, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/commentisfree/2017/jul/05/cool-britannia-inequality-tony-blair-arts-industry

[122] The knowledge-based economy would seek to raise the education of British workers to allow them to design and produce better quality products that could not be as easily outsourced to cheaper labour in other countries. Peter Mandleson, "The knowledge-based economy: Blueprint for British prosperity," *Independent*, December 13, 1998, accessed June 11, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/the-knowledge-based-economy-blueprint-for-british-prosperity-1191279.html

This was after the would-be Prime Minister was introduced to the Australian *Creative Nation* report in 1995, which said unequivocally: "Culture creates wealth."[123] Following the Australian government's lead, Blair would seek to position culture as the drive for the UK's economy. The embracing of creative practices by the government, in hindsight, can be seen not as a ringing endorsement for the strength of cultural values produced, but instead for the economic benefits created. British culture was a highly marketable and profitable commodity increasingly sought out in other countries and attracting migrant workers to be a part of; this commercialisation of culture quickly came to be widely understood as the 'creative industries'.[124] The creative industries can be seen as a direct development from Boltanski and Chiapello's outlined new spirit of capitalism of the 1970s. The self-organised, often freelance, workers in the creative industries can be directly linked to the post-Fordist[125] rise of faux autonomy workers were afforded. In line with the neoliberal dogma of freedom, competition and opportunity, but pursued through 'creative' means. It was Blair's intention to utilise the creative industries to fill the gap left by deindustrialisation. Creative production would take over as the driving force of New Labour's third way. Allowing it to become distanced from its links to the industrial working classes and failures of the past to portray themselves as champions of the new knowledge-based, rather than industrially-based economy.[126] As Hewison states:

> The shift that began in the seventies from an emphasis on the production of things to the production of images and ideas, where information in

[123] Commonwealth of Australia, *Creative Nation: Commonwealth cultural policy* (Canberra: Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994), 7.

[124] John Howkins, *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money From Ideas* (London: Penguin, 2001).

[125] Used to describe when industrial production methods moved away from large-scale production lines made famous by Henry Ford toward small-scale, flexible methods in the 1970s as part of the 'new spirit' of capitalism. The basis for Boltanski and Chiapello's work, as introduced earlier in the chapter. Boltanski & Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.

[126] Robert Hewison, *Cultural Capital: The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain* (London: Verso, 2015), 31-62.

itself became a precious commodity, made culture as important an item of consumption as any other.[127]

Previously in 1988 policy expert John Myerscough had published a report, *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain*, outlining the financial importance of the 'cultural industries' (as he termed them), stating they were responsible for a sizeable combined contribution to GDP, at roughly £10.5 billion per year from 1984.[128] Although seemingly ignored by Thatcher's government policy, Blair took their growing importance much more seriously, with New Labour re-branding them as the creative industries in the UK. Such was their popularity it prompted the government in 1998 and 2001 to commission and publish detailed mapping reports on them. The overarching theme of these reports were the financial impacts the creative industries had on the country, and their potential for further economic growth. In defining just what the creative industries were it was clear the onus was on economic development through culture, with both reports outlining them as: "those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property."[129]

Intellectual property within the creative industries was also a hallmark of the New Labour government. Following the rise of conceptualism and ultimately the increasing dematerialisation of the art object beginning in the 1960s, intellectual property rights began to have an increasingly important role in the global economic landscape and art system. Here a correlation can be drawn between the value placed upon ideas within visual arts practices, how they were ultimately monetised by the commercial art market, and how businesses have subsequently been drawn to 'creative' professions where ideas are the staple

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[127] Hewison, *Culture and Consensus*, 220.

[128] John Myerscough, *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain*. (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1988), 34-35.

[129] UK Government, Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, *Creative Industries Mapping Documents 2001*. Foreword, April 09, 2001, 5, accessed June 11, 2019, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-mapping-documents-2001

commodity. The apotheosis of this trend in the UK was the rise and re-branding of the creative industries.[130]

That 'exploitation' was used in the government's definition in relation to the creative industries and intellectual property is no surprise, the rhetoric being very much linked with the general neoliberal attitude pervading the country. Indeed, New Labour can be argued to have furthered Thatcher's approach to exploitative practices. Whereas Thatcher openly stripped state support in favour of privatisation and neoliberal competition, Blair predicated his government's socio-economic approach on the entrepreneurialism shown by artists (and those in the creative industries) during the 1980s. Their self-organisation was seen as indicative of a work ethic valued in neoliberalism; at all levels they were creating opportunities for themselves with little to no state support and for a select few enjoying cultural dominance on the global stage. New Labour would use this self-oriented responsibility for achievement and success in their approach to social policy. Encouraging all citizens to behave and think creatively, it was marketed as an opportunity for an increase in social freedom and ultimately an opportunity for individuals to better themselves.[131] In saying they wanted the arts as part of the core script of their government they appropriated the self-organised ethos and results produced in turbulent conditions – mainly by artists – as something to aspire to and tried to encourage the rest of society follow suit.[132]

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[130] Cultural theorist Angela McRobbie offers an account of this period and how it influenced artistic and cultural entrepreneurialism. Angela McRobbie (2002) "Everyone is creative: artists as the pioneers of the new economy" in: *Contemporary culture and everyday life,* ed. Elizabeth Silva & Tony Bennett (Durham: Sociology Press, 2004), 186-199. Researcher, writer and commentator Susan Jones also offers critical insight into the realities of the creative industries for artists. Susan Jones, "Are the creative industries good for artists?," *Padwick Jones Arts*, November 04, 2016, accessed June 11, 2019, http://www.padwickjonesarts.co.uk/are-the-creative-industries-good-for-artists/

[131] Jan Verwoert, "All the Wrong Examples," in: *Self-Organised*, ed. Stine Hebert & Anne Szefer Karlsen (London: Open Editions/Occasional Table, 2013), 122-134.

[132] For reference of different aspects of this shift globally see Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood & Anton Vidokle (eds.) *e-flux journal: Are You Working Too*

The push toward the creative industries came at a time when there was an exponential growth in global communication through the development of more reliable and advanced forms of applications for the internet toward the end of the 1990s, which further fuelled globalisation. This created a new global interconnectedness that had never been seen before. People and businesses were able to communicate instantaneously, raising new possibilities for trade and cultural exchange. In context of neoliberalism this interconnectedness became a tool used to exploit workers through warping business hours to allow communication with different time zones, blurring boundaries between work and life through constantly being contactable, and further reducing manufacturing jobs in many Western countries as outsourcing to cheaper labour markets was easier than ever before. In relation to the arts, globalisation and increased interconnectedness had a number of effects. Firstly – and especially in non-Western countries – it prompted the exponential rise of the biennial as *the* form of contemporary public exhibition. Begun in the 1980s widespread global 'biennialisation'[133] would exponentially increase in the 1990s thanks to the globalisation boom and the technological developments behind it, in turn kick starting a further cycle of international travel and cultural tourism.[134] As art historian Terry Smith states in "Biennials: Four Fundamentals, Many Variations", the format of the biennial has become "*structural within the contemporary arts exhibitionary complex*" and it offers "in one place, *a display of the contemporary art of the world* in ways that are *entertaining, instructive, and competitive, all at the same time.*"[135]

Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011).

[133] Gerhard Haupt, "The Berlin Biennale: A Model for Anti-Biennialization?", *Art Nexus*, no. 53, July–September 2004, accessed May 07, 2020, https://www.artnexus.com/en/magazines/see/5d61ad40eb5c0578bcec42c5/53

[134] Elkins, Valiavicharska & Kim, *Art and Globalization*.

[135] Terry Smith, "Biennials: Four Fundamentals, Many Variations," *Biennial Foundation*, December 07, 2016, accessed June 14, 2019, http://www.biennialfoundation.org/2016/12/biennials-four-fundamentals-many-variations/#post-13592-endnote-2

In many ways the biennials of the 1990s and early new millennium can broadly be seen to symbolise both neoliberalism and globalisation.[136] Presenting art from around the world that is ultimately in competition with the other works on display vying for time and attention from the viewer, before ultimately being sold for a profit. With 240 biennials and periodic exhibitions currently registered in the Biennial Foundation's directory[137] (and more created on a yearly basis), this process and exhibitionary format shows no signs of slowing down.[138]

In the UK during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s the Young British Artists (YBAs) would also rise to prominence as the cutting edge of the art system following their first self-organised *Freeze* exhibition in 1988. This was also alongside larger institutions plotting their next steps in the contemporary art scene such as Tate (planning their expansion that would become Tate Modern), and the establishment of *Frieze* magazine as an acclaimed international visual arts periodical. However focusing on the YBAs, many of the group would transition into the art system *enfants terribles* as the 1990s wore on and a wave of drug- and alcohol-fuelled hedonism arrived alongside the Cool Britannia phenomenon, along with wider cultural publicity. During this time they were famously and paradoxically – at odds with their oppositional self-organised beginnings – spurred on by the financial backing of Charles Saatchi, and saw the value of their works in the art market rise exponentially. Arguably the YBAs

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[136] For an overview of the role artistic and curatorial practices (alongside the biennial model) has played in contemporary globalisation and responded to its development see Paul O'Neill, Simon Sheikh, Lucy Steeds & Mick Wilson, eds., *Curating After the Global: Roadmaps for the Present* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2019).
[137] "Directory of Biennials," Biennial Foundation, accessed June 14, 2019, http://www.biennialfoundation.org/home/biennial-map/
[138] It should be noted that a number of recent biennials have shifted their programmes toward more socially engaged and educational concerns. But this could be argued to demonstrate a level of tokenism around the educational turn in contemporary art, as even with them the commercial aspect of selling works acts to self-affirmingly reinforce the relationship between art and neoliberalism in the biennial exhibitionary model.

helped reinvigorate the commercial market in the country and beyond, spawning a number of new commercial galleries in the process.[139]

Because of their meteoric rise and the romantic anecdote of their breakout – a group of students wanting to show their work, overlooked by larger commercial galleries and institutions in London, who organised their own exhibition in an old industrial unit and were spotted by Saatchi – it positions them as part of the neoliberal archetype. Exemplifying the general entrepreneurial neoliberal attitude *du jour* for having the freedom to work how and where they wanted; Damien Hirst in particular was dubbed a 'true child of Thatcher'.[140] During their heyday they were used as the poster children for how 'successful' artists operated in Cool Britannia. Given their standing the general public could be forgiven for thinking if a group of students could organise an exhibition to force their way into the attention of commercial dealers and sell their work on the international stage then that's what all artists did, with everyone grouped together in the same bracket.

If biennials were to be understood as the sign of the globalised economic art system, and the YBAs as incorrectly indicative as to how artists made their livings in the UK, what impact would wider globalised interconnectedness have on artists outside of this institutionally and economically supported network? The large number of practitioners making up the artist-run community in the UK that biennials didn't directly involve or that were not part of the commercial scene would again turn the developments of the governing socio-economic and art systems to their advantage. In being outside of the relatively small commercial bubble prevalent in London practitioners found themselves at the periphery of a centre of the art system,[141] but were able to turn this to their advantage. In keeping with the outwardly focused and mobile nature of society, a

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[139] Elizabeth Fullerton, *Artrage! The Story of the BritArt Revolution* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2016).

[140] Ulrich Blanché, *Damien Hirst. Gallery Art in a Material World* (Baden-Baden: Tectum Verlag, 2018), 60.

[141] Christoph Behnke, Cornelia Kastelan, Valérie Knoll & Ulf Wuggenig, eds., *Art in the Periphery of the Center* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015).

'double periphery' could be formed, "a centre in itself where a myriad of conjugated influences would be accessible to reshape and translate in one's particular idioms."[142]

These double peripheries outside of the overtly commercial aspects of the London arts community were the first sustained instances of a digitally networked artist-run culture across international boundaries. Particularly evident with Northern practitioners based in deindustrialised cities, global connection and exchange in line with globalisation became of central importance to contemporary art of the time. As Gee states, "do-it-yourself, diversification and networking beyond the local territory while still locally rooted were the significant characteristics of grassroots initiatives in the northern conurbations in the 1990s."[143] Self-organised practices were becoming 'glocalized', operating to global considerations often on a local level[144] to develop new forms of practice, projects and relationships away from the overtly commercial confines of an increasingly impenetrable art market. This process of glocalizing practices and outlooks, mirrored in the socially engaged and educational strands of biennial programming, would continue throughout the decade into the new millennium, in line with wider globalisation. It would see self-organisation by artists increasingly leading to collaboration across international boundaries with international peers, demonstrating the appetite practitioners had to develop their practice and networks. From this milieu of entrepreneurial self-organisation by artists set against the backdrop of a strengthened commercial market and growing biennial culture, artist-led self-organisation as we know it would begin to form.

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[142] Gee, *Art in the North,* 154.
[143] Ibid, 153.
[144] Roland Robertson, "Glocalization: Time Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," in: Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash & Roland Robertson, eds., *Global Modernities* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995), 28-40.

Crisis & Recession

The Global Financial Crisis beginning in 2007 and culminating in what has been called the 'Great Recession' from 2008 – 2009 would bring about substantial changes to global society, decimating economies and causing as yet irreparable social, political and economic damage in many countries, including the UK. Brought about by the subprime mortgage scandal and resultant fallout for banks around the world, in the UK Northern Rock would be the first casualty sparking signs of the impending global crisis, whilst signalling the beginning of the end of Labour's time in government. As Northern Rock collapsed and the global banking system was unable to course correct in time the Great Recession would begin, ushering in the era of contemporary existence we currently inhabit.

That the Global Financial Crisis and Great Recession had, and continues to have, an impact on global socio-economic structures and stability is testament to the view it constitutes a broader 'crisis' of capitalism itself rather than the sudden and sustained downturn of a bust and recession, typical of the capitalist business cycle.[145] The business cycle, understood as the economic cycle, describes the ongoing fluctuations in economic stability through issues such as trade and production, generally comprised of 4 stages: expansion, peak, contraction and trough. These stages generally explain the rapid growth (expansion) of an economy reaching a maximum output (peak) creating economic instabilities needing to be balanced (contraction) until it reaches a low point (trough) after which the cycle restarts.[146] With the nature of capitalist and neoliberal economic production regularly fluctuating between these four stages the business cycle has come to be understood in terms of boom and bust periods, with the boom and bust cycle often used as shorthand to describe it. During bust periods economies regularly slip into recessions, rapidly changing social conditions that

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[145] Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast*.
[146] Jim Chappelow, "Economic Cycle," *Investopedia*, last modified April 05, 2020, accessed April 10, 2020,
https://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/economic-cycle.asp

can bring countries to a standstill depending on their length and severity.[147]

Andrew Gamble states in *Spectre at the Feast*:

> Financial crashes are endemic to capitalism. Despite the optimism often expressed throughout the history of capitalism that such episodes have finally been overcome, and the cycles of boom and bust banished, these hopes have always turned out in the end to be illusory. The way in which financial markets operate in capitalism...means that periods of irrational exuberance and financial bubbles which expand until they burst, leading to a financial crash and the taking of emergency financial corrective measures, are not accidental events but should always be expected.[148]

What made the events of the Global Financial Crisis and Great Recession even more destructive than usual was their effects quickly extended to become a crisis of capitalism itself. Capitalist crises have occurred only twice previously in the past 100 years – the Great Depression in the 1930s and the stagflation of the 1970s. Crises are arguably part of the modern capitalist system but differ from the usually experienced recessions as the economy does not recover quickly and generally resume its growth at a higher level than previously.[149] Instead historically they have lasted for around a decade and posed significant threats to the growth model of capitalism and its future efficiency.[150] Despite the fraught conditions they produce for the majority of society, in relation to the capitalist system they have historically acted as a course correction allowing the system to "renew itself, and purge itself of the false values and the misallocated productive resources which had grown up during the boom phase."[151] Through this destruction crises are seen by many to act as a reset of practical and moral values, clearing space for new businesses and social structures to form from the embers of their wasteful or greedy predecessors.

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[147] Kimberley Amadeo, "Boom and Bust Cycle, Causes, History, and How to Protect Yourself," *The Balance*, last modified June 21, 2019, accessed July 18, 2019, https://www.thebalance.com/boom-and-bust-cycle-causes-and-history-3305803

[148] Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast,* 6.

[149] Ibid, 44.

[150] Ibid, 36-42.

[151] Ibid, 46.

This has previously acted to allow the boom and bust cycle to fully renew and begin again after years of unwieldy accumulation. What is strange about the events of 2007 – 2009 is its effects are still being felt past the usual decade length that has typified previous historical crises. Whilst the global economy has slowly begun to correct, the day-to-day conditions experienced by the majority of global society have remained largely similar. The continued precarious working and living conditions, lack of opportunities for social progression, lack of social security from governments and a slowed global economy point toward an extended state of crisis that as of 2020 still hasn't been overcome.[152] This ongoing state has re-shaped the socio-political landscape rooted in ideological politics of the free market, and helped give rise – particularly in Western Europe and North America – to an increasingly polarised politics allowing populist and nationalistic views to become firmly part of the political mainstream for the first time in decades.[153]

In the UK the situation is no different. After Gordon Brown's Labour government was defeated in 2010 a coalition government formed between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. The Conservatives went on to win the 2015 general election outright, during which time they contributed to this ongoing state of crisis through an increase in the number and severity of cuts to public provision and spending, in line with Thatcher's original neoliberal reforms for the country decades earlier. Notably they would include the introduction of austerity measures from 2010 onwards in what Prime Minister David Cameron would call the new 'Age of Austerity'.[154] During this time Cameron would also

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[152] Andrew Gamble, *Crisis Without End?: The Unravelling of Western Prosperity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[153] Lorenza Antonucci, "Why the rise of populism in western Europe is more than a 'cultural backlash'," *Independent*, February 15, 2019, accessed August 05, 2020, https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/populism-europe-far-right-migrants-lgbt-gender-culture-backlash-a8780861.html
Gideon Rachman, "Donald Trump leads a global revival of nationalism," *Financial Times*, June 25, 2018, accessed August 05, 2020, https://www.ft.com/content/59a37a38-7857-11e8-8e67-1e1a0846c475
[154] Deborah Summers, "David Cameron warns of 'new age of austerity'," *The Guardian*, April 26, 2009, accessed July 27, 2019,

unsuccessfully try to implement the concept of the 'Big Society'[155] on the British people – a further reduction of state support and increased activity from individuals, the private sector and charities to give more 'power' to the people – an updated neoliberal dogma masqueraded as personal power and autonomy for a new era.

It was the choice of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition to enter the country into austerity measures and the post-coalition Conservative government to continue those measures that has had profound effects on citizens of the UK. Arguably the austerity conditions the UK has been under could be seen as an excuse to continue the callous neoliberal conservativism begun by Thatcher decades earlier.[156] Whilst there was an initial negative impact on the economy during the Financial Crisis and Great Recession, from 2010 – 2019 there was a sustained £30 billion of cuts to core public services and spending leading to an increase in poverty with 600,000 children classed as in 'relative poverty' since 2012, and the use of food banks to support day-to-day life doubling from 2013 – 2017.[157] During this time wages stagnated whilst living costs increased, leading many to generate large amounts of debt and use payday loans to cover everyday living costs or to pay existing debts.[158] Against this backdrop the government had the audacity to present the current social conditions as including an

https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2009/apr/26/david-cameron-conservative-economic-policy1

[155] Norman Smith, "David Cameron launches Tories' 'big society' plan," *BBC News*, July 19, 2010, accessed July 27, 2019,
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-10680062

[156] Vickie Cooper & David Whyte (eds.) *The Violence of Austerity* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

[157] Benjamin Mueller, "What Is Austerity and How Has It Affected British Society?" *The New York Times*, February 24, 2019, accessed July 27, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/24/world/europe/britain-austerity-may-budget.html

[158] Maya Goodfellow, "Britain is crippled by a record personal debt while Tories boast of a boom," *The Guardian*, January 07, 2019, accessed July 27, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jan/07/britain-personal-debt-tories-uk-households-employment

'employment boom', with the highest number of people in work since the mid-1970s.[159]

What this hypocritical statistic doesn't include however is the caveat the government's own figures on employment include people on low-waged work and zero hour contracts with no guarantee of work on any given day, showing how ingrained precarity has become within the social structure of the country.[160] Professor Philip Alston, the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights from the UN, stressed in a 2018 report after a visit to the UK that Conservative spending cuts were inflicting misery "unnecessarily, especially on the working poor, on single mothers struggling against mighty odds, on people with disabilities who are already marginalized, and on millions of children."[161] He made clear poverty inflicted upon citizens was from an ideological, not economically necessitated standpoint:

> The experience of the United Kingdom, especially since 2010, underscores the conclusion that poverty is a political choice. Austerity could easily have spared the poor, if the political will had existed to do so. Resources were available to the Treasury at the last budget that could have transformed the situation of millions of people living in poverty, but the political choice was made to fund tax cuts for the wealthy instead.[162]

[159] Larry Elliott, "We're working like it's 1975, but the UK jobs boom isn't all it seems. Here's why," *The Guardian*, March 21, 2019, accessed July 27, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/21/jobs-boom-unemployment-uk-economy

[160] Brian Stuart Finlay, "Employment may be at an all time high in the UK, but austerity, low pay and zero hours contracts inflict misery on millions," *The Conversation*, January 23, 2019, accessed July 27, 2019, https://theconversation.com/employment-may-be-at-an-all-time-high-in-the-uk-but-austerity-low-pay-and-zero-hours-contracts-inflict-misery-on-millions-110252

[161] "Statement on Visit to the United Kingdom, by Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights," United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, November 16, 2018, accessed July 27, 2019, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23881&LangID=E

[162] Ibid.

This ideological drive to impoverish millions to ensure the wealthy stayed comfortable post-Great Recession is damning. The recent move to the Universal Credit benefit system has exacerbated problems further, with research linking nearly 120,000 'excess' deaths to the system, its implementation and a general lack of funding for social support.[163] Whilst these cuts were justified by claiming the money was needed urgently for other areas (such as social care – which is still severely lacking), what becomes clear is with austerity driven by ideology and not necessity there was no need for undue suffering or such a dramatic removal of resources. It amounts to a government maintaining power through destitution of the mental and physical wellbeing of its citizens, privileging the wealthy over the rest of society. Arguably this brutal form of austerity is symptomatic of the political shift post-Great Recession, and has helped drive a new form of increasingly inhumane neoliberalism forward.

As in the 1970s under Thatcher the Conservatives would cut funding to the arts without hesitation as part of their austerity package with county councils in England having £390 million cut from their arts and culture budgets since 2011,[164] and Arts Council England (ACE) itself bearing £230 million in cuts since 2010.[165] This is despite the arts and culture industry still being relied upon and contributing £10.8 billion to the wider UK economy, raising £2.8 billion in taxation and generating a further £23 billion per year.[166] From 2007 onwards,

[163] Jonathan Watkins et. al. "Effects of health and social care spending constraints on mortality in England: a time trend analysis," *BMJ Open*, Vol.7 Issue 11, November 15, 2017, accessed July 28, 2019, https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/7/11/e017722#

[164] Eleanor Busby, "Council funds for libraries, museums and galleries cut by nearly £400m over eight years, figures reveal," *Independent*, January 25, 2019, accessed July 28, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/libraries-museums-arts-galleries-funding-recourses-county-council-network-cnn-social-care-a8741271.html

[165] Peter Bazalgette, "Arts Council England Reports £230m Decline In Arts Funding Since 2010," *Artlyst*, April 18, 2016, accessed July 29, 2019, https://www.artlyst.com/news/arts-council-england-reports-230m-decline-in-arts-funding-since-2010/

[166] Centre for Economics and Business Research, "Contribution of the arts and culture industry to the UK economy," commissioned by *Arts Council England*, April 17, 2019, accessed July 29, 2019,

artistic opportunities unsurprisingly began to reduce dramatically in line with this trend. A study by a-n, comparing opportunities from 2008 – 2010 makes this starkly apparent, with a 60% drop in the value of paid opportunities in England in 2008 compared to 2007, with the figure only improving 12% by 2010 and with paid commissions by organisations in the same year only reaching 16% of their 2007 counterparts. With artists receiving 56% of all paid opportunities from public sector or higher education funds, 10% of paid work coming from local authorities and 34% of artists having higher education jobs, the cuts to core public funds were devastating for livelihoods and practices.[167] To reinforce this point ACE (who along with a-n) conducted and published the *Livelihoods of Visual Artists: 2016 Data Report* in 2018, stated the average mean income of artists in England was £16,150 of which just £6,020 came from their practice, with 36% of artists earning less than £1,000 from it. With the mean income in the country for full time work being £27,600 in 2016 artists were clearly at a disadvantage economically and in most cases were falling below the £16,302 required to meet the national living wage.[168] Whilst the figures for the other countries in the UK were slightly different during this period (owing to the relative size of populations, etc.), a similar scenario can be understood to be present, and is explored in Chapter 3.

During this period – as following other recessions – artists' self-organisation would become *the* default methodology of practice for most;[169] creating opportunities through embracing the self-organisation of historical artist-run practices. In doing so they would move toward contemporary DIWO ('do it with others') and DIA ('do it anyway') stances as ways to counteract the conditions they found themselves in. Standing in solidarity with their peers in the same way

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https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/contribution-arts-and-culture-industry-uk-economy-0

[167] "Research Papers: Changing Face of Artists' Employment," a-n, May 2011, accessed November 16, 2018, https://static.a-n.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/1266356.pdf

[168] TBR, "Livelihoods of Visual Artists: 2016 Data Report," commissioned by *Arts Council England*, December 14, 2018, accessed 29 November, 2018, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Livelihoods%20of%20Visual%20Artists%202016%20Data%20Report.pdf

[169] a-n, "Artists' Strategies."

as the historical artist-run co-operatives and practitioners had done before them.[170] With reduced public funding available practitioners would find themselves in a paradoxically supportive, yet increasingly competitive, funding environment seemingly at odds with the self-organised ethos and having more in common with the broader neoliberal social status quo.

These tumultuous times from 2007 onwards is where the focus of this PhD research is based, and importantly, where I propose artist-led self-organisation can be understood as properly beginning. This is for three key reasons: lack of a previously agreed starting point, uptake of the term from then onwards in published material, and influence of neoliberalism creating a specific experience of contemporary history. With the term previously having no definitively agreed upon start date but seemingly coming into usage from the early new millennium,[171] and historical revisionism allowing people to surreptitiously assign the moniker of 'artist-led' to projects, groups or organisations not understood as such at their inception, it only serves to confuse the term with its 'artist-run' predecessor. The 'artist-led' moniker would then become a widespread and notable part of public discourse in context of self-organisation in the arts in the UK following the Great Recession, particularly through platforms such as a-n. It is broadly from 2007 onwards that 'artist-led' came to be widely used and understood as symptomatic of artistic existence under neoliberalism that had become more pervasive and intrusive than ever before. With precarity (in all aspects of life) – strengthened by globalisation and increased networked connectivity – as an indicative factor of this neoliberal stranglehold, the period of history defined as 'contemporaneity' was different to anything that had gone before. As such a new understanding of self-organisation in this context is required. Evolving from artist-run practices in the UK and ushering in a new era of alternative and oppositional organisational strategies, designating the inception of artist-led self-organisation during this period signals an

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[170] Ashcroft, "DIY • DIWO • DIA."

[171] Indicated by searching the database of articles on the a-n website, the first of which recorded as 01 November 2000. "You searched for artist-led – Page 57 of 57," a-n, accessed November 13, 2017, https://www.a-n.co.uk/explore/network/for/artist-led/page/57/

understanding of the shifting position of self-organisation and determinacy by artists in relation to the influence of neoliberalism on life.

Cyclicality

When viewing the broad development of DIY, self-organised, artist-run and artist-led practices in the UK a number of shared social commonalities become apparent. As outlined these generally include issues such as the perceived need for alternatives to existing social institutions, a lack of access to opportunities, a willingness to act independently to greater control opportunities and methods of production, the removal of resources by the state, and the marginalisation of practitioners in line with national economic conditions. The ideological political machinations begun in the 1970s have given shape to the neoliberal world we exist in. They have provided fertile ground for these commonalities to occur and continue through enforced political ideology, globalised expansion, exploitation and legalised profiteering generally at the expense of those in most need in society. However this situation is nothing new, rather it is a continuation of wider socio-economic and temporal cycles played out over the course of history since the inception of the capitalist system, with artists from the 1960s onwards occupying a prominent space within them. In linking self-organised artistic practices to historical socio-economic and more recent temporal cycles it is hoped to expand upon the driving forces of the key issues practitioners routinely face, placing the inception of artist-led self-organisation at a specific point within these cyclical frameworks of economic periodisation.

With the UK, like most Western capitalist countries, generally operating on a boom and bust economic model it has encountered recessions in a cycle roughly once per decade since the mid-1950s, with each bust period seeing self-organisation becoming an increasingly prominent feature of artistic and cultural existence. The most notable bust endured in recent times began in 2007. However as outlined pre-dating that were recessions in the 1930s, mid-1970s,

early-1980s and early-1990s,[172] including two of those recessions turning into capitalist crises alongside the current state of crisis we find ourselves in.[173] These recessions and crises all directly and dramatically impacted upon the sustainable development of artistic practice; cyclically destabilising working and wider living conditions, contributing to a number of artists' practices, projects and organisations coming to a drastically premature end.

What can be surmised from the brief overview of recent periods of boom and bust and ideological political machinations is a cyclical model emerges. One in which self-organised, artist-run and artist-led practices gain strength despite experiencing a removal of resources in bust periods, remaining relatively strong and reaching a certain level of public output (and recognition) whilst being exploited by external actors when the economy recovers before the next bust occurs. When the next bust inevitably happens the work done by most practitioners to that point (barring a small number who have access to relatively secure funding and/or spatial provision) is undone and the cycle starts anew. The 'artist-led cycle' I outline is perpetuated by the ever-extending power of neoliberalism. This has seen UK governments increasingly marginalise the visual arts, and along with other external actors (such as property developers), imposing processes such as artwashing, gentrification and the precarisation of labour[174] onto practitioners identifying as part of processes of artist-led self-organisation, in order to generate profits to help stimulate the economy toward another boom period (alongside 'improving' the public perception of companies through becoming associated with the visual arts). Here recent key examples symptomatic of the broader processes of artwashing and gentrification include the protracted redevelopment of the iconic brutalist Balfron Tower in London by developers Poplar Harca into luxury apartments – working with Bow Arts to

[172] Larry Elliott. "British recessions: a short history," *The Guardian*, December 07, 2012, accessed November 16, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/business/2012/dec/07/britain-recessions-history

[173] Brian Holmes "Crisis Theory For Complex Societies," in: *Disrupting Business: Art and Activism in Times of Financial Crisis*, DATA Browser 05, ed. Tatiana Bazzichelli & Geoff Cox (Brooklyn, AUTONOMEDIA, 2013), 199-226.

[174] The precarisation of labour will be explored in Chapter 3.

artwash the process – essentially amounting to social cleansing of the social housing residents located there whilst inviting artists from largely artist-led contexts to create work in response to the building through live-in residencies of the vacated spaces,[175] and Rogue Artists' Studios (Manchester) not having their lease renewed in the mill they had occupied since 2000 that was bought in 2015 by developers Capital & Centric to be redeveloped into apartments (leaving the organisation with little time to find a new space before eviction, and eventually re-opening in a new space in 2017 elsewhere in the city).[176]

In relation to the globalised art system and particularly biennialisation (where cycles are implemented as part of the operating model for staging periodic exhibitions every 2 – 5 years), the artist-led cycle is forced upon practitioners by external factors and conditions. Within the artist-led cycle the only inevitability is those same conditions, exacerbated by processes of co-optation and exploitation through artwashing, gentrification and the precarisation of labour, will repeat and bring with them the same challenges to sustainability. Although this may seem somewhat deterministic, it is useful in order to outline the general trends practitioners have routinely faced to date under the capitalist system.

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[175] O'Sullivan, "The Pernicious Realities of 'Artwashing.'"
Rab Harling, "Balfron Tower: the artwash of an icon," *The Urban Transcripts Journal*, Vol.1, no.3, Autumn 2017, accessed November 29, 2020, http://journal.urbantranscripts.org/article/balfron-tower-artwash-icon-rab-harling/
[176] Daniel McMillan, "Jumping Into The Unknown: What Next For Rogue Studios?" *The Double Negative*, October 13, 2016, accessed November 29, 2020, http://www.thedoublenegative.co.uk/2016/10/jumping-into-the-unknown-what-next-for-rogue-studios/
Stephen Palmer, "New Home for Manchester's Rogue Artists' Studios provides "long-term security,"" *a-n*, August 22, 2017, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/new-home-for-manchesters-rogue-artists-studios/

Bust

Boom

Artist-led gains
strength

Exploitation by
external actors
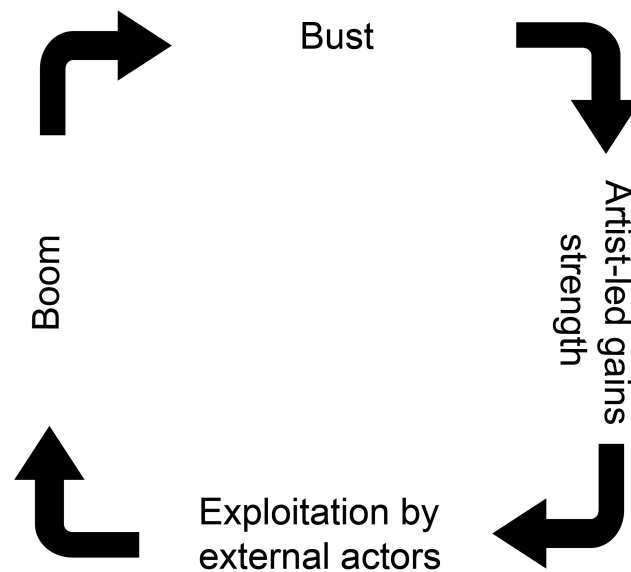
[Fig.1]

The capitalist system in which this takes place is all consuming, anything that

opposes it is eventually absorbed within and repurposed to serve it.[177] There is

no escape; everything eventually becomes a commodity or part of the process to

produce one that can be profited from. Frustratingly that is what makes it so

devastatingly efficient. Even conceptualism, a forerunner of artist-run and artist-

led self-organisation in the mid-1960s and a movement trying to escape the

rampant commercialisation of the art system by holding the thought process as

the most important part of a work (and positioning an idea as unsellable), was

quickly proven to be a favourite of the commercial market. Conceptualist works

became the newest art investment opportunity for financial speculators and

collectors in the 1970s and at art auctions from the 1980s onwards.[178]

Paraphrasing poet Charles Baudelaire, philosopher Herbert Marcuse described

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[177] Boltanski & Chiapello. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.

[178] Christie's auction house staged the first auction of conceptual art in 1987. See
Nate Freeman, "Conceptual Art Wasn't Meant to Be Collected. Now it Sells for Six
Figures," *Artsy*, August 29, 2018, accessed November 17, 2018,
https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-conceptual-art-meant-collected-
sells-six-figures

this as the 'benevolent neutrality' of the art market, with the absorption of anything deemed anti- or non-art into it, mirroring the wider capitalist system.[179] This set the tone for the commercial art market moving forwards, showing it could absorb and profit from any practice, however experimental. As the market flourished it led to the value of only certain individuals or movements to be consolidated by the discretion of those in power. Effectively creating a closed economic loop, only entered through being invited in by its institutional gatekeepers. Bryan-Wilson states of that time:

> The art market is booming but most artists are starving—but this contradiction is exactly the point. The art market was (and still is) predicated on a "star system" that elevates only a small number of individuals. Most others struggle to pay the rent, take up adjunct teaching positions, or work day jobs.[180]

This process of selective commercialisation ensured practitioners had to live and work in precarious conditions, and would carry through to the present. Following in the footsteps of the countercultural movements that came before, artist-run and artist-led practices as an alternative proposition to the governing conditions of art and society face a dilemma. Processes have been, and continue to be, imposed on practitioners seemingly against the shared values of most, but can they manage their complicity within them? The precarisation of labour, artwashing and gentrification are issues long associated with the activity of artists, with artists ironically often being seen as leading the processes themselves through their actions. Clearly these conditions are not conducive to any form of sustainability, and clearly practitioners do not gladly invite them upon themselves. Historically these conditions have been imposed on practitioners because they generally occupy the second economy of art.[181] Because of their generally non-commercial position within society they are marginalised along with other groups and minorities who aren't afforded a meaningful platform for discourse with governing actors because they are

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179 Herbert Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," in: *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, ed. Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore Jr. and Herbert Marcuse (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 89.
180 Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 38-39.
181 Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*, 22.

deemed 'insignificant' for not directly contributing commercially. As such they have been forced into unwitting and unwilling participation for decades[182] at the margins of society.

This marginalisation in plain sight is key to understanding why self-organised practices have seemingly been repeating the same arguments and experiencing the same issues surrounding spatial and funding provision for decades. It follows the general idea of repressive tolerance[183] outlined by Marcuse. When applied to liberal (capitalist) democracies those in power publically tolerate those presenting an alternative to the established order to show they are democratic. Because of the size and strength of those in power in relation to the opposing minority they usually overcome them, undermining their freedom and autonomy, reinforcing the status quo using "tolerance as a means for perpetuating the struggle for existence and suppressing the alternatives."[184] This undermining of democracy creating a relatively powerless minority (in this case practitioners who self-organise) means so long as they are tolerated as an alternative, they will remain trapped in the same cycles of marginalisation and exploitation.

A cause of becoming trapped in these cycles can be argued as directly linked to the repercussions the events of 1989 had globally. Whereas in the preceding decades these cycles were beginning to establish themselves for practitioners, post-1989 they would become the norm. The confluence of events throughout the course of the year was pivotal in shaping how time and Western identity came to be understood. Alongside globalisation and the ever-increasing speed of development for production methods and digital communication technologies, increasingly (art) history was declared (rightly or wrongly) at an 'end' from that point onwards.[185] The understanding of a linear progression of development

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[182] Rosalind Deutsche & Cara Gendel Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," *October*, Vol.31, (Winter, 1984): 91-111.

[183] Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," 81-117.

[184] Ibid, 83.

[185] See Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art?*, trans. Christopher S. Wood, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Francis Fukuyama, "The End

cultivated in modernity shifted to a fractured progression of blurring artistic disciplinary boundaries and an increasingly polychronic[186] (concurrent) viewpoint of time itself, not focused solely on the past and future but rather the multiple individual presents existing for each person within contemporaneity. The exponentially increasing significance of digital media in global society post-1989 must be acknowledged in this shift of understanding, as access to the internet,[187] and its immaterial forms of communication and exchange particularly post-millennium, have implicitly shaped human relations and our experience of time.

As curator Lauren Cornell argues in her article "Down the Line", philosopher Jean Baudrillard's observation[188] that "human history would end with the close of the millennium seems vindicated: with events rapidly proliferating in media, we have lost the possibility of noting significant milestones and seem unable to meter our own position in time."[189] In this instance Baudrillard can be understood (along with others, particularly Arthur Danto[190] and political scientist Francis Fukuyama[191]) as referring to the triumph of neoliberalism over other socio-economic systems globally. The system had become so pervasive the new millennium signalled the epoch of a new global era where human

of History?," *The National Interest,* No.16 (Summer 1989): 3-18; Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art. Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[186] Polychronicity is a fluid understanding of time. Meaning multiple times or actions existing or happening at once, not necessarily in a scheduled order. Drawn from polychromic cultures in human history. First coined by Edward Hall. Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language*, (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1959).

[187] Tim Sandle, "UN thinks internet access is a human right" *Business Insider*, July 22, 2016, accessed November 15, 2017, http://www.businessinsider.com/un-says-internet-access-is-a-human-right-2016-7?IR=T

[188] Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*.

[189] Lauren Cornell, "Down the Line" *Frieze*, September 01, 2011, accessed November 15, 2017, https://frieze.com/article/down-line

[190] Danto, *After the End of Art.*

[191] Fukuyama, "The End of History?."

development wasn't moving sequentially towards an end point, but was in fact fractured, stuck in a constant present.

This increasing inability to properly distinguish our temporal existence in relation to what has gone before has led to the rise of a wider understanding that temporality, as we comprehend it, is fractured and displaced for each individual, creating a collision of multiple times converging to create the present contemporaneity we each experience.[192] Contemporaneity post-millennium operates "as a designator of the changing temporal quality of the historical present, which is not…simply a coming together *in* time, but *of* times."[193] The convergence of these multiple presents acts to reinforce the idea of the end (of a certain idea) of human (and art) history.[194] Showing we have reached a point where communication and experience is too instantaneous and far reaching to be confined by a universal singular shared context – arguably confirming Baudrillard's idea because technology, simulation and simulacra were advancing so quickly history became detached from humanity and unable to catch up, making itself redundant.[195]

Trapped within a climate of presentism in the end of history,[196] where the present has, according to art critic Boris Groys, "ceased to be a point of transition from the past to the future, becoming instead a site of the permanent rewriting of both past and future,"[197] the collective experience of artist-led practitioners is

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[192] Geoff Cox & Jacob Lund, *The Contemporary Condition: Introductory Thoughts on Contemporaneity & Contemporary Art*, The Contemporary Condition 01 (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 12-16.

[193] Ibid, 11. Also paraphrasing philosopher Peter Osborne. Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time. Modernity and the Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 2010).

[194] Arthur C. Danto "The End of Art," in: *The Death of Art*, ed. Berel Lang (New York: Haven Publications, 1984), 5-35.

[195] Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*.

[196] Julieta Aranda, Brian K Wood & Anton Vidokle, "Editorial—"The End of The End of history?"" *e-flux*, Journal #56, June 2014, accessed January 09, 2019, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/56/60325/editorial-the-end-of-the-end-of-history-issue-one/

[197] Boris Groys, "Comrades of Time," *e-flux*, Journal #11, December 2009, accessed September 16, 2017, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/11/61345/comrades-of-time/

one where the embracing of digital communication and knowledge sharing – in an evolution of *The Eternal Network* posited by artists Robert Filliou and George Brecht in 1968[198] and the Mail Art[199] movement of the mid-1950s and 1970s[200] – has led to a situation where even the present can no longer be clearly defined and interacted with. Coupled with the removal of resources and changing social conditions of the Great Recession and beyond this has created a different articulation of time through which practitioners seemingly draw upon 'recent' operational models for reference. Cannibalising organisational models used in the recent past seemingly points toward a closed-loop of knowledge production. However I would argue it instead points to a state of further temporal crisis. Due to an oversaturation of near-identical potential examples – most notably variations of the gallery/studio, gallery, or studio models – the majority of contemporary practitioners become fixated on models from a period of time that irrevocably shaped the society they inhabit around the time of the Great Recession. Given the predisposition for self-organisation to constitute much of a

[198] *The Eternal Network* was a concept based on artistic telepathy between practitioners with the intention of creating a network of cooperating artists that were not in competition with one another, as part of the Fluxus movement. Robert Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts* (Köln: Verlag der Gebrüder König, 1970), 202-207. Also relevant is Filliou's *Art-as-Peace Biennale* using postal networks to organise events and artworks. See Chris Thompson, *Felt: Fluxus, Joseph Beuys and the Dalai Lama* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 153.

[199] The Mail Art movement saw practitioners from the 1950s onwards using postal services globally to send small-scale pieces of artwork or instructions to produce artworks to one another, strengthening connections and cultural exchanges between them. It originated as decidedly 'underground' outside of the view of the commercial art market and gallery system, before being absorbed within it, mirroring the wider appropriative capitalist methodology, or benevolent neutrality, as Marcuse would have it. "Mail Art Then and Now" *The Flue,* Vol.IV, Nos. 3 & 4 (Winter 1984).

[200] Artists Lucy Lippard and her 'numbers' and 'suitcase' exhibitions, alongside Nam June Paik and his 'broadcast' works are key for the development of artist networking. See Lucy Lippard "Curating by Numbers," *Tate Papers*, Landmark Exhibition Issue, no.12, Autumn 2009, accessed October 29, 2019, https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/curating-by-numbers
Marina Isgro, "Video Commune: Nam June Paik at WGBH-TV, Boston," *Tate Papers*, no.32, Autumn 2019, accessed October 29, 2019, https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/32/video-commune-nam-june-paik

practitioner's formative years, the majority of artists seem to become trapped within this framework of Great Recession-centric knowledge. This is in part evidenced by artist Kevin Hunt in the *Artist-Led Hot 100 (version ii)* commissioned by a-n; drawing together a 2017 long-list of (in his subjective view) the most exciting groups, collectives, organisations and platforms operating in the UK. Whilst this list is not exhaustive of the entirety of the organisational methodologies employed in the UK, with Hunt's position as a leader in the field of artist-led self-organisation (and regular contributor to many of its new initiatives for mobilisation and unity) it is widely recognised as a useful (if curated) barometer of practice. Of the 100 entries 12 utilised the gallery/studio, 34 the singular gallery, and 4 the singular studio models exclusively, along with 9 using nomadic models that staged the majority of their output in 'traditional' gallery or studio settings.[201]

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[201] Kevin Hunt, "Artist-Led Hot 100 (version ii)," *a-n*, May 26, 2017, accessed November 21, 2017,
https://www.a-n.co.uk/resource/artist-led-hot-100-version-ii

Image 1. Kevin Hunt, "Artist-Led Hot 100 Version ii," a-n, May 26, 2017, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.a-n.co.uk/resource/artist-led-hot-100-version-ii

However there are those already beginning to counteract this trend of Great Recession-centric knowledge (mentioned throughout the remainder of the

thesis), creating a new temporal dynamic in the process for others to follow.
Utilising the same digital communications technology that had blurred temporal
boundaries and perceptions, increasingly practices are being generated or
reformatted in order to circumvent these problems. Although moving notably
toward redefined communal, roving and digitally-based organisational models
and exhibitionary forms, morphing[202] between online/offline spaces, this can be
seen as somewhat expected. Again Hunt's *Artist-Led Hot 100 (version ii)* in part
reinforces this point, with the remaining 41 entries all coming from nomadic,
pedagogical, educational and publishing/selling models that didn't regularly
utilise a 'traditional' gallery or studio setting in their output. Of the entirety of
the 100 entries it must also be noted at the time of writing only 43 remain open
or currently active, with 17 of those utilising non-'traditional' operating models,
further reinforcing the fleeting nature of artist-led practices and a slow
movement away from continued dependence on Great Recession-centric
knowledge.[203]

With the development and widespread usage of those same digital
communications technologies a key component of neoliberalism, arguably artist-
led self-organisation is simply following the wider social curve. However this
ongoing shift from the cyclical repetition of previous models points toward a
conscious interaction with pre-recession models whilst thinking of future ones
outside of the established cyclical conditions. Through these spatio-temporal
forms this 'new' wave of artist-led self-organisation can be seen to have
developed a reflexive relationship to wider self-organised forms of knowledge
production. One in which their projects display attributes of research in much
the same way as 'research exhibitions' do,[204] rupturing from the presentism that
previously had collectively stupefied them.

With this move towards 'artist-led' knowledge production incorporating an
approach grounded in research outside of the conditions of presentism, it

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[202] Hunt, "People Like Us."
[203] Hunt, "Artist-Led Hot 100 (version ii)."
[204] Simon Sheikh, "Towards the Exhibition as Research," in: *Curating Research*,
ed. Paul O'Neill & Mick Wilson (London: Open Editions, 2015), 32-46.

follows that a wider historical understanding of the development of artist-led self-organisation as a methodology of practice is key for any sustained future development. Throughout this chapter – and in answering the first research sub-question – emphasis has been placed on the importance of establishing just such a lineage of development. Bringing together key works on the avant-garde, DIY, counterculture and alternative space movements alongside broader artist-run and self-organised practices by Bürger, Lowndes, Bryan-Wilson, Gee, (Bernice and Gavin) Murphy and Drabble, they were related to one another to develop a partial history of artist-led self-organisation for the first time, showing how different self-organised resistive practices have developed from, and alongside, one another until reaching the contemporary 'artist-led' variant in the UK.

In doing so, for the first time the broad scope of historical socio-economic factors that have given rise to the current form and role of artist-led self-organisation were made apparent. Answering the second research sub-question, the key works of Boltanski and Chiapello, Hewison, Gee and Gamble were used to outline the rise and dominance the neoliberal system has exerted globally and the impact this has had on artist-led practices. This neoliberal hegemony has been reinforced through modelling much of its contemporary forms of social control in relation to forms of freelance labour on artists, reaching an apotheosis in the creative industries championed by New Labour. Through this the archetype of the creative worker has come to be reinforced, keeping practitioners largely on a freelance – and precarious – trajectory of practice, development and existence.

In the contemporary era, and in answering the third research sub-question, the work of Gamble, Alston, Marcuse, Cox and Lund, and Cornell alongside data from a-n, Arts Council England and various tabloid reports was used to contextualise artist-led self-organisation in relation to socio-economic trends brought about by that same neoliberal hegemony. Gamble's work provides understanding on the nature of the economic cyclicality of that system, where practitioners are routinely co-opted and exploited during specific points of the boom and bust cycle, with their precarious position further compounded by the austerity measures enforced by the Conservative government in 2010 following the

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Financial Crisis in 2007. Coupled with the blurring of temporal boundaries unique to contemporaneity practitioners have arguably never faced such negative circumstances and barriers to everyday life and practice.

With practitioners trying to navigate this turbulent socio-economic backdrop, as outlined it prompts thinking of artist-led self-organisation in terms of an active and ongoing site of research into autonomy, critique, organisational models and experimental practice. In the following chapters this partial history will frame the arguments being made for the need of a new understanding that is central to the thesis itself. In Chapter 2 the online/offline structural components of artist-led self-organisation that have given rise to those spatio-temporal forms and this 'new' wave of practice mentioned above will be critically analysed in detail. Particular attention will be paid to the importance social roles and positions alongside network culture have played in shaping the rise of this form of self-organisation post-2007.

Chapter 2: Online/Offline Structural Concerns of Self-Organisation

Chapter 1 provided a partial historical overview of the broad development and rise of artist-led self-organisation in the UK from the post-war period onwards for the first time, in order to frame the arguments made throughout the thesis. Taking in key socio-economic developments such as the DIY and alternative space movements, the development of artist-run practices, and the rise of neoliberalism and capitalist cycles of boom, bust and crises, it positioned artist-led self-organisation within a discourse of apparent artistic research, resistance and resilience.

Building on that partial history this chapter seeks to explore the broader structural components of artist-led self-organisation. It does so by positioning it within the wider social hierarchy of the visual arts, focusing on practitioners' utilisation of the internet and social media in relation to self-organisation, networks, and network theory. In particular it focuses on how the spread of globalisation and growth of online/offline networks have come to occupy a central role in the continued development of artist-led self-organisation, alongside the increasing technologisation of contemporary society. Through this it provides a critical appraisal of the underpinnings of that self-organisation and how those impulses are communicated, fostered and grow in our globally interconnected society.

The chapter first focuses on the perception of artist-led self-organisation within the wider structure of the art system in relation to historically established hierarchies. It then moves on to the discussion of networks within artist-led practices, drawing on the self-organised online/offline spaces and networks fostered by practitioners within it. Key references include philosopher Pierre Bourdieu and the development of 'social fields', the model of the 'network society' outlined by sociologist Manuel Castells, and the 'organized network' concept developed and expanded by media theorists Ned Rossiter and Geert Lovink.

The chapter seeks to answer the following research sub-questions:

- What is the social relationship between practitioners enacting artist-led practices and the rest of the art system?
- How has digital communications technology impacted process of artist-led self-organisation?
- What online/offline network forms are key to artist-led practices and sociality?

The Vagaries of 'Free' Choice

It is evident that self-organisation is the methodology underpinning all 'artist-led' activity. In the previous chapter the genealogy of this self-organised impulse was made clear in relation to historical visual arts and broader socio-political-historical contexts. Although whilst continuing to utilise the same general motivations as previous self-organised practices and movements (fostering autonomy, providing alternative opportunities and spaces, counteracting the perceived failings of those in power, etc.) in order to create new social and institutional forms, there is also the spectre of state-forced entrepreneurialism and individualism unique to the neoliberal age, coupled in recent times with austerity and the ongoing precarity of citizens, that catalyses this process.

The neoliberal system has inherently produced the universal issue of precarity that in turn subsequently splinters into a number of other detrimental issues for physical and mental health and wellbeing of people globally. In specific relation to the visual arts in the UK self-organisation is seen as a way to regain some control over the drive towards individualism and competition engrained in neoliberal society, counteracting contemporary barriers to everyday life and cultural practices raised by precarity. In the contemporary era on all levels it is clear: "There is no alternative: THE FUTURE IS SELF-ORGANISED."[205]

[205] Stephan Dillemuth, Anthony Davies & Jakob Jakobsen (2005) "There is no alternative: THE FUTURE IS SELF-ORGANISED Part 1," in: *Art and Social Change. A Critical Reader*, ed. Will Bradley & Charles Esche (London: Tate, 2007), 378-81.

Specifically in the post-Financial Crisis era this phrase has come to resonate particularly loudly throughout global society. Although this provocation was the title of a text pressing for a would-be fight back from visual arts practitioners against neoliberal hegemony, the overarching sentiments ring true for all. We exist in an extended period of capitalist crisis where it is up to the individual to secure their wellbeing and future within precarious conditions. State support has been largely jettisoned in favour of ensuring the free market is stable for citizens to be 'free' to act and labour where and when they want to, ultimately serving those in power and further reinforcing inequality. Neoliberalism is quite literally the "market-driven institutionalisation of insecurity."[206] Much of what artists Stephan Dillemuth, Anthony Davies and Jakob Jakobsen outlined in their prescient proclamation of the dominance of self-organisation for cultural practitioners has come to pass. As art critic Jan Verwoert has noted: "In the arts, the question of self-organisation usually presents itself in very concrete terms: either you do it, or you drown. We are free to self-organise. But if we don't, our lives tend to fall apart very quickly."[207]

It is this deterministic feigned appearance of a free choice – that if ignored leads to certain capitulation for practitioners – that is key to contemporary forms and methods of artist-led self-organisation. It is as though the previously held form of repressive tolerance has been further warped by the neoliberal system and is forcing practitioners down certain (publically discernable) avenues for expression of opposition. Once there it is up to them to try and make something worthwhile with the meager resources provided by both the state and their own increasingly precarious employment before they capitulate. In this social space there quite literally is no alternative to self-organisation. Collectively practitioners' hands are forced to behave how the neoliberal system dictates or

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206 Vassilis Tsianos & Dimitris Papadopoulos, "DIWY! Precarity in Embodied Capitalism," in: *Economy: Art, Production and the Subject in the 21st Century,* ed. Angela Dimitrakaki & Kirsten Lloyd (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2015), 125.
207 Verwoert, "All the Wrong Examples," 123.

risk having no semblance of a public artistic output, let alone a space for political dissatisfaction to be aired.

In this extended period of crisis with no end on the horizon and digital technologies meaning we are more (invasively) connected to others than ever before, self-organisation (in the visual arts), despite this oxymoronic and arguably disingenuous departure point, is widely recognised as *the* best option available to the majority of practitioners. The best option in order to not only develop and maintain a practice, but also to counteract in some capacity the increasingly callous and inhumane governance of society. This point was reinforced shortly after my suggestion of the widespread public inception of the 'artist-led' moniker (following the Financial Crisis) in 2007 – particularly for university graduates – by a-n as part of an editorial on artists' strategies and self-management, where the organisation stated:

> It has become the norm for artists to proactively place their work in the public domain. Such activity – whether by artists individually or collectively – empowers those who seek an alternative to handing over control of promotion and presentation of their work. These entrepreneurial types takes responsibility for creating platforms for presenting work, and with that the freedom to control how their work is seen and by whom.[208]

This shift to (often unpaid) self-organisation being openly discussed as the norm for practitioners by one of the UK's most recognised artistic organisations can be understood as signalling how the arts environment in the country changed dramatically, and rapidly, after the recession. Here self-organisation is no longer enacted by practitioners as a rebuttal to those in power, but can be understood as being re-framed by the neoliberal system in order to maintain its dominance over practitioners by removing it as the option for dissent as it had historically been, instead making it the default option.

Enacted in a variety of strategies and through a variety of models, artist-led self-organisation can be seen in light of post-Financial Crisis conditions as a forced,

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[208] a-n, "Artists' Strategies."

collective, process of sociality. One practitioners and other groups gravitate towards to find purpose, opportunity, knowledge, enjoyment and socio-political expression. In its truest form self-organisation, according to Drabble, "is not only non-commercial but actively anti-profit in capitalist terms, and as such intensely incompatible with the current context of a growing cultural economy and move to immaterial labour."[209] Through practitioners' organisational strategies and models, spaces and institutional structures are created across online, offline and social boundaries. Effectively sanctioned by neoliberalism, they regularly provide and act as communal support structures in the precarious times we inhabit, counter to the orthodoxy and intention of the neoliberal system itself. In keeping with the adage of 'constraints creating possibilities',[210] in the UK the combination of austerity, precarity, globalisation, network culture and 'forced' self-organisation has created a volatile cocktail of social conditions for practitioners. However, this mixture of constraints has seen practitioners increasingly subvert the would-be stranglehold placed on them to create new potentialities and subjectivities for practice and cultural existence under the auspice of artist-led self-organisation. Seemingly practitioners have been able to re-structure and shift the expected outcomes of established social power dynamics.

The Contemporary Visual Arts Field

As repeatedly stated, artist-led self-organisation is not only a site of unclear definitional boundaries, but also one that seeks (in varying degrees depending on the practitioner) to challenge the broader structures and institutions of power that hold governance over society. Despite not all necessarily being explicitly political in their practices and outputs, as part of processes of artist-led self-organisation practitioners are participating and engaging in an implicitly political act of creativity and social organisation from an historical lineage of counterculture, protest and direct action. Even those that self-organise to

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[209] Barnaby Drabble, "On De-Organisation," in: *Self-Organised*, ed. Stine Hebert & Anne Szefer Karlsen (London: Open Editions/Occasional Table, 2013), 21.
[210] Scott Barry Kaufman and Carolyn Gregoire, *Wired to Create. Unravelling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind* (New York: Tarcher Perigee, 2015).

develop and maintain a practice not overtly concerned with socio-political engagement[211] still perform subtle acts of resistance, despite the catalyst for their action being co-opted by the neoliberal system. This is similar to the political acts performed by institutional forms in the art system. As museum director Manuel Borja-Villel states:

> An exhibition, a collection or a museum not only exist in relation to the history of art, they are also political acts in that they are public interventions, even if, as Georges Didi-Huberman reminds us, the actors themselves are ignorant of the fact. [212]

The socially constructed nature of power means it is able to be bent to the will of those that hold control over it, and is generally seen to be maintained and reinforced on the population of a given society through social institutions and their agents. Until now throughout this thesis, and in common parlance, the 'field' of artist-led practices is referred to as shorthand to describe the social hierarchy present between practitioners and organisations in their development of knowledge. Very rarely, if ever, is this expanded upon. What it is and how it functions in relation to other creative fields and power at a broader, and more abstract, level remains inconsistently vague. In relation to this particular area of sociology and his contributions to field theory, Bourdieu's concepts of fields and habitus (explored throughout this chapter) align with the implied meaning of field when it is used descriptively. Here they are key to understanding and critically exploring the position of the 'artist-led' moniker and the politicised, precarious, self-organisation that it fosters.

Broadly, Bourdieu markedly advanced the argument of the socially constructed nature of power. Arguing the social world has divided and is now made of a

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[211] Here it must be stressed not all artist-led self-organisation is actively engaged with bringing about social change, but those practices are still an important part of that collective self-organisation.

[212] Manuel Borja-Villel, "Dissent and the Neoliberal Condition," in: *The Long 1980s: Constellations of Art, Politics and Identities*, ed. Nick Aikens, Teresa Grandas, Nav Haq, Beatriz Herráez & Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2018), 55.

number of different, dynamic, often overlapping and interrelated, but generally autonomous social spaces that he termed 'fields'. Each field creates a specific 'illusio' – an unshaking belief in the field and its rules – that people within that field adhere to, showing "the acceptance of the fundamental premise that the game…is worth being played, being taken seriously."[213] Bourdieu used a recurring analogy of the field as a game, explaining that each field has its own specific 'nomos', or 'rules of the game', that each participant is aware of and must adhere to. The habitus of a person – their individual taste and dispositions created through a combination of free will and social structures[214] – guides them towards participation in certain fields. All fields are governed by the larger 'field of power' that amounts to a combination of cultural and economic capital combined in varying antagonistic ways to produce a hierarchy of power. The importance of its constituents is usually weighted in favour of those with the highest economic capital – explaining why institutions favour economic rather than cultural capital in order to remain in positions of power and importance within the social hierarchy, reinforcing class divisions.[215]

Bourdieu outlined a 'field of cultural production' that included the visual arts and literature in order to argue for the need to situate works of art within the wider social conditions that they are produced, shared and viewed in. Although building on those ideas of how sociality and social institutions from the wide spectrum of viewers, collectors, galleries, commercial dealers, critics, press, etc. help to both contextualise and make cultural products what they amount to be,[216] given the rapid advance of digital technology and the increasingly porous borders of medium-specificity, seeing a seemingly singular field of cultural production simply does not fit with contemporary methods of cultural production, dissemination and interaction, particularly within the visual arts.

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[213] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, 2nd ed., trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 333.
[214] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 170.
[215] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in: *Handbook of theory and Research for the Sociology of Education,* ed. John Richardson (Westport: Greenwood, 1986), 24-58.
[216] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

Solely within the visual arts practitioners regularly stray into other creative disciplines to realise work and projects, but those other disciplines still have their own nomos/rules. Those rules exist as distinct from those often recognised and employed by artists in their own field in order to realise aspects of their practice through a variety of means. Writer and curator Linda Weintraub sums up this appropriative spirit of contemporary art by saying that: "No topic, no medium, no process, no intention, no professional protocols, and no aesthetic principles are exempt."[217]

Here then, the contemporary visual arts field (CVAF) is a complex entity that not only incorporates a range of disciplinary, theoretical and conceptual approaches to art practice, but also the commercial and non-commercial nature of practices inherent to those approaches. Closely interrelated within the CVAF are a number of other sub-fields of commercial, non-commercial and mixed economy creative practices that are distinct entities but are a part of the larger field itself. What is commonly referred to as the 'artist-led field' in everyday conversation is actually one of these sub-fields; as such the 'artist-led sub-field' is a distinct, but tightly interrelated component of the CVAF and by extension, other fields. Here it is accepted that the artist-led field and the artist-led sub-field refer to the same thing, both describing artist-led self-organisation at a broad level and its interrelation to the wider CVAF and beyond, with the artist-led sub-field having not been articulated as such previously. Within the CVAF undeniably there is a certain social hierarchy of practitioners and organisations in relation to the larger field of power that governs its practitioners, again generally favouring those that create economic capital.

Reflecting the commercial and non-commercial divide in the various sub-fields – including small-scale institutions as intermediaries[218] – and their importance to the overarching field, the hierarchy of the CVAF can be expressed as:

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[217] Linda Weintraub, *Making Contemporary Art: How Today's Artists Think and Work* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2003), 8.

[218] Nora Sternfeld, "Playing by the Rules of the Game. Participation in the Post-representative Museum," trans. Erika Doucette & Sam Osborn, *CuMMA PAPERS #1*, August 2013, accessed May 05, 2020,

The commercial market (galleries and auction houses)

> Biennials, triennials, Documenta (periodic exhibitions) >

> Public and private galleries and museums (large-scale > institutions)

> Small-scale institutions >

> Artist-led/artist-run/independent practitioners, spaces > and organisations

'Amateur'/recreational practitioners

[Fig.2]

Whilst this hierarchy is relatively fluid depending on the strength of the commercial market and has the potential for change, similar to the field of power, the importance of economic capital in neoliberal societies to date has held the current structure firm. In what can be seen as a classically Marxist trope, visual arts practice at all levels can be understood as responding to the fluctuations of the free market and global economies, with contemporary forms of practice (in the second economy) largely consisting of non-capitalist methods of production and output.[219] Alongside this a reversal of that same hierarchy can be seen as the 'traditional' flow or trajectory purported by cultural and educational institutions for a practitioner looking to become commercially successful. If achieved, the understanding is that they would ultimately exist (relatively) outside of precarious conditions in the field within the commercial

https://cummastudies.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/cummapapers1_sternfeld 1.pdf
Also see small-scale UK institutions such as Bloc Projects, Oriel Davies Gallery, Dundee Contemporary Arts, etc. as examples. "About," Bloc Projects, accessed June 11, 2020,
https://www.blocprojects.co.uk/about
"About," Oriel Davies Gallery, accessed June 11, 2020,
http://www.orieldavies.org/about
"About," Dundee Contemporary Arts, accessed June 11, 2020,
https://www.dca.org.uk/about
[219] See Dave Beech, *Art and Postcapitalism*; *Art and Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

environment of the art system. With the field broken down into reflecting how the art system functions and how people regularly come to linearly perceive progression within it (often exacerbated by institutional propaganda for just such a trajectory), the overall view is one of a series of steps in order to reach the end goal of the pinnacle of critical – and commercial – success. Not only is such a view misguided and the support for it echoed from institutions from higher education, galleries and museums disingenuous, it has clearly proved to be unobtainable for most and at odds with the polychronic and multiple nature of contemporary existence as outlined in Chapter 1.

The Artist-Led Sub-Field

As the socio-economic hierarchy of the CVAF makes clear artist-led self-organisation and its sub-field is located near the bottom, away from the upper echelons of those producing the highest amounts of economic capital, and often the least amount of 'meaningful' cultural capital. With the vast majority of practitioners existing within the second economy of art – their outputs not governed by the primary economy of capital accumulation and generally not seeing proportional remuneration for their labour – they (and the artist-led sub-field) have come to be a part of the 'creative dark matter' of the art system and CVAF. As previously outlined in the Introduction, Gregory Sholette uses the astrophysics terminology as a metaphor to explain the mass of practitioners and people that go largely unnoticed by the rest of the art system, practicing in the shadows of the formal and institutionalised aspects of it but who are crucial to supporting and maintaining it on a daily basis. The system they help underpin is predicated on an ongoing conveyor belt of practitioners entering the outside world (usually) from the confines of educational institutions and 'failing' once there. This leaves a mass of artists and creative practitioners who ultimately take up and labour in other roles within the art system and its institutions that help support its functions. Doing so allows a select few to exist professionally (sanctioned by institutional gatekeepers), and be (often excessively) remunerated for their artworks, thereby assuming positions at the top of the

CVAF social hierarchy.[220] It is starkly apparent why a number of institutions continue to peddle the rhetoric of an historic potential upward trajectory in the art system; without the practitioners that 'fail' the institutions themselves (and by extension the field) would stutter into obsolescence with swathes of their core workforce missing. In *Dark Matter* Sholette states:

> Without this obscure mass of "failed" artists the small cadre of successful artists would find it difficult, if not impossible, to sustain the global art world as it appears today. Without this invisible mass, the ranks of middle and lower level arts administrators would be depleted, there would be no one left to fabricate the work of art stars or to manage their studios and careers. And who would educate the next generation of artists, disciplining their growing numbers into a system that mechanically produces prolific failure? Furthermore, by purchasing journals and books, visiting museums and belonging to professional organizations, these underdeveloped "invisibles" represent an essential pillar of the elite art world whose pyramidal structure looms over them eternally out of reach.[221]

Here Sholette's use of the figure of the failed artist was drawn from the work of art historian Carol Duncan. Mirroring her 1983 assertion in "Who Rules the Art World?" of the surplus of artistic talent vital to the functioning of the wider arts community, field and commercial market, where she states:

> We can measure the waste [of artistic talent] not only in the thousands of "failed" artists – artists whose market failure is necessary to the success of the few – but also in the millions whose creative potential is never touched…This glut of art and artists is the normal condition of the market.[222]

Similar to Sholette's concept of creative dark matter, sociologist Pascal Gielen can also be seen to have taken up Duncan's line of thought and indeed contributed to Sholette's concept. He states that at "the lowest estimate, about

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[220] Sholette, *Dark Matter*.
[221] Ibid, 3.
[222] Carol Duncan, "Who Rules the Art World?" in: *Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 172. Also see Gregory Sholette, "What Do Artists Want? Re-reading Carol Duncan's 1983 Essay "Who Rules the Art World?" In 2017," in: *Who Runs the Artworld: Money, Power, Ethics*, ed. Brad Buckley & John Conomos (Faringdon: Libri Publishing, 2017), 57-74.

ninety percent of the artists graduating from the schools today spend their entire careers as promise or potential – and thus as a murmur."[223] Whilst he doesn't explicitly call them failures he implies that the murmur exists as a generally incomprehensible noise of artistic practices. In linking the murmur to wider historical thinking surrounding post-operaist theory[224] particularly of the 1970s by post-Marxist philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri,[225] he uses the 'murmur of the artistic multitude' to describe how the murmur continues to grow until it forms a diverse grouping of practitioners (the 'multitude') that is constantly in flux with no borders, able to communicate and collaborate together.[226] In *Multitude* Hardt and Negri defined their post-Marxist understanding of the multitude as:

> an irreducible multiplicity; the singular social differences that constitute the multitude must always be expressed and can never be flattened into sameness, unity, identity, or indifference. The multitude is not merely a fragmented and dispersed multiplicity. It is true, of course, that in our postmodern social life old identities have broken apart…The fracturing of modern identities, however, does not prevent the singularities from acting in common. This is the definition of the multitude…singularities that act in common.[227]

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[223] Pascal Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude. Global Art, Politics and Post-Fordism* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2009), 22.

[224] Originally derived from the Italian Autonomia movements (particularly the Autonomia Operaia movement) that were rooted in Marxist and Leftist ideals broadly seeking to bring about breaks from hierarchical social institutions to provide more democratic autonomy in everyday life for people. The term came to be known as 'operaismo' and describes political analysis centred on the working class (Workerism). In a post-operaist context post-Marxist philosophy was used to develop concepts such as immaterial labour, the multitude, commoning, etc. in line with the 'new spirit of capitalism' of the 1970s. This liberally inclined, and democratically minded, approach to autonomy can be seen to have influenced contemporary debates on autonomy, and my own position. For more on Workerism see Sergio Bologna, "Workerism Beyond Fordism: On the Lineage of Italian Workerism," *Viewpoint Magazine*, December 15, 2014, accessed June 25, 2020, https://www.viewpointmag.com/2014/12/15/workerism-beyond-fordism-on-the-lineage-of-italian-workerism/

[225] Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[226] Ibid, 23-41.

[227] Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 105.

This artistic multitude then is symptomatic of the move to post-Fordist working conditions and immaterial labour,[228] its murmuring echoing the spirit of counter-hegemony drawn from the social movements of the 1970s. Arguably Sholette re-casts the artistic multitude in the guise of dark matter to reflect the current landscape of cultural existence and practice, in which the position of the art-worker is one that is subjugated, rather than empowered by their opposition. In helping to passively reinforce the key social hierarchy of the field through being part of the murmur/creative dark matter of the art system, practitioners bind themselves to a variety of precarious forms of labour, or indeed put their own creative position in precarity in seeking full-time positions of labour that would fully provide for their needs. Unable to properly fulfil their artistic potential under the conditions of post-Financial Crisis recession and austerity, practitioners are seemingly caught in a perpetual losing cycle; damned if they do and damned if they don't.

Here it is worth raising the point of the demographic makeup of the visual arts in the UK in order to better understand artist-led practitioners and the dynamics of the artist-led sub-field in relation to the CVAF. The visual arts in this country can be seen as generally liberally-minded, overwhelmingly white, overwhelmingly middle class,[229] and having men in most key positions of power within institutions.[230] Given the dark matter premise (building on Duncan's original

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[228] Originally defined by sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato, he outlined it as labour encompassing skills that were increasingly cybernetic or robotic, and that increasingly involved activities not normally recognised as traditional 'work'. Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial labor," in: *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics,* ed. Paolo Virno & Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 142-157.

[229] Hettie Judah, "The Art World is Overwhelmingly Liberal But Still Overwhelmingly Middle Class and White – Why?" *Frieze*, July 06, 2018, accessed January 15, 2019, https://frieze.com/article/art-world-overwhelmingly-liberal-still-overwhelmingly-middle-class-and-white-why

[230] Dany Louise, "Women in the visual arts: "Leadership is not a gender neutral space,"" *a-n*, April 28, 2016, accessed January 15, 2019, https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/women-in-the-visual-arts-leadership-is-not-a-gender-neutral-space/

thesis) of the conveyor belt of artists entering the world on a yearly basis it could be inferred from this general topological overview that this middle class "overly stale, pale, and male"[231] dominance (to borrow a phrase from the polemical art criticism platform The White Pube) of key positions of power is relative to all aspects of the art system itself, and is also the same at the level of the artist-led sub-field. This is obviously a clear issue for meaningful inclusivity, representation and cultural diversity within the entirety of visual arts in the UK. But when viewed in relation to Bourdieu's concept of the habitus[232] of practitioners it makes for an even bleaker picture. Focusing on practitioners entering into the sub-field, the habitus of most can be tentatively seen to incorporate generally left-leaning liberal political views, existence within some form of precarity, a high level of education gained through university or free school models, and knowledge and experience of practical and theoretical skills and relationships relevant to contemporary visual arts.[233]

Through this generalised outline of the artist-led habitus alongside the racial, gendered and class makeup of the CVAF and artist-led sub-field, when new practitioners enter the CVAF with similar tastes and dispositions they usually receive an equivalent position within the field that ultimately sees them gravitate toward the artist-led sub-field. Because of this a certain collective sense of group identity within the sub-field is fostered. With practitioners generally coming from similar backgrounds, having similar levels of knowledge, similar economic standings and privileges, and having similar understandings of existing social hierarchies and protocols, they are able to feel a sense of inclusivity and

The new Arts Council England 10-year strategy also aims to specifically combat this issue in England as part of its activity. See "Let's Create. Strategy 2020-2030," Arts Council England, January 27, 2020, accessed March 10, 2020, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Strategy%202020_2030%20Arts%20Council%20England.pdf
[231] "Dazed 100 2018 – 44 The White Pube," Dazed Digital, June 26, 2018, accessed October 11, 2019, https://www.dazeddigital.com/projects/article/39702/1/the-white-pube-curators-biography-dazed-100-2018-profile
[232] Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.*
[233] Collated generally from observation, and the events staged as part of the research.

collectivity with their peers. Feeling as though they are part of a wider community of like-minded individuals. Given the liberal consciousness present within the sub-field, seeking for it to be a space open and inclusive to all, it is telling that this same collectivity effectively works to stifle this broadly held but largely unspoken aim.

Image 2. The White Pube, Twitter post, 9:12 am, October 10, 2020, accessed November 29, 2020, https://twitter.com/thewhitepube/status/1314841332372963328?s=21

With practitioners from relatively privileged white backgrounds[234] routinely struggling to find a meaningful position within the sub-field and the artist-led community, the opportunity of an equivalent position for those from a minority, LGBTQIA+, or working class background without access to those same privileges has to date proved relatively slim. This can be seen as in part reflected in the statistic of only 2.7% of the entire UK workforce in galleries, museums and libraries being from a minority background.[235] Despite the fact that even people from a position of privilege struggle to find a role within the CVAF and sub-field, here it further proves just how badly represented wider societal makeup is in the visual arts and other cultural disciplines.

Alongside this unintentionally and structurally biased misrepresentation of the UK population within the CVAF, and artist-led sub-field, arguably this sense of collectivity also serves to placate practitioners that do feel a part of it to a certain degree. Everyone is viewed as being in the same precarious position with previously few that have vocally or publicly challenged this orthodoxy of precarity. This is despite practitioners all possessing different levels of privilege and socio-economic wealth under those conditions of precarity that could provide them platforms to do so. Here it is important to return to Hardt and Negri's conception of the multitude – practitioners, regardless of their class or ethnic background are essentially forced into a certain collectivity. Not flattened together cohesively, but rather singularities currently acting in disjointed commonality under conditions of precarity. A warped inclusivity that provides the potential for dissent from individuals, groups and collectives against the governing social order, yet which often remains fractured.

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[234] Reinforcing the art system stereotype of a privileged white middle class able to undertake precarious work by surviving through other means e.g. familial support or inherited wealth.
[235] Tom Jeffreys, "Survey Shows Extent of Class Divide in Creative Industries," *Frieze*, April 16, 2018, accessed January 15, 2019, https://frieze.com/article/survey-shows-extent-class-divide-creative-industries Something *ROOT-ed Zine* are working to change for artists of colour in the North West, as discussed at *Open Forum 2*. See Appendix 2.

Network Dynamics of Sociality

Within the CVAF and artist-led sub-field, practitioners, like in all other aspects of life, utilise online/offline networks as part of their everyday activities and are in turn part of an almost indecipherable number of networks active in global society. Socially governed, human networks have evolved spanning physical and digital dimensions from the first social groupings of our species onwards.

Social organisation and communication through relations, cultural exchange, trade and conflict on local, national and international scales have always been based on the social networks fostered by and between different groups and peoples. It wasn't until the advent of industrialism that technologised networks as we understand them today would begin to develop. My use of 'network' as terminology is general, and in context of artist-led self-organisation is specifically concerned with the main types of technologised networks, although within those categories there are numerous models of distinct network forms, all of which constitute different forms of power relations.[236] Technologised networks are understood as having three main typologies – centralised, decentralised and distributed.[237] Broadly, centralised networks have a single server node that shares information with other nodes of the network, decentralised networks have numerous server nodes that all have copies of the same set of information to share with other nodes so no single server is in command, and in distributed networks every node is in effect a server and

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[236] For a broad overview of how network structures have risen to prominence in contemporary society and the art system see Relyea, *Your Everyday Art World*.
[237] The distributed network was conceived and developed by engineer Paul Baran in the 1960s as a response to the Cold War and threat of impending nuclear attacks to maintain communication throughout a network if part of it was destroyed. It would help develop the internet as we understand it today. Paul Baran, "On Distributed Communications: 1. Introduction to Distributed Communications Networks," Memorandum RM-3420-PR, August 1964, accessed February 19, 2020, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_memoranda/2006/RM3420.pdf

makes its own decision, with the behaviour of the wider network decided by consensus of the constituent nodes.[238]

As technology increasingly advanced so too did methods of electronic communication, bringing with it the potential for wider, more convenient and instantaneous communication to occur. Within this increasingly technological environment technologised networks became dominant as *the* apparatus of social organisation through their features of flexibility, scalability and survivability that ensured their ongoing presence in society.[239] According to Manuel Castells in "Informationalism, Networks and the Network Society", in any online/offline context the operation of networks in their varying forms can be understood as:

> a set of interconnected nodes…A network has no center, just nodes. Nodes may be of varying relevance for the network. Nodes increase their importance for the network by absorbing more relevant information, and processing it more efficiently. The relative importance of a node does not stem from its specific features but from its ability to contribute to the network's goals. However, all nodes of a network are necessary for the network's performance. When nodes become redundant or useless, networks tend to reconfigure themselves, deleting some nodes, and adding new ones…The network is the unit, not the node.[240]

These countless meshworks of interconnectivity would continue to exert dominance over social organisation as humanity entered the Information Age[241] of the 21st century. Advancing to economies predicated on the development and use of information technologies, they would help fuel globalisation and the increased interconnectivity that has become a commonplace trait of existence in nearly every society globally. As a result of the technological advances made throughout the Information Age we now exist within a 'network society'. According to Castells this is a "society whose social structure is made of

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[238] Ibid, 2.
[239] Manuel Castells, "Informationalism, Networks, and the Network Society: A Theoretical Blueprint," in: *The Network Society. A Cross-cultural Perspective* ed. Manuel Castells (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2004), 3-48.
[240] Ibid, 3.
[241] Manuel Castells, *The information age: economy, society, culture,* Vol.I. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies."[242] As part of the network society we inhabit, aspects of life are driven by the:

> extension and augmentation of the body and mind of human subjects in networks of interaction powered by microelectronics-based, software-operated, communication technologies. These technologies are increasingly diffused throughout the entire realm of human activity by growing miniaturization.[243]

That artist-led communities have come (like the majority of other groups in the UK) to rely on these communication technologies as an extension of the physical collective is no surprise. Whereas previously networks of practitioners involved in earlier self-organised movements and practices were effectively closed to the general public unless they were invited into them, now they are decidedly more public because of that technological development in our network society, and so are arguably open to external interaction or observation. With previous networks contributing much to what used to make those movements and practices subcultural – their existence in the margins of society being enhanced by the almost clandestine sharing of information – now practitioners are nearly at the other end of the spectrum. As technology has developed so too has the public nature of communication and information sharing.

Practitioners have watched on as technological development has exponentially increased; physical forms from telephones to computers, to tablets and smartphones have scaled down in size whilst scaling up in their power of, and potential for, communication and interactivity. Alongside this the platforms, applications and services we use to communicate through those devices have also evolved. With the growth and expansion of the internet[244] to its second

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[242] Castells, "Informationalism, Networks, and the Network Society," 3.
[243] Ibid, 7.
[244] It is important to recognise the internet as having drastically – and paradoxically – changed since its inception. What was initially conceived as a free and democratic resource in the 1990s based on the values propagated by the hippies and communes of the 1960s has been almost entirely reversed and is now rampantly commercialised, and used to harvest data for other organisations

incarnation from the static to dynamic web pages of Web 2.0 from around 2000 onwards, those same platforms, applications and services also shifted, moving from what were purely networked communication channels to interactive, networked sites of sociality.[245] From these conditions of increasing social connections and dialogue occurring through digital means social media platforms as we understand them today would emerge. With digital technology being incorporated into the communication networks of everyday life (beginning with phone calls) it was the next stage in the evolution of networked sociality that those same processes would become integrated within online spaces. Sharing pictures and videos, instant messaging, commenting on activities, sharing anecdotes and political opinions on everyday occurrences, etc. that were once a private solitary or group experience are now a collective act. In *The Culture of Connectivity* new media author José van Dijck states:

> through social media, these casual speech acts have turned into formalized inscriptions, which, once embedded in the larger economy of wider publics, take on a different value. Utterances previously expressed offhandedly are now released into a public domain where they can have far-reaching and long-lasting effects. Social media platforms have unquestionably altered the nature of private and public communication.[246]

As social media platforms have shifted the nature of communication, their structures have also come to exist as relatively fluid, being updated as time progresses from feedback received from users. As van Dijck makes clear, there are a variety of loose categories of social media platforms, but they regularly and increasingly overlap with one another. Notably the 'social network sites' (such as

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to profit from. It has also come to have highly hierarchical conditions that work to limit and constrain the politics and content present within it, in many ways mirroring the conditions people experience IRL ('in real life'). See Geert Lovink, *My First Recession, Critical Internet Culture in Transition* (Rotterdam: V2_Publishing & NAi Publishers, 2003); Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[245] José van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). With reference to the ongoing research of Manuel Castells and digital culture theorist Lev Manovich.

[246] Ibid, 7.

Facebook and Twitter) intended for users to create and maintain social networks and the 'user-generated content sites' (such as YouTube and Instagram) intended for users to express and share creativity, have porously merged uses and functions. This is in order for the platforms to increase their market dominance; users are encouraged to network and share comments, pictures, videos and other content across all of them.[247]

Alongside this trend of encouraging creative and political expression across all social media platforms ultimately for the companies' profit,[248] year-on-year more people are increasingly using various forms of technology to access the internet, and increasingly using it to access and interact with a wide variety of those platforms. In January 2020 it was estimated that 67% of the world's population had access to mobile phones, 59% of the population were active internet users and 49% active social media users. At the time of writing that equates to around 3.75 billion people globally interacting with social media on their mobile devices. Within that demographic the top two most popular social media platforms globally were Facebook and YouTube.[249] It is unsurprising that both blend social networking and production of user-generated content. And even more unsurprising that they have found popularity among users by encouraging their creativity in producing and consuming different forms of content, even to the point of being able to refer to it as a form of curating. In this regard social media users are undeniably cultural content producers, and following this vein could arguably be seen as artists and/or curators. Whether most people would be aware or care about this salient fact is incidental; they have ironically and unintentionally become part of the original avant-garde's quest to sublate art into everyday life on a certain warped, commercially driven, level.

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[247] Ibid, 8.

[248] Many of those platforms and other digital media services and companies have also been bought out by Facebook, further monopolising its position. Notable examples include Instagram and WhatsApp – reinforcing the encouragement of creative expression across platforms and services as it ultimately grows the company's profits.

[249] Dave Chaffey, "Global social media research summary 2020," *Smart Insights*, last modified April 17, 2020, accessed April 19, 2020, https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/

Whilst social media platforms are undoubtedly the main, and pervasive, tool for developing and maintaining networks, other digital services also play a part.[250] Email, SMS messaging, video calling, mailing lists, blogs, forums, etc. still factor in the overall landscape of networks, but their importance pales in comparison to that of social media platforms for instantaneous and influential exchanges.[251] Whereas there is the potential for longer form methods of communication and exchange to occur (both temporally and in content) through these other digital services, it is the immediacy of which users are encouraged to create and disseminate content on social media platforms that has seen them become dominant. This strive toward producing content for these platforms has risen exponentially as they continue to grow, with many external companies quickly catching on to the trend in order to monetise and reinforce this cult of content production. With social media influencers in the UK able to recoup anywhere from £100 – £1,000 per post[252] it has reinforced the 1980 assertion by futurist Alvin Toffler of contemporary society moving toward the roles of producers and consumers becoming blurred as technology increasingly advanced, and instead behaving as 'prosumers' that straddle both sides of the divide at once.[253]

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[250] The distinction between the internet and the 'world wide web' is important here – the internet being effectively a network of networks, and the web a way of accessing information from the internet that supports most digital services and social media platforms. Arguably with the size of the internet, digital services and social media platforms accessed through the web are limiting their potential social reach as the web only covers a partial amount of the overall size of the internet itself.

[251] It is pertinent to note the typologies of those networked digital services and social media platforms is decidedly mixed. From the centralised structure of social media (with individual/corporate owners) to the more decentralised and distributed structures of mailing lists, forums, etc. they all play varying roles in the continued sociality of contemporary life, all of which are utilised by practitioners.

[252] Daisy Murray, "How Much Do Social Media Influencers Get Paid? New Research Reveals All," *Elle*, March 25, 2019, accessed April 21, 2019, https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/a26927125/how-much-do-influencers-get-paid/

[253] Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave: The Classic Study of Tomorrow* (New York: William Morrow and Co.,1980). For a corollary of the debate on the autonomy of art in relation to the prosumer see Rob Horning, "Artistic autonomy and subsumption," *The New Enquiry*, March 21, 2014, accessed August 18, 2020, https://thenewinquiry.com/blog/artistic-autonomy-and-subsumption/

The art system is no different in this regard. As part of contemporary society all of its constituents behave as prosumers, with social media platforms acting as gateways to new practitioners (for practitioners, curators, gallerists and audiences). Arguably for practitioners at all levels it acts as both a research methodology to learn about and connect with others, and also an avenue to potentially monetise their practice.[254] This allows practitioners to eschew the specific roles of producer and consumer (as per Murphy's definition of the artist-run ethos,[255] outlined in Chapter 1). A prosumer-driven output can also be agued as the business model of numerous arts organisations, notably e-flux. Starting as an artist-run email mailing list in 1998, e-flux quickly became funded by larger institutions, catering to the globalised, overtly commercial, art system. It would later begin to produce journals and publications alongside its paid mailing list services and other outputs, reinforcing its networked power relations with the rest of the art system.[256] This prosumerism of the commercial art market is the same in artist-led contexts, with The White Pube arguably symptomatic of this methodology. Not only do they use their sizeable social media following and website presence to communicate their various critical outputs, they also use them to meet their audience, regularly organising 'art dates'. Art dates are used to meet their followers to visit new exhibitions, or any other social space, to make new relationships and broaden their understandings of contemporary practice and practitioners, which then further contextualises their critical output.[257]

The Artist-Led Network.

Self-organised practitioners (including examples such as The White Pube) obviously utilise personal networks in line with the rest of global society, but

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[254] Olivia Fleming, "Why the World's Most Talked-About New Art Dealer Is Instagram," *Frieze*, May 13, 2014, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.vogue.com/article/buying-and-selling-art-on-instagram

[255] Murphy, "What makes artist-run spaces different?," 5.

[256] "About," e-flux, accessed April 21, 2019, https://www.e-flux.com/about

[257] "Art Dates," The White Pube, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.thewhitepube.co.uk/art-dates

alongside these they are also part of a wider, and public, 'artist-led network' that to date has not been critically defined or explored. There is no application process to join this network or membership fees for continued participation. The only criteria is identifying as enacting processes of artist-led self-organisation – once you do so and begin to research or interact with the sub-field or contact other practitioners you inherently become a part of it. In many cases practitioners' wider social networks are comprised of much of the artist-led network itself. The artist-led network is much the same as any other network, but specific to the varying needs and interests of the artist-led sub-field within the wider CVAF, and the different forms and models that self-organisation from practitioners manifests and develops as. It replicates and reflects the same general social tendencies and strategies as the practitioners that are a part of it: supposed openness, knowledge sharing (commonly at an open-source or peer-to-peer level), creative expression (mainly) through the visual arts, and wider cultural interaction are all component parts.

This is all, like the wider sub-field of artist-led self-organisation, staged between online/offline realms utilising digital technology to augment and extend personal relationships and organisation. Allowing practitioners to learn from their peers and think through and freely share their own personal experimentation with others, all whilst developing and maintaining relationships. It can be understood as a 'social-technical' assemblage.[258] Throughout history artists have appropriated specific structures from other disciplines to inform the development of their networks. Arguably the most famous example being the rhizome from botany,[259] employed countless times to orient an underground network with occasional 'above ground' visible activity. The artist-led network is developed from a lineage of rhizomatic networks, notably the communal Mail Art

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[258] Made up of a combination of various digital technologies, platforms and physical aspects. See Ned Rossiter, *Organized Networks: Media Theory, Creative Labour, New Institutions* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2006).
[259] First used in a theoretical context by psychologist Carl Jung in 1965, the rhizome describes the roots of an organism beneath the surface that continues to survive even when the organism's blooms above ground die away. Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 4.

movement of the mid-1950s and all-encompassing nature proposed of *The Eternal Network* by Filliou and Brecht in 1968.[260] It utilises aspects of both suffused with digital technology to cater for a generation of contemporary practitioners. Alongside the prerequisite social media platforms the use of secondary digital services such as email, blogs, mailing lists, etc. and publishing across online/offline spaces are also employed to communicate and organise. This variety of digital options provides security so far as if any platforms or services ever cease operation there is a healthy stream of others to utilise to extend the breadth and life of the network. It also usually functions as a cost-free alternative to print distribution for practitioners already generally lacking funding in their position of financial precarity. The type and format of physical interactions between practitioners also varies, from visual arts events such as exhibition previews and exhibition visits, to tours, talks and symposia, open studios, fundraisers and auctions, practical and theoretical workshops, publication launches and reading groups. This also extends to more overtly political and social situations fostered by artist-led connections such as protest marches, wellbeing workshops and general sociality amongst practitioners.

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[260] As outlined in Chapter 1 along with Filliou's *Art-as-Peace Biennale*, Lippard's 'numbers' and 'suitcase' shows, and Paik's 'broadcast' works.

The Artist-Led Network

Node (practitioner, organisation)

— Online/offline connections (relationships, social media platforms, digital communications technology, etc.)
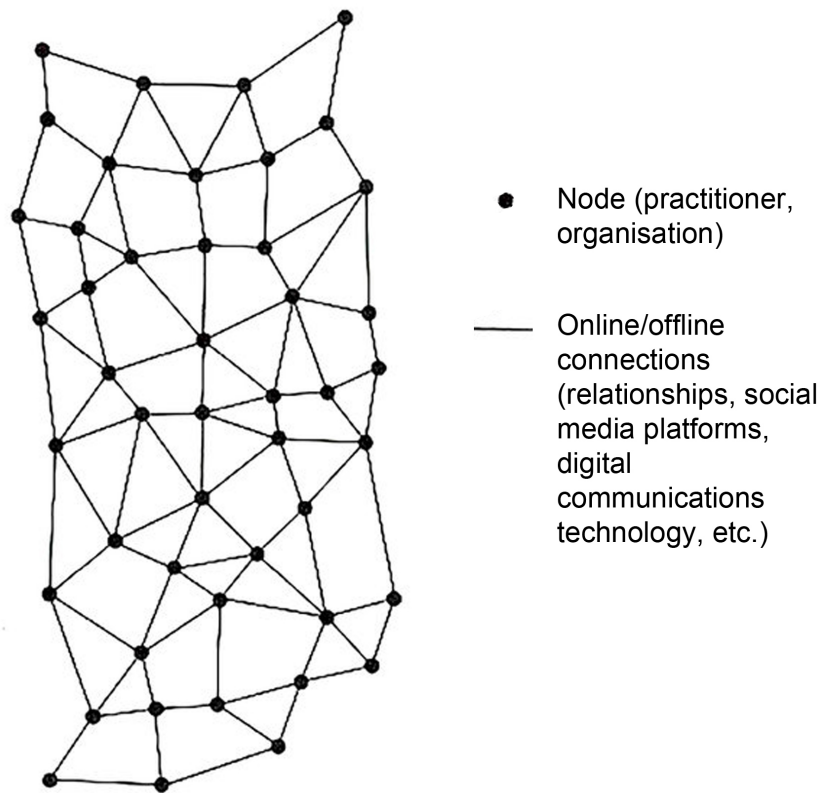
[Fig.3]

Whilst it exists and operates largely within public space, and in keeping with its rhizomatic lineage, it is largely unnoticed by those who either aren't already a part of it or don't have similar interests relating to the visual arts and/or self-organised cultural practices. For the online portion of the network this will result in algorithms not suggesting accounts/pages/events related to artist-led self-organisation to those outside of its confines. In reality this also means posts or content from those practitioners won't ever achieve a viral status likely to reach a mass public, leading to somewhat of an artist-led echo chamber. This selective online algorithmic dissemination also contributes to those outside of the network missing information to potentially interact and participate. The structural orientation of the artist-led network is broadly horizontal with no one

clear 'manager' and is seemingly taken for granted by most practitioners.[261] It can be understood as a distributed network in so far as all of the nodes (practitioners and organisations) within it have agency and are able to communicate, interact and share information with others. In this way it can be seen to incorporate the creative dark matter and murmur of the artistic multitude – as according to Hardt and Negri, the concept of the multitude is best thought of as a distributed network similar to the model displayed by the internet of an amalgamation of networked forms.[262]

I would however argue that its general non-recognition to date as a distinct network is not because it does not exist. Instead, similarly to the nature of the artist-led cycle, rather that on a day-to-day level it is not perceived by practitioners within the milieu of networked sociality and 'prosumerism' of which they are a part, and within which a range of interests outside of the visual arts intersect. It is quietly operating in the background of the wider haze of networks; part of much more complex, wider, assemblages of operation.

It is important to return to Toffler's point and make the distinction here that practitioners within the network are implicitly prosumers along with the rest of global society. In much the same way that self-organisation in contemporary life can be shown to in fact not be a free choice and instead serves to reinforce precarity and neoliberal hegemony, so too does the prosumer lifestyle and reliance on social networks. As Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter state in *Organization after Social Media*:

> Many have already identified social networks as a conspirational neoliberal invention that, in the end, only benefits the global elite...The

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[261] Here it is important to mention the typology of the networks the digital services and social media platforms that practitioners utilise within the artist-led network come from. For those that are centralised the owners of websites, platforms, services, etc. will all have a hierarchical impact upon that particular aspect of the network, creating paradoxical instances within the otherwise horizontally perceived structure.

[262] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, XV.

> algorithmic modulation of networks generates patterns of data that hold economic value for social media corporations and finance capital.[263]

There is no way around it, by having any form of output on any online and/or social media you contribute to strengthening the dominant socio-economic system, even if trying to subvert its use and commercialisation. Arguably the majority of practitioners that identify as enacting artist-led self-organisation have grown up during the rise of the prosumer. However if practitioners try to remove themselves from this demarcation and only use online and/or social media to observe or receive information then their inaction would render them (following Castells[264]) as a redundant node in the wider artist-led network. As such they would eventually be removed, reinforcing the necessity of self-organisation and prosumerism to remain within it and ultimately contributing to the continuation of the precarious status quo. Along with definitively being prosumers it is also pertinent to highlight another point set out by Castells in his definition of the operation of a network. Namely, that the wider artist-led network is itself *the* network unit. The practitioners, organisations and their outputs make up its nodes, and their sociality and connections with one another constitute the broader web of relations they contribute to.

In conceptualising and defining an overarching artist-led network it presupposes that it is distinct from any global variations that exist for artist-run, or other self-organised practitioners.[265] Through highlighting the artist-led network and raising the point of its connection to Mail Art and *The Eternal Network*, it is

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[263] Geert Lovink & Ned Rossiter, *Organization after Social Media* (New York: Autonomedia, 2018), 3-4.

[264] Castells, "Informationalism, Networks, and the Network Society," 3-48.

[265] For brevity I will focus on artist-run practitioners as they have more contemporary interaction and influence in the UK. The main example of a currently defined 'artist-run network' is the Artist Run Alliance (ARA) online network. The ARA will "map artist run initiatives in far-flung places around the globe, enable mentorship and knowledge sharing and provide models and funding solutions for new art initiatives." However the ARA is positioned more as a crossover between a community platform and archive with no features for direct discourse between users, unlike a network in the same sense as I describe the artist-led network. "Our Vision," Artist Run Alliance, accessed November 12, 2019,
https://artistrunalliance.org/our-vision/

implicit that an equivalent (and earlier formed) network exists for artist-run practitioners[266] who are subject to the same neoliberal conditions and dependence on internet-based technologies as their 'artist-led' peers. Whilst there is an argument for the two to be amalgamated into one much larger network of networks[267] (should an overarching artist-run network latterly be defined), here I focus solely on the artist-led network. This is for two reasons: firstly, any research and study into such a wide-ranging combination would arguably require its own research project given its global size and scope, and secondly, that the content of the artist-led network can be seen as related to artist-led activity in the UK from the inception of the 'artist-led' moniker itself. There may be theoretical overlaps in content or even with practical examples of organisational models or methodologies of action with artist-run or other self-organised cultural methodologies, but in this context the impetus of those overlaps will be on furthering knowledge of artist-led practices.

The general characteristics of the artist-led network follow those of an 'organized network' (amalgamated and referred to as 'orgnets') as conceptualised by Lovink and Rossiter.[268] They outline that orgnets are:

> best understood as new institutional forms whose social-technical dynamics are immanent to the culture of networks. Orgnets are partly conditioned by the crisis and, in many instances, failure of primary institutions of modernity (unions, firms, universities, the state) to address contemporary social, political, and economic problems in a post-broadcast era of digital culture and society. In this sense, organized networks belong to the era of prevailing conditions associated with post-modernity. Organized networks emphasize horizontal, mobile,

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[266] Such an artist-run network (in the same vein I describe the artist-led network) would arguably stem from earlier organisations like Art Metropole further developing mail art into its structure to distribute artists' multiples and editions globally. See Peggy Gale & Fern Bayer, "Art Metropole, Toronto," in: *Artist-Run Spaces. Nonprofit Collective Organizations in the 1960s and 1970s*, ed. Gabriele Detterer & Maurizio Nannucci (Zurich: JRP|Ringier & Les presses du réel, 2012), 50-83.

[267] This structure would mirror the basic concept of the internet – a multitude of networks contained in the same space.

[268] Geert Lovink & Ned Rossiter, "FCJ-029 Dawn of the Organised Networks," *The Fibreculture Journal*, Issue 5 2005: precarious labour, accessed July 17, 2019, http://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-029-dawn-of-the-organised-networks/

distributed, and decentralized modes of relation. A culture of openness, sharing, and project-based forms of activity are key characteristics… Relationships among the majority of participants in organized networks are frequently experienced as fragmented and ephemeral. Often without formal rules, membership fees, or stable sources of income, many participants have loose ties with a range of networks.[269]

Related in many respects to the drive to provide open alternatives to existing power structures, it is unsurprising that the artist-led network fits so well within and exemplifies so many aspects of the outline of an orgnet. It must also be noted that given the digital dependency for much of the communicative effectiveness of that network, it is able to reach practitioners throughout the UK and globally through a chain of responses to others' activities in order to develop new activity. In this way it can be seen to reinforce the post-1990s 'glocalization' of self-organised practices as outlined in Chapter 1.

The artist-led network presents another type of navigation of UK society. Through being influenced by the experiences and experimentation of their immediate peers practitioners spread new ideas throughout the various locales in which they are currently residing or passing through. They do so without ever being able to fully or properly chart the activity of the rest of those that constitute the artist-led network and more broadly the sub-field itself. Within the glocal artist-led network information not just relating to upcoming events and projects is shared. As outlined in Chapter 1, organisational models for all manner of activities and infrastructures (methods of installation and display, types of collective and collaborative group structures, strategies of public engagement, etc.) and modes of sustainability (funding opportunities and sources, advice on spatial issues, reformatting structures, etc.) are displayed, and in turn act as freely provided examples from which online/offline neighbours can develop future practice if they find them. Alongside this the network provides a social space for practitioners to listen to or discuss with others their experience of life in the neoliberal age under the umbrella of artist-led self-organisation, allowing them to meter their own thoughts and experiences with their peers. Similarly to the general lack of public perception of artist-led practices, it comes as no

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[269] Lovink & Rossiter, *Organization after Social Media*, 49.

surprise that the artist-led network is also hiding in plain sight just under the surface of everyday social interactions.

The Publicly Discernible Artist-Led Network
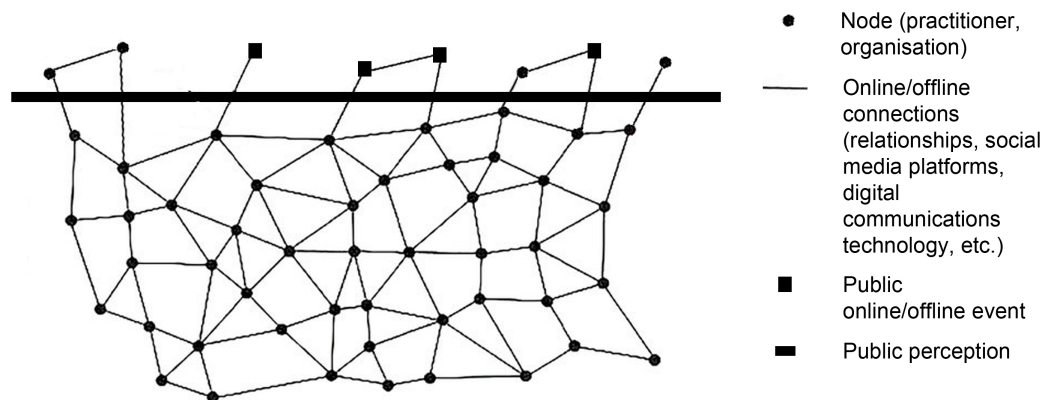
Returning to the rhizomatic lineage of the artist-led network, writer, curator and filmmaker Katherine Waugh characterises the art spaces of the future as fungal spores floating in the air, looking for new cracks and crevices within existing infrastructures in which to embed and grow into mushrooms.[270] To further the analogy, here I would present the artist-led network, a hybrid online/offline space relating to the visual arts, as a formed and ever-expanding 'humungous fungus' or Armillaria. The fungus is embedded within its ecosystem and covers a vast area unseen to the naked eye save for fruiting bodies of mushrooms appearing at the surface. Extending out its rhizomorph tendrils to find rotting wood to consume for its continued growth, the fungus has been known to infect healthy trees, slowly destroying them and taking them over from the inside out. The Armillaria is able to continue growing providing it has access to resources, and a strain of the genus currently holds the award for being one of the largest

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[270] Katherine Waugh, "Delicate But Deadly," in: *Artist-Run Europe: Practice/Projects/Spaces*, Onomatopee #127, ed. Gavin Murphy & Mark Cullen (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2017), 144-159. See also Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

and oldest living things on the planet.[271] Instead of singular spores drifting on the neoliberal breeze, the artist-led network is already grounded firmly in the world. The nodes of its rhizomorphs spreading underground in the forest of the UK cultural landscape, in places slowly infiltrating institutional structures ready to take over and repurpose them, with occasional blooms of organisations, events and exhibitions sprouting on the surface for all to see.

What is arguably most interesting about the artist-led network, and what sets it apart from many other orgnets, is its similarity to the Armillaria in its propensity for using existing (wooden) socio-political institutional structures to sustain itself. Appropriating and re-shaping them to form models better suited to their aims, politics and survival. Conversely to orgnets and their institutionalising tendencies, in *Organized Networks* Rossiter outlines the opposite of the orgnet as the 'networked organization' (amalgamated as 'netorgs') that take institutional forms:

> such as governments, unions and firms whose logic of organization is predicated on vertical integration and representative tenets of liberal democracy. Such dynamics are profoundly unsuited to the collaborative and distributive culture of networks peculiar to digital communications media and their attendant socialites.[272]

In many ways the artist-led network develops and disseminates knowledge that bridges the gap between the forms of the orgnet and the netorg through practitioners' outputs. Whilst there are clear links in artist-led self-organisation to 'traditional' institutional forms as evidenced in the appropriation of hierarchical structures and dynamics in many of its organisations and groupings, there are arguably equally as many horizontally structured organisational forms. Although Rossiter makes clear that orgnets sometimes have to fall back into or begin from a formalised hierarchy in order to allow them to develop into a fully-

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[271] Jason Daley, "This Humungous Fungus Is as Massive as Three Blue Whales," *Smithsonian Magazine*, October 15, 2018, accessed December 04, 2019, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/mushroom-massive-three-blue-whales-180970549/

[272] Rossiter, *Organized Networks*, 14.

fledged orgnet,[273] here artist-led practitioners are divided between utilising or distancing themselves from the hierarchies of the netorgs that they are seeking to create alternative forms to, arguably creating something paradoxically akin to a 'semi-organised network'.

That there is no side on this vertical/horizontal divide seemingly more popular than the other points towards a key aspect of artist-led self-organisation: its agonistic[274] relationship with capitalism. Given the majority of practitioners that constitute the 'artist-led' moniker and are part of its network are liberally minded, the breadth of stances of the political left has positioned the wider sub-field not as an enemy of capitalism, but as an adversary. To date there has been no consensus for a particular strain of liberally-minded politics to lead the sub-field or to make it overtly anti-capitalist. Because of this there has been no sustained attempt to tear down the capitalist system following the footsteps of the original self-organised intention of the avant-garde, and here it mirrors in many respects the approach of the post-war avant-garde. At an idealistic level it can be argued to be seeking to re-shape it to function better for all in society – instead of a select few – through practices that catalyse alternative ways of thinking about and approaching social organisation, facilitated by the artist-led network.

Throughout the chapter in critically exploring the broad structural components relevant to all practitioners that enact artist-led self-organisation the research sub-questions were answered. Firstly utilising the work of Bourdieu, Sholette and Gielen in relation to establishing an artist-led sub-field and wider contemporary visual arts field, and then positioning practitioners alongside their global counterparts that make up the dark matter and murmur of the artistic multitude, the first research sub-question was answered, making clear their social relations to the rest of the art system for the first time.

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[273] Ibid, 14-15.
[274] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 13.

Building on this the rise to prominence, and dominance, of digital communications technology was shown as a key development of contemporary society, one that practitioners have utilised to their advantage. Answering the second research sub-question, the key work of Castells, van Dijck and Toffler were used to show how we have come to inhabit a network society in which social media (alongside the internet) are near indispensible components. Ones that position all that interact with them as prosumers to varying degrees, and that have allowed processes of artist-led self-organisation to straddle online/offline demarcations to create and sustain networked forms of practice.

This online/offline dynamic led directly to answering the third research sub-question in light of conceptualising the forms of orgnets and netorgs in network societies by Rossiter and Lovink. In contextualising online/offline artist-led practices the formation of a broader artist-led network stemming from historical self-organised artist networks was made clear, and allowed for the proper contextualisation and definition of a specific artist-led variant in relation to network theory for the first time. Through this orgnet that exhibits traits of its oppositional netorg counterpart, it is positioned as a dynamic knowledge-sharing component of contemporary visual arts practices. Critical in informing and catalysing the development of forms of artist-led self-organisation set against the backdrop of precarity within the wider confines of the sub-field.

Building upon this, the following chapter moves the discussion to critically examine how precarity has impacted practitioners and their methods of self-organisation on a practical level. It charts how practitioners function and organise within those conditions, utilising the artist-led network to achieve varying levels of sustainability and the potential it, and artist-led self-organisation more generally, poses for enacting dissensual critique against the social institutions and structures practitioners regularly act in opposition to.

The previous chapter acted as an overview of the broader structural components of artist-led self-organisation. In defining the artist-led network in relation to network theory and the increasingly intrusive hold digital communications technology has on contemporary life, it outlined how information is shared and knowledge developed between practitioners under precarious conditions. Although contemporaneous self-organisation is often positioned as a free choice this was quickly shown to be anything but, instead shown as a symptom of contemporary neoliberal governance. It is under this forced 'free' choice to self-organise within conditions of precarity that this chapter is grounded.

Focusing specifically on the role precarity plays within artist-led self-organisation the chapter moves to analyse how practitioners exist in, and respond to, the precarious conditions brought about following the Financial Crisis on practical and conceptual levels. In doing so it shows how the ongoing functioning of the artist-led network has given rise to new responses and organisational forms that attempt to circumvent the precarious nature of practice within the artist-led sub-field.

The chapter begins by focusing on issues surrounding sustainability in the artist-led community in order to ask how any form of sustainability or criticality can be achieved within the sub-field. It closes by exploring how practitioners have developed new organisational models adapted from the 'traditional' gallery/studio model and other forms of social organisation that directly reference artist-led self-organisation as a site of ongoing research. Key references within the chapter include sociologist Ursula Pasero's work on precarity in the arts, drawing on statistical and policy data for practitioners from Arts Council England (ACE), Creative Scotland, Arts Council Northern Ireland and the Welsh Arts Council, and the work of political theorist Chantal Mouffe alongside that of Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Rancière, and Ned Rossiter to re-frame the critical potential of practitioners.

The chapter seeks to answer the following research sub-questions:

- What are the main impacts precarity post-2007 has had on professional opportunities for practitioners, and how has self-organisation been used to achieve forms of sustainability in response to this?
- How, under those same precarious conditions, could (attempted or actual) processes of critique and resistance developed by practitioners be conceptualised?
- What are key current examples of practice utilising online/offline architectures in the precarious conditions practitioners exist within?

Precarious Times

It is no secret that we collectively live in precarious times.[275] As time has moved forward from the new millennium so too has increasing inequality within UK society despite global inequality gradually beginning to ease.[276] As shown in Chapter 1, the past decade under Conservative-induced austerity has seen living standards lowering. Increasingly members of all societies globally are finding, according to social scientists Vassilis Tsianos and Dimitris Papadopoulos, that their future is already exploited in the present. Due to current working conditions and pay levels they have to work as much as possible. But with no fixed guarantee of future work and the need to learn new skills to secure increasingly technologised roles, they end up in a cycle where they cannot turn down work when it is offered as there is no guarantee of more opportunities that

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[275] Daiga Kamerāde & Lisa Scullion, "Welcome to Britain: a land where jobs may be plentiful but are more and more precarious," *The Conversation*, November 21, 2017, accessed May 10, 2020, http://theconversation.com/welcome-to-britain-a-land-where-jobs-may-be-plentiful-but-are-more-and-more-precarious-87423

[276] Richard Partington, "Inequality: is it rising, can we reverse it?" *The Guardian*, September 09, 2019, accessed May 10, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/sep/09/inequality-is-it-rising-and-can-we-reverse-it

will suit their knowledge and skill levels in future.[277] Sociologists Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt state in "Precarity and Cultural Work in the Social Factory?":

> Precariousness (in relation to work) refers to all forms of insecure, contingent, flexible work – from illegalized, casualized and temporary employment, to homeworking, piecework and freelancing. In turn, precarity signifies both the multiplication of precarious, unstable, insecure forms of living and, simultaneously, new forms of political struggle and solidarity that reach beyond the traditional models of the political party or trade union.[278]

With specific reference to practitioners working in the creative industries they outline them as having:

> a preponderance of temporary, intermittent, and precarious jobs; long hours and bulimic patterns of working; the collapse or erasure of the boundaries between work and play; poor pay; high levels of mobility, passionate attachment to the work and to the identity of creative labourer…a blend of bohemianism and entrepreneurialism; informal work environments and distinctive forms of sociality; and profound experiences of insecurity and anxiety about finding work, earning enough money and 'keeping up' in rapidly changing fields…research has also pointed to the preponderance of youthful, able-bodied people in these fields, marked gender inequalities, high levels of educational achievement, complex entanglements of class, nationality and ethnicity, and to the relative lack of caring responsibilities undertaken.[279]

Under these conditions of employment and everyday life it is not difficult to see how merely surviving is an ongoing, increasingly pervasive, challenge even for privileged, younger, white people.[280] Although precarious working conditions are rife throughout the various sectors of UK society, the creative industries pose a particular problem. As outlined in Chapter 1, after New Labour used the figure of the 'creative' worker as the base for its new approach to the economy those in

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[277] Tsianos & Papdopoulos, "DIWY! Precarity in Embodied Capitalism," 129.
[278] Rosalind Gill & Andy Pratt "Precarity and Cultural Work in the Social Factory? Immaterial Labour, Precariousness and Cultural Work," *On Curating,* Issue 16 (2013), Precarious Labour in the Field of Art, edited by Zora Erić & Stevan Vuković: 27. Accessed May 10, 2020, https://on-curating.org/issue-16.html#.X2JZqJNKg1g
[279] Ibid, 33.
[280] Reinforcing the general topological overview of the art system outlined in Chapter 2.

the creative industries face increasingly bleak prospects. Not only are they regularly expected to work for free to gain 'exposure' for future work after having paid for education in specific sets of skills, through doing so they lose an average of £5,394 per year.[281] Because of the irregular nature of creative work it is not hard to see how they would then be forced into other forms of precarious work to sustain themselves, becoming trapped in a wider cycle of precarity and long-term unsustainability. These practitioners are referred to as part of the wider 'entreprecariat' of global society by writer, artist and designer Silvio Lorusso; entreprecariat is a neologism that combines 'entrepreneur', 'precariousness' and 'proletariat'. [282] Exploring how 'creativity' has become shorthand to describe precarious, neoliberal, working conditions in the creative industries and beyond, in *Against Creativity* anthropologist Oli Mould states:

> Companies, public institutions, charities and governments often reduce the stability of work expressly to 'promote' creativity...There are people on zero-hour contracts, long-term employers having their work outsourced to freelancers and self-employed 'associates' via agencies, and the increasing casualization of labour via temporary, short-term staffing. In attempting to capture the benefits of this kind of creative work, employers are doing away with costly labour support structures and repackaging the new streamlined contractual arrangement as 'flexible'.[283]

The visual arts have obviously not escaped this trend of exploitation through precarity as part of the creative industries either. The general state of precarity in the contemporary visual arts field (CVAF) in the UK is one experienced by artist-led practitioners but also shared by artists globally. As outlined in his 2009 *Artforum* article "Precarious", Hal Foster stated there are no universal concepts that unite the art being made in all corners of the world since roughly the turn of the new millennium. But precarity is one of, if not the only constant, impacting

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[281] David Chandler, "All work and no pay: creative industries freelancers are exploited," *The Guardian*, May 18, 2017, accessed May 10, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/2017/may/18/all-work-and-no-pay-creative-industries-freelancers-are-exploited

[282] Silvio Lorusso, *Entreprecariat: Everyone is an Entrepreneur. Nobody is Safe*, Onomatopee #170 (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2019), 16.

[283] Oli Mould, *Against Creativity* (London: Verso, 2018), 33.

and informing the work being created or enacted.[284] Similarly to how the austerity measures of the UK government were shown to be an ideological political choice, with the root of precarity being linked to uncertainty and dependence on those in power, Foster says it:

> implies that this state of insecurity is not natural but constructed - a political condition produced by a power on whose favor we depend and which we can only petition. To act out the precarious, then, is not only to evoke its perilous and privative effects but also to intimate how and why they are produced.[285]

The precarisation of global society can be linked to the rise of neoliberalism and the move toward a post-Fordist methodology of increasingly immaterial labour.[286] In the visual arts this move toward immaterial labour has also coincided with a process of deskilling and re-skilling to keep up with those new approaches.[287] The artist-led sub-field, the artist-led network, its practitioners, and organisational structures are products of, and conditioned by, this overarching precarity and immateriality purported by the system that has created them all. Artist-led self-organisation and precarity are entwined with one another through neoliberalism.

In many ways the role of the practitioner (and other self-organised/independent practitioners globally) nowadays is described succinctly by the German expression 'brotlose kunst'. As Pasero outlines in "Why Artists Go Unpaid", this means:

> literally "breadless art," or work without any money in it…used to describe a profession that fails to produce a reliable income. Whenever

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[284] Hal Foster, "Precarious," *Artforum*, vol.48, no.4, December 2009, accessed November 04, 2019,
https://www.artforum.com/print/200910/hal-foster-24264
[285] Ibid.
[286] Lazzarato, "Immaterial labor," 142-157.
[287] John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade* (London: Verso, 2007).

someone decides to pursue an artistic career, this stereotype makes its appearance, but it is also consistently borne out of social reality.[288]

That social reality is stark. As mentioned at various points throughout this thesis, due to the nature of much contemporary work practitioners often hold multiple jobs in order to finance their practice (and day-to-day living costs). In common with their German, and the majority of their other global, counterparts most practitioners can be seen to work for a living primarily "in *addition* to practicing their art, and in many cases working for a living has long since become their principal activity."[289] There is no longer scope (and hasn't been for well over three decades) for most practitioners to subsist from their artistic output alone. This issue is almost compounded for UK practitioners as precarity is all many will have known. It has become normalised to a certain extent despite obviously seeming counterintuitive. In *The Wretched of the Screen* artist and writer Hito Steyerl states:

> apart from domestic and care work – art is the industry with the most unpaid labour around. It sustains itself on the time and energy of unpaid interns and self-exploiting actors on pretty much every level and in almost every function. Free labour and rampant exploitation are the invisible dark matter that keeps the culture sector going.[290]

Yet practitioners paradoxically continue their self-exploitation despite knowing how damaging it is for themselves and their peers. Pasero makes the point that practitioners will always lose out because their 'work' is generally misunderstood as the final outcome rather than the time-consuming and labour-intensive processes that are required to get there. In real terms it is their art that is remunerated, often over and over again through future sales and auctions, not them as the creator of it.[291] In this way practitioners – who realistically are likely to never sell their work for meaningful amounts in the first place – make the self-exploitation and free labour they provide all the more galling. Here self-

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[288] Ursula Pasero, "Why Artists Go Unpaid," in: *Art Production Beyond the Art Market?,* ed. Karen van den Berg & Ursula Pasero (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 151.
[289] Ibid, 152.
[290] Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 96.
[291] Pasero, "Why Artists Go Unpaid," 155.

organisation could quite easily instead be understood simply as self-exploitation, coerced by neoliberal hegemony.

This reality for practitioners is often in direct contrast with the perception of visual arts practitioners from much of the rest of society. Given the broadly middle class makeup of the CVAF, in *Artistic Lives: A Study of Creativity in Two European Cities* researcher and activist Kirsten Forkert offers most practitioners are assumed part of:

> a homogenous, relatively privileged group...any poverty or hardship they experience is seen to be a choice rather than a necessity. It also becomes too easy to assume that artists can simply create from nothing – or even that creativity is driven by scarcity, which can shake one out of complacency and force one to be inventive.[292]

This view has been systematically reinforced, if not romanticised, historically as the norm for practitioners since the early bourgeoisie poets. With those with less money having to abandon their work for better-remunerated activities, those who remained through the precarity of the time suddenly saw their work vaunted. Forkert again offers the opinion that this historical view:

> may contribute to the sense that the poverty artists experience is not 'real poverty', but rather the price that one must pay for a life in art. Because hardship is ultimately seen to be a choice rather than a necessity, this then makes it more difficult to engage with inequalities in the arts – that those from less privileged backgrounds might be more likely to experience poverty for example.[293]

This normalisation and indoctrination of precarity throughout the CVAF – but particularly pertinently in the artist-led sub-field – can be seen in the way artist and art worker Channon Goodwin describes its impact on historic and current Australian artist-run practitioners as a feeling of being in 'permanent recession'. Goodwin says Australian artist and art worker Peter Cripps used the phrase to

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[292] Kirsten Forkert *Artistic Lives: A Study of Creativity in Two European Cities* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 3. See also Ben Davis, *9.5 Theses on Art and Class* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013).
[293] Forkert, *Artistic Lives*, 14.

originally describe the working conditions and feelings of practitioners in the 1970s and 1980s when they were unable to make a living from their practices. In these conditions he said they created 'recession art', or "art made under the pressure of little money and a lacklustre market."[294] The turn of phrase is intriguing as it can be seen to describe the nature of production for the majority of current visual arts practitioners globally, despite the class-based implications of people with little to no expendable resources historically not finding a route into visual arts practices.

This ties into much of what economist Hans Abbing, in *Why are Artists Poor?*, calls the 'exceptional economy of the arts'. Although seemingly cast from a neoliberal view of the arts, he argues certain aspects – such as large numbers of practitioners that drive wages down, misinformation about the realities of being a practitioner, and public subsidy making practitioners reliant on the state – have contributed to its current state of inequality and precarity:

> Because the average artist cares less about money and more about non-monetary rewards than other professionals do, the high status of the arts causes an overcrowding and low incomes…prospective artists are structurally ill-informed, and therefore more youngsters enter the profession and incomes end up being even lower. The willingness to work for low incomes is so great that, when an artist's art income is too low to earn a basic living, artists often utilize income from second jobs or money donated by partners to continue making art. Finally…donations and subsidies designed to relieve poverty in the arts have the opposite effect; they tend to increase the numbers of artists with low incomes. Moreover, well-known subsidy programs for artists give the signal that the government is willing to take care of artists and thus add to the overall attractiveness of the arts and therefore exacerbates the conditions that produce low incomes.[295]

Although predating the work of both Gielen[296] and Sholette[297] this certainly shares a number of similarities. Given it predates the 2007 Financial Crisis it

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[294] Channon Goodwin, "Permanent Recession. Permanent Vacation." in: *Permanent Recession: a Handbook on Art, Labour and Circumstance* Onomatopee #169, ed. Channon Goodwin (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2019), 11.
[295] Hans Abbing, *Why are Artists Poor?: The Exceptional Economy of the Arts* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002), 283-284.
[296] Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude.*

serves to reinforce the historic precarious nature of the visual arts. This is even if it (inadvertently) strengthens the neoliberal call for an end to public subsidy rather than a general restructuring that could solve the problems he levels at it. Abbing argues in the epilogue to his book that the economy of the arts could become less exceptional in the future. In many ways this has proved to be untrue, and in fact the opposite seems to be the case. With the rise of globalisation and digital communication, for those enacting artist-led self-organisation in particular, the artist-led network has arguably laid bare much of the exceptional nature and inequality rife within the art system. But that seemingly hasn't deterred practitioners. If this is the case, how are they attempting to counteract the exceptional economy, and can they achieve some semblance of sustainability in an otherwise hostile environment?

<u>Sustainability</u>

Currently within the 'exceptional economy of the arts' the artist-led sub-field can be seen as made up of a spectrum of formal and informal practitioners, groupings and organisations. This is what makes the question of sustainability so difficult to critically analyse. Here sustainability refers to the economic realities of developing and delivering any kind of public space and/or practice. Although spatio-temporal concerns are a key factor in terms of sustainability, they too are ultimately governed by economic underpinnings. Because of the diversity of organisational structures and methods of practice in the sub-field there will always be a divergent range of concerns relating to economic and spatio-temporal longevity compromised of, and governed by, precarity. As many practitioners look to institute new organisational forms and dynamics for indefinite and ongoing periods to create alternatives to existing structures, an equal number will seek to harness the fleeting temporality of the sub-field and use it as a strength from which to build pockets of concentrated practice catalysed by, or relevant to, a specific context or moment in time.[298] As outlined

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[297] Sholette, *Dark Matter*.
[298] The delegation from *More Than Meanwhile Spaces* raised this point at the *CKC (Creativity, Knowledge, Cities) 2019* conference in regards to younger generations

in the previous chapter practitioners regularly create new institutional forms through their practices, and can even do so unintentionally within these small pockets of activity.

With the highly networked state that artist-led self-organisation exists in practitioners are all too aware of the precarity they and their peers face on a daily basis. Not only struggling to maintain a practice but also to maintain their day-to-day lives. As mentioned briefly in Chapter 1 given that artists in England generally earn on average less than the national living wage from their practice, whilst not as dramatic a similar picture of below-average income compared to other professions is shown in Scotland,[299] Wales[300] and Northern Ireland.[301] It is a similar picture in terms of the public funding available to practitioners; in England ACE funding has repeatedly (and often drastically) been cut, and delving deeper this is the same for Scotland,[302] Wales,[303] and Northern Ireland.[304]

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of practitioners – through their research they have found those generations understand sustainability differently and don't necessarily want to set up long-term spaces or projects. David Butler, Rebecca Huggan & Paul Richter, "More Than Meanwhile Spaces," *CKC 2019: Rethinking, Resisting and Reimagining the Creative City*, from Creative Economies Research Unit, Digital Cultures Research Centre, UWE Bristol, 13 September, 2019.

[299] A total of £14,000 per annum (although this is slightly misrepresentational as it is for all of the visual arts community, not just artists). Scottish Contemporary Art Network, *What we learned about Visual Arts in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Creative Scotland, 2015), 7, accessed March 07, 2020, https://www.creativescotland.com/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/36485/What-we-learned-SCAN.pdf

[300] A total of £10,399 per annum. Arts Council of Wales, *Creative Professionals Survey – 2017* (Cardiff: Arts Council of Wales), 9, accessed March 07, 2020, https://arts.wales/sites/default/files/2019-02/Creative_Professionals_Survey_2017_0.pdf

[301] A total of £7,419 per annum. An Chomhairle Ealaíon & Arts Council of Northern Ireland, *The Living and Working Conditions of Artists in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Version)* (Lisburn: Arts Council of Northern Ireland), 10, accessed March 07, 2020, http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/LWCA_Study_NI_Full_Version_(with_preface).pdf

[302] The Creative Scotland public funding budget for 2019 dropped by 6% to £66 million and from 2010 – 2019 amounts to a £2 billion overall cut in real terms of grant funding available. Jonathan Knott, "Culture funding falls in Scottish budget," *Arts Professional*, December 20, 2018, accessed March 07, 2020, https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/culture-funding-falls-scottish-budget

Undoubtedly for any form of economic sustainability for either practitioners or artist-led organisations these figures are a grim reminder of how brutal austerity policies from the UK government have been, and the effect that they have had on arts and culture throughout the country is apparent.[305] But how is any form of economic sustainability achieved within the artist-led sub-field providing support for organisations, groups, collectives, and individual practitioners over both longer periods and finite time spans?[306]

Achieving some semblance of sustainability through external funding and/or subsidy is usually the way most practitioners and organisations approach the

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[303] Funding from the Arts Council of Wales has dropped 18% in real terms since 2010 with a very slight up turn in 2017, but still an overall cut. Robin Wilkinson, ""Challenging times" for the publicly-funded arts in Wales," *Senned Research*, November 26, 2018, accessed March 07, 2020. https://seneddresearch.blog/2018/11/26/challenging-times-for-the-publicly-funded-arts-in-wales/

[304] Funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland has fallen from £15.8 million to £13.9 million between 2013 and 2018. Jonathan Knott, "Arts attendance in Northern Ireland falls by a quarter as cuts bite," *Art Professional*, February 08, 2019, accessed March 07, 2020, https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/arts-attendance-northern-ireland-falls-quarter-cuts-bite

ArtsMatterNI was set up as a campaign against these cuts, and the continued underfunding of arts and culture in Northern Ireland compared to other countries of the UK. "The Campaign," *ArtsMatterNI*, accessed March 07, 2020, https://www.artsmatterni.co.uk/the-campaign/

[305] For critical opinions on economic precarity, sustainability, and the art that is produced under those conditions in artist-led contexts see Karl England, "Capitalist rock and a state funded hard place," *Sluice*, March 2016, accessed December 01, 2019, http://www.sluice.info/articles/avant-garde.html

[306] These issues formed the backdrop for the *FOOTFALL: Articulating the Value of Artist Led Organisations* research project and report and subsequent *FOOTFALL Symposium* focusing on artist-led organisations in Ireland, organised by 126 Artist-Run Gallery. "FOOTFALL – Home," 126 Artist-Run Gallery, accessed July 12, 2019, https://126gallery.com/footfallhome/

Joanne Laws, *FOOTFALL: Articulating the Value of Artist Led Organisations in Ireland* (Galway: 126 Artist-Run Gallery, 2015), accessed July 12, 2019, https://issuu.com/126artist-rungallery/docs/footfall_report

Joanne Laws, *FOOTFALL: Articulating the Value of Artist Led Organisations in Ireland*, FOOTFALL Seminar Report – Plenary Session (Galway: 126 Artist-Run Gallery, 2015), accessed July 12, 2019, https://issuu.com/126artist-rungallery/docs/footfall_seminar_report

issue. In the UK the first stop on this route normally involves applying for public support from the relevant arts council[307] or local authority, based on the long-held view of art being a 'public good'.[308] With art seen and positioned as a public good in the post-war period in the UK to help foster a sense of national pride, raise spirits and promote cultural engagement the government set a precedent that is still overtly carried through by the various arts councils of today. Namely that "art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves, and the world around us. In short, it makes life better."[309] This statement from ACE on public engagement makes it clear that although they (and the other UK public funding bodies) haven't been able to provide an ideal level of funding under austerity conditions, there is still a lingering sense of art having the power to affect positive civic change as there was in the mid-1940s.

The role of a public good is defined not by the benefits it brings to the public (that is the role of a social good), but instead that they are both 'non-rivalrous'[310]

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[307] Each arts council has its own version of longer-term funding support outside of small grants. The main programme in England is the 4-year National Portfolio, in Scotland is 3-year Regular Funding, and yearly programmes in Northern Ireland as Annual Funding, and Wales as the Arts Portfolio Wales.
"National Portfolio Organisations – Section 2," Arts Council England, accessed July 12, 2019,
https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-investment-2015-18/national-portfolio-organisations#section-2
"Regular Funding," Creative Scotland, accessed July 12, 2019,
https://www.creativescotland.com/funding/funding-programmes/regular-funding
"The Arts Council announces Annual Funding of £12.8 million for 97 key arts organisations," Arts Council of Northern Ireland, April 04, 2019, accessed July 12, 2019,
http://artscouncil-ni.org/news/the-arts-council-announces-annual-funding-of-12.8m
"What is the Arts Portfolio?" Arts Council of Wales, accessed July 12, 2019,
https://arts.wales/our-impact/how-we-help-make-art/arts-portfolio-wales
[308] Linking to Attlee's view of art as a 'social good', outlined in Chapter 1.
[309] Arts Council England, *Public Engagement Information Sheet*, 3, February 12, 2018, accessed March 10, 2020,
https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Information_sheets_Public_engagement_Project_grants.pdf
[310] It will not diminish for people when it is in use by others.

and 'non-excludable'.[311] Essentially whatever the product or service defined as the 'good' has to be available to everyone at once, and when people interact with it that it should not exclude anyone else from doing so too. If a good is public as opposed to private it is accepted that public funding should be used to maintain it. Using this framework for a public good raises issues surrounding the visual arts in particular, where realistically they can be seen to currently exist as a 'quasi-public good'; similarly to how the artist-led network can be seen as a orgnet that exhibits tendencies of a netorg. This is something that exhibits aspects of both a public and private good in that it cannot always fulfil both the non-rivalrous and non-excludable parts of a public good. When thought of in this regard, the CVAF – and the artist-led sub-field in particular – make more sense; they are open to the public but have a finite capacity for interaction at any given moment due to time/space/funding constraints.[312]

In many ways the role of art and its position in UK society became polarised in the march toward neoliberalism by the Conservative party as public services, spending and support were increasingly reduced to ape the structure of the American National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). As part of the 'progress' of this new economic system it has seemingly warped art away from a purely public good, funded by the state. Instead reverting back to its historical structure of private funding (through commissions) and in some cases extended patronage and sponsorship, but updated for the current neoliberal social context. As this has been happening despite the government encouraging private funding for the arts, public funding bodies have still maintained the orthodoxy of art as a public good. This has been achieved through their application and monitoring procedures in terms of value-for-money and audience demographics reached (as outlined in Chapter 1), further muddying the waters of its role in contemporary society. Where artist-led self-organisation is concerned, practitioners are indoctrinated with the liberal view (most often at university level) of art existing as a force for good that should be open and available to all. As such they

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[311] It is open to everyone to interact with at all times without exception.
[312] Will Kenton, "Public Good," *Investopedia,* updated March 25, 2019, accessed March 10, 2020,
https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/public-good.asp

generally fall misguidedly in line with the post-war public good stance as opposed to the quasi-public good reality when they become a 'failed' artist and part of the mass of creative dark matter, reinforcing the exceptional economy of the arts. With the UK government cutting public funding to stabilise the economic market and re-direct sources of funding to core services that have also been negligently underfunded, there is increasingly little way of reconciling these two sides of ideological separation between public and quasi-public. Despite the advocacy (or naivety) for the good of art for all from practitioners and others involved, there quite simply will unlikely be a way to realise this through solely public funded means given the distancing from public subsidy in the precarious form of neoliberal conservativism we inhabit. With part or full private funding in the UK an unavoidable necessity at all levels of the CVAF artist-led practitioners and other members of the creative dark matter have their position in the social hierarchy of the field reinforced once again.[313]
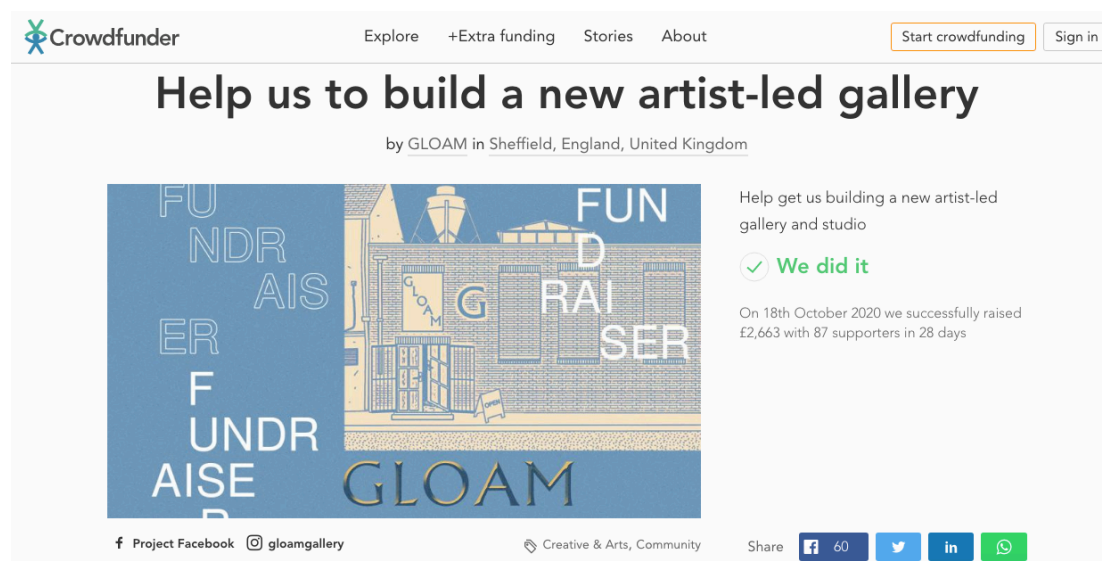
Image 3. GLOAM, "GLOAM Crowdfunder," Crowdfunder, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/gloam

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[313] Gavin Murphy provides a corollary of this argument focused on practices created dependent on state funding during times of crisis, and the bureaucracy associated with accessing it, using the *FOOTFALL* report to inform his writing. Gavin Murphy, "Fantasy Islands: Pleasure and Bureaucracy in Artist-Led Organizations," April 2015, accessed October 11, 2017, http://www.gavinmurphy.eu/fantasy-islands-pleasure-and-bureaucracy-in-artist-led-organizations.html

Post-2007 practitioners (and organisations) at all levels have begun to utilise crowdfunding platforms and donations (including monthly donations through platforms such as Patreon) much more noticeably than at any time previously to create new hybrid funding models, often soliciting funding directly from those who regularly interact with them.[314] Recent examples include successful crowdfunding campaigns from The Royal Standard,[315] Granby Press,[316] ROOT-ed Zine[317] and GLOAM,[318] ongoing Patreon memberships from The White Pube,[319] Catalyst Arts[320] and Shy Bairns,[321] and accepting donations through their websites from 12ø Collective,[322] OUTPOST[323] and g39.[324]

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[314] Kyle Chayka, "Kyle Chayka on Patreon and New Artistic Funding Models," *Frieze*, September 15, 2020, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.frieze.com/article/kyle-chayka-patreon-and-new-artistic-funding-models

[315] A studio complex and gallery space in Liverpool. The Royal Standard, "The Royal Standard: Artist-Led Gallery and Studios," *Crowdfunder*, March 02, 2017, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/the-royal-standard-gallery-and-artist-studios

[316] A community based printing service based in Granby, Liverpool. Sumuyya Khader, "Granby Press," *gofundme*, accessed November 29, 2020, https://uk.gofundme.com/f/granby-press

[317] As outlined in the Introduction, a zine platforming artists of colour and their concerns in the North West of England, based in Liverpool. Amber Akaunu, "ROOT-ed Zine Fundraiser," *gofundme*, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.gofundme.com/f/rooted-zine-fundraiser

[318] A studio and gallery space in Sheffield. GLOAM, "Help us to build a new artist-led gallery," *Crowdfunder*, October 18, 2020, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/gloam

[319] "The White Pube," Patreon, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.patreon.com/thewhitepube

[320] A non-profit, members-based organisation and gallery and project space in Belfast. "Catalyst Arts," Patreon, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.patreon.com/catalystarts

[321] A zine collective based in Manchester. "Shy Bairns," Patreon, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.patreon.com/shybairns

[322] An artist collective based in London. 12ø Collective, "Homepage," accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.12ocollective.com/

[323] A gallery and studio complex in Norwich. OUTPOST, "Donate," accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.norwichoutpost.org/donate

[324] A gallery and creative community space in Cardiff. g39, "Support," accessed November 29, 2020, https://g39.org/cgi-bin/website.cgi?place=support
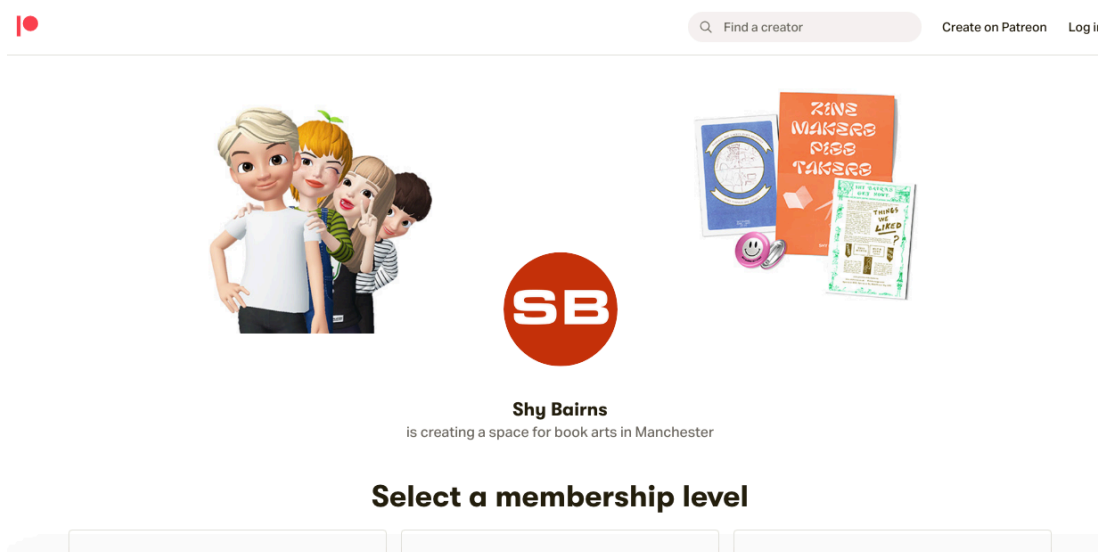
Image 4. Shy Bairns, "Shy Bairns Patreon account," Patreon, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.patreon.com/shybairns

As all practitioners, organisations and institutions rely on some mixture of public and private funds not only are those in the artist-led sub-field competing with one another, but everyone at all levels is competing with them. Sociologist Tina Reis, in her *practicetopolicy* research project outlines this link between precarity and sustainability that could be applied to any geo-political context in the global CVAF:

> Precarity is not only about a lack of money, it is also about how artists obtain access to money and under which conditions, how much non-financial support they receive, how isolated or connected they are and how certain they can be that they will continue to find employment in the future…It seems to me that the reason why precarity has divisive effects on the community is because it forces people to be competitive. When you want to acquire funding for your projects or for yourself, fellow artists become competitors you have to prevail against.[325]

The neoliberal (arguably Darwinian) dogma of competition ensuring only the best will succeed is deeply flawed in practice. In this case skewed for securing support by being in receipt of existing funding, nepotism from staff at funding

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[325] Tina Reis, "A way out of precarity in the arts world," *practicetopolicy*, May 30, 2016, accessed April 21, 2020, https://practicetopolicy.wordpress.com/2016/05/30/a-way-out-of-precarity-in-the-arts-world/

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bodies, having experience of the application processes, and using existing cultural capital to make a case for more. In relation to this recently resources have begun to be publicly shared and updated to aid in practitioners' funding bids. Most notably examples include the ACE Cheatsheet by artist and educator Rachel Dobbs,[326] which was created in 2016 and updated in 2018 to provide a step-by-step guide to 'grants for the arts' funding applications, and the SUCCESSFUL FUNDING APPLICATION LIBRARY[327] and *EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FUNDING*[328] podcast episode, both by The White Pube, which provide a broader overview of examples and insights into creating successful funding applications. However, even with such resources the competitive nature of securing funding, as Reis outlines, persists.

In this climate of multi-stakeholder positions in the funding of the visual arts practitioners and organisations often find themselves operating in such a way as to fulfil the criteria for acceptance and monitoring as set out by funders, shaping their projects and programmes around them rather than from their own volition (which the various funding applications guides mentioned inherently reinforce). In doing so the constituents of the artist-led sub-field again exhibit tendencies of netorgs, in so far as this 'multi-stakeholderism' can be seen to guide many of their practices and policies. This process, according to Rossiter, is incompatible with orgnets as it doesn't allow them to "negotiate the complexities of information economies, societies, and the like."[329] With the artist-led network ostensibly existing as a form of orgnet, following Castells, this pattern should not be able to continue indefinitely before the network will collectively reject multi-stakeholderism or remove those of its constituents involved in it.

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[326] Rachel Dobbs, "NEW: ACE Project Grants application CHEATSHEET (formerly Arts Council England Grants for the Arts)," *Rachel Dobbs* (blog), accessed November 29, 2020, http://rachel.we-are-low-profile.com/blog/ace-g4a-application-cheatsheet/
[327] "SUCCESSFUL FUNDING APPLICATION LIBRARY," The White Pube, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.thewhitepube.co.uk/fundinglibrary
[328] The White Pube, *Podcast Episode 4: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FUNDING*, podcast audio, November 24, 2020, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.thewhitepube.co.uk/thefundingepisode
[329] Rossiter, *Organized Networks*, 56.

The collective rejection of this imposition by multi-stakeholders has not occurred to date, but the rejection of practitioners and organisations by the artist-led network that are guided by multi-stakeholders is a relatively frequent scenario. With the network removing certain nodes that are exhibiting lasting traits of netorgs, it points to their removal from the artist-led sub-field. There are numerous instances of just such a removal happening or those seemingly on the horizon, with The Tetley[330] in Leeds as a notable recent example. Originally begun as Project Space Leeds (PSL) in 2006, the organisation was an artist-led gallery that worked to raise awareness of contemporary art and artists in the city of Leeds and beyond.[331] In 2012 the lease on their property was up and as they were unable to afford the increased rates from the private landlord, a new venue was secured in the old Tetley brewery headquarters in partnership with the brewing company. The new site would provide more space and resources from which to display and promote contemporary art alongside the heritage of Tetley's as an organisation.[332] After receiving a mixture of public and private funding to re-develop the site and fund their programme, it now holds a gallery, residency scheme and event spaces alongside offices and a bar and restaurant; subsequently re-branded as 'The Tetley' prior to opening to the public.

Sitting at an awkward juncture of cultural organisations within the city and trying to define just what the remit and scope of the organisation was, those who had become acquainted with PSL suddenly had a completely new organisation to contend with. Although recently there have been development programmes for local artists and early career artists regularly form the bulk of the public programme, it has taken a long time for the new incarnation of PSL to become integrated with its peers. Within that time it quickly became apparent that PSL was no more and The Tetley was very much a different entity in size and scope. Positioned as a platform for early career artists where they could cut their teeth

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[330] "About Us" The Tetley, accessed December 02, 2018, https://www.thetetley.org/about-us

[331] Potentially an outlier in the use of the 'artist-led' moniker, or another instance of historical revisionism. Project Space Leeds, *Leaving Las Vegas*.

[332] Gillian Nicol, "Project Space Leeds: "It's all there for the taking,"" *a-n*, February 07, 2013, accessed December 02, 2018, https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/project-space-leeds-its-all-there-for-the-taking/

within a more 'traditional' art system institutional environment driven by curatorial rigour rather than purely artistic knowledge production. That is not to say The Tetley is not a useful resource for practitioners, but what was originally promised and what it amounted to were very different entities that at the time left a hole in the cultural provision of the city where PSL once was. In this vein the next most likely instance of a removal from the artist-led network concerns S1 Artspace (Sheffield). This follows its move to an initially temporary venue in Park Hill, and the subsequent announcement they would deliver Park Hill Art Space in a multimillion-pound flagship redevelopment of that site. [333]

The case of PSL and The Tetley (and potentially S1 Artspace and Park Hill Art Space) is indicative of the role multi-stakeholderism plays in dictating trajectories of artist-led organisations seeking to grow sustainably. To be eligible for, or once they are in receipt of, external funding or support they become pressured into aping the institutional conventions many originally sought to move away from or provide alternatives to. Compromising in order to achieve sustainability is nothing new, and is commonplace. Practitioners part of processes of artist-led self-organisation are forced to mirror organisational structures for companies/organisations of the system they are agonistic or in some cases antagonistic to. Ironically expending a large amount of time and energy in order to become increasingly formalised to remain within it to try and continue their operation, which is often antithetical to their original reason for existence.

This formalisation can be seen to encompass defining a fixed organisational structure of some kind, opening bank accounts for the organisation, defining working policies, securing relevant insurance, completing general administrative

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[333] Louise Hutchinson, "S1 Artspace Curator Louise Hutchinson discusses the history of S1's gallery and studios and the move to a new venue," *Map Magazine*, #24 Winter (November 2010), accessed December 02, 2018, https://mapmagazine.co.uk/s1-artspace
Jack Hutchinson, "Park Hill Art Space: Sheffield's new flagship artspace given planning permission," *a-n*, August 30, 2019, accessed December 02, 2018, https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/park-hill-art-space-sheffields-new-flagship-artspace-given-planning-permission/

tasks, recruiting other (often voluntary) members of staff, and developing a management structure and hierarchy. Whilst these structures are not necessarily a bad thing and might serve to safeguard staff, practitioners and visitors,[334] it is how alongside receiving external support that they focus on transitioning organisations toward ultimately becoming a community interest company (CIC), co-operative, trust, or achieving charitable status, and how this further dictates public outputs that is troubling. The preconceptions in artistic terms of all of those forms – barring CICs – hardly conjures notions of radical or experimental practices that are part of a wider, ongoing discourse for socio-political change. Once again it can be seen as another instance of aping how the NEA functioned in relation to alternative spaces in America. Although it offered small amounts of support to alternative spaces, Brian Wallis outlines in "Public funding and Alternative Spaces" that it was always:

> engaged in shaping and curtailing their activities. In particular the NEA strategically compelled alternative spaces to become more institutionalized, to seek and rely on greater and greater amounts of funding, to redefine the role of contemporary artists as professional workers, and to qualify the types of art being made and shown.[335]

While there are a small number of organisations in the UK regularly trying to develop radical and experimental practices from within those heavily dictated institutional forms, for the majority it means fitting into expected behaviours and ways of working that stifle creative experimentation, arguably serving to produce mediocrity. The White Pube fervently make this point in relation to England that carries over to all parts of the UK in their text "I LITERALLY HATE THE ART WORLD":

> From inception, so many #diy artist-led spaces start by building and modeling themselves to fit neatly into the Art's Council's funding

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[334] As evidenced by artist and former Director Sufea Mohamad Noor talking about The Royal Standard's approach to focusing on the provision they can offer for studio holders and other practitioners they work with, and the safeguarding for staff, studio holders and visitors at *Open Forum 3*. See Appendix 2.
[335] Brian Wallis, "Public Funding and Alternative Spaces," in: *Alternative Art New York 1965-1985*, ed. Julie Ault (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 164.

requirements. once they get the money again n again, incentive to change diminishes; appetite for overhaul/introspection of their organisational methods is shriveled bc, hey, if it ain't broke don't fix it! the problem w that is, its not rly broke as in broken systematically, its broke as in SKINT. And just because ur getting ££s from ACE, doesn't mean ur doing good work! for so many, getting publicly funded has always been about jumping through hoops, twisting the figures and the outcomes to suit.[336]

This position could be argued as the same for both public and private funding, but it is the lack of incentive for change that needs to be highlighted. In gaining the support of funding (and physical space where relevant), there is an assumption organisations quickly become mindful of the criteria and metrics they need to fulfil to be in the best position to continue receiving it in future, helping to further maintain their sustainability. This leads to a level of complacency, not wanting to push the boundaries too much for fear of losing out on the resources that are currently maintaining them. This picture is further complicated when usually those resources are drawn from multiple sources in an increasingly complex structure. With the generally complex nature of funding for UK practitioners and organisations it presents funding bodies with an easy option. They know that organisations will fall in line with more risk-averse behaviour for the award of future funding. This risk-averse strategy has led to the same groupings of organisations receiving regular funding, and proven increasingly difficult for newer organisations to break in to especially during times of austerity. Organisations that lose funding also become much better equipped to re-gain it in future, further squeezing the potential for previously unfunded organisations to secure support. Whilst there are specific programmes and schemes tailored to invest in and create new organisations in areas with little previous support,[337] often they are focused heavily on socially engaged models and are suitable for only a small number of practitioners to apply for. When taken as a whole ultimately this works to stifle the wider critical discourse

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[336] Gabrielle de la Puente & Zarina Muhammad, "I LITERLLY HATE THE ART WORLD," *The White Pube*, November 18, 2018, accessed November 20, 2018, https://www.thewhitepube.co.uk/i-literally-hate-the-art-world

[337] For example the *Creative People and Places* project from ACE.
"Our Aims" Creative People and Places, accessed January 20, 2020, https://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/

and development of the artist-led sub-field, again reinforcing the hierarchy of the CVAF.

In regard to practitioners' sustainability, those that labour independently and don't combine resources, energy and skills through grouping together with other practitioners in already near impossible conditions for sustainability face an even greater challenge to survive. As highlighted in Chapter 1 and earlier in this chapter, artists throughout the UK see less income than other professions. In England the majority fall below the living wage for their work, with 90% of practitioners not earning enough from their artistic practice to support their livelihood and 69% having other jobs to supplement their income.[338] In Scotland 45% of practitioners estimate over half the work they undertake is unpaid and 42% of practitioners supplement their visual arts income with other jobs.[339] In Wales 39% of practitioners said 50% or less of their income came from their practice and 60% of practitioners undertook additional work outside of it.[340] And in Northern Ireland 58% of practitioners said income support from other members of their household helped them continue their practice and that 57% of practitioners said their incomes had not been stable in recent years.[341]

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[338] TBR, *Livelihoods of Visual Artists*, 1, 3.
[339] Scottish Contemporary Art Network, *What we learned*, 7, 9.
[340] Arts Council of Wales, *Creative Professionals Survey – 2017,* 4.
[341] An Chomhairle Ealaíon, *The Living and Working Conditions of Artists,* 10, 12.

Image 5. James Schofield, "Talk: Precarity in the Arts, event view," FACT Liverpool (July 30, 2019).

Under such precarious conditions practitioners usually supplement their income in the art system through working in academic institutions, galleries, art supply shops, as technicians, etc. and in the world outside through any variety of jobs and labour.[342] For all practitioners – not just in the CVAF but all sections of the creative industries[343] – there is some element of freelance work about either their practice or supplementary aspects of their income that means managing their invoices, payments, tax and national insurance disrupts their day-to-day scheduling before any artistic or creative work is carried out. Alongside the general precarity of their existence this can lead to excess physical and mental health issues,[344] and in many instances ends with practitioners turning down

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[342] FACT, "Talk: Precarity in the Arts," July 30, 2019, accessed August 01, 2019, https://www.fact.co.uk/event/talk-precarity-in-the-arts

[343] See Angela McRobbie, *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).

[344] Recently mental health issues and their impacts on practitioners in the arts have become talked about more publicly. See Alistair Gentry, "Artists and mental health: a conversation that needs to get louder," *a-n*, August 07, 2018, accessed

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paid work as the rate isn't deemed worth the extra time spent chasing payment and calculating tax for multiple sources of employment.[345] There are schemes such as the *Paying Artists Campaign*[346] championed by a-n and AIR,[347] that seeks to provide resources such as the Exhibition Payment Guide[348] to outline fair pay guidelines for practitioners working in publicly funded organisations (particularly relevant in an artist-led context).

However two major problems remain in relation to the overarching issues of funding and precarity. Firstly (and similarly to other guides for best practice relevant to the sub-field) any guide is just that – a guide – they are not currently enforceable by anyone. And secondly, if there isn't enough publicly/privately accessible funding to begin with then practitioners will usually go without direct pay. This is usually waved in favour of material budgets or 'exposure' to a wider audience to ensure their practice can continue, again playing in to the exceptional economy of the arts and reinforcing their own precarity. It is clear from a cursory glance that for practitioners this environment is in no way conducive to sustaining themselves or their practices in the long term without risking serious mental or physical consequences. Barely scraping by on a monthly basis does not provide a suitable platform for any form of existence, let alone one reliant upon creative faculties.

August 01, 2019,
https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/artists-mental-health-conversation-needs-get-louder/
a-n also commissioned a number of mental health resources available at "Artists and mental health," a-n, accessed August 01, 2019,
https://www.a-n.co.uk/tag/artists-and-mental-health/
[345] FACT, "Talk: Precarity in the Arts."
[346] "Context," Paying Artists, accessed August 01, 2019,
http://www.payingartists.org.uk/
[347] AIR (Artists Interaction and Representation) is part of a-n that works to identify issues impacting artists' practice for further research, exploration and campaigning.
[348] Paying Artists, "Exhibition Payment: The a-n/AIR Paying Artists Guide," Paying *Artists*, October 12, 2016, accessed August 01, 2019,
http://www.payingartists.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Paying-Artists-Exhibition-Payment-Guide.pdf

As briefly outlined, achieving sustainability in any form as part of the artist-led sub-field is a complex undertaking. Because of the bleak landscape from which practitioners make their living without any real opportunity to improve, they are effectively treading water, regularly sinking below the surface. In combining their resources and knowledge with others and forming loose groupings and organisations they have the ability to access further economic and spatial resources more easily with the caveat of a high rate of unsuccessful applications, and inexistent or unfit safeguarding practices and policies for practitioners and staff in place at the organisations themselves. With precarity the main threat to practitioners, to this end in trying to reach a level of short- or long-term sustainability[349] they can be seen to be contributing to the strength of neoliberalism. Indeed, often organisations that do have commercial aspects to aid economic sustainability cater to niche markets such as with editions shops (like Paradise Works[350] or East Bristol Contemporary[351]) or picture framing services (like Crown Building Studios[352]), that people outside of the sub-field and CVAF would not require or spend money on regularly as opposed to cafés, gift shops, etc. found in larger institutions that see regular and sustained business. Through continually contributing to the exceptional economy of the arts with no signs of change on the horizon precarity is reinforced, along with the other issues that go along with it.

Of those associated issues those that gain the least amount of attention in the sub-field (that arguably do the most to keep certain groups of practitioners in

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[349] Often organisations that do have commercial aspects to aid economic sustainability cater to niche markets such as with editions shops or picture framing services, that people outside of the sub-field and CVAF would not require or spend money on regularly as opposed to cafés, gift shops, etc. found in larger institutions that see regular and sustained business.

[350] A studio community, gallery and project space in Salford. "Multiples," Paradise Works, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.paradise-works.com/multiples

[351] An artist-led gallery in Bristol. "Shop," East Bristol Contemporary, accessed November 29, 2020, http://www.eastbristolcontemporary.com/shop/

[352] A studios and project space in Liverpool that also offers a picture framing service. "Framing," CBS Gallery & Studios, accessed November 29, 2020, https://cbsgallery.co.uk/Framing

highly precarious situations) are often the ones that would be covered by working policies or guidelines in the more formalised, institutional, environments of the CVAF. Namely those of safeguarding, equality, representation and accountability.[353] While the formalised aspects of the art system have processes and regulations in place to address those issues (regardless if they are deemed adequate or not), they still exist in the public consciousness and practitioners and institutional staff are aware of them. Because of the often informal nature of artist-led practices and the very real potential that groups of peers or close friends will be working alongside one another these processes are instead largely performed on an instinctual rather than institutional or mandated basis. This is due firstly to the fact although there is a strive for a level of professionalism within artist-led self-organisation this often manifests only in the finished project or exhibition that is available for public scrutiny, not the ongoing processes in the background. Secondly, following this line, given practitioners will routinely be working multiple jobs alongside their artistic output there simply hasn't been the time, energy and willingness for many to voluntarily adhere to codes of practice. Let alone ones that take significant amounts of extra time and effort to implement, and which are expected of fully funded organisations operating at a much higher level than them (both in terms of funding and staffing).

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[353] Internationally organisations like W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy) in New York help provide such a function, and in the UK groups like ArtLeaks and the Precarious Workers Brigade perform similar roles, albeit in much reduced capacities. See "About," W.A.G.E., accessed August 02, 2019, https://wageforwork.com/about#top
"About," ArtLeaks, accessed August 02, 2019, https://art-leaks.org/about/
"About," Precarious Workers Brigade, accessed August 02, 2019, https://precariousworkersbrigade.tumblr.com/about
For a comprehensive history of contemporary resistance to precarity from practitioners see Corina L. Apostol, "Art Workers between Precarity and Resistance: A Genealogy," in: *Art Workers: Material Conditions and Labour Struggles in Contemporary Art Practice*, ed. Erik Krikortz, Airi Triisberg & Minna Henriksson (Berlin; Helsinki; Stockholm; Talinn: Nordic-Baltic Art Workers' Network for Fair Pay 2015), 103-117.

This subjective and sometimes dismissive position is then ripe for both intentional and unintentional abuse by artist-led organisations and practitioners, and other external organisations, institutions and actors. Curator Katy Morrison and artist and curator Dan Goodman touched on this issue in their respective presentations at the *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led* symposium, relating to the exhaustion encountered through sustaining practice and the generally unspoken emotional impact losing a space for practice has. Morrison talked of exhaustion in the Deleuzian[354] sense of someone or something that cannot go on any longer turning their own state of collapse into an opportunity to reassess the limits of a situation. She described herself and other practitioners as active agents capable of interrupting a set of conditions and creating new forms of engagement with a particular reality. Here, exhausted and 'on the brink of collapse' by the precarious conditions she and others in the sub-field exist and labour within, she reinforced the need to help bring about social change through their actions.[355] Goodman continued this criticism of the precarious nature of artist-led self-organisation talking about his role as artistic director of System Gallery (Newcastle),[356] and how they were asked to vacate their property in a matter of days with no prior warning. He outlined practitioners are generally good at talking about the precariousness of their collective existence, but that those conversations are usually framed around ideas of resilience rather than ideas of the impact loss has on their wellbeing. Seemingly conditioned into acting 'professionally' and putting a positive spin on the face of negative outcomes, practitioners regularly have to publicly hide their emotions rather than being open about the realities of the precarious nature of collective practices of self-organisation.[357] Such instances as this – regular occurrences in artist-led self-organisation – obviously contribute to increased

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[354] Gilles Deleuze & Anthony Uhlmann, "The Exhausted," *SubStance*, Vol.24, No.3, Issue 78 (1995): 3-28.

[355] Katy Morrison, "My Name is Katy Morrison and I am Exhausted," *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led*, from Exhibition Research Lab, Liverpool School of Art and Design, 31 January, 2020.

[356] System Art Gallery, *Instagram*, accessed February 02, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/system_art_gallery/

[357] Dan Goodman, "What We Can't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led," *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led*, from Exhibition Research Lab, 31 January, 2020.

mental and physical wellbeing issues within the sub-field (with resources such as those outlined earlier by a-n, intended to help counteract this). This creates further barriers for continued participation, both catalysed and reinforced by the precarity practitioners are a part of, and reinforces the need for collaboration and friendship in processes of artist-led self-organisation.[358]

Alongside this, when external public and private funding is involved in projects, programmes and spaces generally they are held to the same, if not similar, standards by their funders than that of their large-scale institutionalised peers. Further reinforcing the 'professionalism' expected of practitioners, this creates a spectrum of imbalance leaving only a small number of organisations with more formalised structures that can readily, and easily, face proper accountability. Clearly this is one of the major pitfalls of artist-led self-organisation and of the sub-field. There are no structures in place that apply the same levels of bureaucracy and administration to issues that structurally affect the participation and experiences of those involved in artist-led activities. Without a certain level of formalised rigour how can there be any hope to keep participants, staff and visitors safe, broaden participation and face questions and take action if there are issues?

It is obvious that the continued stale, pale, male dominance of the art system at all levels is a huge hurdle to overcome in order to break down barriers to wider and better approaches and processes of safeguarding, participation and accountability. In being 'open', practitioners and artist-led organisations usually (and it must be broadly stressed inadvertently) are only open and welcoming to those from similar socio-economic backgrounds creating unconscious biases based on their own experiences. With little guidance available to most on this matter it exacerbates the problem, meaning people face disproportionate barriers to participation based on class, race and pre-existing marginalisation. This acts to force many into further precarity, unable to properly access many of

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[358] See John Wright, "The Ecology of Cultural Space: Towards an Understanding of the Contemporary Artist-Led Collective," unpublished PhD thesis (The University of Leeds, 2019).

the already scant resources available to those in the sub-field. As outlined in Chapter 2, the face of the wider CVAF is overwhelmingly male, middle class and white, and the trickle down effect in terms of participation from minority backgrounds in key positions, and the perception of mediocrity in programming is stark. The White Pube challenge this pertinent issue in their critical take on the current state of the visual arts at all levels: that the same white middle class mediocrity is stifling representative opportunities and expression, stating:

> I'm knee-deep in a mudslide of art bullshit and trying to walk uphill through it all. At the top of the mountain are all the middle class white people holding onto their director and executive position jobs so tightly their knuckles are as white as their faces n PUBES tbh. The art that surrounds them up there is uncreative, repetitive, and often harmful. most of the art is, really, all the way down the pay scale - with the impactful / emotional / aesthetic experience of art made by some marginalised people few and far between, kept rare. Below the directors, middle ground gallery curators seem largely boring, and below them the artist-led activity is precarious, white, and mediocre.[359]

There are organisations trying to counteract this trend within the sub-field however, with arguably the most notable example being 12ø Collective.[360] Currently the collective, alongside other practitioners, are developing *backend*.[361] It is a project and series of collaborative policies aimed at tackling structural problems relating to all manner of safeguarding, accessibility and accountability issues. It seeks to use the privilege of the majority of practitioners as a tool to bring about systemic change, enabling wider acceptance of, and engagement with, their marginalised peers. Once completed it will act as the first policy document created by and for the artist-led sub-field, its practitioners and organisations, rather than one created by an external entity then applied to them. In this regard it is a significant development, and one that demonstrates

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[359] de la Puente & Muhammad, "I LITERALLY HATE THE ART WORLD."
[360] "About" 12ø Collective, accessed January 31, 2019, https://www.12ocollective.com/about
[361] "intro to backend," backend, accessed January 31, 2019, https://backend.org.uk/

how higher standards can be set and upheld without necessarily giving up on the oppositional self-organised impulse that is synonymous with being 'artist-led'.[362]

Here increased formalisation does not have to mean a paradigm shift toward the institutionalised side of the art system – far from it in fact – it acts to reinforce the strength of the sub-field for all. Alongside *backend*, and although not specifically created by practitioners or artist-led organisations, other resources such as the previously mentioned *Paying Artists Campaign* and Exhibition Payment Guide by a-n and AIR, How to Put On an Accessible Exhibition Guide[363] and Accessible Marketing Guide[364] by Shape Arts, and the Socio-Economic Diversity and Inclusion in the Arts: A Toolkit for Employers by Jerwood Arts[365] all provide guidance on relevant issues that can be applied to the artist-led sub-field. The overarching problem here is not one of their relevance to the sub-field, but that they exist as guides – and as highlighted with the Exhibition Payment Guide – there is no way of currently universally enforcing them or holding practitioners or organisations to account over them.

This points to another glaring failure and paradoxical aspect of the artist-led sub-field: that it can deliver critical analysis of the art system, but when some of that criticism is turned back on itself it lacks the resources, knowledge and experience to be able to address it. In this case the issues of safeguarding, representation and accountability are significant for the continued development

[362] 12ø Collective, "Keynote: 12ø Collective," *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led*, from Exhibition Research Lab, 31 January, 2020.
[363] "How to Put On an Accessible Exhibition," Shape Arts, accessed November 07, 2018,
https://www.shapearts.org.uk/news/accessible-curating
[364] "An Accessible Arts Marketing Guide," Shape Arts, accessed November 07, 2018,
https://www.shapearts.org.uk/news/accessible-marketing-guide?fbclid=IwAR06I7IAWvmAEnY4IUKvZA798dugV90i9IZYk8ClWoiWInGKsjxXKq5bWCs
[365] Jerwood Arts, *Socio-Economic Diversity and Inclusion in the Arts: A Toolkit for Employers*, accessed July 27, 2019,
https://jerwoodarts.org/projects/weston-jerwood-creative-bursaries-2017-19/toolkit/

of the sub-field and its relation to wider society, and the precarity practitioners face within it.

Dissensual Potential

In relation to that critical analysis of the wider art system, and as mentioned in Chapter 2, all practitioners considering themselves part of processes of artist-led self-organisation are acting politically whether they unwittingly acknowledge or are aware of this fact or not. Their practices, projects, organisations and spaces engage in acts of socio-political creativity and organisation usually consciously aimed in some capacity against the prevailing status quo. They are both driven by, and an expression of, political opinion and discourse. Practitioners are implicated and implicate themselves by association in much the same way they are initially inherently part of the artist-led network. However any knowledge of this political implication complicates practitioners' outputs. If they are aware of it they are able to create resistance to, and questioning of, the powers of the social institutions that govern them. If they don't understand or willfully ignore it they work to (inadvertently) reinforce the power those same institutions hold over them and society. As discussed, in trying to become sustainable the processes by which support and resources are gained usually work to strengthen the power of governing institutions. By keeping practitioners indentured to them in a variety of ways it reinforces their precarity. Homogenising their collective outputs (to a certain extent) in order to meet performance and feedback metrics for a combination of increasingly diffuse funding sources to maintain their precarious economic viability.

This potential for challenging or reinforcing the social hierarchy and distribution of power is a key dynamic of the artist-led sub-field as a whole. The ability to go against the grain of the CVAF to challenge those in power and idealistically develop and show new ways of thinking, being and working effectively defines the artist-led sub-field itself. Arguably this is the reason for its initial inception and continued existence. Practitioners' navigation of the impacts the implication of understanding and/or acknowledging this role has pushes the boundaries of

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the sub-field and its position in relation to the rest of the CVAF and the overarching field of power that governs society. Given the multiplicity of practitioners with differing views participating in processes of artist-led self-organisation, here I will build on a theoretical framework to explore dissensus first outlined by artist and curator Daniel Pryde-Jarman in relation to artist-run curatorial practices.[366] He begins with Bourdieu's work on fields and power, combining it with the work of both Jacques Rancière and Chantal Mouffe, followed by that of philosopher and theorist Gerald Raunig's instituent practices.[367] From this he creates a framework to argue and analyse the challenging of social power in relation to artist-run curatorial practices. Here I adapt this framework of thinkers in context of artist-led self-organisation, re-casting it in light of Rossiter's work on networks and in Chapter 5 on artist Dave Beech's Marxist approach to art and postcapitalism, ensuring its relevance to artist-led concerns for potential future socio-political change.[368]

The political wrangling evident in processes of artist-led self-organisation reflects the work of Rancière in relation to the concepts of 'consensus' and 'dissensus'. His thinking provides a general underpinning to artist-led self-organisation[369] often overlooked by practitioners involved within it. Broadly, much of Rancière's work is based on the idea of the 'police' that govern us – not officers of the law but the symbolic constitution of social power and the institutions and systems that distribute and maintain it. The police (somewhat similar to the field of power in Bourdieu's terms)[370] define what the makeup of society is by continually presenting it to us.[371] He contends with the ongoing struggle over what particular aspects of the police is allowed to be perceptible – how people understand the machinations of the power that governs them – and

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[366] Daniel Pryde-Jarman, "Curating the Artist-run Space: Exploring strategies for a critical curatorial practice," unpublished PhD thesis (Coventry University, 2013).

[367] I refer to Raunig and instituent practices in Chapter 4.

[368] This framework holds the potential to be further enhanced and adapted by others to incorporate their own or any future conceptual/theoretical particularities.

[369] And other historical forms of self-organisation globally.

[370] Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," 24-58.

[371] Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, 36-37.

the spaces in which it can be seen and questioned. Consensus can be seen as the police maintaining power relations by creating the conditions for no political questioning of social power to occur, through making citizens see the existing institutions and systems as making sense to them alongside their roles in society. This limits the spaces to meaningfully question that power, reinforcing social hierarchies in the various fields that make up society, and attempting to exclude anyone questioning them and it from a meaningful place in that society. Dissensus however can be seen as the opposite of this and as such the 'true' role of democratic discourse. Voicing opposition and showing new subjects or ideas in social spaces to re-order perceptions of those social spaces and relations. Divisions inserted in the pervading 'common sense' of the established social order. All with the aim of bringing about wider change to power structures without necessarily reaching a wholesale agreement, thereby disrupting the politics of the police.[372] In continually examining the boundaries of what is normalised by authority and that which is alternate to the current conception of 'normal', dissensus creates new spaces for discourse where socio-political structures can be evaluated freely and re-thought.

Clearly practitioners have the potential to, and regularly do, contribute to both consensus and dissensus. Indeed Rancière goes so far as to say the "main enemy of artistic creativity as well as political creativity is consensus—that is, inscription within given roles, possibilities, and competences."[373] Artist-led self-organisation allows us to see clearly the roles, possibilities and competences of the majority of practitioners prescribed by those currently in power. Part of the creative dark matter propping up the art system and wider CVAF, mired in precarity and mostly unable to escape consensus once they have contributed to it. When constituents of the wider artist-led community act in any other way than to create dissensus they fall into the trap of contributing to, or wholly creating, consensus for the current formation of social power through their actions. Through this they ensure the continuing functions of the art and socio-

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[372] Ibid, 27-218.

[373] Jacques Rancière, "Art of the Possible. Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey in conversation with Jacques Rancière," *Artforum*, Vol.5, No.7 (March 2007): 263.

economic fields and systems that keep them socially and economically constrained. They reinforce their own precarity through their actions. However even those creating dissensus as part of the artist-led sub-field face the prospect of going on to create consensus if they simply repeat the stereotypes of past critiques that have become engrained within the art and political systems and fields themselves,[374] and as such which have become "entirely integrated within the space of consensus."[375] Outlined by Hewison, consensus in context of the UK can also be understood as another way to maintain hegemony between the leaders and the led (as Gramsci would phrase it). He outlines there:

> is a word which offers a more familiar alternative to hegemony: "consensus"...there must be a degree of mutual consent by both the governors and the governed to abide by its laws, and Britain with its long history of gradual rather than bloody revolutions can be said to have been governed by a form of consensus since William and Mary.[376]

This potential integration into consensus (and hegemony) can also be understood as 'complicit critique'; a term coined by art historian Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen to describe how practitioners have seemingly accepted the position of never truly being able to be free of art institutions, becoming complicit with/within them, ultimately weakening the critique they seek to enact.[377]

Although navigating the spaces and implications of consensual and dissensual actions are complex and fraught with pitfalls that are easy to unknowingly stumble into, if practitioners are able to create dissensus – even as part of complicit critique – those pockets of resistance and questioning become spaces of what Mouffe calls 'agonistic pluralism'. Using Mouffe's concept, those spaces are constituted by adversarial social positions creating dissensus to the current status quo. Those spaces are seen as positive forces, arguing between one another and with hegemonic power structures in order to develop better ways of

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[374] Particularly relevant here in relation to artist-led self-organisation are the first two waves of institutional critique, explored in Chapter 4.

[375] Rancière, "Art of the Possible," 264.

[376] Hewison, *Culture and Consensus*, 13.

[377] Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, *After the Great Refusal: Essays on Contemporary Art, Its Contradictions and Difficulties* (Winchester: Zer0 Books, 2018), 70-71.

organising the social institutions that govern us.[378] Agonism can be seen as the productive relationship between adversaries rather than the destructive relationship between enemies of 'traditional' antagonism, and that one would associate with a classical Marxist approach to critique. As Mouffe states in *The Democratic Paradox*, agonism:

> is a different mode of manifestation of antagonism because it involves a relation not between enemies but between 'adversaries', adversaries being defined in a paradoxical way as 'friendly enemies', that is, persons who are friends because they share a common symbolic space but also enemies because they want to organize this common symbolic space in a different way.[379]

Although agonistic pluralism seeks to ultimately create a new socio-political consensus through dissensual debate, the new consensus formed would be one continually contested by the dissensual spaces present in, and accepted as, a key part of a functioning, inclusive, democratic society. In this understanding "the aim of democratic politics is to transform *antagonism* into *agonism*."[380] In this context the 'frenemies' present in the concept of agonistic pluralism lends itself to the multiple, individualised experiences of temporality present in post-1989 global society. Experiences where people have nuanced political outlooks rather than adhering to strict binary opinions of centre, left and right.[381] It is easy to see how practitioners and their self-organisation fit comfortably within this outlook toward a society built upon agonistic pluralism. Here though it is the dominance of the neoliberal order and apathy from members of society that continue the same social hierarchy, despite its current precarious form being destructive for swathes of the population and increasingly in many respects clearly not fit for purpose. With artist-led self-organisation a product of the same post-1989 conditions of contemporaneity, the multiplicity of individual experiences of practitioners are mirrored in the variety of methodologies and practices that constitute it. Because of this, within its agonistic spaces it can be understood as

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[378] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*.

[379] Ibid, 13.

[380] Ibid, 103.

[381] Maria Hlavajova, & Simon Sheikh, eds., *Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017).

fostering 'critical art' which, according to Mouffe in "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces":

> foments dissensus…makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. It is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony.[382]

Whilst Mouffe is here describing all critical artistic practices, her statement is particularly pertinent for artist-led self-organisation. It directly references the critical capacity (or dissensual potential) they have and aspire to, and touches upon the process of reformatting social structures they are inherently part of, which could in turn act as a way to break free from the widespread precarity currently being experienced.

Although agonistic pluralism and the production of forms of critical art seemingly encapsulates much of the drive and potential of artist-led self-organisation, it does not touch upon a key facet within it. That of the increasingly networked nature of social organisation and existence in contemporary life. This is a key distinction that serves to weaken Mouffe's thesis of a dissensus-based politics. A direct critique of Mouffe's approach comes from Rossiter who makes clear it needs to be re-cast in order to be able to be implemented in a contemporary networked society, of which the social-technical artist-led network and its constituents are a part. One in which online/offline labour is exploited in order to maintain the precarious neoliberal status quo. He states Mouffe is "unable to describe the new modes of sociality, labour and politics as they are organized within network societies and information economies."[383] In order to properly function in contemporary networked societies he believes her agonistic pluralism needs to be understood as being part of a 'processual democracy'. Such a democracy takes into account post-Fordist ideas and practices of capital production and flexible accumulation otherwise

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[382] Chantal Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces," *Art & Research*, Vol.1, No.2 (Summer 2007), accessed January 21, 2018, http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/mouffe.html
[383] Rossiter, *Organized Networks,* 203.

unacknowledged in her work, in favour of the maintenance of the state simply as a series of complex institutions. This allows the continued strive for inclusive dissensus to be relevant. Particularly when there are so many potential online/offline spaces for it to be created within by such a large number of people. It resituates Mouffe's work as a "radical pluralism within networked media ecologies."[384] In doing so it allows for inquiries "into the power relations that condition the formation of the social,"[385] in keeping with the dissensual spirit of artist-led sensibilities.

Rossiter explains processual democracies as having non-representative structures based on the Italian Marxist philosopher Paolo Virno's[386] concept of a 'non-representational democracy'. One that doesn't operate within the "constitutive framework of the nation-state and its associated institutions and civil society organizations."[387] In combining Mouffe's pluralism with Virno's break from the state-civil society relation he is able to reconcile the role of networks in developing sociality. He outlines that the relationships between actors and all other aspects of a network are a site of politics that when located within institutional settings are the basis for contemporary democracy. Rossiter states:

> A processual democracy goes beyond the state-civil society relation. That relation no longer exists. Processual democracies necessarily involve institutions, since institutions function to organize social relations. This isn't to say that in and of themselves the modulation of networks somehow automatically results in a democracy. But it is to suggest that the processes by which networks undergo a scalar transformation signal the emergence of new institutional forms that are shaping politics as a non-representational idiom.[388]

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[384] Ibid, 200.
[385] Ibid, 202.
[386] Virno's political and philosophical views were decidedly non-statist, and were part of the Autonomist Marxist tradition. His contemporaries included Hardt and Negri, and he was an earlier proponent of the concept of the multitude. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life,* trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito & Andrea Casson (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004).
[387] Rossiter, *Organized Networks,* 202.
[388] Ibid, 203-204.

The integration of agonistic pluralism within a processual democracy to form a radical (agonistic) pluralism succinctly describes how the artist-led sub-field (and its collective network) best functions in contemporary UK society. Free from neoliberal consensus and actively creating and developing existing online and offline spaces as new institutional forms to ultimately help shape cultural politics. However what is clear is in keeping with how the artist-led sub-field can be seen as an orgnet that occasionally interacts with hierarchical aspects of netorgs to varying degrees, there is a crossover between how practitioners interact with the institutional structures of representative democracy. To seek sustainability or adapt them for a new function despite seemingly being a part of a non-representative form of democracy. In this way practitioners currently fulfil the role of being part of a 'chain of equivalences' of critical art as stated by Mouffe to help bring about political change. They still play a key role in the struggle against the current social hegemony by subverting it and:

> contributing to the construction of new subjectivities…it is only the modernist illusion of the privileged position of the artist that has made us believe otherwise. Once this illusion is abandoned, jointly with the revolutionary conception of politics accompanying it, we can see that critical artistic practices represent an important dimension of democratic politics. This does not mean, though, as some seem to believe, that they could alone realize the transformations needed for the establishment of a new hegemony…a radical democratic politics calls for the articulation of different levels of struggles so as to create a chain of equivalence among them…It would be a serious mistake to believe that artistic activism could, on its own, bring about the end of neo-liberal hegemony.[389]

Because of the sheer volume of practitioners and methodologies employed in their practices, the constituents of the artist-led sub-field are effectively helping lead others away from precarity and toward social change through their actions. Rather than being the ones to bring about widespread social change directly themselves, they persist in precarious conditions, contributing to a wider chain of equivalences and indirect social change. Despite their collective role at first glance seeming as a position of little influence, in this case the opposite is true. This is due to the variety, intent and criticality of the new perspectives and

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[389] Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces."

subjectivities created by practitioners, meaning through them the social hierarchy of the CVAF (and wider field of power in society) is constantly being challenged in a range of ways. With particular focus on the CVAF, where it cannot absorb the critique to strengthen its power, slowly the dispositions of practitioners begin to shift. Leading to changes in the structures and rules governing the game, ultimately contributing to changing the position of the artist-led sub-field within the wider CVAF and beyond.

Models of Online and Offline Collectivity

In holding the potential for creating true dissensus and ultimately creating new ways of approaching, thinking about and interacting with the wider world the artist-led model is unique in many respects in current UK society. It provides practitioners with the potential to collectively change the current 'rules of the game'[390] governing them, ultimately offering the potential to escape much of the precarity they (and other members of society) face. The critical art that it fosters and the position someway between representative and non-representative democratic systems allow practitioners to utilise, adapt, invent and re-constitute organisational forms to institute new possibilities for wider social change. As mentioned in Chapter 1,[391] in recent years practitioners have begun to move toward organisational models more focused on fostering a sense of community, morphing between online/offline spaces in much the same way artist-run practitioners did in the 1960s using pre-internet technologies.[392] Whilst this shift to socially engaged forms can be seen as the continuation of a cycle previously including relational aesthetics,[393] it is one that serves to strengthen the

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[390] Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

[391] And first published in 2018. See James Schofield, "Artist-Led," in: *Contemporary Research Intensive,* The Contemporary Condition 10, ed. Mara Ambrožič et al. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2018), 41-44.

[392] See Melissa Rachleff, "Do It Yourself: Histories of Alternatives," in: *Alternative Histories: New York Art Sapces, 1960 to 2010*, ed. Lauren Rosati & Mary Anne Staniszewski (New York: Exit Art; Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012), 23-40.

[393] A concept conceived by curator Nicholas Bourriaud in the 1990s describing artists as 'facilitators' using human relations as the social context through which art was created. Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* trans. Simon

relationships between practitioners (and occasionally other publics) through fostering a certain sense of community. One that also serves to reinforce peer-group validation, as outlined by Bernice Murphy[394] in Chapter 1. This sense of community extends to the organisational and artistic practices creating distinct cultures within those online/offline spaces. This trend was first described in detail in relation to artist-run organisations in the UK by Coffield,[395] who found those cultures actually helped to inscribe roles to members of those organisations and worked to modify their attitudes and behaviours to a certain extent. However those cultures were not fixed and could be seen as "subject to constant, active negotiation by those involved"[396] showing the potential self-organisation has to challenge a given social status quo in an ongoing process.[397]

Since the impacts of the Financial Crisis and the ensuing precarity within society, practitioners have found themselves challenging the social status quo of their own position. They can be seen to have attempted this through what Pasero outlines as 'post-heroic arrangements' that they enact with others in the sub-field and beyond. A post-heroic arrangement in this context is a new arrangement within the various social spaces and networks of the art system to create new forms of sociality, increasingly leaving the institutions of the art system to become contingent and irrelevant. They break free from the expected institutional machinations and economic underpinnings of the system that simply do not apply or are irrelevant to them. Instead they are searching for and propagating peer-to-peer exchanges and experimental practices in new models and forms of collaborative endeavour. Pasero states:

Pleasance, Fronza Woods & Mathieu Copeland, 2nd ed. (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002).

[394] Murphy, "Alternative Spaces: Part One," 322.

[395] Emma Coffield, "Artist-Run Initiatives: A Study of Cultural Construction," unpublished PhD thesis (Newcastle University, 2015).

[396] Ibid, 208.

[397] Further research into modes and models of artist-led practices and their effects on artist-led cultures can be found in the *Stretched* research project by Jason Bowman at Valand Academy. "Stretched: Expanding Notions of Artistic Practice through Artist-led Cultures," Valand Academy, accessed April 19, 2020, https://akademinvaland.gu.se/english/research-/research-projects/stretched

they no longer engage in professional activity for others—collectors, curators, exhibition organizers, viewers—but *"work" with others*…The artists are no longer concerned with enlightening others through the medium of art in the traditional sense—but through undertaking mutual cooperation, learning from one another, and experiencing the accompanying transcendence of individual abilities…establishing themselves as socially relevant experimental laboratories for new perceptual paradigms.[398]

When framed in relation to networked societies, the post-heroic arrangements of the practitioners within the artist-led network can be thought of as increasingly politically astute. That is in terms of both the politics they uphold and seek to share, and the very politics of being networked. Whilst this may seem a minor distinction it belies a rigour to the sub-field that is often overlooked. Rossiter hints at such distinctions, saying:

> The tendency to describe networks in terms of horizontality results in the occlusion of the 'political', which consists of antagonisms that underpin sociality. It is technically and socially incorrect to assume that hierarchical and centralizing architectures and practices are absent from network cultures.[399]

Here he is not trying to undermine his own thesis, but offers an insight into how network cultures adapt their strategies to best serve themselves. In relation to the artist-led sub-field their agonism, rather than pure antagonism, is drawn from mirroring the actions of the neo-avant-garde as outlined in Chapter 1. Whether the agonism shown by most practitioners is more useful than pure antagonism is a separate point for debate, but as outlined by Mouffe it is worth noting agonism is a form of antagonism.[400] However, as a 'frenemy' of the cultural institutions of the CVAF and wider society, they still employ hierarchical architectures (as a purely antagonistic approach would do) despite their generally 'alternative' agonistic stance as part of their implicitly political existence. In doing so practitioners show they are able to distinguish what platforms or infrastructures will best serve their art production, and ultimately the political discourse they seek to – or perhaps inadvertently – further.

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[398] Pasero, "Why Artists Go Unpaid," 164.

[399] Rossiter, *Organized Networks,* 36.

[400] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*.

Loosely all forms of artist-led self-organisation, along with the platforms, infrastructures and methodologies employed in their realisation can be seen as necessarily hybrid forms utilising online/offline components to varying degrees, differing on a case-by-case basis depending on the practitioners involved. It can be understood in a similar way to practitioners utilising different methods and platforms to ensure the artist-led network remains functional. As time has progressed since the inception of the internet and the subsequent development of the hybrid artist-led network, previous spatial categories of online, offline and hybrid organisational forms have blurred and broken down, reflecting the wider technologisation of everyday life.[401] As outlined in Chapter 1, as globalisation and digital communications technologies have rapidly advanced so too has the glocal outlook of artist-led self-organisation. In keeping with the globalised concerns of the art system and wider society, in many respects practitioners operate using online/offline components. This is not only in fear of losing connectivity to their peers and audiences, but because the nature of artistic production has embraced those components as part of a wider cultural shift; similarly to how self-organisation was shown to not be a free choice, but dictated by the neoliberal system itself.

This hybrid form of organisation by practitioners can be seen as having conceptual parallels with the form of the self-organised project space of the 1960s. As outlined in Chapter 1 they were physical spaces (notably in the downtown lofts of New York following the 1960 – 1961 recession), where experimental practices deemed unsuitable for the 'traditional' white cube gallery

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[401] From the inception of the internet the global Net Art (or net.art) movement has utilised it as an artistic and curatorial space in the creation of 'net art'. It is understood as "a site-specific art form bound to its own presence and impact on the Internet." "What is net art?" Net.Specific, accessed August 19, 2020, http://netspecific.net/en/netspecific/what-is-net-art
As such artist-led self-organisation either regularly comes to be understood as Net Art in varying degrees, or apes many of its working processes and models. For a comprehensive archive of Net Art from the inception of the movement, see the anthology developed by Rhizome (an organisation dedicated to platforming new media art). "Net Art Anthology," Rhizome, accessed August 19, 2020, https://anthology.rhizome.org/

spaces of the time would manifest for display and public consumption, governed by self-organised methodologies. Because of the experimental nature of most practices displayed within them (including the use of performance and digital technologies), they were seen quite literally as spaces that projected out into the future. Forward facing sites of practice laced with possibility, occupying generally abandoned physical spaces in precarious socio-economic conditions. It would not be long before many large-scale institutions would appropriate this form, presenting it inside their walls as an 'exciting' contemporary contrast to the otherwise historical works on display.[402] This historical tension between large-scale institutional and self-organised operational forms still continues today. Whereas most large-scale institutions create project spaces within their confines, other historical global examples, like the Museum of Modern Art, would instead cannibalise existing independent project spaces in order to expand in an urban centre (New York) where physical space was at a premium. They did so in 2000 when they merged and took over the original 1976 artist-run P.S.1 Art Center project space, rebranding it as MoMA PS1.[403] As practitioners in the UK utilise hybrid architectures of organisation favouring online components as sites for experimental practice to respond to, or attempt to counteract, the precarious conditions they find themselves in, larger-scale institutions have begun to increasingly follow suit to widen their artistic provision and deepen visitor engagement, mirroring the appropriation of the project space in the 1960s.[404]

Throughout the remainder of this sub-section the examples chosen largely deliberately ignore organisational forms mirroring the 'traditional' studio/gallery model that has become rife within the artist-led sub-field, as outlined in Chapter 1. This is not to downplay the importance of it, but rather to

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[402] Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All. Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013), 168-173.

[403] See Lauren Rosati & Mary Anne Staniszewski, eds., *Alternative Histories. New York Art Spaces 1960 to 2010* (New York: Exit Art; Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012).

[404] Encouraged in part by the UK government. UK Government. Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, *Culture is Digital*, February, 2018, accessed April 19, 2020, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/687519/TT_v4.pdf

show a breadth of other resistive approaches utilising different ratios of online/offline components, and acknowledging that when employed the model often struggles to do more than reinforce consensus and maintain the current social hierarchy, as it is conceived as a vehicle to support and facilitate, rather than drive forward, practice. Arguably in most instances it no longer serves the art or practices of those involved in a critically meaningful capacity outside of acting as a site for production and platform for 'public' display, with inherently political underpinnings that largely go unrealised. That is not to say the physical space to think and create in is not key for practitioners. But instead for the majority this model has become inscribed within and co-opted by the wider CVAF and art system. As such this means practitioners generally continue to be mired in precarity, inscribed within the given roles, expectations and competences of those in power, as Rancière would have it,[405] usually to their own detriment.

Image 6. serf, "AGM 1," Facebook post, August 7, 2019, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/serfleeds/photos/a.2307313435984778/2307313535984768/?type=3

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[405] Rancière, "Art of the Possible."

There are however examples of studio/gallery models employed expressly to serve the art and practitioners they host, moving away from easily and routinely straying into consensus, continuing the ethos of the original artist-run project spaces of the 1960s. Here a key example is serf (Leeds); an artist-led 'community' providing studios and a project space that does not seek external funding and is run by a voluntary committee comprised of studio holders (one of only a handful in the country to do so, taking cues from Transmission).[406] This allows a certain level of autonomy and experimentation in its public programming, with decisions made by consensus of the committee for all aspects of the organisation following open meetings in an ongoing process. Alongside this the organisation works to foster critically informed peer-to-peer learning between members, external practitioners and visitors in order to strengthen relationships, networks and solidarity between different social groups.[407]

Image 7. OUTPUT gallery, "Installation view of Gina Tsang at OUTPUT gallery," accessed November 29, 2020, http://outputgallery.com/EXHIBITIONS/GINA%20TSANG/

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[406] Transmission is currently the oldest artist-run gallery space in Glasgow, managed by fixed-term appointment committee. "Info," Transmission, accessed October 11, 2019,
https://www.transmissiongallery.org/
[407] "About serf," serf, accessed October 11, 2019,
http://serfleeds.co.uk/about/

Moving away from the gallery/studio model, OUTPUT gallery (Liverpool) exemplifies a new approach for artist-led organisations to take favouring mainly offline components. Although in receipt of ACE public funding and ostensibly functioning as a gallery space, it subverts the usual operating methodologies by only working with practitioners from or based in Merseyside.[408] In doing so the intention was to create an organisation to cater for the artists already in the city often overlooked by the larger institutions such as Tate Liverpool and Liverpool Biennial. The organisation invites public feedback and input over programming decisions in relation to exhibitions, events and the type of work on display, creating a curatorial transparency and openness that is usually absent in other larger-scale organisations. Through this it hopes to encourage visitors to see the space and organisation as something more relevant to them, alongside giving practitioners a platform to new audiences from the city and beyond.[409] By offering something the large-scale institutions of the city quite simply have overlooked through having different agendas – space and representation for artists from or based in Merseyside at varying stages of their careers – OUTPUT has begun to force others into action and enacts an ongoing critique that ultimately serves practitioners. Most notably Tate Liverpool have seemingly responded to OUTPUT's programme after launching the Art North West open call in 2019, awarding artist Emily Speed a solo exhibition at the gallery in 2021.[410] OUTPUT's ongoing programming raises the status of 'local' artists alongside their peers already established in the art system, encouraging them in turn to

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[408] "INFO," OUTPUT gallery, accessed October 11, 2019, http://outputgallery.com/INFO/

[409] Laura Robertson, "Output seeks input: new Liverpool gallery launches with a focus on Merseyside artists," *a-n*, June 06, 2018, accessed October 11, 2019, https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/output-seeks-input-new-liverpool-gallery-launches-focus-merseyside-artists/

[410] "Tate Liverpool Announces New Commission by Emily Speed for 2021," Tate Liverpool, November 04, 2019, accessed December 18, 2019, https://www.tate.org.uk/press/tate-liverpool-announces-new-commission-emily-speed-2021

challenge the precarity they experience through the exposure the gallery offers.[411]

Image 8. 12ø Collective, "Group Show live show, event view," accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.12ocollective.com/single-post/group-show-live-show

Taking a decidedly more online approach is *Group Show*,[412] a free-to-download podcast series by artist and curator Caitlin Merrett King. The series came about as the result of a curatorial residency with 12ø Collective in 2017,[413] and was initially intended as a five episode series reflecting on issues central to artistic activity. A 'final' live recording event was held as a culmination to produce an episode to reflect on the project, before it was revived following Merrett King's participation in a *Practice Makes Practice* residency at The NewBridge Project

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[411] Sufea Mohamad Noor, "Critic Turns Curator: Investigating Neutrality at OUTPUT Gallery," *Corridor8*, December 03, 2019, accessed December 18, 2019, https://corridor8.co.uk/article/critic-turns-curator-investigating-neutrality/
[412] Caitlin Merrett King, *Group Show*, podcast audio, accessed October 11, 2019, http://groupshow.libsyn.com/
[413] "Group Show," 12ø Collective, accessed October 11, 2019, https://www.12ocollective.com/single-post/Group-Show-Podcast

(Newcastle) in 2019.[414] Taken as a whole, the podcast spans topics covering work, collaboration and criticism within the artist-led sub-field, giving a platform to issues that are marginalised, yet impact all practitioners. The format allows the critically engaged content to not only be freely shared internationally through streaming services, but archived within them. Many online artist-led projects are inevitably lost when website domains lapse, etc. but with *Group Show* being archived through large international streaming services there is more opportunity for a continued presence in future. Leaving a lasting online legacy allows future practitioners to benefit from the discussions, providing a platform to further inform methodologies of practice and critique against the negative social conditions they may face.

Here it is pertinent to note that other models that rely on mainly online components tend to favour occupying websites or social media platforms rather than other forms. This may relate to the artist-led network and ideas of practitioners having connectivity with their peers, but it positions artist-led self-organisation within those hierarchical structures rather than in a subcultural area of the internet away from view. Again it can be seen as reinforcing the neo-avant-garde approach of re-shaping existing institutional structures to suit their own needs, rather than following the examples of other earlier self-organised artistic movements, in much the same way as the Mail Art movement developed. Acting as sites of display and discourse when the precarity of their everyday life means resources to physically foster relationships and stage exhibitions or projects in other locations is largely impossible.[415] Increasingly in this vein digital residencies are becoming staples of online artist-led self-organisation, despite the potential for them to be seen as reinforcing the hegemony of the

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[414] "Practice Makes Practice," The NewBridge Project, accessed October 11, 2019, https://thenewbridgeproject.com/join/practice-makes-practice/

[415] Such a way of using online spaces is nothing new and has been happening since the advent of digital communications technology by artists and other members of society. A notable example is the first virtual community The WELL, founded in 1985 and still in operation. "What is The WELL?" The WELL, accessed March 03, 2020, https://www.well.com/about-2/

prosumer.[416] Arguably here one of the most-notable recent artist-led examples comes from The White Pube. The duo have hosted a popular residency programme on a page of their website lasting for one month since 2016, using their platform to give priority to artists from marginalised and/or precarious groups.[417] In doing so they, and other digital residencies, reinforce the artist-led network whilst providing 'mainstream' spaces for online display and discourse. Challenging the politics of governance in those spaces and soliciting feedback for artists' work from external sources as part of the process.
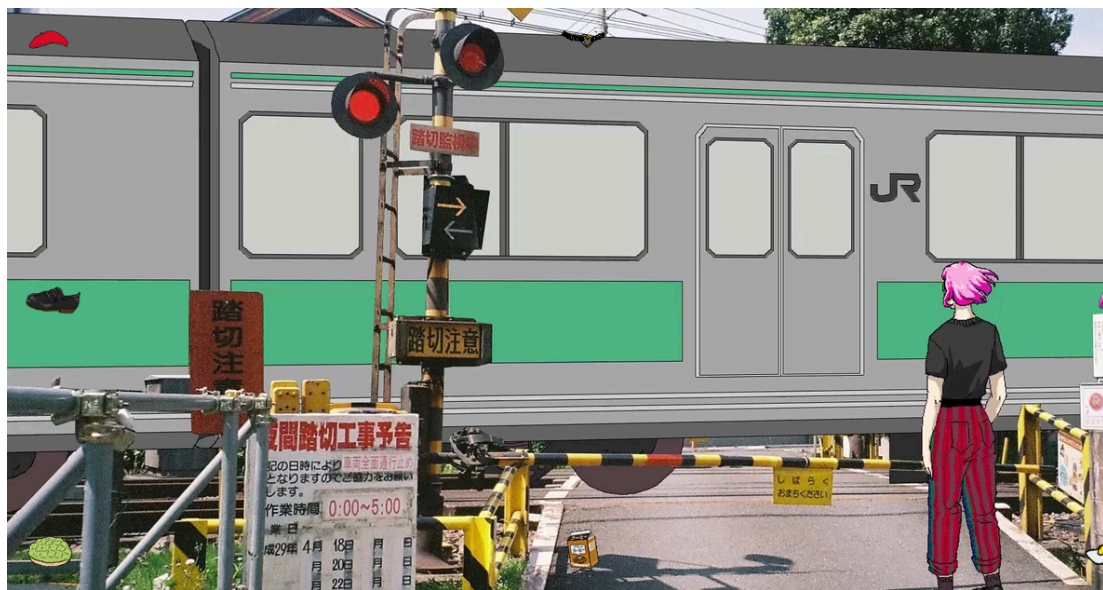
Image 9. isthisit?, "Installation view of Petra Szemán, *to go off screen*," accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.isthisitisthisit.com/to-go-off-screen-9

Many online spaces practitioners oversee are also able to manifest projects in offline spaces and forms too. The ability to morph between online and offline spaces allows practitioners the potential to push the boundaries of how social organisation, dissensual critique, and artistic interaction is structured as part of a networked society. *isthisit?* founded in 2016 by artist and curator Bob Bicknell-Knight is a project and platform that works along these lines. It is concerned with

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[416] Digital residencies and other forms of online presentation platforms are also nothing new, and come from a lineage of digital artistic and curatorial practices. See Joasia Krysa, "02. Experiments in (Social) Software Curating: Reprogramming Curatorial Practice for Networks", *Vague Terrain: Digital Art/Culture/Technology*, issue 11, (2008).
[417] "About The White Pube," The White Pube, accessed October 11, 2019, https://www.thewhitepube.co.uk/about

broad themes relating to digital technology and art, and the social implications produced at their intersection. Online it functions as a gallery with a monthly changeover of exhibitions, archived Net Art pages and a residency space; offline it operates staging nomadic physical exhibitions in various spaces around the UK and beyond. Tying these two components together the organisation also publishes a book series both online and in print on issues relating to the role of digital technology, neoliberalism, precarity and the implications they bring to contemporary life and cultural practice, further reinforcing and exemplifying the hybrid nature of artist-led organisational forms.[418]

In this brief snapshot of hybrid online and offline architectures of organisation, practitioners can be seen to display a nuanced approach to being networked and how they perform subtle and overt acts of resistance against the precarious conditions they are part of. As part of a larger chain of equivalence that could ultimately help bring about wider social change, the modes of sociality and collectivity – such as those outlined above – are key in this process. In collaborating in ways that look beyond the established institutional structures and hierarchies of the art system, through creating new forms or subversion, they begin to make those historical forms increasingly irrelevant. Following Pasero, artist-led self-organisation is increasingly establishing itself as a site of "socially relevant experimental laboratories for new perceptual paradigms."[419] Although there is an increasingly careful consideration to the forms that critical self-organisation takes, there is still the risk of having those forms appropriated and recuperated back within the very same art system structures they are implicitly making contingent. Despite these new and/or adapted social-technical organisational forms enabling ongoing knowledge production to occur within them, their collective precarity currently leaves them continually open to external co-optation.

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[418] "About," isthisit?, accessed October 11, 2019,
https://www.isthisitisthisit.com/about
[419] Pasero, "Why Artists Go Unpaid," 164.

Through critically exploring the impacts precarity has on practitioners within the sub-field, and subsequent issues produced surrounding sustainability, the first research sub-question was answered. Drawing on the work of Foster, Pasero and Abbing, and data from Arts Council England, Creative Scotland, the Arts Council of Wales and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland as key, the role precarity plays in uniting practices globally under similar circumstances and the impacts this has had on cuts in provision of resources and opportunities, and overcrowding by practitioners and organisations for them is starkly apparent.

The lack of income available to practitioners within, and outside of, the art system has led many to collaborate with their peers, creating increasingly formalised online/offline organisational structures necessitated by those conditions to secure resources. Although in doing so the capacity for resistance from practitioners has been curtailed to a large degree by resource holders, those social-technical organisational forms still posses an inherent potential for creating dissensus alongside consensus. To answer the second research sub-question the work of Rancière and Mouffe is used building on the work of Bourdieu in Chapter 2 to create the basis of a conceptual framework to describe processes of critique and resistance attempted or developed by practitioners. As part of a radical (agonistic) pluralism, processes of artist-led self-organisation have been shown to hold the potential to function as part of a wider chain of equivalence in society that ultimately could lead to a new social hierarchy.

Lastly, as outlined in the sub-section above, the third research sub-question is answered showing selected key examples of recent practice. Through them practitioners have employed a variety of different online/offline social-technical organisational architectures from which to attempt to develop instances of dissensus against the pervading status quo. Reinforcing the outlined conceptual framework the structures of serf, OUTPUT gallery, *Group Show* and *isthisit?* enact differing forms and levels of critique across the online/offline spectrum, whilst all being formalised to differing degrees and for different purposes.

In reflecting on these points, examples, and the critical observations raised in the first two chapters, the following chapter will expand upon the nature of artist-led self-organisation as a paradoxical entity to make the argument for a new understanding being required. In particular this will be framed through highlighting artist-led self-organisation's close relationship with neoliberalism, wider acceptance of the CVAF and art system, and the role critique plays within its processes.

Chapter 4: The Artist-Led Paradox

While the previous chapters were concerned with linking artist-led self-organisation with the rise of contemporary forms of neoliberalism, globalisation and technological networks, this chapter progresses the discussion to explore the paradoxical nature of that self-organisation, and the implications this produces. Building on the potential for dissensus and consensus inherent to 'artist-led' activity, it establishes a central paradox to make the case for a new, wider, understanding of that self-organisation being required.

Initially the chapter focuses on exploring this central paradox, the aspects impacting artist-led self-organisation and the issues that often go unspoken as a result that hold significance for upholding the same, generally negative, conditions practitioners face. The discussion then brings into question the merits of institutional critique as a practice (given how it has itself become institutionalised within the art system), and if what Gerald Raunig refers to as 'instituent practices' could serve as a way to reconcile the issue of recuperated forms of critique. The viability of instituent practices as a potential methodology for artist-led self-organisation, and the possibility of maintaining a level of meaningful criticality without becoming wholly institutionalised within the contemporary visual arts field (CVAF), is crucial to the argument set out in the chapter. It concludes by reframing the current state of artist-led self-organisation as a neoliberal exemplar. Arguing an overhaul is needed in order to devise a clearer understanding of just what it is, and what it represents, in order to have any hope of larger collective organising and lobbying for meaningful and lasting change to occur in future. Here key references throughout in establishing the artist-led paradox and the implications arising from it are Jacques Rancière and Gerald Raunig, with particular importance placed on processes of dissenus and consensus and the role instituent practices could be utilised for, and psychologist Martin Seligman relating to the psychological underpinnings current social power dynamics have on practitioners.

The chapter seeks to answer the following research sub-questions:

- How is the proposed paradoxical nature of artist-led self-organisation established and reinforced, and could it be used as a strength by practitioners to further develop resistance?
- How is institutional critique engaged with and enacted by practitioners?
- What are key examples of current instituent practices used to enact dissensus in the sub-field?

Artist-Led Self-Organisation as/is Paradoxical

Throughout the thesis artist-led self-organisation has been shown to have been shaped by neoliberal conditions and processes in place in wider UK and Western society from the 1970s onwards. This has produced a relationship where the socio-economic system has largely dictated the parameters of practice for the various forms of self-organisation under the 'artist-led' moniker. Because of this I would argue it needs to be understood as being an inherently paradoxical approach to artistic practice, and not the wholly autonomous rebuke to the art system (and beyond) many characterise it to be. To date since its proposed inception in 2007 artist-led self-organisation has been dependant upon the very institutions, hierarchies and conditions it implicitly opposes in order for practitioners to derive meaning, create political opposition and structure new methodologies and processes of organisation. It is at the same time legitimised by those structures as an 'alternative', and serves to legitimise them. Solidifying their power through consensus and recuperated forms of critique routinely produced by practitioners, and with practitioners often repeating the same critiques that have previously become recuperated, as Rancière would have it (and as outlined in Chapter 3).[420]

The origins of this 'artist-led paradox' are most apparent when thought of in relation to the end of the original avant-garde movement. As outlined in Chapter 1, artist-run and artist-led approaches to practice can be linked to the earlier attempted revolutionary self-organisation of the avant-garde. In being

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[420] Rancière, "Art of the Possible."

historically connected to a movement that aimed for cultural revolution, but was ultimately co-opted by the governing capitalist socio-economic system, foundations were already laid for subsequent forms of self-organisation deriving from it to become regularly co-opted and exploited. With artist-led self-organisation being implicitly shaped and responding to conditions brought about through increasingly callous neoliberal social governance, a similar scenario was always likely to happen. This can be understood as being characterised by the feigned appearance of free choice when deciding to self-organise, shown in Chapter 2 to be brought about by the repressive tolerance of the neoliberal system itself. Practitioners are forced into their methodological approach by the very system they think they are acting in opposition to (in much the same way the Young British Artists, preceding artist-led self-organisation, did in the 1990s, as outlined in Chapter 1). There is no option in making that choice; it is dictated to them under the guise of a process of creating their own spaces for dissent and expression just inside the margins of mainstream society, or risking having no discernable artistic practice.

It is from that initial point of perceived opposition practitioners are generally oblivious to how insidiously ingrained the neoliberal system is within their methodologies of practice. The public and private funding bodies providing economic support generally work on a neoliberal, value-for-money, ethos. And the access to physical spaces for production and display (outside of established precarious studio and gallery spaces) is often limited for larger-scale institutional opportunities, or sees practitioners regularly become part of wider processes of artwashing and gentrification. The neoliberal system provides the social-technical architecture for contemporary existence and artistic practice at every level; there is no escaping from it (the orgnet exhibiting traits of a netorg that is the artist-led network is testament to this). The relationship artist-led self-organisation has with that same system is clearly antithetical to its supposed oppositional origins and underpinnings, and as such is paradoxical.

The number of constituents of the artist-led sub-field also does little to move it away from its paradoxical underpinnings. The understanding each individual has

of just what the 'artist-led' moniker is, or has the potential to be, in relation to other practitioners, actors, cultural and socio-economic institutions can be different in minute ways. But when taken in context of the loose grouping as a whole, serves only to confuse and confound positions further. The diversity of practices and viewpoints is often lauded as a strength of the sub-field, not confining practitioners to a specific approach or methodology of thought or practice. However in reality this total freedom generally works to stop cohesion and understanding between all parties. As mentioned in Chapter 3 this has instead led to co-optation and exploitation of practitioners by external actors and institutions. As has been the case since the 1950s and the rise of the DIY movement, for every organisation or practitioner able to flourish dozens become instrumentalised in the onward march of capitalism and latterly neoliberalism. Within this un-cohesive multitude of practitioners the boundaries of opposition shift so they are slightly different for each individual. As such, given the precarity most of this multitude exist within this usually serves to divide what would otherwise have the potential to be a critical mass able to collectively mobilise to lobby and legislate for meaningful change for themselves, the wider sub-field and CVAF. The paradox is reinforced by practitioners through the socio-economic conditions brought about by the neoliberal system. The weight of their numbers serves to create more consensus overall – and so reinforces the status quo – than it does create dissensus to challenge the conditions it labours under and against. The dissensual potential it possesses largely goes unrealised.

Within this paradox practitioners can be seen to generally accept the roles and competences they are inscribed within as part of the current consensus, and in this light a sense of apathy can be argued to have taken hold. The conditions they exist within and ultimately contribute to, as part of the precarity of their everyday lives, works to stifle the potential for collective mobilisation or direct action. As evident from the lack of social change developing from processes of artist-led self-organisation in a wider chain of equivalence, most practitioners do not see past the precariousness of their situation. One that feels like it has existed indefinitely thanks to the presentism of contemporaneity. Collectively practitioners cannot see past the toxicity of the relationship they are in. This has

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been perpetrated by a neoliberal state that has formed society in such a way to heighten marginalisation. Through the exploitation of labour, positioning digital media as a distraction tool to quell political unrest, and stoking fear and hate as a methodology to push through political reform, it has structured social power dynamics to ultimately serve those already in power, keeping marginalised peoples subjugated.

For practitioners enacting processes of artist-led self-organisation so much goes unspoken, unchallenged and accepted under those conditions serving only to raise barriers for participation, both initially and over the long term, and also for interaction with other social groups.[421] This includes other topics such as inclusion and openness, diversity, nepotism, solidarity, accountability, support (both social and economic), remuneration (for labour, services and artworks), the dynamics of collaboration and competition, the lack of knowledge on how to create and maintain small- and medium-sized cultural organisations, how to critique the gatekeepers and institutions of the CVAF when they alienate or misrepresent practitioners, and what the realities (both practical and ideological) are in existing as part of the artist-led sub-field for any extended length of time. In many respects artist-led self-organisation is so enmeshed within the CVAF and neoliberal society, practitioners cannot see how important tackling those generally unspoken issues are. To further reinforce the paradoxical nature of the sub-field, with the weight of numbers in the UK alone (taking Gielen's estimate of 90% of graduates from educational institutions globally existing as a murmur of unrealised potential),[422] if there was some way to collectively mobilise they could become a near unstoppable force to bring about changes that many practitioners long for. Instead because of the mass of differing perspectives and approaches the multitude, as per Gielen, serves only to create a murmur.[423] One of white noise that is regularly, and routinely, drowned out or ignored.

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[421] Addressing this was one of the motivations behind the *What We don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led* symposium. See Appendix 2.
[422] Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude*, 22.
[423] Ibid.

However the paradox inherent to artist-led self-organisation is not necessarily solely a barrier to meaningful action. It is undoubtedly a problem, and as outlined in the previous chapter, through creating any form of consensus (even as part of attempted dissensus) practitioners strengthen the power dynamics of the current formation of the art system and wider society. But when practitioners fully understand the implications of the paradox central to their self-organisation it creates an opportunity for them. An opportunity to exploit the neoliberal ties to their working methodologies, allowing them to create pockets of dynamic forms of dissensus that aren't recuperated back into the wider art or social system that could affect lasting change. This has allowed for a surprising level of access to many benefits from the formalised structures of the art system to realise projects or aid sustainability. Usually these benefits are only accessed by a relatively small number, especially following cuts in provision following austerity measures from 2010 onwards. As outlined in the previous chapter, even in such circumstances artist-led self-organisation still has the potential to act as part of a wider chain of equivalence to bring about lasting social change. However this is wholly dependant on the originality and dynamism of the critique developed.

Un-Institutional/Institutional/Anti-Institutional Critique and Instituent Practices

The relationship between artist-led self-organisation and institutional forms and structures – one of the key facets of its existence – has always existed paradoxically; reflective of the relationship it has with neoliberal society at large. Many practitioners seek to move away from existing structures entirely to create new ones, others seek to reformat those same existing structures, and many are indifferent and apathetic to the politics of the institutional form and instead simply seek to stage their practice in whatever online/offline space is most relevant (and often convenient). Here a key point must be stressed: artist-led self-organisation at any level is an inherently institutional form in and of itself. As such it is party to the same institutional politics as other aspects of the art

system and beyond.[424] Within that group of institutional forms any site created to host social interactions as an 'exhibition' space[425] regardless of how "open or non-hierarchically it defines its programme, is construed within relations of power and is itself, as an institutional site in the broadest terms, a space for the formation of particular forms of knowing."[426] Practitioners' self-organisation is always enacted in-line with social power dynamics as part of a wider institutional discourse of knowledge production; their organisational forms are expressions of power. Within those expressions of power are inherent (and often inadvertent) forms of critique central to the functioning of artist-led self-organisation.

Moving away from institutional sites and structures, to institute in a practical sense means to organise, to create something. All artist-led practices institute (often new) forms of knowledge and social organisation.[427] Providing new subjectivities, as Mouffe would have it,[428] in an ongoing process regardless of their viewpoint relating to the eventual sites or structures they could create. Through this process and creation of new subjectivities practitioners regularly institute new institutional forms and relationships with existing structures. Often aping existing institutional structures and repurposing them as they do so. These forms and relationships exist somewhere roughly on a spectrum of implicitly un-institutional/institutional/anti-institutional practices and critique. Along this spectrum there are differing levels of public and private opposition to

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[424] For a broad overview of institutional positions in the art system, using agonistic pluralism to structure the accounts as a form of learning from each other, see Paul O'Neill, Lucy Steeds & Mick Wilson, eds., *How Institutions Think: Between Contemporary Art and Curatorial Discourse* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2017).

[425] By exhibition space I mean any kind of online/offline space accessible to people to view or interact with artistic practices in the broadest sense.

[426] Mark Jackson "Alternative Spaces to Critical Spaces," in: *Permanent Recession: a Handbook on Art, Labor and Circumstance,* Onomatopee #169, ed. Channon Goodwin (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2019), 298.

[427] Curatorial practices also increasingly recognise instituting and institutions as sites of production. See Carolina Rito & Bill Balaskas, eds., *Institution as Praxis: New Curatorial Directions for Collaborative Research* (Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2020).

[428] Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Space."

institutional forms[429] from mild indifference, to acceptance, to outright rancour, and along those same lines varying degrees of organisation and administration.

Ironically as the behind-the-scenes organisation and administration intensifies as practitioners move toward a structured institutional form, those who shy away from such models often inadvertently work to reinforce consensus, ultimately remaining within the roles prescribed to them as part of the creative dark matter by those in power. As writer and curator Lauren Velvick states:

> Commonly, part of the reasoning for setting up artist-led spaces and organisations at all is to try and do things 'un-institutionally', to some extent rejecting professionalisation and the bureaucratic structures that institutions cultivate. But, despite the unglamorous nature of administration and bureaucracy, it is necessary if we want to keep records and hold people to account for their actions.[430]

This un-institutional methodology of being relatively carefree, ad-hoc and experimental helps perpetuate the social conditions practitioners seek to be alternative to. On the anti-institutional side of the spectrum similar problems persist. As Rossiter acknowledges, orgnets regularly fall back into hierarchical architectures of organisation,[431] and in that vein ironically so to do many practitioners with anti-institutional views. But like their counterparts who appropriate institutional forms to create new structures, here they are once again appropriated directly (in many instances) from the very institutions they seek to distance themselves from because they are part of the same neoliberal society. As such this oxymoronic approach ensures those same practitioners leave themselves and their practices ripe for co-optation. This usually takes the form of first being archived or displayed within institutional contexts, re-deployed latterly as tools to serve and 'educate' others about their actions. Again

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[429] This was reinforced by Gabrielle de la Puente, Gallery Manager of OUTPUT gallery at *Open Forum 1* in relation to criticism on a broad range of subjects from practitioners mainly being staged in private, with only a small amount being made public and acted upon. See Appendix 2.

[430] Lauren Velvick, "Artist-Run Multiverse Summit," *Corridor8,* February 13, 2019, accessed February 16, 2019, https://corridor8.co.uk/article/artist-run-multiverse-summit/

[431] Rossiter, *Organized Networks*, 14-15.

the original avant-garde movement and its own subsumption is pertinent here. Two contemporary examples of this (alongside assimilation into the cultural 'mainstream') specific to UK-based artist-run and artist-led self-organisation comes from the *Life/Live* survey exhibition of 'independent' artists and organisations from the UK curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1996, and *No Soul For Sale – A Festival of Independents* at Tate Modern in 2010, where for the gallery's 10th anniversary global independent practitioners and organisations, many from the UK, were invited (without pay) to occupy its Turbine Hall space for 3 days.[432] But in being presented by and within larger-scale institutional contexts, similar to practitioners with non-institutional tendencies, they too seemingly serve to reinforce the overplayed stereotype that ultimately there is really no institutional 'outside' to the CVAF. Eventually everything becomes subsumed to strengthen the current hierarchy of power, an apt example of the processes of the neoliberal system.

The first two waves of institutional critique are textbook examples of exactly this process, acting as cautionary tales of how practitioners today can hope to create dissensus and enact some form of critique whilst trying to avoid being so readily subsumed. With the first wave (roughly from 1960s – 1970s) concerned with highlighting and exploring the authority enacted upon artists by institutions through their socio-economic power and frameworks, the second wave (roughly from 1980s – 1990s) saw artists able to enter institutions to critique them directly in a new (and brief) climate of openness for critical discussion stoked by the first wave.[433] In the New Institutionalism movement of the 1990s institutions not only began to publicly embrace those critiquing them, but actively sought to

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[432] See Paris-Musées, *Life/Live: La scène artistique au Royaume-Uni en 1996 de nouvelles aventures* (Paris: Paris-Musées, 1996); Annette Monnier, "No Soul For Sale: 2 Articles, both alike in dignity," *Artblog*, October 08, 2010, accessed February 16, 2019,
https://www.theartblog.org/2010/10/no-soul-for-sale-2-articles-both-alike-in-dignity/

[433] See Alexander Alberro & Blake Stimson, eds., *Institutional Critique: an anthology of artists' writings* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009); Gerald Raunig & Gene Ray, eds., *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing institutional Critique* (London: MayFlyBooks, 2009).

acquire their work and the work of their first wave predecessors in a process of re-thinking the structure of their organisations and how they functioned.[434] Understandably through this process of acquisition practitioners, academics and art critics globally raised their concern and disapproval (largely to no avail). Andrea Fraser – one of the most prominent second wave artists – penned a response to the appropriative institutional approach, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique", where in 2005 she said bluntly: "Now, when we need it most, institutional critique is dead, a victim of its success or failure, swallowed up by the institution it stood against."[435]

The precedent was seemingly already set for artist-led self-organisation before it had fully developed. Institutional critique had become part of the complicit critique (outlined in the previous chapter) as described by Rasmussen.[436] The artists that enacted it had become increasingly complicit within the institutions they were seeking to critique. Their critique had literally become recuperated back into the mainstream of the art system as a methodology of practice adopted within exhibitions by large-scale institutions globally. As Fraser outlines, the 'institution' of institutional critique is the problem[437] – the very act of critique has been sequentially subsumed and nullified. Now we exist in a situation where (rightly) anyone can enact critique, but unless that takes the form of a dynamic dissensus it serves to merely legitimise the existing structures and inadequacies of the art system and beyond. The art system functions by claiming it is critical of itself and its own institution, yet in reality that critique does nothing but serve the system. Artist-led self-organisation is clearly part of this process; this recuperation of critique a key of the artist-led paradox and practitioners' production of consensus.

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[434] See Nina Möntmann "The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism: Perspectives on a Possible Future" in: *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique,* eds., Gerald Raunig & Gene Ray (London: MayFlyBooks, 2009), 155-160; Lucie Kolb & Gabriel Flückiger, eds. *On Curating*, Issue 21 (December 2013), (New) Institutional(ism), accessed February 20, 2019, https://on-curating.org/issue-21.html#.X2JZN5NKg1h

[435] Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique." *Artforum*. Vol.44, No.1, (September 2005): 101.

[436] Rasmussen, *After the Great Refusal*, 70-71.

[437] Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions."

In many ways this institutional appropriation and absorption of the practitioners critical of them – and crucially the recuperation of their critique – reflects cultural institutions' neoliberal tendencies in utilising 'appropriative capitalism'. Mould outlines this process as preying on alternative creative practices by stabilising "those movements, people and ideas that are 'outside' it by naming them. It brings them into the 'mainstream' and the broader public consciousness. It does this all to prep them for commercialisation."[438] Here it is not just the physical institutions such as galleries that perform it, but essentially all forms of social institutions including public and private funding bodies, governmental organisations, universities, other academic institutions, and publishers. They name those subcultural and/or alternative practices or force them to name themselves for the purposes of accessing resources or support, making them known, ready to be entered into the market and ultimately be exploited in some capacity for profit. Arguably this happened for artist-run practitioners and organisations in the UK under the New Labour government. Artists were used as exemplary of how people should act entrepreneurially in society, which given their interrelatedness has been carried over onto those in the artist-led sub-field. The rise of network culture has also contributed to the increasing lack of peripheries and rise of appropriative capitalism in which people can no longer claim to be truly alternative to the mainstream. As Lovink and Rossiter state:

> In earlier times there was either the mainstream or the margin. You could exist in one but not both. Within a near universal condition of a mainstream without margins, the capacity to devise and unleash the power of critique is consigned to the *Trauerspiel* of modernity. Immanence without an outside is submission with occasional resistance whose only effect is to supply data-driven capitalism with a surplus of records and related metatags.[439]

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[438] Mould, *Against Creativity,* 13. Appropriative capitalism describes a key part of the new spirit of capitalism raised by Boltanski and Chiapello, and the benevolent neutrality of the art market as outlined by Marcuse, both in Chapter 1.

[439] Lovink & Rossiter, *Organization after Social Media*, 7.

Within this near universal mainstream where recuperated critique is so prevalent it is unsurprising practitioners, similarly to their predecessors in the first two waves of institutional critique, have developed a back-and-forth relationship with the institutional structures of the art system. Unlike their predecessors however, a large percentage of practitioners will be imbedded in cultural institutions on a daily basis, as evidenced by the firsthand accounts from speakers at the *Precarity in the Arts* talk, outlined in Chapter 3.[440] Their status as 'failed' artists as part of the creative dark matter drawing them to labour within the same institutions they routinely enact critique against, as outlined in chapter 2.[441] Not only in order to sustain their day-to-day lives and practices, but to gain recognition from those in power as having a role within the 'proper' institutionalised sites of the art system. Even those that don't labour within institutions will still spend a great deal of time within them as part of trying to contextualise, maintain and develop their own practices. In this situation it is unsurprising that seeing how those same structures 'successfully' operate would draw practitioners to them to either employ or critique them themselves.

This aping can be seen as linked to the first wave of institutional critique, and reinforces how recuperated critique has become. Initially it was larger-scale institutions that would begin to ape artist-run structures from the 1960s and 1970s onwards, notably the project space.[442] But as time progressed the back-and-forth would become more apparent as formalising and hierarchical conventions were employed by practitioners aping larger-scale institutions in order to frame their own instances of critique. In the UK this relationship has continued and has arguably become one of interdependence between practitioners and institutional structures. Not only do they routinely labour within them and ape their forms in their own organisations, they invite participation from institutional staff in their organisational programming. Institutions rely on practitioners to help keep their programmes practically (and in places conceptually) running, whilst practitioners rely on institutions for

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[440] FACT, "Talk: Precarity in the Arts."
[441] Sholette, *Dark Matter*.
[442] Such as with MoMA PS1, as outlined in Chapter 3.

sources of income, occasional support and organisational inspiration.[443] Even when critique is enacted in this setting it is clear that recuperated, consensual, critique is most likely to occur. Broadly practitioners seemingly won't risk losing the support (financial and otherwise) they can gain from those same institutions through being too critical of them given their general precarity. Even at the cost of becoming routinely co-opted and exploited through precarious work and unpaid internships, and processes such as artwashing and gentrification. Again it reinforces the artist-led paradox and self-serving nature of much critique in the art system. To paraphrase Nam June Paik, "an artist's job is to bite the hand that feeds him, but not too hard."[444]

This interdependent relationship where practitioners at all points of the institutional spectrum are routinely co-opted and exploited reaffirms Fraser's assertion of there being no time when meaningful institutional critique has been needed more. In returning to Fraser, in the same text she claims 'we are the institution'[445] in reference to there being no outside to the form of the institution itself, instead proposing a new understanding of a wider form of social, rather than purely institutional, critique from the art system. I agree that such a move is both useful for, and reflective of, the socially engaged practices of artist-led self-organisation and the dissensual critique that practitioners routinely enact. However throughout her text Fraser calls for art to be incorporated into a unified social institution (with the rest of society) from which wider critique can then occur. I also agree with this position, however she repeatedly talks of the art system as both part of and distinct from this unified society, reasserting a view that art (and by proxy the CVAF) is autonomous from the rest of society. This positions art as having greater importance and not being truly interrelated with other fields. Instead I would draw on the proposed 'third wave' of institutional critique put forward by the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (eipcp) in the 2006 edition of their *Transversal* journal series titled *do you*

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[443] FACT, "Talk: Precarity in the Arts."
[444] Grayson Perry, "Grayson Perry: in defence of super-rich knick-knacks," *Financial Times*, September 20, 2019, accessed November 08, 2019, https://www.ft.com/content/730164cc-cd97-11e9-b018-ca4456540ea6
[445] Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions," 105.

remember institutional critique? to move toward that potential unified social institution.

The premise of a third wave of institutional critique is outlined as a framing device for the practice, integrating it into the socio-economic conditions of contemporary society. Steyerl (as part of the eipcp) puts forward her view on how this integration could occur in "The Institution of Critique", stating:

> In the third phase the only integration which seems to be easily achieved is the one into precarity. And in this sense we can nowadays answer the question concerning the function of the institution of critique as follows: while critical institutions are being dismantled by neoliberal institutional criticism, this produces an ambivalent subject which develops multiple strategies for dealing with its dislocation. It is on the one side being adapted to the needs of ever more precarious living conditions. On the other, there seems to have hardly ever been more need for institutions which could cater to the new needs and desires that this constituency will create.[446]

Here the organisational forms developed through artist-led self-organisation can be understood to cater for the needs and desires of the precarity of contemporary life for practitioners, and through their increasing social engagement, wider publics. Raunig (also part of the eipcp) contributes to the need for a third wave of institutional critique, linking his idea of 'instituent practices' (those practices that institute to create new forms or methodologies) with philosopher Michel Foucault's use of the ancient Greek concept of 'parrhesia' (free speech). In doing so the 'speaking freely' afforded by parrhesia as an institutional right – usually from a bottom-up perspective – is reframed as a way for institutional critique in the CVAF to move into other fields reflecting the diffuse nature of art and everyday life. This is counter to Fraser's assertion of art's autonomy from wider sociality, effectively integrating the two positions. Because of this, Raunig argues, institutional critique will always have the scope to develop and mingle with other forms of social critique within and outside of

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[446] Hito Steyerl, "The Institution of Critique," *Tranversal*, do you remember institutional critique? (January 2006), accessed January 21, 2018. https://transversal.at/transversal/0106/steyerl/en

the CVAF. In "Instituent Practices. Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming", he states in order to do this what is needed are:

> practices that conduct radical social criticism, yet which do not fancy themselves in an imagined distance to institutions; at the same time, practices that are self-critical and yet do not cling to their own involvement, their complicity, their imprisoned existence in the art field, their fixation on institutions and the institution, their own being-institution. Instituent practices that conjoin the advantages of both "generations" of institutional critique, thus exercising both forms of parrhesia, will impel a linking of social criticism, institutional critique and self-criticism. This link will develop, most of all, from the direct and indirect concatenation with political practices and social movements, but without dispensing with artistic competences and strategies, without dispensing with resources of and effects in the art field...as participation in processes of instituting and in political practices that traverse the fields, the structures, the institutions.[447]

Here Raunig's title is key. Fleeing, instituting and transforming are required in order to traverse the fields, structures and institutions and attempt to break free from the recuperation of critique in the form of consensus – seemingly granting an increase in autonomy – in a third wave of institutional critique. With Raunig asserting instituent practices required for this do not hold themselves at an imagined distance from social institutions, and at the same time don't fixate on the institutional form or their own institutional structure all whilst being self-critical, in many ways he can be seen to describe enacting dissensus from a position of self-referentiality, self-reflexivity and wider social understanding present in much artist-led self-organisation. Within this self-organisation practitioners combine the two previous waves of institutional critique through their enaction of critique (regardless of its complicity), and their involvement within institutional structures. The key is how to ensure their practices become instituent forms of dissensus rather than contributing to the wider consensus and maintenance of the current status quo.

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[447] Gerald Raunig, "Instituent Practices. Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming," *Transversal*, do you remember institutional critique? (January 2006), accessed January 21, 2018.
https://transversal.at/transversal/0106/raunig/en

With Raunig framing instituent practices with Foucault's use of parrhesia and his wider understanding of the relationship of *government* and *not to be governed like that* it allows them to reflect "on the contemporary relationship between institution and critique."[448] In other words they are concerned with speculating on, or contributing to, the ongoing development of governmental forms through critique of social institutions outside of those related purely to visual art. When applied to artist-led self-organisation it outlines the reason practitioners generally do not necessarily seek to destroy social government and create something new in line with the original spirit of the avant-garde. But instead through dissensus, as part of a radical (agonistic) pluralism, speculate and put into practice ways to re-develop what that governing force is and can be. Instituent practices are, according to Raunig, inherently in flight and dynamic. Drawing on Virno's concept of exodus[449] by the multitude as a method not of retreat but of changing the conditions of power and resistance, he states such an exodus can actually be a productive force. In effect fleeing to find a 'weapon' to resist those in power with.[450] Raunig goes on to assert when applied to the visual arts this is how instituent practices can be understood as behaving. Practitioners and organisations are in a constant process of transformation and instituting, unable to be pinned down; once again the active verb is key.[451] They are:

> linked and intertwined with constituent power, re-organizing, re-inventing and instituting. The movement of flight also preserves these instituent practices from structuralization and closure from the start, preventing them from becoming institution in the sense of constituted power.[452]

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[448] Ibid.

[449] Virno describes exodus as transforming "the context within which a problem has arisen, rather than facing this problem by opting for one or the other of the provided alternatives." Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude,* 70.

[450] Raunig, "Instituent Practices. Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming."

[451] Such active verbs can be seen as stemming form the works of philosopher Gilles Deleuze, notably the concept of the 'line of flight' he developed alongside fellow philosopher Félix Guattari. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: The Athlone Press, 1988).

[452] Raunig, "Instituent Practices. Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming."

Protected by exodus and flight allowing them to constantly re-format themselves, instituent practices are arguably symptomatic of the neoliberal age; (self-)organising to ensure their relevance and survival away from the rigidity of traditional socio-cultural institutional forms. Understood as a verb not a noun. Part of an orgnet rather than a netorg. There are numerous instances of instituent practices within forms of artist-led self-organisation, but recent pertinent examples include Coventry Biennial, Keep It Complex, and the collaborative practice of Sophie Chapman and Kerri Jefferis.

Coventry Biennial may at first appear to follow the established biennial operational model. But what makes this festival significant (and different from its UK-based biennial peers) is that it is aping and utilising the biennial festival model, but manifesting its programme as a large-scale artist-led project. It works within the paradox of artist-led self-organisation to function as a critical and reflexive entity. Describing itself as the UK's 'social biennial' the organisation states:

> Coventry Biennial is…about a commitment to society, its about a personable and non-institutional approach to existing in the world…Founded in 2017 as an artist-led and strategic response to the city publishing its 10 year cultural strategy and bidding to become UK City of Culture, we are an activist organisation which responds to the city's complex history, geography, built environment and relationships but we retain an outward looking perspective, ensuring that our programme has wider appeal, significance and impact…Coventry Biennial supports artists and community groups to respond to the world(s) around them and encourages collaboration, partnerships and other kinds of informal support between artists, organisations and citizens.[453]

Through this subtle, but arguably substantial, pivot away from the explicit display of globalised art as primary focus the festival has instead sought to champion more early-career practitioners in its first iterations. Highlighting how art can be used as a meaningful placemaking and cultural policy tool for a city and its inhabitants, it positions practitioners central to discourse around changing social relations and structures of the city itself. Given its use of the

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[453] "About Coventry Biennial," Coventry Biennial, accessed April 09, 2020, https://www.coventrybiennial.com/about/

biennial model, the festival quite literally moves through the institutions and beyond, never becoming fixed as a constituted power, always in a state of becoming. Responding to different issues in each iteration of the festival, never consistently concerned with one particular subject.

Image 10. Coventry Biennial, Instagram post, October 29, 2019, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/B4N-bqiFf5e/?igshid=1dndoje15v6mi

With Coventry Biennial having had two iterations to date, arguably the festival is still being established and will likely take more time to fully develop as a critical entity, and could indeed still pivot away from existing as a truly artist-led biennial depending on pressure exerted from multi-stakeholders that support

the festival. However Keep It Complex offer a more rounded outlet for dissensus as an instituent practice. Initiated by a group of artists backing the 'remain' campaign in the 2016 EU referendum,[454] following the vote the organisation shifted to become:

> a collaborative and evolving organisation which confronts political issues through ideas and action. It's about using art to have conversations with people you don't usually talk to. It's about not giving in to fear and apathy…We work collaboratively to run events, curate workshops, facilitate discussions and create campaign materials…Keep It Complex is about making clear what we want, without simplifying discussion: a peaceful, caring, angry, anti-austerity, factual, DIY, transnational, struggling, messy, family-friendly, queer, inclusive, intergenerational, generous, diverse society.[455]

Here the fluid structure and the diversity and changing nature of concerns are evident. Bridging the gap between other (often radical) social movements and utilising creative methodologies of expression. Within this scope for dissensus the organisation consistently re-shapes its responses to suit each particular situation. They are the facilitators using creative means to communicate with different, often divided, social groups; they are indicative of Mouffe's wider chain of equivalence at work.[456]

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[454] Although Keep It Complex describes itself as being 'artist-run' it also appears on the "Artist-Led Hot 100 (version ii)" and is grouped with other 'artist-led' organisations, reinforcing the interchangeability practitioners often perceive between the two terms. See Hunt, "Artist-Led Hot 100 (version ii)."
[455] "Information," Keep It Complex, accessed April 09, 2020, https://makeitclear.eu/information
[456] Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces."

Image 11. Keep It Complex, Instagram post, June 19, 2019, accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/By5hzm6l88k/?igshid=ce9r27v2c51e

This instituent ethos and chain of equivalence also extends to the collaborative work of Sophie Chapman and Kerri Jefferis, who state:

> Our practice is rooted in the politics of collaboration, together we orchestrate anarchic situations and improvised encounters – opening space for critical and convivial exchange. The remains from these events are shaped into artworks…Common to each work is the desire to convene differing people and enact prefigurative forms of resistance. Prompted by

the feminist 'practice of doing', we invite people to re-orientate, unlearn or embody unfamiliar ways of being, together.[457]

Their collaboration is rooted in social practice and underscored by the varying forms 'support structures'[458] can take in hosting and presenting artworks. Artworks here understood as remnants of social interactions and developing various forms of resistance to governing structures. Through this process they work across (usually working class) communities and locations to form instances of dissensus through making connections using creative means. Their practice exemplifies smaller working groups and their propensity for forming instituent practices as part of artist-led self-organisation.

Image 12. Sophie Chapman + Kerri Jefferis, "'Idle Acts' film still," accessed November 29, 2020, https://www.sophieandkerri.com/idle-acts

However as with the artist-led relationship between producing consensus and dissensus, similar issues are at hand here in relation to instituent practices turning into constituted power and ultimately contributing to social consensus.

[457] "Self-Narrate," Sophie Chapman + Kerri Jefferis, accessed April 09, 2020, https://www.sophieandkerri.com/self-narrate
[458] Based on the work of artist Céline Condorelli and her collaborative project with artist-curator Gavin Wade, 'Support Structure' (2003 – 2009), alongside a subsequent publication critically exploring what is and constitutes 'support' for artistic practitioners. Céline Condorelli, *Support Structures* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009).

As with the production of consensus and dissensus, precarity and the sheer number of practitioners active under the 'artist-led' moniker have the same impact. The weight of numbers of practitioners each with slightly divergent views on how to organise themselves contributes largely, but the integration into precarity Steyerl outlines as indicative of a third wave of institutional critique is key. As precarity acts to suppress artistic practices and organisation through limiting sustainability it means processes of instituting practitioners perform often lead them away from being instituent practices because of the desire for economic stability. Although the fluidity and dynamism of instituent practices are tied to the precarious nature of the social conditions of which they are a part, it does not mean that longevity of a group, collective, organisation or project stops it functioning as one. Rather the nature of the longevity and how it is achieved does. When practitioners are able to secure resources over a longer term they generally move toward static institutional models – more often than not guided there by the organisations, bodies or associations providing them – whilst moving away from the role and capacity of instituent practices.

Not static in the sense of being fixed in a physical space. But static in their capacity to compose and re-compose their constituent power repeatedly in relation to ongoing glocal concerns related to 'artist-led', 'artist-run', and other socio-political issues (or indeed their potential for exodus). They become stuck concerning themselves with one or a small number of particular issues that then become their driving force, rather than being able to re-focus on new and different issues as the need arises. Usually this takes the form of creating studio provision or creating a public programme of exhibitions and events where there was previously a lack. Even though within these two loose categories there is the potential to re-focus critique on a variety of subjects, often the constraints required for continued funding and spatial provision tie the hands of those in charge to behave in expected ways. Falling in line with the competences Rancière posits as part of consensus.[459]

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[459] Rancière, "Art of the Possible."

Again practitioners are part of a paradox; in order to be able, or attempt, to enact dissensus over a longer period and remain outside of relative precarity whilst doing so invariably they have to accept resources from those they are seeking to critique, usually as part of a mixed source funding model as outlined in Chapter 3. At which point the critique is nullified, as (following Raunig) through structuralisation they begin to lose the constituent power that helped develop them as instituent practices to begin with.[460] This structuralisation is not practitioners and organisations becoming increasingly institutional, but becoming organised in such a way as to block their capacity for constant re-formatting. Here examples could be drawn from any number of organisations currently active, but arguably SPACE (as first outlined in relation to a blurring of terminology in Chapter 1) presents a symptomatic case. Through becoming increasingly structuralised since their inception to support the provision of affordable studio space in London (that led the oppositional and experimental practices of the time), now they have become structuralised to such a degree that their organisational capacity to support critical issues has waned in favour of ensuring they fundraise and meet their charitable goals (which are far removed from any oppositional underpinnings), reinforcing the paradox.[461] Unlike the relationship between artist-led self-organisation and the production of consensus and dissensus, where practitioners can inadvertently produce consensus, here practitioners have to actively move toward structuralisation. Although this ultimately leads to consensus, arguably practitioners here have more potential to navigate away from that structuralisation and towards maintaining their instituent practices.

This paradoxical structuralisation has been present for the would-be instituent practices of artist-led self-organisation since its inception (and indeed crossing over with artist-run practices preceding artist-led self-organisation), but how has this process come to be reinforced as part of the artist-led sub-field? Although it can be perceived as inadvertent, as outlined that is clearly not the case when scrutinised in any detail, in much the same way as the artist-led

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[460] Raunig, "Instituent Practices. Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming."
[461] Harding, *Artists in the City*.

paradox impacts artist-led self-organisation at a fundamental level. The reality, like so much of the makeup of artist-led self-organisation, is that it is entwined with the rise of free market capitalism and neoliberalism. Although now there is a growing interdependence between the sub-field and the institutions its practitioners supposedly implicitly oppose, this increasing reliance was instead once fierce opposition to, and independence from, those institutions. This first began (as outlined in Chapter 1) with the DIY movement in the 1950s followed by American artist-run practitioners and organisations, and the alternative space movement, reinforced by the Art Workers Coalition (and broader understandings of the social production of an artwork) from the 1960s onwards.

This genealogy offered practitioners a shared identity but allowed them to be brought into public discourse and knowledge; selectively brought into the commercial market or forced into the creative dark matter. I would argue this move forced, and continues to force, practitioners into widespread structuralisation to seek forms of sustainability away from the dissensual and instituent practices many may have envisioned. Because of this move to define intangible (and formerly unassociated) processes as part of the makeup of the visual arts many of the resource keepers in the CVAF and socio-political institutions have over time from the 1980s – coinciding with the Conservative government instilling a value-for-money ethos at the Arts Councils in the UK – altered their selection criteria and assessment metrics to focus on quantitative data as a way to circumvent this. In short, in order to ensure continuing power over art workers institutional gatekeepers shifted the parameters to preempt any further diversification of what could constitute a visual arts practice. By rigidly adhering to quantitative metrics for what are largely qualitative outputs it has ensured practitioners have to become, or remain, structuralised to a certain degree in order to have any chance of access to public or private resources to aid sustainability. Further reinforcing the power relations of the CVAF and wider society.

Because of this instituting and the structuralisation necessitated by those in power, practitioners have constantly had to adapt their own practices and

incorporate new, often wildly diverse, skills into their day-to-day lives. All of this is bracketed by the precarity of contemporaneity, ensuring practitioners that do structuralise often become trapped within those processes. Unable to escape aside from stepping back from, or in some cases closing down, their groups, collectives, projects or organisations. However those that do manage to avoid total structuralisation find themselves with a range of skills that can be turned back against the art system in order to continue developing dissenus through instituent practices.

This once again highlights the paradoxical nature of artist-led self-organisation. Practitioners are regularly trapped adhering to processes they only become part of in order to secure resources from parties they are generally opposed to. All for the sake of perpetuating their practices that present implicit opposition to, and critique of, them that usually remains nullified because of the structuralisation that occurs through accepting those resources. This causes many to reassess their approaches and attempt to self-fund or group with others to fund their projects and practice, often plunging them further into precarious living and working conditions. What becomes clear is they are both expected and required to perform a number of roles within their designation as a practitioner to function in the artist-led sub-field and wider CVAF. Arguably this can be understood as being warped from the original premise and intention of redefining the art worker in the 1960s by those in power, alongside the rise of neoliberalism and the managerial dogma key to the economic system's development. As Forkert outlines, the:

> infrastructure of alternative spaces and public art programmes which began to develop in the 1960s and 1970s continued to expand and also became institutionalised, in some cases receiving state funding. This had the effect of creating jobs for artists, who would be employed by such spaces as educators and administrators; to a certain limited extent, it also normalized the role of artists occupying these roles, and the competencies developed within them.[462]

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[462] Forkert, *Artistic Lives: A Study of Creativity*, 23.

It is these roles and the new competencies practitioners are forced to develop that provide both exploitation and opportunity. With the increasingly inscribed and pervasive core tenets of neoliberalism (entrepreneurialism, flexibility, competition, etc.) practitioners, following their artist-run predecessors, would essentially have to operate as a myriad of roles in any form of organisation or as a freelancer. Whilst this is commonplace in self-organised activities, for those within the artist-led sub-field this has often meant, and continues to mean, their practices suffer because of the impact these extra responsibilities exert on them. In any given group, collective, organisation or as a freelancer there is an expectation to fulfil one or all of the roles outside of creating artworks (in whatever form artworks may take). In some capacity they must also address administrative, fundraising, commercial sales, engagement, technical, curatorial, marketing, and other roles.[463] They can be understood as self-organised polymaths.

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[463] As outlined in Chapter 3, this added range of responsibilities often has a negative impact on creative outputs, further reinforcing practitioners' precarity.

The White Pube
@thewhitepube

Artists trying to be their own curator, press and marketing team, administrator, technician, studio manager, art handler, social media manager, web designer, application writer, archivist, and photographer who documents the work all at once

10:50 · 30/10/2019 · Twitter for iPhone

268 Retweets **27** Quote Tweets **1,052** Likes

Image 13. The White Pube, Twitter post, 10:50 am, October 30, 2019, accessed November 29, 2020,
https://twitter.com/thewhitepube/status/1189494862833422337?s=21

With rethinking forms of exhibition making from the post-war period onwards and with the breakdown of medium specificity in the 1960s, the role of the curator is regularly amalgamated within the practices and processes of self-organisation. This is usually the most recognised example of such an incorporation of roles, with practitioners regularly going on to become labelled as an 'artist-curator'.[464] With other roles not receiving such recognition, the figure of the artist-curator could be seen to be an outlier and instead indicative of

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[464] Elena Filipovic, ed., *The Artist as Curator: An Anthology* (Milan: Mousse Publishing; London: Koenig Books Ltd., 2017).

highlighting how practitioners combine archetypes of the CVAF. Pryde-Jarman explores this subject in his 2013 thesis.[465] Critically analysing the role of the artist-curator in context of artist-run practices, and how those practices might create new working dynamics within artist-curator-run spaces.[466] He situates his own practice as fluidly between both sides of the artist-curator divide, as such occupying the role of 'curator-artist' depending on the context.[467]

Furthering this line of thought, there is no widespread public acknowledgement of the artist-administrator, artist-fundraiser, artist-salesperson, artist-engagement officer, artist-technician, artist-marketer, etc. Let alone the inverse of them for the administrator-artist, fundraiser-artist, salesperson-artist, engagement officer-artist, technician-artist or marketer-artist. In essence practitioners have to be everything, or a mixture of everything, at once. Usually getting credit for none of the many roles subsumed within their practice as it is seen as part of their existence. This is a global issue for practitioners and any other self-organised activity in other fields. With the supposed 'freedom' afforded to all by neoliberal society in regards to how, where and for whom individuals labour Indonesian artist collective ruangrupa perhaps sums up this situation best. When artist Reinaart Vanhoe describes how the collective define artistic practices in *Also-Space, From Hot to Something Else* he states: "An interesting metaphor in this respect, often cited by members of ruangrupa, is the 'total football' developed in the Netherlands in the 1970s, in which any player can assume any position in the field at any time."[468]

Moving fluidly between different positions to dynamically occupy spaces or roles that need filling at different stages or times, as per Raunig,[469] is apt. This

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[465] Given my own argument for situating the inception of artist-led self-organisation in the UK in 2007 I would agree with Pryde-Jarman's use of terminology; throughout his thesis he relates his research to the 'shared categories' of artist-run and artist-led practices, reinforcing their perceived interchangeability, outlined in Chapter 1.

[466] Pryde-Jarman, "Curating the Artist-run Space."

[467] Ibid, 6.

[468] Vanhoe, *Also-Space, From Hot to Something Else*, 16.

[469] Raunig, "Instituent Practices. Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming."

incorporation of roles somewhat mirrors Thatcher's inadvertent funding of artist-run spaces in the 1980s through social support outlined in Chapter 1. Here the art system is forcing practitioners to gain skills and knowledge to help reinforce power dynamics, but providing them with the capacities to develop instituent practices if they don't become too structuralised. Building from Vanhoe's total football metaphor, the artist-led paradox is once again apparent. In existing within the art system practitioners face both the problem of their own being, and the opportunity that same precarious existence can provide for meaningfully challenging the social status quo. The shifting dynamics between these two sides are in a constant flux of consensus and dissensus.

Artist-Led, and You Fucked it up

On the second day of the *Ecologies & Economies of the Artist-Led: Space, Place, Futures Symposium*[470] convened by the Artist-Led Research Group (Leeds),[471] artist and director of Creative Factory (Middlesbrough)[472] Gordon Dalton opened his contribution with the following slide:

"ARTIST-LED, AND YOU FUCKED IT UP, ARTIST-LED, AND YOU FUCKED IT UP"[473]

[470] Artist-Led Research Group, *Ecologies & Economies of the Artist-Led: Space, Place, Futures Symposium.* Symposium publication (Leeds: Artist-Led Research Group, 2018), accessed June 06, 2019, https://artistledresearchgroup.files.wordpress.com/2019/06/arg_a4_book_2.1.pdf
[471] "About," Artist-Led Research Group, accessed November 01, 2017, https://artistledresearchgroup.wordpress.com/about/
[472] "About," Creative Factory, accessed June 06, 2019, http://creativefactoryboro.co.uk/about
[473] Gordon Dalton, "WTF is a Creative Factory?" *Ecologies & Economies of the Artist-Led: Space, Place, Futures Symposium,* from University of Leeds, School of Fine Art, History of Art & Cultural Studies, 27 October, 2018.

Image 14. James Schofield, "Gordon Dalton presentation at the *Ecologies and Economies of the Artist-Led: Space, Place, Futures* symposium, Leeds" (October 27, 2018).

Cutting through any pretensions with the attendees of artist-led self-organisation as some sort of utopian, bohemian, cultural space, Dalton's presentation focused on the labour conditions that make up the reality of everyday life for practitioners. The discussion following the presentation focused on the acceptance of often having multiple jobs vs. the desire to challenge why that situation is the case. Questioning if a separation between the forms of work required to facilitate practice needs to exist, or if they should be considered part of that practice? Whilst this marries with the line of thought from the incorporation of other skill sets and roles into the makeup of a practitioner, I would like to return to the content of the first slide and expand upon it further.

Intentionally confrontational, the slide acted (and acts) as a collective dressing down to all identifying as part of the artist-led sub-field. It is not suggesting personally each practitioner is the sole reason for the state of the sub-field and the dominance those in power in the CVAF hold over them. But that in not outrightly challenging that power in any meaningful capacity – or attempting to

challenge it and redress the problem of recuperated critique – that obviously it will continue through collective inaction. At its inception artist-led self-organisation was a direct response to the socio-political conditions of the time. In much the same way most other self-organised movements that preceded it globally were, there was a confrontational beginning that would then wane over time. In the visual arts these same movements, groups and self-organised strategies may have seemingly all been created in some capacity by practitioners, artists, art workers, etc. but in reality their origins were shaped by the forces they sought to rally against. The lack of opportunities and resources they set out to combat forced them to self-organise or risk losing everything. Self-organisation in the UK may now be understood as being 'artist-led', but it is in no way, shape or form purely centred on artists. This is a key point that often goes overlooked; it is not so much self-organised practices are hijacked by capital, but unknowingly or unwittingly and callously shaped by it at every step.

Very rarely (if ever) are artist-led practices anything other than repressively tolerated or allowed to occur in an abstract sense by those in power. The appropriative capitalism that catalysed this hijacking is also nothing new; it has been an ongoing, and widely recognised, process for decades. One interesting observation within this situation, outlined at the start of this chapter, is practitioners that have been part of artist-led (and even formerly artist-run) processes for any length of time seem to develop an almost understanding acceptance of this hijacking and the socio-economic barriers and conditions they will face as just part of the landscape, whereas newcomers are more inclined initially to rally against those same conditions, until they too reach a point of embittered acceptance.

I would re-frame this collective acceptance and lack of response over time as pointing towards a collective state of 'learned helplessness' between practitioners. Discovered and developed by chance in a series of experiments involving canine test subjects in the 1960s and 1970s by Martin Seligman, learned helplessness describes when a subject becomes so used to certain negative outcomes in situations they won't take action to avoid those outcomes

in future situations, even when there are alternative options for other (positive) actions and outcomes to occur. In his follow up book exploring the theory in greater detail[474] Seligman would go on to outline how such learned helplessness could lead to other negative conditions in people relating to self-worth and self-esteem alongside other mental and physical issues. He initially outlined the general premise for his theory in "Learned Helplessness":

> Not only do we face events that we can control by our actions, but we also face many events about which we can do nothing at all. Such uncontrollable events can significantly debilitate organisms: they produce passivity in the face of trauma, inability to learn that responding is effective.[475]

Although his theory was initially applied to individuals, it would later be expanded to encompass groups,[476] producing similar effects. It is here I would argue of its relevance to the current formation of power relations between practitioners, the rest of the art system and wider social power structures. Practitioners can be understood to demonstrate the main components of the theory, reinforced by the recuperation of much of their supposed 'critique'. Over time accepting negative outcomes (lack of funding, space, sustainability, and general precarity, overwork, stress, etc.) and not attempting to change this acceptance despite there being clear potential for different actions and outcomes available (such as sustained and public critique, direct action and protest, or even joining a national union such as the Artists' Union England[477] or the Scottish Artists Union[478] to legislate for change at an institutional level). When understood, a consequence of this learned helplessness can be argued to have led practitioners to feeling a certain degree of hopelessness at the situation they

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[474] Martin E.P. Seligman, *Helplessness: On Depression, Development and Death* (New York: W.H. Freeman & Co Ltd, 1975).

[475] Martin E.P. Seligman "Learned Helplessness," in: *Annual Review of Medicine*, Vol.23 (February 1972): 407.

[476] David K. Simkin, Jan P. Lederer & Martin E.P. Seligman, "Learned helplessness in groups," in: *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, Vol.21, Issue 6 (1983): 613-622.

[477] "Explore," Artists' Union England, accessed March 07, 2020, https://www.artistsunionengland.org.uk/#explore

[478] "About Us," Scottish Artists Union, accessed March 07, 2020, https://www.artistsunion.scot/about

exist and labour within. In turn this continues to negatively impact their collective physical and mental wellbeing. As outlined at various points throughout this thesis, the precarious conditions practitioners contend with have a direct impact on their physical and mental wellbeing, but because of the debilitating nature of learned helplessness they largely feel literally helpless to do anything against them.

This also contributes to maintaining the power hierarchies, structures and dynamics of the art system. Being essentially locked in socio-economic cycles where negative aspects become conditioned and accepted into the collective mindset of practitioners raises further barriers for instituent practices, and meaningful dissensus, to be enacted. Under these conditions even as part of a wider chain of equivalence there are no immediately realistic ways to re-shape the power dynamics of how the artist-led sub-field, CVAF and wider field of power interact with one another. Artist-led self-organisation, like the rest of society, has been subsumed within neoliberalism to such an extent it has accepted the system as dominant and seemingly changing only fleetingly at the will of those in power, whilst allowing others to benefit from their productive, non-productive and useful labour.[479]

Even outlining the generally misguided sentiment of artist-led self-organisation being 'created' by artists but hijacked by capital reinforces not only how paradoxical the current state of that self-organisation is, but how pervasive those power relations have become. Seligman said organisms had to learn responding in different ways is effective, but I would argue practitioners also need to learn it is affective. It shows others there are different ways to respond they can follow or adapt for themselves. When digital technology has made connectivity a key part of contemporary life, there has never been a period where the tools to begin

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[479] Cultural theorist Marc James Léger outlines how those in power try to make the unproductive labour of practitioners as productive as possible through social engagement providing services for others that can be instrumentalised in processes such as artwashing and gentrification. Marc James Léger, *The Neoliberal Undead. Essays on Contemporary Art and Politics* (Winchester: Zer0 Books, 2013), 86-107.

to escape learned helplessness have been so widely available and accessible. With artist-led strategies and methodologies shaped by capital, it is an ignorance or obliviousness to this point that arguably kick-starts the process to begin with. In attempting to have any form of autonomy from parts or all of the institutionalised structures and procedures of the art system and other forms of social governance without recognising this fact, practitioners face a bleak landscape. To return to Dalton's slide, arguably artist-led self-organisation being fucked up comes from the paradox inherent to its initial formation. The conditions and preconceptions of that self-organisation were rigged from the start in favour of the economic system. Only when practitioners realise just how fucked up the historical social-technical development of the artist-led sub-field was, in comparison to the oppositional motivations by its constituents, can they then begin to formulate methods of meaningful dissensus. Ones that require the constant fleeing, instituting and transforming Raunig suggests in order to function.[480]

Artist-Led Self-Organisation as Neoliberal Exemplar

As outlined, the self-organised practices of artists and others in Western society throughout modern and contemporary history are acknowledged to have come about as a direct response to capitalism and its perceived failings. Whilst there is a certain logic to this pattern, in many ways it obviously ties those same instances of self-organisation to the dominance of the capitalist socio-economic system. Whereas previously those links and divides have been plain to see – such as with the generally vitriolic response to institutional organisations and practices by the alternative space movement in North America – with artist-led self-organisation because of its paradoxical nature they are much less clear. Indeed that relationship for many has begun to dissolve completely as interdependence continues to grow.

Similarly to as clearly paradoxical as artist-led self-organisation is once subjected to any level of engaged scrutiny, under the same exploration it is abundantly

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[480] Raunig, "Instituent Practices. Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming."

clear it acts as a neoliberal exemplar. It has ultimately inadvertently served to maintain the status quo put forward by the institutions and organisations of the art system. By this I mean it exhibits all of the key traits the neoliberal orthodoxy has sought to instill in people since its inception in the 1970s. In the greatest of its paradoxical elements it functions to propagate the very socio-economic system its practitioners seek to change; passing on those same traits to all those that constitute it. Given the proposed inception of artist-led self-organisation came about at a time when faith in the neoliberal system had been shattered in the lead up to and subsequent devastation wrought by the 2007 Financial Crisis, it is intriguing that when the brutally unnecessary period of austerity was forced on the UK in 2010 practitioners continued to behave in the same ways as they had been inscribed by that same society for decades previously. Particularly when it would have seemed more apparent to forge – or attempt to forge – a new path under the auspice of the 'artist-led' moniker. Arguably the greatest of those inscribed behaviours (one also applied to society during the 1980s) was being both creative and acting creatively through the filter of labour (in all its forms) was to be free. It was to be lauded as one of the most important revolutions for (art) workers of the postmodern and contemporary eras in Western society. People had the (supposed) choice to do what and labour how they wanted, whilst having the autonomy to choose for and with whom, apart from themselves, they wanted to work.

Mould focuses on this when outlining a wider argument for the negative co-optation of creativity into the rhetoric of capitalism in UK (and wider global) society over the past two decades. Obviously creativity as a concept and form of social existence was present in human history from its inception, long before it was harnessed by neoliberalism. But (following his logic), this version of creativity has been redefined and almost weaponised by the system itself to serve its continuing socio-economic growth and development. He states:

> to succeed in this world, you had to unleash the inner entrepreneur. It is easy to see then how neoliberalism and the creativity rhetoric go hand-in-glove. Being creative today means seeing the world around you as a resource to fuel your inner entrepreneur. Creativity is a distinctly

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neoliberal trait because it feeds the notion that the world and everything in it can be monetized. The language of creativity has been subsumed by capitalism.[481]

Those key tenets of neoliberalism that propagate entrepreneurialism as central to the system itself such as competitiveness, self-management, self-organisation, flexibility of labour, resourcefulness, etc. are all shown in abundance by the constituents of the artist-led sub-field. Artist-led self-organisation – as repeatedly stated – serves the very thing it implicitly seeks to critique and alter. This is understandable to a certain degree given the sub-field and the practitioners that labour as part of it have either known only neoliberal politics, or have continually been shaped by them throughout their lives and existence. By engaging in UK society in any capacity you are inherently contributing to that neoliberal system of governance. And given since 2007 onwards a strain of increasingly cutthroat neoliberal dogma has reached near cacophonous levels set against the backdrop of financial crisis, austerity policies and growing nationalistic politics, it is unsurprising in most respects that cultural practitioners have become such shining examples. Established practitioners have been gradually worn down into learned helplessness, and those emerging (and usually younger) practitioners that have subsequently joined the ranks of the artist-led sub-field have been conditioned by neoliberal politics throughout much, if not all, of their lives.

Since the 1980s the state itself has not only encouraged neoliberal traits in all citizens, but also constantly reinforced the same mantra of value-for-money and the highest return for the least resources to practitioners in its allocation of increasingly dwindling publicly funded support. Subsequently this mindset has been carried through in the assessment criteria for its awarding and the quantitative feedback metrics used in reporting on the success or failure of the activities awarded that public support. If every part of public social governance practitioners interact with on a professional/non-professional basis was predicated on the propagation of neoliberalism, leading to entrepreneurialism and privatisation, how was artist-led self-organisation in its current form ever

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[481] Mould, *Against Creativity*, 12.

going to be anything but a neoliberal entity? That is not to overlook the obvious assumption of the state not encouraging socialist, communist, or other opposing socio-political or economic ideologies. But rather because of the stranglehold neoliberal orthodoxy has on society those dissenting voices against the system are all but drowned out on the public stage. Again similar to forms of artist-led self-organisation, they are repressively tolerated at the margins of mainstream society in many respects to show how democratic the political system and discourse in the UK is. At that safe distance there will always be little risk of those not sanctioned by and appropriated into the system itself having any meaningful impact.

In thinking of and accepting artist-led self-organisation as a neoliberal exemplar there is an ironic correlation between it and the current socio-economic system. Just as artist-led self-organisation has, since its inception, been too ambiguous and often unwieldy to ascribe a universally held definition, so too has the neoliberal ideology itself. There is no exact, universal definition of what neoliberalism is. However it is accepted that it is concerned with free market competition and reducing the role of the state in economic affairs to let social Darwinism win out. Ensuring the 'best' provide the products and services to the public and profit at the expense of the rest. Gamble gives an overview, observing:

> The history of neo-liberalism shows that, like other ideologies, there is no pure form of it, and no single authoritative statement, and within its compass there can be found both highly subtle and extraordinarily crude versions. There are also a number of different political forms which it can take, a variety of hybrids and compounds.[482]

This statement could quite as easily have been based on studying methods of artist-led self-organisation such is the similarity of the sentiment. It works, alongside the artist-led paradox, to reinforce just how similar and entwined it and neoliberalism are, despite initially seeming outrightly oppositional. Given there are so many possibilities and potentialities for agreement and disagreement over just what neoliberalism or the 'artist-led' moniker is, they can

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[482] Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast,* 88.

both be understood to be in constant states of flux, shifting at various points, in varying speeds, to be continually re-defined through the actions of their constituents. Through their constant interaction with or as part of them, those making up either or both can be seen to be constantly reinventing them (in minor capacities), at any given time re-instituting them and their own knowledge; showing a level of similarity to Raunig's outline for instituent practices.[483]

This leads me back to Chapter 1, where the lack of definition of the 'artist-led' moniker was highlighted as being largely problematic for all those involved with it. Whereas the lack of a fixed definition of neoliberalism allows those in power to in many respects behave however they wish so long as they hold the free market as sacrosanct above all else, in not being able to universally define artist-led self-organisation it serves to alienate people and practitioners from one another and wider society. Not only this, it reinforces the need for self-organisation and the entrepreneurial skill set demanded by neoliberalism. The minute differences between the understanding of what artist-led self-organisation constitutes from one individual to another often forms barriers to interaction as time and effort is spent trying to understand the exact viewpoints and motivations of others who labour under the same moniker. As Velvick states:

> This can be a silencing tactic, a way of closing off avenues of thought through a preoccupation with grammar and etymology…due to how many terms pertaining to art are either ill-defined to start with, or depend on unacknowledged privilege and implicit understandings.[484]

That is not to say practitioners consciously seek to silence one another. But as an unforeseen consequence of the fluidity of the 'artist-led' moniker encompassing any and all practices or approaches focusing on artists, this is what regularly occurs. This is also true of other definitions and understandings of artistic self-organisation globally. In allowing everyone to labour under the same oppositional auspice again it paradoxically lends strength to those in power they

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[483] Raunig, "Instituent Practices. Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming."
[484] Velvick, "Artist-Run Multiverse Summit."

seek to oppose. Causing the dissensual voices in the sub-field (and wider CVAF) to be splintered from one another and to date never able to unite. Fractured by their personal understandings of things that have largely always been essentially undefined.

The irony of dissensual voices requiring some form of consensus to continue creating larger – and potentially lasting – dissensus is not lost. Although artist-led self-organisation exists as implicitly oppositional to current forms of social power at any time, it has a complex relationship with the rise of neoliberalism that works to impede its own growth into a true force for positive change in the CVAF and wider society. There needs to be a new understanding of just what artist-led self-organisation is and can function as in order to achieve this, one that begins to break down conscious and unconscious privileges and other barriers. It needs to be re-articulated and re-framed. Positioning knowledge of the paradox at the heart of the sub-field allowing all practitioners the opportunity to build instituent methodologies of dissensus if they wish, rather than being constrained by its history and negative efficacy. Arguably the crux of most issues surrounding the sub-field come from this lack of definition and how entwined with neoliberalism and its various institutions it actually is. Only when practitioners are fully aware of what they are a part of would it then allow for meaningful concentrated or collective mobilisation and collaboration to begin in earnest, at scales that have previously not been achieved before. Artist-led self-organisation may be a neoliberal exemplar, but once understood there is no reason it could not be reconciled to the strength of its constituents and allow them to exploit it to their collective advantage.

In critically outlining the paradoxical nature of artist-led self-organisation for the first time, the extent of how closely it mirrors the key tenets of neoliberalism and the significant influence of the neoliberal system on its continued functioning is apparent. Currently existing as a neoliberal exemplar, the sub-field often unwittingly helps to perpetuate and further the socio-economic system that has historically been so limiting and toxic for practitioners. This is central to establishing the paradox at the heart of this form of self-organisation and

answering the first research sub-question. Using critical argumentation based specifically on the partial history stemming from the avant-garde outlined in Chapter 1 and the concept of repressive tolerance from Marcuse outlined in Chapter 2, the paradox is shown as neoliberalism legitimising processes of artist-led self-organisation which in turn further legitimise the neoliberal hegemony by acting in 'opposition' to it, and work to keep practitioners in precarious conditions. Through this paradox it actively works to maintain and reinforce the recuperation of critique as subservient to the art system and its institutional structures, ensuring existing power dynamics remain intact. However as outlined in the sub-section above, practitioners have the potential to counteract this through utilising instituent practices to create dissensus, using this paradox as a potential site of strength from which to work.

With practitioners generally working on a spectrum of un-institutional/institutional/anti-institutional critique there is a modulated variety of engagement with forms of critique within the sub-field. Approaching this broad grouping of responses the work of Velvick is key to highlighting the need for accountability in artist-led contexts in order to help safeguard all staff, practitioners and visitors. Moving forwards from this point, and answering the second research sub-question, the work of Fraser, Steyerl and Raunig was key in outlining the general recuperation of critique, and as first described by Fraser, how it has become nullified by the very thing it seeks to change. As such the majority of current artist-led practices can be seen to produce recuperated critique, maintaining the social status quo. In light of this Steyerl's proposal for a third wave of institutional critique was contextualised in relation to artist-led self-organisation as a strategy to create meaningful dissensus to be enacted by practitioners, with Raunig's concept of instituent practices added to the conceptual framework of the previous chapter to create a methodology for doing so.

Following this it was made clear that what is crucial for practitioners, and the sub-field as a whole, is to be able to ensure more instituent practices can be developed to work as part of a growing, and wider, chain of equivalence across

other social fields to help bring about lasting social change and avoid total recuperation. To answer the third research sub-question key current examples of organisations and practitioners creating dissensus through instituent practices were shown as Coventry Biennial, Keep It Complex, and the collaborative practice of Sophie Chapman and Kerri Jefferis.

Within the paradoxical state of artist-led self-organisation as the site of both a problem and an opportunity that these organisations and individuals operate in, there is need for some form of clarity to ensure practitioners are sufficiently informed so they do not simply keep cyclically repeating mistakes of their peers and predecessors. This could be achieved and communicated through the social-technical forms of the artist-led network, but first requires a better understanding and re-framing of artist-led self-organisation in order to do so. With the 'artist-led' moniker having always existed as a site of unclear boundaries it presents a theoretical and conceptual space within which a new understanding can be formed. This shift to a coherent descriptor seems long overdue in order to help practitioners better be able to meaningfully challenge their own position in the CVAF and the wider field of power in society. The following chapter provides that re-articulation in the form of the 'artist-led condition'. The focus of the chapter will explore exactly how to re-articulate artist-led self-organisation, what that new understanding entails, and what impacts it will have for future practice.

Chapter 5: The Artist-Led Condition

Chapter 4 worked to outline for the first time just how paradoxical artist-led self-organisation is. It highlighted how the neoliberal system has shaped its methodologies of organisation, subjecting practitioners to a particular set of socio-economic conditions that ensure the status quo, and the system itself, is ultimately maintained. This chapter builds upon those discussions to argue for the urgency of re-articulating and re-framing those self-organised practices, calling for a new understanding of the 'artist-led' moniker and the roles it can perform in relation to developing and enacting meaningful critique and social change. The chapter proposes and outlines the 'artist-led condition' to offer a way for practitioners to reconcile the ideological underpinnings of their self-organisation with the neoliberal reality they inhabit. Through this it is hoped current and future practitioners will be able to better equip themselves with the knowledge and skills needed to understand the conditions they are subject to. All in order to be able to develop critical strategies to respond to the diverse, shifting, socio-economic realities of contemporary society.

The discussion in the chapter begins by questioning if artist-led self-organisation is an example of, or counterpoint to, neoliberal hegemony, building upon this to outline the conceptual parameters of the artist-led condition as a piece of terminology and its potential impact on power relations in the art system and beyond. Throughout key references in defining the content and parameters of the artist-led condition include sociologists Paul van Seters and Paul James in defining the attributes of social movements to outline why artist-led self-organisation cannot be considered as one, Emma Coffield in relation to the paradoxical importance of naming and defining a universally applicable term for that self-organisation to ensure continued critical dialogue, and Dave Beech to articulate and contextualise how social change could be furthered within the artist-led condition.

The chapter seeks to answer the following research sub-questions:

- What, if anything, can artist-led self-organisation currently be defined as, and how could re-framing it benefit practitioners?
- How is the artist-led condition constituted, and what are its parameters?
- Do processes of artist-led self-organisation always need to be developed from a position of opposition to the governing socio-economic system, or its institutions of power, and would this change under the artist-led condition?

A Condition(ing), Not a Movement

Following exploring the paradox at the heart of artist-led self-organisation in the previous chapter, and establishing those processes of self-organisation as an exemplar of neoliberalism, it is pertinent to ask if those same processes can be understood only as part of an overarching neoliberal hegemony? In showing how artist-led self-organisation has been shaped by neoliberalism, regardless of the re-articulation I propose as the artist-led condition and the opposition those subject to it regularly show, you cannot escape the fact that those processes are entwined with the system itself. By accepting the role and competences of a visual arts practitioner they enter into neoliberal precarity with little hope of meaningful remuneration through their practice, becoming part of the creative dark matter. One of a near endless multitude of practitioners positioned to be exploited by those in power in order to keep the commercial art market, and other processes that extract economic and material value from them, viable.

Here the paradoxical nature of artist-led self-organisation being both a problem and an opportunity is further reinforced. As shown throughout the thesis, practitioners routinely contribute to the social consensus, helping maintain the status quo and social hegemony of neoliberalism. Alongside this there are also those who enact dissensus as part of instituent practices in a wider chain of equivalence to challenge that dominant order. This is illustrative of Gramsci's view of the 'contradictory consciousness' present in people relating to social hegemony. A consciousness made up from their experiences of the world with other members of society (usually through those a person worked with), and

inherited unconsciously (learned) from history, creating the capacity for both passivity and resistance within any person to a given social regime; in relation to artist-led self-organisation clearly overlapping with the formation of Bourdieu's habitus.[485] As Gramsci states:

> The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which nonetheless involves understanding the world in so far as it transforms it. His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed.[486]

So it follows, through the contradictory consciousnesses of practitioners, this paradoxical existence of being a problem and an opportunity seeps into every facet of artist-led self-organisation in different measures. The levels at which they are inclined to be passive or resistant varies on an individual basis, arguably working to reinforce the learned helplessness of the multitude. Whilst practitioners try to bring about social change they are routinely undermined by their very existence as self-organising entities.

The question of artist-led self-organisation being part of neoliberal hegemony can currently be answered in short as that self-organisation occupies, in keeping with its paradoxical history and underpinnings, somewhat of a contested, and necessarily hybrid, space. It is undoubtedly an example of the pervasive and callous neoliberal hegemony of contemporary society. But it has offered previously at its inception, and is currently beginning once again to offer, counterpoints to it through practitioners' organisation that challenges wider

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[485] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 170.
[486] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 641.

socio-political issues. Ultimately there is no binary yes or no response to the question, when the era we exist within very rarely grants such simplistic ways of viewing and understanding the world. However it must be acknowledged that artist-led self-organisation is characteristic of contemporary social critique. Very rarely, if ever, will a group in opposition to another cause, institution or system not have any link or previous engagement with those they critique. There will always be a certain amount of firsthand knowledge required in order to properly develop and articulate those instances of critique, and the hybrid state occupied by the proposed artist-led condition and its practitioners could be seen on one hand as a position of power. Granting wider knowledge of the hegemonic order, the art system and their machinations that its own practitioners implicitly or explicitly oppose. From which they are better placed to be able to enact dissensus and ultimately help bring about meaningful change. It is revelling in the paradox of its existence that artist-led self-organisation, and subsequently the proposed artist-led condition, can embrace its own dynamic constituent power. Embracing and working within it, using it as a strength and tool for future mobilisation and critique. But what of the undefined nature of current artist-led self-organisation? How does this impact upon what it can be understood as?

It is generally acknowledged as a generic term, and as stated in the Introduction, it is unclear just what that term refers to more precisely. This uncertainty has allowed the term to remain (using *Doggerland*'s expression)[487] relatively elastic, with a wide variety of practices included under its auspice. But this non-specificity has somewhat ironically allowed it to be shaped by the neoliberal system and reinforce the learned helplessness of its constituents, contributing to ongoing cycles of precarity. Whereas previous self-organisation by practitioners and other members of Western societies and the globalised art system have come to be understood either at their inception or latterly as social movements in their own right (the DIY movement, alternative space movement, etc.), the artist-led sub-field has not had such an affirmation. There were/are clear goals that other movements and their constituents were/are working towards, whereas artist-led self-organisation, as it currently exists, is vague and disjointed

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[487] Playford-Greenwell & Prater, "Notes from the Middle Stone": 7.

at best with no clear unifying objective. Although the elasticity of that self-organisation is often seen as its main strength, as shown it also helps to ensure that its constituents can be co-opted and exploited by external actors and processes, as there is no meaningful safeguarding or protections in place because of its currently disjointed nature. As a result this reinforces the need for a greater depth of outline, definition and understanding surrounding it.

In order to do that the development of artist-led self-organisation as an approach to practice must once again be taken into account. Having developed at a time when digital technology was undergoing a rapid development to lead it to the instantaneous and pervasive social force, resource and component of everyday life it is today, the artist-led sub-field – and by extension its network – developed a unique makeup exhibiting aspects of both orgnets and netorgs. Setting it apart from many other contemporary networked, organisational and institutional forms. Whilst developing digital communications technologies have brought social and practical benefits and dilemmas in equal measures for the orgnets and netorgs in our society, the artist-led network is able to circumvent them in many ways. Practitioners routinely utilise the horizontality of the orgnet or the hierarchical organisation of the netorg to suit individual online/offline needs and desires – the application of the form of network, like processes of artist-led self-organisation, is fluid. This means the sub-field and its network exists as a hybrid form, shaped by social-technical forces. Unable to be pinned down with fixed parameters as the networked form of a contemporary social movement. To revisit Lovink and Rossiter, one of the main problems they address for any contemporary network or social movement is one of the relation between digital technology and social organisation. With communication technology allowing instantaneous interaction, planning and mobilisation to occur, most new movements or networks quickly outgrow the resources they hold and ultimately dissolve into nothing more than failed potential for social change.[488] The overarching issue is one of scalability. If neoliberal society is predicated on continued growth and development how do networks or movements they relate to within that society continue to grow in size or scope without becoming co-

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[488] Lovink & Rossiter, *Organization after Social Media*, 121.

opted, or losing their way, all while retaining their innate purpose, driving force or characteristics? Although this observation mainly focuses on activist movements and networks that are seeking to bring about direct (and often immediate) political change, the same issues can be understood as relating to the sub-field and its collective network. Lovink and Rossiter state:

> The borders of networks are the spatial sites of politics. As networks undergo the transversal process of scalar transformation, the borders of networks are revealed as both limits and possibilities...After some months or...a few years, there is no longer an inside of networks, only the ruins of the border. This is an enormous challenge for networks – how to engage the border as the condition of transformation and renewal?[489]

I would argue that for the artist-led sub-field the border of its collective network has become an issue and acted to limit its scalar transformation, ultimately continuing the vague nature of just what the 'artist-led' moniker is defined and understood as. As it has grown and its borders shifted, because of its hybrid orgnet/netorg characteristics it has collectively moved toward and away from various institutional forms, practices and digital dynamics. Not only have its practitioners become co-opted and exploited by external actors and processes, there has been no way to properly define what artist-led self-organisation is. I argue this is because it exists *pluriversally* for each practitioner. A shared, currently neoliberal, reality comprised of a near infinite plurality of entities with individual experiences and ideas that shape their understanding of that state of existence.[490] In returning to my earlier question, does it then make sense to view artist-led self-organisation as a movement in and of itself, and its network as part of that movement?

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[489] Ibid, 108.
[490] Here my understanding builds on Eastside Projects' proposition of being an 'artist-run multiverse' – or a space where an infinite number of realities can exist at the same time. Gavin Wade, "Welcome," *Artist-Run Multiverse Summit*, from Eastside Projects, 09 November, 2018, accessed June 10, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=954&v=SgrJko0RgFI&feature =emb_logo
Theories of the pluriverse/multiverse also help begin to conceptualise worldviews outside of Western colonial and imperial hegemony. See Bernd Reiter, ed., *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge* (Durham: Duke University press, 2018).

In their text "Global Social Movements and Global Civil Society" Paul van Seters and Paul James outline what constitutes the definition of a contemporary social movement in a series of conditions of 'coming together' that must be fulfilled before acknowledging it as such:

> (1.) the formation of some kind of collective identity; (2.) the development of a shared normative orientation; (3.) the sharing of a concern for change of the status quo and (4.) the occurrence of moments of practical action that are at least subjectively connected together across time addressing this concern for change. *Thus we define a social movement as a form of political association between persons who have at least a minimal sense of themselves as connected to others in common purpose and who come together across an extended period of time to effect social change in the name of that purpose.*[491]

Van Seters and James also go on to explain how such a definition of a social movement could be applied to one that reaches globally, stating:

> a globalizing social movement requires a fifth minimal condition: global reach – that is, the extension of social relations in a way that contributes to connecting people across a significant proportion of the world.[492]

When viewing artist-led self-organisation through this definition in-line with globalisation there are correlations between them, with the paradoxical nature of that self-organisation meaning that it ultimately cannot fulfil all of the conditions required. To assess the individual conditions:

1. Constituents of the artist-led sub-field all share a form of collective identity as practitioners; generally part of the second economy and regularly practicing outside of traditional public and private institutional confines.

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[491] Paul van Seters & Paul James "Global Social Movements and Global Civil Society: A Critical Overview," in: *Globalization and Politics. Volume II: Global Social Movements and Global Civil Society,* ed. Paul van Seters & Paul James (London: Sage Publications, 2014), xi.
[492] Ibid.

2. There is a normative orientation between constituents of the sub-field toward a generally liberal position with the assumption they are open and welcoming of any and all peoples and interests (despite in reality this not being the case on a practical level).

3. Whilst many practitioners actively seek to change the social status quo in some capacity arguably the same number will not hold this as a primary concern for their practice, regardless if their actions inadvertently or unconsciously help to contribute to this concern or not.

4. There are many instances of practical action connected to this concern for change across its relatively short history, but with all constituents not directly focused on changing the status quo this concern cannot be met.

5. The artist-led network clearly holds the potential to extend a global reach and connect with other practitioners throughout a significant proportion of the world (in theory able to connect with an as yet undefined artist-run or other self-organised network), but to date has not made such a connection.

Because of this, artist-led self-organisation cannot be viewed as a social movement in and of itself at any point in its relatively short history. The openness and flexibility it provides practitioners – again paradoxically – means it cannot fulfil all of the required conditions for being recognised as either a social movement or a globalising social movement. The lack of a unified goal for all practitioners to work towards ensures its status as a nebulous grouping of self-organised practices.

Whereas previous self-organised movements had/have clear concerns and/or aims that unified/unify their constituents this is not the case for practitioners in the sub-field. Although they all labour as part of the second economy they're not tied together by a collective concern or desire despite many of them explicitly seeking to challenge the status quo. This challenge to those in power is implicitly linked to all artist-led practices by the history of the self-organised movements

that have gone before. It can be seen as both consciously and unconsciously created and continued by its practitioners, but it cannot be argued as being a unifying force between them. In the case of those who inadvertently challenge social hegemony through their actions it is not their primary concern, but instead a happenstance they may have no idea is occurring. Because of the varied and multiplicitous nature of the practices and concerns within the sub-field alongside this understanding or lack of understanding in relation to its dissensual underpinnings, the definition of a fixed social movement following its predecessors and peers would never hold. This also goes some way to answering why practitioners regularly find themselves co-opted or exploited. Lacking a clear collective end goal means despite existing as a multitude they are vulnerable to being targeted as individuals with no established method of collective mobilisation for protection.

As outlined by Coffield (and raised in Chapter 1),[493] there is a certain sense of irony in not wanting to have a blanket term describing the various forms of self-organisation by artists, with often terms such as 'artist-led' used as a shorthand descriptor in communication with other practitioners, organisations, funding bodies, etc. In relation to artist-led self-organisation this is arguably consistent with its paradoxical nature; it is an inherent problem but also a site of opportunity for unity between disparate forms of practice. She rightly argues such usage of terms outlines clearer boundaries whilst narrowing conversations, limiting who or what is considered part of them. Coffield asks:

> Can we think through the vocabularies of the artist-led (or whatever) in a way that holds on to specificity without fear that our differences would be smoothed over? Can we open up to anyone who wants to join the discussion? Can we mobilise?[494]

It is this opening out of vocabulary to be inclusive, acting as a site for mobilisation, that underpins the conception of the artist-led condition.

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[493] Coffield, "The problem with naming."
[494] Ibid.

In re-framing artist-led self-organisation from its inception I propose that it is understood as both *a result of specific conditions, and as a shared social condition*; a paradoxical process of conditioning and *the* social condition of practitioners. Somewhat ironically while there is no universally accepted definition on what a social condition is, they are generally understood as comprising the variety of factors, experiences and dispositions that constitute an individual's place in the society they are a part of such as class, education, economic stability, health conditions, etc., acting in much the same way as Bourdieu's habitus.[495] In framing artist-led self-organisation as a social condition instead of a social movement it takes into account the conditional topology practitioners are a part of that holds influence over their specific everyday lives and experiences. Conditions and experiences that shape processes of self-organisation and practitioners' lives, ultimately seeing them exist in precarity, whilst trying to maintain some form of artistic output.

With so much of what practitioners experience stemming from negative processes and conditions imposed by external actors and institutional structures, and the self-organisation they employ to counteract them understood to be imposed to a certain extent and not a truly free choice, it makes sense to view artist-led self-organisation as paradoxically both a result of conditions and a condition of existence in and of itself. An overarching condition of conditions unique to each individual, where external factors work to ultimately maintain power hierarchies and under which practitioners seek to have some form of artistic output (critical or otherwise). For most being part of the artist-led sub-field is something imposed upon them due to the unequal nature of the contemporary visual arts field (CVAF) as a whole, rather than something they work toward joining, as is usually the case with a traditional social movement or network. Although based on education, sociologist Harold Silver's research into the concept of the social condition provides an insight into its use as a way to re-think artist-led self-organisation to frame the artist-led condition, helping practitioners strategise for the future. In *Education and the social condition* he states:

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[495] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 170.

> The 'social condition' therefore offers the opportunity to emphasize the present and a manageable time-scale of discussion, to ask what are some of the main features of the way we *are* together...A 'condition' is something that it is sensible to try to understand, and wish to improve. It calls us to reflect on recent experience, and to expose anxieties.[496]

In thinking of the artist-led condition as a distinct social condition for creative practitioners in contemporary society it allows for the re-framing of knowledge, practice and potential for change. The importance of asking what the main features of practitioners' being together are is crucial here. In reflecting on how practitioners are connected to one another (on a conceptual level outside of the artist-led network), the scope of the conditions they are part of and that are imposed upon them can be critically explored in detail to arrive at a conception of what a shared, and ever developing, artist-led social condition could be understood as. Forming a truly interdependent community.[497] In doing so it opens out the vocabulary of artist-led self-organisation on a more formal level. It allows for individuals to hold on to the specific understandings of their own practices. But as Coffield implored,[498] allowing for greater inclusion and promoting continued discussion of how practitioners *are* in relation to one another. It allows practitioners and their forms of self-organisation to remain fluid, the borders of the artist-led condition constantly shifting to avoid becoming a site of constituted power. Through this ongoing collective process the condition could overcome the rigid and static nature of the borders of previous self-organised movements, which saw them fully recuperated into the institutions of the art system and wider society they sought to change, becoming nullified.

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[496] Harold Silver, *Education and the social condition*, (London & New York: Metheun & Co. Ltd, 1980), 3-4.
[497] Combining the community of Harker, and the interdependence of Bowman, outlined in Chapter 1.
[498] Coffield, "The problem with naming."

The Importance of the 'Artist/Artist-'

A key point relating to establishing the artist-led condition must be raised to avoid further misunderstanding. Namely, the importance of the 'artist' or 'artist-' and the subsequent impact this has on opening up vocabularies, working to decide who can be understood as being part of the condition itself. In all conceptions of artist-led self-organisation it is apparent the artist/artist- is central to the practices and organisational structures created or developed within its confines. However at the same time 'artist/artist-' (along with others listed in the Introduction such as 'practitioner' and 'practice') as a piece of terminology within the wider art system is a contested and constantly shifting space. As outlined in the Introduction this reinforces confusion over what is understood as an artist-led practice. But what implications does this have for the importance of those figures?

The notion of an artist-led practice would imply that the artist/artist- is of prime importance, whether this is attributed to them by external thought or opinion, or if an individual narcissistically raises themselves above all others. This raises issues relating to hierarchies of power in artist-led contexts. Given the implied importance of 'artist-' as prefix, artist-led self-organisation seemingly cannot avoid privileging the artist as a cultural archetype, raising further questions over the effectiveness and importance of any critique enacted by them. If the artist/artist- is placed above all else within the sub-field, it discredits the idea of the sub-field itself being open to all and a generally horizontally organised structure where constituents are considered equal. The critique that is advertently or inadvertently developed through practices within this social space is then also brought into question. If practitioners are understood or understand themselves as the most important aspect of that self-organisation they will serve to ultimately create consensus through their actions with little to no regard of the dissensual impact it could have the potential for.

Arguably stemming more recently from the alternative space movement where artists were the ones that initially made the move away from the existing

institutionalised aspects of the CVAF and self-organised their own spaces for practice, they were written – however inadvertently – into a position of central importance. What would the original artist-run practices be that developed during the alternative space movement without the artist/artist-? With the artist/artist- acting as a figurehead for the self-organised movements that were to follow, a precedent had seemingly been set. However in contemporary society this obvious generalisation does not apply to all practitioners, but poses a very real stumbling block. At a time when self-identification has never been more relevant or timely in the art system or Western society, why has the use of the artist/artist- descriptor continued with the artist-led condition? This is for two key reasons. Firstly, it establishes the condition in a clear genealogy of other forms of self-organisation that have gone before and positions it within a relatively recent timeframe. In doing so it continues the established relationships and ideas practitioners and others have surrounding the subject area without requiring a substantial amount of new information to be communicated. Secondly, because of its positioning post-2007 in the genealogy of self-organised practices in the visual arts, the condition is located in a specific set of socio-economic and political conditions rooted in precarity. Conditions that have given rise to the diversity of practices in the UK recognised as processes of artist-led self-organisation. Because of the need for this temporal specificity to focus neoliberal precarity as the unifying factor between practitioners it seemed illogical to draw on other terms with their own specific (and sometimes wider) temporal associations and connotations such as 'autonomous', or even singularly 'self-organised'.

If the artist/artist- prefix is used as a marker to tie the condition to a specific period of temporality in order to highlight, as per Foster,[499] precarity as one of the only global constants for practitioners since the new millennium, then what is the importance of that prefix? Following Coffield,[500] the condition is intended to allow practitioners to hold on to the specific terms they use to describe their roles, practices and understandings of what it means to make art and how,

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[499] Foster, "Precarious."
[500] Coffield, "The problem with naming."

alongside grouping them together to widen discourse. This works towards providing an increased potential for solidarity and opportunities to contribute to social change. Because of this the figure of the artist/artist- is almost incidental. As outlined in the previous chapter artist-led self-organisation may be 'led' by artists but it is anything but centred on them. The prefix of the condition takes this one step further. Embracing the paradox of that idea to open the borders of the condition to anyone that identifies with methodologies of self-organised practice and artistic production in any expanded capacities post-2007. In seeking to embrace differences as a strength rather than smooth over them, the condition could be understood as a site of radical (agonistic) pluralism. Practitioners positively debating with one another in order to better develop understanding and combat hegemonic power structures, with the artist-led network ultimately acting as arbiter for this multitude. Removing certain nodes if and when they become redundant.

To attempt an initial outline of who can be understood as part of the condition means to assess the nebulous grouping of people and organisational structures associated with artist-led self-organisation since its inception. Although the artist-led sub-field has never previously had formally acknowledged and universally agreed upon constituents (not helped by the lack of a governing body or in-depth published materials surrounding it to provide public guidance on the subject), a generic list of visual artists, artist-curators, artist groups and collectives, and small to medium sized organisations directed by artists or artist-curators would seem applicable as the main constituents.[501] Taking this very general mixture at face value I would propose an expanded roster for those subject to the artist-led condition. Expanded in the sense of including organisations similar in approach, size and scope to existing artist-led examples, but which are not necessarily led by an artist/artist-, but most importantly, anyone that identifies as being a practitioner, operating mainly in the second economy, that contributes to the production of self-organised artistic practices. Directly linking to the shift in mindset from the inception of the art worker in the 1960s. Although this may not seem a significant departure, it opens the borders

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[501] Drawn from observations made during fieldwork.

of the condition as broadly as possible. All whilst remaining rooted in the neoliberal conditions that have conditioned and shaped those same practitioners and their predecessors since 2007. Within this grouping curators, assistants, technicians, fabricators, labourers, writers, musicians, performers, etc. have grounds for inclusion, having been party to the same conditions and helping to bring about the same processes of practice. Along those same lines organisations active post-2007 in artist-led contexts without ostensibly being 'artist-led' in a directorial capacity, such as Grand Union,[502] &model[503] or PINK,[504] would be considered part of the condition.

With the understandings of both art and artist contested throughout history, in modern times Marcel Duchamp[505] and Joseph Beuys are widely credited with pushing the boundaries of both terms. Public debates surrounding both have grown from Duchamp's supposed conception of the readymade in 1917 (leading to the birth of conceptual art as we know it today), and Beuys' proclamation 'jeder mensch ein künstler' (every man an artist) in 1972.[506] In opening out just what art was understood as, and challenging the innate creative capacities of people in their everyday lives, the grounds from which contemporary art would grow became further contested and tempestuous. With those same issues still being questioned, the approach of self-identifying as an artist, practitioner, or

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[502] A gallery and artists' studio complex in Digbeth, Birmingham. "About," Grand Union, accessed November 29, 2020,
https://grand-union.org.uk/about/
[503] An ongoing collective curatorial project based in Leeds. "About," &model, accessed November 29, 2020,
http://www.andmodel.com/about.htm
[504] A discursive curatorial project between curators and artists based in Manchester. "About," PINK, accessed July 5, 2020,
https://www.pink-mcr.com/about
[505] Although credible evidence exists that it may have been Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven that actually created the famous urinal readymade. See Siri Hustvedt, "A woman in the men's room: when will the art world recognise the real artist behind Duchamp's Fountain?" *The Guardian*, March 29, 2019, accessed June 10, 2020,
https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/mar/29/marcel-duchamp-fountain-women-art-history#maincontent
[506] Made during a talk of the same title as part of his talk series at Documenta V. Bodenmann-Ritter, *Jeder Mensch ein Künstler*, 5-20.

any other descriptor is often the easiest way to proceed in the contemporary era. Especially given the often-diffuse viewpoints of individuals and further blurring of previously held art and non-art boundaries impacting understanding at all levels. The artist-led condition then uses the artist/artist- prefix as a temporal and conceptual signifier. One that doesn't seek to position artists in a privileged position above others, but instead uses the artist/artist- as a figure to centre ongoing debates on wider understandings within the sub-field and art system in relation to those identifying as subject to the condition.

In my definition the artist-led condition presents an expanded understanding of who and what that incorporates. Despite difficulties surrounding terms used to identify actors – with artist the most recognised and common term – it is necessary in order to in part resolve bringing individuals together in the same space for dialogue and unity. Here importance is placed upon the impact their practice[507] can have, rather than their chosen specific form of cultural construct, each of which having been romanticised and culturally valued differently throughout the course of history. Following the shifting of debates begun by Duchamp and Beuys the condition acts to further democratise the role of practitioners through the self-definition by anyone as one or through positioning their organisational structure as subject to it. Moving away from the artist/artist- as a figure of self-importance toward it being simply a role anyone can fulfil under any title they wish. Granted the results of this opening out may vary, but that isn't necessarily the point. It is more important that there are no prohibitive barriers in relation to understanding, skill or existing knowledge. So much artist-led knowledge is gained through practical acts of experimentation – learning through doing – that to assume otherwise for the roles within the artist-led condition would be disingenuous. So long as those that occupy the role of practitioner are aware how the outputs driven by their practice can have a real impact on the wider society around them, and that the condition is not a mechanism to secure the importance of themselves above all others, these problems are embellished with new understanding; their difficulty begun to be explored.

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[507] Practice as the output of a given practitioner, as outlined in the Introduction.

Through the inclusion of roles and people that would not necessarily have been understood as part of the previous conception of artist-led self-organisation, it is hoped the artist-led condition properly reflects the various strategies of current self-organised practices. It ensures the variety of practitioners, and those that meaningfully contribute to their practices, are properly credited and accepted as peers. In many ways the structural elements of artist-led self-organisation would seem the most difficult aspects to properly understand. By structural here I mean the social-technical organisations newly created or adapted from existing examples that provide or act as the frameworks, models or structures for continuing practices across online/offline boundaries. In the previous conception of artist-led self-organisation there was a general acceptance of the various forms organisations would take as being ostensibly artist-led until they reached a certain point. This would usually dovetail with the receipt of larger amounts of longer term funding to secure longevity in physical spaces, that would then see them being recognised as 'institutionalised' to varying degrees and as such not part of the sub-field – such as with the case of Project Space Leeds and The Tetley, and S1 Artspace and Park Hill Art Space, outlined in Chapter 3.

In trying to navigate the confusing and often fraught terrain between artist-led and institutional organisations many key issues are often overlooked. However the one I feel as most important for the artist-led condition is that of intention. Intention may not seem the obvious choice, but in context of the condition and the previous conception of artist-led self-organisation it is arguably the most important. The intention behind an organisational form refers to both the reasoning why that form came into being and its focus for future operations and outputs. In a sub-field and area of practice where funding and security is often at such a premium practitioners go without both for much of their career, the intention behind actions can be seen as holding its own form of value and currency. By creating varying levels of affiliation through groups, collectives and organisations there is an implied intent by practitioners that they are seeking to foster relations and work collectively to achieve something in that same situation

that would otherwise be unmanageable or extremely difficult to achieve alone. That is not to say that individually a practitioner cannot achieve anything meaningful in the sub-field, but pooling labour, resources and ideas in a group is often a much more stable route to doing so. In these situations the structure of organisations in their various forms can be seen to tie back into the overarching and implicit artist-led narrative of bringing about new understanding and (hopefully) meaningful change through processes and works of visual art. The intention here tends to be clear; practitioners as individuals coming together and working as part of a multitude to develop practices through common cause or concern with their peers.

Whilst it would seem straightforward to understand groups, collectives and any other loose forms of affiliation between practitioners, and organisations not previously acknowledged as being 'artist-led', as part of the condition, more formally structured pre-existing artist-led organisations present more room for debate. When increasing levels of formality are introduced historically this has acted to sound the alarm for encroaching institutionalisation, and a perceived move away from processes of artist-led self-organisation. In relation to the artist-led condition however, I would argue this need not be the case. The logic of increasing formality leading to inscription within institutional methodologies does generally hold true, but again it is the intent that is key. When artist-led organisations of all scales are deemed to become increasingly institutional this is usually in line with seeking funding or other resources to secure longevity. In these situations where formalised operational practices have to be incorporated to fulfil criteria to access support the intention of the organisation itself should be taken into account. It does not necessarily follow that because one adopts formalised practices and processes that it cannot be considered 'artist-led'.

Those in charge of an organisation can be considered practitioners under the expanded borders of the artist-led condition. As such they can obviously work toward the organisation itself focusing on developing and contextualising visual arts practices and their potential for helping bring about social change in context of the condition. The perceived issues surrounding funding and resources again

aren't necessarily a problem for an artist-led organisation. It is not the funding or resources themselves that remove an organisation from an artist-led context, they merely help bring about a level of relative sustainability. It is those gatekeepers in charge of the resources that act to do this through placing the organisation on a trajectory for growth. This usually leads them to quickly become unwieldy for the staff to manage as they become increasingly hierarchical and institutionalised, moving further away from their original focus. The extra processes and protocols added that, following Velvick,[508] aid accountability, bring with them extra levels of administration that often require specialist roles usually filled by people from outside of an artist-led context. This helps to drive the organisation further away from its origins as more specialised staff are recruited, despite the need for their experience and knowledge to augment the artistic output of that organisation. Again here it is the intent that is important. If an artist-led organisation receives funding or other resources it does not suddenly stop being 'artist-led'. It will not stop overnight.[509] But it does run the risk of moving further and further away from the artist-led condition unless there is a clear desire to remain there by those charged with overseeing its operation, or unless the borders of the condition itself collectively shifts to allow their continued affiliation.

In a situation where the borders of the condition were to shift for all this also raises the question of organisational structures being able to move in the opposite direction. Moving into the condition rather than out from within it, almost devolving in certain areas to become part of it. Whilst this is general speculation it is not out of the realm of possibilities. There are examples globally of highly institutionalised organisations that straddle the boundaries of self-organised and artist-run practices – such as Den Frie in Denmark[510] or Vienna

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[508] Velvick, "Artist-Run Multiverse Summit."

[509] A corollary of this discussion comes from Sufea Mohamad Noor. Sufea Mohamad Noor, "Knowing the Nature of the Beast," *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led*, from Exhibition Research Lab, Liverpool School of Art and Design, 31 January, 2020.

[510] "About Den Frie," Den Frie, accessed June 12, 2020, http://denfrie.dk/en/about/about-den-frie/

Secession in Austria[511] – but again most of those examples have grown from self-organised beginnings and not 'devolved' from a highly formalised institutional state to an institutionally artist-run/led model, despite the potential existing for organisations to do so.

If anyone can be an artist and anything can be argued to be art, then the artist-led condition must also follow those rules of the game. Anyone and anything can be a part of it if they consider themselves to be, and have the intention of being; whether that be individual practitioners or larger organisational structures. Whereas previous understandings of those terms served to diffuse debate surrounding the makeup of the art system – and following Velvick[512] – ensured they and other terms depend on unacknowledged privilege and implicit understandings to function, the condition re-frames this situation. Through opening out borders and understanding, the condition allows those terms and subjects to instead function as freely approachable, and contestable, with whatever existing knowledge and experience any individual may have. Indeed the condition itself will shift in future in both practical and conceptual terms as those debates and discussions continue. Using the problem and opportunity inherent to the previous conception of artist-led self-organisation in order to re-frame who is part of those practices, the condition exists as a pluriversal site of practice and resistance.

Further Capacities for Social Change

As mentioned throughout, all practitioners part of processes of artist-led self-organisation have the potential to bring about meaningful and lasting change, contributing to a broader chain of equivalence of social change through their practices. Although this dissensual potential has largely gone unrealised, practitioners contribute to revealing the vicissitudes of the neoliberal conditions they exist and labour under through the dissensus and consensus they produce.

511 "Mission Statement," Vienna Secession, accessed June 12, 2020, https://www.secession.at/en/mission/
512 Velvick, "Artist-Run Multiverse Summit."

With lasting and meaningful social change the goal for many, this aim has ultimately not yet come to pass. Arguably this can be seen as part of a genealogy of similar routines historically stemming from the original avant-garde, where revealing negative social conditions was the first step toward potential change that would remain unrealised; their radical critique quickly recuperated into institutional structures.

While I would argue the development of dissensus through instituent practices should be a central aim for practitioners as part of their wider practices, they must also navigate carefully so as not to completely transform themselves and the artist-led condition from still existing as an example of neoliberal hegemony. This means continuing to embrace, rather than beginning to ostracise, those practitioners that create art for art's sake or for other social causes, not seeking to explicitly challenge the status quo (as outlined in Chapter 2) and unwittingly contributing to consensus. Although at first glance this may once again seem a paradoxical assumption, mirroring much of the previous conception of artist-led self-organisation, there is sound reasoning behind it relating to institutional critique, dissensus and instituent practices. The most pressing concern arising from this is relates to the production of critique in the hybrid paradoxical state of the artist-led condition.

This is not ignoring that artist-led self-organisation has always held such a hybrid paradoxical state, at once being both an example of and a counterpoint to the very same thing. But with the artist-led condition bringing new practitioners under its auspice, it creates more solidarity between peers and organisational structures to function as sites from which that critique can develop or be incubated. By remaining in touching distance of neoliberalism and continuing being acknowledged as an example of the system itself it allows practitioners to keep control over the connection they have with it. They retain some capacity to be able to re-frame their own operational narrative. They may be part of a condition fostered by neoliberal hegemony, but in using the various externally imposed socio-economic conditions that form that overarching condition as a departure point it provides fertile space to develop critique and bring about

change. It allows practitioners and their forms of self-organisation to contest the spaces they inhabit redefined as a dynamic condition for being, as otherwise they would be instantly absorbed by and within the system itself. Here they are provided with a buffer of sorts; if they are already considered part of the system it should take longer for that same system to try and appropriate or absorb them fully within to strengthen its power. Arguably those enacting dissensus actually need their peers inadvertently creating consensus to continue doing so to be able to achieve this buffering effect. As such all practitioners are welcomed as part of the condition. The production of dissensus is a specific goal catalysed from specific ideas and experiences which not all of those subject to the condition will have had, and so won't have the same desire to enact. Those oblivious to the production of consensus and dissensus here give strength to those attempting to enact dissensus. It allows them the opportunity and space to contest the current institutional constructs of both the CVAF and wider society whilst being able to develop new ones. Fulfilling the capacities of radical (agonistic) pluralism in a processual democracy.

In reinforcing the status of the artist-led condition as part of a radical (agonistic) pluralism within neoliberalism, this has implications for the production of dissensus through instituent practices and the wider practice of institutional critique. In his article "Institutionalisation for All", Dave Beech draws from a Marxist and broadly postcapitalist approach to argue for the need for a wider embracing of institutional structures in the art system and beyond to achieve meaningful critique and social change, using the avant-garde as an example. Illustrating how recuperation into art system institutions is not necessarily as final, or negative, as it may initially seem he states "despite being framed as authorised, the institution thereby makes avant-garde art available for a public that cannot rule out scrutiny by dissenters."[513] In bringing critical practices within the institutions the institutions themselves have to constantly remake that recuperation – much like the constant reformatting of the neoliberal system itself – in order to ensure their hegemony over them. And "since the social forces that underpin subversive culture continue to challenge the given social

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[513] Dave Beech "Institutionalisation for all," *Art Monthly*, No.294 (March 2006): 8.

hegemony, recuperation is fragile."[514] Even when consensus is produced from within the expanded borders of the artist-led condition, or dissensual practices are appropriated, it arguably still functions to empower other practitioners and motivate their practices of dissent. Previous recuperation of critique in the art system can be used as a departure point for future subversion so long as the legacy of the recuperated practices are challenged.

This maintenance of recuperation through not challenging how and why the critique remains subservient to the institution – which has previously been commonplace in the artist-led sub-field and wider art system – leads to what Beech calls the 'taboo on institutionalisation'. This is where practitioners "invest in the maintenance of the established social system in order to justify its own opposition. Here the taboo on institutionalisation is a conservative impulse which hopes that nothing will change."[515] This taboo is arguably a crucial site for the artist-led condition. Practitioners enacting dissensus through instituent practices undeniably want to see change happen, not merely using a continuation of the status quo to provide them with a reason for continuing their practices. Wanting to help bring about change and then be part of building new forms of sociality from that point onwards. Witnessing the existing institutions and social structures adapt or change positively to their critique for the betterment of all. However even those practitioners that enact dissensus occupy a grey area alongside their peers that produce consensus. They can both be understood as working in varying capacities to create a 'negative image of the institution'. Beech outlines this as where the values of an institution are inverted in various respects rather than cutting across them to provide a 'true' alternative.[516] Although those enacting dissensus are providing an alternative, they cannibalise many of the structures and processes inherent to the institutions they oppose. The negative images they individually produce are not wholly 'alternative' to existing structures because of how entwined artist-led self-organisation is to the ongoing neoliberal hegemony. Indeed, as outlined in

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[514] Ibid.
[515] Ibid, 9.
[516] Ibid, 9-10.

the previous chapter, even organisations using instiuent practices to produce dissensus – such as Coventry Biennial – can clearly be seen as using a negative image of the biennial model to orient their own output. As Velvick[517] stated, those structural and bureaucratic forms are needed to hold people and processes to account. They aren't necessarily a wholly negative aspect for practitioners to appropriate, especially given their constituency within a neoliberal society where radical change away from its orthodoxy hasn't happened in nearly three decades. Arguably incremental change will be required first; using a negative image of the institution in certain situations is a practical way to go about it.

Following this line of thought institutional opposition and critique can be approached by both occupying existing institutional structures differently and creating new ones (with practitioners adapting existing structures as part of this process). In his writing Beech favours such a combined approach[518] in relation to tackling institutions, where he states:

> Art's existing institutions can be reused independently if they are treated as contested spaces. Independence, resistance and dissent have to be manufactured…The first condition of art's independence is not art's isolation but its contestation of the cultural field, either by setting up alternative spaces or by occupying existing spaces differently.[519]

Here Beech can be understood as referring to processes of instituting. He argues that everything, even alternative practices and spaces, are institutional insofar as they institute new forms of knowledge, understanding and often organisational forms which then go on to be institutionalised in wider society. As he outlines, critique, "if it is to have a transformative effect, needs to build alternative institutions. If critical culture is not to be converted into mainstream culture without remainder then it needs to institutionalise its alternative values."[520]

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[517] Velvick, "Artist-Run Multiverse Summit."
[518] Although Beech focuses here on artist-run practices/spaces, the same strategies can be carried over into the context of the artist-led condition, especially given this text was published so close to the proposed inception of the 'artist-led' moniker.
[519] Beech, "Institutionalisation for all," 10.
[520] Ibid.

Although Beech risks straying into the same territory as Fraser's assertion 'we are all the institution',[521] here he does not make the same mistake of referring to the CVAF as separate from the rest of society. In doing so the issue seen as the failing of Fraser's theory is avoided. He states:

> The taboo on institutionalisation in art is effectively the refusal to underwrite alternative practices with the institutions that they need and deserve in order to thrive. We do not need to avoid institutionalisation, we need fuller, wider, and more diverse forms of institutionalisation. Institutionalisation for the few needs to be replaced by institutionalisation for all.[522]

This is a key line of argument for the artist-led condition. To bring about social change more diverse forms of institutionalisation are required in order to help that process. In the condition the process of institutionalisation for self-organised practices is given new weight with the opening out of its borders, providing a greater variety of examples for others to follow, and to help strengthen the ties between them. This means new organisational forms created by those previously not wholly understood as being part of processes of artist-led self-organisation will now be much more accessible. Accessible to all practitioners to interact with outside of the confines of already established larger, and much more public, organisational structures. Again it is worth noting the intention of practitioners as also key to the process of institutionalisation, outlined earlier as a way to safeguard from becoming institutionalised under the throes and whims of neoliberal governance. When digital technology and online platforms are considered alongside this process as an augmented source of, and site for, communication and organisational development, Beech's proposition fits comfortably within the artist-led condition and its expanded borders. However what of the link between Beech's instituting and Raunig's instituent practices? Here there is clear overlap between them. Beech talks of the need for an ongoing contestation of the cultural field through creating alternative spaces or occupying existing spaces differently, and Raunig outlines constant transformation and instituting as the way to avoid becoming institutionalised in

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[521] Fraser, "From a Critique of Institutions."
[522] Beech, "Institutionalisation for all," 10.

the traditional sense of concentrated, constituted power.[523]

This approach to constantly transforming the aspects or methodology of organisation in order to create new, or occupy existing structures differently, can be seen to relate to an Eastern view of the world. Compared to much Western thought on the topic of re-figuring social institutions, historically there has tended to be an appetite for destruction and rebuilding from the ashes.[524] Compare this to Eastern teaching from religions such as Taoism or Buddhism, and the difference is stark. Generally the approach to institutional forms and creativity, in the visual arts particularly, has evolved from the view of reincarnation and recycling present throughout life. Nothing ever really dies or is destroyed; it is simply reconfigured differently from another place or time.[525] The Chinese concept of shanzhai can be used to describe this process. Shanzhai translates as the neologism for 'fake', often used to describe counterfeit goods or cultural products rooted in creative thought and linked to wider Eastern approaches to the subject. The overall view being one of process and how things should flow in relation to one another and society, rather than focusing on an end result. As philosopher and cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han outlines:

> *Shanzhai* cell phones are forgeries of branded products such as Nokia or

[523] Raunig, "Instituent Practices. Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming."

[524] Potentially influenced historically in many Christian countries from the wrathful God of the Old Testament.

[525] This, alongside the concept of shanzhai, was brought to my attention in relation to artist-led, self-organised and alternative practices at the *Against an Economy of Violence* event organised by Kosaten (a collective organised by migrants, refugees and minorities), as part of their ongoing collaborative project *Radio Kosaten* in Tokyo. It was raised by cultural researcher Jong Pairez of Kosaten and expanded upon by Michael Leung (an artist/designer and urban farmer) from Kai Fong Pai Dong (a self-organised, socially engaged, market stall space in Hong Kong). See Kosaten, "Radio Kosaten – Against an Economy of Violence: The Political Economy of Creative Practices, Artist-Led Initiatives, Art Projects, and Alternative Art/Education," Facebook event, May 31, 2019, accessed July 14, 2019,
https://www.facebook.com/events/180007726213125/?active_tab=about
"About," Kosaten, accessed July 14, 2019,
http://kosaten.org/en/about/
"Texts," Kai Fong Pai Dong, accessed July 14, 2019,
https://paidong.tumblr.com/texts

Samsung. They are sold under names such as Nokir, Samsing, or Anycat. But they are actually anything but crude forgeries. In terms of design and function they are hardly inferior to the original. Technological or aesthetic modifications give them their own identity…*Shanzhai* products are characterized in particular by a high degree of flexibility…they can adapt very quickly to particular needs and situations, which is not possible for products made by large companies because of their long production cycles…The ingenuity of *shanzhai* products is frequently superior to that of the original…In this way it has established itself as an original. The new emerges from surprising variations and combinations…Gradually its products depart from the original, until they mutate into originals themselves.[526]

It is easy to see how this approach can be applied to instituting alternatives, and arguably how artist-led self-organisation has come to embrace a similar path. Moving away from the long-held Western view of creating a break or rupture from which to build something new or original – as was the case with the historical avant-garde – towards an Eastern (and also neo-avant-garde) approach of compromising on this destructive impulse in order to restructure and subvert the status quo. With processes of instituting in the artist-led condition an ongoing feature, it would follow with practitioners constantly instituting structures, forms and practices that the understandings of them are constantly being made and re-made. Shifting depending on who is in control of them at their inception. A parallel can be drawn here between what gives life to processes of critique enacted by practitioners and other approaches to creating alternative propositions to the overarching socio-economic system itself. As Gamble states in regards to neoliberalism of there being no pure form of it,[527] this unsurprisingly echoes many similarities with the structure of artist-led self-organisation, and the need to constantly challenge institutional recuperation. So too does the approach to creating potential alternatives to the capitalist system of neoliberal hegemony. Economist Chris Rogers outlines this general approach in *Capitalism and its Alternatives* by saying:

It therefore suggests that alternatives to capitalism should be thought of as processes that need to be continually made and remade if they are not

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[526] Byung-Chul Han, *Shanzhai: Deconstruction in Chinese,* trans. Philippa Hurd (Boston: The MIT Press, 2017), 72.
[527] Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast*, 88.

to degenerate or reproduce the injustices of capitalist social relations, and if desirable outcomes are to be realized.[528]

From here it is not difficult to argue for the neoliberal system undergoing a similar process. If there is no definitive form of it – like the previous conception of artist-led self-organisation – it follows that on a daily basis all those that are part of the nebulous understanding of it work to constantly re-make it through their actions, ensuring its dynamism in a variety of contexts. For practitioners then, their acts of critique as part of the artist-led condition are best realised being targeted at the institutional structures of the system itself. Structures that help propagate conditions individuals can then warp in a variety of ways to suit their own outlooks and subjective approaches to daily life under its name. They should be encouraged to take a 'non-judgmental' position of others in society, instead focusing on the system that gives rise and freedom to them and their actions. This is in part because practitioners are also constituents of that system, and so experience similar conditions (depending on their level of privilege, etc.) and have the potential to act in the same manner as those they would critique. Instead by targeting the structural supports of that system that are relatively unchanging, there is more potential for meaningful and lasting change to take place that would have a knock-on effect on the individuals it influences or supports. Rogers puts forward:

> such a non-judgmental position is a sensible one to take; people cannot be considered bad people simply for living their lives according to what they perceive to be the prevailing 'rules of the game'. However, if we do not ask questions about those rules and their implications, we cede control over how to remake or resist them.[529]

Enacting dissensus as part of the artist-led condition still faces the same hurdles as enacting it in the previous conception of artist-led self-organisation, as outlined in Chapter 3. What has changed with the new understanding brought about by the condition is the increased structuralisation serves to unite practitioners and institutional forms, providing a more rigid and inclusive

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[528] Chris Rogers, *Capitalism and its Alternatives* (London: Zed Books, 2014), 4.
[529] Ibid, 18.

framework from which critique can be enacted instead of a purely undefined mass. This allows for practitioners or organisations to act as a focal point for their peers within the multitude in a process of collectivisation. All whilst being in constant dialogue about the condition and those within it, providing constantly shifting borders to steer it away from existing as static, constituted, power. Assuming a much more visible position to the institutions and organisations being critiqued, rather than appearing from an unspecified haze outside of their usual social register. In doing so practitioners can be seen to be challenging the perceived rules of the game they are a part of.

By challenging the overarching rules of the game (and implicitly the game itself) as part of the condition practitioners work to actively move away from the rhetoric of creativity peddled by those in power. In the UK this can be equated to roughly around the time of New Labour's rise and indoctrination of the creative entrepreneur as key to its vision for contemporary society. Since that point that same rhetoric of creativity has been used repeatedly in order to solidify and strengthen power. Often done through creating inequality and social injustice, according to Mould, the system works to tell us:

> we must be 'creative' to progress...because capitalism of the twenty-first century, turbocharged by neoliberalism, has redefined creativity to feed its own growth. Being creative in today's society has only one meaning: to carry on the status quo.[530]

In this way it "merely replicates existing capitalist registers into ever-deeper recesses of socioeconomic life."[531] Through institutional critique and dissensus staged knowingly or inadvertently through their practice, practitioners are able to attempt to resist this stranglehold creative activity has gained. One that serves only to indebt citizens and force them into precarious working and living arrangements. As Mould reflects:

> Creative work, despite its evangelists, does little to question the norm of capitalist accumulation: indeed it catalyses it. To break from this norm,

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[530] Mould, *Against Creativity*, 3.
[531] Ibid, 50.

and realize alternative models of organizing societies and economies, is what creative work can allow us to do – it just needs to be released from the vernaculars in which it is currently embedded. Rather than 'releasing the inner entrepreneur', creative work can, and should, 'release the inner revolutionary'.[532]

For practitioners, luckily they are able to release their 'inner revolutionary' through dissensus within their practice. In doing so it has served to create ruptures from the current use of creativity as a tool of oppression and social control. These ruptures, once explicitly and visibly formed by artist-run methodologies and other self-organised movements creating new physical spaces for dissensual activity to take place, have become more nuanced as part of the artist-led condition. Reflecting the diffuse nature of current UK society and the important role digital technology and connectivity plays. As these instances of dissensual rupture have become more nuanced many practitioners have begun to incorporate them within established CVAF structures in more pragmatic methods,[533] where following Beech's proposition they can be seen to be behaving differently within them.[534] In doing so they can be seen to be taking part in instituent practices and shifting their approach (however coincidentally) from a 'traditional' Western standpoint, to one heavily influenced by Eastern thought, perhaps influenced by the rise of globalisation. Although it remains to be seen if the artist-led condition will be able to ensure more practitioners can realise their dissensual potential – as a large part of that rests on each individual's intentions – it allows them a better opportunity to be able to do so.

To return to Bourdieu, this approach of continued instituting and enaction of dissensus shows a certain level of self-reflexivity from those subject to the artist-led condition toward their role and place within the sub-field, CVAF and contemporary society.[535] In critiquing the rules of the game in the sub-field, CVAF or the field of power in society at large they seemingly directly contradict the standing of them. They question the very rules and autonomy of the game as

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[532] Ibid, 52-53.
[533] Ibid, 179-180.
[534] Beech, "Institutionalisation for All."
[535] Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*.

social constructs by showing they can see where they labour from the outside looking in, in part because of their working knowledge of the neoliberal system, rather than from the inside looking out, to produce critique. Bourdieu himself states that you cannot create a science (understanding or critique) of a field without removing yourself from those rules and understandings:

> and suspending the relationship of complicity and connivance which ties every cultivated person to the cultural game, in order to constitute the game as object. But nevertheless it must not be forgotten that this *illusio* is part of the very reality we are concerned to comprehend.[536]

Here he offers the paradoxical nature of the critique of a field. In order to truly critique something you have to remove yourself from the game, the same thing that also acts as the reality you exist in on a day-to-day basis and are seeking to change or better understand. Usually this position would seem incompatible with continued presence within that field or sub-field. As Forkert expands upon and clarifies in relation to the visual arts:

> one cannot critically examine the art field and still belong to it, because to belong to it is to believe in its autonomy and other related principles. This makes it very difficult to be an artist and to still be critical, or self-reflexive.[537]

Whereas earlier I had argued for the critique enacted by practitioners too often serving the very thing they sought to critique, when dissensus can be achieved under the condition as part of an instituent practice I would argue that it can be understood as breaking down the pretense of the illusio. The paradoxical nature of artist-led self-organisation here shows itself as a strength. The ruptures created from dissensus allow practitioners to temporarily look in on themselves, the sub-field and CVAF. The constant shifting of their instituent practices meaning they cannot be pinned down within them by other institutional structures. It serves to lay bare the artist-led sub-field and CVAF, allowing for instances of true critique to occur in order to help bring about change and deepen practitioners' understanding of the environment they exist within. Only

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[536] Ibid, 230-231.
[537] Forkert, *Artistic Lives: A Study of Creativity,*15.

by acknowledging and showing how little autonomy actually exists for practitioners will any kind of reversal be possible to grant them more. In turn bringing increased capacity for social change through their practices.

To return to Fraser's call for a unified social institution from which wider critique and meaningful change can occur,[538] Beech's call for increased institutionalisation[539] alongside Raunig's instituent practices[540] can be seen to bridge the gap between various fields. Ensuring practitioners from the artist-led condition can work in a wider chain of equivalence with others from different social registers and groupings in order to bring about social change. With the condition not privileging the 'artist/artist-' as above all others – but somewhat ironically using the word as a prefix for a specific spatio-temporal understanding of visual art – it allows for its incorporation with other dissenting parties from throughout society. Here Beech holds we have a multiply agentive social system needing to be dealt with in multiple ways, forming a social totality that can challenge neoliberal hegemony,[541] in much the same way Fraser's conception does.[542] Undoubtedly the artist-led condition functions in exactly this way, presenting further capacity for social change than the previous conception of artist-led self-organisation allowed. Capacity that doesn't seek to put the artist at the forefront, but instead uses practitioners' creative practices to aid others in shaping social change in a communal and collective process of resistance and dissent.

Existing Under the Condition

Even with the shift in understanding to the artist-led condition processes of self-organisation produced under it still exist paradoxically, and are likely to do so indefinitely. It will always be a neoliberal exemplar so long as the system persists; there is no way around it as this specific form of artistic self-

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[538] Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions."
[539] Beech, "Institutionalisation for All."
[540] Raunig, "Instituent Practices. Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming."
[541] Beech, "Keynote: Dave Beech."
[542] Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions."

organisation only came about as a direct response to, and is continually shaped by, neoliberal governance. In planning any kind of future for practitioners and organisations under the artist-led condition the paradoxical nature of that condition has to be taken into account. Previously this was overlooked by practitioners trapped in the presentism of post-Financial Crisis contemporaneity. However in detailing how cyclical artist-led self-organisation was (and still is) in Chapter 1 it is hoped that will prove useful as a point of reference.

Although similar in many ways to the previous understanding of artist-led self-organisation, re-framing that self-organisation as part of a process of socio-economic conditioning that exists as a condition for practitioners shifts discourse and outlooks. It allows for clarity to aid processes of supporting and mobilising others to work towards potential change in the near future. Potentially helping further strengthening and securing practitioners' roles and rights in contemporary society. However to conceptualise existing in the current paradoxical state of the artist-led condition I return to my description of artist-led self-organisation as cyclical. The self-organisation employed by practitioners has always tended to gain strength and public visibility depending on the relative weakness of the UK economy. The art system itself is governed by neoliberal tendencies, and ultimately works to appropriate and absorb all in opposition in order to profit from them in economic cycles of indeterminate length. To exist under the artist-led condition then is to be within this constant push and pull between the condition on one side, and the art system, governance of the state, and its gatekeepers on the other. Whenever one side begins to exert any dominance over the other it causes a chain reaction where the other acts in order to regain control, or the perception of control.

To view the CVAF cynically, the repressive tolerance it enacts – under the guidance of the neoliberal system – through resource distribution to, and public acknowledgement of, practitioners and organisations in order to be seen to be fair and democratic, has to date not had the desired effects. Practitioners are continually seeking to explore new spaces to inhabit, new publics to engage with

and new strategies to ensure their remuneration and longevity. Even with the best intentions if the resources gatekeepers are able to offer are less than what is required to begin with, they still ultimately guide practitioners back to state-run resource holders. Resource holders who have been at the mercy of consistently callous Conservative governments, and who ultimately serve to maintain the status quo.

Although it may seem a futile task with the odds weighted heavily in favour of those in power, this total imperfection is arguably what makes the artist-led condition such an interesting site of labour, existence and resistance. Practitioners struggle against the socio-economic system actively working to constrain and indebt them, but through these conditions of precarity some of the greatest works and critical practices are developed. Where those works and practices move to beyond that is another subject for future debate. Although that in no way, shape or form acts to agree with the conditions in which practitioners labour, or to romanticise them, it is simply stating a – paradoxical – fact. That neoliberal governance has inadvertently created a perfect storm of negative factors that have combined to continually produce practices that challenge the neoliberal order in a myriad of ways, rather than fully stifle practitioners into submission. The system acts as the catalyst for its own opposition, providing resources to those that would oppose it through repressive tolerance. Although access to those resources is usually predicated on trying to absorb or appropriate those in opposition back within the system to strengthen it, increasingly practitioners are finding ways to retain a certain level of independence. However romantic this approach may sound the realities of existing in the paradoxical state of the artist-led condition are that economic safety and security are usually traded (over varying lengths of time) for having a public creative output. Most do so in full knowledge of the exploitation they face and how undervalued or un-remunerated their labour will be. Usually because they feel compelled to express themselves, often valuing their practice more than the money they can raise from it. Although it is not a tradeoff that should occur, or certainly not occur at such an extreme, it is one the majority begrudgingly accept.

Not only is the artist-led condition paradoxical by its very history and nature, to imagine a future in which it was not paradoxical raises a further potential paradox of its existence: namely that of its perceived need for opposition. All self-organisation (in the visual arts and other fields) can be seen as an oppositional response to those in power, a rebuke to a perceived lack of provision in any number of socio-economic or political areas. This opposition can be implicit or explicit depending on the form of self-organisation taking place. In context of the artist-led condition practices incorporate that opposition into them rather than solely being focused on it; they have their own inherent content that augments their opposition and facilitates it. In theory the challenge for change coming from them should help inform and regulate socio-political governance, creating a balance through radical (agonistic) pluralism, even if it is relatively unstable. Here it is pertinent to note Beech's opposition to the combination of dissensus and agonism to produce a 'narrow' concept of critique, instead favouring a more antagonistic approach. As noted earlier, whilst there is the potential for the condition to pivot back towards an antagonistic approach, to date such an approach has not had any meaningful impact in relation to artist-led self-organisation. With the combination of dissensus and agonism I propose as part of the initial conception of the condition, it positions the critique developed as both broad in scope (through its use of networks and instituent practices), and insidious to the neoliberal system it opposes.[543]

Although the artist-led condition acts to provide a framework within which practitioners can develop new movements or responses to a variety of causes or concerns, until it is abolished it will always implicitly (and as outlined insidiously) oppose the neoliberal system of governance as the starting point from which further points of opposition arise. In this way it inherently draws its opposition from the socio-economic system of political governance. As such, if the neoliberal system were ever overthrown, or replaced by an as yet unknown alternative, the outcome for the artist-led condition would be unpredictable. There is no telling if it would become oppositional to the new socio-economic

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[543] Beech, "Keynote: Dave Beech"; *Art and Postcapitalism*, 4.

system, further institutionalise its practices, be absorbed into the new makeup of the system itself, or even something else entirely.

Whilst there is an implicit opposition to the governing status quo present, as outlined earlier practitioners who enact dissensus can be understood as not beholden to the taboo on institutionalisation. Their opposition is a step toward helping bringing about wider social change. Change practitioners want to see happen as part of their practices, not merely being motivated by the idea of it happening. Once that change happens we reach uncharted territory. Very rarely yet, if ever, have artistic practices been able to bring about lasting social change in Western society in the contemporary era. And if they were able to the focus would then be on how to exist within the new sociality produced, building practices under the shifting borders of what the artist-led condition and mainstream institutions would then exist as. Opposition would undoubtedly still exist to the governing status quo, but cohesion under the new social order as a site for practice would be the primary concern. Even for practitioners producing consensus a similar scenario would play out. If they inadvertently produce consensus whilst aiming for dissensus they would not be subject to the taboo, and if they consciously produce consensus over an extended period then the artist-led network would remove them from the condition as a redundant node. Even if they inadvertently produce consensus their practices would not consciously be focused on opposition to the institutions of the art system and so would also not be subject to the taboo.

Curator Brian Wallis outlines the alternative space movement as having three distinct generations, which here are pertinent. Beyond the 1980s the movement would increasingly become part of the mainstream art system because of the volume of practitioners situating their practice in those spaces, along with the profile its increasing popularity brought as a new methodology of practice. With this increase in popularity leading to artist-run practices globally, those three generations can be argued to initially be present at the start of that method of self-organisation too. They provide an interesting overview of the motivations and impetus for the genesis of the alternative space movement and artist-run

methodology. When taken into consideration alongside the artist-led condition and the previous conception of artist-led self-organisation it points again towards an unknown future. Throughout his text the generations that Wallis describes can be seen as:

1960 – 1974: Radical and utopian, circumventing galleries, political in nature with activist tendencies.
1975 – 1980: Focusing on new media and representing diverse and marginalised cultures; also overtly political in nature.
1981 – 1983: Alternatives to the alternatives taking the form of more commercialised galleries/spaces founded by artists.[544]

These generations of shifts in artistic practice arguably follow the famous example set by literary critic Frederic Jameson of periodising the 1960s as beginning in the 1950s and ending in the 1970s.[545] Jameson argued the 1960s were not marked by a calendar period, but instead a period of wider socio-historical development where socio-economic-technical developments irrevocably shifted culture. He reinforced this idea in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, showing how the traditionally held ideologies of modernism had broken down in postmodernism following the 1960s.[546] Sociologist Jeffrey Nealon would extend this logic saying that only after such a cultural epoch could you periodise it. He argued the 1960s led directly into the 1980s, which only ended in summer 2000, or autumn 2001, coinciding with 9/11 and the dissipation of anti-Western government sentiments from their own citizens.[547] In relation to Wallis' generations, they can clearly be mapped against socio-economic-technical shifts of the 1980s in Western society at large. Helping

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[544] Wallis, "Public Funding and Alternative Spaces."
[545] Frederic Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s," *Social Text*, No.9/10, The 60's without Apology (Spring - Summer, 1984), 178-209.
[546] Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).
[547] Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 10-12. Also see Nick Aikens, Teresa Grandas, Nav Haq, Beatriz Herráez & Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez (eds.) *The Long 1980s: Constellations of Art, Politics and Identities* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2018).

to compartmentalise those practices at specific points in shared human history in line with economic fluctuations (in-keeping with the artist-led cycle outlined in Chapter 1).

This points towards a broadly deterministic economic view of all socio-political structures in society being based on economic trends. Although this would seem a simplistic way to frame capitalist social structures, alongside the artist-led cycle, it helps reinforce how cultural practices are positioned by the neoliberal economy as subservient to free market capital accumulation. This is further reinforced when you add in key events in the artist-led genealogy to the periodising logic of the 1960s and 1980s:

1950 – 1970: DIY movement/neo-avant-garde/counterculture movements/first generation of the alternative space movement.

1970 – 2001: Second and third generation of the alternative space movement/Thatcherism/artist-run practices/first two waves of institutional critique/New Labour.

In both the 1960s and the 1980s it has been made clear throughout the thesis that self-organisation from practitioners directly counteracted the subservient position the capitalist hegemony sought to place it, and them, in. In relation to artist-led self-organisation we have not yet reached the end of the current epoch of capitalist crisis to be able to properly periodise it. However arguably we have seen the first two of Wallis' generations again, and are currently experiencing a potential crossover between the second and third. As outlined in Chapter 2, the move toward new media and interacting with increasingly online platforms for communication and exhibition has provided marginalised peoples a slowly increasing visibility and increasingly louder public voice. Through this the second generation has clearly arrived and is rising to prominence. Whether this rise will continue is contingent as a third generation presenting alternatives to the alternatives is already forming. In response to a variety of factors, as outlined in Chapter 3, many practitioners are attempting to add more overtly commercial

aspects to their outputs or organisational structures to aid sustainability, challenging Drabble's view[548] of self-organisation as non-commercial and anti-profit, outlined in Chapter 2. Although previously this would signal the definite beginning of the third generation, here it is slightly more complex. Whilst there are notable recent examples such as Crown Building Studios,[549] Shy Bairns,[550] and PINK,[551] they can also be seen to hold many of the same values and driving forces as the second generation, pointing toward a process of blurring rather than succession.

Although self-organised practitioners sharing similar catalysts is nothing new, in relation to the artist-led condition I would argue the contentious political times we live in have begun to disrupt the 'traditional' generational cycle as there is seemingly no end to this 'decade' from which we could properly periodise the societal shifts. With a succession of socio-economic calamities resulting in the turmoil of the current state of capitalist crisis, the socio-economic conditions present during those times have seemingly warped much of the activity. In the space of just over a calendar decade the three generations present in self-organised visual arts activity from the alternative space movement onwards has been compressed and effectively made defunct, moving toward a meshwork of all three. For the artist-led condition its 'generations' could be initially speculated as:

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[548] Drabble, "On De-Organisation," 19.
[549] As outlined in Chapter 3, a studios and project space in Liverpool with an editions shop and framing service that works with institutions in the city and beyond. "About," CBS Gallery & Studios, accessed May 17, 2020, https://cbsgallery.co.uk/about-1
[550] As outlined in Chapter 3, an artist collective that creates and sells zines alongside developing exhibitions and hiring themselves out for design and production work and workshops for other practitioners and organisations. "Info," Shy Bairns, accessed May 17, 2020, https://www.shybairns.co.uk/info
[551] As outlined earlier in this chapter, a discursive curatorial project between curators and artists driven by an exhibition and residency programme, incorporating commercial activities. PINK, "About."

2007 – 2010: Politically active practitioners creating new spaces for sociality, exhibition, production and experimentation as alternative to the institutionalised art system and wider social institutions.

2011 – 2015: Increased focus on digital media and new technology, with a noticeable move toward issues of equality.

2016 –: Blurring of second and third generations incorporating commercial aspects alongside utilising digital technology to help overtly promote messages concerned with subjects of politics and equality; heading toward an unknown future.

Despite the uncertainty this may appear as ushering in through condensing the previous model, with re-framing artist-led self-organisation as the artist-led condition it once again presents both a problem and an opportunity. Since the 1960s whenever self-organised visual arts practices have been named and gone through those three generations it has signalled an increasing acceptance into the mainstream. Leading to an appropriation within the institutionalised art system and move toward another new movement or methodology. With artist-led self-organisation shown to not exist as a movement and less a clear methodology but a state of cultural existence it follows that it could also break free from this three-generation cycle. Especially given there doesn't appear to be any new form of self-organised movement on the horizon to take up the mantle – again pointing to no end to this 'decade'. As the generations increasingly blur and boundaries seemingly collapse in on themselves there is no reason for the artist-led condition to become an instrumentalised part of the mainstream that only serves to reinforce neoliberal hegemony. The condition can instead act as a paradigm shift. A social-technical space in the mainstream to develop dynamic institutional forms required for dissensual practices to survive and thrive like never before. The condition does not need to exhaust itself and fall prey to the creeping spectre of the institutionalised art system. Those subject to it have the ability now to be able to collectively, collaboratively and co-operatively forge their own path that hasn't already been worn by previous generations, once again positioning their practices outside of subservience to the commercial art market.

With the move toward an albeit dynamic form of structuralisation the artist-led condition offers the opportunity for other forms of bureaucratic organisation to be developed to further aid practitioners in sharing knowledge and safeguarding. Not only for those enacting dissensus, but anyone else subject to the condition. Here the 'traditional' forms of governing bodies/unions/steering groups/archives are most relevant as speculative departure points. Initially, when the inevitable shifting of the borders of the condition occurs, who will decide upon what those new boundaries should be? If the previous conception of artist-led self-organisation faltered because of its total openness allowing individuals that were part of it to shift the borders individually, and drastically, for themselves without communicating them to others, how could this be avoided as part of the condition? How could this space for potential be harnessed as a strength?

Given the unique experience of contemporaneity for each individual there should not be an expectation to stop shifts in personal opinions of the borders of the condition, but instead using the parameters of understanding outlined as the point for future individual and collective revisions. This will provide solidarity and better potential from which practitioners can seek to re-think the limits for themselves, further strengthening collective positions. Not starting from a vague indeterminate point that is unclear enough to feel opaque, serving to distance practitioners from one another making them easier to exploit and co-opt. By using the same departure point and understanding it allows practitioners to at least be headed in a similar direction, even if their paths there are slightly less direct. With parameters for the condition set this still leaves the opportunity for practitioners to warp the borders of the condition however they see fit.

In order to stop practitioners from causing that would-be consensus to break down (rather than change over time through dissensual discourse), the immediate thought would seemingly be to develop some form of governing body that could continually work toward evaluating and re-thinking just what it means to be subject to the condition. A governing body could quite feasibly

convene and host meetings or communicate online/offline along with asking for feedback on individual experiences and thoughts on issues for future changes to the borders of who or what is included. It would however require a certain amount of effort and resources to create alongside enthusiasm and appetite from practitioners and organisations. With the scope of practice and amounts of time and resources individuals and organisations generally have, in many ways this would likely be troublesome to implement. Arguably organisations like a-n do already help fulfil some of this role with their various campaigns and initiatives. But they, (and others like them), are ultimately limited by resources and the fact that they were never intended to act as a governing body. Posing the question of professionalising all those subject to the condition to some degree through a governing body also raises its own set of issues, not least as to understandings of 'professionalism'. However the Museums Association (MA) offers a potential model that could be successfully adapted and adopted in order to develop a structure large enough to cater for the entirety of those subject to the artist-led condition in the UK.[552]

The MA has similar boundaries to the condition in many ways; seeking to be open and inclusive, sharing experiences and information between its members, and having a broad enough definition of what a museum is to permit a wide variety of organisations to be included as members. They state:

> The Museums Association…agreed a definition in 1998. It says: 'Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society.' This definition includes art galleries with collections of works of art, as well as museums with historical collections of objects.[553]

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[552] The MA as a governing body model was first brought to my attention by Emma Coffield in the first researcher roundtable meeting at the Exhibition Research Lab, and used as an example in her talk at the *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led* symposium. See Appendix 2.
[553] "FAQs," Museums Association, accessed March 07, 2020, https://www.museumsassociation.org/about/frequently-asked-questions

Under this definition the MA welcomes a wide scope of organisations to be a part of it, with each paying membership fees relating to their yearly operating budgets ranging between £80 – £2,300,[554] ensuring accessibility for all. Membership of such a governing body also allows for it to lobby for change on behalf of its members following their consultation, input and feedback. Which in the case of the artist-led condition could be targeted toward those in power and the gatekeepers of public resources. Doing so could help further argue for implementation of new levels of safeguarding for freelance practitioners or to argue for new approaches and strategies for paying practitioners fairly, etc. (which could link up with a-n, and other organisations', campaigning to do so). The potential is limitless depending on what its future membership would agree are the most important broader issues to mobilise against. It would help to further join the dots in the wider chain of equivalence for social change practitioners are part of.

This aspect of cohesively mobilising to lobby for change sounds somewhat like it is drifting away from the role of a traditional governing body and instead moving toward the form of a workers' union. Although workers' unions have historically been a key site for protecting rights and welfare, in relation to the visual arts in the UK recently they have been somewhat contested sites and have been able to affect less change compared to governing bodies like the MA. Currently in the UK the only active unions for practitioners are the Artists' Union England (AUE) and the Scottish Artists' Union (SAU). These two unions have been in operation sine 2014 and 2001 respectively, with AUE representing roughly 400 members[555] and SAU representing roughly over 1,200 members.[556] They both primarily represent artists (having to meet a certain number of criteria for membership), but both allow others membership too. AUE allows freelance curators to join so long as their curatorial practice is part of a wider practice (as an artist-curator or curator-artist) alongside fulfilling the required criteria to be considered an

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[554] "Institutional Membership," Museums Association, accessed March 07, 2020, https://www.museumsassociation.org/join/institutional-membership
[555] Figure provided through an email conversation dated 02 December 2019.
[556] "Our Achievements So Far," Scottish Artists Union, accessed March 07, 2020, https://www.artistsunion.scot/achievements

artist.[557] The SAU also allow art workers to be full members so long as they fulfil the criteria for being an artist, and if not are offered associate membership.[558]

Even with these concessions the membership figures for both unions may seem relatively low compared to the official UK numbers as of 2009, according to *The Visual Arts Blueprint* workforce development plan, of 37,480 people employed in the visual arts sector with 28,490 being practicing artists.[559] Seemingly the unions are failing to offer benefits that entice others to join their causes. That could very well be down to the perception of a union as an organisational model and the ramifications that has historically had in relation to social class division, or other more practical reasons such as a lack of resources meaning the unions cannot market themselves effectively to their potential members. Regardless, the results are somewhat damning and again point to an apathy of practitioners brought about through a collective sense of learned helplessness. The unions are offering a different course of action but practitioners stay in the same routines they and the majority of their predecessors have become part of. Also if practitioners do not view themselves as an 'artist', their practice doesn't adhere to stereotypical artistic tropes, or they don't tick the boxes of each union's criteria for membership they will be alienated. Whilst unions are both working toward positive change and offering support for members (such as with insurance, legal advice, tax guidelines, etc.) their approach to who constitutes their membership seems somewhat outdated with the realities of current practice. In order for any union to be representative of those subject to the artist-led condition this would either have to change, or the current (and any future) unions themselves could instead become part of and support a governing body as proposed above. In this situation, like in the relationship between unions and political parties, the extra weight of union backing would provide further

[557] "FAQs," Artists' Union England, accessed March 07, 2020, https://www.artistsunionengland.org.uk/faqs/#FAQ9

[558] "Art Workers," Scottish Artists Union, accessed March 07, 2020, https://www.artistsunion.scot/if_it_s_an_artists_union_why_are_arts_workers_al lowed_to_join

[559] Creative & Cultural Skills in partnership with Arts Council England, *The visual arts blueprint: workforce development plan for the visual arts in the UK* (London: Creative & Cultural Skills, 2009).

credence to any lobbying activity whilst allowing the unions to still continue their representative functions.

With this talk of governing bodies and unions issues of autonomy and paradoxes must also be raised, as with every subject related to the condition. Although the idea of a governing body that could make collective decisions based on constituent feedback seems a logical step, the other side of that argument would be that it acts to curtail truly autonomous and spontaneous self-organisation. However as already shown artist-led self-organisation in and of itself cannot be considered autonomous, and practitioners regularly institute themselves into increasingly formalised structures. Although the potential for spontaneity is reduced with an increase in formality, as outlined by Velvick this is a tradeoff that has to be weighed up as being beneficial because of the accountability that comes with it.[560] In relation to the larger-scale institutions of the CVAF, even with this formalising practitioners and organisations still posses a significant amount of spontaneity compared to them. Although this tradeoff would seem beneficial for all, it once again highlights the paradoxical nature of the artist-led condition. Practitioners want greater protection and representation but have been collectively unwilling or unable to reconcile for it.

Some practitioners that have been able to bridge this divide can be seen in being part of or taking up roles in various steering and advisory groups and committees representing the visual arts across the country. Here practitioners generally seek to be part of a wider conversation with others from different parts of the CVAF to help try and interact with and lobby for change from gatekeepers. Key examples of such groups could be recognised as the Contemporary Visual Arts Network (CVAN) and its various regional networks in England,[561] the Scottish Contemporary Art Network (SCAN),[562] Visual Artists Ireland (VAI),[563]

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[560] Velvick, "Artist-Run Multiverse Summit."
[561] "Mission, Vision and Values," Contemporary Visual Arts Network, accessed 27 April, 2020,
http://www.cvan.art/mission-vision-values
[562] "About: What is SCAN?" Scottish Contemporary Art Network, accessed March 07, 2020,

and more local steering groups such as The Bristol DIY Arts Network.[564] Those organisations all involve a mixture of staff and practitioners from various parts of the CVAF and beyond in their respective locations and help to join the dots between them, whilst also providing general professional support and compiling advocacy and policy documents.[565]

Once again similarly to the various campaigns and toolkits such as those from a-n, Shape Arts, Jerwood Arts, and to a certain extent 12ø Collective, they are seemingly creating guides and suggestions rather than bringing about lasting meaningful change. The organisations function some way between networks and advocacy bodies. They are concerned more with connecting, supporting and promoting rather than acting to bring about urgently required change for practitioners outside of the institutionalised CVAF. SCAN even went so far as to publish a manifesto in 2017 relating to what they were working towards with other visual arts organisations, to "address the significant challenges and inequalities that exist within the visual arts in Scotland."[566] However the document is peppered with non-confrontational language that instead 'highlights', 'urges' and 'encourages' those with power to heed their calls.[567] Similarly to other attempts to lobby for change to date there is a relatively polite request with no threat from practitioners about withdrawing labour, not

https://sca-net.org/what-is-scan

[563] That covers both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. "VAI: At a Glance," Visual Artists Ireland, accessed March 07, 2020,
https://visualartists.ie/regional-roundup/vais-regional-focus/

[564] "What is Bristol's DIY Arts Network?" Theatre Bristol, accessed September 17, 2019,
https://theatrebristol.net/what-is-bristols-diy-network/

[565] "CVAN Advocacy and Policy," Contemporary Visual Arts Network, accessed March 07, 2020,
http://www.cvan.art/advocacy-policy

"Resources," Scottish Contemporary Art Network, accessed March 07, 2020,
https://sca-net.org/resources

"Help-Desk," Visual Artists Ireland, accessed March 07, 2020,
https://visualartists.ie/ni-portal/help-desk-advice/

[566] "Visual Arts Manifesto Launched," Scottish Contemporary Art Network, December 11, 2017, accessed March 07, 2020,
https://sca-net.org/news-feed/view/visual-arts-manifesto-launched

[567] Ibid.

spending money in organisations, etc. – things that help keep the art system functioning. The more influential positions within these advocacy groups are also generally allocated to people mainly from institutionalised and academic, rather than artist-led backgrounds. Public funding bodies regularly contribute to the maintenance and continued activity of the groups themselves, potentially further muting voices of complaint and dissent for legitimate fear of hampering future support.

From this point, one of the other key concerns for the future of the artist-led condition is that of posterity. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, the lack of recorded published information on artist-led self-organisation as a subject of study is of concern. With disparate critically engaged publications or accounts charting the history of specific organisations and the main components of the current published literature and the artist-led network serving as the main source of information dissemination, is there a need to hold a broader archive and current mapping resource of artist-led self-organisation for the UK for use by future generations of practitioners? Whereas projects like Hunt's *Artist-Led Hot 100*,[568] the now defunct *Archives of the Artist-Led*[569] or *Doggerland*'s artist-led spaces map[570] serve to provide piecemeal information (with some artist-led organisations also appearing on the Artist Run Alliance platform, providing some archival information of them alongside their artist-run peers),[571] *The Irish Artist-Led Archive* by curator and artist Megs Morley[572] could act as a precursor to a larger variant for the UK. Covering a 30-year period beginning in the 1970s, it charts a number of Irish self-organised organisations and their life spans, whilst also raising the point of historical revisionism surrounding artist-led self-organisation. Following the end of the project the entirety of the archive was

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[568] Hunt, "Artist-Led Hot 100 (version ii)."

[569] "Homepage," Archives of the Artist-Led, accessed November 03, 2017, https://archivesoftheartistled.org/

[570] "Artist-Led Map," Doggerland, accessed November 03, 2017, https://www.doggerland.info/artistled/

[571] "Indie Art Guide," Artist Run Alliance.

[572] "The Irish Artist-Led Archive," Projector Collective, accessed November 03, 2017, http://www.projectorcollective.org/artistled.html

placed in the collection of the National Irish Visual Arts Library[573] to allow for free public access. A UK variant aiming to map the networks, relationships and impacts of artists and their forms of organisation – *Networking Artists' Networks*[574] – was under development by a-n in the early 2000s. However there is no reason why such a project could not be resurrected and re-homed in an institutional setting (such as a library or higher education institution) that had the proper resources to continue its development as a public knowledge resource.

Although archiving any form of cultural information and ephemera, unionising or creating a steering group or governing body brings with it a certain move toward constituted hierarchisation, it is one that I would argue is necessary to ensure the future strength of the artist-led condition and the rights, roles and competences of those subject to it. It would continue processes of artist-led instituting, occupying traditional institutional spaces differently than their previous uses, focusing on propagating self-organisation and dissensus. Applying different attempts at structuring organisations present in artist-led contexts; moving towards more distributed functions in keeping with the artist-led model of being an orgnet with netorg tendencies.

Without trying to further speculate on a continued neoliberal or post-neoliberal future under the artist-led condition, it is clear practitioners would be required to alter their approaches to practice – and governance – in varying degrees depending how socio-politically engaged they are with combating neoliberal hegemony. It is important to note although practices may be less overtly concerned with bringing about social change, once individual practitioners' concerns have been met there will always be an implicit opposition from their

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[573] "Exhibitions – The Artist-Led Archive," National Irish Visual Arts Library, accessed November 03, 2017,
http://www.nival.ie/collections/exhibitions-database/view/exhibition/exb-name/the-irish-artist-led-archive/
[574] "About NAN," a-n, November 03, 2008, accessed November 05, 2017,
https://www.a-n.co.uk/resource/about-nan/
Jane Watt, "Impact of Networking," *a-n*, June 30, 2006, accessed November 05, 2017,
https://www.a-n.co.uk/resource/impact-of-networking-2/

self-organisation. Existing in a new sociality would also entail renegotiating relations with art system and wider social institutions, whilst avoiding creating a new social consensus and ensuring dissensual debate continued. This would work to ensure they were not routinely co-opted or exploited once again, but wider dialogue between those subject to the condition must happen – like that held at the *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led* symposium – before these processes could begin. But to be able to do this, what are the parameters of the artist-led condition as a starting point?

As outlined throughout this chapter, my proposal is that it is to be understood as the combination of the wider social, political, historical, physical, economic and environmental conditions, processes, factors and sites practitioners exist and labour within. Shaped by neoliberalism, globalisation and network culture these factors combine to form their experience of the world and the practices they ultimately create (in line with the development of a person's habitus, as Bourdieu would have it).[575] It is present across the online/offline spaces they inhabit or move between, with the understanding of it existing pluriversally for each individual. It is rooted in the precarity of contemporaneity, largely within the second economy, and through this provides shared experiences between practitioners. Like the previous conception of artist-led self-organisation it is paradoxical; both a conditioning of individuals and their structures of organisation, and the overarching condition they exist under. This overarching condition is the combination of various elements acting as the catalyst for self-organised activities rather than attempting to wrangle those activities – often driven by diverse concerns and agendas – into some semblance of a coherent group. Rather than constantly contesting its own borders and those considered subject to it, the condition allows for inclusion of a wide roster of practitioners, using its borders as shifting sites for further development and discourse of practice and understanding in a process of collectivisation. Through this it is to be seen as a space that allows for a greater potential of achieving dissensus through instituent practices as part of a wider chain of equivalence. Helping

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[575] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 170.

bring about social change across fields through networked and localised resistance.

As artist-led self-organisation cannot be understood as a movement, the artist-led condition circumvents this. It acts as the broad umbrella under which individuals can come together to unite behind a general sense of collective identity, shaped by neoliberal precarity. Opening out vocabularies to help mobilise whilst embracing differences;[576] allowing the singularities of the multitude to act in common.[577] It is still elastic enough to allow individuals to work toward their own concerns that can act to bring about wider social changes in varying capacities through practice – that explicitly or implicitly challenge the status quo – being in common under the same moniker. It is a way to help positively unite and mobilise the multitude of practitioners and their organisational forms through shared experiences rather than a specific shared goal. The artist-led condition is framed by relatively inclusive and flexible parameters that never become restrictive for the sake of maintaining a descriptive unity. The parameters and makeup of the condition can (and no doubt will) be changed over time by those subject to them. Shifting the borders as social theory and philosophical concepts change as new understandings of the broader human and post-human[578] conditions emerge.

The artist-led condition is a way to make sense of existence for visual arts practitioners as part of the second economy of contemporaneity. Whereas previously 'artist-led' was regularly used as a shorthand piece of terminology in the UK to describe anyone (practitioners) or anything (practices) deemed alternative to the institutionalised aspects of the CVAF, the artist-led condition provides parameters at its borders to provide a (relatively) stable foundation for individuals to coalesce around and within. It includes and celebrates the

[576] Coffield, "The problem with naming."
[577] Hardt & Negri, *Multitude*, 105.
[578] A strand of scientific, philosophical and cultural thought surrounding organisms or entities deemed beyond the traditional 'human' state.
See N. Katharine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

differences in understanding those subject to it have, rather than smoothing them over into a homogenous grouping. Whilst they don't have to share exactly the same views on each subject or issue, they all regularly experience, or have been influenced in some capacity by, the same conditions of contemporaneity. Regardless of their own personal privileges, through this they hold shared experiences of the varying levels of precarity of contemporary neoliberal society and so can be understood as having levels of mutual connection to one another, further reinforced by their roles within the visual arts.

In reframing the previously held view of artist-led self-organisation the new understanding of the artist-led condition allows practitioners to be able to better join the self-organised ideology of their existence with the realities of life under neoliberal hegemony. It provides a space for resistance and dissent to develop amongst peers as part of wider artistic practices and concerns, whilst being in an ongoing discourse around the nature, definition and understanding of artist-led self-organisation. In defining just what the condition is it also creates a more inclusive framework from which practitioners can form a chain of equivalence for change as part of a radical (agonistic) pluralism. Joining with other agents of social change in the process like never before from a site of pure potential.

As outlined throughout the thesis the 'artist-led' moniker has always been a contested term. In answering the first research sub-question the work of van Seeters and James was used to show for the first time explicitly how it could not be considered as describing a social movement in line with its historical self-organised forebears. Instead with reframing the terminology as the artist-led condition it was shown to fulfil the need highlighted by Coffield for a new understanding that allowed collectivisation without flattening out vocabularies and individual understandings of practice to create true solidarity between practitioners for the first time in the sub-field.

The chapter as a whole works to answer the second research sub-question, outlining what constitutes the artist-led condition and what its parameters are as both a social condition and social conditioning of those subject to it. Here the

work of Silver is key to outlining exactly what a social condition can be understood as, and the need for them to be dynamic spaces of questioning how we are in relation to others. From that point I outline who I understand as subject to it based on critical argumentation drawing on the previous chapters (citing intention and the 'importance' of the 'artist/artist-' as key), alongside arguing specifically for the artist-led network and those practitioners subject to the condition as being the arbiters for the parameters of changes to borders of the condition itself in future.

Finally, in answering the third research sub-question the work of Beech and Rogers are both key in conceptualising if processes of artist-led self-organisation will always need to be developed from a position of opposition in future under the condition. Although as outlined the only certain answer to that question is currently yes, there is clear potential for this to change. This strikes a balance between the positions of Beech and his taboo on institutionalisation and Rogers and his non-judgmental position of critique of the neoliberal system, as artist-led practices arose in direct opposition to the system itself. But should practitioners help bring about a new socio-economic system it would be expected they would then want to go on to continue to help establishing it as a new and improved model beyond that initial change. Rather than requiring continued opposition to the dominant socio-economic system that would no longer exist as their drive for practice and existence, instead they would create further dissensus within the as of yet unknown new system initially conceived through their consensus as and when they saw fit.

Conclusion: Speculative Futures, Tumultuous Presents

Self-organisation within the visual arts has a rich and varied history of opposition, non-conformity and principled action. Throughout this thesis I have focused on the impact neoliberalism, globalisation and network culture have had on conditions of practice, organisation and critique post-2007 for practitioners mainly based in the second economy. The central problem of the research, and events organised as part of it, focused on questioning how processes of artist-led self-organisation can be re-framed in order to achieve greater solidarity and understanding between practitioners, and allow for meaningful, effective, and sustained processes of social critique and resistance to develop to counteract neoliberal hegemony. It was concerned with issues fundamental to the foundation of the (sub-)field of study from the outset, and proposes the artist-led condition as the way to re-frame those processes in light of contemporary conditions of existence for the betterment of all practitioners.

The aim was always to publicly help ensure practitioners, their models and methods of organising be better informed to face the practicalities and realities of existing and practicing in an increasingly globalised contemporary UK society. One in which individuals have grown increasingly dependant on digital technology to maintain social relationships and their place in global society, with the impacts of ideological austerity ensuring most are kept within precarious living and working conditions. As outlined, within this society self-organisation – that most popular method of self-determination and resistance – has been continuously instrumentalised by those in power. In recent times this has acted to force practitioners into action at the risk of otherwise having to effectively abandon their practice altogether. The state, through its ideologically imposed austerity measures and its institutional gatekeepers lacking the required resources (and in some cases desire) to support practitioners and organisations, can be understood to have trapped everyone in the contemporary visual arts field (CVAF) within an increasingly competitive, and neoliberally fuelled, race for public resources. Resources provided by private funds, organisations and companies have also operated in a similar manner. However with the added

caveat of regularly co-opting and exploiting practitioners and organisations within processes such as artwashing and gentrification which have severely negative impacts on specific communities and locations. Coupled with the general precarity of contemporary existence, the presents experienced by each individual in society can be seen as a tumultuous landscape of existence; in relation to the visual arts people can be seen to be barely surviving let alone being anywhere close to thriving.

In what is a rapidly expanding, and diffuse, subject area for research and practice artist-led self-organisation is the latest in a genealogy of self-organisation spanning decades of recent history, with earlier influential examples reaching back towards the 18th century. Regardless of however you define those processes of self-organisation, in the contemporary era there has been a need for some form of cohesion between them to help safeguard those that enact them, in whatever social-technical forms or online/offline spaces they occupy. When you strip back the variety of terms given to them and what they are understood as on an individual level, what remains are processes largely connected by their implicitly oppositional stances to structures of power in society and production of different forms of artistic practices.[579] Central to those processes in the UK post-2007 is a paradoxical underpinning between them of implicit resistance and how they have been shaped and conditioned by the neoliberal system itself. Entwined within its machinations since their inception, they have arguably been turned back upon themselves and wider society; used as examples of flexible and creative working to develop a contemporary entrepreneurial ethos. To date, this has meant ultimately the status quo is maintained and the existing neoliberal hegemony continues as many practitioners unwittingly contribute to wider social consensus through their actions. However as demonstrated throughout the thesis, artist-led self-organisation has always offered the potential to act as a site of resistance and dissent to hegemony. Providing space for meaningful dissensus (and instituent practices) to be developed and enacted.

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[579] Coffield, "The problem with naming."

Within those overarching parameters of existence and practice in contemporary society, the thesis answered the following key research questions:

1. What are the social and economic conditions of artistic practice that emerged post-2007, and how have they impacted upon current forms of artistic self-organisation?

2. How has increased globalised connectivity impacted artist-led self-organisation?

3. What is distinctive about new forms of contemporary self-organisation that emerged post-2007, and what do they offer as models for future practitioners to draw from and further develop?

4. What perceived and actual forms of resistance does artist-led self-organisation offer wider systems of social organisation?

As stated in the Methodology sub-section of the Introduction, through using a mixed-methods approach often the key research questions were addressed concurrently or in non-sequential order through the various research methods. This is reflected in the structure of the thesis itself, preserving the flow of argument throughout with overlaps between subjects central to addressing those questions. As such they can be understood to have been addressed in the following order:

1. Chapter 1, Chapter 3, Chapter 4.
2. Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 3, Chapter 5.
3. Chapter 2, Chapter 3, Chapter 4.
4. Chapter 2, Chapter 3, Chapter 4, Chapter 5.

The methodology and methods employed during the research provided richness in relation to both their processes and findings whilst answering the key research questions. The semi-autoethnographic methodology of utilising the

events as public reflections on the other research and fieldwork conducted (as outlined in the Introduction) was the first instance of its kind in relation to self-organised visual arts practices in the UK. The events gave further credence to the research by legitimising it through public platforms, with themselves as events legitimised by the research as the catalyst for their development as practical and conceptual knowledge production and sharing exercises (mirroring the paradoxical nature of artist-led self-organisation itself). In turn it can be argued the importance of the research was reinforced through the popularity of the events and their documentation, with the symposium in particular yielding international coverage.

The findings from the fieldwork also provided unexpected avenues for enquiry, particularly surrounding the dependency on digital networks to help facilitate research and practice. Not only was the level of dependency surprising, but also how engrained that dependency had become in recent years alongside the rise of social media as one of the most popular forms of communication in global society. The events tested this dependency by being advertised initially solely through what I had outlined as the artist-led network, with the symposium in particular requiring extra capacity to be added repeatedly because of demand for such a public event involving leaders in the (sub-)field. Alongside this, findings drawn from observation and my own personal experience during the research reinforced existing perceptions of artist-led self-organisation. These included the general lack of understanding on what 'artist-led' described as a piece of terminology, common problems facing practitioners (found to stem from austerity), regular recuperation of critique by institutions, and the regular co-optation and exploitation of practitioners by external parties.

Through the research, fieldwork and events artist-led self-organisation was repeatedly shown to be so elastic as a piece of terminology and understanding of practice it inadvertently contributed to the co-optation and exploitation of practitioners due to its ties to neoliberal hegemony and the associated societal developments of globalisation and network culture. This led to the paradox at the heart of its existence; being legitimised by the neoliberal system as an

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'alternative', but in turn working to constantly legitimise the system itself through its collective opposition. Because of this it has ensured most practitioners expect negative outcomes by default as part of a wider condition of learned helplessness. This is despite the potential those same self-organised processes hold for resistance and autonomy, and the differences from their historical forebears present in their contemporary online/offline structures. As such it has been clear – arguably since its proposed 2007 inception – that some form of more rigid definition has been required.

In addressing the key research questions (and chapter-specific research sub-questions) throughout the thesis, and specifically in Chapter 5 of the thesis itself and in the series of events organised during the research period, the research problem was answered. This allowed for the logical development of the overall original contribution to knowledge at its conclusion: the conception of the artist-led condition. A shared (paradoxical) social condition and social conditioning of practitioners in the contemporary era. Able to act as a site of solidarity and understanding between them, taking into account the socio-economic issues unique to this time period. This conception fills a clear gap in knowledge relating to contemporary self-organised visual arts practices in the UK, alongside offering practical and conceptual benefits to practitioners.

For the CVAF and artist-led sub-field at a broad level it provides new knowledge that can be adopted by anyone – regardless of their position within the art system – to greater contextualise the breadth and depth of self-organised activity that for too long has been tentatively accepted but not understood (and ultimately ignored) by those in positions of power. It makes those activities public under the same understanding and common cause so they can no longer be as conveniently overlooked, co-opted or exploited to suit the perceived commercial needs of the art market and other neoliberal institutions. It allows for the opportunity in future of beginning to redress the disparities of the art system and beyond in the UK through sustained, and collective, resistance and dissensus.

As raised and demonstrated throughout it has always been problematic to try and define exactly what artist-led self-organisation is as a piece of terminology or as a potential movement following on from other historical self-organised practices and movements. The practicalities of doing so would mean ostracising swathes of practitioners and their organisational structures developed through their own experiences and understandings. The multiple presents of contemporaneity creating the potential for minute and major deviations from one practitioner to another.[580]

This is arguably the greatest strength of the artist-led condition. It reconciles those practices together under a conceptualisation of existence and practice unique to the contemporary era. One in which those individual experiences under the same general conditions of contemporary life are used as relational references to deepen discourse, promote solidarity and allow for broader (and easier) collectivisation. Keeping broad, but structured, criteria for inclusion allows for as wide a variety of practitioners to exist under it as possible. In turn through the artist-led network this multitude of individuals acting in common are able to decide the shifting borders of the condition in future. Permitting or excluding practitioners or organisational structures as the majority sees fit in an ongoing process of agonistic discourse, potentially driven by a larger steering group or governing body, should practitioners choose to collaboratively develop one. It provides the basis and framework for an interdependent community of practitioners from which networked and localised critique and resistance can be formed, allowing practitioners to be politically active in whatever circumstances or environments they exist and practice within.

Not only does the artist-led condition provide a new structure for practitioners to mobilise under, it makes them public as a multitude for the first time in much the same way as Sholette's dark matter,[581] or Gielen's murmur[582] does on a global scale. Here though, the condition allows for a congregation of UK-based

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[580] Cox & Lund, *The Contemporary Condition*, 12-16.
[581] Sholette, *Dark Matter*.
[582] Gielen, The *Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude*.

self-organised practitioners, actively debating their own perceptions of one another and their histories in order to share knowledge and strengthen their own place in the wider CVAF and beyond. At any time (depending on the consensus of the multitude) potentially taking on aspects of unions, governing bodies or steering groups, flattening their hierarchies in keeping with the distributed nature of orgnets, yet still retaining some structure like netorgs, in keeping with broader artist-led organisational architectures to ensure they don't tacitly become instrumentalised by neoliberal hegemony so readily in future. Instead able to use this new knowledge and form of collectivisation to their advantage for creating future dissensus as part of instituent practices. Collectively instituting to ensure their relevance in the art system and society they are acting to change from the inside out.

Alongside outlining the artist-led condition as the key contribution to knowledge in the (sub-)field of research, there are a number of specific interventions into existing knowledge that constitute key findings to be taken from it. They include:

- *Outlining the development of artist-led self-organisation*. The key socio-economic and political developments in Western society are charted, arriving at the proposed inception of artist-led self-organisation in the UK in 2007 for the first time. Providing practitioners with a chronological resource to reference, it makes apparent how influential cultural policy has been on the history of the current form of self-organisation.

- *The pluriversality of artist-led self-organisation*. Building from the multiple understandings of the 'artist-led' moniker, it was shown for the first time to be symptomatic of the pluriversal nature of contemporaneity, with each individual having different experiences that shape their understandings of the nebulous concept.

- *Cyclicality and the learned helplessness of practitioners*. The research highlights how cyclical processes of artist-led self-organisation, co-optation and exploitation are in relation to practitioners. All of which

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serve to reinforce a collective sense of learned helplessness, ultimately embedding the maintenance of the social status quo in their everyday actions.

- *Outlining the artist-led network*. Showing for the first time how practitioners use online/offline connectivity in line with network theory to communicate knowledge and maintain sociality. Populating a public network through social-technical structures that removes redundant nodes if they move too far from what are collectively accepted as artist-led practices.

- *The paradoxical nature of artist-led self-organisation*. The thesis outlined how paradoxical artist-led self-organisation is in relation to its perceived oppositional underpinnings and its history with the neoliberal system. Arguably this is a key issue that has served to undermine those processes of self-organisation since their inception, ensuring they have acted as a neoliberal exemplar. Displaying all of the traits the neoliberal system seeks to instill in people to function in the 'creative' working environments of the current knowledge-based economy.

With this contribution to knowledge and key findings in mind, the research – and subsequently the artist-led condition – provides a new level of understanding between practitioners in the UK, re-framing exactly what artist-led self-organisation is or has the potential to become. Bringing some form of increased structuralisation, even if it is paradoxical, in order to bring about a form of stability previously absent. Allowing for greater solidarity between those subject to it to help safeguard more of them from external pressures and threats. In many ways regardless of how self-organisation is callously weaponised by those in power, once this fact is understood and communicated with others it cedes a certain level of control back to those that perform it. In this space of contesting power dynamics relating to self-organisation practitioners can create pockets of dissensus through their own instituent practices, in turn becoming part of a larger chain of equivalence to help bring about wider social change. This is

arguably key. The condition does not simply provide a framework for opposition and forming social bonds with likeminded peers, it also provides real opportunity to now harness the innate resistive potential of this methodology of practice that could bring about meaningful change to the neoliberal order that has otherwise worked systematically to keep practitioners marginalised.

What comes next for the artist-led condition and those subject to it is obviously undecided. Whereas the neoliberal hegemony that the condition is implicitly linked to would have practitioners and their organisations subsumed within the wider CVAF to be further profited from, this thesis provides a more fluid framework and understanding from which practitioners can begin to defend their precarious futures from continued exploitation in the present. The research outlined and explored here is only intended to act as a departure point. Establishing a knowledge base specific to this iteration of self-organisation, whilst raising questions and leaving room for other practitioners, researchers or interested parties aside from myself to take up related issues to help further strengthen the artist-led condition.

As with any research project, during the course of study there were obvious questions and areas for further research that became apparent, and upon reflection others that were raised. Building on the outcomes of this thesis and the discussions raised at the events alongside it there are already explicit areas I have highlighted as warranting further research and exploration. As stated in Chapter 5 these include the potential (or need) for some form of cohesive association in the guise of a governing body, union or steering group to help maintain the borders of the condition and lobby for change from those subject to it, or the development of a central archive (or regional archives) to serve as both an educational tool for practitioners and a record of the temporally finite practices, spaces and organisations active in the UK.[583]

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[583] These areas for research are directly influenced from earlier discussions raised at the *Ecologies and Economies* symposium and *Artist-Run Multiverse* summit, alongside the *Open Forum* series, researcher/practitioner roundtables and *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led* symposium I organised.

Outside of those already mentioned, the thesis also raises further questions relating to the condition itself and processes of instituting and critique. How will practitioners institute new organisational forms or adapt existing ones under the condition? What would happen to the borders of the condition if more commercially-minded organisational forms were developed? Although examples were provided in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5, there still have been few detailed research projects into the variety of artist-led organisational forms at a UK-wide level outside of legacy publications from organisations that all hold similar operational models, and under-resourced or defunct mapping projects.[584] This is also true for the production of dissensus through instituent practices. As shown in Chapter 5, undoubtedly practitioners are achieving this, but it is largely going unrecognised and to date hasn't been critically analysed in-depth. Following this, what about the dynamic between those that create dissensus through instituent practices, and those who do not, and how might practitioners join other activist groups in a wider chain of equivalence to bring about social change – how might their relationships impact the condition and relations between those subject to it?

In relation to the condition itself clearly more research is needed. Whilst it fell outside of the remit of this thesis to do so there is scope for detailed enquiry into specific aspects of it. Notably I would argue for more research being initially required in four main areas. Firstly, how the artist-led cycle of practice, co-optation and exploitation is influenced by increased solidarity from those under the condition. With a more consciously connected peer group (and the potential for a formation of a publicly recognised advocacy organisation), how could practitioners lobby for change against those exploitative practices they routinely become co-opted by? Secondly, the nature of the artist-led network and how it could be linked to other self-organised networks globally. How could this social-technical construct join and inform other similar global networks, or act as a model for others to develop from? What impact would a truly interconnected

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[584] Though John Wright has begun to counteract this in relation to artist-led collectives. Wright, "The Ecology of Cultural Space."

multitude of practitioners in a globalised world be able to create and achieve? Thirdly, with an increasing drive towards equality from large sections of society along gendered, racial and economic lines, how could the dismantling of the stale, pale and male dominance of the art system come about, and what would it entail? Finally, and crucially, how embracing the paradoxical nature of artist-led self-organisation is key to the condition impacting practitioners' abilities to enact dissensus. Will this proposed acceptance and revelling in the paradox central to practitioners' self-organisation allow them to turn the neoliberal traits modelled on their historical behaviour against the system itself? And how will this impact practitioners in the different nations of the UK?

It is also pertinent to mention that the research was concluded during the initial stages of the global COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures enforced in the UK. Given that at the time of writing the pandemic is still ongoing, the full, and lasting, impact on societies and global economies is unknown. What is expected however is a major economic fallout that will affect all aspects of global society. In context of the visual arts in the UK, with the cultural industries collectively facing a 'cultural catastrophe', music, performing and visual arts are projected to lose around £11 billion in revenue.[585] This view of a bleak immediate future has also been echoed by practitioners in the recent UK-wide *COVID-19 impact survey* by a-n,[586] in which 96% of respondents reported facing income reduction as an immediate impact,[587] and around 60% of respondents expecting a decrease in income of over 50% in 2020.[588] With the true costs and impacts of the pandemic still unclear, there are obvious opportunities for further research on its impact on those subject to the artist-led condition and processes

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[585] Martin Bailey, "UK creative industries face 'a cultural catastrophe'–but museums may not be hit as hard," *The Art Newspaper*, June 17, 2020, (accessed August 12, 2020), https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/a-cultural-catastrophe-coronavirus-report

[586] "COVID-19 impact survey," a-n, April, 2020, (accessed August 12, 2020), https://static.a-n.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Covid-19-impact-survey-2020.pdf

[587] Ibid, 12.

[588] Ibid, 14.

of artist-led self-organisation at all levels, to be taken up by researchers moving forwards.

Although I outline initial areas for further research above, there is the scope for any subject area within the broad landscape of visual arts practices, and their crossover with socio-economic and political discourse that could be researched further in relation to the artist-led condition and the self-organisation created under it. The thesis outlines the condition for the first time; it is now up to myself and others to acknowledge our individual and collective existence subject to it. Populating it with our own practice and research, expanding (or contracting) its borders to create increased solidarity and sociality between all, regardless of the socio-economic conditions we face in the near (post-pandemic) future. In order to apply the research in practical, real world, contexts practitioners must disseminate understanding of it through their processes of self-organisation and embed it within their networked organisational structures. Only once the condition, and the practices and organisational structures developed under it, are properly entered into discourse on contemporary visual arts and cultural practices within wider society will the conceptualisation properly flourish. Allowing broader associations and working relationships to develop. These relations will in turn allow for a greater breadth and depth of dissensus to be developed and enacted, helping strengthen the potential for change that any wider chain of equivalence could bring about.

Artist-led self-organisation has arguably always been a contested site for practice. A distinct aspect of the art system, the processes attributed to the name largely at odds with overarching power structures and at times with one another because of minutiae of individual understandings. They are generally fluid, expressive, immediate, reactionary, oppositional, critical and regularly absurd social processes allowing practitioners to test and experiment new ways of approaching and existing in the wider world. More so than with the majority of other visual arts practices, methodologies of this self-organisation hold an innate potential for change alongside the capacity for aesthetic and conceptual rigour that others display. There is an ironic strength present within all forms of artist-

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led self-organisation; they have been molded by the socio-economic system they implicitly oppose, have the potential to help bring about change of that system because of the knowledge they hold from it, yet are often unable to do so because of the precarity brought on them by that same system. Yet practitioners persist. Developing both consensus and dissensus as each individual's resources and inclinations permit. Potentially on the verge of helping bring about a paradigm shift in the system they exist within, which has to date remained just out of reach for the majority aiming to do so.

With most practitioners spending the majority of their lives and 'careers' in the second economy, artist-led self-organisation is all many will know. My own experience echoes this trajectory. Despite working in and for larger art system institutions ultimately I have always felt a sense of belonging with my peers in the precarity on the periphery of the centre of that system. Conditioned into accepting it as the default. The catalyst for undertaking the research project has always been to make knowledge public to help others avoid unknowingly repeating the same cycles of co-optation and exploitation most practitioners undergo. Or at least to make them conscious of the underpinnings behind them, providing the potential for change alongside their peers. It is this sense of belonging and camaraderie the artist-led condition is predicated upon. Making explicit and visible that camaraderie between all practitioners regardless of their backgrounds or existing knowledge, with the artist-led network helping bridge those gaps. Providing a recognisable peer group that could advocate for meaningful change to those precarious living and working conditions through their collective processes of instituting. Allowing the multitude to become a critical mass.

While the conception of the artist-led condition as outlined here may ultimately prove too utopian to fully realise initially, there is no reason why that could not be a collective goal to achieve – or revise – in future. With the likelihood of a post-pandemic recession on the horizon (as part of the current crisis of capitalism) a realisation of some form of the condition could come at a time when UK society has to be restructured at all levels, allowing practitioners to

vocally, and cohesively, make the case for a paradigm shift in how their role in the visual arts is meaningfully acknowledged and supported.[589] Whereas at the previous bust of the economic cycle (and proposed inception of artist-led self-organisation) in 2007 practitioners were arguably unprepared, with the increased structure the condition brings there is potential for real disruption to be brought to their roles within the artist-led cycle and methodologies of co-optation and exploitation.

If the future is indeed still to be self-organised,[590] then we must ensure that those who do so are aware of the neoliberal underpinnings of the processes they are enacting. Whereas previously the neoliberal system obscured much of that through repressive tolerance and the development of the knowledge economy, practitioners will now be able to recognise what the realities of their methodologies of practice are. The condition allows for this to be possible, turning those neoliberal strategies back on the system to allow practitioners to attempt to take control of those processes should they wish. In this way, artist-led self-organisation can pivot back towards examples of earlier self-organised movements with a greater knowledge and strength. Existing as a truly dynamic social-technical organisational methodology that can unleash the emergent potential of those that enact it.

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[589] Following the outline of the condition acting as a paradigm shift for the social-technical site of the production of dissensus in Chapter 5.
[590] Dillemuth, Davies & Jakobsen, "There is no alternative."

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<u>Appendix 1 – Research Visits and Research Visit Notes</u>

<u>Research Visits:</u>

Throughout the research numerous visits were conducted to a mixture of artist-led and institutional organisations and events of varying sizes. This was to help contextualise understanding of forms of artist-led organisational structures and practices, and the similarities and differences in dynamics between them and their more established institutional counterparts. In total 148 visits were made during the research period. Highlighted in bold are visits specifically to artist-led organisations or events. They were:

<u>2017</u>

30 September – 01 October: ***'Nourish '17'* conference, Humber Street Gallery, Hull.**

03 – 04 October: *Contemporary Research Intensive* (workshop), Research Pavilion, 57th Venice Biennale. [Participant]

25 October: ***Notes on Queerness*, The Royal Standard, Liverpool. Kevin Hunt studio visit, The Royal Standard.**

27 October: The Manchester Contemporary, Manchester Central Convention Complex, Manchester.

07 November: **Artist-Led Research Group, School of Fine Art, History of art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds.**

05 December: **Artist-Led Research Group, Ladybeck Studios, Leeds.**

<u>2018</u>

16 January: **Artist-Led Research Group, School of Fine Art, History of art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds.**

19 January: ***The morning has gold in its mouth* (COLLAR 2018 programme launch), The Great Medical Disaster, Manchester.**

06 February: **Artist-Led Research Group, Hyde Park Book Club, Leeds.**

21 February: *Raqs Media Collective: Twilight Language*, The Whitworth, *John Stezaker*, The Whitworth. *Alison Wilding*, The Whitworth. Tuesday Talks: Fabian Schöneich, The Whitworth. *Break in Transmission*, Holden Gallery.

NOW: A dialogue on female Chinese contemporary artists, Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art, Manchester.

05 March: Christoph Platz Lecture, Tate Liverpool, Liverpool.

23 March: **Artist-Led Research Group, School of Fine Art, History of art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds.**

02 April: ***And Yet It Moves*, The Royal Standard, Liverpool.**

08 – 11 April: ***Artistic Research Will Eat Itself Research Workshop*, KARST Gallery, Plymouth. [Participant]**

11 – 13 April: *Artistic Research Will Eat Itself Conference*, University of Plymouth, Plymouth.

17 April: **Meeting with Amarha Spence (MAIA Creatives), Birmingham.**
**   *Melanie Jackson, Deeper in the Pyramid*, Grand Union.**
**   Meeting with Kim McAleese (Programme Director) Grand Union.**

19 – 20 April: Glasgow International Festival professional preview:
   Cellular World: Cyborg-Human-Avatar-Horror, Gallery of Modern Art.
   After Dark, Gallery of Modern Art.
   Ciara Phillips, Glasgow Print Studio.
   Duggie Fields, The Modern Institute.
   Urs Fischer, The Modern Institute.
   Nicolas Party, The Modern Institute.
   ***iQhiya*, Transmission Gallery.**
   Code-Switching & Other Work, The Briggait.
   Citadel, The Briggait.
   ***Artist's Type Foundry Spring/Summer '18 Collection*, Good Press.**
   Corin Sworn, Koppe Astner.
   The Transit of Hermes, Centre for Contemporary Arts.
   Roadmaps, Centre for Contemporary Arts.
   Breaking in, Breaking out, Breaking up, Breaking down, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum.
   Lavendra, Kelvin Hall.
   Self-Loathing Flashmob, Kelvin Hall.

09 May: 'How to Biennale!' discussion event, Tate Exchange, Tate Modern, London.
   Counter Investigations: Forensic Architecture, Institute of Contemporary Arts.

18 May: Collections displays, Tate Modern, London.
   1968: Protest and the Photobook, Tate Modern.
   Joan Jonas, Tate Modern

Becoming Animal, Tenderpixel.
Landed, Cubitt Gallery.
Chim↑Pom: Why Open?, White Rainbow.

17 June: **a-n Assembly Birmingham, Eastside Projects.**
Migrating Flavours, Eastside Projects.
Inherited Premises, Grand Union.
Three Models for Change, Centrala Space.

29 June: *The Role of the Arts in Civic Renewal* discussion event, The Harris
Museum & Art Gallery, Preston.

01 August: *Isaac Julien: Ten Thousand Waves*, The Whitworth, Manchester.
The Art of Volunteering, The Whitworth.
Collections displays, The Whitworth.
Phil Collins: Can't Do Right for Doing Wrong, HOME.
Aquatopia, Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art.

08 September: **Nongkrong discussion event, g39, Cardiff.**
UNITe programme artists' studio visit, g39.
KIZUNA: Japan | Wales | Design, National Museum Cardiff.
Becoming One, Arcade/Campfa.
PAINTINGS OF PLANET EARTH, Arcade/Campfa.

18 September: Liverpool Biennial 2018.
Land Sand Strand, The Bluecoat.
Variations on a Ghost, The Bluecoat.
Time Moves Quickly, The Bluecoat & Liverpool Metropolitan
Cathedral.
The Intermediates, Tate Liverpool.
Your face / is not enough, Tate Liverpool.
Dale Harding, Tate Liverpool.
Independents Biennial 2018, various venues.

20 September: **The NewBridge Project (Gateshead), Newcastle.**
The NewBridge Project, Carliol House.
i o u a e studio visit, The NewBridge Project, Carliol House.
**Goldtapped studio visit, The NewBridge Project, Carliol
House.**
NewBridge Books, BALTIC 39.
We Are Where We Are, BALTIC 39.

29 September: **Tall Tales From An Artist-Led Space event, Cubitt Gallery,
London.**

12 October: **a-n Assembly Dundee, Vision Building.**
Black Flag, Dundee Contemporary Arts.
Mobile Homestead, Dundee Contemporary Arts.
This, looped, V&A Dundee.

26 October: *Bus2move*, The Tetley, Leeds.

26 – 27 October: ***Ecologies and Economies of the Artist-Led: Place, Space, Futures Symposium*, University of Leeds and MAP Charity, Leeds. [Participant]**

09 – 10 November: ***Artist-Run Multiverse Summit*, Eastside Projects, Birmingham.**

28 November: *Jade Montserrat: Instituting Care*, The Bluecoat, Liverpool.
The Art Schools of North West England, The Bluecoat.

<u>2019</u>

30 January: ***ROOT-ed Zine*, OUTPUT Gallery, Liverpool.**

05 February: ***backend* discussion event, OUTPUT Gallery, Liverpool.**

23 February: ***Light Blue*, The Royal Standard, Liverpool.**

26 February: **Curatorial dinner, Islington Mill, Salford.**

09 May: ***Gender*, PRISM Contemporary, Blackburn.**

27 May: ***Creating an Artist Career* discussion event, Akibatamabi21 (3331 Arts Chiyoda), Tokyo. [Participant]**
Syd Mead: Progressions TYO 2019, 3331 Arts Chiyoda.
Junya Kataoka + Rie Iwatake < Big Two-Hearted River >, 3331 Arts Chiyoda.

29 May: Morioka Shoten independent bookstore and gallery, Ginza, Tokyo.
Design Festa Gallery, Harajuku, Tokyo.

31 May: ***The Political Economy of Creative Practices, Artist-Led Initiatives, Art Projects and Alternative Art/Education* discussion event, Radio Kosaten, Tokyo. [Participant]**

18 July: *David Lynch: My Head is Disconnected*, HOME, Manchester.
Get Together and Get things Done, Manchester Art Gallery.
Louise Giovanelli, Manchester Art Gallery.
404: Resistance in the Digital Age, Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art.
He Xiangyu, Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art.

30 July: ***Precarity in the Arts* talk, FACT, Liverpool.**

01 August: Yorkshire Sculpture International festival, Leeds.
Rashid Johnson, Tamar Harpaz, Maria Loboda, Cauleen Smith, Sean

Lynch, The Henry Moore Institute.
Nobuko Tsuchiya, Ayşe Erkmen, Rachel Harrison, Joanna Piotrowska, Leeds Art Gallery.

Index Festival, Leeds.
***Kuroko*, Gallery House.**
***...Even If It Someone Else's (serf members group exhibition)*, Freehold Projects.**

***Resilience is Futile* Corridor8 publication launch, The Art House, Wakefield.**
Laura Yuile: A Brick Tunnel with a Concrete Floor, The Art House.

06 September: Ibrahim Mahama: Parliament of Ghosts, The Whitworth, Manchester.
Future Cities: Technopolis & Everyday Life, Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art.
***No Particular Place to Go? 35 years of sculpture at Castlefield Gallery*, Castlefield Gallery.**

11 September: *Natural Selection*, Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, Bristol.

12 – 13 September: ***CKC 2019: Rethinking, Resisting and Reimagining the Creative City Conference*, Watershed, Bristol. [Participant]**

20 September: New Contemporaries 2019, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds.
Divide By Two, BLANK_.

03 October: ***Transform and Escape the Dogs* (British Textile Biennial), Church Street, Blackburn.**

19 October: *Heirloom Project* (British Textile Biennial), Queen Street Mill, Burnley.

24 October: *A Trick of the Light*, Grundy art Gallery, Blackpool.

08 November: *Fons Americanus*, Tate Modern, London.
Nam June Paik, Tate Modern.
Olafur Eliasson: In Real Life, Tate Modern.
Mark Leckey: O' Magic Power of Bleakness, Tate Britain.

16 November: ***Azraa Motala*, PRISM Contemporary, Blackburn.**

07 December: ***The Studios*, PRISM Contemporary, Blackburn.**

12 December: *Theaster Gates: Amalgam*, Tate Liverpool, Liverpool.

2020

18 January: *Shy Girl*, Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool.
      Collection Spotlight: Sculpture, Grundy Art Gallery.

13 February: Edward Allington: Things Unsaid, The Henry Moore Institute,
      Leeds.
      Sara Barker: All Clouds are Clocks, All Clocks are Clouds, Leeds Art
      Gallery.
      Staged Grand Guignol: Surrealism and Beyond, Leeds Art Gallery.
      Taus Makhacheva: Hold Your Horses, The Tetley.
      Emii Alrai: The High Dam, The Tetley.
      serf studio visit, serf.

20 February: ***OUTPUT Open* 4, OUTPUT Gallery, Liverpool.**
      Organisational visit, Convenience Gallery, Birkenhead.

21 February: ***Open Call #2 The Future Is…*, Convenience Gallery, Liverpool.**

27 February: Meeting with Learning Team members, FACT, Liverpool.

29 February: ***Joseph Cotgrave*, OUTPUT Gallery, Liverpool.**

06 March: ***TRS-Gen*, The Royal Standard, Liverpool.**
      Organisational visit, Bidston Observatory.
      Languages of Editing Corridor8 workshop, The Bluecoat.

11 March: Overnight stay and tour, Art B&B, Blackpool.

12 March: **Studio tour, Abingdon Studios, Blackpool.**
      Shy Girl, Grundy Art Gallery.
      Conversations Series II – OTHER TRNASMISSIONS, Grundy Art Gallery.

<u>Research Visit Notes:</u>

The following notes are collected from informal research visits throughout the research period and have helped to inform the research direction, arguments and ideas developed. They are anecdotes, notes, or ideas for further areas to guide the thesis research.

2017

Nourish '17 conference, Humber Street Gallery, Hull, 30 September – 01 October
Gregory Sholette and Isabelle Tracy in conversation.
- Artistic practice/production subsumed by capitalism in increasingly unprecedented levels within the last 2 decades.
- The pleasure of resistance/opposition as a continued cause for optimism.
- 'Brave Art World' (borrowing the term from Agamben): we now exist in a state where the dark matter is a recognised facet of the art world.
- 'Art, process, change.'
- Sholette teaching new students: you're fucked/the situation is terrible. Work from that point from the beginning to produce truly critically engaged practices.
- Nothing in the art world is free from contradiction, even in the sphere of dark matter.
- Culture as a Trojan horse for capitalism to gentrify areas (in recent history), now with capitalism beginning to ignore cultural provision and instead move straight to gentrification.

<u>The Manchester Contemporary, Manchester Central Convention Complex, Manchester, 27 October</u>
- Artist-led organisations: The Birley, Goldtapped, Islington Mill, PAPER, Paradise Works, Two Queens, Love Unlimited, LLE = 8/30 organisations involved.
- What is the purpose of the fair for them? i.e. sales/exposure/networking?
- What is the expectation of the fair for them?
- Rarely do artist-led organisations get such recognition alongside larger-scale institutions and organisations at public events.
- Reinforces the ties between both as peers, even if in day-to-day operations this seems far from the case? Disingenuous, or attempting to bridge the gap?

2018

The morning has gold in its mouth (COLLAR 2018 programme launch), The Great Medical Disaster, Manchester, 19 January
- At the 'Great Medical Disaster', part of Castlefield Gallery's 'New Art Spaces Scheme' in Deansgate; a.k.a. Great Northern Tower Unit 3 (temporarily turning unused vacant space over to artists).

- Collar launching their new programme for the year titled '(in) LOVE and FAITH', with the event 'The morning had gold in its mouth'.
- Hosted by Suckerpunch in their occupation of the temporary space, COLLAR invited SEIZE Projects (Leeds) to design cocktails to be served throughout. The event replaced the 'usual' preview evening, focusing on sociality framed around links between art and the service industry (where many practitioners labour).
- SEIZE = Lily Ackroyd-Willoughby, Ned Pooler, Sarah-Joy Ford, Tom McGinn and Daisy Forster.
- COLLAR = Katy Morrison, Charley Blake-Banks and Russel Bagnall.
- Do organisations need gallery spaces? Physical spaces in the 'traditional' art system sense, especially given the use of temporary and meanwhile spaces post-1960/70s?
- Group discussion talks of ever-increasing social engagement, providing links between peoples and communities rather than simply admiring/interacting with works. How does the perception of the need to be productive play into this?
- (Standing around for the discussion you realise just how cold the space is – especially at this time of year)
- Do organisations need a fixed space of their own, or given the amount of temporary/meanwhile spaces available will they suffice instead? What of gentrification?
- How do artist-led organisations serve practitioners and other members of the communities they are (often fleetingly) based in?

Christoph Platz Lecture, Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, 05 March
- The Fridericianum was the first museum built in continental Europe, with the British Museum the first built in Europe outside of that.
- 'Being safe is scary' work in Kassel (for Documenta 14?) was taken from graffiti found in the grounds of the metropolitan university that has been taken over as a countercultural space where police in Athens still refuse to enter.
- In 1955 Kassel hosted a flower show to bring back colour and nature to the destruction left form the allied air raids during the war, with Documenta 1 being a para-site as an exhibition to show modern art alongside the flower show.
- Documenta as essentially a self-organised project with an interdisciplinary nature (outlined in a document from a meeting before the first iteration was proposed. Although the first iteration was mainly focused on modern art, subsequent iterations would fulfil this criteria). Under the name 'Association for Western Art of the 20th Century'.
- Originally the Fridericianum was a ruin and was gradually refurbished, similar to the generally accepted self-organised practice by artists and other countercultural groups and movements from the 1960s (before those practices took hold though?).
- The self-organisation of the early Documenta being absorbed by/appropriated into the institutional structures of the art system?

Artistic Research Will Eat Itself Workshop, KARST Gallery, Plymouth, 08 – 11 April and *Artistic Research Will Eat Itself Conference*, University of Plymouth, Plymouth, 11 – 13 April

- KARST Gallery: typical of artist-led venues (former industrial building, in a less-than-desirable location/on a periphery/cold). Relatively small number of studios given how large the building and gallery space is. A strong public programme of exhibitions/events spanning visual arts, music, performance, etc. With a small, close-knit team overseeing operations, a strong community of studio holders, and good relationships with other practitioners and organisations in the city and beyond.
- Do many locals visit given its location? Seemingly yes, a number came to the exhibition preview having never visited before?
- Very hospitable (alongside the staff from the University of Plymouth), and with the other practitioners involved there is a real sense of cohesion and critical discourse focused on developing new work and research.
- Tal Beery's 'Instituent Practices: Art After (Public) Institutions'. Seemingly the arts don't yet have the language to properly describe their institution building, with businesses not having the tools to properly comprehend instituent practices? "How is an institution sensed? How do we see something operating simultaneously within multiple temporalities, with no beginning and no end? How can we understand a thing when the distinction between object and subject is completely muddled? And for that matter, how can we even begin to discuss a thing whose name is always changing?"
- Exhibition preview very busy, attracting a large crowd from the end of the day at the conference; interesting to see the excitement for visiting/discovering the space for the first time, particularly by those form outside the UK. Providing a counterpoint to the academic setting of the conference and the lack of other visual arts venues open in the city (most are between exhibitions)?

- Conference: 'Artist Taxi Driver vs. Jacques Rancière: Art Politics, Invisibility, Work' – Kim Charnley.
- Alternative media commentary as a form of institutional critique?
- Artist Taxi Driver (ATD) works as a taxi driver i.e. does not 'work' (get paid) as an artist [-> apart from that he sells prints?]. how does definition of professionalism allow space for institutional critique?
- Rancière's dissensus: the labour of fiction (specifically regarding artists), he states the real can only be truly approached by fiction. He says political art creates consensus rather than dissensus that would allow 'true' legitimate criticism as they are too much a part of the field they are seeking to critique.
- ATD creating dissensus as he comments on something he has no real control over (waged labour in the arts), so has a legitimate position for criticism?
- [He does get paid for his practice in certain respects though i.e. selling prints/watercolours online, although it's not his main source of income?]
- Artist-led capacities for dissensus as part of the dark matter/second economy?

- ATD as redefining language to present often acerbic criticism through lo-fi means and aesthetics.
- Conference: 'Post, Extra, Anti: The Institution as Cannibal' – Andrea Liu.
- 'In the Castle of my Skin' – George Lamming.
- 'The University of Trash' at the Sculpture Centre, Long island (NY).
- 'Escola Moderna' Spain (the basis of modern free schools?).
- #school www.hashtagclass.com
- Anhoek School
- The Bruce High Quality Foundation setting up a university as a free school.
- 'The Artist as Debtor' www.artanddebt.org
- 'Scenography of Friendship' – Svetlana Boyom.
- AAH (Association of Art Historians) free school panel discussion.
- New York examples of free school models formed in opposition to the neoliberalisation of the university in America.
- Anti = explicitly in opposition to the culture of institutions; Extra = a project (pedagogical) seeing itself as a supplement to conventional institutions (more neutral than adversarial); Post = a project (pedagogical) seeing itself after traditional educational institutions have already become obsolete.
- Is the institution the cannibal (as per Bataille?); that works to eat all the anti/extra/post projects, absorbing them within to ultimately strengthen itself and its power? (Appropriative capitalism?)

Meeting with Kim McAleese, Grand Union, Birmingham, 17 April
- Introduction to the organisation from Programme Director Kim McAleese.
- Gallery and studios, with the studios holding a mixture of individuals, groups and other small businesses/projects e.g. Modern Clay.
- Critically engaged programme, working with practitioners and researchers (at all stages of their careers?).
- Originally 'artist-led', but now overseen by a director and programme director both of whom don't have an overt artistic practice, yet still included with other artist-led organisations of similar sizes in debates and discussion.
- Don't necessarily always consider themselves as 'artist-led', but seemingly happy to be part of those conversations to share support, knowledge and advice with others.
- What are the parameters for being considered 'artist-led'? does a practitioner who acknowledges they have an artistic practice have to be in control? Or could an organisation be led and guided by the practices of those they work with?
- There needs to be clarity for the whole field, even if it is diffuse, so everyone has a more joined up understanding?
- The gallery and studios themselves are relatively easy to locate in Digbeth, but the building they are based in is relatively inaccessible to anyone with physical access issues (following the now well established artist-led precedent).
- Hold regular sessions with people from vulnerable groups in the city to help use art as a way to offer support and work through trauma, etc. that

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often aren't publicly advertised as they work directly with charities and council groups.

<u>Glasgow International Festival professional preview, various venues, Glasgow, 19 – 20 April</u>
- Transmission, Good Press, Mount Florida Gallery and Studios, Market Gallery, as well-known examples that are part of the festival programme.
- Overall festival split into 'Director's Programme' and 'Across the City', with artist-led and most other independent venues and organisations in the latter part (artist-run in the case of Transmission and Market Gallery).
- Similar to The Manchester Contemporary the publicity material does well to jeep a sense of cohesion between all of the exhibitions events and venues. The Director's Programme mainly used as a way to show the exhibitions and events central to the curatorial framing of the festival, rather than privileging them over the others?
- The artist-run/led and independent venues and organisations seemingly/generally in much less deprived/neglected areas than for others in large cities in the UK? Does Glasgow's large artist community have an impact?
- Good Press as an interesting example: bookshop and small gallery/display space (much like Village Books in Leeds?). Primarily a bookshop run by volunteers (often artists) and stocks all kinds of publications (books, zines, etc.) and prints/editions/accessories, helping practitioners sell their works.
- Allowing artists to better monetise their practice; arguably an artist-led organisation that is explicitly for-profit, separating it out from the majority of its peers in the city and beyond. Helping to bring about a change in mindset as its reputation increases and its sales and distribution networks grow?
- A number of venues (nowhere more explicitly than Kelvin Hall for Hardeep Phandhal and E. Jane's exhibitions) using the biennial/art festival trope of aping the dilapidated aesthetics of artist-led/independent/self-organised spaces as a framing mechanism. Making those spaces seem less clinical than a 'traditional' white cube, and more dynamic/edgy, despite the sizeable budget that will have gone into production costs for works, etc. Part of the wider problem of biennialisation?
- Generally many early career practitioners included in the Director's Programme, maybe more so than at other UK biennials recently (is there an easy way to check and see this?). Maybe Coventry Biennial 2017 had more?
- A number of the other organisations in the Across the City strand of the programme seemingly occupy a space between artist-led and 'fully' institutionalised/larger-scale institutions e.g. David Dale Gallery and Studios, whose staff/members still regularly participate in or develop artist-led activities (similar to Grand Union and its structure/development). Put on a path to increased formalisation and instituting by resource providers?

1968: Protest and the Photobook, Tate Modern, London, 18 May
- Atelier Populaire protest posters from 1968 in Paris included in the free collections display, alongside photobooks from practitioners in France, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Mexico and Japan.
- Photography and print as key sites of sharing and archiving resistance and dissent?
- Many of the pieces acting as documentary reminders, with a small selection being works in response to the events of 1968 as it was happening globally. (A number of the items from Japan fall into this category, with the pieces of documentary images charting social dissent/rebellion in an unprecedented move away from deeply ingrained societal norms).
- Institutionalising those practices? Their display within Tate acting to stifle the rebellious nature of them? Or encouraging a wider audience into similar behaviours of civil unrest in future by looking to the past to remind what has gone before? How do you navigate that balance, is it only the institution that holds the power to do so in how it mediates the items and their content?

Landed, Cubitt Gallery, London, 18 May
- Cubitt, 'artist-led' since its inception in the mid-90s (according to their website?). A co-operative gallery and studios.
- Public programme is overseen by a director of programmes, programme assistant and gallery manager, similar to Grand Union (and to an extent David Dale), but they actively label themselves as being 'artist-led'. Also says 'artist-run co-operative' on their website homepage.
- No real historical precedent for 'artist-led' surfacing as a term in the mid-90s; historical revisionism?
- Working with a mixture of established and earlier career artists?
- The production and installation of the works in the exhibition are both to a very high standard, it would be interesting to see what other funding sources they have apart from ACE, and if they have any in-kind relationships for equipment hire, technicians, etc.?

Chim↑Pom: Why Open?, White Rainbow, London, 18 May
- Artist collective from Tokyo; their first solo show in the UK? (Bringing together works/remnants of works/documentation from recent projects in Japan, Taiwan and Mexico/America).
- Socially engaged, constantly asking questions of the established social hierarchies we are party to.
- Artist-led/run or self-organised not really taken up as terminology in Japan? (Artist-run used to describe Chim↑Pom's studio space, using DIY as a preferred term).
- The self-identifying as a collective linked to the post-war avant-garde groups in the country?
- The art of the 1960s in Japan leading to restrictions being introduced in museums and galleries as to what could be shown in public institutions.
- Avant-garde artists were creating in public that caused the authorities to tighten regulations, stopping them from having access to public

institutions, forcing them into self-organising spaces and public performances/actions. Almost the polar opposite of Western institutional approaches as institutional critique moved on from its first wave.
- Self-organised practices in Japan stemming from this, and groups like Chim↑Pom can be seen to be trying to bring their subversive practices back within the institution, maybe to legitimize them to those structures?

a-n Assembly Birmingham, Eastside Projects and Minerva Works, Birmingham, 17 June
- Held at Eastside Projects featuring a-n, Eastside Projects, Antonio Roberts, Stryx, Grand Union, Airspace Gallery, Coventry Biennial, SOUNDKitchen, New Art West Midlands, Bomb, Maia Creatives, Andy Howlett and Libby Cufley.
- Eastside very much consider themselves and make a point they are 'artist-run' in most literature and publicity material, but for this event referred to as 'artist-led' by a-n. to ease understanding for attendees? Or showing how interchangeable to terms are? Or both?

- Presentations: Stryx – Karolina Korupczynska (director).
- Studio and project space in Digbeth.
- Works with new graduates and artists new to the city, including the 'Soup' 8-week residency programme.
- Run on a voluntary basis due to lack of funding/currently unable to secure long term funding.
- The studios allow them to pay building rent and bills. They currently have an unfixed lease so they are at risk of imminent closure depending on what the owners/property developers want to do. Recently had an unsuccessful funding bid that would have provided much more security for them going forwards.
- Re-using previous organisational models to begin to change in the near future with the upcoming influx of artist-led NPOs in England as there are more funded at a much higher, and public level? i.e. There will be an oversaturation of gallery/studios for already stretched resources, so practitioners will have to increasingly become more inventive? Or once again move away from a fixed, physical, venue?

- Presentations: Air Space Gallery – Anna Francis (director).
- Opened in 2008 in Stoke.
- Stoke seemingly around 10 years behind Birmingham's deindustrialisation process, so rebuilding/repurposing buildings is only just properly starting. This has had an impact on the gallery's programming.
- Been in the same property since 2007, but still only able to get a rolling monthly lease.
- Also runs graduate bursaries and professional development opportunities (e.g. artists' soup kitchen; a relational artwork that is pay-as-you-feel with a soup created relating to the current exhibition and gives the opportunity for each person/artist to have a set amount of time to talk about their work or the current show with the group).

- Recently negotiated an asset transfer with the council for a disused pub to be converted to a community space/pottery studio/artist residency space, so hopeful of using it as an example of the benefits of artistic organisations to a city to help renegotiate their own rolling monthly lease.

- Presentations: Coventry Biennial – Ryan Hughes (director).
- Set up as the city had a pending city of culture bid with no real focus on the visual arts (only theatre/performance). The city also published a new culture strategy document in line with the bid that had subsequent review points every 2 years so the biennial model seemed a good fit.
- Conceived as a biennial in January 2017 and launched in October of the same year.
- Second iteration 'The Twin' coming 2019.
- Pitching artist-led practice at an institutional level to the city council and the wider art world rather than buying in to the model of the global biennial itself. Can such an artist-led biennial model be sustained over time as its popularity grows without becoming just another biennial?

- Presentations: Grand Union – Cheryl Jones (director).
- The recession allowed them to access relatively cheap property at Minerva Works, where they have been based since.
- Matt Higginbottom designed all the architecture for the studio spaces at a reduced rate to act as an example of his work for his new business. The studio architecture is also all modular so could be added to or taken down if they needed to move location in future, etc.
- Grand Union has helped encourage production chains between other businesses at the Minerva Works site (e.g. fabrication for exhibitions, etc.) to help the local ecology and help keep the site fully occupied, etc.
- The modular studios won't fit in the newly acquired Junction works building, so they will be passed on to other/new organisations to use and provide better conditions for artists in the future.

- Panel discussion: chaired by Gavin Wade (Eastside Projects) with Louise Latter (Bomb), Amahra Spence (Maia Creatives) and Craig Ashley (New Art West Midlands).
- "We need to shape the future otherwise someone will shape it for us"
- Eastside using 1979 artist-run space manifesto text to guide how they operate?
- Largest concentration of artistic activity in the history of the city in Digbeth over the pas 10 years; also the highest number of NPOs in the city over the past 10 years.
- 'Midlands Engine' artist development programme by New Art West Midlands as a more engaged and artist-focused programme compared to the 'development' offered by the national 'Northern Powerhouse' scheme.
- What is it that we can do or are comfortable with in relation to objecting to capitalist methodologies of operation? E.g. How cognitive of the effects of capitalism are we, and how comfortable are we with those effects? Where are we on the capitalist spectrum?

- "Society wont ever break from capitalism if everyone takes the position of thinking others will change it."
- Collectivism as one of the only ways to overcome capitalism? E.g. 13P New York (13 playwrights that work in a group, concentrating their efforts to produce one of the group's plays over the course of a year and then working through the rest of the group's in subsequent years).
- Steamhouse Birmingham as a centre to provide a production base for ceratives somewhat similar to the various fabrication/production spaces in London?

- The themes covered in the event – precarity, funding, spatial provision, working with local authorities – as common in most, if not all forms of artist-led practices. Discussions were engaged in, but nothing really came from them? Most attendees seemed to be in similar positions individually or organisationally, so acted more to reaffirm shared conditions and promote a sense of disparate cohesion?

- Minerva Works visit: Grand Union and Centrala (Stryx in between exhibitions so the space was closed).
- All currently located in the same large, former industrial site in Digbeth. The area of the city is still largely industrial, a former periphery that is scheduled to be the site for the proposed HS2 rail stop. Much of the property in the area has been bought by private landlords/developers and left idle to increase in value ready to redevelop/sell on in future. This has generally raised prices of rents in the area with a small number of creative and independent businesses still based there alongside industrial productions spaces, garages, etc.
- Relatively well-sized spaces for the organisations within the building, still with generic 'artist-led' tropes e.g. some industrial noise pollution, generally cold or colder inside even during spring/summer months, generally in a less-than-desirable part of the city particularly apparent at night for events attendees/studio holders.
- Really useful for all organisations to develop their audiences if they schedule their preview evenings, etc. or coordinate art walks/tours, even around other events like Assembly. Check and see if that happens, particularly as the Birmingham Art Map could also help promote, broadening social/professional networks.

The Role of the Arts in Civic Renewal discussion event, The Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston 29 June
- Post-Brexit Preston 3 (third in the discussion event series).
- Peter Latchford 'The Future of Civic Museums' (commissioned by English Civic Museums Network) talks of museums leading a 'new enlightenment'. Doesn't really expand; unclear on the practicalities of that process too. What would the new enlightenment be? How could institutional structures like museums suddenly pay such a key role as a site of social development, especially regionally? Especially considering the size/budget/scope of those in Preston.

- In Certain Places 'Expanded City' project. Informing city planning, using Preston as a case study (working with UCLAN?), through artistic interventions.
- 'New Model Visual arts Organisations and Social Engagement' report by the Psychosocial Researchl Unit at UCLAN, using Art Angel, Grizedale Arts, CCA Glasgow and FACT as case studies. What impacts have technologisation and globalisation been found to have had on them? (Check report to see if they have impacted larger institutional practice like they have for artist-led activity).
- 'Understanding the value of arts and culture' – AHRC cultural value project.
- 'What is the role of arts organisations?' – The Galbekian foundation.
- 'Baa Baa Baric…a quiet resolution' – Mark Storor and Rainford High School, a 12-year project embedding artistic practice in student governance as part of the larger Heart of Glass project in St Helens.

Nongkrong discussion event, g39, Cardiff, 08 September
- g39 visit: slightly out of the 'main' part of Cardiff's city centre, seemingly surrounded by social housing and new build housing developments.
- Former industrial space/warehouse, ground floor (so fully accessible), with a large gallery space, screening room, reading room/reference library and desk space, bookshop, office and bar.
- Repurposed parts from older installations to help recycle and fabricate furniture, etc.
- Half of the gallery is currently being used as studio space for artists as part of the UNIT(E) residency programme. Practitioners getting space and professional support from g39 and their staff ahead of a final group exhibition.
- Small team of staff at g39 very welcoming and happy to talk about the organisation. Anthony Shapland (founder and director) talking about g39's history saying how they have tried to move locations ahead of waves of gentrification in the city, but now they are nearly at the periphery with nowhere else for the city to expand to as on one side there is sea, and the other hills/mountains. What impact will that have long term on artists? And g39 as they will have to imminently renegotiate their current lease.
- 'Breakfast Club' every Saturday morning. Originally conceived by artist Louise Hobson as part of her UNIT(E) library residency. The gallery opens for a pay-what-you-can breakfast for anyone form the local area and beyond as a way to open the organisation up to local communities, increase social cohesion and help provide an affordable meal.
- Also told about Spit and Sawdust (didn't have time to visit): a skate park and exhibition space that also commissions artists throughout the year to produce work for a billboard on site. A sustainable business (skate park) supporting artistic activity through an ongoing programme.

- Arcade/Campfa visit: artist-led gallery based in the Queens Arcade shopping centre on the basement floor (also runs off-site studios and an artist residency and exhibition scheme).

- 2 spaces; one either side of the escalator. One space (Arcade) acts as an experimental project space, whilst the other (Campfa) has a year-long exhibition and event programme.
- Mainly working with early career artists and designers?

- Nongkrong: discussion event followed by food and rinks, organised and hosted by curator Helen Nisbet and g39 (Anthony Shapland and Cinzia Mutigli), including Transmission, The White Pube, Dimaz Maulana (LIR Space, Indonesia) and Ratna Mufida (Jogjakarta Biennial Foundation).
- Nongkrong is an Indonesian cultural practice of gathering (usually with friends) to have informal conversations over food and drinks.
- g39: seen as an institution and bigger than they are after operating for 20 years; really 2 full time salaries split between their 4 current staff. The team works horizontally so all the paid staff are able to work on their own projects externally, with the other 3 staff covering the person's role until they return to ensure they can all continue their own practices as artists/curators/etc.
- Most of the spatial architecture is recycled from past projects/exhibitions e.g. Bedwyr Williams' plinths from his Venice Biennale show now act as benches in the screening room. Keeping the space relatively modular to fit with their needs of creating and displaying art.
- Ran the first paid gallery internship in Wales.
- "Just because something is regional doesn't mean it should be mediocre."
- Ratna Mufida: setting up artist-led activities in Indonesia through curiosity about local and national art history, and also through a sense of wanting to have a different critical voice to the state funded/organised bienniale.
- Artist-led used as terminology in Indonesia, or being used here to ease understanding because of the laguage barrier?
- Alaya Ang (Transmission): 2018 the first year Transmission committee is made up entirely of POC (continuing Transmission's commitment to working with marginalised communities and exploring decolonisation).
- "From isolation to empathy."
- Dimaz Maulana (LIR Space): LIR Space = reading room, gallery, kitchen and outdoor music performance space, hosting 15-20 shows/projects/exhibitions per year.
- The White Pube: DIY shouldn't mean political equality can be ignored due to a lack of funding/professional capacity.
- "Why is the art world so white?"
- some organisations making policy documents for artist-led spaces and organisations eg. 12ø Collective, Auto Italia and Transmission.

Independents Biennial, various venues, Liverpool, 18 September
- Taken over in 2018 by Art In Liverpool who organised the festival for the first time, previously it had been in operation since 1999 (early documentation is scarce, however it has been organised by different steering groups/organisations/etc. so there is seemingly no complete archive in one place online/offline).

- Formerly known under other names e.g. Biennial Fringe, Biennial Independents, etc.
- The press and marketing material for the 2018 edition frames it as providing new perspectives on practitioners in the region and the challenges they face, also working with international practitioners to do so, creating opportunities for all.
- Originally set up in opposition to the Biennial itself as a rebuke to a perceived lack of opportunities for local artists? Or more in keeping with the task of highlighting local practitioners and organisations rather than as an overt critique of the Biennial?
- Now positioned very much as complementary to the Biennial itself, making use of the increased visitors to the city for it in order to capitalise for their own projects and events. Central hub for 2018 located in the St John's shopping centre; central to one of the main shopping areas in the city and within close walking distance of Lime Street station.
- What is the perception of the relationship and dynamic between the Biennial and the Independents biennial? What do each side think, and what crossover between the two is there? Many artist-led organisations end up within the 'main' programme of the Biennial, creating a distance between themselves and their peers operating with similar budgets and at perceived similar levels in the arts community of the city.
- Under Art In Liverpool the scope (and arguably quality) of the Independents Biennial is definitely increasing, but is it recognised by most Biennial visitors beforehand, or inadvertently discovered whilst there?
- Could the two festivals publicly work together more in future and collaborate on more programming to begin to redress the long held perception of the Biennial overlooking local practitioners? Would the Biennial want to given how outward and globally facing they are and have been previously? Would they have the time and resources to do so?

The NewBridge Project, Gateshead; The NewBridge Project, Carliol House, Newcastle & NewBridge Books, BALTIC 39, Newcastle, 20 September
- Established in 2010 to provide affordable studio spaces for artists in the city and an exhibition space.
- Maintain studios, gallery spaces, artistic development programmes and curatorial opportunities.
- 2 spaces; one in Gateshead and on in Carliol House in the centre of Newcastle.
- Clare Gomez (studio manager) to give an introduction and tour of both spaces.

- Gateshead site: space in a large, former retail unit (Woolworths?). Gallery space at the front looking out onto the street, studios and communal spaces behind it in the rest of the building.
- The organisation has a relatively formal structure with a director, programme manager, etc. but the whole organisation and its staff are part of the artist-led 'ethos' (whatever that could be defined as?). i.e. they place

artists and their practices as key/central to everything they do. So intentionally different from other, similarly sized, organisations?
- Trying to help foster and maintain a sense of community with their studio holders and other practitioners in the city (Newcastle has one of the highest graduate retention percentages for art students in the UK?).
- One way of doing this is through the 'Practice Makes Practice' development programme. Run by artists for artists, it acts as a professional development programme for both practical and administrative skills. Aming to connect what is taught in educational institutions/contexts and real-world situations and necessities?
- Supporting over 100 artists in the studio spaces over both sites?
- Met up with studio holders Lesley Joan Guy and Toby Lloyd who spoke about their views on NewBridge and the key role it plays in the artistic community in the city and beyond.
- Talking with Lesley about the collective she is part of (Totaller), she outlines their collective practice as based on Bataille's definition of the dictionary as being something that shows how a word is used, not something that defines them; this is central to their output. Also the hagiography of art, artists and their lives being used in the commercial market to drive up or ensure market prices keep their value, ending up deifying them as a seemingly separate cultural form/object. The hagiography of artist-led practices as perpetuating the practices themselves as a cultural form/product?
- Also met with travelling researcher/photographer Abby Banks from California who was also visiting NewBridge. She was the photographer for Thurston Moore's book 'Punk House. Interiors in Anarchy'. Her current project has her travelling and meeting artists in their studios, taking portraits to document commonalities of practice.

- Carliol House site: Carliol house is a listed building (former home of the city's electricity company), with NewBridge occupying 2 floors housing around 80 artists at any given time.
- The site also has a wood workshop, ceramics workshop, film lab and darkroom that studio holders or NewBridge members can book out to use. The site also has communal spaces, co-working spaces, and exhibition and making spaces that can also be booked to use.
- The building is fairly cold given its age and size (and in keeping with general artist-led trends).
- Studio visit with Stacey Davidson (i o u a e and Goldtapped). She has curated the current exhibition at the Carliol House gallery space (studio holders/visitors have to enter through it to access the studios and communal spaces like at the Gateshead site). She has also curated an upcoming project with Shelf at Spanish city (a new venue in Bridlington) with other artist-led groups for the opening of the venue to the public.
- i o u a e's focus on utilising digital platforms to provide space for early career practitioners to experiment/display their ideas and works. Widening networks through social media and digital technology?

- NewBridge books visit: formerly part of the Gateshead site, it is one of the only places in the city dedicated to art/critical theory publications and periodicals. It is now based on the ground floor of the building BALTIC 39 (off-site project space managed by BALTIC) is located in.
- The ethos of the shop seems to be at odds with the building itself which is full of offices, with BALTIC 39 occupying one of the higher floors (currently showing the group exhibition of Liverpool Biennial Associate Artists, many of whom usually practice in decidedly artist-led contexts). BALTIC 39 as using the same model as MoMA PS1 i.e. offsite project space where the programming can be more experimental as it isn't physically within the institution? (However BALTIC 39 hasn't cannibalised an existing artist-led/artist-run/self-organised space to do so).

Tall Tales From An Artist-Led Space event, Cubitt Gallery, London, 29 September
- Day-long event was the culmination of a research residency by MA Curating student William Noel Clarke from Goldsmiths University. Featured performances from the artists Amelia Barratt, Natasha Cox and Keira Greene.
- The residency was based in the Cubitt archive; an archive roughly 27 years old, charting the entire history of the organisation. Clarke approached the archive as a form of network, looking specifically at the idea of the 'paranode' (a node situated between the links of nodes in a network), and how this could be used to rethink the Cubitt archive.
- The artists that were part of the event acting as paranodes, speculating on parts of the archive that lack information or clarity in order to fill them with para-fictional responses. Creating new spaces of information that exists 'other' to the main body of the archive.
- Raising valid issues on the importance of artist-led archives in order to record and share information. Clarke also indicated 'artist-led' was not used as terminology until much more recently in items within it. Historical revisionism and artists seemingly not holding self-identification in that way as important until the 2000s?

a-n Assembly Dundee, Vision Building, Dundee, 12 October
- Held at the Vision Building (creative office/meeting spaces), featuring a-n, Generator Projects, The Royal Standard, Tendency Towards, Jamboree, Dundee Print Collective, Dundee Cermaics Workshop, Spit and Sawdust, curator Alissa Kleist and artists Thomas Goddard, Jen Collins and Sekai Machache.
- Seemingly a much broader range of participants compared to the earlier Birmingham event – drawn from all over the country instead of just the specific region the event is located in, hopefully able to broaden discussions and avoid repeating the same conversations ad infinitum.
- 'A Network of Outposts' panel discussion: Julie Lomax (a-n CEO). Tendency towards, Alissa Kleist, Beth Emily Richards (Jamboree), Joanna Helfer (Assembly organiser), documented by Jen Collins.
- Does regeneration in context of cities not just mean gentrification?
- Artist-led creating and acting as networks that provide things that institutions cant of wont offer, but institutions could still contribute to

their upkeep/development as it impacts on the institutionalised network/ecology/environment?

- Surely outposts are the wrong way to look at artist-led organisations given their proliferation. Arguably larger institutions could be thought of as outposts in what is otherwise an artist-led community in the second economy?
- Alternative structures that have hierarchies that don't conform to current institutional models that strengthen outdated modes of thinking?
- The end of the panel invites everyone to decide some 'actionable outcomes' and encouraged to connect with one another to develop new support networks. Why? The actionable outcomes aren't actually anything meaningful aside from creating 'solidarity' and 'support' between groups – what does this actually mean in practical terms apart from outwardly showing your solidarity and support by expressing it without actually helping in tangible ways?
- The afternoon session seemingly just an introduction to different production spaces/organisations in Dundee (along Spit and Sawdust from Cardiff). Although it's good to get an introduction to organisations, what does this actually serve? Ceramics workshops/print making studios are established models maintaining traditional working processes within the art system that are nothing new. They exist in every big city in the UK – what is the point in including them here apart from to offer a practical session for attendees? Does it actually add to the dialogue of the wider event?
- Although there was a wider lineup of participants for this edition many of the same discussion topics were covered again. But once again nothing really came of them. They were raised as significant issues and barriers and people were congratulated for expressing them as such, but after the mutual pat on the back for doing so overtly nothing else happened. There were no meaningful outcomes really derived from the sessions that would start to have any kind of useful wider impact, and no looking further forward for broader changes collective unity could bring.

Ecologies and Ecologies of the Artist-Led: Place, Space, Futures Symposium, University of Leeds and MAP Charity, Leeds, 26 – 27 October

- Gordon Dalton (Creative Factory): artists as consistently bottom of the food chain in the art world/system, a world/system initially developed by themselves. Why would you create a situation where you could be so badly exploited for the gain of others?
- Artists paid so badly (usually 5k per year in England for their practice, with the living wage at 17k per year), so leads to occupying unfit spaces and continuing exploitation, backed up by objective data findings.
- Gill Crawshaw and Gem Carlier: "Normalise accessibility and don't make a drama out of it!" What can artist-led spaces do to combat the unfit for purpose spaces they usually end up inhabiting to ensure there is adequate provision for people with access issues or complex needs? Always have accessibility information on websites and social media for events, etc. as it could make a huge difference in the short-term. How could you translate your programming into online or digital spaces to ensure those that can't

physically access them can still interact with them? Attempting to offer creative ways around access issues which often cant be helped due to the nature of staging artist-led practices could be a way to open wider dialogues, and even by collectively rejecting the use of certain post-industrial spaces it could force developers and landlords to address needs of provision? See the Shape Arts 'How to put on an accessible exhibition' guide.

- General consensus throughout the symposium was for the need of some sort of resource relating to artist-led practices – taking any form e.g. online Wiki or some form of archive. One that could be contributed to by anyone in the field, potentially stored in and/or managed by an educational institution so it wouldn't be solely managed by one artist-led organisation, but would be a collaborative resource framed around debate and discussion.

Artist-Run Multiverse Summit, Eastside Projects, Birmingham, 9 – 10 November
- Hosted by Eastside Projects, featuring Transmission, Pallas Projects, Jamboree, One Thoresby Street, CROXHAPOX, Modern Clay, Test Space, The White Pube, Rabbits Road Press, Kunsthal Gent, 12Ø Collective, The NewBridge Project, Campbell Works, a-n, Coventry Biennial, Outline, Hereford Market Art Collective. Artist Run Alliance, Ontsteking, East Leeds Project, the Art House, Post X, ex-mathematician Aaron Sloman, and artists Kelly Large, Flora Parrott and Grace Ndiritu.
- Kelly Large and Flora Parrott: the emotion of crowds ('Crods and Power'), where each person within feels connected to the others, temporarily destabilising hierarchies and acting as one. A sanctuary in hostile conditions.
- Transmission: how do we make care central to our institutional praxis as an artist-led organisation? What are the difficulties of this? (2016 committee constituted as made up of POC from then on to reverse the whitewashed history of the Glasgow art scene and create a safe space fro POC/LGBTQ+ artists).
- Committee prioritising their own wellbeing before conducting work for others to ensure they were ready to do so.
- How can they open the Transmission space out to others who have been excluded from other institutional spaces? 'Decolonising their institution'.
- Ensuring boundaries remain clear for all in relation to private and professional capacities.
- 'From isolation to empathy'.
- Pallas Projects: occupied 14 spaces over 20 years with their current lease set to expire in 2020. Their series of artist-initiated projects aimed at democratising their gallery space so it isn't fully controlled by them. i.e. they hand the space over to artists to programme their own projects in.
- Is it inevitable that artist-led organisations eventually grow to become an institution?
- 'Institution' not useful as a piece of terminology when describing and evaluating artist-led practice given the historical connotations associated with it? What alternatives to it are there?

- [Is artist-led practice, in whatever form, already an institutional structure/form in and of itself though, so this point is somewhat moot?]
- CROXHAPOX (Ghent): 30 years old, started as a squatted space. Lost funding last year so redefined what their organisation was; it now works with other organisations to produce their public programme.
- The White Pube: does every artist-led scene have the same problems because of the state of arts criticism? Do we collectively need to actively invite more external critical viewpoints?
- "Those in power fail upwards."
- Productive annoyance: 1. (White) mediocrity; 2. Institutional critique of how the art world operates is focused on the biggies (i.e. large institutions); 3. Artist-led structures need evaluating.
- Criticism that isn't anonymous. Current 'criticism' just reinforcing the general attitude of mediocrity that reinforces the existing racialised hegemony. Arts journalism rather than arts criticism.
- Rabbits road Press: what is the role of small visual arts organisations within the wider arts ecology? (Helping support One of My Kind (OOMK) & DIY Cultures).
- Providing access to equipment and a community of creative people that wouldn't necessarily exist otherwise.
- Artist-led…what happens when the artists leading get bored?
- Kunsthal Ghent: can an artist-run model evolve into a(n artist-run) city?
- Speculative/utopian as the space doesn't exist yet; will be opening in a former monastery.
- Collaboration with other organisations at the heart of its operation/programme.
- Off spaces/alternative/artist-led.
- 019 Ghent using their building as an ongoing artwork with ongoing interventions throughout.
- How can they interact with their monastery space with all of its history, whilst seeing it as a 'city' where they can invite others to also interact with it?
- 'Is it inevitable that a successful artist-run space grows up to be an institution?' breakout discussion: 'growing up' as infantilising artist-led organisations and looking down on the area of practice.
- Running a space/organisation as an artistic practice.
- Why is longevity akin to success?
- Can you devolve an existing institution?
- Public funding requirements steering organisations down a certain route in regards to becoming institutional.
- Domination of Arts Council in the UK public funding. Needs serious discussion on the structure of public funding in the arts.
- 12Ø Collective: 'backend'; a collaborative artist-led code of conduct being developed around 3 events bringing artists and artist-led organisations together.
- Currently most organisations use ACE guidelines to guide them that are outdated and lacking in terms of exploitation/harassment/discrimination/etc.

- Artist Run Alliance: started as 'Alfred' (Tel-Aviv), an artist co-operative with Adi from that co-operative helping to developed the Artist Run Alliance. The Alliance as trying to connect and network all artist-run organisations globally.
- Aiming to create an artist-run resource centre alongside their free mapping project.
- Onsteking (Netherlands): created as a mixed model art/music/performance space.
- Created in response to a lack of opportunities for early career artists in Ghent.
- The space and public programme as an ongoing artwork.
- Post X: housed in an old post office bought by the founder in a town ear Ghent.
- Operates local engagement sessions and artist residency programme in their garden and project space.

2019

backend discussion event, OUTPUT Gallery, Liverpool, 05 February
- By 12Ø Collective, hosted at OUTPUT, with facilitation/contributions from Sufea Mohamad Noor, Priya Sharma and Maggie Matić.
- backend as a public project/resource for practitioners and organisations aiming to help bring about systemic change along key issues such as structural racism, sexual harassment, accessibility and transphobia that act as barriers to participation.
- Is trying to be 'alternatives' to larger institutions part of the problem? In not wanting to replicate exactly their structures and hierarchies does that also mean the good things they bring (arguably even though they don't bring enough o them) i.e. accountability and safeguarding are also usually not replicated?
- Gentrification a huge problem for artist-led organisations in Liverpool, and arguably has worked to ensure practitioners and organisations cant put proper safeguarding or best practices measures in place because of the precarity of their tenancies/resources/etc. Although precarity shouldn't be an excuse to not approach those issues, their unintentional avoidance has become ingrained into practice because of the perception of not being able to do anything about them?
- Anti-gentrification working group to be set up in the city to combat rising rents/lack of physical space/art washing?
- How to get artist-led organisations having more joined up thinking with one another in the city without having to invest a significant amount of extra time/energy/resources that many already don't have?
- Liverpool art map similar to the ones in Birmingham and Leeds? Could even be overseen by a larger institution/organisation like the Biennial, LJMU, etc. or even Art In Liverpool and used as a way to not only advertise the breadth of practice happening in the city, but foster better relations between the larger and smaller organisations.

Creating an Artist Career discussion event, Akibatamabi21 (3331 Arts Chiyoda), Tokyo, 27 May

- Hosted at Akibatamabi 21; an offsite gallery from Tama Art University where students and graduates have control over the public programme. The gallery is housed within 3331 Arts Chiyoda, a former elementary school that has been repurposed into an art space (including its own gallery space), where classrooms have been converted and rented out to other galleries and creative organisations.
- The event was organised using an LJMU travel grant, and also featured COBRA (XYZ Collective), Yuu Takamizawa (4649), Hajime Nariai (Tokyo Station Gallery), Kenji Ide (SOS Network) and Maiko Jinushi (Ongoing Collective).
- SOS Network: 'Super Open Studios Network'. Graduates from Tokyo arts universities joined together as needed studio spaces, started with 2 studios, now after 7 years they have over 100.
- Runs 'super open studios' event as part of the organisation, creating a publication alongside it and the organisation's output. Where they have an open studios across all their sites in multiple locations within and outside of Tokyo.
- Curated 'Munster Sculpture Project' featuring local and international artists in 2018 appropriating the title from the periodic exhibition to stage a group show in a public park, creating an 'artist grave' tribute for dead practitioners as part of it to reinforce the international nature of the project.
- The whole project was operated in a guerrilla/grass roots/artist-led fashion.
- Also organised 'Sylvanian Families Biennial 2017' appropriating 'famous' artists' works to be displayed inside Sylvanian Families houses and sets.
- SOS projects tend to be organised and realised quickly, lending them to the conceptually driven nature of the group and their output.
- COBRA: founding member of XYZ Collective. The collective has 2 venues both located in the same building (XYZ Collective and The Steak house Doskoi).
- XYZ has an artist-run gallery and studios (studios mainly for early career artists), with the gallery acting as an 'alternative space' to show cutting edge contemporary practice from and in Tokyo.
- Participates in international commercial art fairs to help promote and sell their artists' work.
- 4649: gallery space, located in the same building as XYZ. Yuu is also a member of XYZ Collective, staging similar projects to the collective in terms of scope and ambition.
- Maiko: recently has participated in residencies rather than programming her own space.
- Usually practices outside of larger institutions and is part of Ongoing Collective (a non-hierarchical collective of creative practitioners).
- Recent projects include a 2-month residency at the KUNZI Cultural Studies Center, Yogyakarta (developing films and performance works), and the Koganecho Bazaar project, which has led her to a socially engaged side of her practice, seeing her work in artist-led contexts.

- How important is a physical space? From site-specific practices and organisations having a physical space to now through the rise of network culture to ephemeral, and communications-based spaces where practices and relationships can develop.
- Sustainability – seemingly individual funding in Japan is easier to access than for groups? In Japan how can you retain autonomy if you work with/are in receipt of funding from larger institutions or local/national government?

Design Festa Gallery, Harajuku, Tokyo, 29 May
- 'A gallery for every artist'
- Gallery space in Harajuku; established in 1998 it has over 70 gallery/display spaces that are all available for hire for any time period from one day onwards.
- Used by a variety of creative practitioners for a variety of means e.g. exhibitions, book launches, fashion shows, etc. The organisation doesn't charge any commission fees for sales, just for space rental.
- Set up following the international Design Festa art event in 1994, the gallery is intended to follow the same ethos of providing space for anyone and everyone to express themselves without space/price being prohibitive.
- A hybrid between larger institutional and ostensibly artist-led operating structures?

The Political Economy of Creative Practices, Artist-Led Initiatives, Art Projects and Alternative Art/Education discussion event, Radio Kosaten, Tokyo, 31 May
- Hosted by Kosaten (a group operating a space for marginalised groups and communities to come together through art) at Radio Kosaten (their regular digital radio broadcast project).
- The open discussion event was organised using an LJMU travel grant and also featured Junko Harada (Rojitohito), Nozomu Ogawa (Art Center Ongoing), Arts Initiative Tokyo and Bigakko.
- 'A space to create space for space.'
- Also have a 'mutual aid box'; a box for donations that are intended to help cover the travel costs of those that use the space. A way to repay their efforts when they may not monetarily be able to afford it.
- Junko: manga artist/poet/painter. Runs Rojitohito art space; 'not really a gallery' (a multi-use creative space). She calls it a group of people sharing ideas (started in 2009).
- Wants to have diversity in the space to make it suitable and available for anyone; funded by the people that use the space (i.e. they pay for the time used). The people that use it are people that are part of the Rojitohito group itself.
- 10-year anniversary in December 2019. Generally stages exhibitions and other events (reading groups, fashion shows, etc.) to allow/provide a discursive space on a variety of cultural/creative practices and issues.

- The expectations of how a space should function influences how people act and perform within it; Rojitohito hopes to counteract this to encourage seeing and appreciating from another perspective.
- Nozomu: Started Ongoing in 2008; gallery/café/library/archive, currently with a bi-weekly exhibition programme (25 per year, closed Mondays and Tuesdays).
- Cant do it any other way as rent is so expensive in Kichijoji (¥220,000 per month) as it is now one of the most desirable cities to live in in Tokyo. So the programme has to be constant so it doesn't waste time and money.
- Also has an international artist-in-residence programme, and has recently set up 'Ongoing School' for school children (and in the future adults), to counteract the lack of arts education at school level in the country.
- Generally shows experimental works that are not intended for sale, the space is to provide new experiences with art, not sell works.
- His 'patrons' are the artists he works with and the network he has developed over time.
- No external funding, the space is financed personally and from any profits from the café/entrance fees to visit the shows and events.
- Not an 'alternative' space, instead it is independent. Independent from larger institutions and from Ongoing itself being seen as one, it is a realisation of his personal desire for a space rather than entering into direct competition with other insitutions.
- Michael Leung: from Kai Fong Pai Dong market stall and creative space in Hong Kong.
- Trying to create a sociallyinclusive space that can be used for a variety of uses, grounded in a background of creativity form its creators.
- Jong Pairez (Kosaten): to understand 'alternative' you have to understand the context in which it is being used. Shanzhai (Chinese term roughly translated as counterfeit, referring to a form of compromise in context).
- i.e. alternative as a rupture, a break. Through shanzhai (an Eastern viewpoint) it is more about the process, the flow in relation to past and future social conditions.
- How can we subvert society using the compromise?
- Shanzhai as a form of commoning?
- Western domination of historical narratives though colonialism etc. warping the understanding of what an alternative is or could be in relation to other world views, how could artist-led self-organisation be more holistic and use this as a strength?

Get Together and Get Things Done, Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester, 18 July
- Related to the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 and the social rights the peaceful protesters won, and the legacies of helping to established trade unions etc. that came from the event.
- Manchester Art Gallery questioning/analysing public gatherings and crowds and their roles in group activities, reflecting on how their own institution has been and is shaped by the crowds that have used and continue to use it.
- Essentially the exhibition shows that mobilisation of groups acts as the precursor to social change, often regardless of what that mobilisation

takes the form of e.g. protest, education, parties, etc. It is the being in common with others with a shared goal that provides the impetus.

- Wide variety of historical and contemporary works providing a genealogy of gatherings, trying to incorporate non-Western viewpoints too, although this could be argued as indicative of the gallery reflecting on the crowds that have helped shape it, through colonial acquisitions etc. through to the present transition towards a 'useful' museum.
- Has the gallery truly been shaped by those that use it, or has it historically been shaped by ideas of what were perceived to be the interests or needs or those that used it?
- The potential of art, to not only record, but help catalyse different forms of social gatherings and work towards bringing about some form of social change also glosses over the fact that it needs other social actors and contexts to help bring about that change. Art cannot change or has not in Western history been the sole reason social change has occurred, it has been in context of other social actors and situations. The gallery trying to convey itself as something it has never been and could never be through the idea of the useful museum?
- The useful museum concept (that the gallery is on the road to embracing) seeks to have the institution as a tool for social change. How do you do this in practice whilst acknowledging that visual art is not the most important aspect in bringing about social change? Does that ultimately serve weaken the institution itself?

Precarity in the Arts talk, FACT, Liverpool, 30 July
- a-n event hosted by Julie Lomax at FACT including artists Emily Speed (a-n Artists Council), Kevin Hunt, Fauziya Johnson (ROOT-ed Zine), Joe Cotgrave and Sufea Mohamad Noor.
- Paying artists and spatial precarity both feature heavily in all of the contributions throughout. Even established practitioners such as Speed and Hunt who have been practicing for decades still raise both as crucial barriers to long-term viability of their studio practice and the impact both have had on their professional and personal lives.
- Mental health impacts of precarity highlighted as often overlooked at all levels by practitioners as a result of precarity, and also the impacts working conditions offered by larger institutions that have negative impacts in both the short- and long-term on practitioners' mental health.
- Practicalities of precarity also often overlooked, particularly in relation to self-employment. Most practitioners will either have piecemeal teaching positions on temporary contracts, or freelance in various roles from being paid by other organisations for exhibitions/talks/etc. through to writing commissions about others' work. How does having numerous temporary contracts and being on PAYE systems from numerous universities impact tax when the HMRC system isn't designed to cope with logistics like that? Often leading to turning down paid work as it's not worth the hassle of getting taxed on it and then trying to claim it back, as the money you'd earn overall would end up working out as less than what you'll get for the hours work and the hours admin chasing it up (see Hunt's list of payments/accounts on his website for evidence of this).

-   Knowing the value of practitioners and their practices also brought up repeatedly. Often practitioners don't value their own practice for the impact it actually has, which leads to co-optation and exploitation given the precarious conditions most practice and exist within. There is consensus amongst the panel that there needs to be more public conversations about this, and not having a fear of saying no or negotiating with larger institutions and organisations when paid work is offered.

Index Festival, various venues, Leeds, 01 August
-   Ran alongside the first Yorkshire Sculpture International festival, also split between Leeds and Wakefield and functioning as a fringe to the 'main' festival itself.
-   Similar to the Independents Biennial in many respects, however YSI were partly responsible for establishing it to begin with, so it and its programme were very much in addition rather than in opposition to its larger scale peer.
-   Acted to show visitors the breadth and diversity of art and culture in the two cities – in reality meant an ostensibly artist-led approach to a festival that was interwoven with aspects of the YSI programming.
-   Asked to vacate the premises for the festival hub in Leeds as the landlord had rented it out to someone else, despite having agreed to the full dates for the festival in advance, reinforcing the precarity of meanwhile spaces even for larger scale public projects.
-   Definitely more of a back-and-forth relationship between Index and YSI, maybe because it was the first iteration of either festival and Leeds and Wakefield are relatively small 'big cities' compared to the scope of others such as Liverpool for the Biennial and Independents Biennial?
-   Working with a number of marginalised communities within the visual arts in the two cities, actively giving platforms to groups and individuals often at the peripheries of larger public festivals elsewhere.

Resilience is Futile Corridor8 publication launch, The Art House, Wakefield
-   Resilience used as a positive way to respond to negative and debilitating conditions – often brought about through neoliberal governance – that puts the onus on the individual or community positively dealing with negative conditions without challenging them. Instead accepting them as part of normal, everyday, existence.
-   An arts 'community' not 'ecology' (as per Kerry Harker)? Community infers the complex and diverse nature of networks of care developed between practitioners to help strategies of resilience and potential rather than ecology with its root in botany describing an often-hierarchical order?

No Particular Place to Go? 35 years of sculpture at Castlefield Gallery, Castlefield Gallery, Manchester, 06 September
-   Charting the exhibition history of the gallery through its ties to sculpture.
-   Explores turning into a much more institutionalised and hierarchical organisation over time since its inception.

- Founded in 1984 by artists from the Manchester Artist Studio Association as a response to the need for space to display and exhibit work to the public by emerging practitioners in the city.
- As time has gone on the organisation has seemingly kept that aim in mind, seeking to combat the perceived lack of provision, but opened their remit out to national and international practitioners alongside locals. Also being more selective with who they work with and when to ensure its right for the development of practitioners in a more considered development of their own working approach.
- A definite institutional trajectory for what was once a purely artist-run/self-organised organisation?
- Now the organisation is much more hierarchical with a director and curator, but still overtly guided by the practices of the artists they work with, in a similar vein to that of Grand Union, David Dale, etc.
- Formalising their own structures to ensure they have access to resources to better support the practitioners whose practices drive their programming?

CKC 2019: Rethinking, Resisting and Reimagining the Creative City Conference, Watershed, Bristol, 12 – 13 September
- Hosted by the Creative Economies Research Unit at the University of the West of England, Bristol, staged at The Watershed.
- Exploring the impacts of the creative economy outside of the 'usual' neoliberal metrics or buzzwords of creativity and innovation building on a previous conference in 2018. Focusing on how socio-economic-political developments globally are impacting the development of cities.
- 'Remembering the Creative City': the past as a resource to draw on for city of culture bids.
- Susen (2018) and Boltanski & Esquerre (2017) talking about the past used for future enrichment.
- Susen – tourist vs. traveler (one capitally minded, the other arts minded)?
- Impoverishment/cultural work/tourism as the main aspects of the enrichment economy utilised so widely in current city development schemes.
- Creative governance: Alte Münze (Berlin) – a space being given over to 'creatives' to be a production, not a display, space.
- Studio Berlin III report on artists' livelihoods.
- Coalition of the Independent Arts – advocacy group that has been able to bring about some changes for artists in the city. Also see: 'Precarious Workers and the Gig Economy'.
- The importance of friendship: artist collectives as a social output in a dialectical relationship.
- Friendship as going beyond the support of a purely professional relationship vs. the risk of slipping into carelessness.
- Assemble as one and both, i.e. part of the gentrification process, but knowingly part of it and trying to change it from the inside.
- Artist-led housing: why is it not talked about in any detail given that it plays a formative role for many practitioners?

- Could argue for artist-led housing as existing as a larger socially engaged or ongoing artwork (in physical, social, spaces).
- More Than Meanwhile Spaces: ongoing research project based in the North East, partly asking what kind of city do we want to live in? (In relation to provision for artists)
- Berlin tourist tax distributed to independent artists and organisations that they administer and distribute themselves.
- Understanding the impact of organisational and management models on artists' spaces in the production of sustainable urban futures.
- Do artist-led practitioners and organisations need to start following larger art institutions' spatial expansionist approach?
- The influence of precarity meaning many practitioners from recent generations understand sustainability differently and don't necessarily want to set up long term space, etc. and so have come to rely on meanwhile spaces, despite the potentially fraught conditions that often come along with them.

Transform and Escape the Dogs (British Textile Biennial), Church Street, Blackburn, 03 October

- Part of the British Textile Biennial, exhibition by Jamie Holman including all newly commissioned work.
- Informed by the history of East Lancashire, its role in global textile production, the social impact the boom and bust of the industry had on residents, and how that has translated through to contemporary society.
- Tracing the artistic tendencies and practices of many mill workers in a genealogy from poets and painters during the boom years, whereas once the mills were abandoned those same spaces being reclaimed by countercultural figures and used as sites for acid house raves and mass gatherings in the 1980s alongside the rise of football 'casual' culture.
- Using the archetype of the Pendle witches and their supposed transformative rituals of turning into hares to escape the dogs of the local townsfolk that would have them tried and put to death.
- The analogy of collective gathering and transformation by groups at the peripheries of society (and how visual artists have been part of those processes), indicative of ways to reclaim social spaces and create new ones in the ruins of the old for current generations to utilise. Gathering and collectively mobilising providing strength and solidarity for action.
- What would happen when that gathering and mobilisation was by groups in the creative dark matter that were already recognised as part of 'mainstream' society?

Nam June Paik, Tate Modern, London, 08 November

- Retrospective at Tate Modern.
- Working across a variety of genres Paik was one of the first artists recognised as having embraced newly emerging technology as part of his practice. Particularly in the 1960s where he would experiment with AV equipment in his sculptures.

- As part of this he wanted to use that same technology to be able to stage long distance collaborations between practitioners across the world, beginning to experiment with satellite broadcasts to do so.
- Paik was also a member of Fluxus (arguably an artist-run organisation) before being temporarily ejected in 1964 for taking part in an experimental musical performance by a rival artist to George Maciunas (founder of Fluxus). Reinforcing the competition of many early self-organised groups and practitioners, showing a relatively closed social dynamic, leaving them open for recuperation by larger institutions?

2020

serf studio visit, serf, Leeds, 13 February
- Top floor premises on Wharf Street, Leeds. Formerly home to other artist-led organisations MEXICO and Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun, with serf being founded after Set The Controls closed down.
- Studios with a small project space, previously the space had been one large gallery (MEXICO), and a studio complex with a large gallery space split over the current floor and the one beneath (Set The Controls). Entry is still via an external fire escape, or steep an uneven stairs, although serf are in negotiations with their landlord trying to get an access lift installed to ensure accessibility for all.
- Operated by a voluntary committee made up of current studio holders, serf doesn't have any regular external funding and covers all costs from studio rent with the committee having to agree on any changes to the premises/operating structures. Programme costs also come from studio rents and if required/available small pots of external public funding. Generally no regular pubic funding to ensure they have autonomy and control over how they programme events and the content of them.
- A community rather and a gallery/studios? The space is open plan with studio holders regularly spreading out into other communal spaces to produce work, and being able to socialise with one another.
- A continual social, skill and knowledge exchange between studio holders and any external visitors?
- Sociality rather than seclusion?

Organisational visit, Convenience Gallery, Birkenhead, 20 February
- Birkenhead-based gallery.
- Originally house within Birkenhead market, now located in Bloom Building (coffee shop, music/performance venue, work spaces), the gallery is rooted in social engagement and trying to embed art within everyday life of the people of Birkenhead and beyond.
- Founded by artists Ryan Gauge and Andy Shaw, they have effectively put their own practices on hold to develop the gallery and provide opportunities for other practitioners, acting as facilitators.
- Refer to themselves as a 'community, contemporary art space and gallery'.

- Hoping to expand to deliver more defined public outreach as part of their programme instead of the relatively informal sessions they have delivered up until now. That is all dependent on resources though as there are currently only 2 people working behind the scenes to facilitate everything, with both having to work to sustain themselves and the organisation outside of the practical planning and installation commitments that go alongside it.

TRS-Gen, The Royal Standard, Liverpool, 06 March
- Second part of an artist exchange between The Royal Standard (Liverpool) and Generator Projects (Dundee); the first part was in 2019 when Generator hosted TRS studio artists for an exhibition in Dundee.
- This exhibition includes Generator artists Saoirse Anis, Laura McSorely, Jamie Donals, Caitlin McLeod, Elizabeth Day and Charis & I.
- Spending time with the artists and TRS members after the install and during the preview evening there is a warmth and openness between them (with many of the current TRS directors not part of the original exchange as they weren't in post at the time), a mutual respect and willingness to collaborate creating a friendly working dynamic. The relationships fostered during the two-part process are apparent as there are hopes of continued exchanges between the organisations in future.
- The project from TRS aiming to host other artist-led organisations nationally to introduce practitioners form them and from TRS to new cities, organisations, and audiences. Did this iteration with Generator follow on from the a-n Assembly event in Dundee?
- Generator artists happy to speak of the strengths of the artist-led offerings in their city, highlighting Wooosh Gallery in particular as a highlight: using a car park as a gallery space for wall-based paper works that are pasted into place for display.

Studio Tour, Abingdon Studios, Blackpool, 12 March
- Founded in 2014, they are the only studios in the town. Located above the indoor market Abingdon Studios is a gallery/studios housing 10 artists' studios split over 2 floors. All of the studios are currently full and they have a waiting list for new prospective studio holders.
- There are 2 current directors Garth Gratrix (also the original founder), and Tom Ireland (from Supercollider Projects), both of whom are practicing artists/curators and have studio spaces on site.
- Alongside the studios they have a project space on the top floor of the building with a sporadically ongoing public programme dependent on public funding when available.
- Abingdon brings international artists to the town for the ongoing exhibition (and residency) programme to broaden artistic provision for the local audience, whilst acting to dispel preconceptions and myths about the city and its inhabitants to outsiders.
- The organisation is trying to make space for creative practitioners in Blackpool, change preconceptions from locals about the role visual arts can have in a town that is so visually and aesthetically vibrant and

saturated, and help inform policy planning for future provision for practitioners.

- Very few visual arts organisations in Blackpool, outside of Abingdon there is the newly opened Arts B&B, and the Grundy Art Gallery. All within a 5-minute walking distance of one another, allowing a good relations and working dynamic to develop between them (regularly sharing equipment etc. when required, and other methods of in-kind support).

Appendix 2 – Active Research/Practice: *Open Forum* Event Series, Researcher/Practitioner Roundtables and *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led* Symposium

Throughout the research period my own active research/practice in the artist-led sub-field continued. As part of this, and owing to time constraints meaning it was prohibitive to develop any exhibition-based projects of my own, I conceived and organised a number of events to supplement the research itself. The main intention underpinning what would become three separate strands of events – the *Open Forum* series, researcher/practitioner roundtables, and the *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led* symposium – was to gather together groups of interested parties to explore research, practice and ideas to create new understandings and share knowledge. In doing so acting to raise issues key to catalysing, limiting or exploiting artist-led self-organisation in the wider public consciousness, with the hope they would have positive impacts in encouraging and counteracting them.

All of the events were held at the Exhibition Research Lab (ERL) at Liverpool School of Art and Design, Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) in 2019 and 2020. The remainder of this appendix provides selected relevant information and documentation relating to them.

Open Forum Event Series:

After observing the broad interactions between artist-led organisations and larger-scale institutions within Liverpool the event series sought to act as a bridge between the often one-way relationship of larger institutions not meaningfully collaborating with, or giving a platform to, artist-led organisations or individual practitioners, keeping the status quo and social power relations firmly intact. The attempt to redress that balance drove the event series, with LJMU itself having little to no previous public-facing events where artist-led activity was platformed. Instead involvement from artist-led sources was usually kept in-house for working or lecturing directly with students. Through giving control of the content of a number of public-facing events over directly to artist-led organisations I wanted to ensure the ERL began to position the practices and methodologies of curatorial and exhibitionary research and practice they enacted equally within its own programming, reinforcing the variety of practice outside of larger institutions in the city and beyond.

There were three events in total held 11 March, 17 June and 09 December 2019, all 18:00 – 20:00. The organisations selected for the events were OUTPUT gallery, _ROOT-ed Zine_ and The Royal Standard, as they represented a variety of organisational models and operational structures working towards different concerns in their programming and other outputs. From those organisations the speakers were Gallery Manager Gabrielle de la Puente, _ROOT-ed Zine_ Co-Founder Fauziya Johnson, and outgoing Director Sufea Mohamad Noor joined by current Directors Benjamin Lunt and Benjamin Nuttall. In providing a cross-section of activity happening in the city – specifically representing artists from or based in Merseyside in an ongoing exhibition and event programme, promoting artists of colour and their concerns in research, practice and social life from the wider North West region in an accessible format, and providing studio provision and professional development for practitioners alongside a public exhibition and event programme – I hoped to highlight the strength, breadth and diversity of the artist-led community in the city.

Initially conceived as a quarterly series, due to logistical issues (as outlined in the symposium section of this appendix below) only three events were staged, with the third event being shifted until later in the year meaning the final events were not in a quarterly order. For each event the setup was the same, stripped back to the bare essentials of a laptop, projector, PA system and chair alongside refreshments so the speaker and audience could properly connect in an informal environment, and meaningful dialogue could take place. Each speaker was paid £100, with the two-hour duration split equally between their presentations and an open audience discussion. In reaching out to the organisations to invite their participation it was also hoped to support them without their representatives spending time applying for a paid opportunity in competition with their peers in the city, and instead encourage a new relationship to form between their organisation and the ERL.

Listings for each event can be found on the ERL website:

https://www.exhibition-research-lab.co.uk/events/open-forum-1-output-gallery/

https://www.exhibition-research-lab.co.uk/events/open-forum-2-root-ed-zine/

https://www.exhibition-research-lab.co.uk/events/open-forum-3-the-royal-standard/

Brief notes were taken at each event, and are included alongside other selected information from them below.

Open Forum 1 Press Release:

Open Forum 1 – OUTPUT gallery

11 March
6 – 8 pm
Exhibition Research Lab

Open Forum is a series of quarterly public events hosted at the Exhibition Research Lab (ERL) consisting of a presentation from an invited artist-led organisation, group or collective followed by an open forum discussion with attendees. The first session is organised alongside OUTPUT gallery, where Gallery Manager Gabrielle de la Puente will present an account of the trials of creating and sustaining an organisation within the city.

Following the general format of a public open forum anyone will have the opportunity to participate in the discussion and have their voice heard, with no topics surrounding artist-led practice and its intersection with other socio-cultural practices and institutions off limits. Providing a neutral space for open discourse, attendees are encouraged to raise issues for public scrutiny in order to share knowledge, critique and develop solutions. Through a process of open and transparent dialogue pertinent issues will be exposed, explored, understood and re-thought.

OUTPUT gallery works exclusively with creatives from or based in Merseyside. It aims to be the go-to for art by and for our local art scene. The gallery delivers a busy programme of exhibitions and events to support the mobility, development, and visibility of artists in the area. Since its launch in April 2018, OUTPUT has facilitated exhibitions, performances, group crits, art socials, talks, and a weekly Culture Club from our prime location in Liverpool City Centre.

The Exhibition Research Lab is an academic research centre and a public venue established in 2012 as part of Liverpool School of Art and Design, Liverpool John Moores University. Dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of exhibitions and curatorial knowledge, it presents a year round programme of exhibitions, events, residencies, fellowships, publications, and education at postgraduate and doctoral levels.

Open Forum is a programme of events organised by James Schofield, PhD researcher based at the Exhibition Research Lab.

Exhibition Research Lab, Liverpool School of Art and Design, Liverpool John Moores University, Duckinfield Street, L3 5RD.

Open Forum 1 Event Poster:

OPEN FORUM 1

OUTPUT

gallery

11.03.19
6-8pm

Exhibition Research Lab,
Liverpool School of Art
and Design,
L3 5RD.
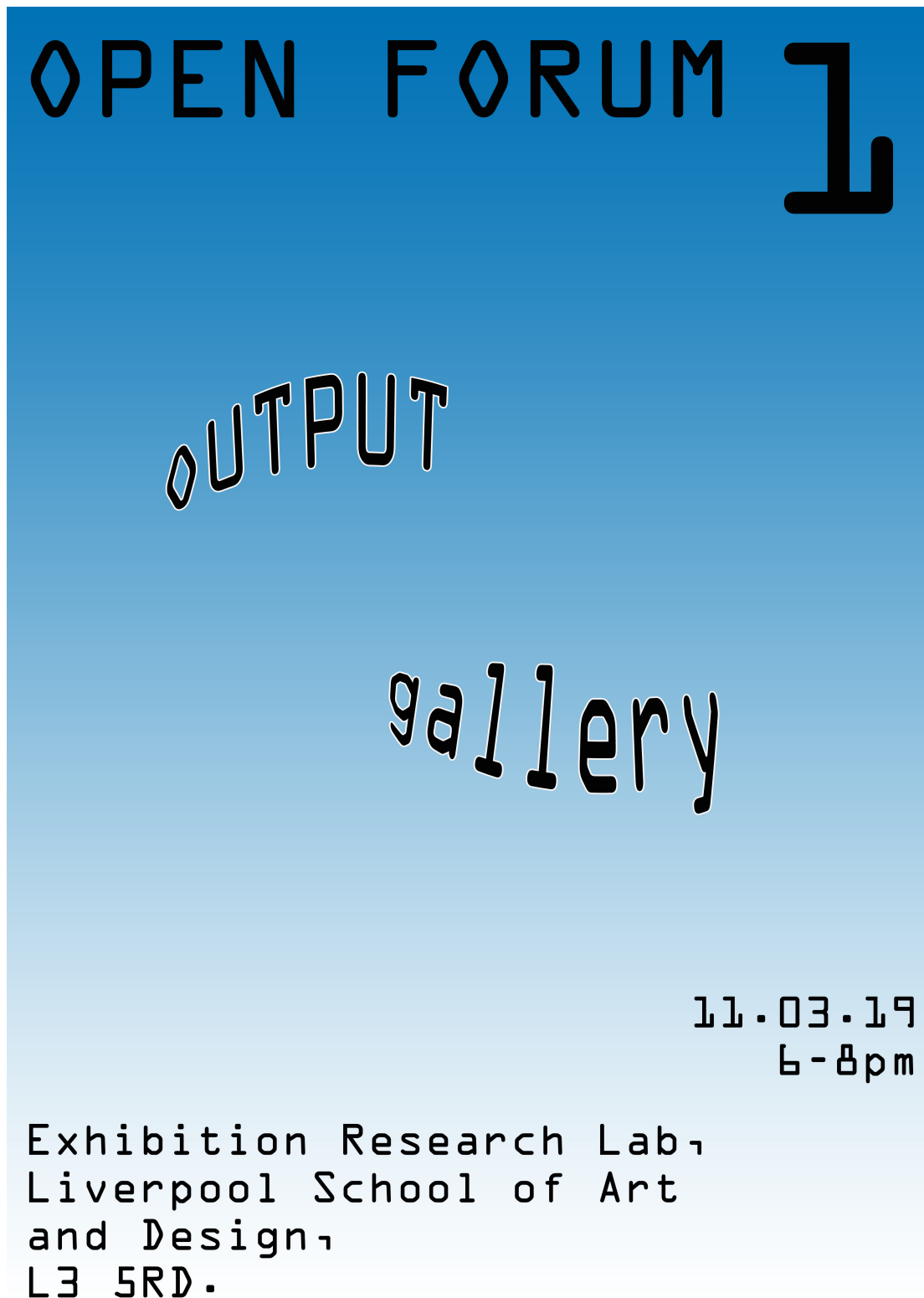
Open Forum 1 Event Images:
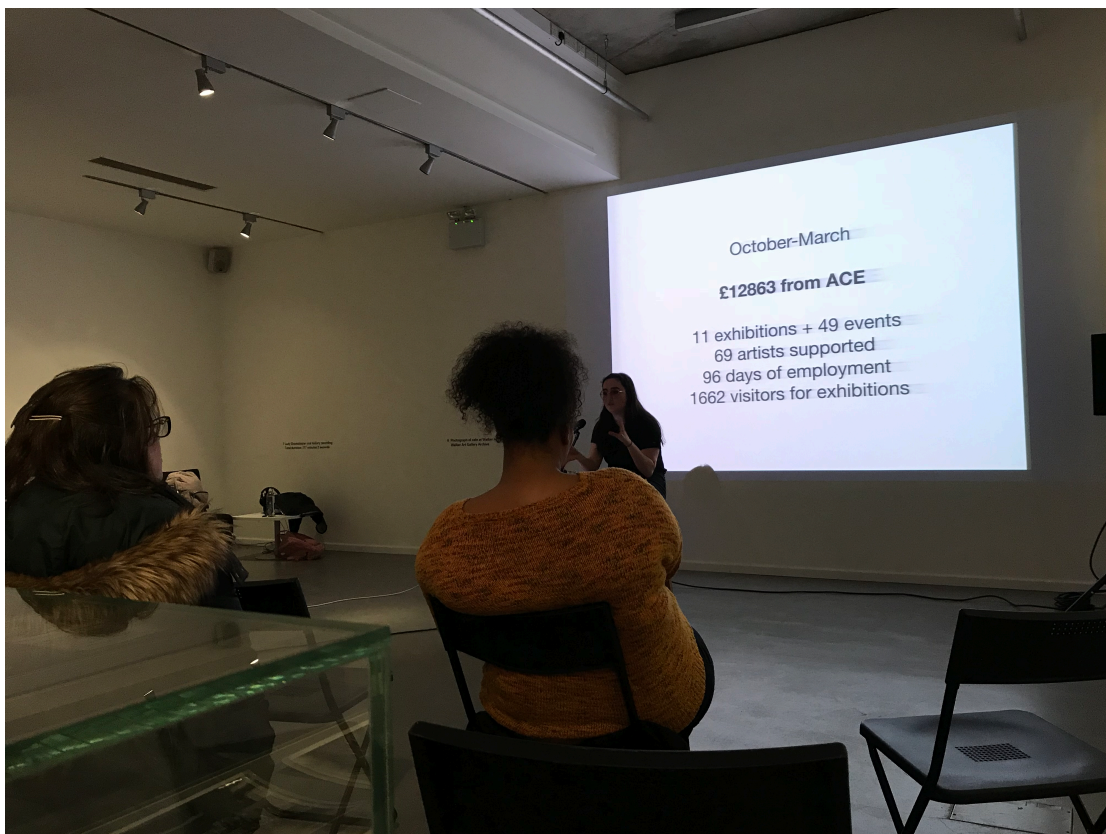
Open Forum 1 Notes:

- Wanted to invest the time/energy into Liverpool rather than London and make something meaningful.
- OUTOUPT filling the void around the Kazimier gardens area that is now full of student accommodation (Why would they use the space for art and not business? -> Invisible Wind Factory run the space).
- Originally wanted to call it 'Outlet' i.e. a Cheshire Oaks for art that would accept anything/anyone and allow people from institutions the freedom they wouldn't have at their day jobs.
- From or based in Merseyside allows practitioners to come back for certain periods of time.
- £12,863 from ACE for the past year (11 shows, 49 events) -> Scared that everything has gone so well given the little resources that are available and that inevitably will be available going forward -> Why cant institutions in the city use some of their space to create something like OUTPUT as they definitely have the space/money for it?
- Everyone is good at criticism but in Liverpool it's always in private and nothing happens from it -> Good at talking the talk but that's it.

'What does Liverpool Need?'
- Institutions need to programme more regularly.
- Need a Liverpool art map and a first Thursdays/Fridays.
- A market for art in the city (not just ceramics) or a shop?
- The people that run spaces and organisations to be more representative of the makeup of the city.
- Someone to offer a breakfast club similar to g39; a free breakfast to help build relations and interaction with locals -> Also MIMA Thursday lunches where the gallery closes and free lunch is offered to anyone that wants it with gallery staff/curators taking part.
- Investing in spaces outside of the city centre.
- Input events everywhere -> Input at Tate?
- Better criticism (Corridor8, The Double Negative, etc. lean more towards journalism?) -> Also need better professional development from the universities.

Open Forum 2 Press Release:

Open Forum 2 – ROOT-ed Zine

17 June
6 – 8 pm
Exhibition Research Lab

Open Forum is a series of quarterly public events hosted at the Exhibition Research Lab (ERL) consisting of a presentation from an invited artist-led organisation, group or collective followed by an open forum discussion with attendees. The second session is organised alongside ROOT-ed Zine, where Co-Founder Fauziya Johnson will present an account of the trials of creating and sustaining an organisation within the city and beyond.

Following the general format of a public open forum anyone will have the opportunity to participate in the discussion and have their voice heard, with no topics surrounding artist-led practice and its intersection with other socio-cultural practices and institutions off limits. Providing a neutral space for open discourse, attendees are encouraged to raise issues for public scrutiny in order to share knowledge, critique and develop solutions. Through a process of open and transparent dialogue pertinent issues will be exposed, explored, understood and re-thought.

ROOT-ed (Revolution of Our Time) is a self-published zine and social platform that aims to promote, support and inspire creative people of colour within the North West of England. The zine was founded by artists Amber Akaunu and Fauziya Johnson during their final year at university in which they both studied Fine Art. The two saw a lack of representation in university, media, galleries and museums and felt the need to create this platform to represent the underrepresented by allowing creatives to showcase their talents and skills and voice their thoughts and ideas.

The Exhibition Research Lab is an academic research centre and a public venue established in 2012 as part of Liverpool School of Art and Design, Liverpool John Moores University. Dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of exhibitions and curatorial knowledge, it presents a year round programme of exhibitions, events, residencies, fellowships, publications, and education at postgraduate and doctoral levels.

Open Forum is a programme of events organised by James Schofield, PhD researcher based at the Exhibition Research Lab.

Exhibition Research Lab, Liverpool School of Art and Design, Liverpool John Moores University, Duckinfield Street, L3 5RD.

Open Forum 2 Event Poster:

Open Forum 2 Event Images:

Open Forum 2 Notes:

- Trying to navigate the press and arts in Liverpool.
- The North West seemingly more neglected than the South in terms of opportunities and funding, so felt it was more worthwhile to operate here.
- £480 raised at a public fundraiser for the first issue.
- Had to refine the focus of the zine to people of colour after the first call out as minorities was too broad a term to be useful.
- Use Word to create the zine as haven't got the resources to afford In Design.
- What if people want to be successful in art but don't want to go to university? How can you make them feel welcome and become involved with institutional programmes?
- Institutions need to go into the local community and talk to people to show they are welcome, and you as the institution can make connections with different communities.
- Custodians/guardians/parents as artists often perceived in a certain way and not taken seriously, along with the structures and practices being prohibitive to people with families/other responsibilities/etc.
- Going forwards advertising hopefully playing a larger role in funding for zine issues.
- Intended cycle will be something like: idea -> submissions -> marketing -> selling -> events -> review.
- Future plans: get ACE funding, be more active in other areas of the North West, be more active online, partner with other organisations to broaden networks.
- Physical advertising also needed to avoid classist exclusions i.e. can't afford the internet, etc.
- Artwashing: L8 household income lower than the average national household income, although the area is seen as multicultural, artistic, and a positive for the city.

Open Forum 3 Press Release:

Open Forum 3 – The Royal Standard

9 December
6 – 8 pm
Exhibition Research Lab

Open Forum is a series of public events hosted at the Exhibition Research Lab (ERL) consisting of a presentation from an invited artist-led organisation, group or collective followed by an open forum discussion with attendees. The third session is organised alongside The Royal Standard, where current Director Sufea Mohamad Noor will present an account of the trials of creating and sustaining an organisation within the city and beyond.

Following the general format of a public open forum anyone will have the opportunity to participate in the discussion and have their voice heard, with no topics surrounding artist-led practice and its intersection with other socio-cultural practices and institutions off limits. Providing a neutral space for open discourse, attendees are encouraged to raise issues for public scrutiny in order to share knowledge, critique and develop solutions. Through a process of open and transparent dialogue pertinent issues will be exposed, explored, understood and re-thought.

The Royal Standard (TRS) is an artist-led gallery, studio complex and registered charity based in Northern Lights, Cains Brewery Village, Liverpool L8. The organisation is dedicated to supporting the practice of both emerging and established artists in the city through providing affordable studio spaces and development opportunities. In addition to supporting 45 artists, TRS also run a year-round programme of free exhibitions and events ranging from monthly crits to studio exchanges.

The Exhibition Research Lab is an academic research centre and a public venue established in 2012 as part of Liverpool School of Art and Design, Liverpool John Moores University. Dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of exhibitions and curatorial knowledge, it presents a year round programme of exhibitions, events, residencies, fellowships, publications, and education at postgraduate and doctoral levels.

Open Forum is a programme of events organised by James Schofield, PhD researcher based at the Exhibition Research Lab.

Exhibition Research Lab, Liverpool School of Art and Design, Liverpool John Moores University, Duckinfield Street, L3 5RD.

Open Forum 3 Event Poster:

OPEN FORUM 3

The Royal Standard

09.12.19
6-8pm

Exhibition Research Lab,
Liverpool School of Art
and Design,
L3 5RD.

Open Forum 3 Event Images:

Open Forum 3 Notes:

- Founded by 4 artists in 2006 as a response to the lack of organisations positioned between larger institutions and grassroots initiatives.
- Originally housed in a former Toxteth pub of the same name, TRS moved to a larger industrial space on Vauxhall Road in 2008, where they stayed for 8 years.
- They then moved in 2016 to their new (and current) site in Northern Lights in the Baltic Triangle.
- The new space has secure 24-hour access, security, is all on the ground floor so fully accessible, and (arguably crucially) is much warmer than the Vauxhall Road site. This allows them to safeguard staff, studio holders and visitors much more than previously possible. The space is split between single occupancy and mixed studios, a project space, communal area, and workshops that members are able to access. However it is sharing the larger space with a number of other creative businesses and a café, so often scheduling events and noise pollution coming into studios can be a problem.
- Directors on voluntary terms of up to 2 years working closely with trustees on 5-year terms, with them all having different skills and networks to draw on.
- Their public programme is split into exhibitions, events, workshops, residencies and exchanges with other artist-led organisations.
- Continuing to develop an ongoing residency programme, with an upcoming ongoing studio artist residency and exhibition exchange with Generator Projects (Dundee).
- Stage collaborative crits with other regional organisations every month, and have also started the *Shuffle* series where other organisations are invited to Northern Lights for a one-night series of exhibitions.
- Regular fundraising events (such as the Christmas art auction) crucial to bringing in much needed extra income, whilst also connecting TRS to the wider arts community in the city.
- Focus has always been provision for the artists that are studio members and those they work with through their exhibition and event programmes. How do or should organisations provide for the artists they support or work with during times of austerity? What are their needs on a personal, social and professional level?
- Future is slightly uncertain for the organisation due to increasing rents in the space they currently occupy, the Directors and trustees need to weigh up long-term planning and position within the city to ensure they get the best space and resources they can for their studio members.

Following regularly participating in the Leeds-based Artist-Led Research Group (ARG) and contributing at the *Ecologies and Economies of the Artist-Led: Space, Place, Futures Symposium* that the group organised, and from knowledge from my wider practice, it became apparent there were a number of current researchers and practitioners conducting or having recently completed research into various aspects of artistic self-organisation in the UK. Instead of coalescing into a reading group (as the ARG had already successfully started), my idea was to host a number of researchers/practitioners at the ERL to present their own research, share ideas and see if any collaborative projects could result from that. The *Open Forum* series helped to guide discussion topics, also providing examples and in some instances case study visits, for the group.

The invited attendees were drawn from previous participants of the ARG and subsequent symposium, current and/or recent researchers whose literature/practice I had found through the course of my own research, initial invitees extending the invitation to others they knew, and through a university-wide staff and student invite from LJMU. The intention was for a sharing of information with the hope for the sessions to act as catalysts for a collaborative network of knowledge production.

Invited attendees for both roundtables:

Holly Argent,
Dan Howard Birt,
Jenny Cavanagh,
Emma Coffield,
Martin Cox,
Charlotte Cullen,
Gordon Dalton,
Rebecca de Mynn,
Benedetta D'Ettorre,
Niomi Fairweather,
Dan Goodman,
Jacqui Hallam,
Kerry Harker,
Robert Hollands,
Deborah Jackson,
Nikki Kane,
Susan Jones,
Lucy Lopez,
Katy Morrison,
Nicola Naismith,
Jonathan Orlek,
Rebecca Prescott,
Stephen Pritchard,
Daniel Pryde-Jarman,

Filippo Romanello,
Sophie Skellern,
Emilia Telesse,
Sevie Tsampalla,
John Wright,
Alex Zawadzki.

Attendees (online/offline) for both roundtables:

Dan Howard Birt
Jenny Cavanagh
Emma Coffield
Martin Cox
Jacqui Hallam
Katy Morrison
Jonathan Orlek
Filippo Romanello
Emilia Telesse
Sevie Tsampalla
John Wright

Researcher Roundtable 1
22 February 2019, 10:30 – 17:00.

Roundtable 1 Schedule
10:00 - Refreshments
10:15 - Welcome and introduction to the ERL
10:30 - Brief introductions to research from all attendees
11:00 - Roundtable discussion (exact topics TBD following introductions)
12:30 - Lunch break and informal discussions between participants
13:00 - Site visits (OUTPUT gallery, Crown Building Studios, The Royal Standard)
16:00 - Discussion of potential future outcomes/projects
17:00 - End

Researcher Roundtable 2
22 May 2019, 10:30 – 17:00.

Roundtable 2 schedule
10:30 - Meet at ERL and refreshments
11:00 - Introductions (for anyone that wasn't at the previous meet up)
11:15 - Updates from previous meet up
11:30 - General discussion/catch up
12:00 - Lunch
12:30 - Publication planning
14:00 - Conference planning
15:30 - Break
15:45 - Anything else to discuss
17:00 - End

A shared Google Doc with notes from both meetings was created to act as a legacy document editable by any participant, and to inform future research and planning for the proposed conference and a potential future publication. The contents of the notes were split into related subject headings and formatted here for clarity:

<u>Definition/Makeup/Function</u>

- Have to have one to be able to de-construct it critically; currently don't have a universal definition (would be need for a potential conference/could be developed at one?) -> 'You need the canon before you can deconstruct it.'
- Defining the scale of the artist-led field -> The strength of the 'field' is its difference?
- Nuances in the current understanding of the artist-led meaning there is no coherent body of literature from which to develop knowledge (new publication/conference could address this).

- Artist-led as self-learning experiments that develop skills and working methodologies?
- Organising (ongoing) rather than organised (realised) -> Self-organising?
- Creating alternatives to current power structures (financial, social, political).
- 'Self-organising experiments of self-learning to develop skills and working methodologies to create alternatives to existing social, political and financial power structures.'

- Constant cycle of burnout associated with the artist-led?
- Does the artist-led have to be political? Can it exist inside and outside of the political?
- As per Bourdieu, what are the power fields of the artist-led?
- Radical acts perpetrated by the artist-led now fetishised as the norm in curatorial methodologies used by many institutions -> Parodied by COLLAR in their pursuit of 'professionalism' in the artist-led, following the writing of Paul O'Neill (http://collar-mcr.com/about-1).
- What's the balance for artist-led in an organisation's development? -> When do you turn from an organisation to an institution? Can you de-institute?
- The arts sector being increasingly risk-averse which has contributed to the rise of the artist-led and artists doing things for themselves.
- The potential of artist-led antagonism to go either way i.e. continuing the status quo or creating something new...how do you navigate those dialectics?
- Whose standards are we using to define the artist and as such the artist-led? -> Anyone can be an artist meaning the hope of a holistic artist-led definition is impossible?
- Need to step sideways and re-establish what an artists' role can be? i.e. artist-curator-administrator? -> Positionality in relation to power

(as per Bordieu), alternative spaces and organisations of authorship permitted?

Public Conversations

- The need to continue conversations happening at an academic/research-based level in public with practitioners, organisations and policy makers.
- Conference could aim to do just that? An 'Artist-' conference bringing together practitioners to create/disseminate knowledge to counteract this.
- *Open Forum* series of events at the ERL also aiming to start doing just that (March, June, September, December 2019).
- 'Movement for Cultural Democracy' organised by Stephen Pritchard.
- The need for a larger body or organisation to actually help lobby for change (a-n, Artists' Union England, etc. don't do this effectively enough?) -> In museum studies all kinds of museums agree they are all museums and can come together to bring about wider sectoral change -> How do you define the wider field that the artist-led is part of? - Artist-run centres in Canada going through a similar problem (Could do through conference?).

Archive

- Newcastle University looking at a funding bid for an artist-led archive to help develop a history of the field, including 3D scanning spaces as part of it.
- Similar archive in Canada; it is updated yearly.
- The Artist-Run Archive (Ireland).
- Archives of the Artist-Led (https://archivesoftheartistled.org/).
- *Doggerland*'s artist-led map (http://www.doggerland.info/artistled/) and artist-led projects archive (http://www.doggerland.info/artistled/index.html#artist-led-projects).
- The Glasgow Miracle Archive project, aiming to pick apart the narrative of arts in the city rather than showing a step-by-step history (http://www.glasgowmiraclearchives.org/).
- Any potential archive would need to be a central resource for artist-led history/activity that is regularly updated -> Is that too big to achieve?
- Emilia previously created an artist-led archive as part of her role with a-n, after she left her position it wasn't maintained but they still hold 8+ years worth of information that was collected as part of it -> Emilia helped to organise the Networking Artists' Network project as part of a-n that aimed to map artist-led networks and generate evidence of their activity etc. to help arguments for artists' advocacy on a larger scale (https://www.a-n.co.uk/resource/about-nan/).
- Potentially pitch to a-n for a new artist-led archive overseen by academic researchers/staff based on Emilia's existing work/model?

(i.e. hosted by a-n but maintained independently?) -> Including a UK map so people could search by region?
- Potentially an archive of closed artist-led projects/spaces showing which were intended to not last and those which were but didn't as it would provide a more useful tool to show what has/hasn't worked to current practitioners thinking of self-organising in some capacity?
- 'A centre for the study of the artist-led.'

Funding

- Stereotypes that surround artists often impacting award of funding from a variety of sources i.e. what they are and how they are perceived to be able to manage finances, etc.
- Creative Scotland were planning to create a separate fund for artist-led organisations/projects around the same time of Transmission losing funding (Transmission were asked to have input and advise on the new fund, but couldn't because of a lack of existing funding in part from CS meant their staff couldn't take time out of their paid jobs to be able to do so).
- General risk-averse nature of the arts sector, visual artists frequently overlooked in funding applications for other 'safe' bets, usually theatre where ticket revenue provides a quantitative return.

As a follow up during the day the ideas of a conference in the relatively near future and a possible publication further down the line were mooted as a way to join up the disparate thinking and conversations that were being had to make meaningful changes going forward. Although we didn't discuss logistics or structure for either, the idea of a conference backed by the universities many of us are/were based at could be a first for the field in the UK (not to forget the *Ecologies and Economies of the Artist-Led: Space, Place, Futures Symposium* held between the University of Leeds and MAP Charity organised by the ARG, but rather this would be backed by multiple academic institutions with a view to creating/developing knowledge between academics/practitioners/the public).

Conference

As a start

- LJMU happy to host and have agreed to give use of the ERL gallery space and/or the Johnson Foundation Auditorium (lecture theatre) next to the ERL.
- LJMU has just announced an 'Event Organisation Support' fund of up to £1,000 for PGRs to apply for, so will make an application in the coming weeks once we've decided timescales.

Structure

- 2-3 day conference comprising keynote lectures/panel discussions, possibility of having offsite sessions/events at artist-led organisations in the city?
- Lectures in the lecture theatre, panel discussions in the ERL? -> Depending on size related to budget and attendees (i.e. may have to use the lecture theatre if over a certain size of audience as there is limited seating for the ERL).

Conference Following Roundtable 2

- Infrastructural development (physical and conceptual) of organisations and spaces, infrastructural framework -> overall theme of conference/publication with more refined subjects within both being addressed?
- Co-authoring of the publication/conference? How can we work collaboratively and improvise to make them happen?
- Katy developing an offsite space for the conference to act as a site of exchange for curatorial knowledge/practice? Sevie keen on the offsite side of things too.
- How do you activate research and make it engaging for the audience? How do you enter something in the middle without destroying the process? i.e. if you aren't there from the start.
- Structure of the conference? -> Keynotes/contributions in the lecture theatre/practical and discursive sessions/breaks in the ERL/offsite project to happen at the end of each day so people can travel to it and not have to come back to LJMU. ERL as a break room for informal discussion?
- Timescales? October for conference to give enough time for advertising?
- Publication after the conference so the conference can be used to test and get feedback for publication content, get some of the information into the wider world and then launch the publication as a tangible manifestation of it?
- [Turning Q&A sessions at the conference into a podcast?]
- Processual active space (for future action) in the artist-led through the conference and publication?
- Is there a space/spatial setup that would be more useful to help the audience take part? i.e. at the conference don't have the chairs in a traditional lecture theatre setup, use language to show the audience are welcome to contribute if they want to, have a 3-minute period of no questions after each presentation to let people develop questions, then do a Q&A. -> Think about the scenography of it.
- Conditions of performativity in the conference. What structures and conditions can we build to allow people to engage with it? -> Creating our own conditions of freedom. -> How do we welcome and host people in a safe environment? We can't expect the audience to create them; we have to create it for them.

- Reflecting the collaborative nature of the artist-led in a conference setting -> How do you make a collection of individuals who won't know one another feel comfortable to be open and honest?
- Sign up sessions for a period during the day of the conference where people have an open mic to raise points in relation to what they've seen/heard experienced during the day. Can also be about how their practice works in relating to the themes brought up -> Way to help people to think and approach subjects differently (i.e. everyone in the room can benefit from it, not just the presenter getting direct feedback).
- Conference aiming to raise further questions on the artist-led -> The publication then seeking to answer them in some capacity?
- Flat fees for all contributors/Need a transparent pay structure.
- Funding > Call out > Advertising > Decisions on programme/content (vague process of what needs to be done).
- Backing up the hospitality theme with actions during the conference i.e. community interest catering groups instead of university catering, etc.?
- Funding: LJMU conference PGR fund (£1,000), ERL budget? -> Need to find other streams from other people in the group...
- Decide on length of conference...
- Free conference i.e. no tickets costs; may have to be ticketed to gauge numbers but can have free EventBrite sign up, etc.
- Mock up a text for a call for contributions once idea of budget is sorted...

Publication

Options

- Before the conference leading into it (raising debates/issues that will be tested during the conference and beyond).
- Launched during/at the end of the conference (as a legacy document/extending the debates begun in the conference and also wider issues relating to our research).
- After the conference (a few weeks/months providing a follow up to the debates raised and linking to our research).
- Further down the line (so could be incorporated into workloads, etc.)?

Digital vs. Physical

- Cost (currently have no funding/is self-funded by the group).
- Distribution (if physical who would be the best publisher?).
- Price (free to ensure it is accessible to anyone?).
- Publisher or independently published? (What publisher would line up with the ethos of the publication we are trying to make?).

- ISBN regardless? (Can buy one between the group £90 if self-publishing and ensure it can be held in library records, etc. as a 'real' publication?).
- Digital for ease of creation/distribution that could then be printed out by readers if required? Could be hosted by artist-led organisations on their websites as a free download, and even in future turned into an ongoing publication that could be updated with new texts etc. as time goes on?

Content

- Texts/responses by the group plus invited writers/artists' contributions?
- Papers by speakers at the conference? (Any fee for speaking could include the publication of the paper in the publication?).
- Text and images or just texts? (Creative commons for image licensing).

Publication Following Roundtable 2

- Could approach Open Humanities Press as a potential publisher if it would fit with their wider publishing remit? -> They have a relationship with ERL for the Data Browser series (all publications are free to read online and can also order paid physical versions of them, the organisation wants to democratise and make knowledge available instead of hidden behind paywalls like most academic resources are). See: http://www.openhumanitiespress.org/books/series/data-browser/

General Notes/Topics From Roundtable 2

- How would you go from being a researcher to an artist? Rather than an artist to a researcher.
- How do we maintain artist-led spaces? At what point is it ok to admit we have no idea how to do it?
- Artist-led as 'creating the condition(s) for your own freedom' (Filippo).
- Parasitic nature of artist-led projects before they find a lasting space.
- Have to balance between strategy and integrity…you have to find the gap for both and mold yourself to fit it -> 'fake it 'til you make it'
- How do you exist in an age of entrepreneurialism at the artist-led level? -> Have to pick your poison to a certain extent to be able to function?
- You're damned if you do and damned if you don't in terms of making money from artist-led practices -> How do you question this shift?
- Professionalism and validation of the artist-led…why is it not seen and accepted as 'real' experience by much of the art system?
- Filippo as a 'producer' not a researcher for the conference and publication, to approach it as a way to perform his research and

develop a space. -> Practical points of creating and running a space; plan of action for one.

- ESA Guild organisations/researcher involvement in conference and publication?
- 'Hospitality' in relation to the 'Cultures of the Curatorial' book series. 'Hosting Relations in Exhibitions'. i.e. how can we make both 'hospitable' to be inclusive and interacted with?
- Invitation for contributions for both the conference and publication; see what people submit and then make space for the responses within the programme/publication? Invites different forms of contributions.

<u>*What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led* Symposium:</u>

As part of the research project I organised and delivered a symposium at the ERL titled *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led*. The symposium was held on 31 January 2020 featuring 20 contributors, and delivered to an audience of circa 140 attendees.

The symposium was developed directly from subject matter and issues arising from my own research and from the *Open Forum* series and the two researcher/practitioner roundtable meetings held at the ERL. Originally the intention had been to organise the symposium collaboratively alongside a number of those that attended those meetings and other invited collaborators. However due to scheduling issues with the potential collaborators and the timeframes involved to fit the event within the research project I had to lead on it alone. A number of the potential collaborators contributed to the event itself and were instrumental in helping share the information presented at it through online/offline means. Although the scope of the event had to be altered from the plans made at the researcher/practitioner roundtables due to myself being the only organiser, it was well received and to date is the largest event the ERL has held. The symposium also built on two previous external events I had contributed to and/or attended, the ARG *Ecologies and Economies of the Artist-Led: Space, Place, Futures Symposium* and the *Artist-Run Multiverse Summit* organised by Eastside Projects (Birmingham), and also the *FOOTFALL Symposium* organised by 126 Artist-Run Gallery (Galway) that I had viewed the documentation from. The intention was to prioritise key issues and subject matter not covered in detail at the previous events so that when the documentation from each event was engaged with it would provide more of a holistic overview of contemporary artistic self-organisation. To further this aim, as part of the welcome pack for the event the contributors also produced a reading list of online/offline resources that informed their contributions or that they used regularly in their own practices.

The budget for the event totaled £3,410 and was drawn from a combination of sources: £1,000 from the LJMU Postgraduate Researcher Event Support Fund, £1,200 from an Arts Council England small project grant, and the remaining £1,210 from the ERL programme budget and my own researcher consumables budget from LJMU. All Keynote Speakers were offered the same rate of £150 per person plus travel and accommodation for a 1-hour timeslot to be filled how they saw fit, with Contributing Speakers selected from an open call offered the same £50 rate per person for 10-minute contributions. A limited number of ten £50 attendance bursaries were also made available for attendees to apply for to help cover costs for their attendance.

In order to ensure the content form the symposium could be accessed by anyone not able to attend in-person part of the budget was used to commission a feature article from Corridor8. Alongside this artist-led platform/publication *Sluice* produced a review of the event. The symposium was also recorded in full, with participants able to choose if they wanted their contribution documenting or not.

Edited recordings of the event can be found on the ERL YouTube channel at the links below. The audio from the recordings was also broadcast on *Bus Radio*, a digital radio channel from Bus Projects (Australia); an organisation dedicated to supporting the critical, conceptual and interdisciplinary practices of Australian artists.

Information about *Bus Radio* can be found here:

https://busprojects.org.au/program/bus-radio

Recordings of the event can be found here:

Part 1 – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTtLzA2cQtI&t=2s

Part 2 – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbvwbTJBw5k

Further information on the event can be found on the ERL website:

https://www.exhibition-research-lab.co.uk/events/what-we-dont-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-the-artist-led/

Symposium Call for Responses:

What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led

Symposium held at the Exhibition Research Lab, Liverpool John Moores University, **Friday 31 January 2020.**

Self-organisation by artists and creative practitioners in the UK has in recent years come to be understood as being 'artist-led' – initiated and directed by them – often in non-commercial contexts that act as an alternative to the mainstream offerings and practices of the institutionalised art system. Through this self-organisation practitioners respond to a perceived lack of provision in the arts communities in which they or their networks of peers are based, creating new opportunities and organisational structures for expression, experimentation and change that can be traced historically to other self-organised movements from the post-war period onwards.

Those practices have always been developed in some form of opposition to those in power and display an innate sense of social and institutional critique. But over the past decade at a time when the socio-economic stability of the country has been in flux and felt the full force of ideological austerity, practitioners and their collectives, groups and organisations have found themselves routinely co-opted, exploited and appropriated by external actors and institutions, often nonchalantly justified by the perpetrators. These conditions are largely accepted as simply part of the contemporary nature of the art system itself, and in part allowed to continue by practitioners for legitimate fear of speaking out publicly and limiting their future prospects of opportunities, support or career development; constrained into maintaining the status quo by their economic instability.

This symposium seeks to provide a neutral space to open discussion up beyond the usual perimeters on those very subjects, acting as a safe and welcoming environment in which to do so. It will function as both a site of knowledge exchange, discourse and development, and a provocation to freely and publicly challenge those conditions detrimental to the physical, mental and creative wellbeing of those involved. As the culmination of the first year of the *Open Forum* discussion programme held at the Exhibition Research Lab, and building on previous events surrounding artist-led and self-organised practices in the visual arts, it will host critical dialogue and begin to formulate new approaches.

The event will critique the culture of accepting social hierarchies and conditions imposed on practitioners within the artist-led by external actors, organisations and institutions in order to begin collaboratively developing possibilities and proposals for meaningful change to occur throughout the art system. It will allow participants and attendees to share their thoughts, opinions and proposals for future strategies that otherwise go unspoken or ignored.

<u>Call for Responses</u>
The organisers invite proposals from any interested artists, curators, practitioners, producers, researchers, students or art workers for **10-minute** responses in any format and medium to any of the following general themes surrounding artist-led practices:

- 'Artist-' demarcations
- Self-organisation
- Precarity
- Co-optation
- Exploitation
- Value production
- Inclusion and openness
- Diversity
- Accountability
- Sustainability
- Remuneration
- Professionalism
- Support
- Nepotism
- Institutionalisation
- Critique

Proposals relating to other themes are also welcomed; the above is only to help give an overview about general points for discussion during the symposium.

Proposals for responses should include:

- Applicant's name and contact information (including links to relevant websites).
- Title of proposal and medium(s) for the response to be delivered in.
- Proposal outline (up to 300 words) and any relevant sound, film or image files (up to 3, up to a maximum of 20mb in total).
- Any AV equipment required.

Proposals should be sent to info@exhibition-research-lab.co.uk. Please include 'Conference Proposal' as the title of your email; if you have any questions about your proposal before you submit please contact us on this email address. There will be a fee of £50 paid per response for all those selected for the symposium.

The deadline for submissions is **<u>Monday 16 December 2019</u>**. All submissions in any medium for delivery will be considered for inclusion, with the outcome of your submission communicated to you by Friday 20 December.

Please note, the Exhibition Research Lab is fully accessible and the Liverpool School of Art and Design has full facilities for people with a disability on site. A

PA system will be used throughout the day, but if you have any further access requirements please do contact us on the email address above and we will do our best to accommodate your needs.

Press Release:

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Free tickets can be booked for the symposium here:

https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/what-we-dont-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-the-artist-led-symposium-tickets-84868163963

ERL Information Pack for Attendees:

<u>Information Pack</u>

Exhibition Research Lab (ERL) is a public venue and a research centre dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of exhibitions and curatorial knowledge, founded in 2012 as part of Liverpool School of Art and Design.

ERL proposes curatorial practice as a form of critical inquiry and knowledge production. It extends the traditional remit of an art gallery as a site for display or pedagogical resource, to an expanded concept of a 'lab' where experimental thinking and making takes place, and where curatorial knowledge is enacted, produced and made public.

<u>How to Find Us</u>

The address for the ERL is:

Exhibition Research Lab,
John Lennon Art and Design Building,
Duckinfield Street,
Liverpool,
L3 5RD.

The ERL is located on the ground floor of the Liverpool School of Art and Design (LSAD). It is in the middle of two hills – Brownlow Hill and Mount Pleasant – and is next door to Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral. If arriving by train the nearest main station is Liverpool Lime Street (roughly a 10-minute walk or 5-minute taxi journey). The nearest bus stops to the ERL are Trowbridge Street (70m away) and Mount Peasant (160m away). Taxis are able to drop off at either side of LSAD on Brownlow Hill or Great Orford Street, and there are also disabled parking spaces outside LSAD on Great Orford Street (roughly 115m away from the ERL) if required. Although we would recommend taking public transport wherever possible, if arriving by car there are 2 car parks nearby:

Mount Pleasant Car Park,
38 Mount Pleasant,
Liverpool,
L3 5TB.

Mount Pleasant Car Park is £4 for a full day's parking and is operated by Liverpool City Council. It's open 07:00 – 20:00.

Britannia Adelphi Hotel Car Park,
Ranelagh Street,
Liverpool,
L3 5UL.

Britannia Adelphi Hotel Car Park is £13 for a full day's parking and is operated by the Britannia Adelphi Hotel. It's an open-air car park behind the hotel that is open 24 hours a day. Both car parks are pay and display and can be paid for in cash or via card using your mobile phone. Paying via your phone will incur a small surcharge for card payment (usually 20p).

On the map below the John Lennon Art and Design Building is marked as a red marker, Mount Pleasant Car Park as a blue marker, and the Britannia Adelphi Hotel Car Park as a purple marker.
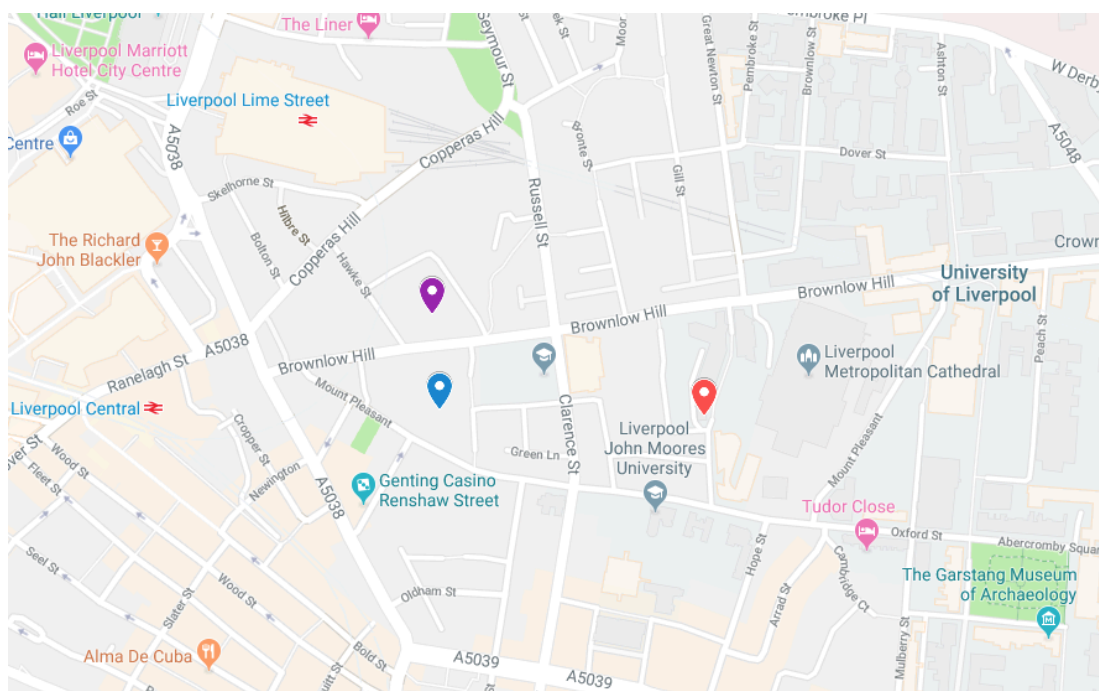
Facilities and Health & Safety at LSAD

LSAD has toilets (including facilities for people with disabilities) and water fountains on every floor with lift access throughout. There is also EDU Roam wifi available throughout the building. There is a reception desk staffed until 5pm in the main entrance, with the foyer space also having a number of chairs and sofas for public use.

In case of an emergency there are fire alarms, fire extinguishers and fire exits on each floor along with signposted first aid boxes and registered members of first aid trained staff. When in the ERL there are 2 fire exits close by located at the front of the space (the external entrance/exit door), and just out of the space inside the LSAD building; both are clearly signposted.

Food and Drinks

There are a number of supermarkets, cafes, bars and restaurants nearby should you wish to visit them, including 2 Tesco Metro shops around a 5-minute walk in either direction up and down Brownlow Hill from LSAD that are both open 06:00 – 23:00. There are also a number of vending machines

throughout the building and a café on the basement level that serves hot and cold drinks and food (including vegan and gluten free options) until 15:00 daily.

Aside from the café at LSAD there are a number of other coffee shops, bars and restaurants within a short distance of the ERL. Our recommendations include:

Cuthbert's Bakehouse,
103 Mt Pleasant,
L3 5TB.
(Coffee shop that serves a full range of breakfast and lunch items and afternoon tea including gluten free and vegan options. Always with a wide selection of homemade cakes)

Free State Kitchen,
No.1 Maryland Street,
L1 9DE.
(Restaurant serving contemporary versions of American food classics, including vegan and gluten-free options)

The Pen Factory,
13 Hope Street,
L1 9BQ.
(Bar and restaurant serving small plate/tapas-style food, including vegan options)

The Caledonia,
22 Caledonia Street,
L7 7DX.
(Co-operative vegan pub serving food and drinks including gluten-free options, often with live music in an evening)

Accommodation

There are a large number of hotels in the city centre, below is a list showing a mixture of hotels and their distance from the ERL:

Hallmark Inn Liverpool (The Feathers)
Mount Pleasant
L3 5TF.
(150m)

The Holiday Inn
Lime Street
L1 1NQ.
(800m)

Hope Street Hotel
40 Hope Street
L1 9DA.
(800m)

ibis Liverpool Centre (Albert Dock)
27 Wapping
L1 8LY.
(1800m)

Jury's Inn
31 Keel Wharf
L3 4FN.
(1900m)

Symposium Welcome Pack:

What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led

Exhibition Research Lab.
Friday 31 January 2020.
10:30 – 19:00.

A symposium exploring the often unspoken issues relating to artist-led practices and organisation.

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#ERLsymposium

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<u>Keynotes</u>

- 12ø Collective (Eva Duerden, Kelly Lloyd & Lou Macnamara)
- Dr Dave Beech
- More Than Meanwhile Spaces (Dr Emma Coffield, Rebecca Huggan, Dr Rebecca Prescott & Dr Paul Richter)

<u>Contributors</u>

- Dean Casper
- Michael D'Este
- Juliet Davis-Dufayard
- Dr Emma Coffield
- Dan Goodman
- Susan Jones
- Rory Macbeth
- Katy Morrison
- Sufea Mohamad Noor
- Jonathan Orlek
- James Schofield
- Lauren Velvick
- John Wright

<u>Schedule</u>

Session 1

10:00 – 10:30 – Doors open & refreshments

10:30 – 11:00 – Welcome
James Schofield – 'The Learned Helplessness of Practitioners'
Dr Emma Coffield – 'The problem with naming'

11:00 – 11:20 – Keynote: 12ø Collective

11:20 – 12:00 – Contributing speakers
Rory Macbeth – 'More Than DIY'
Lauren Velvick – 'Parallels – comparing models in Preston and Hull'

John Wright – 'Artist-Led Collectives: Friendship and the Realities of a Capitalist Economy'
Juliet Davis-Dufayard – 'Artist-led stones with ears'

12:00 – 12:10 – Break

12:10 – 12:40 – Contributing speakers
Sufea Mohamad Noor – 'Knowing the Nature of the Beast'
Katy Morrison – 'My name is Katy Morrison, and I'm exhausted'
Dan Goodman – 'What We ~~Don't~~ <u>Can't</u> Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led'

12:40 – 13:50 – Lunch break

Session 2

13:50 – 14:50 – Keynote: Dr Dave Beech

14:50 – 15:00 – Break

15:00 – 15:40 – Contributing speakers
Dean Casper – 'The currency of self-led is not bankable'
Michael D'Este – 'What Does Praxis Look Like in the Artist-Led Space?'
Jonathan Orlek – ''In house' research: reflections on moving in and out of artist-led housing'
Susan Jones – 'Resetting Artists' Support'

15:40 – 15:50 – Break

15:50 – 16:50 – Keynote: More Than Meanwhile Spaces

16:50 – 17:00 – Refreshments

Session 3

17:00 – 17:40 – Workshop: 12ø Collective

17:40 – 18:40 – Q&A with contributing speakers / keynote panel discussion

18:40 – 19:00 – Closing remarks

At the end of the symposium there will be the opportunity of an optional visit to a nearby bar/restaurant (to be confirmed on the day) to socialise and continue any ongoing conversations from throughout the day.

Biographies

12ø is a collective based in London, motivated by interesting processes rather than shiny exhibitions. We create projects that exploit the gaps in our knowledge and our eagerness to learn. www.12ocollective.com

Dr Dave Beech is Reader in Art and Marxism at the University of the Arts, London. He is the author of *Art and Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics (*Brill 2015), which was shortlisted for the Deutscher Memorial Prize. *Art and Postcapitalism: Aesthetic Labour, Automation and Value Production (*Pluto 2019) is out now. *Art and Labour* (Brill 2020) is forthcoming. Beech is an artist who worked in the collective Freee (with Andy Hewitt and Mel Jordan) between 2004 and 2018. His current art practice translates the tradition of critical documentary film into sequences of prints that combine photomontage and text art.

Dean Casper is Creative Director of Caustic Coastal, an independent art label based in Manchester.

Dr Emma Coffield is a Lecturer in the School of Arts and Cultures at Newcastle University. She leads the Art Museum and Gallery Studies MA and contributes to a wide range of teaching across the School. Her interdisciplinary research focuses on artist-run initiatives, the sociology of creative practice, spatial politics, and employability in the cultural and creative industries. She co-published *Museum and Gallery Studies: The Basics* with Prof Rhiannon Mason and Alistair Robinson in 2018, was PI for the 'Beyond Employability' project (2018-19) and again for 'More Than Meanwhile Spaces' (2018-19) and 'More Than Meanwhile Spaces II' (2019-20).

Juliet Davis-Dufayard is a French artist, performer, curator and housing co--op organiser based in Manchester. Using collaborative principles, her practice explores the lived experience of the everyday, using collective listening and doing to create sites for communality. Current projects include "Let's Keep Growing" an award-winning, community-led gardening project in Longsight (South East Manchester), facilitated with fellow co-op tenants

and neighbours, and FUNGUS UNITED, a newly formed band born out of the Outsiderxchanges residency with learning-disabled and non-learning disabled artists (Venture Arts, 2016). Juliet has co-funded or collaborated in the running of several DIY nomadic projects and art spaces in Manchester including MUTO, TOAST and LEGROOM, a multidisciplinary platform exploring the potential of movement co-directed with Amy Lawrence.

Michael D'Este is a writer and photographer whose research investigates the way in which we shape natural and urban spaces, the evolving manner in which we gain access to the products of artistic creation and the role those practices and products play in transformative social praxis, and the legacy of aesthetic, technological and cultural modernity. He has written for Corridor8, focusing on the self-organised artist/practitioner-led spaces of North West England, and has contributed critical reviews of recent monographs to the institutional journal of the Open Commons of Phenomenology, *Phenomenological Reviews*. He blogs at https://antipodes.home.blog/ and his portfolio can be found at https://michaeldeste.co.uk/.

Eva Duerden is a director and co-founder of 12ø collective and multidisciplinary artist and designer. Their practice focuses on workings and dynamics, whether that be the way we engage with design, in systemic habits or curation. She received her BA (Hons) in Fine Art from Central Saint Martins and recent projects include 'f_ck fiction' a multidisciplinary design collaboration, 12ø's 'backend' a UK wide DIY art space accountability network and facilitation of '30works30days' a project that challenges artists to make a work everyday for the month of April.

Dan Goodman is currently undertaking a practice-led PHD at Newcastle University exploring the tacit value of artist-run gallery spaces. This centres on an auto-ethnographic study of running artist-run gallery *System* for over two years. He is also a research associate for *More Than Meanwhile Spaces II*, an interdisciplinary project working towards developing a more sustainable future for artist-run initiatives in the North East of England.

Rebecca Huggan is the Director of The NewBridge Project, an active and vibrant artist-led community in Newcastle and Gateshead. Established in 2010, The NewBridge Project supports artists to create ambitious new work through a programme of exhibitions, commissions, events and artist development, and works in solidarity alongside local communities. She has previously worked on a number of freelance projects alongside local communities in Northumberland; partners on these projects have included bait (Creative People and Places), Woodhorn Museum and BALTIC Centre for

Contemporary Art. Through her career she has also worked for organisations including AV Festival, Northern Film and Media, Vane and Project Space Leeds.

Susan Jones is a researcher, writer and commentator on contemporary visual arts and artists' matters. Her doctoral research at Manchester Metropolitan University 2015-2019 exposed a new rationale for more productive future interrelationships between artists' livelihoods and arts policy. She is a mentor and adviser to individual artists and artists' groups and contributor to development programmes for artists and individuals including Boosting Resilience: Survival Skills for the New Normal, CAMP Plymouth, Castlefield Gallery Associates, ELIA NXT Project, Mark Devereux Arts, The NewBridge Project, S1 Artworks and Somerset Art Works. She was a Board member of Redeye: The Photography Network 2014-2018, Arts Council England Assessor 2014-2019 and directed a-n The Artists Information Company 1999-2014. www.padwickjonesarts.co.uk

Kelly Lloyd is a multidisciplinary conceptual artist who focuses on issues of representation and knowledge production and prioritises public-facing collaborative research. Lloyd received a dual M.F.A. in Painting and M.A. in Visual & Critical Studies from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2015, and earned a B.A. from Oberlin College in 2008. Recent projects include solo exhibitions at the Royal Academy Schools (London, U.K.), Institute for Contemporary Art Baltimore (U.S.A.) and Shane Campbell Gallery (Chicago, U.S.A.). Kelly Lloyd is currently working on a project interviewing people in the arts sector about their livelihoods, and lives and works in London. www.k-lloyd.com

Rory Macbeth is an artist and Fine Art Tutor, whose practice and teaching is centered around proactivity and self-empowerment.

Lou Macnamara is a documentary filmmaker and curator. They co-directed and produced Working Illegally (2015) a 28-minute documentary premiered at Glasgow CCA, exploring the UK's privatised immigration detention estate through the stories of detainees who work jobs inside detention centres for only £1 per hour. They have taught seminars on documentary art, freedom of expression and socially engaged practice at Central Saint Martins and Middlesex University. Lou is currently working on their first feature documentary, Keenie Meenie (post-production) about British mercenaries in the Sri Lankan civil war. www.loumacnamara.com

More Than Meanwhile Spaces is a collaborative, ESRC IAA funded project. It has two iterations to date. More Than Meanwhile Spaces I (2018-19) involved three events that brought together a network of stakeholders, developed a shared understanding of decision-making processes and began to co-develop new business models. More Than Meanwhile Spaces II (2019-20) is currently underway, and involves five events, bringing together a regional network of stakeholders to explore the feasibility of a Creative Enterprise Zone in the North East, as a means by which to protect and champion artist-run/led workspaces in the long-term. The project team includes Dr Emma Coffield (PI), Dr Paul Richter (Co-I), Rebecca Huggan (CP), Dr Rebecca Prescott, David Butler, Robin Beveridge, Julie Monroe, and Dan Goodman. The previous project also included Dr Katie Markham and Dr Ed Wainwright.

Katy Morrison is an independent curator | researcher with interests in discursive frameworks, performative platforms for critical enquiry and ways in which we can facilitate and mediate multiple spaces for the generation of knowledge. At present, her research explores the creation of alternate spaces for curatorial research, considering the role of choreographic method, structure and apparatus as a way of opening up critical dialogue and setting a series of relations in motion to question the inherent structural devices and processes of the exhibitionary model. She has founded and directed a number of artist-led projects in Manchester including Lionel Dobie Project, MUTO, COLLAR and The Art Bar and in April 2020 will launch PINK, a new project space co-directed with curator Matt Retallick, and artist Liam Fallon.

Sufea Mohamad Noor is an artist, curator and fundraiser based in Liverpool. Her primary interests are useful art and postcolonial discourse. Sufea is currently exploring typography and embodiment through the practice of making artist books, hosting communal meals and creating textiles sculptures. Sufea recently published an article about representation, peers, mentors and balancing practice with work for Museum ID. Previous commissions include The Good Society Sunday Lunch at The Bluecoat, Liverpool (2017), and PAGES New Voices Project at The Tetley, Leeds (2019). She was also awarded the UKYA and Porthmeor Studio Residency in St Ives (2018), UKYA Cultural Leadership Coaching (2018) and Helen's Gossip Professional Development Bursary from Heart of Glass (2018). Sufea currently works as the Development Assistant at Tate Liverpool and is a Board Member for Corridor8. She was previously Artistic Director at The Royal Standard, Curator for Granby Winter Garden and the co-founder of Not Just Collective.

Jonathan Orlek is a collaborative PhD researcher, investigating the relationship between artist-led organisations and housing with East Street Arts and the School of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Huddersfield. His research explores artist-led housing as a critical spatial practice, through the use of multiple ethnographic positions and methods. He is also a director of Studio Polpo, a social enterprise architecture collective in Sheffield, and an Associate Lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University School of Architecture.

Dr Rebecca Prescott is a Lecturer in Entrepreneurship at Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University. Her passion for research focuses on the relationship between place and (specifically creative) practice. Thanks to 10 years' experience working across sectors as a practitioner, lecturer, researcher and consultant, she has a sustained, deep and extensive grounding in questions of creative practice and its relationship to wider issues of identity, inclusion and design. A core element of her research focuses on identifying the fundamental features of artist-led organisational development and the processes that both promote, and constrain, creative practice.

Dr Paul Richter is a Lecturer in Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Newcastle University Business School. Paul has been involved in numerous policy and practice-oriented research projects over the last fifteen years funded by the AHRC, ESRC, EPSRC, and the EU. Paul's current research interests centre on innovation and entrepreneurship trends as they relate to a number of practice settings, most recently the cultural and creative sectors. Conceptually, Paul is interested in the relationship between organisation, subjectivity, and technologies/artefacts and the function of language and materiality in constituting those phenomena.

James Schofield is an artist-curator, Regional Editor of Corridor8 and current PhD researcher based at the Exhibition Research Lab. His research is focused on artist-led practice in the UK post-financial crisis and the relationship it has with neoliberalism, globalisation and network culture. Taking into account the impacts of these core aspects of contemporary existence the research explores how they have shaped and continue to influence self-organised artistic practices within the confines of the art system, and the strategies practitioners develop and employ to create organisational models 'alternative' to those governing forces to try and maintain autonomy between digital and physical spaces.

Lauren Velvick is variously a writer, curator and/or artist based in the North of England. She is currently a Director and Contributing Editor of contemporary art and writing publication Corridor8, and is a regular contributor to Art Monthly. She was recently Associate Curator at The Art House, Wakefield and Assistant Curator at Humber Street Gallery, Hull, and was a Liverpool Biennial Associate Artist 2016-2018.

John Wright is a researcher, curator and artist working as a Visiting Lecturer at Leeds Arts University alongside nearing the completion of a PhD with the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds. His practice is centred on the intersections between artistic, curatorial and academic fields, with his current research focused on artist-led collectives and the role in which friendship plays in their evolution. He has worked in the cultural sector as both a freelancer and within institutions such as Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Leeds Arts University, The British Library and the National Science and Media Museum. He currently works within artist-led collective the Retro Bar at the End of the Universe, and is a co-founder of the Artist-led Research Group (ARG). https://retrobarattheendofuniverse.wordpress.com/

Further Information

To help share knowledge and resources the participants have collectively prepared a short list of material they feel is relevant to help guide research and practice following on from the symposium and their contributions.

Physical
- Adorno, Theodor W., *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002).
- Ashcroft, Louise, "DIY • DIWO • DIA." In: *Art Monthly*, No.424, (March 2019): pp.11– 15.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979).
- Bourdieu, Pierre & Alain Darbel, *L'Amour de l'Art* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1966).
- Chan, Paul, *Selected Writings 2000—2014* (Basel and New York: Laurenz Foundation Schaulager and Badlands Unlimited, 2014).
- Deleuze, Gilles & Anthony Uhlmann, "The Exhausted" In: *SubStance*, Vol.24, No.3, Issue 78 (1995): pp.3-28.
- Goodwin, Channon (ed.) *Permanent Recession: A Handbook on Art, Labour and Circumstance* (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2019).

- Heron, John, *Co-operative Inquiry: Research into the human condition* (London: Sage, 1996).
- Lefebvre, Henri, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1991).
- Lepecki, Andre, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (London: Routledge, 2005).
- Lowndes, Sarah, *The DIY Movement in Art, Music and Publishing* (London: Routledge, 2016).
- György, Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1971).
- Marcuse, Herbert, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, trans. Erica Sherover (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).
- Mould, Oli, *Against Creativity* (London: Verso, 2018).
- Osborne, Peter, *The Postconceptual Condition: Critical Essays* (London: Verso, 2018).
- Pasero, Ursula, "Why Artists Go Unpaid" In: Karen van den Berg & Ursula Pasero (eds.) Art Production Beyond the Art Market? (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013): pp.15-164.
- Phillips, Andrea & Fulya Erdemci (eds.) *Social Housing—Housing the Social: Art, Property and Spatial Justice* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012).
- Protopapa, Efrosini, *Possibilising Dance: A Space for Thinking in Choreography* (London: University of Roehampton, 2009).
- Steyerl, Hito, *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War* (London: Verso, 2017).
- Vanhoe, Reinaart, *Also-space, From Hot to Something Else: How Indonesian Art Initiatives Have Reinvented Networking* (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2016).
- Vergara, Leire, "An Exhausted Curating" In: Jean-Paul Martinon (ed.) *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013): pp.73-78.
- Verwoert, Jan, "Exhaustion & Exuberance: Ways to Defy the Pressure to Perform" In: *Dot Dot Dot*, No.15, Winter 2007 (2007): p.106.
- Willats, Stephen, *Artwork as Social Model: A Manual of Questions and Propositions* (Sheffield: Research Group for Artists Publications, 2012).

Digital
- All Conference organising network publication library
  https://allconference.org.au/library
- Artist-led Research Group
  https://artistledresearchgroup.wordpress.com

- Guidance on fees and day rates for visual artists 2019
  https://static.a-n.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Guidance-on-fees-and-day-rates-for-visual-artists-2019.pdf
- Backend project
  https://backend.org.uk/
- Corridor8 & YVAN 'Resilience is Futile' publication (digital copy)
  https://corridor8.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Resilience-is-Futile-2019-C8-YVAN.pdf
- Sophia Crilly 'Assessing opportunities'
  https://www.a-n.co.uk/resource/assessing-opportunities
- Fact 'Precarity in the Arts' talk recording.
  https://www.fact.co.uk/news/2019/08/precarity-in-the-arts
- Emily Hesse 'I am an artist and I am really sad'
  https://medium.com/@emilyhesse/i-am-an-artist-and-i-am-really-sad-6b0b91107631
- Kevin Hunt 'People Like Us'
  https://static.a-n.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/People-like-us.pdf
- Susan Jones 'Are artists peripheral?'
  http://www.cvan.art/directors-blog/2019/3/21/guest-commentary-by-susan-jones
- Susan Jones 'Artists in Work in 2016'
  https://www.a-n.co.uk/research/artists-work-2016/
- Susan Jones 'How to negotiate an exhibition'
  www.a-n.co.uk/resource/how-to-negotiate-an-exhibition
- More Than Meanwhile Spaces I publication
  https://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/file_store/production/258050/06E70F9E-62A9-47F0-81EB-80AFDD0D7CD7.pdf
- 'Negotiating your practice'
  https://www.a-n.co.uk/resource/quick-guide-to-negotiation
- Nicola Naismith 'Artists practising well'
  https://www.a-n.co.uk/research/artists-practising-well/
- Paying Artists campaign
  www.payingartists.org.uk
- Paying Artists Exhibition Guide
  http://www.payingartists.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Paying-Artists-Exhibition-Payment-Guide.pdf
- Sluice
  http://www.sluice.info/
- Something's Brewing – Preston's 12 year Culture Strategy
  https://somethingsbrewing.org.uk/

- Jenny Syson 'Approaching galleries'
  https://www.a-n.co.uk/resource/approaching-galleries

Further information on the ERL and its programming can be found at:
https://www.exhibition-research-lab.co.uk/

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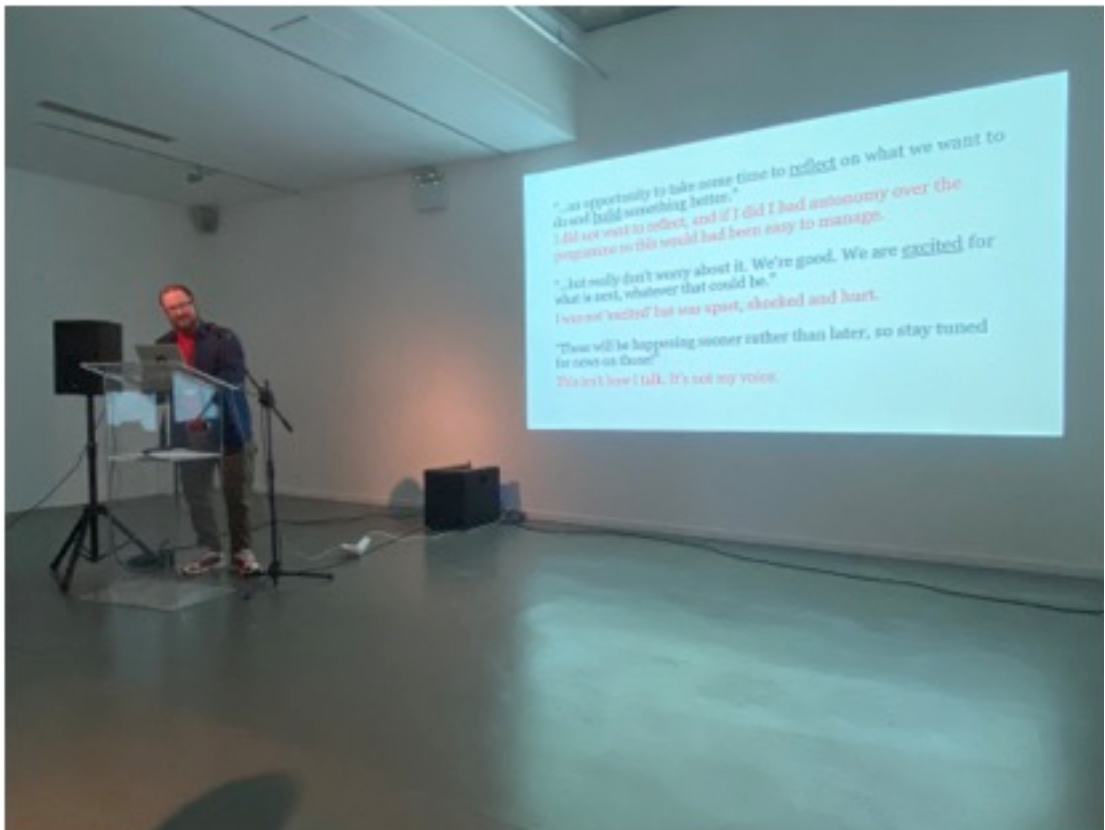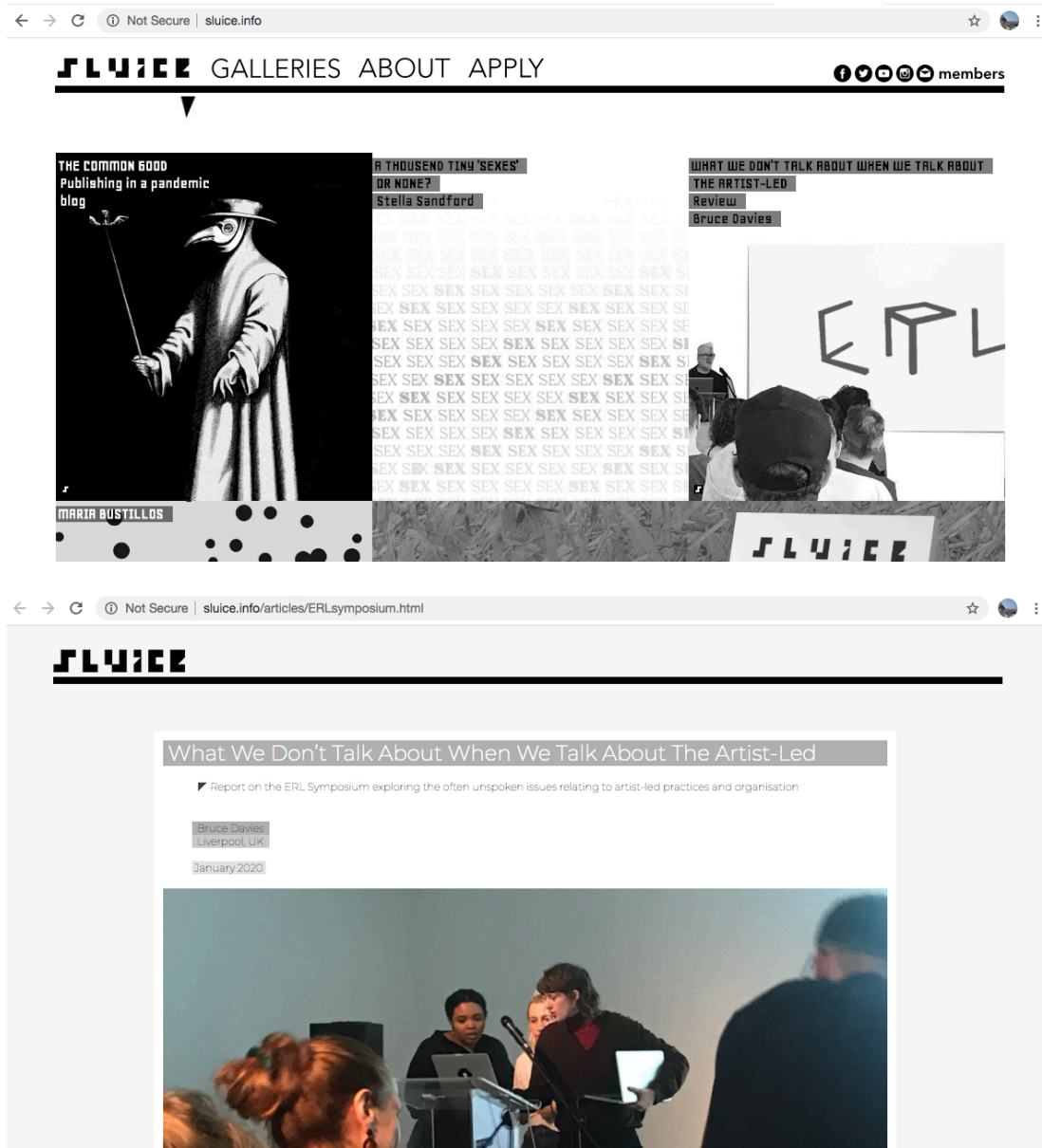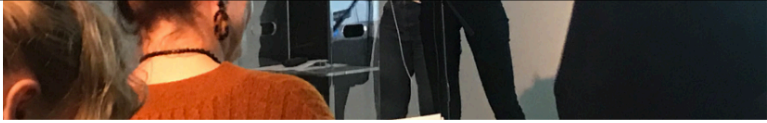
12ø Collective presenting at the ERL Symposium at Liverpool John Moores University / January 2020 / photo: Bruce Davies

Never being one to pontificate or over-think things, I would say that I am a great believer in just 'getting on with stuff'. It is better, so they say, to have tried and failed than to have never tried at all, and, in the spirit of one who bore my name before me, I would say that 'if at first you don't succeed; try, try again.' In fact when asked for advice about making art the artist Henry Moore's response was often 'just do it'. Today is a day when I relax my view on overthinking and talking about things, and sit back to take the long view, forwards and, crucially, backwards. One of the things that the world of independent and grassroots art rarely has is the time to reflect. Before one thing is over the next has begun, it is less a cycle, more of a treadmill. Of course reflection is one of those things that is actually beneficial, if only modern life afforded the majority such luxuries. The year is 2020, a number often associated with visual acuity, and yet it is not just the year, but also the day of Brexit in the UK - 31st January; so maybe now is as good a time as any to reflect on art's recent past whilst keeping our attention focussed firmly on the future.

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Dr Emma Coffield (Newcastle University) is the first speaker to hold the floor on the subject of language and how it defines us, do we allow it to define us, should we be defining it? The suggestion here is that people often seek to talk about the artist-led by trying to find a common denominator. In this way they hope to arrive at some kind of definition by which they can understand what they are dealing with. When considering the wide variance in situations affecting the artist-led community, is this then a far too reductive way of viewing them? Artist-led organisations can be large or small, funded or unfunded and survive with generally whatever modus operandi is suitable for the scale and
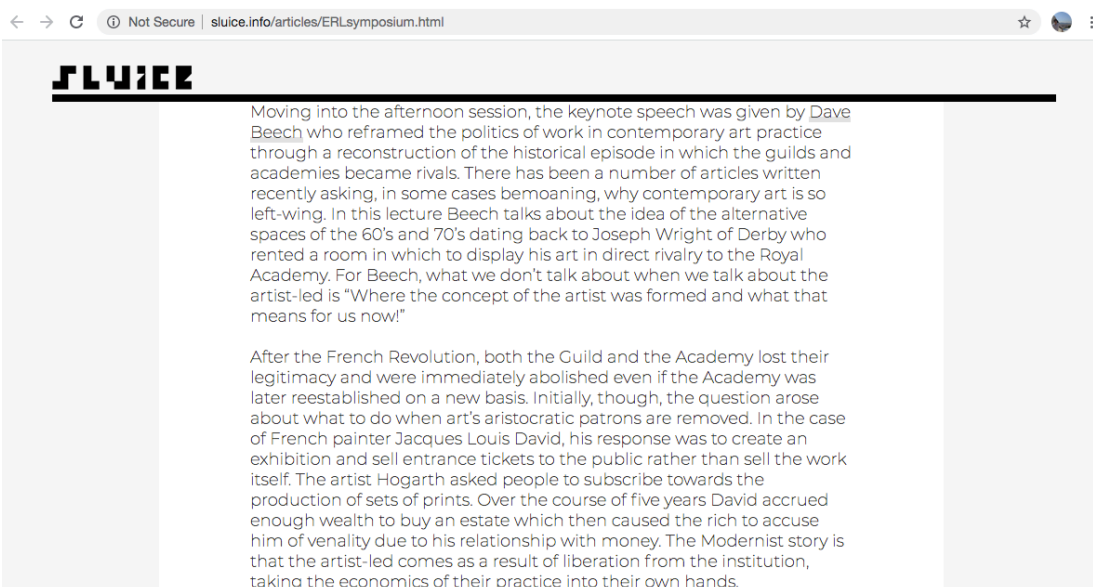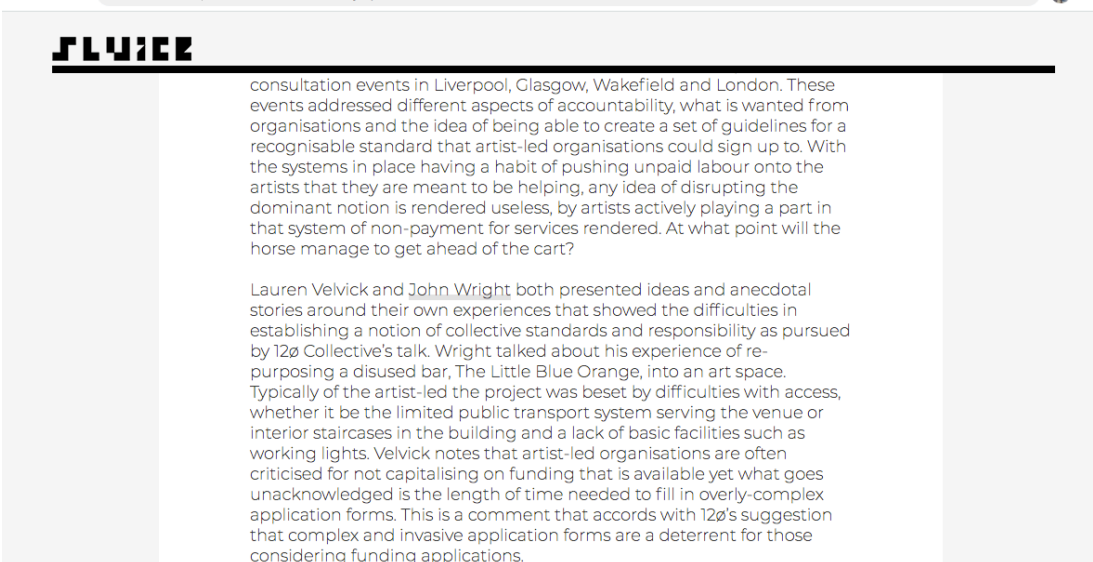
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ambition of their operation. The idea that we can then define them with a particular umbrella term becomes fanciful due to the wildly different nature of each organisation and the nature of the art and artists that they deal with.

Of course the need to be able find suitable descriptors is imperative from an audience and marketing point of view, which makes this a particularly hard ask. Whilst the lowest common denominator idea may be reductive to the organisations as they try to establish exactly what it is that they do, the opposite is true in situations where it is necessary to explain their practice and raison d'être to an audience. Unless there is something that can easily be plucked from the sometimes impenetrable language of art practice, one will always struggle to find an audience. Contemporary art practice seems to be an area where most learning is done when audiences do not realise that they are learning, which makes classification a very difficult task indeed.

Later on, Jon Orlek of Huddersfield University and Susan Jones, a former assessor with Arts Council England, point to the dichotomy in how the artist-led is positioned in comparison to larger, generally funded, structures. When Orlek talks about the experiences of the practitioner embedded within communities through his PHD and with East Street Arts Live/Work programme, the disparity seems like the circle that cannot be squared in relation to what Jones says about artists being

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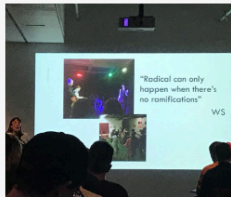prioritised by funding structures based on what they deliver rather than what they practice. She also points out that it is an unrealistic expectation for the artist-led to support artistic practice. Accompanied by the statistic that only 11% of regular funding for organisations, and little of that goes towards traditionally building based organisations, makes its way into the hands of the artist-led, the idea of an artist-led organisation being able to support artistic practice becomes an untenable, or at best unrealistic, prospect. Scarcity, as Lauren Velvick points out, leads practitioners to justify, perhaps over-justify, their work and the complexity of application forms is not necessarily conducive to the programming of more experimental forms. This points back to Susan Jones' suggestion that artist-led organisations struggle to find ways in which they can support and develop creative practices that already struggle to find an audience. With this kind of thinking in place then that which is considered niche is likely to always remain niche.

12ø Collective spoke about their desire to set up an organisation to create opportunities that they felt were missing. They talked about a lack of accountability, responsibility and physical barriers to access in the world of the artist-led. For them the priorities revolved around artist pay and accessibility, citing invasive questions when having to fill in applications for grants, bursaries, internships and projects as being part of a system that works against artists operating at a grassroots, d-i-y level. Much of what 12ø Collective had done revolved around a number of public

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consultation events in Liverpool, Glasgow, Wakefield and London. These events addressed different aspects of accountability, what is wanted from organisations and the idea of being able to create a set of guidelines for a recognisable standard that artist-led organisations could sign up to. With the systems in place having a habit of pushing unpaid labour onto the artists that they are meant to be helping, any idea of disrupting the dominant notion is rendered useless, by artists actively playing a part in that system of non-payment for services rendered. At what point will the horse manage to get ahead of the cart?

Lauren Velvick and John Wright both presented ideas and anecdotal stories around their own experiences that showed the difficulties in establishing a notion of collective standards and responsibility as pursued by 12ø Collective's talk. Wright talked about his experience of re-purposing a disused bar, The Little Blue Orange, into an art space. Typically of the artist-led the project was beset by difficulties with access, whether it be the limited public transport system serving the venue or interior staircases in the building and a lack of basic facilities such as working lights. Velvick notes that artist-led organisations are often criticised for not capitalising on funding that is available yet what goes unacknowledged is the length of time needed to fill in overly-complex application forms. This is a comment that accords with 12ø's suggestion that complex and invasive application forms are a deterrent for those considering funding applications.

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Moving into the afternoon session, the keynote speech was given by Dave Beech who reframed the politics of work in contemporary art practice through a reconstruction of the historical episode in which the guilds and academies became rivals. There has been a number of articles written recently asking, in some cases bemoaning, why contemporary art is so left-wing. In this lecture Beech talks about the idea of the alternative spaces of the 60's and 70's dating back to Joseph Wright of Derby who rented a room in which to display his art in direct rivalry to the Royal Academy. For Beech, what we don't talk about when we talk about the artist-led is "Where the concept of the artist was formed and what that means for us now!"

After the French Revolution, both the Guild and the Academy lost their legitimacy and were immediately abolished even if the Academy was later reestablished on a new basis. Initially, though, the question arose about what to do when art's aristocratic patrons are removed. In the case of French painter Jacques Louis David, his response was to create an exhibition and sell entrance tickets to the public rather than sell the work itself. The artist Hogarth asked people to subscribe towards the production of sets of prints. Over the course of five years David accrued enough wealth to buy an estate which then caused the rich to accuse him of venality due to his relationship with money. The Modernist story is that the artist-led comes as a result of liberation from the institution, taking the economics of their practice into their own hands.

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This is very much in accordance with practice as we understand it now, something brought up in the talk by Katy Morrison who described the peculiarities of having an artistic practice alongside two part-time jobs in coffee shops. In my own experience of exhibiting work, and staging exhibitions of the work of others for the last fifteen years, the nature of how we understand this in relation to how the public view it has become apparent. Many times have people suggested that it

"Radical can only happen when there's no ramifications"
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must be both relaxing and fulfilling to have such a hobby as to be able to stage such events. Whilst the fulfilment aspect of making and exhibiting work is absolutely true, it is apparent that there is no understanding that it is firstly, more than a hobby, and secondly a massive amount of work that can take a fortnight of holidays from paying work, in order to work eighteen hour days for no pay in order to assemble whatever it is they are currently looking at. There is a certain satisfaction in this, in so much as it is analogous to the swimming swan; gracefully gliding on the surface whilst the legs paddle frantically yet barely registering on the surface, but it indicates that this is an issue that only the artist can understand. Morrison also describes encounters in which, having left University she continued to work in coffee shops in the close vicinity of the University that previous lecturers would frequent, leading to questions, asked in a concerned manner, such as 'Is everything alright?'. Morrison suggests through her talk that there may be artistic potential in exploring a state beyond exhaustion, one leading to a productive realm. But, in light of other suggestions throughout the day, does this then just become yet another version of the much romanticised starving artist in a garret, living out other peoples vicarious fantasies and feeding into the notion of becoming complicit in one's own downfall.

Caustic Coastal, a small artist-led organisation operating under its own

ERL Symposium presentation at Liverpool John Moores University / January 2020 / photo: Bruce Davies

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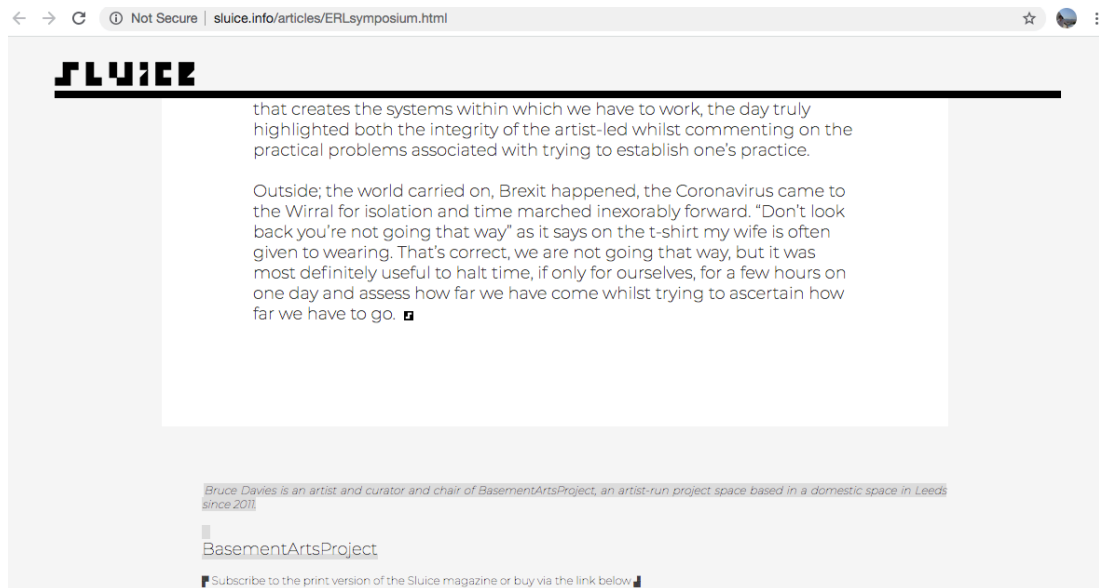
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Elsewhere across the day many different aspects of independent art are looked at from many different angles. The methods are, as you would imagine, creative and wildly different. Whether it is the make do and mend associated with dilapidated buildings, the rent as rate-relief of 'Meanwhile' and 'Temporary' spaces, students taking matters into their own hands and presenting degree shows in the public realm rather than Universities, as talked about by Rory McBeth, or the nature of the beast that creates the systems within which we have to work, the day truly highlighted both the integrity of the artist-led whilst commenting on the practical problems associated with trying to establish one's practice.

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*Bruce Davies is an artist and curator and chair of BasementArtsProject, an artist-run project space based in a domestic space in Leeds
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BasementArtsProject

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What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led

Report on the ERL Symposium exploring the often unspoken
issues relating to artist-led practices and organisation.

by Bruce Davies, Liverpool, January 2020.

Never being one to pontificate or over-think things, I would say that I am a great
believer in just 'getting on with stuff'. It is better, so they say, to have tried and
failed than to have never tried at all, and, in the spirit of one who bore my name
before me, I would say that 'if at first you don't succeed; try, try again.' In fact
when asked for advice about making art the artist Henry Moore's response was
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the year, but also the day of Brexit in the UK - 31st January; so maybe now is as
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Artist-Led was a symposium convened by PHD researcher and regional editor for
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Dr Emma Coffield (Newcastle University) is the first speaker to hold the floor on the subject of language and how it defines us, do we allow it to define us, should we be defining it? The suggestion here is that people often seek to talk about the artist-led by trying to find a common denominator. In this way they hope to arrive at some kind of definition by which they can understand what they are dealing with. When considering the wide variance in situations affecting the artist-led community, is this then a far too reductive way of viewing them? Artist-led organisations can be large or small, funded or unfunded and survive with generally whatever modus operandi is suitable for the scale and ambition of their operation. The idea that we can then define them with a particular umbrella term becomes fanciful due to the wildly different nature of each organisation and the nature of the art and artists that they deal with.

Of course the need to be able find suitable descriptors is imperative from an audience and marketing point of view, which makes this a particularly hard ask. Whilst the lowest common denominator idea may be reductive to the organisations as they try to establish exactly what it is that they do, the opposite is true in situations where it is necessary to explain their practice and raison d'être to an audience. Unless there is something that can easily be plucked from the sometimes impenetrable language of art practice, one will always struggle to find an audience. Contemporary art practice seems to be an area where most learning is done when audiences do not realise that they are learning, which makes classification a very difficult task indeed.

Later on, Jon Orlek of Huddersfield University and Susan Jones, a former assessor with Arts Council England, point to the dichotomy in how the artist-led is positioned in comparison to larger, generally funded, structures. When Orlek talks about the experiences of the practitioner embedded within communities through his PHD and with East Street Arts Live/Work programme, the disparity seems like the circle that cannot be squared in relation to what Jones says about artists being prioritised by funding structures based on what they deliver rather than what they practice. She also points out that it is an unrealistic expectation for the artist-led to support artistic practice. Accompanied by the statistic that only 11% of regular funding for organisations, and little of that goes towards traditionally building based organisations, makes its way into the hands of the artist-led, the idea of an artist-led organisation being able to support artistic practice becomes an untenable, or at best unrealistic, prospect. Scarcity, as Lauren Velvick points out, leads practitioners to justify, perhaps over-justify, their work and the complexity of application forms is not necessarily conducive to the programming of more experimental forms. This points back to Susan Jones' suggestion that artist-led organisations struggle to find ways in which they can support and develop creative practices that already struggle to find an audience. With this kind of thinking in place then that which is considered niche is likely to always remain niche.

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opportunities that they felt were missing. They talked about a lack of accountability, responsibility and physical barriers to access in the world of the artist-led. For them the priorities revolved around artist pay and accessibility, citing invasive questions when having to fill in applications for grants, bursaries, internships and projects as being part of a system that works against artists operating at a grassroots, d-i-y level. Much of what 12ø Collective had done revolved around a number of public consultation events in Liverpool, Glasgow, Wakefield and London. These events addressed different aspects of accountability, what is wanted from organisations and the idea of being able to create a set of guidelines for a recognisable standard that artist-led organisations could sign up to. With the systems in place having a habit of pushing unpaid labour onto the artists that they are meant to be helping, any idea of disrupting the dominant notion is rendered useless, by artists actively playing a part in that system of non-payment for services rendered. At what point will the horse manage to get ahead of the cart?

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Bruce Davies is an artist and curator and chair of BasementArtsProject, an artist-run project space based in a domestic space in Leeds since 2011.

BasementArtsProject

The full review can be found online here:
http://sluice.info/articles/ERLsymposium.html

Corridor8 Review:

On the drab January day that the United Kingdom left the European Union, a healthy audience gathered at the Exhibition Research Lab (ERL) in Liverpool to talk about the unspoken issues impacting the artist-led. While taking the form of a traditional academic symposium, 'What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led' managed to ensure that the artist's voice was the most prominent throughout.

The symposium marked the culmination of the first year of ERL's Open Forum series, featuring talks from Liverpool artist-led initiatives OUTPUT gallery, ROOT-ed, and The Royal Standard. These talks gauged the temperature of the city's artist-led scene while providing a platform for the practical issues and challenges of arts organising in the current socio-economic climate. The same ethos underpinned this day-long event, which aimed to draw out and tackle issues related to the artist-led that often lurk beneath the surface of public discourse.

Symposium organiser James Schofield (also Corridor8's Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cumbria editor) opened proceedings by suggesting that artists operate in a collective state of 'learned helplessness'. In appropriating Martin Seligman's theory, Schofield persuasively argued that artists have become conditioned – and resigned – to the structural inequalities propagated both by the contemporary artworld and neoliberalism; the exploitation of artist-led activity within the cycle of urban gentrification being a prominent example. Emerging artists initially resist this inertia but are gradually worn down into acceptance of the situation. In order to

address this, Schofield suggested the adoption of new creative approaches to self-organise and combat these frameworks, such as harnessing digital tools to 'disrupt' existing structures.
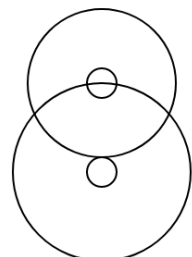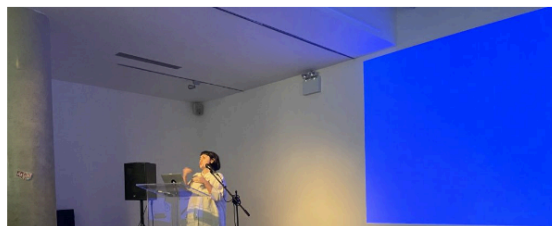
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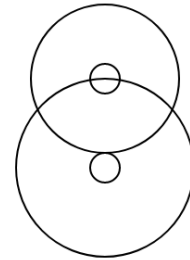
Katy Morrison presentation, image courtesy of James Schofield/Exhibition Research Lab

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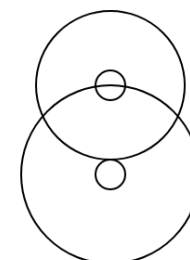
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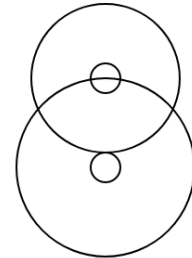
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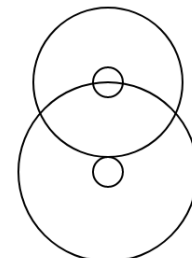
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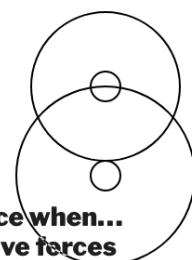
Dave Beech presentation, image courtesy of James Schofield/Exhibition Research Lab

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With repeated calls to formulate new models, it was encouraging to see two examples of collaborative practice that aimed to affect change. Research project More Than Meanwhile Spaces, for example, brings together academics from Newcastle University and artist-led organisation, The NewBridge Project, to collaboratively explore new models for creative practice in Newcastle. Several aspects stood out, including its positive cross-disciplinary approach that seems to ensure a balance of salaried, skill-based professionals as opposed to relying on voluntary labour. Language proved once again to be important, but here rather than art-specific terms, the necessity to find a linguistic common ground amongst a wide range of actors, from businesses to local authority, was emphasised. The use of existing resources to test new models was articulated by NewBridge's Rebecca Huggan, who argued that 'change must be led by organisations already there'. If More than Meanwhile Spaces proves successful in forging new approaches to setting up artist-led space, there could be wider implications, despite the geographical imbalance of resources in the UK. With the high street model in a death spiral, alongside a continued shift towards the experience economy, could there be opportunities to negotiate new terms and fluidly test new models in the near future?
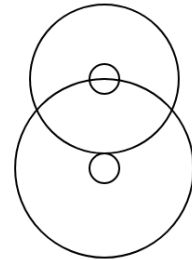
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With the day comprised of fast-paced presentations there was minimal time to take stock, and several pauses for thought were welcomed. Juliet Davis-Dufayard's simple but impactful activity asked the audience to pair up and ask each other direct questions – such as 'Who does this matter to?', that riffed off of issues throughout the day. 12ø Collective closed the symposium by convening group sessions that returned to their draft guidelines produced for Backend, exploring topics such as 'care', 'value' and 'time'. However, the remaining twenty-odd minutes wasn't nearly enough to explore these in any detail.

An academic symposium, arguably, isn't the right forum for the artist-led; calls for action always look better in practice than at the institutional lectern.

However, there was much value here. The importance of sharing new perspectives, exchanging knowledge (including with those beyond the artist-led) and highlighting possible pathways forward shouldn't be dismissed, nor ERL's ongoing aim to establish space for critical discourse on the artist-led. When transcribing my notes, several terms repeatedly cropped up: openness, solidarity, generosity, fairness, sharing, disrupting. Beech's 'infrastructure of dissent' in particular seems important in relation to this lexicon: without evidence of material action, including offering capacity and resources to those engaged in struggle, solidarity is purely symbolic.
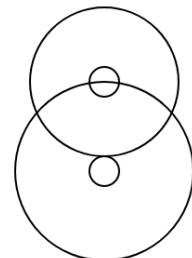
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What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led *took place at the* Exhibition Research Lab, *Liverpool John Moores University on 31 January 2020. Recordings of the day are available upon request.*

This report is supported by the Exhibition Research Lab and Arts Council England.

07.03.20 – Review.

What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About the Artist-Led.

Exhibition Research Lab.

by Jack Welsh.

On the drab January day that the United Kingdom left the European Union, a healthy audience gathered at the Exhibition Research Lab (ERL) in Liverpool to talk about the unspoken issues impacting the artist-led. While taking the form of a traditional academic symposium, 'What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About The Artist-Led' managed to ensure that the artist's voice was the most prominent throughout.

The symposium marked the culmination of the first year of ERL's Open Forum series, featuring talks from Liverpool artist-led initiatives <u>OUTPUT gallery</u>, <u>ROOT-ed</u>, and <u>The Royal Standard</u>. These talks gauged the temperature of the city's artist-led scene while providing a platform for the practical issues and challenges of arts organising in the current socio-economic climate. The same ethos underpinned this day-long event, which aimed to draw out and tackle issues related to the artist-led that often lurk beneath the surface of public discourse.

Symposium organiser James Schofield (also Corridor8's Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cumbria editor) opened proceedings by suggesting that artists operate in a collective state of 'learned helplessness'. In appropriating Martin Seligman's theory, Schofield persuasively argued that artists have become conditioned – and resigned – to the structural inequalities propagated both by the contemporary artworld and neoliberalism; the exploitation of artist-led activity within the cycle of urban gentrification being a prominent example. Emerging artists initially resist this inertia but are gradually worn down into acceptance of the situation. In order to address this, Schofield suggested the adoption of new creative approaches to self-organise and combat these frameworks, such as harnessing digital tools to 'disrupt' existing structures.

Such an approach is evident in <u>12ø Collective's Backend</u> project, which focuses on the lack of accountability within artist-led organisations. Presenting outcomes from a series of collaborative and facilitated workshops held in artist-led spaces in Liverpool (OUTPUT gallery), Glasgow (Transmission Gallery), Wakefield (The Art House) and London (Block 336) in 2019, 12ø Collective highlighted the key issues that emerged, with each workshop influenced by the context of each venue. These included: voluntary and value, privilege, the dispersal of power, labour and the decolonisation of the gallery, unconscious barriers and accessibility, public funding, and professionalisation. The outcomes of these workshops have resulted in the first stages of a collaboratively written 'code of conduct' for artist-led organisations. It initially seems like a great idea, with the long-term potential to generate a shared approach to enacting change. However, the steps to get there could be turbulent, from wrestling with the nuances of terminology to frustration at the slow pace of development.

The problematic nature of the language associated with the artist-led was a recurrent issue throughout the day. Perhaps unsurprising given the recent launch of Arts Council England's ten-year strategy, in which the term 'artist' has been side-lined for 'creative practitioner' due to its supposed lack of inclusivity. In her presentation, Dr Emma Coffield called for a specificity of language when describing the artist-led, suggesting that the plurality of specific terms – such as artist-run, artist-led and DIY – is important for articulating the texture, ideas and motivations that drive these projects. In contrast, clunky umbrella terms often reinforce the dominant and unsustainable volunteer-led, white cube gallery model, one based on privilege that excludes many. In this regard, both Coffield and 12ø Collective – mind the incoming pun – seem to be speaking the same language.

Katy Morrison engagingly declared her complete exhaustion – not only mental and physical, but also with trying to maintain artist-led activity, juggling two jobs and a personal life, all while swimming against the strong tides of a broken system. We hear you, Katy. This proposal of exhaustion as a critical methodology has mileage; a method for breaking down the walls constraining the artist-led, something Morrison and collaborators will be testing with new curatorial project PINK. As Morrison asks, could banging your head repeatedly on a wall lead to a new 'critical elsewhere', or just give you a throbbing migraine?

Divergent notions of authenticity were touched on by Sufea Mohamad Noor and Dean Casper. Noor's accompanying zine, emblazoned with a series of amusing slogans in deep red text, including, 'Why do you need a logo for everything?', playfully, but adroitly, queried why artist-led organisations mimic institutions and what could be drawn from this. Casper, of art label Caustic Coastal, employed the cycling term of the 'peloton' as a metaphor to describe problems stemming from projected authenticity: those who adopt artist-led activities are often riding at the front, visibly boosting their careers; art institutions benefiting from artistic activity ride in the middle, reaping the rewards; with individual artists languishing at the back. Both challenged the pressure to professionalise and the institutional exploitation of artists, asking questions that perhaps aren't asked enough.

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The full review can be found online here:
https://corridor8.co.uk/article/what-we-dont-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-the-artist-led/