Animating the Arts Centre:

The Socio-Material Production of an Exhibition at Bluecoat, Liverpool's Centre for the Contemporary Arts

Abstract

Title: Animating the Arts Centre: The Socio-Material Production of an Exhibition at Bluecoat, Liverpool's Centre for the Contemporary Arts

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This thesis is a qualitative case study of the socio-material production of an art exhibition and its publics. It is based on a yearlong ethnographic and filmic study of *In the Peaceful Dome,* an exhibition in 2017 at Bluecoat, Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts, supported by a CASE studentship from the Economic and Social Research Council.

Contributing to the 'new' sociology of art, it reads Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* alongside the theoretical work of Tim Ingold to conduct a sociology of art stemming from the interactions and entanglements of materials and practice. This provides an analytical framework that presents the art world as a meshwork. Studying the production of *In the Peaceful Dome* as a meshwork is achieved through close attention to moments of interaction between materials and social actors, located in spatiotemporal contexts in the arts centre. These contexts include the installation ('install') of *In the Peaceful Dome* which brings into focus the gallery technicians ('techs'), and their work is studied as a vital part of making the exhibition. The animation of the arts centre is shown to also depend on the cultivation of publics and practices within it. The study of the install is matched with the study of the study of the socio-material production of these publics; this takes the analysis to both the private view and the everyday life of the arts centre.

There are two aspects of production under consideration in this thesis. The first is the skilful work of the gallery techs, which is studied as a practice with a tacit and extra-textual character. The second is the way in which interactions between people and objects are entangled with the institutional context of a specific gallery. This is approached through two complimentary methods. The first is a film making research practice, in which the qualities of film is found to suit the analysis of tacit, skilled material practices and atmospheres. This element of analysis is carried out in a fifteen minute, two channel film *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre.* This corresponds with two chapters of written analysis which place these interactions in context. These chapters analyse the socio-material work of producing meaningful art objects; the organisation of this work; the production of publics; and the administrative context of art institutions in the UK.

This thesis has three contributions. Firstly, a study of the contribution of gallery tech's skilled labour to an art exhibition through a textural and sociological filmmaking practice. Secondly, it theoretically develops Becker's *Art Worlds* to take account of new sociological approaches to matter, particularly Tim Ingold's. Finally, it offers a theoretical/ ethnographic analysis of the ways in which one art institution makes objects and labour public.

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I am infinitely grateful to the support of all my family and friends, a gratitude I can only hope to acknowledge in the fashion it was received—through friendship, through being together, with love.

To Ann and Perlita Harris,

on whose encouragement and enthusiasm I could always depend

Contents

Preface

It is 4pm on Thursday 12th October 2017. After two weeks of heavy and busy work, Bluecoat's new exhibition, In the Peaceful Dome, is near enough complete. The windows that give out onto Liverpool One's shoppers are being wiped clean of any give-away finger prints, and the last few tools are packed away in their cupboard. The centrepiece of the exhibition—Jacob Epstein's Genesis—stands dead still in the middle of the gallery floor, immovable and enduring. The traces of sawdust and specks of paint testament to the hive of activity of the install are all gone, swept away by a team of volunteers or gallery technicians. The walls are white once again, the doors still locked. Out in the café empty, expectant wine glasses are neatly arranged and the stage is set for the speeches and applause obligatory for a 'Private View'. This is a liminal time—the exhibition is ready, the audience impending.

The opening of the exhibition brings to an end my time spent working and filming with the gallery technicians. Their work here is done, and as they finish their obligations to Bluecoat they once again enter the job market. My tripod is pointed at the door; I leave the camera running to catch their goodbyes. It is a strange atmosphere, the gallery's unnatural stillness more pronounced now I am used to the sounds of drills echoing down the cloisters. I catch an intimate moment. Two of the gallery technicians, who have got to know the art works on display by lugging them into place, stand with Genesis. They are a few steps back, and talk in hushed tones, out of my earshot. They look at the sculpture as if they have never seen it before. And, as they shed their contracted relation to the sculpture, I wonder if they find themselves falling into a new way of seeing it, of envisioning it and sensing it—no longer techs, but audience.

As the gallery technicians prepare to leave, I call: 'See you later!' One turns to me, his expression somewhere between confusion and amusement. 'The private view tonight', I clarify, 'I'm shooting it'. He settles with amused— 'Oh, you won't be seeing us there! We go down the pub at the end of a job, celebrate with a pint'. He names a pub I have never heard of. It seems so obvious, really, that the last thing they would do is celebrate the end of an intense job with a drink in the workplace: for them, the pub over the private view. As they leave, I think about the hands that will pick up the waiting wine glasses, the bodies that will drink from them. I think about what they will not know, what has gone with the techs as they leave for the pub, and return to the perpetual work cycle of the gallery tech.

Introduction

In 2019, construction workers, art handlers, and gallery technicians at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, organised a union drive with a view to being represented by the International Union of Operating Engineers. Their drive was fuelled by frustration over stagnating wages and job insecurity. On the eve of the vote to determine whether the union would be recognised, the director Richard Armstrong sent an email to staff at the institution. 'I do not want to work with a third party who has very limited experience in the museum field,' he wrote 'and whose membership is largely in the heating and air-conditioning and construction industries' (Harris & Pogrebin, 2019). The Guggenheim, he added, is a 'unique workplace' ill-suited to working with a union (Harris & Pogrebin, 2019). With these remarks, published by the New York Times, Armstrong captured two prevailing narratives in the institutional arts. Firstly, that art is categorically distinct from the work of its construction. Secondly, that galleries are categorically distinct from other workplaces.[1]

In one respect Armstrong was right: The New York Guggenheim is a 'unique workplace'. Its curved walls and the strange demands of modern and contemporary art require a materially skilled workforce, sensitive to the symbolic landscape of the art world, to build its exhibitions. The Guggenheim union drive was organised by these workers, who describe themselves as the 'crews that make the Guggenheim the incredible museum that it is' (GuggenheimUnion!, 2019). Across institutions of art presentation, this is a workforce of gallery technicians, audio-visual technicians, construction workers, fabricators, cleaners, and many other art-adjacent workers. These workers occupy the spaces of art institutions, usually at times when they are not publicly accessible, and have usually developed a skill-set particular to the gallery. They labour in the service of art objects that have been authored by an artist, selected by a curator, and will be animated by a public according to the meanings ascribed to them by artists, curators, critics, academics and other discourse producing professions. Many art-adjacent labourers have an ambiguous relationship to the art institutions in which they work— materially their labour is deeply entangled with the public facing gallery space and its objects, while symbolically it is distanced.

The union drive at Guggenheim was part of a struggle against the stagnating wages and job insecurity they faced. In the UK, the arts workforce as a whole is marked by constrained wages compared to other sectors (Arts Council England, 2014), and many artists and art professionals experience job insecurity (ArtsProfessional, 2019). However, unlike workers

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[1] I have used this example in an article for Art Monthly (Harris, 2019).

directly employed, or long-term outsourced, by arts institutions, for those who build exhibitions work is localised in the short periods of time when galleries transform from one exhibition to the next. The intermittent nature of this work requires a freelance worker whose livelihood is sustained by moving between institutions as the demand arises. As such, the general constrained pay and job insecurity across the arts is compounded by the particular concerns of freelance work: prompt payment, the uncertainty of future work, and a lack of an employer pension or sick pay. While the freelance nature of this work is a symptom of intermittent demand, it reflects a distinction in art institutions about what types of labour are germane to the art world in general.

This thesis is a qualitative case study of the socio-material production of an exhibition and its publics. This requires work, and the thesis makes clear that this socio-material production happens in the contexts of paid work in many forms, including during the install and the private view. In this respect, it challenges Armstrong's claim that an art gallery is categorically distinct from the work of its production. Instead, the art gallery is shown as deeply entangled with the socio-material work of constructing its form and its publics. Similarly, Armstrong presented the art gallery as a 'unique' place. This is particularly pertinent to this thesis, which studies an art gallery within a larger arts centre. As such, part of the work of producing this gallery is making clear its distinction from surrounding areas. Armstrong's essentialising claim will be challenged by studying the work that goes into producing a gallery's 'uniqueness' on the ground, in a public.

This will not be achieved by studying the pay or contractual nature of this work, although these may prove indicative. This is to avoid conflating the economic value of work with the social value vested in it by the employing institution. Instead, this thesis will study how this work plays out through the materials and places of the arts centre, and how it is organised in relation to the institution. The thesis therefore speaks to the impetus of Guggenheim's union drive to re-evaluate the place of art-adjacent workers in institutions of art through a fine-grained study of their work.

This pulls into focus those art-adjacent workers who work in the backstage of art galleries. It approaches this concern at the level of the material, rather than the discursive or economic, by focusing on specific art works in time and place and teasing out the interactions that brought them to a public. In this respect, it is an intervention in the sociology of art. The sociology of art has taken various approaches to the study of art objects, often approaching them as meaningful objects, and conducting meaning-focused analyses. This thesis is not

necessarily concerned with art object's meanings, but rather the work of constructing meanings in a gallery. It does not approach the art object as something to which meaning has already been attached, and which appears stabilised as a meaningful art object—it is not an inductive study of an art object with a view to producing a hermeneutic understanding of it in sociological terms. Instead, art objects appear in the process of being formed, in times and places where their meaning is being negotiated and produced. It shares this perspective with a dominant trend in the sociology of art, the 'Production of Culture Perspective' (Peterson & Anand, 2004). This depends on a sociology of art which does not follow from a researcher encountering an art object, but from research being positioned alongside the art object as it is made public. In the art gallery, this takes research to the gallery install, the private view, and the everyday life that flows through the spaces of an art gallery.

This thesis benefits from a resurgence of sociological interest in the production of art and culture. It draws on the path-forming work of Howard Becker, whose *Art Worlds* (Becker, 2008) did much to make clear the diverse forms of labour that contribute to art objects, but which are only tangentially linked to galleries—canvas stretchers, delivery drivers, paint manufacturers etc. Becker refers to this network of workers and material contexts as the 'art world', and this thesis adopts this starting point, rather than following the sedimented systems of value and divisions of labour that operate in and structure institutions of art. However, this 'production' perspective has often operated as the 'other' to meaning focused sociologies of art, like that of the Yale School (Alexander & Smith, 2003) which focuses on the symbolic, discursive and interpretive aspects of art. These two directions in the sociology of art have come to conduct analysis down these two different paths. This thesis is an attempt to travel these two paths together, to identify meaning as intimately entangled with the material work of producing art objects in time and place, and the material work of producing art objects to be sensitive to the customs of meaning making. The install, and the private view that directly follows, offer a fruitful sites for this study, as art objects are undergoing processes of becoming meaningful, becoming material, and becoming public according to the particulars of the time and place in which they are built and encountered.

The gallery install is an under-researched time and place. The install has been studied by Albena Yaneva (Yaneva, 2003a; 2003b), but none of the landmark texts in the sociology of art are located in the install. The benefits of basing research here is in affording close attention to the local processes and work required by each art object in the context of specific galleries. However, it is also a spatiotemporal context marked by a high degree of material processes. The everyday life of an exhibition tends to have a relatively stable material form,

with the exception of processual exhibitions, and the offices of art institutions tend to be filled with administrative or immaterial work. The install, therefore, is a particular moment in the life of a gallery in which objects are in transit, picking up and shedding meanings; the private view and everyday life of the gallery are the contexts in which meaning and value is contested. This makes them valuable spaces to interrogate the practices of producing the 'uniqueness' of art exhibitions and art objects.

As well as the manual work the install, exhibitions depend on the production of certain publics in which they are socially animated. This is the second benefit of studying the install, as it is directly followed by the private view. The private view is a particularly performative moment in the everyday life of a gallery, where the 'brand' and 'narrative' of the institution is reproduced by the social practices of staff who circulate at these events. The animation of an exhibition also depends, however, on the presence of publics prepared to accept the sense-making conventions of the art gallery. This makes the social and affective labour of producing these publics as critical as the work of the techs who build the exhibitions. This work is thread through, and supported or contested, but the objects and spaces of the gallery itself. The production of art publics can therefore be studied as the necessary counterpart to the install, which together produce the conditions for an exhibition to be animated.

Following much work in recent sociologies of art, and the social sciences more broadly, this makes material itself a stake in the research. Traditionally, artists have been located as the authors of art object's form and meaning. However, many skilful art-adjacent workers also shape the art objects and exhibition that comes to meet a public, through negotiating with the materials and spaces of the gallery—this work comes into focus when studying the making of an exhibition. To study the work of art-adjacent workers is therefore to take seriously the material aspect of art works, without approaching this material as simply the scaffold onto which meanings are hung, nor to follow the form of art objects back to the artists. The empirical work of this thesis is invested in the moments of interaction between materials and workers and publics in the art gallery, crucially understanding these interactions as bound up with the conditions of work.

Giving material an elevated status in sociological research has been achieved in a variety of ways. In a dominant approach, drawn from material culture studies, material is studied as objects of consumption. However, this approach depends on sociological attention being applied to objects that are already positioned in certain way towards their consumers—such an approach would not suit the objectives of this thesis. As such, this thesis requires an

approach to objects as they are being formed, and the diverting influences that shape the development of their public-facing form. Anthropologist Tim Ingold has developed an approach to objects that foregrounds the developmental, processual nature of materials, and the contingency of objects. This suits this thesis' investment in the processes and contexts of materially producing art objects and exhibition. Ingold's work makes clear that material is entangled with practice, and the interdependence of social and material factors—this is captured in his term 'meshwork' (Ingold, 2010, p. 11), which describes the generative socio-material processes that shape the world. This thesis adopts this approach, reading it alongside Becker's *Art Worlds* (2008) in order to argue that the 'art world' can be understood as a meshwork in which workers, publics, the material aspects of art objects and their places correspond.

There are two aspects of production under consideration in this thesis. The first is the skilful work of the gallery techs, which is studied as a practice with a tacit and extra-textual character. The second is the way in which interactions between people and objects are entangled with the institutional context of a specific gallery. Both of these can be studied empirically and qualitatively, and taken together can contribute to a fleshed out description of how an art exhibition comes and continues to be. The empirical backbone of this thesis is a yearlong ethnographic study of the institutional context in which an exhibition was made. The analysis of the way in which interactions between people and objects are entangled with the institutional context of a specific gallery is carried out through written analysis using a theoretical framework drawn from the work of Tim Ingold.

The practicing of skilled practice in action, however, requires different, but complimentary, methods. This section of the study is concerned with the actual work of gallery techs, and the affective contexts in which this happens. Drawing on an understanding of tacit knowledge, as well as atmospheres, this calls for a non-textual approach—this is in line with Michael Polanyi's assertion that 'we know more than we can tell' (1966, p. 4). In order to develop a non-textual method, this thesis benefits from both the growing popularity of visual methods in sociology, as well as a growing textural sensitivity in sociological research (de la Fuente, 2019). Film making is argued to be an effective method to both take seriously tacit knowledge and textures, as well as producing research outputs (films) that do not depend on specific linguistic interpretative frameworks. As such, a textural sociological film making practice is advanced, which requires a particular form of engagement—a textural sociological gaze.

Included in this thesis is a film, *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre*. This is a fifteen minute, two channel film which studies the installation of an exhibition and the social and material contexts in which this happens. This film is intended to correspond, but not overlap, with the written analysis of the work and socio-material processes of producing exhibitions. The inclusion of a film as a constitutive part of a sociology thesis is currently unusual, although it is more common in neighbouring disciplines like (Visual) Anthropology and practice-led artistic research.[2] The thesis is also illustrated with images taken by myself—these images serve an illustrative rather than analytic purpose. Predominantly, these are stills drawn from the 13 hours of footage shot in the course of my film making as research practice. Images that are taken by myself are not referenced. There are six images used in the thesis that are not mine—these are numbered and cited.

The gallery under consideration in this thesis is at Bluecoat, Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts. Bluecoat is an arts centre, a category of cultural institution distinct from a galleries and museums, and with its own history. Arts centres arose in the UK in the aftermath of World War One as an early initiative of the nascent Arts Council of Great Britain which intended to develop a network of buildings which served as a place for the arts, as well as broader social practices.[3] Bluecoat embodies this, and everyday life in its garden, studios, shops, cafés [Appendix One], offices, and gallery is a complex of overlapping socio-material practices. The building that houses Bluecoat celebrated its three hundredth anniversary in 2017. Since 2008 it has been surrounded by Liverpool One, a 42 acre shopping district that monopolises Liverpool's city centre. On any given day shoppers make a shortcut of Bluecoat, the homeless find shelter there, Bluecoat staff are busy in the offices or front-of-house, and volunteers keep the gallery in check. Within this complexity, the Bluecoat's gallery—located in a wing of the building, redesigned in 2008 but variously active since 1927—operates as symbolically distinct. This gallery is linked to the systems of knowledge and value that operate

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[2] This is the first thesis submitted to the Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology at the University of Liverpool to include a film. *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre* has an equivalence of two written chapters, or 16,000 words. This has been determined by the primary supervisor of this project, Dr Paul Jones, with the guidance of the University of Liverpool's Graduate School as well as colleagues in sociology departments with a more established use of film. This ensures that the film's equivalence is based on a form of industry standard.

[3] The Arts Council of Great Britain was the forebear of today's Arts Council England, Arts Council of Wales, Scottish Arts Council and Arts Council of Northern Ireland—governmental bodies responsible for administering public funding of the arts. Arts Council England is the body responsible for the administrative context of the current study, and the contemporary arts policy referred to in this thesis is issued by them. Bluecoat is a National Portfolio Organisation of Arts Council England in the category combined arts—this means its core funding comes from public money, although the level of funding it receives has not increased over the last two budgets, amounting to a real terms cut.

in and bind contemporary institutions of arts presentation, and in this it stands apart from everyday life elsewhere in the arts centre.

Specifically, this thesis studies one exhibition at Bluecoat which ran from October 13th 2017 to April 8th 2018. The exhibition, *In the Peaceful Dome,* was curated by the Artistic Director of Bluecoat, Bryan Biggs, who also supervises this PhD project. *In the Peaceful Dome* formed part of Bluecoat's tercentenary celebrations, and reflected on Bluecoat's past as well as speculating on its future. It brought together art works that had previously been displayed at Bluecoat, including work by Jo Stockham and a sculpture by Jacob Epstein that was first exhibited in 1931. Various art works from the exhibition are foregrounded in both the written analysis and film, but they are always presented within the interactional contexts of their production at Bluecoat, rather than as a fait accompli. Its exhibition handout can be found in Appendix Two.

The project was made possible by financial support from the Economic and Social Research Council's CASE Studentship scheme. This scheme supports PhD candidates to work closely with industry partners, in this case Bluecoat. The relationship between the University of Liverpool and Bluecoat had been established by Dr Panayiota Vassilopoulou (Philosophy) and Dr Paul Jones (Sociology), who have both been 'academics in residence' at Bluecoat. This saw them deliver free public lectures at Bluecoat, teach undergraduate courses in its performance space, and host reading groups and symposiums. This collaboration was intended to open up public access to the content of university courses, and to establish close links between the University of Liverpool and the cultural institutions within the city. The collaboration was facilitated by Bryan Biggs, Artistic Director at Bluecoat and occasional curator. The working relationship between Dr Paul Jones, Dr Yiota Vassilopoulou and Bryan Biggs resulted in the development of a PhD project to coincide with the Bluecoat's tercentenary celebrations, and the team was granted an ESRC CASE Studentship to which I successfully applied. This Studentship did not determine the shape of the research, but did facilitate early access to the field site, and empirical research began in the first year of the study. As such, preliminary research was conducted in and amongst the working life of Bluecoat which shaped the direction the project took. This project is therefore deeply enmeshed in Bluecoat, although some analysis may be relevant to similar institutions, and is indebted to the generous access I have been granted to Bluecoat's staff and building.

This thesis sets out to do three main things. The first is to illuminate the contribution of gallery tech's skilled labour to the construction of an exhibition through the development of

a textural and sociological filmmaking practice. The second is a theoretical development of Becker's art world to take account of new sociological approaches to matter, particularly Tim Ingold's, which is applied to a description of different spheres of action in the production of an exhibition. The third is a theoretical/ ethnographic analysis of the ways in which one art institution makes objects and labour public, and the implication of this on the art-adjacent workers who achieve this. These three aspects of the thesis constitute its original contribution, which speak to both the sociology of art and objects, as well as sociological methods. The introductory comments on the union drive at the New York Guggenheim highlight the political conversations in which this research could potentially intervene. The aim is not to argue that galleries are not 'unique' spaces in the fabric of our socio-material life, but rather to study the work of making this 'uniqueness' convincing: the work of making art at Bluecoat. Taking this study to Bluecoat, with its heterogeneous socio-material practices, throws into relief the distinctiveness of the gallery within the context of the arts centre and urban life.

Chapter Plan

Literature Reviews

This thesis begins with two literature reviews which detail the academic context of this study. The first introduces the literature relevant to this sociological exploration of an exhibition at a contemporary art gallery. Rather than offering a historiography of the sociology of art, it instead concentrates on literature pertaining to the production of art and the conventions of exhibitions. This is to avoid invoking art as an abstract or predominantly discursive field, rather than a local and (usually) material thing encountered in specific places by social and sensory actors. This includes canonical sociological works, especially Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* (2008), and its academic context in the Production of Culture Perspective (Peterson & Anand, 2004), as well as more recent works like Dominik Bartmanski and Ian Woodward's study of the making of independent vinyl records (Bartmanski & Woodward, 2020). This chapter also introduces specific ways that the art object has been incorporated into its sociological study, for example the arts-in-action approach, which studies art objects as they intersect with practice (Krzys Acord & DeNora, 2008). This is contextualised as part of the 'new' sociology of art which foregrounds the importance of placing art objects themselves at the centre of their sociological study (de la Fuente, 2010). This chapter also introduces a key metaphor that runs throughout the thesis: Erving Goffman's 'frontstage' and 'backstage' (Goffman, 1990, p. 69).

The second literature review chapter turns to the specific workforce of this backstage: gallery technicians ('techs'), and, to a lesser extent, other workers in the arts centre. It details the general context of work in the arts, as well as the particular conditions of gallery techs (i.e. informal and intermittent). It also discusses forms of labour that will be shown to contribute to social production of the exhibition, including affective labour. These definitions are offered to supply this sociology of art with a critical awareness of the work and working conditions that operate in the production of an art exhibition, and to suggest that in production contexts a sociology of art might move in step with a sociology of work.

Methodology and Methods

The two literature review chapters will make clear the objectives of this thesis to empirically study the socio-material production of an exhibition by attending closely to backstage of an exhibition. This makes it necessary to discuss the theoretical framework within which this study can be conducted. The material focus of this thesis requires a certain approach to objects and their position in sociological research. The methodology chapter begins with a critical literature review which details different approach to objects within the social sciences, and argues against a focus on how objects are consumed or discursively made sensible. It then moves on to introduce the approach to objects which this thesis adopts. This is drawn from Tim Ingold's work which provides a general account of matter, as well as particular concepts which provide useful lines of enquiry. In particular, I will introduce his concepts of 'meshwork' (Ingold, 2010, p. 11) and 'correspondence' (Ingold, 2018). To conclude, the meshwork will be read alongside Becker's definition of the art world and the arts-in-action approach. This is an art world composed of socio-material interactions (or correspondences), which is fluid and in motion and where:

o   All action is interdependent: material with material, material with human, and human with human;

o   This interdependence is an ongoing negotiation shaped by the material qualities and social powers vested in participants and places.

This characterisation of the art world draws on Ingold's theoretical framework, and underpins both the textual and film making aspects of this project.

This leads onto two methods chapters which detail the ethnographic and film making research methods in turn, both of which contribute to an understanding of Bluecoat as a 'meshwork' and are mutually reinforcing but qualitatively different. The first methods chapter begins with an introduction to the specific field site of this thesis: Bluecoat,

Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts. Here, the stories this institution tells of itself will be linked to sociological literature on institutional storytelling, with a focus on the powers that inhere in certain historical accounts of organisations. As such, it offers a history of the institution while highlighting the partiality of this story.

It then goes on to introduce the ethnographically-informed study of Bluecoat which took place in February–September 2017. This involved following the development and administrative planning of an exhibition, *In the Peaceful Dome.* This period of fieldwork provided crucial contextual information on labour relations at Bluecoat and the immaterial processes through which an exhibition is developed. However, it argues that this office based field work was lacking in the art objects that are at the centre of my research interest. Instead, attending off-site visits like a studio visit proved vital in developing the focus on objects, as in this context the exhibition began to emerge through the interactions of artist and curator with materials. This made clear that the research project was best suited to the hands-on work of making exhibitions materially, rather than the administrative contexts of its planning. As such, the install is identified as a critical site for research, but my engagement with it benefits from my observation of Bluecoat as a place of work generally.

The second methods chapter details the methods I took to the install, which continued throughout the private view and the day to day life of the exhibition. This was where I employed a sociological film making practice. However, while shooting the install, private view and public facing galleries I retained an ethnographic attention to the social contexts around the lens, continuing to produce field notes—these feed into the written analysis chapters. This chapter will begin by introducing the main texts that informed my film making method, in particular Les Back and Nirmal Puwar's *Live Methods* (Back & Puwar, 2012); de la Fuente's textural sociology (2019); and Becker's influential 'Photography and Society' (Becker, 1974b). Susan Sontag's seminal 'Against Interpretation' (2009) also provided a useful text to establish the general approach of my film making practice. Following this I introduce four films which illustrate how the film camera has been used texturally in the study of work, before arguing that such films ask for a sociologically textural gaze. These films and texts straddle art practice, sociological methods, visual anthropology and documentary. I then go onto detail the practical aspects of shooting and editing the film, which took place in October 2017–February 2018. This chapter concludes by discussing an exhibition, *Situating Practices* at the University of Huddersfield's Temporary Contemporary gallery, for which I developed the film into a three channel installation. This points towards future directions

that my method could take in order to realise textural sociological research outputs beyond the screen.

Analysis

The analysis section of this thesis is comprised of the film *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre,* as well as two written analysis chapters. While in the order of this thesis the film precedes the written analysis, this order is not prescriptive or linear. Instead, the two forms of analysis are entangled with each other and mutually reinforcing, while making claims on different aspects of the production of *In the Peaceful Dome.* All analysis is informed by the description of the art world as a meshwork as set out in the methodology chapter.

The film features the install of the exhibition, the private view, and members of the public interacting with it. It has a broadly chronological structure, but is split across two channels to avoid a simple linearity. The film focuses on techs at work, as well as the atmospheres of several of Bluecoat's spaces. This is with a view to 'evoke' the field site of the install as a textural and affective environment (Vannini, 2015). The film was shown in Bluecoat's café/Hub space during *In the Peaceful Dome,* and a free public discussion and screening event was held (March 28th 2018, kindly supported by Bluecoat). This was an experiment in bringing research into new publics, and the public discussion and responses to the film contributed to my understanding of it. Many responses to the film at Bluecoat evaluated it as a 'work of art', a primarily aesthetic thing, not least because it appeared in an arts centre and shares an aesthetic with some works of contemporary artists moving image. When I showed the film in academic contexts, however, there was often an appetite for me to provide a commentary or to 'explain' the film in sociological terms. The 'textural sociological gaze' advocated by this thesis sits between these two approaches. While *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre* was designed to function as a stand-alone work of moving image, within the context of this thesis it fulfils a specific, extra-textual role, and an engagement with it will be informed by the importance this thesis places on texture, movement, skill and materials.

The two written analysis chapters study the interactions between people and objects and the ways in which they are entangled with the institutional context of a specific gallery.

The first written analysis chapter is concerned with the install. It focuses on three art objects in the process of being made to appear stable in the exhibition: Jacob Epstein's *Genesis* (1929–1930), and Jo Stockham's *Empire Made* (1989) and *Canon, Model 3* (1989–2017a). This involves a discussion of how the particular material affordances of these art objects interact with workers, such as conservators and techs, as well as the symbolic interpretative work

that rests on this material basis. It then moves on to discuss how the organisation of the tech's work plays out in the social life of the install. The work of the gallery techs is shown to be in an uneasy relation to the institutional world of art. Techs are shown to be socially positioned in the install as non-discursive partners, as well as to organise themselves as a bounded group at a distance to the institution of Bluecoat. This manifests in interpersonal relations at the install, and this chapter details these social practices, relating them to their institutional contexts.

The final written analysis chapter moves away from tech work and the install to instead study the production of publics at the private view and in the everyday life of the exhibition. This chapter therefore introduces how the exhibition was made public, as well as how publics are constituted in the spaces of Bluecoat. It will argue that the creation of publics is necessary in order for exhibitions and arts centres to be socially animated; as such, the affective work of producing publics at the private view is the correlate of the material work of building the exhibition spaces. The construction of these publics—or indeed, the failure to construct a public—will be shown to be informed by the particular socio-economic needs of Bluecoat as an arts institution in the UK: Firstly, to cultivate private giving; Secondly, to have an audience that binds it to the Liverpool arts scene; Finally, to attempt to encourage a broader public to engage with its art object through the sense-making order established in its galleries. This requires affective work, and this work will be shown to be entwined with the objects and spaces of the private view, as well as the work that goes into the writing the institutional narrative into the window of Gallery Three. This fleshes out the analysis of the production of *In the Peaceful Dome* by illuminating how it was socially animated by different publics in different times and places.

The thesis concludes by returning the three key aims of the thesis and detailing how they have been achieved. These aims are:

- To study the contribution of gallery tech's skilled labour to an exhibition, through the development of a textural and sociological filmmaking practice;
- To offer a theoretical development of Becker's art world to take account of Tim Ingold's approach to matter;
- To produce a theoretical/ ethnographical analysis of the ways in which one art institution makes objects and labour public, and the implication of this on the art-adjacent workers who achieve this.

These aims serve as the main pillars of this research project, and are original contributions to the sociological study of art, and its methods.

Chapter One: Art Worlds and Sociology

Introduction

Bourdieu's reflection that 'sociology and art do not make good bedfellows' (Bourdieu, 2002) has been invoked by many sociologists studying art (Zolberg, 1990, p. 1; Tanner, 2003, p. 1; Zolberg, 2013, p. 1; Hennion, 2017, p. 70). This seeming disconnect between the disciplines and their related practices and knowledges has roots in the professionalisation of both disciplines in late nineteenth century Europe (Tanner, 2003, p. 8). In this context, both art (predominantly art historians rather than artists) and sociologists were developing their own particular language and methods for making sense of the world, and of art, in order to stake a place in the nascent university context. Early and foundational art historians, such as Alois Riegel, Heinrich Wölfflin and Erwin Panofsky, therefore attempted to 'elaborate concepts which identified the irreducibly artistic dimensions of works of art' (Tanner, 2003, p. 9), in other words, to loacte the inalienable qualities of objects that secured their status and value as art. Many prevalent art historical methods of analysis, including stylistic analysis (Wolfflin, 1986), iconographical (Panofsky, 1983) or formalist (Greenberg, 1961), depend on just this disciplinary assumption that art object's ontological distinction and value is to be found in these 'irreducibly artistic' elements (whether that be style (Wolfflin, 1986), content or iconography (Panofsky, 1983) or form (Greenberg, 1961)). As such, art is held beyond the reach of a sociological analysis.

Contrary to this, sociological studies of art objects have variously read them through the social contexts of their making (often with a Marxist inflection) (Hadjinicolaou, 1978; Wolff, 1981; Baxandall, 1988; Hauser, 1999), the social profile of their makers (Pollock, 1988; DeNora, 1995; Davis, 2013), or the social context of their consumption (Halle, 1993). In general, these approaches are not invested in the 'irreducibly artistic' qualities of art objects, but rather in their social emplacement and, indeed, the cultivation of their apparent exceptionality in both art discourse and beyond. With these sociological disciplinary assumptions, art object's ontological distinction is to be found not in the art object or any of its qualities but in the social world surrounding its production and consumption. As David Inglis argues, this overwriting of artistic knowledge with sociological knowledge could be seen as an 'imperialist' gesture (Inglis, 2010), as the knowledges of art and its disciplines are sidelined in the pursuit of sociological explication. This does indeed seem to make of art and sociology odd bedfellows, especially uncomfortable were that bed to be Tracey Emin's (Emin, 1998).

As Nick Prior writes, however, the 'productive tension between [sociology and art] is at least revealing of the contours of each' (Prior, 2004, p. 586). With this in mind, this thesis does not attempt a general account of art from a sociological perspective. Instead, it will undertake local, empirical and sociological research into the production of an art exhibition. As such, the twists and turns of artistic and sociological approaches to art objects matter only as much as they play out in this context. In such a context it is the specific construction of different claims about objects, and the work of making such claims convincing, that is of concern. To differentiate art and sociology too keenly from the start is to reproduce the commonplace that they make incompatible claims about art, and to pull attention more towards the construction of disciplined ways of thinking than to the substance of the issue—art objects and their spaces. It is perhaps more productive to proceed by taking a 'sociological imagination' (Mills, 2000) into these places and objects, and trying to evoke how specific art places 'come to be and continue to be' (Becker, 2008, p. 1).

This chapter will introduce the literature relevant to this sociological exploration of an exhibition at a contemporary art gallery. Rather than offering a historiography of the sociology of art, it instead concentrates on literature pertaining to the production of and culture, and the conventions of exhibitions. This is to avoid invoking art as an abstract or predominantly discursive field, rather than a local and (usually) material thing encountered in specific places by social and sensory publics. The exhibition is a key context in which art and its objects interface with a public wider than the professional art world—considering that that the professional art world is marked by social exclusion (Brook, et al., 2018), while the visiting UK public is more broadly composed (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016), the gallery space could be considered a 'contact zone' where meaning is negotiated by social groups with uneven distribution of powers (Pratt, 1991). As art is an increasingly integral part of a post-industrial urban fabric (Molina & Guinard, 2017), and with most publicly funded art and cultural institutions in the UK based in urban places[4], the production of an exhibitions as a unique location within the social life of cities is a vital part of how art comes and continues to be in the contemporary UK context.

This literature review will begin by establishing the context of the study—a gallery of contemporary art and the social and material conventions therein. This section concludes by

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[4] By way of indicative example, 4.6% of Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisations (NPO) are in rural areas, while London receives 41.2% of NPO funding (figures of 2018-2022 funding round) (Arts Council England, 2019). This demonstrates the general urban-centrism of the English arts and cultural sector.

borrowing from Erving Goffman's metaphor of 'frontstage' and 'backstage' (Goffman, 1990, p. 69) and characterising the gallery space as a stage on which exhibitions and their objects are mounted. This also brings into focus the 'backstage' work of producing an exhibition, which is conventionally out of view of a visiting public—except when such work is glimpsed through a window during the installation. Focusing critical attention on this side of the exhibition is informed by other sociological studies into art production, most canonically Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* (2008) and its academic context in the Production of Culture Perspective (Peterson & Anand, 2004), and more recently work like Dominik Bartmanski and Ian Woodward's study of the making of independent vinyl records (2020).

This can be read alongside other work in the sociology of art, especially the arts-in-action approach, which studies art objects as they intersect with practice (Krzys Acord & DeNora, 2008). This approach is indicative of general 'turn' within the sociology of art to bring the object into the centre of analysis (de la Fuente, 2007), following a widespread material 'turn' in the social sciences (Bennett & Joyce, 2013) (for a discussion of the literature on this turn, see Chapter Three). The third and final section of this chapter introduces specific ways that the art object has been incorporated into its sociological study. The first of these is arts-in-action, with a focus on 'affordances' (Gibson, 1986) and the actionable properties of art objects. Another relevant discussion is Howard Becker's 'Principle of the Fundamental Indeterminacy of the Artwork' (Becker, 2006, p. 23) which argues that an art object needs to be understood in time and space. All of this work is towards the spirit of the 'new' sociology of art which, responding to the wealth of literature on the need to integrate materials into social analysis, makes the material fact of art matter in its social analysis (de la Fuente, 2007).

Setting the Stage

The concern of this thesis is the socio-material construction of a particular space of art presentation, the contemporary gallery.[5] This signifies a persisting, architectural site in which objects are interpreted as art objects and meaning is made relative to the histories, canon and conventions of art. The 'contemporary' gallery is characterised by prioritising recent work, predominantly by living artists; these galleries tend to avoid historical survey

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[5] It is well beyond the scope of this thesis to offer a universal definition of art. Of course, the word could refer to things as diverse as a urinal in twentieth century New York to traditional Japanese 'Noh' theatre to, arguably, the earliest traces of human activity, cave paintings. In this thesis it is used in a very narrow sense, which arises from the location of this research in contemporary a UK city (Liverpool). It is limited to mean those things that carry value within the institutionalised art world as it appears in the UK. This teetering-on-tautological definition will be refined throughout the thesis, with a discussion of both temporality and socio-material contexts.

exhibitions, and where they may show canonical and/or modern works, they do so in new contexts which lend them fresh significance. Contemporary galleries fall into two main categories, commercial and public[6], although it is prescient to note that neither type is necessarily removed from corporate or business interests (Rectanus, 2002; Wu, 2003). Commercial galleries, whether international brands like the White Cube, Gagosian and Lisson Gallery or high street UK chains like Castle Fine Art or Whitewall Galleries, are motivated by the sale of art works and the art market, exhibiting work to this end. Nonetheless, such galleries can and do generate trends and are often 'kingmakers' in the field of contemporary art (see the illustrative examples of New York commercial galleries and Abstract Expressionism (Brystryn, 1978)). Public galleries are less directly implicated in the sale of art works, and serve instead as primarily places where the discourse around art is contested and developed, where its meanings are produced, stabilised and communicated, and where its value is established. This is done by a team of staff who populate the gallery with objects or practices and offer an interpretation of such, foregrounding the generation of meaning and cultural value over economic capital (although this relationship is complicated). This type of contemporary gallery serves as the (technically) publicly accessible interface between the material and symbolic art world, and it is this type of gallery that is the concern of this thesis.

In general, individual establishments of contemporary art each have their own identity or brand—the exception being chains such as TATE or MoMA which operate across multiple venues. TATE Modern is seen as an early adopter of the 'museum as brand' tendency, in which marketing is integral to the gallery as a place for art, and this is often linked to its huge success as the UKs most visited tourist attraction (O'Reilly & Phillips, 2011; VisitBritain, 2018). Historically, galleries were places for the general display of art (albeit with a constrained and formulaic conception of 'art') like the Victoria & Albert Museum and the National Gallery (UK), the Louvre (Paris), and Prado (Madrid). Today art organisations are likely to have specialisms, for example The Yorkshire Sculpture Park specialises in sculpture, where other galleries specialise in certain fields, for example FACT Liverpool specialises in the intersection of art and technology. This serves to hollow out an institutional identity, differentiating the gallery within the broader sector of contemporary art within which galleries compete for resources from state funding to audiences.

Increasingly, these brand identities are linked to the building within which the gallery is contained, buildings which materially contribute to the lived experience of the gallery and its

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[6] This distinction, in reality, is blurred as private or public funding is often present across both types of institution.

brand (MacLeod, 2005; MacLeod, 2011; Jones & MacLeod, 2016). This can be seen with 'superstar architect' galleries like Frank Gehry's Guggenheim in Bilbao, Jean Nouvel's Foundation Cartier in Paris, and Zaha Hadid's MAXXI in Rome (Higgins, 2005). As a phenomenon, this is associated with the wider urban economy in which galleries function, especially their role in tourism, city branding and 'cultural consumption' (Stevenson, 2005). A strong priority within contemporary galleries is the generation of this reputation (Rentschler & Hede, 2011), which is solidified through prominence in the art press or other signifiers like identifying up-and-coming artists (Rosenblum, 1978a, pp. 433–4), but is contested, challenged and reimagined through the gallery's publics (O'Reilly, 2005).

All of these are macro forces that shape the contemporary art gallery and its relation to the wider social landscape. Each individual gallery is implicated in the general social and economic positioning of galleries: economically existing through various cocktails of private patronage, corporate sponsorship, engaging in the art market or state funding; and socially positioned as in some way affiliated to the fields of meaning, value and socio-cultural cachet of the arts.

This comes with a culturally disseminated way of being in, and understanding, the gallery space. Contemporary art galleries are sites where objects and their audiences enter into a particular way of sense-making[7] in two interconnected ways—firstly how objects or experiences are made meaningful or legible as art within the vast array of their potential interpretations, and secondly how sensory experience is made of an object. Within the site of the contemporary gallery, objects take on significances that they would not outside of it.[8] In this way the gallery itself functions as a 'truth spot' (Gieryn, 2018) in that it provides the requisite material backdrop for an object to be detached from its everyday meaning and legitimately read according art discourse and history. What is more, within the contemporary gallery space objects are consumed in highly proscribed ways—usually to be looked at but not touched. This visual-centrism is challenged and subverted by many artists and galleries, for example 'relational aesthetics' is the wide-spread practice of making participatory art designed to be engaged with rather than consumed from a distance (Bourriaud, 1998). However, even these works manifest a degree of control (whether that of the artist or curator) over how sensory experience is made of them. It true that almost all socio-material

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[7] 'Sense-making' is a term common in organisational studies (Weick, 1980), but here draws on cultural sociology's interest in how meanings are negotiated and communicated.
[8] It is not just objects that undergo this process—practices, sounds, and any other form of experience can be legitimised by the gallery space. For the purposes of this thesis the focus is on objects.

practices are disciplined in a similar fashion. However, this usually depends on the normal course of consumption—lifting a coffee cup, or pulling on a jumper. In a gallery these material interactions are rerouted through the matrix of contemporary art, and a key function of the gallery is therefore the regulation of sensory experience along a pre-authored and art-relevant path.

In his seminal text *Inside the Gallery Space: The Ideology of the White Cube*, Brian O'Doherty argued that these embodied and symbolic practices are bound up with the aesthetic form of the contemporary gallery (1986). This mat aesthetic form, the white cube, is another way in which individual galleries establish their kinship with one another. White or pale walls, concrete or plain floor, top lit, cold light and minimal decoration—this aesthetic emerged in the early twentieth century and has been linked to the stylistic predilections of modernist movements such as Bauhaus' abstract style (Klonk, 2009). The white cube offers the necessary neutral background onto which new, art-relevant, interpretations of objects or practices can be cast.

O'Doherty outlines how these design conventions came to signify neutrality over the course of the twentieth century, linking this to the rise of postmodernism, the erosion of the parameters of what, where, when or even who art is, and, by his analysis, an increasing elitism in art (1986). As Lefebvre warns, the presentation of a space as neutral obscures the partisan, indeed 'political', production of this neutrality:

> If space has an air of neutrality and indifference with regards to its contents and thus seems to be 'purely' formal, the epitome of rational abstraction, it is precisely because it has already been the focus of past processes whose traces are not always evident on the landscape. Space has been shaped and moulded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideology (Lefebvre, 1976, p. 31)

This will prove central to this thesis, particularly the traces not evidence in spaces (i.e. 'invisible labour'). Contemporary art galleries converge from or conform to the 'neutral' white cube model variously with each new exhibition. However, the general aesthetic and its underlying politics serve as the material convention against which they are calibrated.

One aspect of the politics implied by the white cube is the separation of art from life.[9] This has been argued to happen in two ways. The first is to provide the necessary backdrop for objects (or practices) to be read as art—this is the material reflection of the 'truth spot' (Gieryn, 2018) function of galleries. This is most infamously epitomised by Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) or, later, Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box (Soap Pads)* (1964). Both of these works were path-forming in the development of postmodern art which, as O'Doherty argues, makes the gallery the necessary framing device within which things are transformed into art (O'Doherty, 1986). This chimes with the central claim of the Institutional Theory of Art which argues that art institutions, and the actors that constitute them, are invested with the power to 'confer the status of candidate for [art] appreciation' (Dickie, 1974, p. 26; Danto, 1998). However, the Institutional Theory of Art conceptualised the 'institution' in the broad sense, as all the people, positions and histories of art. O'Doherty makes a more material and aesthetic argument, pulling into focus how these social powers appear in the gallery (also see Bourdieu how this plays out on a subjective level (1993)). This also produces the headline generating occasions when audience members apply an artistic gaze to something like a pair of glasses, mistaking it for an intentional art work (Hunt, 2016).

However, establishing the conditions for this negotiation to take place, and therefore for art to happen, requires work. This is the second, and related aspect of the separation of art from life by the gallery. The material conventions of the gallery space, whether the typically muted and monochrome walls or the uncluttered arrangement of objects, offers no material traces of their physical, manual production. This allows the gallery to appear as a fait accompli, disconnected from the world of work and, it follows, from the bodies that passed through the space behind closed doors. Recent work in the social analysis of art has begun to direct attention to exactly these hidden workers in the art, for example the fabricators who make artist's monumental sculptures on commission (Child, 2018). Below, the Production of Culture Perspective in the sociology of art will be introduced, which did vital work in locating these workers (Becker, 1974a; 2008). Suffice for now to note that the standardised material

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[9] This claim has a long history, with roots in the Kantian 'sublime' and 'disinterest' (Kant, 2007) and most prominently in the idea of the 'genius'. This is often historically linked to the path-forming work of Giorgio Vasari whose 'The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects' (Vasari, 2006) celebrated and documented the individual artists as distinct from the studios in which their work was produced. Tia DeNora's 'Beethoven and the Construction of a Genius: Musical Politics in Vienna, 1792-1803' excellently introduces the contingent and deeply uneven ways that a person and their work is elevated to the point of genius—where it seems they seem no longer sullied by the social world from with they issued (DeNora, 1995).

form of the gallery not only creates the conditions for art to happen, but also erases certain necessary labourers.

Part of the work of denaturalising the white cube has been done by artists themselves, especially those working in the genre 'Institutional Critique' (Alberro & Stimson, 2009). In a famous example, Hans Haacke's *MoMA Poll* (1970) asked visitors to the gallery to vote on their approval of Governor Nelson Rockefeller in light of his tacit support for Nixon's military policies in Vietnam. As Rockefeller was a sitting board member of MoMA, Haacke's work is seen as a direct attack on and exposure of the way that galleries are caught up with and complicit in political contexts through their social and economic networks. Haacke's work was ground-breaking for bringing this critique into the gallery.[10] In a similar vein, in 1973 artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles did a series of performances at Wadsworth Atheneum, including *The Keeping of the Keys* and *The Maintenance of the Art Object* in which she undertook the manual work of upkeep at the museum (Ukeles, 1973; Molesworth, 2003, p. 135). The work was a challenge to the conventional distance between the reified gallery space and the work of its maintenance, again taking aim at the way that the space, and what it erased, had been shaped in a 'political' way (Lefebvre, 1976). Both of these examples expose the artifice of the positioning of a gallery as outside life and reproductive labour by making clear specific intimacies between the gallery and contexts (work, politics) from which it designed to appear distanced.

Institutional Critique has an uneasy position within the history of art. It is both inherently disruptive while having been incorporated into the canon and art institutions—for example, agent provocateur Marcel Broodthaers was recently given a survey show at MoMA (MoMA, 2016). Many artists continue to work in its spirit. In 2016 artist Maria Eichhorn's exhibition *5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours* at Chisenhale gallery (London) saw the gallery closed and all staff given five weeks leave (Chisenhale, 2016). This was intended to challenge the requirement of gallery workers to exchange their labour power for a wage. At the end of the exhibition, however, Chisenhale returned to normal operations. This demonstrates that galleries have an ability to perform, or host, criticisms of themselves without necessarily addressing or adopting the criticisms. This speaks to another function of the gallery space, related to the neutrality of the white cube—not only does can the gallery operate at an apparent remove to the socio-political context in which it operates, the organisation running the gallery is also

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[10] For a contemporary comparison see the work of Liberate Tate (Liberate Tate, 2020) or Platform (Platform London, 2020) who campaign against big oil sponsorship of the arts (Evans, 2015) although their work is not itself always legitimised as art in the way Haacke's is.

to an extent immunised against the socio-political commentary it hosts.[11] This makes clear a key starting point of this thesis: the gallery is not the institution, the gallery is a stage.

It is useful at this point to introduce a metaphor that invigorates this thesis. It is drawn from Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1990), and follows from the characterisation of the gallery as a stage. In Goffman's terms, the gallery as stage is the geographically fixed 'setting' within which things (e.g. object interactions) can be performed as art (1990, p. 13)—to labour a metaphor, this would make an exhibition a play, a temporary construct that depends on its stage for the necessary suspension of disbelief. This means the gallery (and by extension an exhibition) has both a 'frontstage' and a 'backstage': the frontstage being how someone (or something) is expressed (1990, p. 14), and the backstage (1990, p. 69), being the place where, Goffman writes, 'illusions or impressions are openly fabricated' (1990, p. 69).This characterises the gallery as a stage, upon which social actors, together with objects, practice an interaction with art. The transition from back to frontstage can therefore be characterised as one of tempering the 'openness' of the fabrication of the stage. Without pushing this analogy too far, and without importing the gallery wholesale into Goffman's description of a human, social actor, it is possible to adopt the frontstage, stage and back stage typology into a description of the contemporary art gallery.

So far, the description of the contemporary gallery space has largely concerned the frontstage—including audience practices, the material form of the gallery, and a nod towards the things that become protagonists on this stage. However, this too easily follows the logics that underpin the gallery concerning what (or indeed who) is relevant, or even present, in the space. As such, an interesting route into studying, sociologically, the contemporary art gallery is to begin with the backstage. It is here that the 'impressions or illusions' (Goffman, 1990, p. 69) are fabricated that go on to create the conditions for art. This is a departure from other sociologies of art which take as their object of study the activity sounding the production of art works themselves, whether that be social (Wolff, 1981; Baxandall, 1988) or economic and market activity (White & White, 1993). These contributions are valuable for denaturalising the persistent idea that art exists at a remove from social life. However, they concern themselves with a different backstage to the one of concern here—they are

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[11] There is, throughout this thesis, a difference between a gallery, an exhibition and an organisation/ institution. A gallery is the persisting architectural place (usually a series of rooms) that plays host to temporary exhibitions. An organisation/ institution is the brand under which this happens and the permanent (or relatively permanent) workforce that run it.

concerned with the studios and equipment that precede an art object coming into being, while the current concern is with the backstage activity of bringing an art object to a public.

However, if the gallery is not the institution but rather a stage, this leaves open not only the construction of the stage but also the nature of the organisation or institution of which it is a part.[12] This chapter opened with a discussion of the branding of galleries and their work to differentiate themselves in a competitive sector with diminishing resources. It is within the context of these organisations that the gallery-as-stage is set—to push once more on a metaphor, perhaps the organisation is the playwright. The organisation in question is that which administrates and organises the labour of producing the exhibitions or events that happen at certain galleries. In reality, this is often a small group of staff with various responsibilities, from curatorial to fundraising to marketing. These staff undertake the joint endeavour of both producing temporary exhibitions (or events) as well as establishing and maintaining the reputation of the enduring institution. As such, the institution becomes a meta-narrative: larger than, but not necessarily containing, the smaller narratives set up within exhibitions.

Three avenues of research present themselves at this juncture. The first concerns the meta-narrative of the institution within which a gallery of contemporary art is housed, which can be understood as the local and specific contextual backdrop of the gallery. This can include its history, its specialisms and even its building (Chapter Four). The second concerns the gallery itself, specifically its backstage. With this the object of study shifts from the symbolic meanings of art, to the material fact of its staging and backstage production and the construction of its publics (Chapter Seven and Eight). Finally, both of these concerns involves a discussion of work. This work is performed, in the contemporary art gallery, under conditions that could be experienced in any other sector—including freelance and precarious work (Standing, 2014).[13]

These avenues of research draw on specific literatures. While this thesis does not give a general account of art institutions, in Chapter Four introduces the particular gallery and

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[12] From here on the word 'institution' is relatively interchangeable with 'organisation', simply because it is in more common usage in the arts, even though the term institution in sociology more usually refers to a set of practices, rules, roles and histories which are enlivened by people and organisations.

[13] The discussion of art and work, especially theoretically, is usually concentrated on the curator (Krzys Acord & DeNora, 2008; Krzys Acord, 2016) or the artist. There are countless references to demonstrate this point, from myriad artist biographies to sociologies of specific artists, such as Eduard Manet (Bourdieu, 2017), or art scenes like that of Renaissance Italy (Baxandall, 1988).

institution that this thesis studies. The next chapter also introduces the literature on work which is relevant to the study of the various workforces that produce the gallery and its exhibition: invisible, informal and affective. Preceding that, however, it is necessary to identify who, exactly, makes up this workforce. This encompasses literature on the production of culture, which first enjoyed favour in American universities in the 1970s, and is occurring today with works such as Bartmanski and Woodward's study of independent record labels (Bartmanski & Woodward, 2020). Within contemporary work on the production of art and cultural artefacts, however, there is a growing acknowledgement that something has previously been missing: the art work itself (Becker, et al., 2006). Howard Becker has offered an account of what can be interpreted as the 'work itself', arguing that, sociologically, an art work should be understood in time and place (Becker, 2006). It is also necessary to offer an account of how art objects are taken up in practice, and this is found in the 'arts-in-action' approach (Krzys Acord & DeNora, 2008).

The Production of Culture

The most comprehensive focus on the production of art and culture emerged in North American universities in the 1970s and 1980s, and has commonly come to be known as the 'Production of Culture Perspective' (Peterson, 1976). It was consolidated by two edited journals dedicated to articulating and applying the perspective (Peterson, 1976; Coser, 1978); the formation of professional associations such as the American Sociological Associations' 'Culture' section in 1987 (de la Fuente, 2007, p. 423); and the publication of Becker's *Art Worlds*, the most comprehensive expression and application of the approach (Becker, 2008). The perspective concerns how art 'comes to be and continues to be' (Becker, 2008, p.1), taking into account practical factors such as the production, distribution and availability of certain tool tools, training and materials (Lyon, 1974) as well as how 'the symbolic elements of culture are shaped by the systems within which they are created, distributed, evaluated, taught, and preserved' (Peterson & Anand, 2004, p. 311). The perspective therefore takes into account the way that 'society organizes productive economic activity' (Becker, 2008, p. 71), and works within the perspective art work's material and symbolic particularities result from their relationships within to the market of (symbolic) cultural goods, and the general mode of production. It achieved this through empirically researching the art world through its interactions with the wider market of materials and ideas.

Work in the production of culture perspective undertook empirical research into publishing houses (Powell, 1978), radio stations (Peterson, 1978), art galleries, critics, curators (Brystryn, 1978), record labels (Kealy, 1982) and the mass media (Hirsch, 1972, p. 643). Each

of these sites were found to shape the course of art practice while also being shaped by changes therein (Kealy, 1982, p. 109). The perspective locates these institutions as the necessary mediators—or 'gatekeepers' (Brystryn, 1978) —between artist and audience. This gatekeeping role is itself a symptom of how the cultural sector is organised and how it fits within the wider economic structure: in the UK, state arts funding is predominantly distributed through these institutions; they facilitate an artist making a living through sales and commissions or produce the cultural value of their work; and they offer the sites where the material on which the discursive and capital art world relies is made stable and apparent. The way they operate and are organised is therefore materially and symbolically constitutive of the way that art comes and continues to be.

The production of culture perspective therefore concerns the 'work' of art works. By empirically following the art product whilst it is being materially and symbolically formed (for example (Lyon, 1974)), diverse and formative networks of labour are made apparent (which are imbricated within diverse and formative networks of materials). From the canvas stretcher to the paint manufacturer, to the hired hands moving monumental art works into place, to the editor or curator, the perspective, in the context of the current thesis, draws attention to the work that goes into suspending art works in the gallery—labour 'whose traces are not always evident' (Lefebvre, 1976, p. 31).

Becker's *Art Worlds* is the most enduring and influential work in the perspective (2008). In it, he fully develops his earlier ideas that art is best understood as 'collective action' (Becker, 1974a). In so doing he takes aim at the prevalent notion of the individual 'genius' who, he writes, is seen to channel and express 'the essential character of… society' (Becker, 2008, p. xxv). This obscures this genius' relation to and reliance on just the networks of cooperation that the production of culture perspective illuminates. Over the course of the book Becker unpicks many dominant categorisations in the arts that determine how it is organised—from the (institutionalised) difference between art and craft (Becker, 1982 2008, pp. 272–299) to the (social) segregation of 'outsider' (or 'naive') artists (Becker, 2008, pp. 226–271).[14]

Central to Becker's project in *Art Worlds* is the identification of 'support personnel', a term first posited in his earlier paper 'Art as Collective Action' (Becker, 1974a, p. 768). Becker uses

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[14] It is worth noting that Becker's focus on collective action is being turned to political ends in contemporary writing on underground music scenes. Under the term 'interdependence', writers and musicians are foregrounding the communal and interconnected element of both making and experiencing music over its commercialisation. This is turned to directly challenge the isolation and competition inherent in music industry structures, like streaming (Davies, 2019; Dryhurst, 2019).

the designation to refer to those people whose labour is cooperative in, indeed often a necessary condition for, the production of art works. Recognising that the term 'support personnel' is, as he puts it, rather 'unfeeling' and 'dehumanising' (2008, p. 77), Becker adopts it not only as a descriptive term but also as a reflection of the lack of importance conventionally placed on this type of work (and worker) in institutions of art and culture. Often freelance, these workers (and their work) are 'assembled for each project as the need arises' (2009, p. 83), are often hired on the basis of their reputations (or, as will later be argued, social ties) (2008, p. 86), and are often subject to short-term employment (2008, p. 84). They are also usually trained and skilled, able to do elements of the necessary work that other actors (like artist or curator) are unable to perform (2008, p. 78). These elements of the work of support personnel will be introduced in the following chapter, and the term and its implications are of central importance throughout this thesis. However, recognising the unfeeling character of the phrase, this thesis adopts the term 'art-adjacent' to refer to that work which is necessary for art works and exhibition to come and continue to be, but which is not attached to the symbolic category of art.

As well as a useful identification of a specific and relatively overlooked section of the art workforce, placing a focus on art-adjacent workers mounts a challenge to the conventional attribution of authorship within the arts. The conventional location of authorship of art objects with the artist (and, in the contemporary arts, the authorship of exhibitions by a curator (Balzer, 2014)) depends on artistic value arising from the creative (mental and physical) labour of an individual. As has been made clear through the production of culture perspective, such an individualised creative practitioner exists only in the social imaginary. In order for this attribution of authorship to remain viable, labour must be divided, socially distanced from the 'art work' and socio-economically valued to support this. As such, the work of, for example, building an intricate sculpture—the precariously balanced work of Phillip King, by way of example, or the carefully hung installations of Larissa Sansour—within the gallery space is divided from the work of imagining or curating the sculpture. This is to say that the position of art-adjacent workers relative to other workers related to the gallery is not only a result of historical ways of conceiving what, where and when art is, but is also reinforced by the socio-economic conditions of this labour force.

It is left to make explicit what Becker means by the 'world' of an 'art world'. Put simply, a world in Becker's work means 'patterns of collective activity' or the complex 'cooperative networks through which art happens' (Becker, 2008, p. 1). This lends itself to empirical study,

as this is a series of interactions that can be charted and observed by taking into account the broad and cooperative activity through which art is produced. Of the concept, Becker writes:

> The metaphor of the world… contains people, who are in the middle of doing something that requires them to pay attention to each other, to take account consciously of the existence of others and to shape what they do in the light of what others do… They develop their lines of activity gradually, seeing how others respond to what they do and adjusting what they do next in a way that meshes with what others have done (Becker & Pessin, 2006, pp. 277–278)

What is more, as Becker notes (Becker & Pessin, 2006, p. 278), a world is not necessarily spatial, but such activity may nonetheless be angled towards a specific space like an art gallery. Finally, this world is also a place of power and possibilities are constrained by 'what [one] can force or persuade other people to do' (Becker & Pessin, 2006, p. 281)—such a formulation is a useful understanding of social power generally. This is uneven, and those vested with power (both economic and cultural) are able to channel other people's work in certain ways—this determines not only the cultural product, materially and symbolically, but also the socio-economic life of the participants in the art world. This responsive, iterative, action-centred account of the work of producing art, containing 'flesh and blood' people (Becker & Pessin, 2006, p. 277) and, as will later be stressed, material things, will go on to be of central importance to this thesis.

The production of culture perspective is itself a product of the intellectual environment of American sociology in the late twentieth century where macro-level, functionalist and arguably determinist sociologies from the likes of Talcott Parsons were being repudiated by micro-level attention to social life as an open-ended process of 'interaction and negotiation' (Johnson, 2008, p. 76). This was the general approach of 'symbolic interactionism' to which Becker has (reluctantly) been seen as proximate (Segre, 2019). This approach avoids structural determinism; rather than regarding action as the result of structure or institutions, and focusing scholarly attention on these powers, it instead focuses attention on interactions and how they contribute towards, and cumulatively produce, social life. This keeps sociological attention on the micro-level, on the fine-grained details of lives as they are lived.

Where *Art Worlds* symbolises one dominant approach to the sociology of art, its dominance is tempered by approaches fomented outside of this American academic environment. Pierre Bourdieu developed a hugely influential sociological approach to the study of art and culture that drew on more European traditions of thought, such as Marxism, and foregrounded the

impact of classes and their cultures (Bourdieu, 2010), particularly in the development of the 'aesthetic gaze' required by art (Bourdieu, 1993). Where Becker can be said to be studying art at the level of interactions, Bourdieu's work has a concern with structure (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2005; Bottero & Crossley, 2011, p. 100). A central component of his work, which has been widely adopted in the sociology of art, is his concept of 'field' (Bourdieu, 1993b). He defines a field as a 'space of objective relations between positions defined by their rank in the distribution of competing powers or species of capital' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2005, p. 113) in which 'underlying objective relations structure manifest social relationships' (Bottero & Crossley, 2011, p. 100). As such, a field is an arena of social action, characterised by 'forces' and 'struggle' (Bourdieu, 1993b, p. 30), in which actors with varying powers take positions and determine the shape, activity, meanings and value within the field. Bourdieu found art, or cultural production, an illustrative domain in which to apply the idea (Bourdieu, 1993b). By his analysis, therefore, the 'field of art' emerges as a place of conflict and struggle for socio-material power, and can be characterised as the space of 'artistic position-takings' (Bourdieu, 1993b, p. 30).

This has clear parallels with Becker's general project and the concepts of field and world are often put into conversation with one another (Bottero & Crossley, 2011). In popular understandings, Becker is seen as offering a relatively optimistic, descriptive account of the 'cooperative links' (Becker, 2008, p. 35) of making art (Becker & Pessin, 2006), while Bourdieu's conceptual counterpart, the field, is characterised by struggle and dissension. In light of this, Becker mounts the challenge that the concept of field depends on people acting 'in the style of the Homo Economicus of the economists, endowed with the minimal capacities they have to have to behave as the theory suggests' (Becker & Pessin, 2006, p. 277). The retort implicit in Bourdieu's structural approach, however, is that by placing all action within the context of wider social and economic relations, a deeper, more critical, analysis is offered than a description of an observable chain of activities (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2005). This thesis is informed by the metaphor of the world, as analysis stems from the interactions that happen between people (and objects) whose activity is occurring, physically and socially, as part of a wider chain of productive activity. However, this does not necessarily follow the approbatory implications of Becker's words like 'cooperation' (Becker, 2008, p. 1), and these interactions are studied in relation to their institutional context. As such, weight is given to the, too often overlooked, aspect of worlds where the course of activity depends on 'what [actors] can force or persuade other people to do' (Becker & Pessin, 2006, p. 281) (and an extension of 'actors' to both human and non-human things).

This is a power that is manifest at the specific level of interactions, making such interactions an appropriate unit of analysis in which socio-economic influences can be felt. In other words, the study of contexts, if not necessarily conflicts, is centrally important to this use of worlds.[15]

Returning to the discussion of applied sociologies of art production, the production of culture perspective advocated an empirical method in which the researcher followed the material and organisational contexts through which the art object passed. This method remains common in the sociology of art and cultural products.[16] Dominik Bartmanski and Ian Woodward's work exemplifies the contemporary iteration of this tradition, while taking into account new material sensitivities in the social sciences. Their two books, *Vinyl: The Analogue Record in the Digital Age* (2015) and *Labels: Making Independent Music* (2020), cover respectively the production of symbolic 'icons' (2015) and the symbolically and materially mediating role of labels in music production (2020). In *Labels: Making Independent Music* (2020) in particular the authors adopt the general principle of studying art and cultural products by studying their production (also drawing on this lineage within cultural and material studies), while making clear that this process is always imbricated in a place (in this example, Berlin), a social and symbolic world (or, as they put it a 'family-like' group (Bartmanski & Woodward, 2020, p. 5)) and a material context of making (e.g. a studio or nightclub).

Two elements of *Labels: Making Independent Music* are of importance to this thesis. The first is the importance they place on the skilled practice of the actors involved, trained in certain technical skills and fluent in certain social codes and symbolic markets. They draw from Richard Sennett's *The Craftsman* (Sennett, 2008) in their description of skill, or craft, being both everyday as well as highly-attuned, responsive, creative and evolving—as they put it 'craft means the pleasures of work done well and on your own' (Bartmanski & Woodward, 2020, p. 21). This thesis adopts a slightly different definition of skill, drawn from Tim Ingold's extensive work on the phenomenon whereby 'skilled practice involves developmentally embodied responsiveness' (Ingold, 2008), and which focuses on the cooperative practicing of such skill. Regardless of these different references in conceptualisations of skill, it is informative that the topic is critical to their work. In Becker's *Art Worlds*, skill/craft (specifically of support personnel) is bunched together with other resources that make art

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[15] The word 'field' is used occasionally in a less specialist sense, and without necessarily implying Bourdieu.
[16] For example, see Georgia Born's ethnography of the BBC as the site of production of public service broadcasts in the UK, which gets close to specific contexts while assessing broader currents like managerial culture and risk-aversion (Born, 2011).

production possible, and the development of this skill/craft is relegated to support personnel's education (Becker, 2008, p. 78). Bartmanski and Woodward demonstrate that skill/craft is a vital and central factor in the production of art and cultural goods and, and such, that it stands apart from other purely material resources.

Secondly, their focus on labels themselves is instructive. In focusing on labels as diverting social, technical and material interlocutors in the production of independent music, Bartmanski and Woodward demonstrate that intermediary contexts (and their workforces) are fundamental to understanding the broader world within which these products move. To isolate labels from the production and consumption of their products would be to turn them into an 'input-output device', hollowing out a 'black box' in the study of music production (Becker, 2014, p. 61). Instead, to study them is to avoid rendering the record as either an overly constant end result or as an overly isolated creative act. This focus on the deliberative, family-like and lively contexts that bring art objects (in this case records) into the world shares the focus on 'gatekeepers' (Brystryn, 1978) with the production of culture perspective, but does not approach them as one fixed part of a longer process, but rather as threaded through the whole socio-material scene, and its political economy, in which a product is consumed. This is likewise the approach of the current thesis, which studies the local and laborious conditions that position art works before certain publics.

The Work Itself

So far, this chapter has introduced the context of the current study, the exhibition, and begun to introduce the perspective, production. However, the exhibition, as a constellation of art objects, has been expressed as if it were an enduring or definitive thing. This section troubles this by introducing literature arguing that sociologists of art must be more specific, taking into account the temporal and spatial contexts of the objects of their analysis, as well as the material particularities that allow certain practices to occur. This falls into two main sections. The first returns to Becker who, in a more recent contribution to the field that responds to critiques of his earlier work, introduces the 'Principle of the Fundamental Indeterminacy of the Artwork' (Becker, 2006, p. 23). Secondly, the 'arts-in-action' (Krzys Acord & DeNora, 2008) approach to the sociology of art foregrounds the moments when an art object (or other cultural product) is taken up in action. This is formative of the general scope of this thesis which focuses on the production and contingency (or indeterminacy) of the exhibition and its art objects, and the negotiation this requires between skilled bodies and material things.

In 2006 Becker and fellow editors Richard Faulkner and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett published *Art From Start to Finish: Jazz, Painting, Writing and Other Improvisations* (Becker, et al., 2006). The collection responded to a critique of previous trends in the sociology of art: that 'there has always been a blind spot in the sociology of art: any discussion of specific artworks' (Becker, et al., 2006, p. 1). The collection features writings exploring how specific art objects come to be considered 'finished', that is, the conditions that deliver an art work from the process of production to consumption. The art object, it is argued, is made available for consumption in a material form that has been socially located as its 'finished' form—but this is a highly contingent and socially saturated formulation.

The impulse to return specific art works to their social study is symptom of a wider move towards integrating objects into the prevalent ontological basis of social sciences and, in the sociology of art, has come under the rubric the 'new' sociology of art (de la Fuente, 2007). Previous sociologies of art, according to the critique of the 'new', failed to give adequate attention to art works as resolutely material and sensory things. The production of culture perspective describes a process of production, but the art object therefore becomes the passive and mutable material imprint of this process. Other sociologies that foreground the socio-cultural context of their makers, such as Janet Wolff's *The Social Production of Art* (1981), similarly approach an art object's form as a trace of the social position of its maker, and the histories to which they were subject, rather than an active and vital component in the art world. Chapter Three takes up this discussion.

Becker, Faulkner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett devised a way to discuss the 'work itself' that captures something of the negotiations between social actors and art products, and without reducing them to catalogues of social meanings. Placing the focus on 'improvisations' (which has itself been a rich avenue of sociological analysis of art from a material perspective, see (Gibson, 2006)) foregrounds the iterative and emergent character of art, and the exchanges between a work and its maker(s), over its apparent determinacy. This can be likened to Bruno Latour and Albena Yaneva's study of architecture, which argues against an image of a building as static, fixed in Euclidean space, and for an image of a building which evolves through time (Latour & Yaneva, 2008). In other words, products of whatever sort appear static and 'finished' by virtue of how they are perceived by a viewer in a certain social context—an alternative processual ontology is described in Chapter Three. This makes not only the production of an art object in a practical sense the object of study, but also the (social) production of its apparently determinate form.

Becker encapsulates this with his 'Principle of the Fundamental Indeterminacy of the Artwork' (Becker, 2006, p. 23). He argues that a 'work' should be studied in time and place—there are no enduring art works across time, 'only the many occasions on which a work appears or is performed or read of reviewed, each of which can be different from all the others' (Becker, 2006, p. 23). In other words, the material particularities of a work are not of sociological interest for what they illuminate about the work's meaning or maker—this is how traces are read by art historians. Instead, the material particularities are important for how they interact with the practices that realised this art work in a space and time, as well as how they combine in the apparently finished and determine art object that is encountered in the gallery. This shares some similarities with Varvara Kobyshcha's paper 'How Does an Aesthetic Object Happen? Emergence, Disappearance, Multiplicity' (Kobyshcha, 2018). Here, Kobyshcha argues that for something to be realised as art there has to be corroborating activity from the audience; as such, the audience and its socio-material practices are implicated in an art work's 'becoming'. Kobyshcha presents this argument through description of audiences at an outdoor sculpture festival and as such 'indeterminacy' is shown to be hinged on processes of consumption, while this thesis takes a similar approach to production. Becker's and Kobyshcha's caution against confronting art objects as atemporal and alienable from their material context shapes this thesis, which offers analysis only of the art object as it in a specific time and place.

There is a risk of conflating the exhibition to a collection of individual art works. The exhibition, its symbolic perimeters, and its material form is equally as changeable as the art object. Its 'finished' or determinate form is similarly a symptom of the power vested in certain social actors. The gallery is not synonymous with the exhibition which is not synonymous with the art objects; the exhibition is itself a unique socio-material construct. This thesis begins with gallery already formed (i.e. it is not the study of the construction of a set of rooms etc. that come to be called a gallery). However, the exhibition itself, following Becker, is to be understood as a unique passage of time in a specific place, which provides one of the (theoretically limitless) 'occasions on which a work appears or is performed or read of reviewed, each of which can be different from all the others' (Becker, 2006, p. 23) — it is an intermediate level, neither as proliferate as the many contexts in which an art work might appear, nor as enduring as the institution that contains it. As such, Becker's principle of fundamental indeterminacy, and the directions of study it indicates, are equally as relevant to an exhibition as to a work of art.

Finally, it is left to introduce the arts-in-action approach which offers a way of articulating how production actually transpires in the art world and on the gallery floor. The production of the apparently determinate form of art works and exhibitions happens on a social and material level; the arts-in-action approach informs the analysis of the material level as well as a specific way to bring the art work 'back in' to its social analysis without treating it as a text (de la Fuente, 2007).

The 'arts-in-action' trend within the sociological study of art was schematised by Sophie Krzys Acord and Tia DeNora in their review of the field 'Culture and the Arts: From Art Worlds to Arts-in-Action' (2008). The approach is characterised by empirical studies of art (widely construed as cultural products) as it diverts everyday practices. For example, Tia DeNora undertook ethnographic research and in-depth interviews to study how music effects practices in settings such as an aerobics class, shops or karaoke bars in her *Music in Everyday Life* (2000). David Halle used similar methods to study how images are displayed in the home in his *Inside Culture: Art and Class in the American Home* (1993). From landscape to abstract paintings to photography, Halle's objective was to study how these objects are made meaningful and significant in diverse homes, looking closely at the intersection of class in these practices (1993). Both of these studies exemplify the arts-in-action approach which studies the social practices that surround art in particular places, while taking into account the particular and diverting qualities of the art works themselves. Such an approach does not reduce an art work to its social signifiers, but places it in real-life contexts of sense-making.

This requires a description of how art objects physically interact with socio-material (embodied) practices. DeNora's study of music is illustrative here. Commenting on how lively music acts as a motivation in exercise classes, she writes 'disassociation from the repetitive and tiring movement involved in exercise can be achieved by using music that has been 'chunked' or bunched into interrelated movements or musical units' (DeNora, 2000, p. 98). This takes a particular, formal and sensory quality of a cultural product and examines how this 'corresponds' (Ingold, 2018) with practices. In this case, the flow or rhythm of music is seen as motivation to continue exercising.

This analysis is hinged on a concept drawn from ecological psychologist James Gibson (Gibson, 1986): affordances. Affordances are actionable properties between an object (or in DeNora's example, a sound) and a person—the path-forming features of a material interaction that shape its course. Gibson writes, 'the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes… It implies the complementarity of

the animal and the environment' (Gibson, 1986, p. 127). It has subsequently been applied to areas from design (Norman, 1988) to technology (Hutchby, 2001), as well as in 'contemporary approaches attempting to rethink the entanglements of 'the cultural' and 'the social'' (de la Fuente, 2019, p. 553). Fundamentally, affordances are relational (describing the possibilities for action between certain things), social (as only certain affordances are socially mainstreamed), and finally material (depending on material, empirically observable interconnecting parts). As the example of the exercise class shows, affordances also have a temporal character, with certain actionable properties becoming most apparent in certain temporal and spatial settings. This has clear benefits for work within the sociology of art that attempts to account for the object as a uniquely material or otherwise sensory thing, placed in time, without depending on asocial categories.

In general, arts-in-action studies have concerned the consumption of art works. However, the production of art works, or in this case, of exhibitions, equally benefits from the focus on practice and affordances. In this context, the concept of affordances speaks to the material conditions in which art objects are stabilised in an exhibition context. The focus on action highlights the necessary partner in this process—the support personnel/ art-adjacent workers. This approach is similar to that used by Albena Yaneva in her study of the installation of two art works (a chalk drawing (2003a) and a bus (2003b)). However, these papers, associated as their author is with Actor Network Theory, draw close attention to the materials without lending the same attention to the practitioners.

This thesis benefits from the relational approach of arts-in-action which, through the concept of affordances, makes operative the relation between an object and its user. This action is not characterised as consumption in a way that draws attention away from the object and towards the results of consumption. The relationship stands at the centre of analysis, and it will be argued in Chapter Three that the process of this relationship is agential, without agency residing in either the object or its user. However, this chapter has introduced the schema of Becker's *Art Worlds* (2008) which shares with symbolic interactionism a focus on the micro-level, on the fine-grained details of lives as they are lived. Where arts-in-action has tended to study art objects as they meet a public, this thesis instead follows art objects on the journey towards a public. This journey is made up of many different interactions, with different participants, spatial, temporal and social characters; this 'journey' amounts to the socio-material production of (in this case) an exhibition. All of these interactions, however, can be studied through a focus on affordances, and this suggests the approach of this thesis: arts-in-interaction.

Conclusion

This chapter has established the academic context from which this thesis stems. Predominantly, this is the tradition of the sociology of art, particularly the strain that foregrounds production. This will be carried throughout this thesis, in which art will consistently be studied in moments of its making and socio-material contestation. It also introduced literature concerning the contemporary art gallery, specifically in the urban UK context. This is the location of the current study, which looks at the co-production production of art objects and their socio-material emplacement. Finally, the chapter has also introduced how sociologists have located and study the art object itself. This will be taken further in Chapter Three, which expands the discussion from art to objects generally, offering an account of material and objects drawn from Tim Ingold. This chapter has provided key terms that the thesis will depend on, including art world and support personnel (or art-adjacent workers) (Becker, 2008), affordances (Gibson, 1986) and the 'Principle of the Fundamental Indeterminacy of the Artwork' (Becker, 2006, p. 23). It concluded by suggesting the approach of this thesis: arts-in-interaction.

This chapter has established key pillars of this thesis: a focus on production, the entanglement of the gallery space with the art objects and its lived experience, and the necessary art-adjacent work required for art to be encountered by a public within an exhibition. The next chapter moves onto introduce the specific nature of this work. I have stressed that a sociological approach to art will bring into focus workers who remain invisible to some in the frontstage of the gallery. These workers will therefore emerge as the necessary counterpart to art objects and the gallery in the production of the exhibition, and sit at the centre of *Critical Focus Study of an Arts Centre* and Chapter Seven. It is therefore necessary to consider the exact nature of their work in order to understand the social contexts in which art exhibitions come and continue to be.

Chapter Two: Art Work

Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the literature specific to this study of the socio-material production of an exhibition at a gallery of contemporary art, drawing on a lineage of sociological approaches to art and its objects. This remained at a general level, speaking of the generic material conventions of contemporary art galleries (the white cube (O'Doherty, 1986)) and the disciplinary separation of art objects and their meanings from social life, and the production of generic cultural products. It also made clear that the world of art can be useful described in terms of the 'frontstage' and a 'backstage' metaphor drawn from Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1990). This characterises the exhibition as the frontstage, the 'behind the scenes' work as the backstage, and suggests the gallery itself as the stage.

It then went on to identify the approaches to the sociological study of art which will come to bear on this thesis. This was found in Becker's *Art Worlds* (2008), particular its focus on support personnel (or art-adjacent labourers) and moments of interaction. Drawing from the arts-in-action approach (Krzys Acord & DeNora, 2008), it introduced affordances (Gibson, 1986) as a useful way to expand an understanding of interactions to include how materials are taken up in practice. This responds to a general move towards thoroughly intergrating art objects in their sociological study. This will be further developed in Chapter Three, which will tease out the methodological implications of this approach. The approach of this thesis draws from Becker in its investment in production of art and the interactions that occur along the way, while offering a specific account of how these interactions entangle the social with the material.

The general orientation of this thesis towards production and towards the art gallery brings into focus a key setting for the empirical research: the gallery install. The install is the time and place where an exhibition is given material form, usually by displacing a previous exhibition, and where the process of producing of an exhibition is at its most material. The install produces the conditions for meanings to be made in the gallery, and the material face of the exhibition that is turned towards a public. As such, the day to day life of an exhibition stems from the activity of the install, and the install emerges as a critical spatiotemporal context in not only the production of an exhibition, but also the symbolic economy that it supports. It provides the context within which most of the material interactions, negotiations and stabilisations in the art gallery occur; the backstage in which 'illusions or impressions are

openly fabricated' (Goffman, 1990, p. 69). As was alluded to in the previous chapter, the convention in art galleries is to locate this installation behind closed doors, hidden to certain publics. This leaves the gallery space and objects within it free from overt links to the work of securing them in time and place, furnishing the space with an 'air of neutrality and indifference with regards to its contents' (Lefebvre, 1976, p. 31).

The install therefore holds a critical place in this research as the context from which all other action on the ground in the art gallery flows. The install is also an unusual time in the life of an art gallery, where a specific workforce enters the gallery and enacts the plans laid out by curatorial and other office staff. This is a workforce of gallery technicians ('techs') who occupy the backstage of the gallery, and who negotiate with art objects while endeavouring to leave no overt trace of their work and exert no undue influence on how they will be appreciated in the gallery. Fundamentally, this is highly skilled work, and the following chapter will introduce a theoretical approach to this skill and a sociological method for studying it.

While the techs do vital work in making the exhibition what it is, additional processes need to occur for the exhibition to be animated by a public. This involves the interpersonal work of establishing relationships between an art gallery and its audience, as well as the work of establishing the discourses that render the exhibition and art objects meaningful. This, in general, is understood as the work of the curator and of artists. However, in the day to day running of an art gallery, these processes are realised through the work of low and mid-level office staff who are tasked with circulating public facing events like the private view. The creation of publics also depends on the building of the gallery itself, and how this positions certain people in relation to it.

This thesis is therefore invested in different types of interaction: the skilful interactions of the techs with material; the interpersonal interactions of staff with a public; and the interactions of all of these with the material of the gallery. All of these interactions share an underlying characteristic: They happen in the context of work. In the previous chapter, it was subtly suggested that the approach of this thesis shares the general temperament of symbolic interactionism, broadly conceived. This could usher in a tendency to begin study with interactions, rather than with their structural emplacement. However, the specific nature of employment in the art gallery has effects on how this work is realised on the ground, and how workers navigate their place of work both materially and socially. As such, it is necessary to introduce the employment context within which these interactions happen. This suggests that when a sociology of art is based in an art gallery or any institution in which

art is organised, it should be threaded through a sociology of work—while suggesting that the structure of work is not determining, but is one contributing dynamic in the production of art. These structures of work, however, are realised through the specific context of each gallery, with its own history, division of labour, and local context. Chapter Four will introduce the gallery under consideration in this thesis, and the manifestion of the general forms of work introduced in this chapter are couched in this institutional context.

This short chapter introduces the specific dynamic of art adjacent work in contemporary UK art galleries, specifically the work of building an exhibition and producing its publics. This is a slight side-step from the general orientation of this thesis towards material. However, the way that work is organised in the production of an exhibition contributes to how an exhibition comes and continue to be. This will lend detail to the analysis chapters of Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre, and Chapters Seven and Eight, which study the navigation of both social (i.e. employment, interpersonal, contractual, and institutional) and material (i.e. objects, architecture) factors that play out in the course of producing an exhibition. This chapter can therefore be seen as a brief pause in the focus on interactions in order to take a larger view of the contexts in which they take place.

There is no body of literature on gallery tech work to draw on. Instead, this chapter focuses on certain characteristics of tech work: i) that it is invisible to certain publics in certain times and places and ii) that it is intermittent. Producing an exhibitions publics involves affective work coupled with particular spatial and material contexts. This chapter will introduce invisible, intermittent and affective work, relating these definitions to the UK art sector. It thereby provides a necessary counterpart to the description of interactions of art-adjacent workers on the ground of the art gallery by recognising that these interactions are labour, and that the enacting, division and organisation of labour has consequences for the worker and the work. This thesis is not an analysis of work per se; it is rather a sociology of art based in places of work.

Invisible Labour in the Art Gallery

Work is an activity that is performed in exchange for a wage. This thesis borrows from a Marxist description of work in which to go to work is to sell labour power (the potential for labour or action) over a certain time (Marx, 2010, p. 83; 114). Many different types of labour happen in an art gallery and are required for an art gallery to happen. These different types of labour often have different economic conditions and different contractual relationships to the place where they happen, ranging from in-house and salaried to intermittent and own-account. This thesis is in part concerned with gallery techs as a (skilful) subsection of the arts workforce who are intermittently and usually casually employed to build the exhibitions hosted in gallery spaces.[17] The work of gallery techs has not been subject to extensive sociological study, although Albena Yaneva has studied their work site, the gallery installation ('install'), in two papers which focused on the materials at play at specific installs (Yaneva, 2003a; 2003b).

Although gallery tech work has not been widely studied within sociology, a discussion of it benefits from studies of similar work. Specifically, there are many studies into work that contributes to a product or process, but which is invisible in the public facing form that this product or process takes. Regarding technical or support work in the gallery, a fruitful comparison can be drawn with the production of scientific knowledge in the laboratory. In an influential paper 'The Invisible Technician' (Shapin, 1989), Steven Shapin details the instrumental role that laboratory technicians have played in the history of science, contrasting this with the relative lack of study into their work (Shapin, 1989). It has been said of these workers that they have 'not so much been written out, but never written into a history of science' (Morus, 2016). Shapin makes clear the instrumental role that laboratory technicians have played in the development of scientific knowledge, while teasing out the reasons contributing to the 'invisibility' of laboratory technical work. This includes, for example, the convention of locating advances in scientific knowledge with moments of individual genius, which goes some way towards obscuring the formative role played by support personnel. It is through conventions and practices such as this—specifically, the location of authorship with an individual (whether scientist or artist)—that the 'invisibility' of many forms of labour is produced.

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[17] The skilful nature of their work is evoked in *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre,* while Chapter Seven studies the social practices bound up with tech work.

Much of the sociological literature on invisible work is indebted to feminist work in the late twentieth century that revaluated the status of housework. Arlene Daniels' *Invisible Work* (1987) was influential in this field. Daniels argued that the mainstream understanding of 'work' as waged labour of value to 'society' obscures and devalues 'the work involved in the social construction of everyday life and in the maintenance and development of institutions' (p. 403). This work, she argued, 'disappears from view' under the mainstream understanding of work as paid (p. 403). Daniel's advocates an expanded concept of work to encapsulate 'all the work in the private world of the home, the volunteer work in the public sphere, and the emotion work in both public and private worlds' (p. 412). Daniel's work challenged an understanding of work and its value through a gendered lens, and was influential in establishing approaches to the social studies of work which do not follow, or reproduce, value systems embedded in structures of employment. This has implications for how we study institutions, and, as Cato Wadel writes, we should not approach institutions as 'end results [but also consider] the 'work' that has gone into their achievement' (Wadel, 1979, p. 371).

The field of invisible labour studies has benefited from the publication of Marion Crain, Winifred Poster and Miriam Cherry's *Invisible Labor: Hidden Work in the Contemporary World* (2016), which schematised the subject. The edited collection brings together essays looking at the visibility or otherwise of certain forms of work in contemporary capitalism. This includes labourers in the agricultural (Stewart, 2016) and retail sectors (Otis & Zhao, 2016), and how the visibility of work can be understood at the intersection of race (Stewart, 2016) or disability (Pendo, 2016). The collection makes clear that the visibility of certain labours in certain publics is related to the wider organisation of work and value under capitalism. However, the visibility or otherwise of work and workers always happens through particular places—whether an art gallery or a shop (Otis & Zhao, 2016)—following certain sedimented notions of value, as well as certain material conventions local to that place of work.

Specifically within the context of paid work, research into invisible labour has concerned retail and fast-food (Newman, 2000) and seasonal agricultural work (Ehrenreich, 2010). The effect of computer systems on the organisation of work has also encouraged studies into invisibility, including how some labour is obscured by the design of digital interfaces (Star & Strauss, 1999; Nardi & Engeström, 1999). These studies of invisible labour are not necessarily concerned with making visible previously invisible work, even though to do so may 'dignify the labor [sic] and engender respect for those who do it' (Daniels, 1987, p. 403). Rather, the concern is with studying the conditions that make some work invisible, and what power is served in the process. As such, invisibility is not introduced as an evaluative category, but

rather as an axis along which to consider how work is implicated in the production of the place in which it happens.

To take this to the example of the gallery, the question emerges as to what power is served by tech works being invisible to certain publics. In one respect, similar to Shapin's analysis of the production of scientific knowledge and the erasure of laboratory technicians, the invisibility of gallery techs creates the space for the visibility of the conventional authors of the gallery space—artists and curators. In Crain, Poster and Cherry's terms these workers, and their work, is 'hypervisible' (2016, p. 10) in the gallery, credited and often giving talks and tours in exhibitions.[18] This comes, however, with the increasing demand on artists to market themselves as a brand and to make themselves and their lives the legitimate concern of an arts audience. This is linked to the celebrity culture that grew around the Young British Artists and the 1990s UK arts scene (Stallabrass, 2001, p. 1). Likewise, the rise of the 'super-curator' (The Art Newspaper, 2018) ties the work of curation to the cultivation of an individual public persona. The contrast of the visibility in the gallery space of tech work as opposed to artist or curatorial work is illustrative of the ways in which the invisibility of labour is produced in the support of sedimented value systems.

Crain, Poster and Cherry also make the important step of decoupling the value vested in work from the level of pay it receives—in other words it does not follow that the invisibility of labour is connected to 'lowly pay', or vice versa (2016, p. 10). This is important to the current study as tech work may well be better remunerated than artist or volunteer labour within a gallery. Crain, Poster and Cherry argue instead that the valuation of work is also manifested in 'whether the task is recognized as worthy of inclusion in the category of 'work'—and regulated as such' (Crain, et al., 2016, p. 8). Work can be rendered invisible not only by being 'hidden from view' (Crain, et al., 2016, p. 1), but also by being socially and administratively distanced from the place in which it happens. This happens in a variety of ways. Labour necessary for a process to happen but considered 'outside' the main operation of the place of work may be outsourced or freelanced, as opposed to being in house and salaried. The next section will introduce these categories, which characterise tech work.

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[18] However, a recent discussion on professional art Twitter concerned the extent to which curators were credited in press reviews, with many expressing frustration at their (perceived) lack of credit. The art editor of The Guardian Tweeted 'Dear curators, in the same way that I don't get a byline when I commission and edit a piece, chances are you won't get mentioned in the Guardian when we cover one of your shows. That's just how it is' (Needham, 2019) generating debate about whether the work of an editor and curator is comparable, and the appropriate degree of credit for both forms of labour.

Invisible labour, in this thesis, is therefore understood as: work that is 'hidden from view—sometimes in the public imagination, sometimes from consumers' (Crain, et al., 2016, p. 1); which is socially and administratively distanced from the place where the work happens; and which is, therefore, endemic to the backstage of places of work. This makes clear that the invisbility or visibility of labour is not essential, but is rather constructed according to certain sedimented ways of organising labour in specific workplaces—as Star and Strauss argue in their paper on computer-supported cooperative work, 'no work is inherently either visible or invisible' (Star & Strauss, 1999, p. 1). In the case of the gallery, this is intimately bound up with the material conventions of the gallery space with their 'air of neutrality' (Lefebvre, 1976, p. 31). This presents one direction of analysis—the production of tech work's invisibility at the level of material in the gallery, and how this moves in step with the social and administrative distancing of tech work across the arts as an industry.
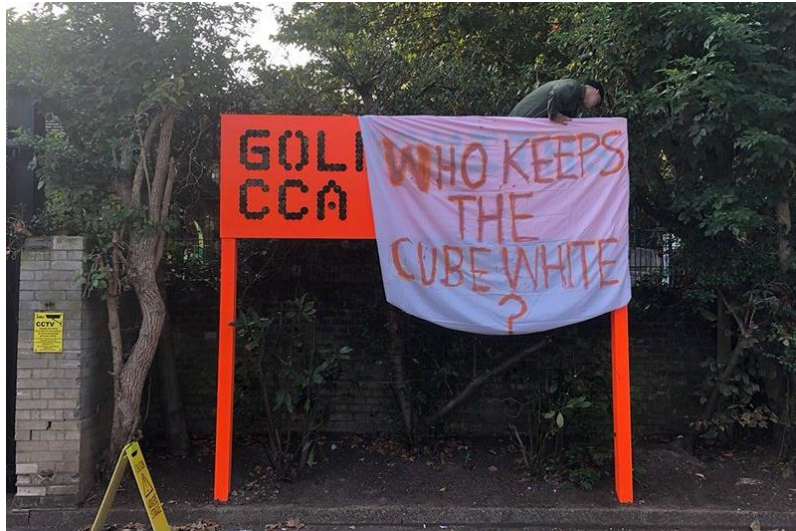
Figure One (The Art Newspaper, 2018b)

Informal Labour in the Art Gallery

In 2018 protestors picketed the opening of the new Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art [Figure One] (The Art Newspaper, 2018b). The action was organised by protest group 'Justice for Cleaners at Goldsmiths' who were organising against the outsourcing of cleaners and the worsening of their contracts across the university (Justice for Cleaners at Goldsmiths, 2019). While the protest was not only aimed at the gallery, the protest spoke to the general tendency to outsource cleaners in art galleries and the conditions this produces for such workers (European Cleaning Journal, 2013; KGB Cleaning, 2017). The protest was organised under the banner 'Who keeps the cube white?', and this thesis is motivated by a similar question: who performs the necessary labour of reproducing the art gallery, and how is their work implicated in the material contexts of the gallery? This section will give detail the types of employment conditions experienced by one such group who keep the cube white: gallery techs.

Gallery techs work across several galleries, establishing a reputation within this context, often travel to other cities for work and may use tech work to support their own artistic practice. They tend to report to, and be organised and recruited by, a gallery's in house technical manager with whom they have a pre-existing relationship. This depends on a professional network and contacts, who often develop friendships forged in the busy site of a gallery install which often requires close cooperation. Techs tend to have their own hierarchies of institutions, with some being preferable to others. This does not only depend on pay (level and speed), but also on the support they receive from the institution, the nature of the gallery space itself, and whether they like or dislike the shows they are installing. Securing tech work therefore often depends on social ties (Becker, 2008, p. 86; Gill & Pratt, 2008). This blurs the separation of work and private life, as breadth of a workers life is opened up to the demands of work, and the cultivation of professional and private ties can happen in the same breath (Tronti, 1966; Negri, 1989).

Typically, cities the size of Liverpool have a relatively small pool of gallery techs, and institutions tend to organise installs around one another to avoid a run on the workforce. As such, the tech work available in each institution is intermittent. What is more, the type of work required by each exhibition and each gallery can be diverse, requiring these workers to be highly dexterous in their skill as well as literate in the demands of art. For these reasons, techs tend to develop working relationships with many galleries, without depending on any individual gallery for sufficient employment. The most recurrent feature of a tech's working

life is therefore the relationships with other techs, which is mobile across different institutions.

As well as being intermittent, gallery tech work is usually informal. Its intermittency is owed to the changing needs of galleries and the irregularity of gallery installs. Each exhibition will require a different number of workers, with specific skill sets. Intermittent work is bound up with 'precarity' (Standing, 2014). Those in precarious work are unable to make secure long-term plans, bearing 'unstable, insecure forms of living' (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 3). This produces a subjectivity constrained by limited horizons (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 3).

Informal work has the following definition:

> Remunerative work (i.e. both self-employment and wage employment), that is not registered, regulated or protected by existing legal or regulatory frameworks, as well as non-remunerative work undertaken in an income-producing enterprise. Informal workers do not have secure employment contracts, worker's benefits, social protection or worker's representation (International Labour Organisation, 2004).

This type of work has largely been studied for its propensity towards marginality, insecurity, low income and a lack of worker's rights (Smith, 2013, p. 75). By 2018 61% of the global workforce were in 'informal' conditions (International Labour Organisation, 2019, pp. 12–13); for this reason it is often called the 'new normal' (Kawooya, 2013; Overseas Development Institute, 2018; Joassart, 2019).

Informal work can be own-account, freelance, self-employed. Informal workers organise their own work life; provide a service for a self-set fee; are responsible for their own National Insurance contributions and not paid through PAYE (in the UK); and depend on contacts and commissions (potentially garnered through social connections or self-promotional work). The pay and working conditions of self-employed workers are difficult to quantify and often statistics over-represent self-employed work that is stable (Athow, 2017). 'Own-account' workers 'tend to lack legal recognition' which can complicate access to 'financial resources, markets or property' (International Labour Organisation, 2019, p. 12); these are some of the economic and social disadvantages that go hand in hand with informality.

Informality in the arts is commonplace. Having an artistic practice is rarely financially sustaining—only 3% of visual artists earn a living from their art that is comfortably liveable (TBR, 2018, p. 2)—driving 69% of visual artists to have additional jobs. Of those, 66% take on extra work that is art related, which includes the non-employee work appended to art

institutions such as tech work (TBR, 2018, p. 1; 82). There is a preference for supporting jobs to be informal, as the flexibility (e.g. only short term commitments) can fit around studio time or exhibitions but there is insufficient research into the destination jobs of artists supplementing their income (for a Canadian context, see (Robertson, 2006, p. 270) anecdotally in the UK, see (Barnett, 2010)). Suffice here to note that the economic reality of the art world produces conditions that incentivise informality—both on behalf of artists, and of institutions hiring highly skilled and art literate workers to support their day to day functioning, without bearing the commitment of secure contracts.

However, while there are plenty of studies into the informal working lives of artists, and the arts as a place of work (Museums Association, 2017; ArtsProfessional, 2019), there is no data on self-employed gallery tech pay and conditions. When technical work is included in statistics it refers to in-house, salaried staff (Museums Association, 2017, p. 16) and research and advocacy for self-employment or day-rates is concerned with artists (Artists Network, 2016a). This brackets out informal tech work from commentary on the arts as a place of work. As noted above, many studies of informal labour under-represent the most precarious corners of the workforce as their lack of stability makes them hard to pin down (Athow, 2017). This is true of support personnel in the arts, who only appear in studies when in-house, entrenching the symbolic distance between tech work and art work proper.

This section has given specific details about gallery tech work, characterising it as informal and intermittent. This has effects on how the workers organise themselves, as well as how they are positioned by the institutions that employ them. This provides contextual information for *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre,* which features techs at work, as well as Chapter Seven which studies the socio-material practices of the install. Other workers encountered in this thesis, including mid to low-level office, salaried staff are equally subject to the general conditions of working in the arts in a UK context, including a propensity towards short and insecure contracts, and constrained wages. All of these workers co-produce exhibitions, and understanding the conditions of their work is therefore necessary in a sociology of art that takes seriously both art objects, and the work they compel.

Affective Labour in the Art Gallery

So far, this chapter has introduced gallery techs, characterising and detailing their work as invisible, informal and intermittent. However, this thesis is also concerned with other workers necessary to realise the exhibition and animate it in a public space, and whose work places them in interpersonal relationships with these publics. This will be observed through the private view, which immediately follows the install of an exhibition. Work such as this is often carried out by low or mid-level workers with longer-term, contractual positions in the art gallery, and whose roles might come under the titles 'Engagement Manager', 'Programme Assistant' or 'Gallery Assistant'. This section introduces this work; however, unlike the above section, it does not detail its contractual nature, but the nature of the work itself.[19]

The interpersonal work of producing an exhibition's publics requires a qualitatively different type of work to that of the gallery techs. Where the nature of gallery tech work is that it is materially-focused, tacit and skilful, the work of producing publics requires what can be called the production or manipulation of affects (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 108), where affects are understood as 'how we are touched by what we are near' (Ahmed, 2010, p. 30). Antoni Negri and Michael Hardt offer the examples of fast food workers or flight attendants, whose work is not only to perform a service, but do so while instilling a sense of intimacy or affinity with the recipient (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 108). In conveying, or externalising, a certain atmosphere or social relations, these workers place their interlocutors into certain relationships with the place of work, while simultaneously performing a service.

In the contemporary UK arts sector the prevalence of this type of work is bound up with an ideological landscape in which the main public funding body—Arts Council England—is advocating for more private patronage in the funding portfolios of art institution. This is incentivised through specific initiated, like Catalyst Evolve, that match-fund private gifts with public money (Arts Council England, 2016). This creates a need for art institutions to generative private income in the face of shrinking state funding. Private income is generated by arts institutions in a variety of ways—including developing businesses with galleries like cafés or venue hires. However, a key strategy is through soliciting philanthropic giving. This requires particular work. Contemporary philanthropic giving has been shown to be motivated by the intimacy with the recipient that the donor receives in exchange for their gift—in the arts the donor benefits from the cultural and social prestige of being closely associated with the arts (Harvie, 2013, p. 185; Swanson & Davis, 2006). This 'intimacy' is an affective

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[19] The nature of tech work itself (i.e. materially skilful) is introduced in Chapter Three.

relationship between the donor and the institution, and this requires affective, interpersonal labour.

Affective labour a form of immaterial labour, a form of work increasingly prevalent in many post-industrial economies (Lazzarato, 1996). This is the 'the labor [sic] that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity' (Lazzarato, 1996), including the fashions, tastes and public opinions in which the commodity moves. The branding work that goes on in art galleries is typical of this work, as what is being produced is itself immaterial—the codes and standards that symbolically produce the art gallery and its reception. At its most basic, immaterial labour does not refer to the work of producing material commodities in the way that material, or manual, labour typically does. This work can potentially be uncoupled from a specific place and time in a way that previous, factory-based, work could not. This is the type of work takes place in the curation of exhibitions, and is the counterpart of the material work of building exhibitions in the time and space of a gallery. Affective labour in the art gallery can therefore be seen as the mediation, or social animation, between the material work of the gallery techs and the immaterial work of the curator.

However, affective and immaterial labour, regardless of how detached from material labour they may seem, are nonetheless bound up with the spatial and material contexts in which they happen. This thesis stresses the interdependence and co-production of the social and the material, and for this reason resists completely embracing 'affective' or 'immaterial' labour as a categories which can be studied at a remove from socio-spatial contexts. Instead, 'affective' and 'immaterial' labour offer useful terms to describe the qualitatively different kinds of work performed by those workers who contribute to the production of an exhibition, but not through practicing skill in the install. In particular, this is the interpersonal work of producing an exhibition's publics at the private view. This work has an affective character, but will be studied as it interests with specific objects and spaces (Chapter Eight).

Conclusion

This chapter has narrowed the focus of the previous literature review to introduce the forms of labour relevant to the production of an art exhibition. Key terms were introduced including invisible labour which was defined as work that is 'hidden from view—sometimes in the public imagination, sometimes from consumers' (Crain, et al., 2016, p. 1) and which is socially and administratively distanced from the place where the work happens. This was associated to the work of the gallery techs. It then introduced the contractual nature of this work, which is intermittent and informal. This is labour which is without 'secure employment contracts, worker's benefits, social protection or worker's representation' (International Labour Organisation, 2004), and which is only occasionally required in a place of work. This was linked to a blurring of social and professional ties, as the day to day work, as well as future employment opportunities, is more closely bound to the professional network of techs, rather than any individual employing institution.

It then moved onto introduce affective labour, drawing this definition from Italian post-Marxist theory. Affective labour was defined as work which performs a service, while instilling a sense of intimacy or affinity with the recipient. This was shown to be entangled, in the contemporary UK art gallery context, with an ideological shift towards private giving which entails the cultivation of philanthropic relationships. This was linked to the work of those who interact with a galleries publics, and was argued to be entangled with the material and spatial settings in which this work happens.

This chapter provided detail concerning the nature of the work that goes into the socio-material production of an art gallery. This was to ensure that the focus of this thesis on materials does not obscure the working conditions in which material interactions in the art gallery happen. A sociology of art production based in a gallery or any employing organisation should borrow from a sociology of work in order to ensure that analysis does not fail to recognise the socio-economic powers that have positioned people in certain places in the gallery, doing certain things. The definitions in this short chapter have therefore provided contextualising information on art-adjacent labour, and the thesis can now move on to studying this labour in action.

The next chapter introduces the theoretical framework that underpins the approach this thesis takes to studying in the art gallery. It presents an approach to materials, drawn from Tim Ingold, which is amenable to an understanding of the skilled work of gallery techs as depending on tacit knowledge. This leads on to an extra-textual study of the practicing of this

skill, and the atmospheres in which it happens. The definitions in this chapter feed into the written analysis of Chapter Seven and Eight which tease out how the interactions that occur in the production of an exhibition and its publics are implicated in the local context of a specific gallery, with specific divisions of labour and economic needs. Both of these aspects of analysis stem from moments of interaction between a person and a material—this chapter has made clear that these are often people not only in an art gallery, but at work.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Foundations

Introduction

The previous chapters have introduced several literatures pertaining to this thesis. Firstly, I introduced the literature related to the site of the gallery, characterising it as the stage setting on which art objects are positioned towards an audience. I then introduced approaches to studying the production of art, before moving on to consider the specific working conditions of those who do this productive labour.

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework that underpins the research methods taken to the field site. I adopted two research methods for different aspects of the research. This reflects the dual concern of this thesis with both the materials and skill of building the art exhibition, as well as the wider social reproductive practices through which an exhibition is developed and made public. Both of these aspects of analysis stem from empirical observation of socio-material interactions, but take them down different lines of enquiry. They also lend themselves to different forms of observation and different registers of analysis, and these are set out in the following two chapters. Firstly, I undertook ethnographically informed field work over the course of the development and execution of the exhibition. This provided contextual information about the institution of Bluecoat and its organisation—this is detailed in Chapter Four. Secondly, I develop a sociological filmmaking practice which I practiced during the two weeks of the exhibition installation. This is detailed in Chapter Five, which introduces specifically what film can offer a sociological investigation, as well as the work of moving image artists who practice similar styles of filmmaking. During the shooting of the film I continued my ethnographic observations, which feed into the written analysis in Chapters Seven and Eight, while the film, *Critical Focus: Study of An Arts Centre* comprises Chapter Six.

Both research outputs can function independently of one another, but taken together they flesh out a description of the art world that surrounds Bluecoat as it is described in this chapter, sharing the same theoretical foundation while realising it through different media. These two ways of seeing and representing the production of the exhibition, through participant observation and filmmaking, depend on a certain approach to objects and how they are implicated in social life. The approach I take stresses the interdependence of the social and material, conducting analysis along the hyphen of the 'socio-material.'

The chapter begins with an overview of recent approaches to matter within the social sciences in a section that includes how this has been applied to art. I will argue that a

materially sensitive account of art should not study objects as if they were entirely a cultural text. The focus of this thesis on production ensures against this, as the time-space of the install is primarily concerned with stabilising art works materially—their cultural emplacement is secured by different forms of labour. The approach to objects I take is drawn from the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold. Ingold's work provides a general account of matter, as well as particular concepts which provide me with useful lines of enquiry. In particular, I will introduce his concepts of 'meshwork' (Ingold, 2010, p. 11) and 'correspondence' (Ingold, 2018). To conclude, the meshwork will be read alongside Becker's definition of the art world and the arts-in-action approach. This is an art world composed of socio-material interactions (or correspondences), under certain pressures and conditions, and Bluecoat is described in this image.

Objects

A renewed interest in objects and materiality has characterised much 21st century social theory (Miller, 2005; Dant, 2005; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012; Lange-Berndt, 2015; Fox & Alldred, 2017). In general, this is characterised as a response to the preceding 'cultural turn', where enquiry into meaning within social life was predominantly symbolic and intertextual (Bonnell & Hunt, 1999). The material turn is a broad church, encompassing many different orientations to objects as well as their status within research. In this section I will conduct a critical literature review of this material turn and its impact on the sociology of art and culture, particularly in terms of what kinds of claims the art objects themselves are made to uphold. This is in order to introduce the intellectual context to which my approach to objects response and how it departs from that set out here.

In a popular introduction to 'materiality' as it is currently being researched, Daniel Miller writes that 'today consumption is … important as the practice through which people potentially make themselves' (Miller, 2005, p. 44). This epitomises a dominant approach to objects that studies the practice and contexts of their consumption. Prevalent in material culture studies, this approach understands objects as 'the material things people encounter, interact with and use' (Woodward, 2007, p. 3). This leads analysis towards the process of consuming (or using) objects such as toilets (Molotoch & Noren, 2010) and toys (Brandow-Faller, 2018). However, in such accounts the object is given meaning 'through the narrativisation of broader discourses of self, identity and biography' by the people who use them (Woodward, 2007, p. 6). In other words, this approach to objects gives them the status of 'receptacles for human categories' (Latour, 1993, p. 52), or the 'semiotic representation

of some bedrock of social relations' (Miller, 2005, p. 3). The object within such research acts as a proxy for the social life of its user, explored for the traces it offers of social organisation.

This shares similarities with the path-forming work of Arjun Appadurai, most thoroughly introduced in his *The Social Life of Things* (1986). In this work, Appadurai attempts to lend objects 'biographies' or social lives of their own, suggesting that articulating these biographies is a legitimate form of research. This begins from the premise that objects' relationships to one another and to economic value is a political process which can be illuminated by following the trajectories of objects themselves. To do so is therefore to illuminate something of the political and economic contexts to which they are subject. Appadurai's turn to objects is motivated by a view of objects in which:

> Their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things (1986, p. 5).

In this approach to objects, the researcher positions themselves alongside the object in order to look outward, onto the human transactions and calculations that are the true object of analysis. This is similar to the approach of material culture—though it shifts the focus to a historical view, rather than studying individual acts of consumption.

This has effects on how art and cultural objects have been studied. Illustrative of this status of art objects in research, and the types of analysis of art it produces, is Victoria Alexander and Anne Bowler's paper 'Scandal and the Work of Art: The Nude in an Aesthetically Inflected Sociology of the Arts' (2018). Their paper, a discussion of a nude by French Impressionist Henri Gervex, argues that:

> The work of art tells us about social things—the signifiers that tell us, for instance, that Marion was a prostitute, and a street prostitute at that, and that the scene was set in contemporary Paris…The pictorial elements of the work of art can be used as social facts, placed in specific historical and economic contexts as objects grounded in time and place (Alexander & Bowler, 2018, p. 337)

This notion that the work of art is aesthetically meaningful to sociology of art as a code of social facts shares the disposition of Appadurai that objects offer a portal into historical socio-economic contexts. This brackets out both material agency and sensory experience. The paper, by the authors account, is an attempt to correct the tendency of sociologists working in the production perspective to disregard the work of art itself. However, in so doing they

present a method of approaching the art object only as a cultural text. What is more, this paper has little to say about the relationship between the researcher and the art object, although its consumption (presumably they looked at the painting) is deeply bound up with socially dominant ways of seeing in the arts.

The Yale School, particularly Jeffery Alexander and Philip Smith, have presented a rationale for the study of culture and its objects, advocating what they call a 'strong programme in cultural sociology' (Alexander & Smith, 2003). They make a distinction between cultural sociology as the study of culture and its objects as a 'collective representation, a language game that reflects a prior pattern of sense-making activity', and the 'weak' approach of the sociology of culture which suggests that 'explanatory power [re: culture] lies in the study of the 'hard' variables of social structure' (Alexander & Smith, 2003, p. 13). They advocate the former, arguing for a 'sharp analytical uncoupling of culture from social structure' and a 'commitment to hermeneutically reconstructing social texts in a rich and persuasive way' (Alexander & Smith, 2003, p. 13). As such, the cultural object becomes something to which a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) should be applied, augmented with 'attention to institutions and actors as causal intermediaries' that operate beyond, while socially emplacing, the cultural object (Alexander & Smith, 2003, p. 26). Arguing that works in the production of culture risk an understanding of meaning as 'infinitely malleable in response to social settings' (Alexander & Smith, 2003, p. 21), the 'strong programme' instead understandings cultural meaning as having its own internal patterns (Alexander & Smith, 2003, p. 24).

This thesis, however, does not adopt either the 'strong' or 'weak' position in Alexander and Smith's vocabulary. This is because the object of analysis is not meaning per se, and the cultural object is not symbolically linked to either the hard variable of social structure, or the internal patterns of cultural meaning. What is more, 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) is not angled towards the meaning of an art object, but its material fact and affordances as they unfold in the setting of the art exhibition. The hard variable of social structure are not searched for within the art object, and a study of the socio-economic conditions of the object's production does not lead to a reduction of the object to these contexts. As such, the art object does not stand ready for either a 'weak' or 'strong' analysis of its meanings, but rather it is presented as a participant in the struggles and cooperative activity of making an exhibition of art. The creation and dissemination of meanings attached to the object is understood locally, in relation to the work of certain actors in the cultural institution, likewise the material production of the exhibition makes claims only on specific objects in specific

places. Meaning, therefore, becomes entangled with the work of placing art objects in a time and a place—processes which would neither be illuminated by a hermeneutic study of the object as it is encountered in the gallery, nor the study of the broader superstructure at a generic level. This, as per Alexander and Bowler's paper, has implication for how the art object is taken into study, and it will be argued that this involves the researcher placing herself within the currents that preceded an art object coming and continuing to be on the gallery floor.

Agency

These approaches to objects all depend on a certain approach to object's form and agency. Firstly, the material form of an object enters research only as a scaffold onto which cultural meaning or social facts are hung, or economic contexts inferred. This leads analysis towards human consumption and meaning-making, and away from the material qualities of objects themselves. This, in effect, places agency squarely with the human actor, limiting the status of the object within research to that of a clue, or proxy for an anthropocentric imagining of agency. This is the notion of agency that functions in some anthropological approaches to agency, such as Alfred Gell set out in his *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (1998). Here, Gell argues that art objects enchant their viewer almost as if they were an enchanting person, but that they do so as a result of the technical or 'artistic virtuosity' of their maker (Gell, 1998, p. 72). As such, the object and its material form appear as the bearer of deferred human agency.

Bruno Latour, whose influence on this field is pronounced, diagnoses this approach to objects as 'the price of entry into the sociology profession' (Latour, 1993, p. 52). His work in developing and popularising science and technology studies has done much to establish a new status for objects within social science research.[20] Latour's Actor Network Theory (2005), following from his research at science laboratories (Latour & Woolgar, 1979), revaluated the constitutive role that materials plays in the social construction of scientific facts, and indeed in social life generally. This understands objects as the enacting their own agency, diverting the passage of the social life that surrounds them; they are actors, every bit as agential as the humans that adopt them in their practices.[21] A key refrain in Actor Network Studies is 'follow the actors themselves' (Latour, 2005, p. 12), paying attention to the way that matter

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[20] This is a similar argument to David Inglis's 'Sociological Imperialism', in which sociological analysis is presented as unable to account for, or accommodate, other disciplinary ways of making sense of the world (Inglis, 2005).

[21] Latour extends this to argue that the ontological distinction between human subject and inanimate object does not exist. This is implicit in what follows, but is not of central importance.

exerts itself in the field. As such, the material object is not simply a '[receptacle] for human categories' (Latour, 1993, p. 52), but rather an active player in the passage of the world with uniquely diverting material qualities. To return to the example of Alexander and Bowler's paper, the painting would emerge as more than a codex of social facts, but also as a material thing whose qualities not only determined its production, but also by the material tendency of oil on fabric to fade, for example (Dunkerton, 2013)—some art works have even spontaneously combusted (Frieze, 2018). As such, the material qualities of objects themselves have their own 'biographies', which intervene in their socio-economic contexts and consumption.

However, following the actors in this way leaves open the possibility that social forces which may have a determining effect on a phenomenon, such as 'gender', are left out of the picture as their influence is not always expressed visibly (Rudy, 2005, p. 111). As such, actor network theorists bracket out such social forces as they go in search of the 'actors themselves' (Latour, 2005, p. 12). Latour even goes as far as arguing that capitalism, for example, 'does not exist' (Latour, 1988, p. 173). This has made adopting Latour's approach an uneasy task for sociologists, who stand to benefit from many of his material insights, but risk producing a 'value neutral descriptive sociology' (Mills, 2018). Critiques of Latour, such as Rudy's (2005) or Mills' (2018), take aim at this. They argue that Latour's method of returning the material to the social flattens out the latter into the former. This suggests a limited purchase of actor network theory in the sociology of art, as its flat ontology leaves unaccounted for the powers operative in the art world and the particular site of the gallery, such as that of the curator or artist, and the uneven socio-economic conditions of 'actors' therein.

Regardless of these shortcomings, the actor network approach has been fruitfully applied to the study of art by Albena Yaneva (Yaneva, 2003a; 2003b). In two papers, she studied the production of art exhibits from the point of view of the material attribute of art objects and galleries, whether the weight of a bus which was being installed in a gallery as an art work (Yaneva, 2003b), or the dustiness of the chalk being used in a mural on a gallery floor (Yaneva, 2003a). Yaneva characterises the expression of material agency as the 'pulses' of an object, describing how the art works that come to be consumed by a public are shaped by the unique coming together of art object's material and the particular material contexts of the gallery space (Yaneva, 2003a; 2003b). This goes some way to reintroducing art objects to their social analysis and taking them seriously as material things.

Yaneva's work does much to show the agential qualities of objects, and how workers respond to them (if leaving unexplored the socio-economic contexts of these interactions). However, what is left unresolved is a discussion of exactly how materials are taken up in practice—materials are seen to act but are rarely acted upon. However, people acting upon art objects is a necessary part of studying their production. It is not, however, necessarily a part of sociologies of art which confront art object as finished products—such as Alexander and Bowler's—which instead focus on socio-cultural meanings. Whether an object is seen as a material or cultural thing depends on the relationship between the object and its consumer. This is articulated in Bill Brown's essay and subsequent book 'Thing Theory', in which he draws heavily on the examples of many art works:

> We look through objects because there are codes by which our interpretative attention makes them meaningful, because there is a discourse of objectivity that allows us to see them as facts. A thing, in contrast, can hardly function as a window [i.e. to be looked through but not at]. We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us (Brown, 2004, p. 4).

Brown makes clear that objects only appear as 'receptacles for human categories' (Latour, 1993, p. 52) when they are positioned towards us in a way that is culturally prescribed. For example, a painting appears as something to be looked at with an 'interpretative attention' when it is not making claims on any other type of our practices. A painting would 'stop working' for an audience with this 'way of seeing' (Berger, 2008) were it to appear instead as a material artefact that does more than wait for a gaze to be cast upon it.[22]

This essentially casts approaches to objects as determined by whether they study it in production or consumption. In production, an object's material acts in far more unruly ways, as it undergoes a process of being stabilised into that which is consumed. As Marc Higgin notes, objects 'approached empirically through the prism of already-made objects [leave] somewhat vague the question of how these object-forms are created in the first place' (2016, p. 75). Higgin is critiquing Daniel Millar as an example of a consumption-focused material analyst, continuing:

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[22] This is exactly the butt of Banksy's recent prank where a painting of his was immediately shredded after selling at auction for £1.04million (Johnston, 2018)—paintings are only there to be seen if other functions of their material (like there shred-ability) are not made pressingly apparent.

Miller can, in good faith, insist that his project is attentive to the material world, to the "physical attributes of the textiles used in the sari… the propensities of silk, cotton and polyester… issues of colour, form, embroidery… transparency and sheen" (Miller 2007, p.24), but this attention is restricted to qualities of materials that help define the specific social form and function of an object consumed; what he calls its materiality (2016, p. 76).

Focusing on 'consumption', in other words, is to focus on material interactions that are always and already structured by the social world that surrounds the objects and its consumer. In other words, such an approach to objects is under the spell of the discourse of objectivity that has positioned both product and consumer.

This influences the current thesis in two ways. The first is by acknowledging that it is the 'discourse of objectivity that allows us to see [art works] as facts' (Brown, 2004, p. 4). This 'discourse of objectivity' is the production of those social actors invested with power by the history and institutions of art. In the case of the current thesis, this is predominantly the curator and artists who position art works towards audiences as facts and stabilised and significant as art. This recalls discussion of the finished art work in a previous chapter. The second influence of thing theory on this thesis is that this discourse of objectivity is not necessarily the operative force in the gallery install. While the intended form of the object may be decided by artist or curator, the techs do not confront the object with their interpretative attention but with their skilled practice as the material affords. In this context, therefore, the art work is not 'objectified' (i.e. turned into an object compliant to and exhausted by our interpretative attention) but rather as a material entity, with agency-like potential, which exceeds its cultural interpretation.

The approach of the current study has begun to emerge. Art objects will not be approached as finished entities, and read for their cultural meanings. Instead, art objects will appear as they do in the install and towards the techs—caught up in the activity afforded by their material and the skilled body of the techs. This shares similarities with Yaneva's study, but places a stronger emphasis on practice and a slightly different description of agency to that in the Actor Network Theory that she uses. What is more, social structures will remain important as the contexts within which the production of the art exhibition happens. This chapter now turns to the approach to objects, and their status in this research, which is predominately drawn from the work of Ingold.

Tim Ingold: Key Concepts

My approach to objects draws predominantly on the work of Tim Ingold, particularly his notions of meshwork and correspondence. Ingold's work has gained traction over the last decade, popular for its sensitive rendering of material and its place within the lives of human and non-human beings. As an anthropologist, his work is always attentive to how materials are caught up in action and how local cultures interact with material practices. Ingold himself draws heavily on three main sources—Marx, the ecological physiologist J.J. Gibson (Ingold, 2015, p. 38) and Heidegger's essay 'The Thing' (Ingold, 2010, p. 4)—though his writing is characterised by a breadth of reference points, including contemporary artists (Ingold, 2018). What matters to this thesis, however, is the applicability of his work to research into the socio-material production of an exhibition. This depends on an understanding of the status of objects in social life, and research, in which the social and material are entwined as an exhibition emerges through the coaction of both forms of production. Secondly, it requires an understanding of how action happens in order to study the materially oriented work of the gallery techs. Critical throughout this is his insistence on movement and the impossibility of separating production from consumption, or the social from the material.

Meshwork

'When everything tangles with everything else, the result is what I call a meshwork' (Ingold, 2016, p. 10).

A useful place to begin an overview of Ingold is in his divergence from Actor Network Theory. As briefly introduced above, Actor Network Theory describes action as happening through the combined agencies of human and non-human things. Each actor in these assemblages, commonly called a 'node' of the actor-network, holds their place within the network. These nodes are able to associate and act together because they are themselves agential, their material qualities enabling them to spring themselves towards each other. This is where Ingold locates his criticism. By Ingold's analysis, the network of associations of Actor Network Theory may describe the actors that are present, but depends on a leap of faith in which individual material actors are granted agency. This is an agency that is not empirically observable as it is a metaphysical property of material. In Ingold's analysis, this makes it little more than a 'figure of speech' (Ingold, 2010, p. 7). As such, the actor network may identify nodes, but it leaves ambiguous the action itself through which these nodes interact. As such, the network appears as a descriptive device that can only map out the constituent nodes of a process that has been frozen in time—like a freeze-frame in a film. This, by Ingold's

analysis, means Actor Network Theory describes a 'fossilised universe', concluding 'it is dead' (Ingold, 2018, p. 13). The network accounts for only the potential for action, not action itself.

Ingold offers the 'meshwork' as an alternative (Ingold, 2010, p. 11).[23] The term is borrowed from Henri Lefebvre, who wrote: 'Mental and social activity impose their meshwork upon nature's space (Lefebvre, 1999, p. 117). Ingold writes 'life is a meshwork' (Ingold, 2018, p. 35), making clear that where the descriptive power of the network serves to create accounts that are still, or 'dead' (Ingold, 2018, p. 13), the meshwork describes processes of movement and vitality. The meshwork is comprised of the 'lines of flow' (Ingold, 2010, p. 11) of things co-acting as their affordances allow. These lines of flow, moreover, are not made to stand in for the potentail for action as they do in the network. Instead, the meshwork is the process of interactivity itself—not made up static of individual nodes but of the lines of things coming together and trailing apart. Ingold describes the meshwork, therefore, not as an ontology which describes the fundamental being of things, but as an 'ontogenesis' which describes instead the 'the generation of being' (Ingold, 2018, p. 9). The meshwork, therefore, does not depend on isolating a freeze-frame of an action; it is the flow of the action itself, more akin to the movement captured in film.

The meshwork is made up of the lines of relations 'along' which things move, not the lines that exist 'between' them (Ingold, 2010, p. 12). Much of Ingold's work concerns 'lines' of this type (Ingold, 2015). These lines are the courses of action, or paths, that things take as they co-act, which sometimes become knotted together and at other times trail apart. This is how Ingold understands the object. An object is, in his terms, a 'parliament of lines' (Ingold, 2007a, p. 5); the result of various elements combining, becoming bound together with an apparent degree of coherence, and presenting a surface to external elements. However, following the principles of the meshwork, this object or 'parliament of lines' (Ingold, 2007a, p. 5) is subject to the 'generative fluxes' (Ingold, 2007b, p. 5) of its material, which constantly threaten to lose their grip on each other, unravel the 'parliament' and dissolve the object. In keeping with the understanding of the object introduced above, Ingold writes that when objects exhibit apparent coherence the 'generative fluxes' to which they are subject are concealed. It is the surface of this apparently persisting object that appears, in our mental representations, as a stable element in a system of signification (Ingold, 2007b, p. 5). Each element, or line, in the object is potentially alienable from the object, and has an existence through time that exceeds that in which is becomes knotted up in the object—placing an

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[23] From now on it can be assumed that the term 'meshwork' refers to (Ingold, 2010, p. 11).

object's lines within their own lifeline produces a 'biography' of an object far more material than Appadurai's. This changes Latour's injunction for research to 'follow the actors' (Latour, 2005, p. 12), to Ingold's injunction to 'follow the materials' (Ingold, 2010, p. 8).[24]

This has two main applications to this study of art objects and galleries, which has been implicit in much of the introduced literature on objects—Ingold offers a clear theoretical framework in which to couch this analysis. The first is the necessity of studying objects in time, as the 'parliament of lines' (Ingold, 2007a, p. 5) is only knotted together for a passage of time, before and after which its constituent lines trail apart. As such, the art object offers an apparently coherent surface to a viewer only across a passage of time; a surface which is made meaningful as a stable element in the system of signification in the arts. However, the system of signification in the arts, as I have argued, depends on it being carefully placed in certain contexts like a gallery and exhibition. The art object is therefore located at the intersection of space, material and time; the symbolic meanings layered onto the art world depend on this foundation. Secondly, fixing the object at this intersection requires work. Materially this is the work of the gallery techs (and also of cleaners) and I will now move on to introducing how their work is woven into the meshwork of art objects and galleries.

Correspondence

As introduced above, Ingold's key criticism of the actor-network stems from its reliance on an inexplicit and agency residing in nodes (actors) in the network. In order to understand how practice intersects with material, it is necessary to first introduce Ingold's understanding of agency in the meshwork. The fundamental characteristic of agency in Ingold's work is that he does not 'separate agency from action or the doer from the deed' (Ingold, 2018, p. 13). In other words, unlike in the actor-network, in the meshwork agency is not a property of individual actors. Instead, agency is the action of things carrying on together and answering to one another (Ingold, 2018, p. 13). This definition of agency shifts it from being a noun to a verb. The enacting of agency is the lines of flow that provide the connective threads of the meshwork.

However, not all things come together in equally productive ways; not all things combine to set in motion equally generative courses of action. The potential for agency depends on the potential interactivity of things. This recalls the concept of affordances as the actionable properties amongst things and between things and people—the path-forming features of an

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[24] I use the word object to refer to things which are put into practice and symbolically understood as if they were a unified and enduring whole.

interaction that shape its course. Ingold adopts the term 'correspondence' to describe the action of things interacting as their properties afford, defining the action as 'co-responding'— mutually reacting, answering and adapting to one another (Ingold, 2016). As such, correspondence is the relational and animated enacting of affordances; agency is the animation of the meshwork.

By this account agency is neither necessarily human nor non-human as it is not a properties of things but a process of interacting. This has ramifications for this study. In accounts of art works that depend on the actor-network, art objects exert their agency on the gallery space, which exerts its own agency in return (chalk is dusty (Yaneva, 2003a) or a bus is weighty (Yaneva, 2003b)). This depends on both the object and the gallery (as an architectural site) as being agential. However, following Ingold's account, it is the productive tensions and affordances between the art object and the gallery that create the conditions for things (an art object placed in an exhibition) to happen. As such, in this thesis art objects will be described in their entanglement in specific material relationships which produce certain outcomes. This lends itself to a more fleshed out empirical analysis of action, as what is observed is not the traces of agency (e.g. a chalky footprint) of objects (which themselves appear as an indivisible article). Instead, it describes the character and unfolding of correspondences, the process of an art object coming and continuing to be in the gallery.

Implications for Research Practice

So far Ingold's theoretical framework has appeared barren of humans and their activity, which this thesis studies as much as it does objects. The human practices studied are of two kinds. The first is the enacting of skill in the install; the second the interpersonal practices that surround the socio-material production of an exhibit. I will address both these in turn, teasing out the implications of studying them through Ingold's framework on how they can be studied and represented. In the discussion of skill I will argue that text-based or photographic methods overlook two central attributes of skill in Ingold's account—that is, tacit and processual. Secondly, I will introduce an account of social power in the meshwork that makes clear the interdependence of the social and the material. I will then read together the meshwork and Becker's *Art Worlds* (2008) and the arts-in-action approach (Krzys Acord & DeNora, 2008), and argue that this rethought art world requires both the structural description of social conditions and extra-textual depiction of material conditions.

Before this discussion, however, it is worth considering how Ingold's framework positions the researcher in the research site. Fundamental to his work is that it does not provide a

prescriptive device which can be cast onto the world—not least because to do so would require a researcher to have a perspective on the site from without (as does, he would argue, Actor Network Theory). Instead, it is an account of how things come to pass, and therefore offers the researcher less of an analytical toolkit than an attitude towards their research site. This attitude is one of understanding and accounting for the research site as a constantly unfolding and vital field of potentialities, and research is therefore the process of charting which of these potentialities come to pass and why. It would make little sense to articulate the constituent parts of the meshwork, as to do so would isolate each 'line' from the knot in which it is entangled. This requires the researcher to 'join with the texture of [their] world' (2017a, p. 101), to go with the grain of the action, and represent their view from within. As such, analysis (in whatever medium) can be seen as the practice of giving a lively accounts of processes which are continually unfolding in a responsive way. This is in how I position myself in the field, the proximity I keep to materials, and the currents of action I follow.

Skilled Practice

In this section the notions of correspondence and the meshwork will be linked up with human material practices. In so doing it finds a middle ground with regards to how humans are implicated in the ontologies that underpin the turn to material recently in the social sciences. As suggested above, the material culture approach depends on agency residing with the human; contrastingly, in Actor Network Theory, agency is distributed indiscriminately amongst human and non-human things. Neither of these approaches, and the ontologies they depend on, are entangled with an account of material practices. The material culture approach considers objects as the 'other' of human practice; Actor Network Theory levels out practice as equal to the material agency of objects or things. In what follows, I will argue that human practice is an indispensable part of the material fabric of the world, of the meshwork where 'everything tangles with everything else' (Ingold, 2016, p. 10).

This chapter has previously introduced a material thing as a 'parliament of lines' (Ingold, 2007a, p. 5). However, this bundle of properties can be fashioned by humans towards their own ends. In the current research project, objects and places are primarily encountered as they being fashioned by humans. As such, the practices of those who engage with them are propelling and determining factors in how they come and continue to be. However, it is necessary for this practice, in order to be effective, to be responsive to the particular qualities of the material and how these can be put to use. Ingold writes: 'Practitioners'… skill lies in their ability to find the grain of the world's becoming and to follow its course while bending

it to their evolving purpose' (Ingold, 2018b, p. 92). In other words, material practice is the actioning of correspondences between a body and material.

However, potential correspondences between a body and a surface are not always equally actionable. Some people have developed an acute sensitivity to the action that certain materials afford; this is the development of skilled practice.[25] Of this practice, Ingold writes: 'skilled practice involves developmentally embodied responsiveness' (Ingold, 2008, p. 215). In other words, skilled practice[26] is an iterative process of a body becoming attuned and responding to the possibilities afforded by their engagement with a material surface (Ingold, 2017b). Ingold calls this 'thinking-doing' (Ingold, 2018b, p. 160). Fundamental to this thesis is the 'embodied' nature of this, as it suggests that skilled practice is situated and inalienable from its practice. Secondly, skill by Ingold's account is embodied and developmental i.e. it unfolds as a person gets a feel for the material they work upon. As such, skill happens at the interface of a hand (usually) and a material surface—as J.J. Gibson notes, the surface is where 'most of the action is' (Gibson, 1986, p. 23). The quality of this interaction is determined by both the dexterity of the hand as well as the texture of the surface. Finally, Ingold argues that skill is a 'knowing from the inside' (Ingold, 2018), a form of knowledge that is fundamentally different to that carried in language, which will now be explored.

Ingold is not the first to write on skill, nor the first to argue for its non-linguistic nature. He draws from a linage of writing on the subject, important in which is Polanyi's *The Tacit Dimension* (Polanyi, 1966). Famously, Polanyi writes 'we know more than we can tell' (1966, p. 4). With this, Polanyi is arguing for a form of knowing that is tacit and embodied, and which we cannot put into words. This is as Ingold means by 'knowing from the inside' (Ingold, 2018). Of importance to this thesis is that this kind of knowledge resists:

> The kind of word we academics are used to… the sort that inhabits the training manuals, assessment protocols, regulatory standards and codes of practice that pretend to subordinate skilled practice to rational management (Ingold, 2018b, p. 160).

This is because skill is fundamentally extra-textual; a practice rather than a quantifiable, explicable attribute of a person. As such, to represent skill in research should represent it in

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[25] In Chapter One I introduced Bartmanski's and Woodward's study of the production of independent music which relied on Sennett's description of craft. In what follows I set out my slightly divergent understanding of skill.

[26] I limit my discussion to skilled material practice, rather than, for example, social skills.

the contexts of its practice, not mistranslate it into words which themselves are alien from the practicing of skill itself.

This has obvious implications for empirical research which tends to turn to language as a mode of expression. In this example, when the research object is skilled practice itself, text does not meet the demands. In this thesis I propose the film camera as a possible research tool in this context; the argument is developed further in Chapter Five, and the resulting film, *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre*, constitutes Chapter Six. However, a few notes here by way of introduction. Firstly, skill has long been an interest of visual sociologists. For example, Doug Harper's genre-defining *Working Knowledge: Skill and Community in a Small Shop* (1987) is an ethnographic photo essay of the skilled work of Willie, a mechanic in New York. Harper is interested in Willie's skill and his workplace (as well as the community of which it is a part). However, the photographs Harper captures of Willie at work freeze-frame the process of which each action is a part—such is the technological affordance of the photographic camera that it captures only the movement and light of a millisecond. In so doing, Willie's skill is not represented as an unfolding, developmental, dynamic process, but as a series of static images which may offer contextualising information on Willie and his work, but do not account for the practicing of skill itself. What is more, it was argued above that the surface and its texture are what a skilled hand encounters and corresponds with in material skilled practice. It is often assumed that the 'truth' of something's 'essence' is located somewhere within it, and a research must plunge into the depth of things to truly understand them—de la Fuente calls this a 'depth ontology' (de la Fuente, 2019, p. 553). However, by this account offered in this chapter it is exactly at the surface that things happen (Gibson, 1986, p. 23) and for a researcher to take seriously the surface of things is to discern how they are taken up in practice. Influential film theorist Laura Mark's describes this as one such affordance of the film camera and moving images. She writes that film 'move[s] over the surface of its object rather than plunge into illusionist depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture' (Marks, 2000, p. 162). This ability of film to discern texture, and to focus an audience's attention on the textural qualities of surfaces, recommends it to the study of skilled practice as it is understood here, as does its ability to represent the movement of a skilled practitioner.

Art World as Meshwork

'They develop their lines of activity gradually, seeing how others respond to what they do and adjusting what they do next in a way that meshes with what others have done' (Becker & Pessin, 2006, pp. 277–278)

In this section the notion of correspondences and meshwork will be linked up with human social practices. As above, this finds a middle ground with regards to how social life is implicated in the ontologies that underpin the turn to material of the recent social sciences. As suggested above, the material culture approach over-writes objects with the social life in which they are consumed; contrastingly, in Actor Network Theory, social life (or rather, social structures) are bracketed out as they are not empirically observable in associative networks, leading to Latour's assertion that capitalism, for example, 'does not exist' (Latour, 1988, p. 173). In what follows I will introduce how social life, social structures and social power operate in the meshwork. This allows me to recast Becker's art world as a meshwork comprised of social and material things tangled together, but in which some people have the power to 'force or persuade other people' to act in certain ways (Becker & Pessin, 2006, p. 281). This is eligible for text-based analysis, and Chapter Seven details some of the social negotiations that surround tech work.

The concept of social practices that Ingold proposes relies on the implications of the connective 'with', as opposed to 'and' (Ingold, 2016, p. 14). By this account, the collective of social actors is not the aggregate of heterogeneous and discrete social beings. Instead, as was argued above in relation to materials, social life is composed of people going along 'with' one another, shaping their life-course and actions in accord with those they encounter. Ingold offers the example of the family. In traditional anthropological accounts of the family, or rather filial relationships, are the relations that exist between the base unit of the family (family members), which together comprise the family. However, drawing on Alfred Schutz, Ingold instead argues that the filial relationship is the quality and process of 'growing older together' (Schutz, 1967, p. 98). This recasts social relations as correspondences; processes of paying attention to each other and answering to one another. As such, to study social life is to 'attend to persons and things, to learn from them, and to follow in precept and practice' (Ingold, 2016, p. 24).

However, there are two important gaps in this account of social life. The first is how it incorporates objects, and the second is an account of power—Ingold's writing has a tendency towards a romanticism and people and things that harmoniously co-respond rather than conflict. Objects can be understood in this account of social life in two main ways. The first is through how they are taken up in practice and this has been introduced above. The second draws on Marcel Mauss' influential work on gifts (Mauss, 1925). By Mauss' account, gifts bind people together in charged relationships of exchange and return—giving a gift binds the recipient to the giver and a return gift is socially expected. The examples of gifts is not

particularly relevant to this thesis. Instead, this account offers an example of the ways in which the social and material are imbricated, and how the bonds of social life are mediated through material surfaces. That is not to say that the gift, in this example, is a fundamentally symbolic thing. Rather, the gift (object) becomes entangled with and draws together the giver and recipient, shaping the course of the relationship between them. This casts the hyphen of socio-material as process of cross-pollination, rather than standing in for the separating out of two discrete arenas of life. As such, socio-material in this thesis stresses the entanglement of matter with social life and vice versa.

The final subject requiring consideration here is that of power. The first issue that presents itself with regards to Ingold's theory and an understanding of power is that his generally positive language seems, like Becker's, to present the world as a place of cooperation as opposed to one of struggle and inequalities—this is similar to the previous discussion of Becker and Bourdieu. This is relatively easily answered, as nothing in the concept of correspondence implies that it is an easy or frictionless process (except, perhaps, the word 'correspondence'). Instead, the relationships that develop between people and things can as readily be understood as fractious, full of discord, and unequal, as then can be seen as full of harmony and accord, without changing the principle that these relationships develop in a fashion afforded by their particular characteristics. If one participant in a relationship has a characteristic that can dominate over its interlocutor, then the relationship proceeds accordingly. Following the above description of social relations as correspondences, this can mean that one person, being imbued with power like capital or social standing, can exert more influence over the course of the relation. This is as Becker claims when he writes that power is the ability to 'force or persuade other people to do [things]' (Becker & Pessin, 2006, p. 281). To express this in terms of the meshwork, the powerful actor is able to contort the meshwork—the general advancement of things—and encourage action to flow in particular ways. This will be shown, in the current study, to be enacted through things like labour relations and the economic conditions of work.

Secondly, Ingold's work has come under critique for failing to give an account of social power while overemphasising how humans are entangled with the world, rather than describing how 'human societal relations enlist non-human nature in the service of their own logic' (Hornborg, 2018, p. 256). In other words, Ingold describes the course of action rather than how this is organised, whether economically, symbolically, materially, linguistically or through any other system that interprets and influences lived experience. I will answer this through reference to this particular study. Ingold encourages researchers to be attentive to

relationships (material-material; material-human; human-human) as they play out. It is perfectly possible, however, to take analysis further and to study how these relationships contribute to and reinforce existing systems or structures in the world. For example, the process of locating an art object in a gallery and a gallery in an art centre involves relationships that co-produce the apparent fixity of these things. This calls into play existing preconceptions such as what an art work is in general, what a specific art work is, what a gallery looks like and how a gallery is distinct from the rest of an arts centre. As such, Ingold is offering a disposition towards research without limiting the possibility that the correspondences under observation can be understood in specific socio-material contexts. In fact, to do so is simply to place them within larger meshworks. Further, it is also the case that relationships between people and things are often, especially in this thesis, precipitated not by some innocent force, but by the demands of work. As such, the forms of relationships that develop between, for example, a tech and the institution of Bluecoat or an institutional worker and a visitor to the gallery, are shaped by the way that this labour is organised. Importantly, as with all relationships in a meshwork this is a two-way process, and the experience of these relationships in turn shapes the life course of the worker. As such, a worker's subjective experience of the relationships they enter into at work become a valid part of researching the meshwork of the art world. This will be taken up in the written analysis chapters, and the year-long ethnography of Bluecoat was necessary in order to understand how interactions are organised.

This section concludes by aligning the description of all of the above with the art world as it was introduced in the previous chapters, drawn from both Becker's writings and the arts-in-action approach. I will begin with their existing synergies. Firstly, both Ingold's work and Becker's place the interest of research as with the interactions between people and things, and therefore the researcher must position themselves proximate to these interactions. By Becker's account, people in the art world 'develop their lines of activity gradually, seeing how others respond to what they do and adjusting what they do next in a way that meshes with what others have done' (Becker & Pessin, 2006, pp. 277–278). By Ingold's account, all social engagement is the 'process by which beings or things literally answer to one another over time, for example in the exchange of letters or words in conversation, or of gifts' (Ingold, 2016, p. 14). The similarities in these accounts are clear, describing social life as a process of interacting across time. Ingold, however, takes this one step further by stressing that social life is both put into words (conversation) and objects (gifts), and I would add to this communication between our emotional bodies. Secondly, both Becker and Ingold make clear

that the objects within the art world are fundamentally indeterminate (Becker, 2006, p. 23) or, in Ingold's terms, ontogenetic (Ingold, 2018). Thirdly, when it comes to material practice, Ingold shares the description of affordances with the arts-in-action approach, understanding human material practice as going along the grain of the object—this reaches its zenith as practice becomes skilled. Finally, the account of power in the art world described by Becker depends on people's ability to 'force or persuade other people to do [things]' (Becker & Pessin, 2006, p. 281). This shares the description I offered above of social power as that which distorts the meshwork and encourages action to flow in certain directions.

As such, Ingold's work provides the perfect vessel through which to take the advances in the sociology of art, especially that of Becker and arts-in-action, into the field with a renewed material sensitivity. By approaching the art world as a meshwork, I angle my analysis toward these certain qualities of the field site:

- o That it is fluid, in motion;
- o That action is interdependent: material with material, material with human, and human with human;
- o That this interdependence is an ongoing correspondence shaped by the material qualities and social powers vested in participants and places.

Not all of the interactions this accounts for are expressed the same in the field. For this reason, I represent them through different media. The skilled practice of the gallery techs towards art objects is studied through the film camera which, I argue, meets the object of analysis (skill) on its extra-textural and textural plane. What is more, moving images have been argued to carry a particularly sensory quality that lends a viewer an affective approximation of the sites it represents (Shaviro, 2010; Brinkema, 2014). As such, filming the spaces of the Bluecoat also expresses their sensory characters, and how this feeds into the feel of the social life within them (this argument is taken up in Chapter Five). The negotiation and consequences of social powers, however, are manifested in how social actors are organised. This is something that can be represented through propositional language, as ostensibly it is an analysis of social structures. What is more, when analysis is shifted from the practice of skill to the social negotiation of objects (such as determining when an art work is finished), this also lends itself to propositional language, as it is ostensibly an analysis of structures of signification. This is the rationale that underpins the following two methods chapters, which take analysis to different places while beginning from the same place: interaction.

Conclusion

This chapter has laid down the theoretical framework on which this thesis depends. This began with a critical overview of approaches to objects within contemporary social sciences, finding fault with their overemphasis on processes of consumption or their models of agency. It responded to these faults by drawing on the work of Ingold, which will be put to use in this thesis. This involved introducing how his work responds to the general move to incorporate materials into social analysis, but departs from prevailing approaches. Key terms were introduced, such as the meshwork as the entanglement of things with each other, and correspondence as the action of things going along together. This depends on a model of agency that understands it not as a noun, or property of things, but as a verb—the enacting of a potential for action. Ingold's description of skill was introduced, which depends on its extra-textual, embodied quality of a person that is played out on surfaces. It was briefly suggested that this makes the film camera a useful research tool.

The chapter came to an end with an application of Ingold's work to the approaches to the sociology of art set out in Chapter One and its application to the work of art-adjacent workers (Chapter Two), primarily Becker's work and the arts-in-action approach. This described the art world as a meshwork of corresponding socio-material practices. This views the art world as fluid and the collective of interdependent practices which are shaped by material qualities and the social powers of participants. This is a novel reimaging of the art world that bringing Ingold's work into conversation with new canons, and it is applied across the analysis. This rethought art world requires both the structural description of social conditions and extra-textual depiction of material conditions. It was argued that this involves researching different skills and representing this research through different media. The practicing of skill is achieved through film, but this is contextualised in written analysis of the social interactions that co-produce the art world, and the structures of power to which they are subject.

I have argued that analysis (in whatever medium) can be seen as the practice of giving a lively accounts of processes which are continually unfolding in a responsive way. It is left to introduce how I intend to conduct this analysis. The next chapters therefore turn to the actual methods I will be using, their lineage and ethical practice. The next chapters introduce them in more depth, though I have chosen to discuss them at the same time as I detail my use of them in the field. Chapter Four introduces the ethnographic study which contributes to and contextualises the analysis in Chapters Seven and Eight. Chapter Five introduces my use of the film camera as a textural sociological practice, leading onto the film *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre* that comprises Chapter Six.

Chapter Four: An Ethnographically-Informed Approach: Planning *In the Peaceful Dome*

Introduction

This project is divided between contextual and textural field work, and between visual and textual analysis. The contextual field work involved an ethnographic-in-character approach to the planning stage of an exhibition, which provided an insight into the institutional context in which the exhibition took place. This informed the written analysis which benefits from knowledge of how work is organised, valued and divided in the production of an exhibition. The textural field work involved studying the gallery install, private view, and the public facing gallery through the film camera. This informed the visual aspect of analysis, which focuses on the skill and atmospheric contexts through which an exhibition is produced. The next two chapters introduce both elements of field work, the methods I took to either site, and the sociological pedigree of these methods.

This chapter introduces the ethnographically-informed approach to studying the production of an exhibition. This included participant observation in offices, studio visits, and interviews with members of salaried staff. However, it is first necessary to introduce the specific field site in which this research was based. It therefore begins with an introduction to Bluecoat, Liverpool's centre of the contemporary art. This introductory overview is concerned with the production of the institutional narrative. As such, it takes a critical view of the story that Bluecoat tells of itself; institutions are embroiled in attempts to construct how they appear to their publics, and this thesis is invested in the work of this construction rather than the validity of the story itself. It then moves on to detail the months spent following the production of one exhibition, *In the Peaceful Dome* [Appendix Two]. The chapter concludes at the brink of the install of the exhibition, when I was poised to undertake a different form of research practice in order to research that which was missing in the office based ethnography: art objects themselves.

The Storied Bluecoat

This thesis takes as its field site Bluecoat, Liverpool's Centre for the Contemporary Arts, an arts centre on School Lane in Liverpool city centre. The Queen Anne style building is made up of two wings, forming an 'H' shape from an aerial view. One wing houses the gallery and hired artist studios, and the other holds staff offices and conference or event spaces. These two wings flank a courtyard with independent businesses including a florist and tailors which pay rent to Bluecoat. This public space has picnic benches and table tennis and is the most

reproduced aspect of Bluecoat which is visible from one of Liverpool's main shopping streets, Church Street. The wings also encircle a 'secret garden' to the back, where volunteers tend to flower beds, there are tables available for public use as well as café patrons, and more shops leased by Bluecoat, including a violin shop and Bluecoat Display Centre, a ceramic and jewellery shop. Inside, the public spaces of Bluecoat include the ground floor Hub, the first space encountered by the public inside the building [Appendix One]. This contains a Tickets and Information desk as well as a café and tables freely available to the public. Upstairs there is a Bistro, offering higher end food than the café, as well as a space for gigs, dance, and lectures and performances which is available to hire as well as hosting Bluecoat's own programme.

The gallery is located in one flank of a wing, entered via the social space of the Hub/ café. There is a series of four rooms, sequentially arranged along a cloisters with a further space upstairs. The rooms have high ceilings, concrete flooring, usually neutral tones, strip lighting as well as some natural light and in this way they are related to the conventions of displaying contemporary art introduced in Chapter One. The largest of the four rooms is flexible, with walls built for the needs of each exhibition—this can leave a large open gallery; section off spaces for moving image; or provide more wall space for 2D works. The final of the downstairs galleries has large windows onto College Lane, a busy shopping street, and this space often features eye-catching works to draw the attention of passing shoppers. The rooms are invigilated by a team of volunteers, the design of each exhibition determining how many are needed and where they are placed. These volunteers are instructed to 'maintain a quiet and studious atmosphere in the galleries—much like a library', because '[the] galleries should be quiet and contemplative spaces where audiences are able to engage with art works without distraction' [From field notes, Volunteer Information]. This atmosphere differs from surrounding spaces at Bluecoat which are full of the busyness, business and sounds of a café and public and commercial spaces.

Bluecoat's building sits within Liverpool One, a 42 acre privatised shopping district that encompasses much of Liverpool's commercial city centre—the largest open air shopping centre in the UK. The development, opened in 2008 and coinciding with Liverpool's tenure as the European Capital of Culture, includes 169 shops and, by way of indicative example, saw a footfall of 29 million visits in 2016 (Liverpool One, 2017). Bluecoat sits in its south-west between School Lane and College Lane, which features relatively high-end brands like Flannels and Edwards England, but the building is also a shortcut from Church Street, a busy shopping street, through to Liverpool's other retail clusters. For this reason, while Bluecoat

is not technically incorporated into the development, it has a porosity with it. Shoppers flow through Bluecoat—maybe stopping to use the café or visit the gallery—and the windows of one of Bluecoat's gallery rooms gives out onto the shoppers of College Lane. This gallery colloquially within the institution is called the 'shop window' and eye-catching works of art are often placed here to capture the attention of passing shoppers. However, once this attention has been caught, a potential visitor would have to make their way down College Lane, through the garden and café before entering the gallery.

The organisation referred to here as 'Bluecoat' contains both the art gallery and its related projects as well as the commercial side which acts as a landlord to the shops and studio holders, rents out areas to conferences and for weddings, runs the café and bistro, and other income generating activities on site like educational courses. Bluecoat's commercial element is a private limited company, incorporated in 2009, called 'Bluecoat Trading' (or 'Trading at the Bluecoat Limited') (Companies House, 2020). The arts activities fall under the rubric of 'The Bluecoat', a registered charity, with the stated aim to:

> Open up creative possibilities for individuals and communities… through a programme of exhibitions, live art and participation projects; through support to artists; by opening our 18th Century building to makers, traders and visitors; and by creating connections between Liverpool and the rest of the world (Charity Commision, 2019).

All profits generated by Bluecoat Trading are gifted to The Bluecoat—this is a common organisation in the arts (it is the same at FACT Liverpool and Tate). The arts side of the organisation's core funding is secured, subject to renewal every four years, by its status as an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO), in the category Combined Arts, receiving £1.9m in the period 2018–2022 (a 0% increase (real-terms cut) on the previous period). Further funding comes from other bodies including the Heritage Lottery Fund or the Henry Moore Foundation as well as private philanthropy. Bluecoat recently introduced a membership scheme where, for £35 a year, members receive special invitations to events and tours as well as discounts in the shops (Bluecoat, 2020b), or for £300 a year patrons receive similar benefits as well as public acknowledge of their support (Bluecoat, 2020c). These schemes, along with other new forms of giving like crowdfunding (Crowdfunder, 2017), diversifies Bluecoat's funding streams in an attempt to make it more viable in a sector faced

with diminishing resources.[27] The workers detailed in this thesis are all employed or paid by the charity, except Engagement Assistants who are employed by Bluecoat Trading.

The ESRC CASE Studentship that supported this thesis emerged from an innovative 'Academic-in-Residence' scheme that saw the supervisors of this project, Dr Paul Jones, Dr Yiota Vassilopoulou and Bryan Biggs (Bluecoat Artistic Director), collaborate in bringing university research and teaching into the public context of an arts space. As such, the research site (and access to it) was preordained through the existing collaborative relationship between Bluecoat and the academic departments in which the thesis sits: sociology and philosophy. The thesis offers a study of an exhibition *In the Peaceful Dome* which ran from October 13th 2017 to April 8th 2018, one of Bluecoat's four annual exhibitions, and was the concluding event of the tercentenary celebration of Bluecoat's building, 'Bluecoat 300' [Appendix Two]. The exhibition itself will be introduced further at a later point. Suffice for now to note that the exhibition was an exercise in a telling of the story of the institution of Bluecoat, as well as speculating on its future, by gathering together works which had previously been shown in the gallery. It took over the galleries in Bluecoat's newest wing.[28] This section will now detail the story Bluecoat tells of itself, which is manifested in the gallery through exhibitions like *In the Peaceful Dome* and the discourse that is produced to surround it.

Bluecoat has a long history and is housed in the oldest building in Liverpool city centre (Pollard & Pevsner, 2006, p. 245). The eminence of this history plays a central role in the work of institutional storytelling at Bluecoat, where curators and other discourse producing staff place an emphasis on the one hundred year history of art at Bluecoat as well as the three hundred year life of its building—these activities can be called institutional representation practices. 2017, as the tercentenary of Bluecoat's building, featured a three hundred day programme of events and exhibitions, called 'Bluecoat 300', and much of the public communication that was issued from Bluecoat during this time concerned this history. This included the publications of a new heritage website, MyBluecoat which included 300 facts about Bluecoat (MyBluecoat, 2017); the publication of a book (forthcoming); pamphlets,

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[27] The city of Liverpool's art and culture sector has suffered both local (Arts Council England; New Local Government Network, 2016) and national funding cuts (The Echo, 2014) at a time of austerity. The national Arts Council England budget was cut by 29.6% from 2010 to 2014 under the collation government (HM Treasury, 2010), and Arts Council England's most recent budget saw decreased Lottery funding resulting in a loss of £156m between 2018 to 2022 (ArtsProfessional, 2018).

[28] As per the distinctions introduced previously, the organisation/ institution is 'Bluecoat', with regular staff, a brand and a position in the art world; the gallery is the set of rooms in the wing, designated for exhibitions and freely accessible to the public; the exhibition is *In the Peaceful Dome*.

press reviews and other in-house literature (Bluecoat, 2017b); historical exhibitions, such as *In the Peaceful Dome* (Bluecoat, 2017c) (the current study), and displays; conferences and talks; and commissioned performances. The narratives within this communication were reproduced by the local and national arts press, where press releases were disseminated celebrating the long history of the building and its symbolic position in the city and the wider art world (Artists Network, 2016b; Artlyst, 2016; The Echo, 2016; Arts Council England, 2017b; ArtNet, 2017; Bido Lito!, 2017; Getintothis, 2017).

This thesis takes a critical view of this storying of Bluecoat, teasing out the power that is manifested in it. It is informed by sociological analyses of storytelling, including the storytelling of institutions which has found that: Stories unfold over repeated interactions rather than being told in an uninterrupted fashion; power inheres in storytelling and this power is unevenly distributed; and that 'the stories that are institutionally required or encouraged change over time' (Polletta, et al., 2011, pp. 114–118). This is with a view to describing the narratives that are threaded through Bluecoat's building, the history and symbolic fields this attaches it to, the strategic management of such by those high in the staff structure (e.g. Artistic Director)[Appendix Three], and the kinds of work needed to sustain it and realise it on the ground, in socio-material interactions.

Bluecoat's narrative centres around two central claims: the three hundred year history of its building and its art related history. These strands were prominent throughout Bluecoats tercentenary programme in 2017 in which the age of the building ran alongside its claim of being 'the UK's oldest arts centre', a claim made in Bluecoat's literature (Bluecoat, 2020a), the art press (as above), as well as in countless social interactions between staff and Bluecoat's publics. This suggests that these two characteristics are profitable for Bluecoat's position in relevant fields (whether the discursive art world, funding structures etc.). This section will now introduce these two threads of the institutionally endorsed history.

In 1717, Bluecoat's building was opened as a 'charity school' ('Blue Coat School'). The build was largely financed with money related to the trading of enslaved peoples—research suggests 65% of donations had this provenance (MyBluecoat, 2018). The architect of the building had for a long time been unknown, but recent research indicates that Thomas Steers, engineer, and Edward Litherland, mason, built Bluecoat, starting just as their previous collaboration, Liverpool's dock, opened in 1715 (Private correspondence with author, 2019). After two hundred years on this site, the school moved to Wavertree where it continues to operate as The Blue Coat School, leaving vacant its city centre premises.

In 1908, a group of artists known as the 'Sandon Studios Society' moved from Sandon Terrace to occupy the building (Willett, 2007, p. 59); it is on this date that Bluecoat stakes its claim as the UK's oldest arts centre (Bluecoat, 2020a). In 1910, the building was purchased by local soap magnate, philanthropist William Leverhulme, securing the property for artists and architects. University College Liverpool's School of Architecture students had also moved into the building, following its principal Charles Reilly's decision to relocate from its home on Brownlow Hill. During this time, the building served as a place for the arts, with concerts, performances, parties and events, notably hosting Roger Fry's ground-breaking Post-Impressionist show in 1911. Leverhulme's death in 1925 left no provision in his will for the building and the resident artists and enthusiasts launched a campaign to buy the building. The campaign, thanks to a large donation from a local solicitor, was successful and in 1927 the Bluecoat Society of Arts was established to preserve the building for its architectural value, and to establish a centre for the arts. The building offered facilities including studios, life drawing classes, and a public programme of lectures and exhibitions. This period saw Jacob Epstein's controversial sculpture *Genesis* brought to Bluecoat for the first time in 1930 garnering 49,687 visitors, which was to return in 2017.

Bluecoat's building has always been a precarious resource. As well as the struggle to financially secure it for the arts in the early twentieth century, the 1940s saw plans to partly demolish it to make way for an inner ring road, as well considerable bomb damage during the Liverpool Blitz of 1941. As the Walker Art Gallery had been requisitioned by the Ministry of Food during the war (MacLeod, 2011, p. 111), Bluecoat provided cultural resources for the city throughout the war including a public library (Bluecoat, 2017a). The building was fully restored by 1958, and a decade later 'The Bluecoat Gallery' was formally established. The layout of the galleries as it was in the 1970s, where the gallery was the first space entered and occupied the large ground floor space connecting the building's two wings (now the Hub), remained until 2005 when a substantial refurbishment by BIQ Architecten commenced reconfiguring the building into what it is today. This goes to show the contingency of Bluecoat's building and the persistence of the organisation, which is constantly challenged by urban, policy and economic conditions. In this sense, the institutional representative work of foregrounding Bluecoat's historical standing and entanglement with Liverpool as a city acts as an attempt to secure or legitimise the institution's future.

Bluecoat's institutional storytelling is not only angled towards its general historical (and therefore continued) importance. It is also a practice of institutional branding which, as introduced in the previous chapter, is increasingly prevalent in institutions of art where a

brand identity secures its place in the arts sector around which resources, from funding to audiences, coalesce. In Liverpool, the arts scene is made up of a few institutions which undertake institutional representative work to secure a unique place in this local economy. Tate Liverpool offers headline grabbing essayistic exhibitions of modern and contemporary art with a broad appeal; Open Eye works specifically with photography; FACT programmes exhibitions and events that combine technology and art; The Walker offers tradition with old masters hung in a traditional gallery style; the Biennial brings international artists to Liverpool. Bluecoat's place within this ecology is as an art space more broadly defined. This characteristic performs its identification as an 'arts centre' and with this, Bluecoat is positioned in the particular history of this type of arts space. In other words, Bluecoat's repeated refrain that it is the 'UK's oldest arts centre' serves an important function—it establishes its uniqueness in a crowded market of diminishing resources.

Bluecoat has a complicated relationship to the history of arts centres. Arts centres were a flagship policy of the nascent Arts Council of Great Britain established in 1945. There was a flurry of interest in the directly post-war period in developing a network of arts centres which would continue the wartime community strengthening and morale boosting function of civic cultural programming (Brown, 1945; Evans, 2001, p. 107). It was proposed that these centres would provide a space where the public:

> May listen to good music, look at paintings, study any object under the sun, join a debate, enjoy a game of badminton and get a mug of beer or cocoa before they go home (Williams, 1943)

Specific architectural plans were laid out which would, much like the contemporary Bluecoat, feature performance spaces, galleries and social or café spaces (The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1945). This effort, and its development, become known as the 'arts centre movement' (Weight, 1998, p. 157) and was deeply influenced by the French systematic policy for Maisons de la Culture (Lane, 1978, p. 8). However, these plans remained largely unrealised. Instead of the unified movement of arts centres that had been envisioned, a scattered network of experiments in the format proliferated. The arts centre movement went through various permutations—such as 'arts labs' (Lane, 1978, p. 15)—and a few committed advocates helped create centres such as Birmingham's MAC (opened 1962). However, as post-war idealism gave way to limited state funding, the arts centres movement relied more on powerful advocates in the art world than on the state and more often than

not made use of existing buildings rather than realising the purpose built blueprints of the early advocates of arts centres (Lane, 1978; Hutchinson & Forrester, 1987).

In 1967 a study located 34 arts centres in England and Wales (sited in (The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976, p. 1)); in 1976, 133 were reported (The Council of Great Britain, 1976); 174 were included in a directory in 1981 (Barbour & Manton, 1981); by 1987 the number had risen to 242 (Hutchinson & Forrester, 1987). The number fell to 129 in 1996 (MacKeith, 1996) and the most recent study in 2006 featured only 98 (Shaw, et al., 2006). Bluecoat features in all of these, but is not given widespread attention. Currently, the main umbrella organisation for arts centres—Future Arts Centres, a collaboration of nine UK arts centres, with whom Bluecoat is collaborating in 2020—acts as an advocacy group, arguing for the continued importance of arts centres in an art world that hardly recognises the category. Indeed, MacKeith's 1996 report found that many of these spaces were not identifying as arts centres—the nature of art-form funding driving them to specialise—and suggested that some 'arts centres' should either specialise (for example, become theatres) or close (MacKeith, 1996). Across this literature, however, a very loose definition of arts centres recurs in which they are institutions with some social function as well as displaying or performing art; indeed, the main discourse around arts centres is an attempt to clarify this 'peculiarly amorphous' definition (Hutchinson & Forrester, 1987, p. 3).

Bluecoat stakes its claim as the oldest art centre in the UK on the date that the Sandon Society of Artists established the Bluecoat Society of Arts in 1927. This allows it to predate Bridgwater arts centre, which opened in October 1946, the first arts centre in the image of the post-war plans, and Swindon's arts centre which opened in November 1946 (Lane, 1978, pp. 2–3). Across its history, Bluecoat has variously foregrounded the phrase 'arts centre and today, Bluecoat's tag line is 'Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts.'

The narrative introduced here is largely similar to that within authorised histories of Bluecoat, such as the pamphlet 'Bluecoat: The First Three Hundred Years' (Bluecoat, 2017a). This, therefore, reproduces a way of envisioning the past that corresponds with the strategic priorities of Bluecoat as they are storied by institutional staff, especially those in the communications department. Of memory and the past, Eviatar Zerubavel writes:

> Certain schematic formats of narrating the past are far more prevalent in some cultural and historical contexts than in others [and] they are by and large manifestations of unmistakably social traditions of remembering (Zerubavel, 2004, p. 14)

Zerubavel makes clear that what might seem like a natural or disinterested narration of the past is always produced through local, contemporary settings with uneven power relations. This casts the introduced timeline of Bluecoat as a 'social tradition of remembering' (Zerubavel, 2004, p. 14) that is produced by the workers that communicate Bluecoat's history under their socio-economic pressures (i.e. the industry drive towards branding). It is worth making clear, therefore, that parallel readings of Bluecoat could be offered that could be mapped onto the socio-material history of the site with the same degree of purchase. One such example would be the legacy of the trading of enslaved peoples that is entangled with the building's history. Bluecoat acknowledges this past (MyBluecoat, 2018), but makes a distinction between the building and the institution of Bluecoat with regards this history. As such, the parts of Bluecoat's history that prevail include: Its status as an arts centre and UK's first, the construction of the building three hundred years ago; the activities of the Sandon Society as the early artistic adopters of the site; and the exhibitions programme since the 1960s. These testify to the narrative of Bluecoat as a site of historical and contemporary artistic importance in a strategic and managed way, and are various linked to the history of the building itself. While doing so, it sits slightly at a distance from the 'social tradition[s] of remembering' (Zerubavel, 2004, p. 14) elsewhere, for example in the history of arts centres introduced onto which Bluecoat awkwardly maps.

However, for a claim to be staked on Bluecoat's nature as an arts centre, certain hallmarks of an arts centre must be apparent. This is achieved through the diversity of socio-material practices that happen on the site which are not necessarily related to its function of presenting art. As per the envisioned idea of arts centre in the 1940s, visitors to Bluecoat can enjoy refreshment, catch up with friends, enjoy the garden or attend a class (these are mainly profit generating activities under the management of Bluecoat Trading). As such, the Bluecoat is a busy social site which on any day of the week is full of lots of people doing lots of things, with various relations to the art world that centres on the gallery. This is a critical point for this thesis. The socio-material practices in the café, Hub and garden, which neighbour the gallery, are distinct from those within the gallery and different practices of sense-making prevail. This is predominately realised through a different relation to objects, which are mobilised for their use-value in the café (for example) but in the gallery are engaged with and interpreted in relation to the discursive and symbolic world of art and its histories. It has been suggested so far in this thesis that this is in part achieved by the aesthetic of the gallery which signifies its relation to the field of art. However, the focus in this thesis on socio-material interactions makes it necessary to study specific moments when

the art gallery comes into being and is socially animated as distinct from the rest of the arts centre. This makes an arts centre a fruitful site to undertake the current research, as the many different uses of the site make the distinction of the galleries, required for their existence, precarious and contingent. Both material and affective work is needed to realise the galleries as a unique space within the arts centre, and it is this work that is studied in this thesis.

On Entering the Field (February–September 2017)

This thesis took an unusual route to developing its methods. Methods are usually designed in relation to the access the researcher has or wishes to gain to the site. The parameters of this study, however, were, to some degree, set before the research itself began. This had determining effects on the shape and scope of the study. As such this project did not begin with my interest in hidden labour in the art world of work or the position of galleries within arts centres, nor was Bluecoat chosen and approached to peruse this interest. Rather, the area of interest arose through spending time at Bluecoat and with its staff. This was an iterative process, and one which required me to follow, rather than pre-empt, the action I encountered at Bluecoat. However, the literature on sociology of art had cultivated an interest in material and objects, which I brought with me to my empirical work.

The study was the result of an ongoing collaboration between the arts centre and the University of Liverpool's philosophy and sociology departments. In 2013–2015, Bluecoat hosted an academic from the Philosophy department—Dr Yiota Vassilopoulou—as their 'Philosopher in Residence' (Bluecoat, 2013). This was believed to be the first scheme of its kind in the UK and included public lectures and reading groups, as well as undergraduate courses taught at Bluecoat and opened up to the public. A few years later, in 2017, the scheme was continued with Dr Paul Jones taking on the role of 'Sociologist in Residence' (The University of Liverpool, 2017). The Artistic Director of Bluecoat, Brian Biggs—who was also the curator of the exhibition studied—was instrumental in facilitating this collaboration. As a part of the 'Sociologist in Residence' scheme a PhD Studentship was proposed as part of the Economic and Social Research Council's CASE Studentship scheme. It was to be co-supervised by Bluecoat and The University of Liverpool, to undertake a sociological case study of the arts centre and its place in the city. Bluecoat's two Academics-in-Residence and Artistic Director made up the supervisory team of this PhD position, to which I successfully applied.

The basis of this PhD was therefore characterised by a very specific field site and a very broad research topic. As a case study it was clear that the shape of the research, and the development and deployment of theory, would emerge through the engagement with the

site (Alexander & Bennett, 2005; Price, et al., 2009). Beginning with the site ensured that the research spoke specifically to phenomena encountered at Bluecoat, rather than using the art centre to illustrate a theory developed elsewhere, sharing this principle with grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). For this reason the empirical research began unusually early in the PhD project, in the fifth month of study. This was made possible by the fact that access to the site was pre-ordained through the cooperation and participation of the Artistic Director.

Before empirical research could commence it was necessary to gain ethical permission from the University of Liverpool. The ambiguous and broad scope of the project characteristic of the beginning of a case study meant that the ethical approval had to account for the emergent nature of the research topic. As such, the main stakes in ethical approval concerned the longitudinal nature of the study and the necessity for myself as researcher to be physically present and part of the everyday life of the institution. This speaks to the prevalence of ethnographically informed methods within the social research of institutions (Campbell & Gregor, 2004) and particularly within cultural institutions (Adler, 1979; Born, 1995; Born, 2011) and contemporary art (Fillitz & van der Grijp, 2018). It also draws from Institutional Ethnography's approach to studying the structuring effects of local institutional process on everyday lives (Smith, 2005; Smith, 2006). This proved key to the development of analysis, which concerns the effects of Bluecoat's institutional organisation (as a place of work) on the workforce who socio-materially produced the exhibition on the ground.

Ethical approval was granted for an eighteen-month period during which I would study Bluecoat using ethnographically informed methods such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews. These were informed by the long history of the ethnographic tradition, which can be defined as 'people-focused emic research which makes use of data collection methods such as participation, observation and interview, and which unfolds by way of thick description and interpretive contextualization' (Vannini, 2015, p. 318). These methods offered the breadth to explore the everyday life of the institution by embedding myself within it. I also anticipated that it may be necessary to observe outside of Bluecoat, and this was included in my ethics application. In general, both the ethical clearance and initial field work encounters were angled towards the interactions between the people and things that animate the site, and to gravitate towards practices not usually identified as 'artistic.'

The clear and distinct categorisation of research methods required by ethics committees has been argued to be at odds with the emergent and contingent nature of ethnographic

research (Haggerty, 2004; Schrag, 2011). The bureaucratic and prospective nature of ethical reviewing has been argued to be ill-suited to the ethnographic method, where ethical complications arise in the course of the field work that could not be anticipated. What is more, ethical review requires researches to pin down their method, which may in fact be closer to spontaneous social interactions (Bosk, 2007). The process, it has been argued, has less to do with ensuring ethnographic research and decision-making is practiced ethically than with insuring the University against risk (Neves, et al., 2018). As such, while for the purposes of ethical approval this project fell neatly into predefined 'interviews' or 'observation', it was clear from the beginning that it would in practice be characterised by more contingent social interactions, observations, unplanned discussions and conversations that blurred the boundaries of 'observation', 'participation' and 'interviews' (O'Reilly, 2012; Skinner, 2014). In practice, I undertook seven semi-structured interviews with key members of staff in advance of the main stretch of ethnographic study as a way for me to gather information that would shape the empirical research, rather than providing data for analysis per se. These 'semi-structured interviews' were therefore presented more as meetings or conversations than as interviews; a form of interaction more familiar within the working day, and more appropriate for the scoping aim of the interaction. Following the ethnographic study, five semi-structured interviews were completed with participants that I had met throughout the project and whose specific insight into labour relations was illuminating. These interviews were transcribed and analysed along with the rest of the ethnographic field notes and primary documents.

As is common to institutional ethnographies and case studies I was resistant to following predefined, sedimented orderings of the life of the institution (i.e. departmental separations, pay scale or staff structure [Appendix Three]) —this was to resist encountering Bluecoat and its exhibitions as an 'end-result' (Wadel, 1979), rather than a process of collaboration, as per Becker. It can be said of organisational studies (with which the current study shares some characteristics) that attention is often focused on the managerial culture and practices, rather than the 'humdrum, everyday experiences of people working in institutions' (Ybema, et al., 2009, p. 1). As such, this study was motivated by a desire to get close to practices that fall outside of managerial roles including those that are not invested with cultural or symbolic value by the art world. The staff structure of Bluecoat [Appendix Three] demonstrates how institutional analysis can easily fall prey to an over-reliance on the institutional signposting of what is and is not important (what is and is not a part of the institution) —note how the outsourced cleaning team, short-term employed gallery techs and unpaid volunteers do not

feature in this diagram. In other words, if I had pre-planned my institutional field work according to this staff structure, I would have missed whole sections of the workforce integral to the construction of Bluecoat's gallery that are integral to a study shaped in the image of Becker's art world.

This orientation to the work of Bluecoat would, I anticipated, lead me towards practices that are usually hidden from view as they are not part of the public facing functions of the arts centre. Recent work in visual methods for social analysis seemed to offer a way to think through how to respect and re-interpret these practices that are usually 'invisible', or veiled. Drawing on work in sensory ethnography and visual ethnography I considered the benefits of visual data collection during the ethnographic study (Pink, 2009; Rose, 2012; Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015). Ethical approval was sought to use film and photography equipment as a part of the ethnographic study, and to display the resulting images in public. The Artistic Director provided a letter to indicate that this research practice met the institution's approval, which included providing adequate signage. The next chapter will introduce my use of visual methods, suffice for now to note that ethical clearance was gained to do so from the commencement of the research.

Institutions can appear highly complex and nebulous at first sight and social researchers are faced with making their own sense of these 'complex institutional settings' (Delbridge & Edwards, 2013). This complexity was apparent in early interactions with the field site, and it became clear that—while remaining broad and embedded—the empirical research would benefit from having an ordering principle. As such, I decided to follow the development of one exhibition, *In the Peaceful Dome*, which was in its very early planning stages when I started my project. The exhibition was curated by Artistic Director, and supervisor of this project, Brain Biggs. It was a group show featuring both contemporary and canonical artists, themed around the history of Bluecoat. The exhibition concluded Bluecoat's tercentenary celebrations, its leaflet can be found in Appendix Two and I will introduce it further in Chapter Seven. Following this process closely would take my research to many different areas of the arts centre as a place of work, from funding to curation to education and public outreach. This design was inspired by Yaneva's 2003 papers 'When a Bus Met a Museum' and 'Chalk Steps on the Museum Floor: Following Artists, Curators and Workers in an Art Installation' in which she followed the process of an art work being installed in order to learn something about the various human and non-human actors which together assemble an arts institution. This detailed the difficult and particular process of installing a bus within the halls of an art gallery, involving negotiating material concerns like weight and dimensions (Yaneva, 2003b),

as well as the installation of a chalk mural which involved negotiating specific material affordances that arose through the combination of chalk and the floor—dusty footprints (Yaneva, 2003a). I wished to take this further, to begin not at the point where the art work 'meets' the gallery, but to follow the tides of activity that brought these two material things together from the earliest possible stage.

This had the added benefit of making my project easy to present to staff at Bluecoat. It is an important ethical responsibility of the researcher to ensure her participant's consent is based on being properly informed of the methods and aims of the research (Sin, 2005). For this reason, it is necessary to frame the research in language which is accessible and appropriate to the particular research site. I presented my research as 'following the exhibition making process from beginning to end.' This was clear and uncomplicated, set the perimeters of my study, signposted what I was interested in and made it clear that my engagement with the site would be long-lasting. It had the added benefit of linking myself to the exhibition, as a result of which I found participants took the initiative to invite me to meetings and 'CC' me into communication chains pertaining to *In the Peaceful Dome*.

I also required methods which could account for the dynamic, lively nature of Bluecoat as a social space. The site is characterised by its different spaces—shop, studio, exhibition, and café—each inhabited through an (implicit) different set of behaviours, symbolic associations and attitudes towards objects. Similarly, the social and commercial life of Liverpool One that flows constantly past the gallery windows is tacitly understood to be symbolically distinct from the space of the gallery. Navigating the borders between these symbolic zones requires a dexterity of socially 'appropriate' behaviours and the shifting criteria of symbolic judgement—the material borders between, for example, the Hub and the neighbouring display areas are not necessarily obvious. Early field work made it clear how dexterous Bluecoat's public is. In fact, during the entire field work I only encountered one or two 'breach acts', where the behaviours 'breached' the background expectancies of everyday life (Garfinkel, 1984, p. 54).[29] For this reason, I required a method amenable to the study of these diverse areas and able to flow with participants across these borders. I found this in

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[29] An example of this was a group of children who visited the gallery. They were intrigued by an art work of two outstretched metal hands and arms. They wished to know how it would sound if they bounced their ball off of it. Upon doing so, they were quickly chastised by an invigilating volunteer. This acts as an exception that proves the rule—sense-making in the gallery is highly proscribed, and occasionally policed.

ethnography, which benefits from allowing the researcher to be reflexive to the social life encountered in the field, and to move in its tides.

I began my field work in February 2017 with a series of conversations with members of office staff. I had previously been introduced around the offices by the Artistic Director and I sent an email to all staff informing them of my presence on site. I was set up with a Bluecoat staff email address, giving me easy access to the directory of directly employed staff. I was given a key to access the whole of the building and a desk to make use of, which I used for a couple of days each week from the commencement of the field work. I benefited greatly from this early and broad-ranging access to the institution, which allowed me to undertake early exploratory reading while embedding myself in the place of study.

This access was closely linked to the Artistic Director. Not only had he collaborated on the proposal with the rest of the supervisory team, he also structured the way that access to the institution played out. For example, I was introduced to members of office staff by him which had the effect of positioning me in an ambiguous relation to the institution: I was introduced as an external PhD student[30], and yet I was bound up with the 'residency' scheme and vouched for by the Artistic Director (a position, in practice, nearly at the top of the staff structure). From the outset, I was aware that this may have created a situation in which staff members felt unable to not give consent to participating in my study as I was invested with some of the power of their institutional managers. This positioning of my research poses an ethical and political question and it was perhaps unavoidable that my research had some of the hallmarks of 'studying down', endorsed as it was by the managerial class, imposed as it was (despite my best efforts) on the more precariously employed, the less able to complain. Perhaps this is an ethical concern built into the case studies when access to the field site is routed through management. I endeavoured to diminish this risk by establishing rapport with colleagues, being clear in the concern of my research (following an exhibition) and making sure my distance from Bluecoat was clear—i.e. that I was not undertaking evaluative research on behalf of their employer, but rather academic research of my own devising.

Entering the field as a social researcher required me to think through how best to ethically relate to my participants and to render their lived experiences through my chosen methods. Every methodological choice brings with it an ethics of both relation and representation. The ethnographic nature of my study brought me close to my participants at an inter-personal level and was responsive and committed to the social life I encountered on the ground at

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[30] Bluecoat had previously hosted other PhD studies so this was a familiar role.

Bluecoat (Back & Puwar, 2013). The emergent nature of the research also meant that it was characterised as a study 'with', rather than 'of', my participants; following Ingold, the study aimed to 'correspond' with the people whose practices I encountered, and not to 'speak for them' (Ingold, 2017a, p. 21). This shares an ethical principle with feminist standpoint theory in which the research encounter is motivated by the aim 'to see together without claiming to be another' (Haraway, 1998, p. 586). This also required me to remain aware of the partiality of my position, to attempt to mitigate the power invested in me through my (perceived or real) institutional place, and to acknowledge the prior knowledge of the field I brought with me.

The importance of this orientation to the inter-personal encounters of field work became evident as the extent to which my access to the site was linked to the Artistic Director become clearer. The particular staff that I was introduced to in the initial stages reflected the hierarchies of cultural capital that structure the arts as a place of work—i.e. the importance of the curatorial work, and the outsourcing of cleaning—and was mediated by the Artistic Director. In February 2017, I began my fieldwork with a meeting between myself, the Artistic Director, the (then) head of programming and the (then) curator. This meeting had been set up to kick start the project, to fill me in on the current curatorial projects and for me to introduce my project. It was clear that curation and artistic programming was considered (by the Artistic Director, at least) to be central to any study of Bluecoat, and the natural place to start. Of course, this was not where I eventually located my research.

The first period of field work was categorised by a series of such meetings in which I endeavoured to learn more about the individual roles of staff members. In general, this was informed by the staff structure I had been sent [Appendix Three]; a structure which, over the course of the field work, was shown to be very changeable and marked by a relatively high staff turnover (again, emphasising the movement, or flow, that characterises the institution and is ill-accounted for by such documents). These meetings were also an opportunity for me to introduce myself without the Artistic Director present as gatekeeper. I took this opportunity to position myself as primarily a PhD researcher looking at the institution, rather than a part of the institution per se. In general, the managers were familiar with my project's relation to the 'residency' scheme. Through these conversations I fleshed out a little more about the project ('following the exhibition making process') and made clear that the research was looking more broadly at processes and the production of values than it was at individual workers and their 'performance.' By this, I hoped to distance my work from the increasingly prevalent surveillance within institutions linked to capitalist managerial cultures

(Sennett, 1998, pp. 20, 59; Hansson & Palm, 2005). Finally, as these initial meetings were with departmental managers, they also acted as gatekeepers for the staff under their management.

I organised these meetings on site, usually in the Hub café space. The reasons for this were two-fold. Firstly, it was the least disruptive to the working days of my participants. An ethical consideration of workplace research is not adding to the work-related stress of the participants. The arts and culture sector is marked by a steady real-terms decrease in funding (Arts Council England; New Local Government Network, 2016), resulting in a general tendency to employ only a limited workforce who are under-rewarded. Work-related stress and anxiety is commonplace (ArtsMinds, 2018). This was clear from the outset of my research. Staff reported leaving late, working over contract as standard, I witnessed many staffing changes and indeed the gallery itself relies on the unpaid labour of volunteer invigilators. This is not particular to Bluecoat, however it did mean that I felt an ethical duty to limit the added work required by participating in my research.

The second benefit of having the initial meetings on site was to make myself a familiar face to the front of house staff. As such, I would always make sure to greet whoever who behind the welcome desk and to inform them of who I was, who I was there to meet and make sure that Participant Information and Consent Forms were available behind the desk [Appendix Four]. I would often sit in Bluecoat to work, even when I did not have meetings, attempting to become in some small way a part of the regular life of Bluecoat. I understood, however, that again I occupied an ambiguous position as I met with managers and was often escorted by the Artistic Director, while also enjoying the luxury of inhabiting the café as and when I chose. What is more, front of house staff have an especially high turnover and are quite numerous. The limits of my ambition here was simply to make it known that I was present and in what capacity, and that I welcomed any questions or passing chat.

The Space Between

At this juncture I would like to introduce a complication that became apparent early on in the fieldwork as I reflexively thought through my place on site, a central tenant I have drawn from feminist research (England, 1993). I have an education and professional background in the arts, having worked as a freelance arts writer in both Liverpool and other cities in the years preceding my PhD, and continued to do so over the course of my study. This had two main effects. Firstly, I was not a complete stranger to some members of staff, and indeed in meetings or conversations I was sometimes called upon more as an art writer than a PhD student. As mentioned, Liverpool has a small arts scene in which I have moved for some

years. As such, existing social or professional ties linked me to some of my participants—for example, I had previously lived in the same building as one of the exhibiting artists. This, in general, benefited the project as I was familiar with the reference points and ways of talking of the institutional arts—I could 'talk the talk,' and this smoothed my initial meetings perhaps even eliciting trust in myself as a researcher. It also allowed me to occupy spaces, like the private view, with a degree of confidence.

On the other hand, I considered myself to be familiar with the art centre as a phenomenon. I did not have the benefit of confronting it as a 'stranger' (Schutz, 1967; Simmel, 1971); I am literate in the contemporary arts in a way that renders its bizarre and seemingly random outputs sensible and meaningful. However, I have never worked directly in an arts institution beyond as an intern or volunteer gallery invigilator. This meant that the frontstage roles within the gallery—director, curator, and outreach—were familiar to me. I did not, however, have experience of the everyday, practical work that goes into producing the gallery. As such, I found myself drawn to that which was not familiar and, as will become clear, this pushed me away from the workers whose main job is to cultivate discourse—a discourse I engage with as an arts writer—and towards those performing on the backstage of the arts centre.

The ambiguity of my position on site, and of my research in relation to the organisation, speaks to contemporary writing on the ambiguous positions that the social researcher can find themselves in. The 'crisis' in anthropology, and its attendant ethnographic method, has been consistently challenging the partial nature of ethnographic knowledge due to the social, relational position of the researcher (Clifford & Marcus, 2010). A result of this has been a challenging to the insider/outsider binary, a move towards a recognition of how researchers often straddle these categories and a recognition of the diverting effect of the intimacy with which the researcher inhabits the data collection/ knowledge production process in all qualitative methods (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 55). Generally speaking, this can be linked to a move away from grand theoretical narratives, a growing 'doubt that any discourse has a privileged place, any method or theory a universal and general claim to authority' (Richardson, 1991, p. 173) and a movement towards acknowledging that qualitative research contains traces of the body and life of the researcher.

In my field site I occupied the 'space between' an insider and an outsider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). By the 'space between' Dwyer and Buckle refer to the dialectical relationship between being 'in' and 'out' of a group: 'Holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote

complete difference' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 60). As such, subscribing to the binary of insider/outsider not only masks the ways in which researchers are always inside their analysis, it also does not map onto how researchers actually relate to groups. In my study, I occupied the 'space between' in several ways: between staff and non-staff;[31] between a member of the art world and a (trainee) sociologist; between a friend and critic of the institution;[32] between social and professional relationships. In this, I occupied a 'third space' somewhere between insider and outsider: 'A space between, a space of paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence, as well as conjunction and disjunction' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 60). This recalls Ingold's emphasis throughout all his work on 'with,' as this 'space between' allows for the conjunction, or indeed correspondence, of myself with my various positions and collaborators.

This speaks to feminist standpoint theory's insistence on the partiality of the knowledge production process, and the (patriarchal) power invested in attempts to obscure this (Smith, 1987; Harding, 2004). Feminist standpoint theory argues that the development and deployment of sociological theories and concerns reflects the power invested in its largely male canon. This has been matched by work which acknowledges the relationship between colonial power and knowledge production and research methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith, 2010). Taking this to the field requires the researcher to be committed to a research and analysis practice that acknowledges their standpoint, or positionality, as well as the privileges of the researcher.

In this research, my standpoint was not only defined by the 'space between.' The embodied nature of (most) qualitative research means that the body of the researcher themselves contributes to the unfolding research. In my case, this requires a recognition of the ways in which encounters are shaped by my white, cis-gendered, female, relatively young personhood. These identities played into the field work positioning me in certain pre-existing relationships with participants. For example, my gender put me at a distance from most of the gallery techs, and my age placed me in closer proximity to low and mid-level institutional staff.

As my field work continued, and I navigated the 'space between' that I found myself in, my interest began to move away from the discourse-producing institutional staff such as the Artistic Director. In arts organisations producing discourse is a power largely vested in the

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[31] I had to sign in to the staff book, but could come and go as I pleased.
[32] Over the course of this PhD I published reviews of different exhibition at Bluecoat.

managerial class. By April 2017, many of Bluecoat's staff had begun to work *on In the Peaceful Dome*, and as the planning process moved to more practical concerns, I moved with it. I began to meet with office staff 'lower' down in the structure such as the Programme Co-ordinator and Development Officer. Through these meetings, I began to learn about the 'behind the scenes' work of administrating an exhibition, for example soliciting potential funders and collecting environmental readings of the gallery space to satisfy insurers.

During this time I was also embedding myself in Bluecoat's publics by attending many of their events, especially those linked to the 'residency' scheme. This included co-running a public reading group that discussed key texts from this thesis. I was also endeavouring to embed myself in the day-to-day lives of Bluecoat's staff. This involved making use of office desk space. Desk space is a limited and highly coveted resource at Bluecoat, whose offices are not particularly well-suited to their purpose, made up of a series of small rooms with four or five desks—knowing exactly when I was able to use the desk was a constant negotiation. I ended up using a desk two days a week for a couple of months during its usual occupant's days off. This desk was in the office of the Bluecoat 300 team where most of the discussion was about archival material or interviews. The disconnected nature of Bluecoat's offices meant that while using the desk I was not witness to the general activity of other office staff. As such, I decided that it would be more fruitful to spend more intense periods of time with each department.

In May I moved to spend a week with the Development Officer in an office shared with Marketing and Facilities. Whenever I was working closely with a member of staff I offered to help. Internships are common in arts organisations (Cullinane & Montacute, 2018) and this is how I presented myself—able to help with about the same degree of responsibility as an intern. I was unwilling to take on too much responsibly as I did not want to risk doing anything incorrectly and causing harm to my participants. However, as a 'participant observer' I was keen to learn about the kinds of tasks being performed by office staff.

In general, most of my participants were reluctant to give me work to do, and I felt this reflected an uncertainty about my position at Bluecoat. There seemed to be a sense that asking work of me would be adding unreasonably to my workload, and that, as a PhD student, I should not be burdened with data-entry or such tasks. Only the Development Officer delegated work to me, asking me to develop a database of potential funders for the exhibition, find their addresses and draft letters requesting funding. This was perhaps because her manager had left his post the previous week, and she was clearly facing an

amount of work well above her pay grade. As a result of my work here, Bluecoat secured £1,000 from the Margaret Guido Charitable Trust. Later in the year, in August, I spent time in the Programming office observing the Programme Co-ordinator and Curator.

My time spent in the offices at Bluecoat provided strikingly little by way of information about the exhibition making process. The nature of offices is that they are full of individuals doing individual things—people do not tend to talk about what they are doing, and so I remained relatively ignorant thereof. I would occasionally ask, but often did not want to interrupt and found that people were not always able to say, exactly, what they were doing or felt it was 'too boring' to really explain. What is more, office work is often characterised by a high turn-over of different tasks—one minute answering an email, the next nipping to the printer, filling in a spreadsheet and then making a cup of tea. As such, even asking 'what are you doing?' was not a particularly useful question as most staff members are doing several things at once.

It was therefore more fruitful to attend meetings specifically related *to In the Peaceful Dome*. I was invited to regular meetings such as Communications and Programming/ Curation, and during my first time at any such meeting I would introduce my project and distribute Participant Information and Consent Forms. However, while these meetings provided some general insight into the operation of power in within the staff, the function of these meetings was to communicate work that had already been done towards the planning process. As such, just as in the office-based field work, I found that these meetings allowed me to learn retrospectively or second-hand about the planning process rather than witnessing it in action.

In order to get close to the planning process as a process, I found that an embodied 'participant observer' role was not particularly well suited. This is due to the fact that much of the labour involved in this part of the exhibition planning period is immaterial—it produces the informational and cultural content of a commodity (art work/ art centre/ exhibition) (Lazzarato, 1996), labour that is difficult to study empirically. What is more, I was aware that this production of the cultural content of the arts centre was not turned into an exhibition by magic, but that there would be a host of workers and material processes going on elsewhere in conjunction with this immaterial work and that it was those processes that spoke to my interest in support personnel as informed by Becker. This, coupled with the sporadic nature of the office-based work (i.e. only intermittently working on *In the Peaceful Dome*), meant that I was often frustrated by a sense that, while I may physically have had access to the site of this labour, I nonetheless remained on its periphery.
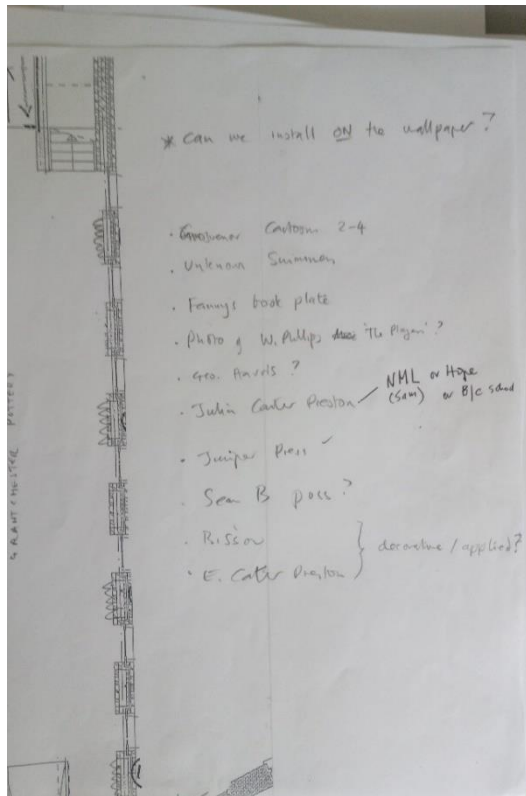
Figure Two [From field notes, 14/07/2017]

There were three aspects of this period of field work (February–September 2017) that proved most useful. Firstly, my close working relationship with the Artistic Director, who was curating *In the Peaceful Dome*, meant that I often met with him and talked through his plans. These plans were often pencil sketches, sometimes in notebooks or on scrap paper and usually done when the thought occurred during some other activity [Figure Two]. These kind of ephemeral notes, however, provided insights to the exhibition physically taking shape, demonstrating the transformation of the discourse around the exhibition from shared digital, textual documents to actual, spatially specific material form. The Artistic Director was generous with his time and willing to share these rough sketches with me when I would pass by to see how the process was progressing. The informality of both this data (sketches) and data collection (usually over a cup of tea) was difficult to plan or anticipate, and depended on the rapport established with the Artistic Director. Similarly, it was only through actually talking over the sketches that his 'notes to self' were made sensible to me. This relationship and the insights it gave me were invaluable in the contextualisation of the exhibition making process.

Secondly, I found it was productive to be 'CC-ed' into email chains concerning the exhibition. This is where most of the discussion or planning of the exhibition took place. I was made privy to discussions on how the exhibition was to be framed, negotiations with exhibiting artists and practical issues like payment and 'Destroy Agreements' as well as the language, familiarity and tone in which such discussions were held. This reflects the digital, networked and dispersed nature of contemporary office work. However, while these communications allowed me insight to the planning as it unfolded (as these emails often achieved a development of the plan), it also had the effect of uncoupling the field work from the actual physical site as I, like all recipients of the email chain, would pick up emails through my phone or laptop while being physically off-site. These emails proved useful for the familiarity they gave me with the art works that later appeared in the exhibition, and the material and administrative journey they had been on before arriving at Bluecoat.

Finally, I accompanied the Artistic Director on a couple of off-site visits. Firstly, to the London studio of an artist who was exhibiting, Jo Stockham (July 2017) and secondly to an organisation that was lending work to the show (August 2017, Liverpool Hope University). These visits had the benefit of putting me in the spaces where planning conversations happened, surrounded by the objects on which these conversations depended. It was striking that the generally slow process of exhibition planning was accelerated in these meetings. Decisions were made which would have considerable effects on the exhibition (for example, what to show) simply based on a quick glance at an object, or realising that another object was not going to work.

These visits were valuable not only for the contextual information they gave me about the exhibition. They also helped develop the methods I would take into the gallery install. The introduced frustrations of the ethnographic field work largely concerned the immateriality (and un-observability) of the work being done, compounded by the dispersed and fragmentary nature of contemporary office work, which seemed at odds with the insistent materiality of the arts centre. These visits demonstrated the benefit of focusing on objects as a way in to studying the exhibition which grew increasingly close.

The lack of objects and material has been a topic of discussion within literature on immaterial labour. It has been argued that studying immaterial labour at the expense of material process of production obscures many forms of labour—especially those material workers who tend to be less financially rewarded than the producers of cultural content (Graeber, 2008). In response, researchers have returned the discussion of immaterial labour to the production

of material goods (Brennan, 2015). Indeed, up to the point of the studio and collection visits, my ethnographic field work experiences seemed to operate in the negative space around art works, with very little to do with the materiality of the arts centre and exhibition. As such, it became clear that I needed to relocate my field work into the proximity of the object that would be placed into the exhibition, in order to ensure by research did not take them as a fait accompli, nor obscure the non-immaterial labour that they required.

As such, my office based field work drew to an end in September 2017, on the cusp of the installation. This ethnographic-in-character study had been invaluable in furnishing me with contextual information and a sense of the institution, especially the production of its stories, as well as giving me an overview of the division of labour in the arts centre. It also left me in no doubt that work in the arts is indeed, as I found in the literature, marked by very high workloads and stress levels. However, it was clear that I had gained all I was likely to from ethnographic research in the offices. Following the success of the studio visits and the findings of my literature review, I drew a line under this period of my fieldwork, and went in search of materials. The flow of activity outside the office doors, through the gallery spaces and café, appeared to me to express the arts centre as it was becoming, being animated. I felt my research being pulled back into its midst

My interest therefore began to focus in on the impending installation process which was to begin on 2nd October 2017. Not only did this research site offer the same benefits of the fruitful studio visits—i.e. being fundamentally material—it also brought me into contact with the area of the arts centre with which I was least familiar: the manual labour it requires. This also returned me to the frontstage areas of the arts centre (i.e. the gallery), but to occupy them at a time when they were closed to the public. This had one large drawback, however: I had no idea who the installation work force were, and therefore depended entirely on the two weeks of their work at Bluecoat.

From February to September 2017 I had attended meetings, worked in offices, conducted 'semi-structured' interviews and gone on off-site visits in my attempt to follow the development of the exhibition. Over this time I composed field notes, which I continued during the installation and until the close of the exhibition in April 2018. I also collected many primary documents related to Bluecoat, including business plans, minutes of meetings, historical documents and many email chains. Following the installation, I conducted follow-up interviews with some participants that I encountered through working at the installation, and transcribed these. Over the course of all of my empirical research, I was taking

photographs of my encounters. I organised and coded these resources—fieldnotes, primary documents, transcripts and images—in NVivo.

This provided the necessary contextual backdrop upon which I could mount the local study of the installation process. With this (largely) in hand, I felt confident going into the install, equipped with a vast knowledge of the institution and its industry. This is the foundation upon which much of this thesis is based, even though it now moves to focus on the few weeks of the gallery install and opening. This period of fieldwork, therefore, helped me hone my research question and methods, as well as being the necessary preliminary work on which the following close, fine-grained and material analysis is based. However, even as I move away from this stage of the research, I carried with me both an ethnographic attitude to the social worlds that surrounded me, as well as drawing on the knowledge I had gained of the working life of Bluecoat's office staff. It with this contextual backdrop that the analysis in Chapters Seven and Eight is based, which study both the social practices of the gallery techs and the construction of the publics of *In the Peaceful Dome* at the private view. Without this preparatory study, I would not have been able to place the social life encountered in the specific local context of Bluecoat, and to relate this, in turn, to larger structuring of social life in the art world.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the ethnographically-informed field work that followed the development of an exhibition at Bluecoat. I have introduced the ethical processes to which this research was subject, and the tradition to which it belongs—ethnography. I have detailed the initial stage of my empirical research, which began very early on in my PhD and was characterised by 'participant observation' with office based staff. My positionality in the field, which I have called the 'space between' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), has been introduced in a consideration of my reflexive practice of conducting research. In parallel to this empirical work, I was studying the sociology of art as introduced in Chapter One. This was reinforcing my experience in the field that something was missing—the art object itself. I found it productive to be exploring this literature while on-the-ground at Bluecoat, noticing that many discussions of art in sociological terms—such as the sociological deconstruction of artistic forms—bared little relevance to the working life of an arts centre. Instead, my persisting interest was in how Bluecoat managed to keep its gallery distinct from the rest of the arts centre. I knew that this was a function of exhibitions, hence my decision to follow one, but had yet to get close to the action of production this distinction. However, the exhibition planning process was, by October 2017, poised and ready to be realised in material. All that

was missing was the workers, and the material. I knew to find these I had to find myself in the backstage of the gallery, on the wrong side of the locked gallery doors.

The next chapter will therefore introduce the component of the field work that moved to working with these manual labourers. It was at this juncture that I took up visual methods, concerned as I was with texture and embodied skill. The previous chapter detailed the theoretical underpinning of this thesis, placing an emphasis on movement and texture. These are not a stake in the empirical research so far introduced, but the next chapter turns to these concerns. I anticipated that the installation would be a highly material process, requiring me to have developed a materially sensitive method. In Chapter Three I discussed 'socio-material' research and the following chapter I take a step back to introduce the method of film making with which I entered the gallery install. As such, my empirical research can be said to have generally progressed from the social towards the material, while recognising the flows and exchanges between these two poles.

Chapter Five: Sociological Film Making

Introduction

The following chapter of this thesis will take the form of a fifteen minute, two-channel film, *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre*. This remains unusual in the context of a sociology thesis, and my choice of this method depends on the theoretical foundations laid out in Chapter Three. The key themes pertinent to the current chapter include movement and processes, skilled or tacit knowledge and surface or texture. Studying these compliments the larger analysis of the exhibition while requiring unique methods. In this chapter I will therefore tease out the practical applications of the methodological arguments of Chapter Three. This continues from the previous chapter where I introduced my ethnographic method which contributed contextual information to the written analysis of Chapters Seven and Eight.

This chapter will begin by introducing the main texts that informed my film making method, in particular Les Back and Nirmal Puwar's *Live Methods* (Back & Puwar, 2012); de la Fuente's textural sociology (2019); and Becker's influential 'Photography and Society' (Becker, 1974b). Susan Sontag's seminal 'Against Interpretation' (2009) provides a useful text to establish the general approach of my film making practice. Following this I will introduce four films which illustrate how the film camera has been used texturally in the study of work: Cao Fei's *Whose Utopia* (2006); Julie Brook's *Pigment* (2013); Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel's *Leviathan* (Castaing-Taylor & Paravel, 2013); and Ben River's *Sack Barrow* and wider artistic practice (2011; 2015). These films and texts straddle art practice, sociological methods, visual anthropology and documentary. With these diverse reference points, I am endeavouring to create a sociology not only 'of art' but one that is also in corresponds to the wide array of creative practices from which sociology might gain.

The filmic part of my research concerns skill and texture—aspects of the social life of the arts centre which resist propositional language. This feeds into, or flows amidst, the wider analysis of the production of the exhibition, and its publics, to be found in Chapter Seven and Eight. The previous chapter introduced my ethnographic study of Bluecoat's exhibition making process, which included gathering primary documents and conducting interviews. Through that work I gained a knowledge of how the institution functions, a sense of the social life of the staff as well as the strange lack of art objects in the planning process. The previous chapter concluded with the beginning of the installation, which is the moment at which I took up the film camera. The second half of this chapter concerns the shooting and editing of the film where I will introduce my use of the film camera over the two weeks of the install. I will

then detail the subsequent months spent in the edit suite and some of the decisions I took there. I do not intend to give an account of how the film should be interpreted, and conclude this section of the chapter with some notes on watching.

In May 2019 I was invited to participate in *Situating Practices*, an exhibition at the University of Huddersfield's Temporary Contemporary gallery. Before concluding this chapter, I will introduce the project that I exhibited there, which developed the footage of the install into a three-channel, interactive installation. Through so doing I hope to show that producing A–B, screen based films is only one way that the film camera and moving images can be made sociologically useful.

Part One: Method
Sociological Film Making: A Texturalist Practice
'The luminousness of the thing in itself' (Sontag, 2009)

The visual field is a growing element of contemporary sociological methods (Harper, 2012). This comes in many forms, from drawing and arts based methods (Literat, 2013), to graphic interpretations of sociological research (Bailey & Tyler, 2018), to studying the social life of image production (Rosenblum, 1978b; Jones, 2013). This rich and diverse field integrates the visual into the course of sociological research in very divergent ways, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to introduce the general status of the visual in contemporary sociology (for an introduction to the use of photography, see (Heng, 2016)). My interest is specifically in the use of image-making technologies as an act of research, where the image produced stands as a research output without being instrumentalised in another way. This makes my interest distinct, for example, from photo-elicitation interviews or participant generated images in general which tend to implicate the images in a larger (often textual) research contexts (Harper, 2002), or in which the visual analysis comes from the participant rather than the research.

This makes the camera, and its use by the researcher, a critical technology to my method. There are many different technologies that can mediate the image-making process, from a pen and paper to digital drawing. There are many reasons I chose to use the film camera. Firstly, it is practical and easily mobile, perfect for a messy and changeable context like a gallery install. Secondly, it does not need my constant attention allowing me to be involved in the install and to move from behind to in front of the lens. Thirdly, it does not demand additional time from my participants nor does it interrupt their work. Finally, and most critically, it records a great quantity of data in real-time (especially important in a time sensitive site like mine). However, a visual method like drawing is clearly mediated by the critical engagement of the drawer with the world. Film making has the tendency to appear unmediated, whereas decisions like what, where, when and who to film are vitally important and also a result of a critical engagement with the world. As such, the technology of the film camera—its affordances—correspond with the unfolding critical attention of the researcher in the data collecting process. The raw footage reflects an immanent and emergent process of analysis.

Unlike a visual method like drawing, however, film making requires the researcher to return again and again to the raw footage, post facto, in the production of the edited film. This is a hugely productive space for an attentive, sensual and non-linguistic analysis to form. In my

research into sociological film making, I have come across a striking lack of writing on the editing suite, despite the fact that this is where the research output emerges from. This positions my work in a certain way. For example, Emma Jackson and Andy Lee's sociological research film *Bowling Together* (2018) shares much with this thesis in terms of its focus on the visual and sensual elements of a site. However, the sociologist herself was not the author of the edited visual outputs. As I will later detail, the editing process was the space where I worked with my raw footage—which already bore the trace of a nascent analysis—and reflected on my experience in the site in the production of a visual output that 'evokes rather than reports on' Bluecoat's install (Vannini, 2015). For this reason, my film making for fieldwork method requires the ability to edit as well as shoot moving images.

There are ethical considerations unique to working with filmic data. Firstly, anonymity becomes an issue, especially in a small social scene like the Liverpool art world, as my participants are often clearly identifiable in my research output. I benefited from the International Visual Sociology Association's 'Code of Research Ethics' which sets out the ethical responsibilities of visual researchers (Papademas & International Visual Sociology Association, 2009). There are also certain decisions a researcher can make to limit the personal aspects of a sociological film. For example, I include no names nor do I do any interviews to camera. What is more, the ethical dimensions of film making change depending on the research topic. I was not using film to engage with the tech's personal lives, nor to capture their opinions on their work which may prove uncomfortable for these workers. Instead, I was using it to engage with their skilled practice. With this type of research concern, the film maker can chose to largely de-prioritise things like faces or voices and to concentrate instead on hands and practices. Finally, it is important to be explicit about the purpose and potential publics of the research. I spoke to each participant of the film individually to gain informed consent, and once I had completed the edited film I contacted each participant with a time-signature of when they appeared in the film to confirm their consent. I informed them of public screenings and the likely future uses of it (academic contexts). These were the ethical implications of working with film, and developing an ethical film making practice proved a constant negotiation and consideration that continues with each new screening of the film.

Another consideration when developing my method was a lack in a widespread practice of sociological film making to draw on. As a rare sociologist-cum-film maker, David Redmon notes: 'Sociologists use documentaries to teach in their courses, yet…sociology teachers do not encourage video ethnography as a legitimate research practice' (Points North Institute,

2018). Photographs are far more common in sociology. As such, sociological photography has its own canon, including the seminal *Working Knowledge: Skill and Community in a Small Shop* by Douglas Harper (1987). Harper's work is an ethnographic photo essay of the work and skill of Willie, a mechanic in New York. The similarity in subject matter to my study could have made this a valuable reference point. However, as photographs necessarily abstract skilled practice from movement, its relevance to my method is limited.

On the other hand, there are a few films by sociologists which might also have provided inspiration. As I have mentioned, Jackson and Lee's film and multi-media project studies a bowling alley (2018), and Redmon has produced documentaries including *Mardi Gras: Made in China* (2005) which studies the global production chains of Mardi Gras beads. However, both of these examples make heavy use of language, including interviews to camera, in order to express their research. This again is fundamentally different from approaching the film camera as a technology that can render the world in a non-linguistic way. Dawn Lyon's *The Passage of Fish* (Bachis, et al., 2016) shares my approach to sociological film making as it relies on a time-lapse to evoke the atmosphere of a London fish market and does not use interviews or words. However, this is a rare example, and in developing my method I had to look to over disciplines (particularly visual anthropology and art (see below)) for inspiration, while making sure to couch my practice within sociological imagining of the world.

Beyond the sociological canon, however, the history of anthropological film making provided a usual reference in developing this research method. Below I will introduce *Leviathan* by visual anthropologists Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel (Castaing-Taylor & Paravel, 2013) which provided inspiration in the editing of *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre*. Early and path-forming anthropological films focused their attention on similar subjects to my concern. In particular, Herb di Gioia and David Hancock's film *Peter Murray* (1981) studied the skill of artisan chair maker, Peter Murray, at work in his studio. The film focuses on the practising of skill and the material contexts that surround it, a clear antecedent to my use of the film camera. Jean Rouch, particularly in his work with sociologist Edgar Morin *Chronique d'un Été*, developed a reflexive film making practice in which the researchers clearly intervene in the film (1960). This is in response to the tendency of the diverting effect of the film maker to be obscured—including the film maker in the frame, discussing the development of the film is acknowledges the partiality and positionality embedded in the film. Finally, David MacDougall and Frederick Wiseman have both developed an ethnographic film making practice that documents institutions, McDougall on The Doon School (Doon School Chronicles, 2000) and Wiseman on, for example, the New York Public

Library (Ex Libris—The New York Public Library, 2018). Both of these film makers use the film camera to go 'behind the scenes' at institutions, as well as presenting intimate portraits of their day to day life. As such, the canon of anthropological film making provides a rich source of inspiration for this thesis.

These were some of the practical considerations of working sociologically with film: the practical aspects of film making, the ethical aspects of film making and the lack of many reference points. My choice of the film camera, however, also was couched in a theoretical context that emerges from Chapter Three. This emphasised the importance of movement to my methodology, and this is critical in locating film amongst the many non-linguistic and visual methods. What is more, my particular research interest in skilled and material practice means I am not interested in using the visual as a route to access, interpret, abstract or explore something beyond the frame. My research concern is the surfaces, textures and processes that happen in the same moment as my film camera records them.

This form of analysis—where the 'data collection' is itself an analytical response to the phenomenon in question—could be characterised as a 'live method' (Back & Puwar, 2012). What is more, Ingold's 'ontogenesis' foregrounds the entanglement of matter and practice, and this implicates my film making within the processes I aim to study. As Ingold argues, collecting data on participants implies that the researcher, at some point, will 'turn their back' on their participants and move from living 'with' them to producing a study 'of' them (Ingold, 2017a, p. 23). Instead, Ingold presents the research encounter as a correspondence between a researcher (with vested interests) and the site they are within: 'It is to notice what people are saying and doing, to watch and listen, and to respond in your own practice. That is to say, observation is a way of participating attentively' (Ingold, 2017a, p. 23). Film making, both on shoot and in the edit, requires the researcher to respond attentively, and what is produced stands as a correspondence of sorts—a correspondence that leaves a trace for others to encounter in the research output. What is more, it is a skilled attention as the researcher mediates their reflexive experience through the affordance of the film camera. In the case of this study, this creates a pleasing and productive synchronicity between the study of skill and the practicing of a skill. Although this may be little more than a metaphorical closeness, it nonetheless instils in me as a film maker something of the form of attention of the gallery techs.

In these observations, I am engaging with a general move in sociology towards 'live methods' (Back & Puwar, 2012), and the move towards 'non-representational theory' (Vannini, 2015).

Critical to both these moves is the potential for 'simultaneity in research' and a re-ordering of 'the relationship between data gathering, analysis and circulation' (Back & Puwar, 2012, p. 7). Back and Puwar are mainly considering the digital sphere in these comments, as 'live methods' are in some respects a response to the constant digital mediation of many people's social experiences. However, their move away from the rigid course of sociological research—from data collection to analysis—captures something of my reluctance to abstract my analysis from the socio-material processes of which I am, as a researcher, a part. The choices made on shoot are an embedded and real-time analytical response to my site.

Back and Puwar go on to argue that researchers should 'utilise [their] senses equally in attending to the social world' (Back & Puwar, 2012, p. 11). This push back against the limited possibilities of methods which do not account for the sensual nature of 'doing social life' (p. 11) informs my choice of a highly sensory method. Sarah Pink has argued, as well, for an end to the idea that the senses are discreet from one another and that we have five or six of them (this was made especially clear in a debate between Pink and 'sensual scholar' David Howes, in which Ingold also weighed in (Pink & Howes, 2010; Ingold, 2011)). For Pink and Ingold, sensory experience is not made up of, for example, smell added to taste added to touch. Instead, such an understanding of our sensory experience is the cultural articulation of an embodied experience that is far less differentiated. This is important for the film making method, as the research output could be argued to give sensory access only to how a process looked. However, by understanding vision and touch as entwined I can argue that the film gives a kind of sensory proximity to the sensory world of the install (this also the central claim of film theorist Laura Mark's 'haptic visuality' (Marks, 2000)). My method was therefore a response to Back and Puwar's call for a sociology attentive to the spectrum of embodied experience, although I depart from their attention to words and the link between live methods and digital (online) research.

The sensory attention of my research is very specific—I am interested in skilled practice and, as argued, this means my focus is on surfaces. This is a very particular use of the film camera, and departs from mainstream documentary approaches (as well as the approach of Jackson and Lee and Redmon). The quality of surfaces that I am interested in is their texture, as this is the affordance with which skilled practice corresponds. I am drawing here on de la Fuente's 'textural sociology' (2019). In this article de la Fuente moves between the surface as a physical and metaphorical concept. He argues that a textural sensibility is present in many contemporary attempts to rethink the entanglements of 'the cultural' and 'the social' (p. 553), notably through the theory of affordances. It is through a textural sensibility, which

pays attention to the correspondence of practices and surfaces, that researchers can access 'hard-to-get-at, situated features of practical actions' (p. 555). These are exactly the features of the gallery tech's work that interest me. Secondly, he focuses on 'atmospheres' which was central to Lefebvre's influential work on texture. Atmospheres, he writes, 'emerge from the complex interplay of the material and the symbolic in the textural domain' (p. 560). Atmospheres are, according to geographer Tim Edensor, the 'key existential dimension of living in the world' (2017, p. vii). As well as gallery tech's work, I am interested in the atmosphere of the arts centre in which it occurs as this swirls around and percolates the skilled, material practices themselves. Surfaces therefore become the sites that mediate action and that reify atmospheres.

Practicing a textural sociology is to attend to 'both the literal 'surfaces' of everyday life as well as the metaphorical 'atmospheres', unspoken 'practical codes' and other implicit orderings at work in social and cultural life' (de la Fuente, 2019, 564). Any textural sociologist would therefore need a method amenable to both these things. I argue that the film camera is uniquely poised to do so. Firstly, the researcher can frame their shooting according to their interest in texture. This simply means pointing and focusing the lens on surfaces and the action around them, rather than facial expressions or interviews. Secondly, the researcher can use the edit to craft a portrait of the atmosphere that the researcher experienced on shoot. The affective quality of film is one of the most dominant topics in contemporary film theory, which largely attests to films' unique ability to not only capture but cultivate an affect or atmosphere (Shaviro, 2010; Brinkema, 2014). However, while films have this capacity to 'evoke rather than just report' (Vannini, 2015), this depends on the skill of the researcher to realise this through their edit and convey this to an audience. As such, 'literal surfaces' can be easily written into the film, while 'metaphorical atmospheres' are always contingent and relational to the spectator's experience—the researcher can only craft their film towards a certain atmosphere, but relegates some power to the spectator. What is more, the surface of the film itself is the site from which this atmosphere emanates and it is a sensory engagement with this surface that carries a sociologically texturalist filmed research.

So far I have introduced why the film camera is an appropriate method. However, it is also necessary to comment on what it requires from its audience. As an unusual presentation of sociological research, it requires an unusual mode of spectatorship. Most textual sociology requires a discursive or hermeneutic form of engagement that is dependent on academic context—this is similar to the claim of the Yale School that art objects repay a sociological hermeneutic approach, in this case the art object is replaced with research outputs. My use

of film, however, requires the viewer's attention to remain with the film itself rather than seeking intellectual context from elsewhere. In this, it is no different from some strands of sociological photography and benefits from Howard Becker's seminal 'Photography and Sociology'. Becker advocates an extended practice of looking closely at an image through which 'the emotion and mood' of the picture overtakes the names, stories, people and things imaged (Becker, 1974b, p. 7). This form of spectatorship is 'time consuming', Becker writes (1974b) as it requires the spectator to stay with an image as its affective, or atmospheric, quality is felt. This is precisely as Vannini argues in his 'non-representational theory' (2015): research can be evocative rather than diagnostic.[33]

In order to achieve a textural sociology through the film camera, I need a sympathetic audience. This chapter so far has been an attempt to establish my approach to film making as a sociological one. It asks a spectator to give time to the film and to discard the dominant mode of film spectatorship that searches for narrative or discursive meaning. This form of spectatorship may be niche in sociology (even though it was lauded by Becker) but has a long history within art theory. Susan Sontag's seminal 'Against Interpretation' (Sontag, 2009) has informed generations of art theorists, and encapsulates many of the ideas I have introduced here and which are slowly gaining currency in sociology as it sheds its dependence on text.

Sontag is writing against the tendency to render images meaningful through reference to their content. In other words, she diagnoses the mainstream approach to photographs to be one of 'interpretation.' Interpretation is an act of abstraction involving 'a conscious act of the mind which illustrates a certain code, certain 'rules' of interpretation' (Sontag, 2009, p. 3). As Sontag writes, interpretation 'excavates, and as it excavates, destroys; it digs "behind" … to find a sub-text which is the true one' and 'interpretation is not (as most people assume) an absolute value, a gesture of mind situated in some timeless realm of capabilities' (Sontag, 2009). This is strikingly close to de la Fuente's critique of 'depth ontologies' (2019) which he argues falsely assume that knowledge is produced by peeling away, or 'excavating,' the surface appearance of something. It also makes the argument that interpretive approaches to images make declarative statements about it (X means Y), which might actually tell us more about the subject doing the interpreting. As I have argued, a non-discursive spectatorship is invested in the mutual relationship to between the viewer and the film—meaning cannot be abstracted from the film as it is fundamentally relational and experiential.

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[33] Phillip Vannini, who I draw on throughout, has a film making practice himself.

Sontag concludes that, instead of interpretation, images should be confronted for 'the luminousness of the thing in itself, of things being what they are' (p. 9). This is applicable to my textural film making method. The film makes no claim to be or to mean anything other than what it is—and what it is a creative, sensory engagement with a particular social world. Sontag concludes 'in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art' (p. 10). Perhaps a similar call can be raised in sociology.

Inspiration

I have argued that there are relatively few films in sociology that share my approach. An exception is Lyon's *The Passage of Fish* (Bachis, et al., 2016) which uses film to study the materiality of a fish market in all its slipperiness. However, I did not approach the film camera from nowhere. I have benefited from the field of contemporary art where many film makers are adopting a similar approach. Harun Farocki has conducted a study into the strange aversion of film makers to the subject of work; following from the Lumière's brothers' *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon* (1895)*, he finds that the film camera usually rolls only once workers have left the factory (Farocki, 2002). However, I have benefited from contemporary artists working in moving image who have taken their practice to the subject of work. This section introduces four such artists who share a sensibility with my textural and sociological film making method.

Figure Three (Fei, 2006)

Firstly, Cao Fei's *Whose Utopia* (2006) [Figure Three] is a short film that was shot in a Chinese light bulb factory after the artist spent an extended period of time getting to know the workers through focus groups and workshops. What emerged from these discussions was that the workers felt a strong sense of ownership over the dexterity that the delicate and manual nature of their work required of them. The film was produced to show that while their physical skill was put to work in the factory, it inhered in their bodies and was unalienably theirs. The participants show off their skills by dancing or making music while on the factory floor. This is interspersed with footage of the work itself, and the delicate hands working on delicate glass bulbs. The film shares several things with the current study. Firstly, it is concerned with skills and realises this through allowing skilled practices to play out on screen. Secondly, it is concerned with a place of work. Cao Fei's camera lingers on the

machines and spaces of this work, and its sounds, strongly evoking the repetitive and somewhat claustrophobic atmosphere of the factory. The film resists narrative (it is organised around poetic interstitial frames), and requires exactly the kind of spectatorship I am interested in—attentive to skill and its relationship to the workplace. Finally, it also points towards the working conditions and subjectivities of those undertaking skilled and material labour.

Figure Four (Brook, 2013)

Another film that I took inspiration from was Julie Brook's *Pigment* (2013) [Figure Four]. This is a short film shot in a cave in Namibia after the artist encountered the three women it features en route to collect a red pigment. This pigment is mixed with oils and used by the women for spiritual, protective and aesthetic reasons. As the women work, they dance and sing, keeping a rhythm in which they strike the rock. The film is shot through with the sensory environment of this place of action, of work. As well as the sounds, the film focuses on their hands as they dance and work. However, the over-riding sense of the film is textural. The redness of the pigment oozes from the screen; dusty clouds of it, shot through with sunlight from above. *Pigment* gives its viewer a textural, haptic, visual closeness to this world that would be rendered inaccessible were the site to be turned to words. What is more, the film is less figurative than *Whose Utopia*, often treading a fine line between figuration and abstraction. These close angled shots were something I wished to reproduce in my work as it forces the attention onto texture rather than event.

Figure Five (Castaing-Taylor & Paravel, 2013)

The third film that I was inspired by is *Leviathan* by Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel (Castaing-Taylor & Paravel, 2013) [Figure Five]. This film came out of the Harvard Sensory Ethnography lab which incubates many works of sensory and visual anthropology, a field whose influence is felt throughout this thesis. *Leviathan* is a feature-length film that studies the North American fishing industry through a portrait of one particular working boat. The film completely does away with narrative, choosing instead to follow the rhythms of the process (something I took to my film).

Leviathan is an exemplary exploration of a textural use of the film camera. For example, in one passage fish from the catch are being discarded into a vat, and so the GoPro is similarly thrown into the pile. What results is a slippery and dark passage in which the camera is buried, catching brief glimpse of slimy scales or a dead, staring eye. The 'haptic visuality' (Marks, 2000) of scenes such as this is pronounced, but the point is not to simply prove the slipperiness of fish. Instead, the film makers constantly return to the workers, making it clear that this sensory atmosphere constitutes their working life. In one scene, the camera rests in the tea room, capturing a worker as he resists and slips into sleep. In another, we watch a worker shelling seafood as a commotion breaks out on deck. The camera does not follow this action, but stays with the worker as he continues his work regardless. These choices—staying with the worker, holding the shot, and resisting a snappy edit—all contribute to a vivid filmic portrait of work and its place. I carried these influences with me as I went about my own shoot and edit.

117

Figure Six (Rivers, 2011)

The final artist I will introduce is Ben Rivers. Rivers' practice is often called ethnographic and his particular interest is in communities that are in some way cut off. In *Sack Barrow* (2011) [Figure Six] he studies a small family run business on the outskirts of London which was established in 1931 to provide work for limbless and disabled ex-servicemen. The business specialised in metal electroplating for the engineering industry. The film charts the final days of the business, and returns to the space after it had gone into liquidation in 2011. Rivers focuses on the workers, but also on the effects that the chemical and mineral processes of the work had had on the space itself. In this way, the film is a study of the coproduction of a space through material processes and human action. This focus on material is heightened by the use of 16mm film which has a highly textural quality of its own, showing how the affordances of film making technology can inform the subject itself. The film informs my work as it is invested in the correspondence between work processes, workers and the spaces of work.

However, Rivers' wider practice also informs my work, especially the installation for *Situating Practices* that I will introduce below. Rivers does not only rely on screen-based media but also creates physical viewing environments for his films. In *There is a Happy Land Further Awaay* (Rivers, 2015), he documented the remote sub-tropical island of Tanna in the South Pacific and the dwellings of the people who live there. The gallery walls were covered in corrugated metal, the 'hues of rusty terracotta and dusty grey mimicking the huts in the film' (Barnes, 2015). River's invoked the textures of his research site in the gallery, and in so doing

conveyed something of the lives lived there. This is an interesting approach for a textural sociology. It does away with the inherent metaphor of 'haptic visuality' (Marks, 2000), replacing it with a tactile viewing experience. As I will introduce below, I attempted to engage with this in the installation version of my film.

These four films all contributed to the development of my method, as do other works of artists moving image. As I began to seek out artists moving image I was struck by the amount of artists using film to explore skilled practices and their workplace—I could have mentioned Hiwa K's *Nazhad and the Bell Project* (Szylak, 2015) or Steve McQueen's *Ashes* (McQueen, 2002–2015) to name two more. Rather than attempting to give a typology that cuts across all of this work, I decided to allow their influence to seep into my work and to sculpt my general attitude. I offer these four films as a way to see what kinds of influences I was working within, and the kinds of textural uses of the film camera that proliferate in contemporary art, and anthropological, practice.

Part Two: Practice

Shooting the Gallery

So far this chapter has situated my use of the film camera within sociological theory and art practice. I will now move on to describe the two-week shooting period and the months of editing that followed.

Chapter Four concluded at the beginning of the install, after I had spent a year working with the office and curatorial staff. By the time of the install, however, objects and material processes had already been set in motion—art works were making their way to Bluecoat from near and far and art workers had been casually recruited (mainly by text message). As such, it is somewhat misleading to consider the moment the doors closed on the preceding exhibition—Abacus, a child-focused exhibition—to be the beginning of the install. My written analysis is testament to this, and includes a studio visit which began the material trajectory of certain art works towards *In the Peaceful Dome* several months prior to the install. What is more, the 'install' is itself a misleading term. The initial stages of the 'install' involve the 'de-install' of the previous exhibition, and the two-week closure is perhaps better thought of as a suspension of the gallery in which one exhibition is becoming in the same breath as another is disintegrating.

However fluid the notion of the install may be, it has a fixed and stable timeframe in the calendar of the arts centre. It takes place over two weeks with a temporarily recruited team of workers. These were not characters I had previously encountered at Bluecoat, testament to their separation from the arts centre in general. As such, the initial while of my working with them required the quick establishment of a rapport. This was made easier by the quick pace of the work—there was immediately a tacit understanding that so long as I did not get in the way, I would not cause an issue.

I had chosen a kit that was portable, simple and easy to operate alone. I had been on a two-week film making course which had furnished me with sufficient but entry-level filmmaking skills. I used a prosumer level Canon DSLR with three lenses, a tripod, a mounted directional microphone and an extra omnidirectional microphone. I had previously spent time with this kit in the galleries in order to get used to the lighting. The ability to quickly move the shot was critical, not only for the benefit of the film but also to ensure I could easily move out of the way of the workforce. I also wanted to be able to leave the camera running while I got involved with the work of the install. This kit suited my purpose well.

On the first morning of the install, I joined the team briefing and was introduced to the team by the Artistic Director. This had the effect of positioning me as linked to the institution, and I struggled to dissociate from this (usually by re-introducing myself as a 'student', or indeed a 'film maker'). My introduction in the team briefing also acted as a form of consent until I later sat down with each worker individually to ensure an informed consent and gain participant consent forms which included an image release agreement. I also collected contact details so I could later gain consent for how I had used their image, sending them the film and screenshots and time-stamps of their appearances.

The install team was made up of a group of around five white men (some days more or less) who all work together at various galleries around Liverpool and further afield. They were diverse in age and background. Their close (if intermittent) teamwork breeds a sense of comradery, which I detail in Chapter Seven. I naively expected the install to feel like a beginning, but of course to these workers the first day had a 'back-to-school' vibe, full of catching up and settling into one another's company again, after some time apart. I again occupied a 'space between' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) as I was positioned outside of the team, was the only woman for most of the install and occupied an institutional place that these workers did not. I will analyse the social life of this workforce in Chapter Seven, but suffice for now to note that my camera kit was a useful device to anchor myself in this space at which I often felt at odds.

Immediately after the first team briefing I set up my camera in the gallery and started shooting right away. This was to establish my presence and to encourage discussions with the team about my project and interests, which it did. I was also keen to offer my help. In the early days of the install, while the work is largely cleaning and less skilled, Bluecoat invites their volunteers support the paid tech team. This proved useful to me as I was able to ingratiate myself to some extent in the position of 'volunteer'—although I remained at some remove as I intermittently returned to my camera kit. The social group of the volunteers and the paid tech team tended to keep themselves apart, and I became positioned somewhere between the two over the initial days of the install.

In general, the techs were amused at my interest in their work. Each day I would move around the galleries, not necessarily following the overarching action of the install but instead focusing on materially rich processes. I would stay with these processes for their duration, even if something more dramatic was occurring elsewhere. This also allowed me to have better conversations with the individual techs, and I slowly began to develop personal

relationships with them. I was also interested in filming the ebb and flow of the spaces across the working day. I chose to remain outside of the tech's break area (except on the first day) in order to give them some time without the camera pointed at them. In these times I would film the galleries, the pauses between action. I also spent time in and around the wider arts centre.

I was interested in using the film camera to capture something of the atmosphere of the site. For this reason I shot passages in the different sensory environments that surround the galleries but which workers and objects flow through, such as the garden and café, and which contribute to the general atmosphere within which the gallery is couched. For ethical reasons this footage avoids people's faces, abides by Bluecoat's in-house filming rules, and participant engagement and consent forms were available in these public spaces

As the install progressed, social relations behind the lens began to shape what was being filmed. This happened in a variety of ways. For example, one volunteer did not consent to being filmed and this ruled out filming much of their group work, focusing my attention on the techs. One tech became particularly invested in the film and would 'perform' for the camera, at one point waving a textile in front of my lens and asking if it looked good.[34] What is more, early field notes record that 'the textures and ways that bodies interact with objects is coming out' clearly in the footage. This led me to directing shooting towards texturally rich processes which intrigued many of my participants and led to fruitful discussions—it also shared a synergy with much of theory developed in this thesis.

Approaching fieldwork through the film camera also sensitised me to unexpected aspects of the filed site. Firstly, I quickly learnt the mistake of wearing certain clothes in the space. In the weeks building up to the install I had been focusing on my role as a film maker, without stopping to consider what textural qualities of the shoot might play across my body and clothes. However, I had in part chosen the film camera as it allowed me to be agile, getting stuck in with the work of the install as much as I stayed behind the lens. The install is very dusty and dirty and my clothes, being more suited to the office, were jokingly mocked by the techs as they became increasingly dirty. The mode of presentation I had learnt in the offices

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[34] At a different point, a shopper in Liverpool One stood in front of my lens and struck a pose. These two examples demonstrate the performativity invited by the film camera.

was clearly redundant here—this type of art work does not come with the adjacent requirement to dress a certain way.

Secondly, material changes in the spaces were made apparent by the affordances of the camera. For example, newly constructed walls changed the light levels and I had to respond to these. What is more, in the early days of the install the sounds were largely the sounds of drill or hammers or indistinct chatter. This is easy to edit together. However, as audio-visual works were added to the gallery they posed a problem for continuity. The change in light levels and sonic atmospheres were all the more pronounced as I was attending to the space with a filmic attention, through the affordances of the camera while keeping half a mind on the edit.

As the build progressed the people in the space changed. As work became more technical most volunteers left and the curator became more present (by this time I had established my position with the techs). Most of the curator's communication with the tech team went through the tech manager. He would use gesture to set out his ideas, which the tech manager translated into the work required by the tech. While the tech's work tended to require them to work in small teams, the curator often occupied spaces alone. He would pace the galleries, deciding on the position of walls of art works. My long-standing relationship with him meant he often talked me through his ideas. While this was interesting, it was difficult to properly record with my kit (which I largely kept mounted on a tripod). This demonstrates a further link between the affordances of my kit and the things I was shooting—it was much harder to successfully record the curator as he paced the spaces, and much easier to leave the camera mounted, pointed towards the relatively localised tech work.

The mobility of the camera kit was also important towards the middle of the install. Around this time art works were beginning to arrive in at Bluecoat which requires an often highly involved process and team. The moving of Jacob Epstein's *Genesis* sculpture from Manchester's The Whitworth gallery was a climax of the install and Bluecoat had run a crowdfunding campaign to afford the costs which were in excess of £5,000. A specialist art moving team were brought up from London to do the move. MTec came with a lot of specialist equipment, and I joined a filmmaking crew (Soup Collective) which had been hired by Bluecoat to document the journey. I filmed the entire process from Manchester to Liverpool, choosing to include in the edit only the footage relating to Bluecoat. I also visited a studio where an artist was preparing work for the show (Fab Lab). Both of these excursions

were made possible by the flexibility of filmmaking technology, which served me well as art works began to make their journeys towards *In the Peaceful Dome*.

Having half a mind on the edit of the film also proved productive. Two thirds of the way through the installation I re-watched my footage and selected 'pick-ups.' These are shots you return to give a sense of the changes that have occurred. This made sure I remained sensitive to the flow of action and how this was changing the spaces. The edit includes many juxtapositions of images taken in the same space at different times, particularly 'during' and 'after' the install of specific art works. This is with a view to acknowledging the ongoing nature of 'processes' of the install. For example, I shot the install of one art work as well shooting it again as it sat on the wall. This makes it clear that the moment of install is only a climatic point in the ongoing life of this art work.

The final period of the installation was characterised by the turning over of the spaces to different publics. In the film this is marked by the opening event, or private view, where the gallery spaces are suddenly busy with new publics. This only happens once the gallery techs have left the space; they did not stay for the opening event but instead went together to the pub. I decided to shoot both the private view and to return when the gallery in normal opening hours. This allowed me to capture the different interactions with the space its objects by these different groups and the different atmospheres of the same space at different times. I analyse the private view, Bluecoat's publics and the day-to-day life of the gallery in Chapter Eight. While these were aspects of fieldwork I conducted through my film camera, I found that the analysis they provoked was not completely captured by the film. The film focuses on skill and the atmospheres in which it is employed. My experience of the private view and other moments in the life of the exhibition focused instead on interpersonal, social factors which I felt were under-represented in the film. As such, even though my empirical research in these sites included the film camera, I also produced extensive field notes and my analysis follows from these. Regardless, the day-to-day atmosphere of the gallery and private view stand in the film as contrast to the atmosphere of the time-space of the install.

During the two weeks of the install my work as a researcher entered into the intense and fast-paced rhythm of the working life of the techs. This was in stark contrast to the preceding ethnography where I had many months to settle into the institution and establish rapport with the office staff. The film camera served as an appropriate method, not only for the methodological reasons that I have already set out, but for the fast-paced method of 'data

collection' it allows. As I made decisions about what to shoot my emerging analysis of the site was already playing out in my footage, and I carried this into the edit as I returned to the thirteen hours of footage that I had shot and the field notes I had taken thorough the install.

Once the exhibition was built and the public view had happened, I began to reflect on my field notes and footage, retreating to the edit suite. Making the film took about four months, during which I showed test-runs to my supervisors and worked in their feedback. The process began with transcribing all of my footage. This resulted in a spreadsheet detailing the length of each clip, what is shows and notes on the audio. This had the benefit of familiarising me with the footage and I began to notice emergent themes. The entire edit process gave me a deep familiarity with the footage and was a slow process of selecting which aspects to include and which to leave aside. These decisions were always informed by whether the shot conveyed either a textural, material work process or the 'atmosphere' of the spaces. The demands of working with filmed data means I became sensitised to the light and sound levels, focus, colours and movement of the raw footage. This was invaluable in carrying a textural, sensory sensitivity through the edit.

I firstly created a timeline of selected clips which in some way tried to capture the 'pulses' of spaces (Yaneva, 2003a). However, it soon became apparent that organising the film around spaces rather than time made it difficult to access for an audience unfamiliar with Bluecoat. I chose to re-edit the film in broadly chronological order, starting with the early days of the install and concluding with the public facing exhibition. This had the unfortunate effect of making the film appear as a kind of 'making of' film, or a 'fly-on-the-wall' documentary. To avoid this, I introduced the use of two channels broadly split between close angled shots of texture and wider angled shots of work. This is a technique commonly used by artists working in moving image and complicates the apparent linearity or simplicity of the process being filmed. It also makes the viewing experience more complex as the attention roams between one channel and the other. This mimics the install and arts centre itself, where it is impossible to encapsulate or be attentive to all the action. It also encourages a more labour-intensive spectatorship, disallowing the viewer from sinking into learned ways of watching. This was informed by the version of spectatorship I advocate below.

This meant that the film has a broadly chronological order, complicated by the use of two channels and the occasional juxtaposition of the same object at different times (the audio is split across the corresponding channels). It opens with shots of Bluecoat, the completed *In the Peaceful Dome* and its surrounding to establish a broad sense of place. It then moves into

the internal spaces of the arts centre, before entering the gallery itself. The middle section of the film details the installation, including the disintegration of the previous exhibition. The final section represents the private view and the public consumption of the exhibition. This structure emerged as the edit progressed and was a balance between accessibility and a resistance of simplicity. I do not wish to offer a thorough introduction to the film, suggesting instead that it repays a sociologically and texturally attentive gaze.

Notes on Watching: A Textural Sociological Gaze

For the reasons introduced in this chapter and Chapter Three I will not be providing a proscriptive account of the film which follows this chapter, as I have argued that its concerns (skill, texture) resist propositional language. However, the themes that I have concentrated on in this thesis so far, including skill and materials, emerged from my time spent with the gallery techs and were consolidated in the edit, and the analysis of Chapters Seven and Eight are in conversation with this. Watching from within the context of this thesis will lead a viewer's attention to these elements of the film. As such, while the film stands slightly apart from the rest of the thesis it is intimately entwined with the thesis as a whole. It asks for an attentive and time-consuming spectatorship, uncoupled from recourse to the language or arguments of a traditional sociological thesis. I characterise this as a distinctly textural sociological gaze.

The film does retain a degree of linearity and does give a general insight to the backstage of the gallery install. This is at the expense of complete abstraction. I took this choice in order to make the film accessible from outside the context of this thesis. I have benefited greatly from the support of Bluecoat in making this film, and was pleased to be able to exhibit it for a week during *In the Peaceful Dome* in the Hub Café. I was also supported in hosting a public screening of the film with an audience Q&A—while I extended the invitation to the gallery techs, none attended.

This is an important application of visual research that I have not touched upon: it is easily transportable to publics outside the discipline of sociology and can catch the attention of a wider audience than academic writing achieves. As my film was shown in Bluecoat, I benefited from a public particularly versant in visual culture and particularly comfortable with the aesthetics of film making I used. However, diverse research outputs are a way to ensure research is accessible in a variety of ways and I was pleased to be able to disseminate my research in the very midst of the context I was researching.

Finally, these public showings of the film consolidated my thinking around hidden labour in the arts centre. I often received audience feedback that they had not previously thought about or admired the work of the gallery technicians, even though these were often regular Bluecoat visitors. This emphasised the extent to which tech work is erased in the social imaginary, even within an art audience. Film is one, rather blunt, way of making this hidden work slightly more visible. I was also invited to reimagine my film for a contemporary art exhibition *Situating Practices* (introduced below) and again found that the tacit knowledge of gallery techs was not something the artists I encountered here had considered, despite

often engaging with them. This was an unanticipated benefit of using film—it allowed me to take my research to more publics, and to hone, debate and consolidate the wider discussion of my thesis in these spaces.

Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre can be found in Chapter Six, following the brief introduction to the exhibition *Situating Practices* that follows. I invite a 'reader/ viewer' to watch the film before reading the analysis of Chapters Seven and Eight, and to return to it afterwards—or, indeed, to follow an order of their choosing. It was originally intended to be watched on two separate screens, but the version I include here shows both channels in one frame. Similarly, the original sound is split into left and right, which will not be apparent with mono speakers. These technical considerations aside, I encourage a viewer to suspend their interpretation in favour of attending to the textural and affective character of the short film.

Situating Practices

In May 2019 I was selected to participate in the exhibition *Situating Practices* at the University of Huddersfield's Temporary Contemporary gallery curated by Clare Booth (Booth, 2019). The exhibition featured nine PhD researchers using an arts practice for research. For the exhibition I developed the research film *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre* into a multi-channel, interactive installation [Appendix Five shows the films, which can also be found through the Inventory]. As well as the opportunity to experiment with turning my research into an installation, it was also an invaluable experience in being in the position of 'artist' while working with a gallery technician. This perspective gave me first person experience of the constitutive role that gallery technicians, materials and their availability have on the realisation of exhibitions of contemporary art.

The installation concentrated on three materials that had been integral to the build of *In the Peaceful Dome*: paper, chalkboard and glass. Each of these materials were instrumental in the realisation of *In the Peaceful Dome*, requiring the tactile engagement of the techs and volunteers, while not being materials that were announced as art works. These were the materials that revealed the show and its art objects to the public: paper which concealed valuable art works; chalkboard from the previous exhibition Abacus which was returned to a 'white cube'; glass which mediated the gaze of passing shoppers in Liverpool One. I chose footage where the trace of the human hand was visible in its interactions with these materials, enacting gestures that erased themselves in the creation of the 'white cube,' and manipulated this footage in order to make these gestures pronounced. The gestures—cleaning glass, for example—tend to slip through the net of attention. By manipulating the footage I refocused attention on them, with a view to reinterpreting them as careful and co-responsive engagement with materials.[35]

The three films were projected onto the materials that they feature. I provided the audience with opportunities to interact with the projections themselves—they could draw on the chalkboard, clean the glass, and the paper was hung in such a way as to float and move. This was a challenge to the hand-off knowledge culture of the 'white cube,' and to invite viewers into some kind of physical, tactile relationship with the workers behind the footage. As an installation about materiality, it was important that it did not reproduce the 'look but do not touch' paradigm which, this thesis argues, underpins the unequal labour conditions produced by the 'white cube.' I also wanted a processual element to the work to reflect this thesis'

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[35] The 'paper' footage did not show the gestures, but their material aftermath.

argument that objects are processes, and indeed the installation changed as the public engaged with it.

The installation was built by a volunteer gallery tech, the husband of the curator. With a Fine Art degree, he had moved into technical work in the culture industry after finding securing gainful employment as an artist a struggle. He did not work as a gallery technician usually, using and developing his skillset in a company which builds large scale cultural events. Nonetheless, these skills were highly transferable to the gallery space and he was literate in the demands of contemporary art.

The installation process was a collaboration between him and myself, with input from the curator, and a negotiation with materials, their properties and availability. While I had drawn up the plans, sourced the material and made the films, I do not possess the skills to build the exhibit. What is more, the particularities of the gallery space determined the shape it took. The projector, for example, had to be installed in response to the beams that ran through the ceiling, which he ascertained by knocking on the area to work out what material he would be screwing into—metal, concrete or wood. Decisions were made on the spot and the final form of the installation was in constant flux. For example, the film file I had made was not in the right ratio for the A1 surfaces onto which is was projected. Rather than attempt to alter the file, we decided in conversation that it looked good and interesting to have the projection overhanging the surface at the top and bottom. In later public discussions, this overhanging became a central element in my discussion of the piece as I suggested it bridged the gap between the gallery of the film and the different gallery whose wall the projection spilled onto.

The gallery tech offered solutions in response to how I spoke about the work. Another result of this was the choice to wire hang the materials a few inches from the wall. When I would voice a concern—for example, would people writing on the blackboard put too much pressure on it—he was able to offer material solutions to the problem. Aesthetic decisions, such as the weight of the paper to be used, were made through a discussion between the three of us—myself, curator and tech—as well as the availability of materials in local shops. This consolidated my awareness of the literacy that is required by gallery techs with regard contemporary art and its aesthetics. For example, the technician and curator appreciated that every decision mattered: how long to run a shelf and whether to leave the label on the glass cleaner. Often, they asked me questions I had not anticipated, which clarified what I was trying to bring out through the work and what was incidental to its general success. As

such, not only are the practicalities of art works a collaborative process, but their meaning, and even the authorial intent, is also dependent on their support personnel.

As well as these contributions to my research topic, my experience in *Situating Practices* also spoke to my methods. I have argued in this thesis that film making is a research practice that contains both data collection and analysis. I have generally argued that the infrastructure of editing films reflects textural, analytical choices and that this is an expression of extra-textual knowledge. However, though *Situating Practices* I was able to push this further and to think beyond screen-based media and to draw even further on contemporary arts practice, particularly the work of Rivers. While editing *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre*, I was limited to a very particular mode of expression and despite trying to avoid a linearity the film was still designed to be watched start to finish. What is more, while arguing that film expresses more of the haptic than text, it is still a non-haptic medium. The gallery exhibit did not contain this linearity—each element was staggered and the order was unimportant—and it retained and invited haptic, multi-sensory engagement.

This is a small step towards aligning the presentation of sociological research with innovations and successful practices drawn from contemporary arts. The invitation of a textural sociology to think beyond the text throws open the door not just to photographs or films, but to installation and multi-sensory forms of presentation. Sections of the academy are open to these experiment, as demonstrated by the proliferation of practice-led or practice-as-research PhDs, particularly in the arts. However, standard assessment of sociology PhDs, as well as the journal and conference format, proscribe such experiments in this discipline. The gallery offers a useful site to begin to explore the possibilities that await sociologists who turn away from the text and towards texture, and the myriad creative ways that such research can be expressed.

Chapter Six: *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre*[36]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PwLjQN-VHc&list=PLpKWBS4KXnc51t6QYrHkjetxOzDjRN0O7&index=1

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[36] This film can be located through the Inventory (p. 229), where an online link is supplied. Hard copies of this thesis have an accompanying DVD (Track One).

Chapter Seven: Analysis: Making *In the Peaceful Dome* Material

Introduction

The analysis across both *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre* and the following two written chapters is informed by the theoretical framework set out in Chapter Three. This invokes the work of Tim Ingold, and it was his conceptualisation of skill that informed the making of a film in the first instance. The study of the practicing of skill itself is contained in the film, and in what follows objects and practices will be analysed as correspondents in the production of the meshwork of the exhibition and arts centre. This is the slight difference in the concern of analysis which justifies the different media of representation. All analysis nonetheless fleshes out a description of the exhibition as the work of an art world which is fluid and in motion and where:

- o All action is interdependent: material with material, material with human, and human with human;

- o This interdependence is an ongoing negotiation shaped by the material qualities and social powers vested in participants and places.

Ingold does not offer an analytical toolkit which can be layered onto observations of a field site to achieve an explanation thereof. It would be counterintuitive to articulate the meshworks constituent parts as one might a network, not least because to do so would isolate each 'line' from the knot in which it is entangled (Ingold, 2015). Instead, I have argued that the practice of research giving a lively account of processes which are continually unfolding in a responsive way. These accounts adopt the attitude of Ingold, which sees action as the relational and animated enacting of affordances and the meshwork of the art world as the lines of relations 'along' which things move. Envisioning this field site with this attitude produces an account of *In the Peaceful Dome* as a meshwork, taking into account the way this relates to the canon of the sociology of art through its similarities with the production of culture perspective and the arts-in-action approach.

Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre precedes this chapter in the order of this thesis, but this order is not prescriptive, nor does it follow a chronology of field work. I invite a 'reader/ viewer' to watch the film before reading the analysis of Chapters Seven and Eight, and to return to it afterwards—or, indeed, to follow an order of their choosing. As I have argued, both the filmed and written analysis adopt the same attitude towards the research site, while teasing out different aspects (film = skill, text = socio-material work and its organisation). All

analysis is therefore intended to be taken together; the film does not act as an illustration of the written analysis, nor does the written analysis act as an additive to that which is represented on screen. In this way, the two media of analysis are mutually reinforcing partners, rather than co-dependents. All of the analysis studies how art objects at Bluecoat are made to appear stable on the stage of the gallery and within the horizons of an exhibition.

This chapter begins with a study of three objects exhibited in *In the Peaceful Dome*: Jacob Epstein's *Genesis* (1929–30), and Jo Stockham's *Empire Made* (1989) and *Canon, Model 3* (1989–2017a) with a focus on the processes by which these art objects were stabilised in the gallery space and turned over to an audience. The chapter will then go on to analyse how the material processes within the exhibition are organised as work. This will be related to wider analyses of work in the 21st century, particularly drawing on the post-Marxist tradition as introduced in Chapter Two. This involves a study of the gallery techs, a subset of art-adjacent workers currently understudied in the sociology of art. The gallery techs will emerge as protagonists in the installation, recalling their skill evoked in *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre* and the particularities of their employment conditions will be detailed. I will explore how this plays out through their social relations at the install. This social life will be shown to be highly bounded, with close group practices, and a clear distinction from other workforces in the arts centre. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the way that tech work comes to be envisaged through the windows which give out onto Liverpool One.

The second chapter of written analysis turns away from the installation to study the production (or social reproduction) of the institution. This begins once the gallery techs have left the site and *In the Peaceful Dome* is in the process of being turned over to a public. The private view will be used to illustrate how the institution is socially reproduced through its salaried office workers. These were the most consistent participants of my study (except, perhaps, the building itself) and I introduced my study with them in Chapter Four. I will use the private view as an example of affective labour, performed by the office workers, which serves to produce one of the necessary publics of the arts centre. I will conduct this through a discussion of the work of low to mid-level institutional workers at the private view, and how this was entwined with objects and spaces. In the final section of analysis I will look at a site where the institutional narrative is contested. This returns to the window in Gallery There, studying how it mediates social interactions with art objects in the gallery, acting as a place where the gallery 'leaks' into Liverpool One, and Liverpool One 'leaks' into the gallery.

'The Install': Becoming Exhibition

This chapter is a study of the production of *In the Peaceful Dome*, which was exhibited at Bluecoat from October 2017 with an extended run until April 2018. An exhibition is understood as a unique passage of time in a specific place, which provides one of the (theoretically limitless) 'occasions on which a work appears or is performed or read of reviewed, each of which can be different from all the others' (Becker, 2006, p. 23). In this case, the symbolic context of the exhibition was Bluecoat's tercentenary celebrations and it was billed as follows:

> The exhibition takes the idea of Bluecoat as a continually evolving building to look afresh at some of the art it has presented, and debated, reinvigorating them by finding contemporary resonances. By addressing themes of transformation, continuity, time and time travel, it raises questions about how the past informs the future—and how the arts might adopt a more civic role (Bluecoat, 2017c).

It was a group show of contemporary and canonical artists, most of whom had previously exhibited at Bluecoat. It also traced a history of the building and looked forward to its next three hundred years. *In the Peaceful Dome* was curated by Bryan Biggs, who also acts as the de facto Artistic Director of Bluecoat is a supervisor of the current project. The exhibition took over Bluecoat's four galleries, although in what follows, I will largely focus on Gallery Three, which featured Jacob Epstein's *Genesis* (1929–1930) as well as contemporary artist Jo Stockham's work. Gallery Three is also the site of a large window giving out onto Liverpool One.

In this chapter I am concerned with the becoming of the exhibition, the processes and work by which it was made to appear determinate to publics. I have argued that this is usually the work of the backstage of the art world and the analysis of this chapter therefore stems from a studio visit and the install, both of which preceded and produced the exhibition as it was met by a public. In the space of the gallery, analysis focuses on a group of skilled, art-adjacent workers negotiating between the material affordances of objects and the demands of the field of art. This includes a conservator, a removal firm, as well as gallery techs. The techs are the focus of the study, and are comprised of an informal workforce to whom Bluecoat has no long term commitments. This chapter also studies how the organisation of the tech's work plays out in the social life of the install. During the install, which took place over two weeks in October 2017, I was shooting for the film *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre*, while also

engaging with the work of installing, and conducting an ethnographically-informed study of its workforce.

Material Practices of the Install

Genesis (1929–1930): 'Protect from all elements'

Genesis is a sculpture by renowned British sculptor Jacob Epstein made between 1929 and 1930.[37] It weighs several tonnes, and is made of white marble from Seravezza in Italy that has a protective wax coating. It depicts a pregnant woman with an African mask and exaggerated features and as such suffers from the problematic overtones of the colonial and male gaze endemic to early 20th century western art history. *Genesis* is in the collection of The University of Manchester's The Whitworth, having been acquired in 1999 with the support of the Art Fund. The sculpture is worth several million pounds and is insured by the government indemnity scheme—this is what makes it feasible for relatively small institutions like Bluecoat to display it. It was previously exhibited at Bluecoat in 1931 when 50,000 visitors were charged six pence to see the 'shocking' sculpture—Bluecoat raised substantial and critical funds through the spectacle. This historic connection to Bluecoat justified its place as the centrepiece of *In the Peaceful Dome*. It was placed, with great care, in the centre of Gallery Three facing Bluecoat's windows onto Liverpool One.

Genesis is subject to material processes that complicate the smooth running of art history; such constant growth is the central argument of Ingold's ontogenesis. This analysis stems from a close attention to *Genesis'* surface, recalling the previous discussion that this is 'most of the action is' (Gibson, 1986, p. 23). After many years of public display at The Whitworth, and other loans, the decision by the conservation team at The Whitworth to clean the sculpture and replace the protective wax coating layer before its loan to Bluecoat. The wax coating had gathered dust and dirt over the years, slightly changing the appearance of the sculpture. This task fell to The Whitworth's in-house conservator, who undertook the work while the sculpture remained on public display. Speaking of the process on the day *Genesis* was transferred to Bluecoat, they said:

> By starting at the reverse… round the backs, it's actually quite a discreet area so even if you're removing it [dirty wax coating] it's not too much of a difference, and I wanted to just start slowly… [and] leave her face and the most obvious places to be removed at the last so there wasn't just a huge contrast so when people came to look at her in the gallery they would see half a clean object, and half a dirty object, so I didn't want to detract from her too much. So that's kind of a process… It's

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[37] From now on it can be assumed that *Genesis* refers to (Epstein, 1929-1930).

thinking about how she's currently being on display and making sure that people can

enjoy her and not see the process at the same time [From filmed data, 06/10/2017]

This quote describes the process of restoring a canonical work while it remains on public display and the negotiations this requires. The aim was to restore the sculpture to the state in which it has been historicised in the canon of art—i.e. 'clean,' without the traces of dirtiness which accrue over years of public display. However, the complication the conservator describes is in doing this work without detracting from the audience's enjoyment of the sculpture. The problem was not that the 'dirt' itself was hindering the audience's access to the work. Rather, the process of cleaning it was the issue that stood to impede the audience's way of seeing it.

The conservator suggests that if her work were clearly visible, *Genesis* would not appear in the gallery as a determinate art object standing out of time. As have argued throughout, the apparently coherent and persisting surface that an art object is made to present to an audience allows the materials of the object to be overwritten with its symbolic meanings. This is as Brown argues when he writes that we see objects through our interpretative attention and cultural codes, rather than seeing the 'the thingness of objects' (Brown, 2004, p. 4). In this example, the process of cleaning the dirty wax could potentially have acted as an impediment to an audience's interpretative gaze. Instead, the risk presented itself that the sculpture would appear instead as a constellation of Seravezza Marble, wax coating and dirt. The conservators work, therefore, became not only to clean the object but to veil the process of so doing.

However, the sculpture had been on public display in its dirty state before the conservator began cleaning it—the decision to clean it was taken not because the audience were having trouble applying their interpretative attention to it through the slightly greying wax coating, but rather in order to ensure against it falling too far into a process of entropy and moving away from its culturally stabilised form. As such, the processes that the conservator aimed to veil was not the process of 'becoming dirty' but rather the process of 'becoming clean'—'becoming dirty' does not require purposive activity where 'becoming clean' does. These processes are subject to different distributions of agency. The first, 'becoming dirty,' was the result of various and interchangeable people, particles of dust, currents of air and atmospheric conditions which all lead dirt towards wax coating. The second, 'becoming clean,' was propelled by the practice of the conservator, themselves compelled by their manager according to the demands of the art gallery. To express this in terms of the

meshwork, the conservator contorted the meshwork—the general advancement of things—to encourage action to flow in particular ways. However, as I have argued purposive activity on the form of an art object is, in the art world, the domain of the artist or curator whose authorship justifies an object's inclusion in the canon and spaces of art. As such, this example demonstrates that it is not simply that *Genesis'* material qua material must be veiled in the gallery space. Rather, it is the intersection of this material qua material with a form of labour, and an agential process, that is not artistic that must be veiled for the sculpture to be made available for culturally interpretative attention.

In the process described, the dirty and clean state of the sculpture were in dynamic tension, mediated by the action of the conservator and subject to the continued flow of material across its surface. The conservator's purpose is not to stop the rush of material across its surface but rather to ensure the sculpture remains, for a while longer, in the state at which it was determined to be 'finished.'[38] This description is in keeping with the intention of this thesis to study art works as fundamentally indeterminate and to illuminate the work of making them appear stable in the gallery. However, this must also be described across the axis of time. The conservator's work, which they described as a process, took place over a relatively short period of time in the life of *Genesis* as an art object; a passage of time immediately followed by its journey to Bluecoat and its emplacement in *In the Peaceful Dome.*

As the sculpture entered *In the Peaceful Dome* it was connected to the temporality of the exhibition as well as the 'social tradition of remembering' that was written into the exhibition's symbolic context (Zerubavel, 2004, p. 14). In this context, *Genesis* was not only reaffirmed as an art work through the duration of the exhibition, but it was presented in institutional texts and tours as an important part of Bluecoat's history—these were written by relatively senior members of staff such as the Artistic Director. As such, the interpretative attention lent to the sculpture is channelled through Bluecoat's institutional representation as a historically important art centre, vouched for by its long-standing tradition of showing artists as canonised as Epstein. The public-facing duration of *In the Peaceful Dome*, therefore, not only requires certain forms of art-adjacent labour to be concealed, it also places *Genesis* within a specific history, articulated by Bluecoat's discourse-producing workers in the service of institutionally storied Bluecoat. As such, the polyphony of temporalities contained within

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[38] This goes some way towards answering Becker, Faulkner and Kirshenblatt -Gimblett's call for sociologists of art to study how an art work comes to be finished—in this case the work of making it seem that once finished, an art work stays finished.

Genesis—from the geological time of Seravezza marble, to the history of modern art—are overwritten with a temporality of Bluecoat. This demonstrates that the art object appears in the exhibition at the intersection of space, material and time, which are all subject to degrees of social power. Without this function of the gallery—to reaffirm an art object's significance through the bracketing of it in time—*Genesis* might remain a lump of marble from Seravezza, or become, elsewhere, a forgotten relic of an ancient civilisation.

In order to transport *Genesis* the 35 miles from The Whitworth to Bluecoat, the services of an 'art transportation' company based in London were solicited. The cost of transportation was pronounced and Bluecoat ran a crowdfunding campaign which surpassed its goal of £5,000. The process of moving *Genesis* involved specialist equipment, specialist vehicles and a small team who were assisted by the gallery techs at Bluecoat when the sculpture arrived in Liverpool. However, despite the wealth of resources invested in the move, the course of the process was most critically endangered by a tiny, and previously unnoticed, material fact of Bluecoat's gallery. The following, from field notes describing the move, describes *Genesis'* arrival at Bluecoat:

> It was very hard to get [the sculpture] into the gallery as there is a small step. There is also a slight ledge that is part of the door frame, which presented… difficulty [From field notes, 06/10/2017].

This example illuminates the concept of agency as it was described in Chapter Three, in which agency is a verb referring to the animation of the meshwork. Rather than borrowing from Actor Network Theory to define agency as latent within the ledge, expressing itself as the ability to hinder somethings passage through the door frame, this instead understands agency as the correspondence of the ledge with the box containing *Genesis*—i.e. the coming together of the two elements to produce a turn of events: a box stuck on the wrong side of a door. The ledge had not been an issue in countless previous installs, only becoming notable when a work as heavy as *Genesis* was introduced. This created a call for new action to be contributed to the situation in order to encourage an agential relationship of the sculpture getting over the ledge. This was achieved by gathering all the techs and volunteers, as well as the introduction of a wedge of wood to act as leverage, whose combined forces were able to overcome the ledge. The effect of the ledge was relational to the weight of the sculpture, the available human power, and the affordances of other materials like the wooden leverage. As such, the agency in this situation was not constant, but the balance tipped away from the ledge as more elements were introduced to counteract it. This makes clear that agency is a

relational process, and that art object's agency can be understood not in terms of their meaning but in terms of how they interact with the material contexts of their presentation.

This section has introduced *Genesis*, the centrepiece of *In the Peaceful Dome*, in order to discuss the work that was required to position the sculpture for Bluecoat's audience. In so doing it has touched upon Becker's 'fundamental indeterminacy of the art work' (Becker, 2006, p. 23) as well as Ingold's description of agency (Ingold, 2010). However, *Genesis* is particular in that it is historical. The processes and work related to *Genesis* depend on how it has historically been stabilised and its cultural and material status in the canon. The following section is similarly committed to a material approach to art objects, however it turns to works of contemporary art where the cultural and material status of art objects is more fluid.

Professor Jo Stockham is a London-based contemporary artist and Head of Printmaking at the Royal College of Art. Stockham has a longstanding personal relationship with the curator of *In the Peaceful Dome*, having exhibited and curated at Bluecoat since the 1990s and moved in similar art world social contexts. In *In the Peaceful Dome* Stockham's work was shown alongside *Genesis* in a curatorial attempt to offset Epstein's male gaze with the feminist critiques in Stockham's work. The artist was invited to return to works previously shown at Bluecoat. In the process of curating the show, the curator held a studio visit to Stockham's studio at Chisenhale to ascertain which works might prove appropriate and practicable.

Stockham showed several works in *In the Peaceful Dome*. Here I will concentrate on two: *Empire Made* (1989) and *Canon, Model 3* (1989–2017a).[39] *Empire Made* is a 2D outline of the UK made of lead, with a wooden pole protruding to the left. *Canon*, *Model 3* is sculptural work, in the shape of a canon, using a men's trouser leg on the shaft and metal dart board ring as the wheels. Both of these works were exhibited at Bluecoat in the 1990 exhibition *New Sculpture*. I will use these works to explore the authorship of cultural meanings and how these intersect with material processes that play across art objects (the artist was present at both the studio visit and for the installation of her work). I will argue that as works of 'contemporary' art, their cultural and material status proved much more negotiable than *Genesis'*. This negotiation happened between the material of the art objects, the artist, and the curator. This section is therefore interested in the social life that surrounds art objects in the process of their becoming determinate, or rather, the how the 'discourse of objectivity' (Brown, 2004, p. 4) surrounding an art object is negotiated.

The studio visit—a key part of the ethnographically-informed study detailed in Chapter Four-provided examples of the interactivity between cultural significations their material basis. The previous section described the process of returning a work to the state authorised by the matrix of authorial intent and art industrial conventions (i.e. cleaning *Genesis* in order to return it to its finished state). However, the material form required to support an art work's symbolic interpretation is not necessarily this stable, especially when a work exists as 'contemporary' art, that is, not yet canonised in a certain state.[40] The following refers to the work *Empire Made* as it was encountered during the studio visit:

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[39] Both will from hereon be referred to by name without reference.
[40]Art works can be historicised in a way that does not imply their material state—such is the case with performance, relational or processual works - although often when these works are accessioned

In the bottom right-hand corner of the slate it says 'Empire Made'. Over the years since 1990 [when it was first exhibited at Bluecoat] it has degraded, as lead does, and turned white and fragile in the right-hand corner of the work, which now hangs in her studio. This change in materiality led Jo to wonder if it was 'too fragile' to show and would need to be fixed. However, on looking at the changed work, Bryan suggested a new reading. Perhaps, he suggested, the degradation in the South West of the UK over the words 'Empire Made' now point towards the political contemporary reality of the UK South West (I assumed he meant the refugee crisis) [From field notes, 19/07/2017]

During the exhibition, Stockham gave an artist talk in the gallery, from which the following description is taken:

Bryan then prompted her to talk about *Empire Made*. 'Has it always been like this?' he asked, pointing to the white section. No, she replied—a bit of a set piece. Bryan was clearly keen to emphasise the change that the work had gone through, and interrupted to point out that the words 'Empire Made' were imprinted [From field notes, 17/03/2018].

These quotes illustrate the interactivity of cultural readings and materials as the process of lead's degradation offered new interpretive horizons. In this case, those interpretative horizons are made to stretch to the geo-political production of the refugee crisis. However, lead's property of fading to white was only made culturally significant through the interpretative work of the curator, his power to author meanings within the space of the exhibition, as well as his physical presence in these spaces. This was not lead exerting its agency, but, as above, a particular affordance of lead confronting a certain context—in this case, the power dynamics of a studio visit and an artist tour.

This illustrates materially-oriented social power as it was described in Chapter Three. This account of social power has two aspects: Firstly, that social life is mediated by material affordances; Secondly that the correspondences under observation can be understood in specific socio-material contexts wherein power in unevenly distributed. This account of power can be read alongside the fact that *Empire Made* exhibited in 2017 signs of the material decay of lead—it turned white. This patch of whiteness was made a site of new symbolic potential by the curator not by virtue of how it looked, but by virtue of the fact that

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certain claims are staked on their material reality. Again, however, I am speaking here specifically to the art works encountered in the course of this empirical research.

how it looked was a trace of a change having occurred. Meaning therefore arises by framing the material within two temporal poles of relevance to the curator: as the sculpture was in 1990 when it was first exhibited at Bluecoat, and as it is now. The curators act was to throw an interpretive framework onto this process and translate it into a cultural symbol. This example shows that the work of producing the discourse of objectivity around an art work is in correspondence with material across time, and therefore, especially in the case of contemporary art, the indeterminacy of the art work actually lends itself to its symbolic emplacement. In response to the Yale School's invitation for cultural sociology to be a hermeneutic pursuit, this example demonstrates that the material roots of any hermeneutic account are deeply entangled with the material of an art work, the imposition of temporal markers, and the social powers of those who labour upon the art object.

This makes the temporality of the exhibition important. Within *In the Peaceful Dome*, *Empire Made* bore an interpretation that was uniquely tied to Bluecoat, as was in keeping with the symbolic context of the exhibition. However, outside of this context, this interpretation of the art object would have less purchase. As such, the temporal markers of the exhibition act as book-ends within which specific meanings stem from the art work's material. However, it is also the fact that the temporality of the exhibition is contingent. For example, the exhibition *In the Peaceful Dome* was extended from four to six months, due to various reasons including a lack of funding to put on another exhibition in that tax year—it was marketed, however, as a response to 'popular demand'. As such, the necessary temporal stage for an art work depends on a vast array of intersecting social and economic pressures. *Empire Made* bore this interpretation for as long as it was expedient for Bluecoat and so long as the material itself persisted. For this reason, any hermeneutic account of art works must take into account both the specific place at various levels (institution, gallery) as well as in time (exhibition).

Unlike *Genesis*, therefore, the material basis of *Empire Made's* cultural interpretation was secured not by the artist (whose concerns over exhibiting such a fragile work were dismissed) but by the curator, their control over the length of the exhibition, as well as by the lead itself. This speaks to the 'hypervisibility' (Crain, et al., 2016, p. 10) of curators in the contemporary arts. As has been suggested, the particular knowledge of the conservator is not implicated in knowledge making practices in the arts. The curator, however, is invested with the power to make claims on an art object and to make these claims relevant in the gallery space. This is an important aspect in understanding who makes an arts centre, as the curator plays a determining and powerful role in establishing the specific discourses that operate upon the

art objects in Bluecoat's gallery—it is the purchase of such discourses on objects that makes objects in the gallery distinct from those elsewhere in the arts centre, and therefore produce the distinction of Bluecoat's galleries from its neighbouring spaces.

Another work of Stockham's, *Canon, Model 3* (1989–2017a), illustrates the indeterminacy of art works more sharply than either *Empire Made* or *Genesis*. Returning to the studio visit, Stockham and the curator discussed the work. The following is taken from field notes of the studio visit:

> Jo cannot show the canon clad in pinstripe that was originally shown at Bluecoat. The reasons are several. One is that it has been requested by a London gallery for a group show and… that opportunity has a little more clout than Bluecoat. Secondly, the original work has been eaten by moths… [From field notes, 19/07/2017]

A few days later there was an email exchange between the curator and artist in which Stockham wrote:

> I've also had an idea about the cannon as I remade the last one anyway IF I found the right trousers and the dart board wires, I might make a [new] canon [From field notes, 27/07/2017]

Stockham was also present during the installation of her work, where I spoke with her about *Canon, Model 3*:

> Me: This is completely remade?

> Stockham: This is completely rebuilt…. [it is] completely dependent on the pair of trousers so this one has a very different bottom end [From filmed data, 08/10/2017]

As such, although it initially seemed impossible to show *Canon, Model 3* as it was both moth-eaten as well as wanted elsewhere, Stockham was able to reproduce the original work and this new art object stood in the gallery as *Canon, Model 3*. This demonstrates the commonplace that the value of an art work is essentially decoupled from material originality (Buskirk, 2003). Multiple 'Canons' can unproblematically be shown simultaneously at Estorick gallery in London and at Bluecoat in Liverpool with both objects legitimately claiming the history of 'Canon' as an art work as their own. This legitimacy is vouched for by the two galleries positioning of these objects within their galleries, and thereby legitimising them not only as art in general, but specifically as related to the history of 'Canon'. The fact of this object being a multiple did not serve to undermine its status—the Bluecoat version was

named 'Model 3' and Stockham detailed in an artist's talk that it was remade. As with the example of *Empire Made*, this demonstrates that the links between an art object's meaning and its material is a power vested in the artists (or curator). However, this only becomes a possibility when it is a work of contemporary art, and particularly when the artist themselves is present to legitimise a 'discourse of objectivity.' As things pass over into the canon, the form of the art work becomes solidified—it is this process that in turn creates the work of the conservator.

Canon, Model 3 also makes clear the sprawling and interactive lines that become knotted up in art works, and which far exceed the field of art production. As a cultural object—which, in this case, exists across various and distinct material objects—*Canon, Model 3* enfolds a heterogeneous 'parliament of lines' (Ingold, 2007a, p. 5) with roots trailing in myriad directions. From dart board manufacturers to the selection of trousers in North London charity shops*, Canon, Model 3* came into being as a result of the correspondence of these materials and the artists' collection of them. These lines have materially significant effects on the art work, with *Model 3* having a 'very different bottom end' to the work as it was originally exhibited at Bluecoat [From filmed data, 08/10/2017]. The history of these lines far exceed a researcher's capacity to account for them; the example of *Canon, Model 3* involves lines as diverse as moths to second hand dart boards. For this reason, a material analysis of an art object is not the process of describing the provenance of the constituent parts and describing the contexts in which they were incorporated into the object—'the systems within which [art objects] are created, distributed, evaluated, taught, and preserved' (Peterson & Anand, 2004, p. 311). What matters, instead, is that this 'parliament of lines' (Ingold, 2007a, p. 5) comes to function as an art object when it is placed with care in a specific place and over a specific period of time, in a way that bears witness to the material and social threads from which its meshwork is fabricated.
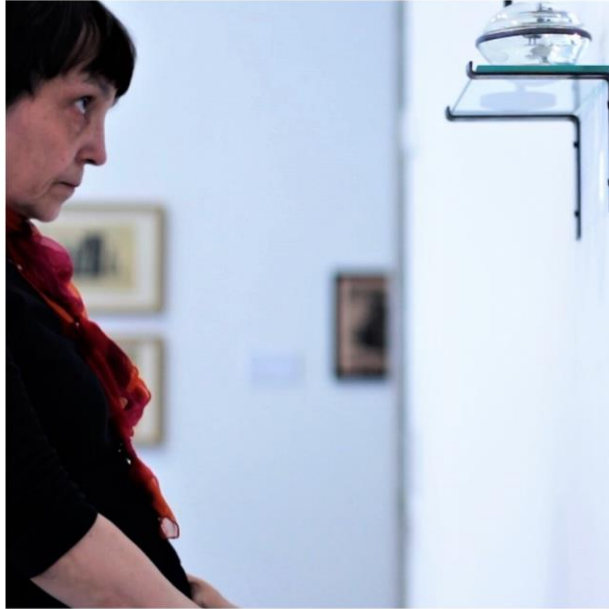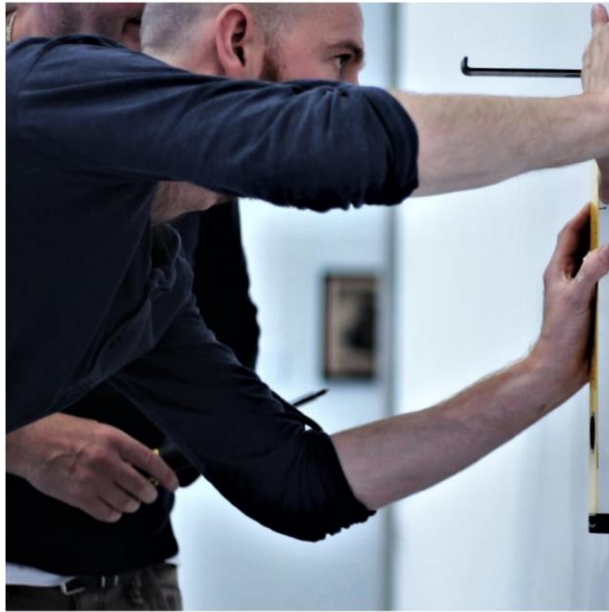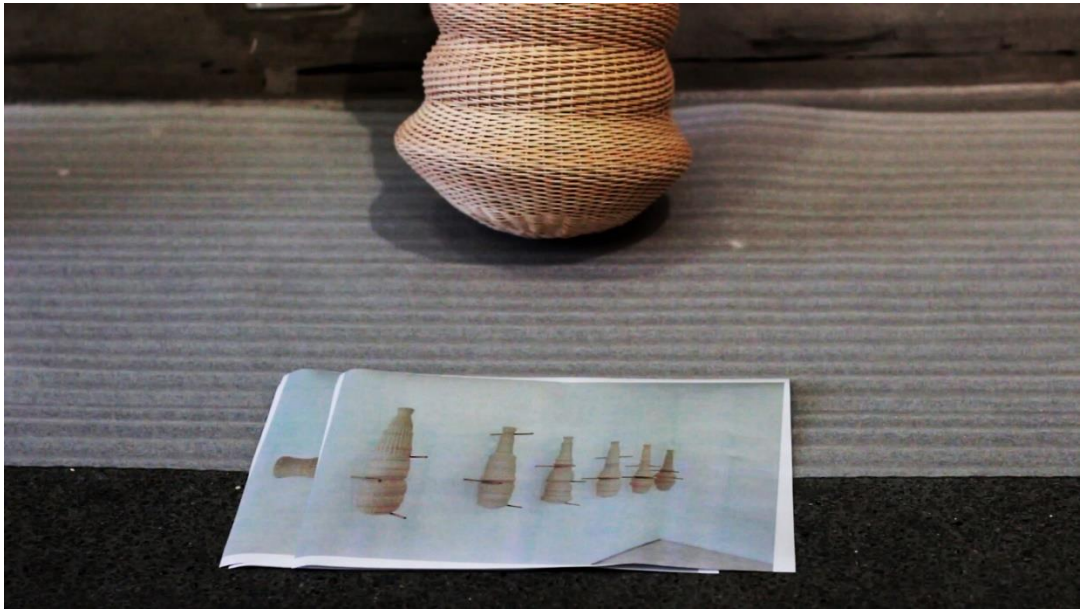
Tech Work

So far, this chapter has introduced three art works that were shown in *In the Peaceful Dome* in order to describe their socio-material production. None of these objects, however, were introduced as they were taken up by the gallery techs whose skill was partially the subject of *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre*. What is more, these objects were described in contexts including The Whitworth, and an artists' studio, neither of which are the stage on which this research is set. This section return to this stage and these workers. However, where the previous section described socio-material production with an emphasis on material, this section focuses on the social relations within the gallery install. This is with a view to showing that the two week install was a coproduction of the exhibition as well as the tech workforce, who were positioned in and claimed a certain relationship with Bluecoat.

In the previous section, I described the curator (and artist) as the mediator between material and symbolic meanings in the gallery space. Gallery techs have a more nuanced position. Their work is material in character and does not require them to do the immaterial labour of establishing cultural meanings. However, it is nonetheless required that their work is sensitive to the particular demands that the art world layers onto its material basis. The following description of the techs at work is drawn from the installation of another of Stockham's work, *Sugar and Spice (Economic Model)* (1989–2017b):

> [Tech moves plinth]
>
> Curator: It's a bit close to there now isn't it? But that can move…
>
> Tech #1: It can do, in a way…
>
> Curator: It's a bit close to there now isn't it…?
>
> Artist: Yeah
>
> Tech #1: Oh yeah…
>
> [Tech moves plinth back]…
>
> Tech #2: Do you need… something attached to the ceiling?
>
> Artist: No [From filmed data, 08/10/2017]

In this example, as well as doing the manual labour of moving the art object, Tech #2 makes suggestions for hanging the work that expresses a familiarity with similar works and conventional gallery hangs and aesthetics. As meanings within art works have been shown

to be entangled with particular material properties, the techs are aware that each material decision carries a potential symbolic implication, which is it not in their power to determine. As such, their work is sensitive to three factors:

o   The possibility that each of their actions diverts the artist's or curator's intention, and being aware of the traces their work leaves on objects;

o   The conventions of the gallery space and the aesthetics that operate therein;

o   The affordances of the material

The actioning of these sensitivities is part of the skilled practice of the techs that was an aspect of the film analysis. However, the actioning of these sensitivities is also that which makes these workers gallery techs. As mentioned above, a hired professional moving team transported *Genesis* from The Whitworth to Bluecoat. This workforce's concern was far more invested in material, and *Genesis* mattered for how it interacted with their equipment. The curator's role in the above episode is to reflect on the spatial quality of the art object in the gallery—at other times, the curator would often say that art works needed to be given 'space to breathe.' Again, this is not the work of the techs, whose concern is with whether, for example, a plinth can be moved but nonetheless demands that they know how to action directions like 'space to breathe'. This shows the dexterity of tech work, and demonstrates that it occupies a unique position in the art world and its actors.

I argued above that a part of the conservator work was to produce their own invisibility. The same can be said of techs. This often places the techs in unique relationships with art works, as evidenced by the installation of Dan Coopey's series *Dry* (2017). These are a series of delicate woven baskets with inaccessible items concealed inside them (including chewing gum and amber), which are suspended on dowel from the gallery wall. The art work was transported to Bluecoat from Portugal. The following was taken from a conversation I had while filming its installation:

Me: Has he [the artist] given you measurements or anything?

Tech: He hasn't like given us a measurement it's more just visual in terms of the dowel [From filmed data, 11/10/2017]

And from field notes of the same day:

159

The skill that it took to mount these was tremendous. [The tech] was having to be so delicate with it, turning it ever so slightly to make it balance correctly. It was a real artisanal process [From field notes, 11/10/2017]

The installation was achieved by one paid gallery tech and one volunteer gallery tech who regularly contributes to Bluecoat's builds. They were given only a photograph of a previous installation by way of instruction.[41]

As the planning processes behind this work were highly dispersed there was no face-to-face interaction between the artist of this work and any member of staff at Bluecoat, including the techs. The techs had to defer entirely to the photographs they had been given, and to achieve the work and their own invisibility through a process of correspondence between their skilled vision (Grasseni, 2009) and skilled hands. As such, the sensitivities of tech work outlined above had to, in this case, proceed from the assumed intentions of the artist who gave only minimal instruction. This example also evidences three conditions of techs' invisibility. Firstly, the techs' correspondence with Coopey's art work went without credit in the gallery space. This is conventional art world practice. Secondly, the nature of this install involved a high level of tacit knowledge, or 'knowing from the inside' (Ingold, 2018), of the techs, and this body of knowledge was not made relevant in exhibition texts nor tours. This is also conventional art world practice. Finally, while the process of flying the art work in from Portugal involved a degree of administration, at no point was the work of the techs accounted for or planned. For this reason the techs were presented only with a photograph to work from. This makes clear that in the planning process of the exhibition, the ability of techs to realise objects was assumed. It is on account of their skill, therefore, that the third condition of their invisibility issued from: the specificities of tech work were not present in the planning of exhibition.

This chapter now moves away from the discussion of specific art objects. The install of Coopey's work has provide a useful bridge between a discussion of material and social factors at play in the install of an exhibition. In Chapter Three I showed that an account of material as per Ingold is can be instrumentalised alongside a study of how these practices are organised. I argued that to do so in the case of this thesis involves studying how practices produce apparent objects contribute to and reinforce existing systems or structures in the art world. This is what is achieved by taking an art objects, such as Coopey's work, and locating it alongside the material practice of the techs, while articulating how this work

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[41] This process features in *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre.*

proceeds under certain conditions. To do so is to make sure that the art world as meshwork described is not flat, but contorted by certain socio-material powers which encourage action to flow in particular ways. What is more, it is an understanding of the art object as a 'parliament of lines' (Ingold, 2007a, p. 5), only some of which leave their trace on the art works surface.

The next section continues in this direction of travel, moving away from a discussion stemming from material interactions towards the social contexts in which these interactions happen. As such, it shifts to the discussion of producing art publics, which is argued to the social correlate necessary to animate the materially produced exhibition. However, as the hyphen of the socio-material is, in this thesis, a channel of cross-pollination, the following discussion of social practices continue to refract across materials, and are threaded into 'parliaments of lines' (Ingold, 2007a, p. 5).

Social Practices of the Install

The techs who built *In the Peaceful Dome* were a team of paid and volunteer workers. The paid techs have freelance careers working across many institutions (particularly TATE and FACT) [From field notes, 02/10/2017; 11/10/2017] [From interview, 19/06/2019; 01/07/2019]. Some techs travel for work, for example to Manchester's The Whitworth [From field notes, 06/10/2017] and some to London [From interview, 01/07/2019]. There is one in-house Arts Technician and one in-house Technical Supervisor who recruit the necessary teams. There is only a small pool of potential workers and the team have largely worked together for years in these various workplaces. Techs for *In the Peaceful Dome* were recruited from this existing pool of workers by informal means (text) by the in-house Arts Technician or Technical Supervisor [From interview, 19/06/2019; 01/07/2019].

While tech work is typically freelance, at Bluecoat the techs are 'on the books' with tax deduced by the institution (PAYE) as well as holiday pay. They are paid by the hour at a rate (during *In the Peaceful Dome*) of £10—this compares unfavourably to other local galleries and a small raise has recently been made. Some techs at Bluecoat, however, work freelance and set their own day rate. This depends on how a worker was brought in. Other techs are volunteers, and receive £5/ day expenses. Working as a tech is highly insecure as opportunities depend on the demands of each exhibition (as argued by Becker (2008, p. 83)), the timeframes of institutions (i.e. where installs overlap, techs are limited in the uptake of work) and the development and maintenance of social/ professional ties (as described by the 'social factory' (Tronti, 1966)). As is in keeping with casualised labour, this complicates access to 'financial resources, markets or property' (International Labour Organisation, 2019, p. 12) [From interview 19/06/2019; 01/07/2019]. Tech workers, at Bluecoat and elsewhere, do not have the security of sick pay and an injury would lead to the complete lack of income. These conditions are typically precarious, understood as an 'unstable, insecure form of living' (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 3).

These conditions are a strategic decision of Bluecoat. State funding of the arts is shrinking and Bluecoat Trading fails to bring in significant income. The arts centre costs nearly £2m/ year to run. In the year to 2015, Bluecoat Trading made a profit of £22,633[42] and in the year to 2017 it made a loss (Companies House, 2020). As an NPO it receives £486,887/year from Arts Council England, which was frozen at the level of 2014 and has not risen since. These are

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[42] I use this example as it is indicative of Bluecoat's financial situation at the time of the business plan I will be quoting.

only indicative of the general economic squeeze Bluecoat has long been experiencing. This economic landscape forces the institution to make certain cost-saving choices, and state policies encourage the generation of private income (e.g. (Arts Council England; New Local Government Network, 2016)). The following is taken from Bluecoat's 2015–2018 Business Plan:

> The Bluecoat's overarching financial objectives for this three-year period are to reduce the proportion of income represented by public grant-aid funding and to increase unrestricted reserves...
>
> Additional staffing requirements will be sourced through freelance or short-term contracts [From Business Plan, 09/02/2015].

This has two main effects here. Firstly, it prioritises the generation of capital which is directly achieved through Bluecoat Trading. This includes the employment of Engagement Assistants who work across the gallery and catering spaces. These workers, by being directly angled towards profit generation, largely through the sale of food and drink, are afforded less precarious conditions than the techs as they are contracted employees of Bluecoat Trading.[43] Secondly, the short-term (occasionally freelance) nature of tech work is justified by their position as 'additional' and is a cost-saving exercise. This is because the institution does not bear long-term commitments to the workers nor pension, sick or maternity securities.

The particular employment conditions of the techs can therefore be said to be institutionally invisible. Despite the integral work the techs do, they nonetheless remain 'additional' to and therefore 'outside' Bluecoat's core work and workforce. What is more, their work is not immediately apparent as profit generating, as is the Engagement Assistant's, and is therefore not incorporated into the profit-generating and strategically privileged operations of Bluecoat Trading. Both of these factors, as well as the invisibility of their work in the public facing gallery (described above) and social imaginary, result in the techs experiencing worse conditions relative to other workforces in the arts centre. The question, remains, however, as to how these conditions effect the social life of the install: how were the divisions and conditions of labour introduced throughout this analysis socially negotiated on the ground at the install?

This was evidenced by the way that the techs were socially integrated as a group, and also the social relations between the techs and other workforces. As above, there was a strong

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[43] Note: there is some use of zero hour contracts which are themselves highly precarious.

division in both space and character between the workforces involved in exhibiting Coopey's work which resulted in the techs having no communication other than an image. The following describes the installation of other works:

> She [an artist] is the only artist, other than Stockham, that I've seen interact with the techs. To be honest, she near enough totally ignored them [From field notes, 11/10/2017]

> While [the artists] were there showing [an art work] to [the curator], a tech came over to take a look. No one spoke to him, only me. Everyone else just kinda acted like he wasn't there until he slipped away… [From field notes, 12/10/2017]

The reasons for this are potentially several—gender or social confidence, for example—and these examples speak to both expedient and sedimented ways of working. However, they illuminate something of the social relations of the gallery install. The work of the gallery techs, I have argued, is in an uneasy relation to the world of art as it appears towards a public. As expressed by the above examples, techs are socially positioned in the install as non-discursive partners. This manifests in interpersonal relations at the install, where there was very little social overlap between tech workers and those in different institutional positions—in general, the tech's work was communicated by the curator to the in-house Arts Technician, who in turn communicated with the techs.

Through social interactions like the above, as well as the divisions of labour operative across the art world in and beyond Bluecoat, techs were kept to themselves. However, it is also the case that the techs kept themselves to themselves. The team had a strongly bounded social nature that pre-existed their work on this install; the techs did not approach *In the Peaceful Dome* from nowhere. The nature of their working lives meant that they had years of experience of brief but intense co-working and depended on good social relations for future work, both of these contributed to a keen sense of comradery. What is more, I have argued that their work takes place in a strange position between that of art and of work, requiring a certain sensitivity of body and mind. This is a disposition shared by the techs, and the unique nature of their work meant their way of seeing the arts was more similar to that of their colleagues than that of other workers at Bluecoat.

The social life of the install can be characterised as follows: the techs were bounded to their group rather that to the institution. This is not only because of the informal recruitment where bad social relations could (and sometimes did [From interview, 19/06/2019]) result in the loss of future work. It was also a symptom of how they were institutionally positioned (as

non-discursive partners), spatially positioned (in the gallery not the office), and the limited social interactions this afforded with other workforces. I will use the evidence of their break times to describe the socially bounded character of the tech workforce:

> The tea breaks clearly are an important part of the rhythm of the day and every team member is hunted down to be asked if he wants a brew. Biscuits are duly forced on everyone... They chit chat about TV, or about previous jobs. The register in which they talk about art institutions is profoundly different from the reverential way that they are usually spoken of. To these guys (and they are guys) they are messy places, that demand lots of manual labour [From field notes, 02/10/2017].

> [Of speaking to a volunteer tech on his lunch break]: He appreciates that [the group] are good pals—currently they are upstairs playing poker and he's 'already a pound down!' [From field notes, 05/10/2017]

These remarks are characteristic of the social life of the install. The working day of the techs was structured by this rhythm of non-negotiable and shared breaks, the responsibility for which was dispersed across the group. What is more, unlike institutional workers, the techs shared food and played games together—practices of group bonding—and saw and vocalised the gallery space as a place of work, not a site of reified art objects, interpretative attention or, indeed, finished art objects.

This was evidence of a shared attitude to Bluecoat as a place of work which corresponds to Bluecoat's contractual positioning of them. Tech work as a career is typically developed at the workers own discretion, but the work is carried out within very specific boundaries— hourly paid, contained within two weeks, physically localised in the gallery and with only a small pool of colleagues. What is more, tech work is beyond the boundary of the institution as it presents itself, i.e. the techs are not part of the fabric of Bluecoat's staff nor have they been 'written into' (Morus, 2016) the institutional 'tradition of remembering' (Zerubavel, 2004, p. 14), diminishing a sense of mutual investment. Finally, the course of the work rarely spatially intersects with those who produce the discourse of objectivity that is the standard-bearer of Bluecoat. All of this feeds into a distance between the techs and Bluecoat as a symbolic vehicle. These breaktimes were therefore temporary territories where the techs would engage in social practices that were not required by the exhibition, a territory in which the group bound themselves together by sharing food and games.[44]

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[44] In contrast, institutional workers undertook social practices deeply enmeshed in the exhibition.

This could suggest that the techs were also distanced from the art world as individuals. This is not the case. In fact, many of the techs are practicing artists, using this work to supplement their income and even to develop skills [From interview 19/06/2019; 01/07/2019]. These workers occupy spaces like private views at other times, and therefore, in other spaces, be invested in the discourses of objectivity and values in the frontstage of the art world. As such, the social position of the tech depended on their position relative to the institution within the two weeks of the install. As such, the relationship between individual techs to the frontstage of Bluecoat's art world did not depend on the tech, but rather on their inhabiting the install, their contractual relationship with Bluecoat, and their entanglement with the tech workforce.

Another factor in tech works' relationship to Bluecoat is that it is intermittent. The nature of working as a tech is highly changeable, working at various institutions, on various builds and in various employment conditions. In a small scene like Liverpool's the most stable aspect, therefore, is one's colleagues [From interview, 19/06/2019; 01/07/2019]. What is more, these workers share the particular struggle of living as a tech as well as a shared enjoyment of the work. In other words, the techs are not likely to invest in Bluecoat in particular as it is one of many workplaces. Instead, the techs invest in the group as this is more relevant and recurrent in their lives. This is unproblematic in terms of getting the job done—Bluecoat matters in as much as it is a material particular, but the aesthetics and conventions of the install are generally transportable across institutions.

This discussion of the social nature of tech work, and the group practices that characterise being part of the tech team, recalls the discussion in Chapter Two on the organisation of contemporary work that is uncoupled from a specific place. The social bonds shared between the techs have a dual character—they both animate the working day as well as providing links for future employment. In some discussions, techs made clear that when they were not socially integrated in the group, they did not receive some job opportunities [From interview, 19/06/2019; 01/07/2019]. This demonstrated the overlap of social and professional ties characteristic of the organisation of tech work. Furthermore, there is an internal hierarchy operative in tech work itself, with some institutions more prestigious than others. This is especially prevalent in a small scene like Liverpool's, and the social bonds therefore also act of channels of communication about important factors like speed and rate of pay. The small size of the scene, however, means that these social ties are subject to competition.

This analysis has suggested that the social practices as well as the division of labour at Bluecoat produces a separation between tech work and the institution. This can broadly be seen across sector of art galleries, where the pursuit of a tech career rarely overlaps with other operations in art galleries. Tech work functions as a sub-industry in the arts, with its own networks and career paths, and while it is intimately linked to gallery spaces it operates in parallel to their institutions. However, through describing the distinction of tech work at Bluecoat a kind of hostility or animosity may be implied. This is not particularly the case. While the day to day work of being a tech has its own socialites and spaces, the distinction is not necessary experienced as an antagonism. Rather, this labour occupies a specific place in the meshwork of the Bluecoat, and techs do not necessarily struggle for greater institutional visibility. Instead, as was the case with the union drive at Guggenheim, techs may be motivated to struggle for more secure contracts, better pay and faster payment. Often, the techs spoke positively about the freelance nature of their careers, as it allowed them to travel in between work or pursue their own artistic practices. Also, when asked if they felt they would like to be credited in galleries they tended to be ambivalent. As such, this analysis should not be taken as an argument for bringing tech work in house nor for making it visible in galleries, but rather as an examination of the constitutive work of techs and how it is socially organised.

I will offer a concluding illustration of this discussion to emphasise the social differentiation of tech work from other social contexts during the installation of *In the Peaceful Dome*. The general process of installing the exhibition can be seen as trajectory towards a public, towards the presentation of the gallery spaces as the determinate ground on which objects appear as art, and are implicated the symbolic and temporal confines of an exhibition. The trajectory towards this is the inverse of the trajectory which removes the techs from the space. By the time the gallery is ready to be turned over to the audience, it has shed its relationship to the work of the techs. It becomes, instead, the stage for institutional staff and for audience. For this reason, it is not incumbent on the gallery techs to occupy the private view. Private views are the art world answer to celebrations, with wine and speeches, and, as I will argue below, offer an excellent site to research the social reproduction of the institution. The techs of *In the Peaceful Dome*, instead, choose to go to the pub as a group over attending the opening of the exhibition [From field notes, 13/10/2017]. This offers a fitting end to my argument in which tech work is characterised by a group sociality that makes and is made distinct from Bluecoat.

Placing Work on a Stage

The previous section discussed the social practices of the gallery techs and how this related to other workers at Bluecoat. This concluding section will discuss how techs work was related to other publics, and how this resulted from both the affordance of a glass window, and the decision of an institutional worker to place signage in this window. This mirrors the concluding discussion of the following chapter, which analysis this same window as it mediates gazes cast onto *Genesis*.

It is increasingly common practice for galleries to acknowledge the techs that are at work in the galleries building exhibitions. 'Making of' videos are made (Gagosian, 2013), events held (Städel Museum, 2019), and tweets sent (Castlefield Gallery, 2020), all offering a public an insight into the processes and workers installing exhibitions. At Bluecoat, as at other galleries such as Oxford Contemporary, similar digital content is matched with its material counterpart. In the window of the gallery which gives out onto Liverpool One, a blackboard was placed by an institutional worker, inviting people to watch 'our techs' at work, and encouraging them to consume the fruits of this labour by attending the private view or visiting the exhibition. Indeed, it is an eye-catching place and people often peered through the window at the work going on—at one point, a member of the public directed me to lift an art work a little to one side, before giving me the thumbs up that it was perfectly aligned [From field notes, 8/10/2017].

Placing a blackboard in the window is an attempt to define the ways in which tech work is seen. Returning to the work of Goffman, I have argued that the gallery provides the stage for the work of art, while tech work is the backstage. However, the exactness of this analogy is challenged in this example, as the 'fabrication of illusions or impressions' (Goffman, 1990, p. 69) is not happening out of view, but in full view of any number of potential viewers. However, what is at stake is how this backstage activity is being placed on the stage of the gallery. As with the literature on invisible labour, it is not necessarily the actual visibility of work that makes it invisible or otherwise. Rather, how that work is socially imagined and valued by others can make it a suitable candidate for the label 'invisible'. That is what is at stake in this window, with this blackboard.

The blackboard's message attempts to make sure that the techs' work and its objects are tethered to the art world, and it points from the tech work directly to the exhibition as it will appear to a visiting public. This irons out all of the material contingencies happening and being skilfully negotiated in the install, replacing this with the symbolic form of the exhibition as it will come to pass. The window and the blackboard lend to the techs' work a performative

character—mediating between the work and the passing shoppers as if a screen. By this understanding, the work of the techs is subject to a representation of labour that is not its own, but is in the service of the symbolic needs of Bluecoat. What is more, its celebratory tone and use of the possessive collective pronoun 'our techs' iron over the distance between techs and Bluecoat that I have described as being constructed by both parties. In other words, the blackboard recasts the window as the forth-wall of a stage—but, as I suggested previously—the power of the playwright remains with Bluecoat.

Conclusion

This chapter has taken the analysis as far as the exhibition opening to the public. This has involved tracing its objects back to lending institutions and artists' studios, while recognising that as material artefacts they far exceed these contexts. It argued for the importance of seeing the material of the art world through time, as the symbolic meanings of art and its spaces are layered onto specific passages of times during which an object or space is stabilised in a local signifying structure: the exhibition. In this example of an arts centre, this process of stabilising object so they can be subject to an art world discourse of objectivity is what serves to differentiate between the gallery and the neighbouring spaces in Bluecoat, where objects do not bear such significance. As such, the process of placing art works in the gallery, and the sensitivities this requires of the gallery techs, is a constitutive part in securing the socio-material basis of an arts centre—i.e. as a place simultaneously directing a public towards art and non-art objects.

I have also, however, argued that a material-focused analysis such as this brings into the picture the work of techs who are invisible in the gallery space. This has been in order to conduct a socio-material analysis which takes into account materials and material practices, as well as how they are socially organised—two mutually reinforcing elements of a socio-material analysis, to which *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre* add. I have therefore made links between material, the intermediate structure of the arts centre, and the macro-structure of work, particularly precarious work, in the 21st century. I have argued that the work of the techs is in a tension with Bluecoat and shown that the sociality of the workers reflects this, as does their employment conditions. This is with a view to answering the question of how an art centre happens—it happens, in part, thanks to these workers who nonetheless remain distinct and, in various ways, invisible.

This chapter has therefore looked at the material and social aspects of making *In the Peaceful Dome*. This has been in order to present a description of the art world as is in keeping with the art world as meshwork model I have introduced. Key aspects, therefore, have been in the

interdependence and correspondence of socio-material lines in the meshwork as well as an insistence on placing this in process, or in time. The chapter now moves with the techs away from the install; but unlike the techs it returns to the private view. This is where the discussion of the next chapter picks up in order to study the social reproduction of the arts centre. As such, it is remains tipped towards the social side of the socio-material. However, these practices serve to animate a resolutely material site filled with specific art objects, showing once again the correspondences between the socio-material production of an exhibition.

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Chapter Eight: Analysis: Making *In the Peaceful Dome's* Publics

Introduction

Both social and material factors contribute to the animation of spaces. As such, the backstage work detailed in the previous chapter of building *In the Peaceful Dome* required the addition of publics and practices in order for Bluecoat's galleries to be realised as art spaces, and for the arts centre to come and continue to be. This chapter takes a socio-material approach to studying the construction of these publics, while locating the motivations of constructing specific publics in the wider socio-economic context in which Bluecoat operates. It is the counterpart to the preceding analysis as it studies not how objects are stabilised in the gallery and the work this entails, but rather the currents that bring certain groups into certain relationships with Bluecoat and its objects. This similarly entails work, although this is no longer the work of the techs. Research into the construction of art publics has studied the mediating role of: critics (Levy, 1988; Shrum, 1991); privatising policy landscapes (Zolberg, 1994); and the spatial, territorialising role of specific art galleries (McClellan, 2008). This chapter takes this study to the mediating role of specific objects and materials.

Publics are here understood as a group of people bound by shared 'interest[s] and experience', and this chapter studies small publics that are localised in time and place (Fine, 2010, p. 361).[45] These shared characteristics may be extrinsic to Bluecoat, while being the basis of a shared relationship to the arts centre at a certain time. This pre-existing relationship with Bluecoat had placed members of these publics, or potential publics, into a certain socio-spatial proximity to Bluecoat's building. As the observations of this thesis stem from interactions, this chapter studies specific socio-material contexts which mediate a person's interaction with Bluecoat, and which contribute to the formation of publics. This thesis has placed an emphasis on the symbolic meanings that are layered onto art objects and spaces. Consequently, a public, in this account, shares the same interpretative practice towards art objects. In other words, publics in the arts centre are bound together through being subject to the same 'discourse of objectivity' (Brown, 2004, p. 4), which makes the liveliness of Bluecoat's meshwork apparently stable and particularly meaningful. The

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[45] To introduce the concept of 'public' is to implicitly evoke its opposite, 'private'. However, acts that are considered 'private' are not necessarily non-social, nor do 'public' acts always contribute to a larger social grouping (Dewey, 2012, p. 47). In this thesis, a public, and public acts, refer to practices through which a group perform a shared identity, and the outside of a given public can just as easly be another, overlaping public as much as it can be a 'priavte'.

successful creation of a public depends on the degree to which these discourse are made convincing.

An exhibition is host to many different publics. Most categorical of these publics are the visitors who are invested in the arts, and the Liverpool arts scene, and who visit the exhibition in the pursuit of their interests and the course of their social lives. This public is broadly shared across Liverpool's art institutions, and its members may work at neighbouring galleries, review the exhibition for the local or national art press, or in some other way be invested in the Liverpool arts scene. The cultivation of this public is therefore vital for Bluecoat to consolidate its gallery as significant in the Liverpool arts scene and beyond. This was predominantly the public who attended the publicly accessible and free element of the opening event of *In the Peaceful Dome* (called here the 'public' private view). The previous chapter concluded with the techs leaving the gallery on the cusp of its public opening, and the concluding section of *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre* featured the public who chose to attend the 'public' private view of *In the Peaceful Dome.* This provided an insight into the practices and atmosphere of the most evident and explicit public of Bluecoat's exhibitions, consisting of artists, curators, critics and colleagues. This public animated the 'public' private view by engaging with the galleries as meaningfully populated with art objects, sharing wine, and providing an audience for speeches. This public is not the concern of this chapter.

Given that Bluecoat is host to many different practices, drawing attention to one risks flattening out the others. Only some of these practices are angled towards the galleries, and only these publics are the legitimising social ground on which the exhibition is animated as art. The members of the Liverpool arts scene are one such public, but the arts centre requires other, less evident, publics. The need for each of these publics arises from the wider socio-economic context in which Bluecoat operates.

Firstly, Bluecoat's economic viability depends on diversifying its income portfolio and attracting 'new sources of income' (Arts Council England, 2013, p. 3), including private giving and income generation. This is a direction of UK state policy executed through specific Arts Council England initiatives (for example, see (Arts Council England, 2017a)) at a time of 'austerity and challenge' (Arts Council England, 2013, p. 5). Income generation is achieved by Bluecoat Trading, as detailed previously. Private giving, however, requires the construction of conducive socio-material conditions, including the identification and establishment of a certain public. This is the first public introduced in this chapter, and was localised at an invite only drinks reception that formed part of *In the Peaceful Dome's* private view (called here

the 'private' private view). The members of this public share a relationship to Bluecoat that conditions their socio-spatial proximity to the building: they have accepted a personal invite to attend a drinks reception and private tour of the new exhibition.

However, as a National Portfolio Organisation in the category combined arts, Bluecoat is also subject to the prevailing social climate of Arts Council England, encapsulated by the tag line 'Great Art and Culture for Everyone' which ran alongside their 2010–2020 strategic framework (Arts Council England, 2013).[46] Beyond economic measures, Arts Council England also establishes guidelines and prerogatives for how arts organisations should operate. Central to their 2010–2020 strategic framework was that 'we want as many people as possible to be stimulated by arts and culture wherever they are' (Arts Council England, 2013, p. 6), and this involves constantly striving to 'engage the public' (Arts Council England, 2013, p. 7). Arts Council England adopts a blunt definition of 'the public' which tends to signify a diverse cross-section of the community, and a desire to remove barriers to access predominantly experienced by those from under-privileged economic backgrounds. In order to quantify the success of organisations in 'engaging the public' (Arts Council England, 2013, p. 7), Arts Council England require NPOs to collect data on visitors through Audience Finder (The Audience Agency, 2020) which uses demographic analysis to segment audiences into categories like 'Metroculturals', 'Facebook Families', 'Experience Seekers' or 'Up Our Street' (Arts Council England, 2020). While Bluecoat does not collect data on every visitor to their gallery, it is nonetheless an ongoing strategy to attract new visitors to the gallery from across these categories, and to broaden their audience beyond the Liverpool arts scene. This is reflected in one of Bluecoat's stated aims, to 'help people find a meaningful place for the arts in their lives, creating safe and inclusive spaces for everyone to engage as audiences and participants' (Bluecoat, 2020a).

Bluecoat therefore adopts practices to ensure that new visitors are attracted to the gallery. A key site through which this is attempted is the window of Gallery Three, which looks out onto College Lane and the shops and shoppers of Liverpool One. This provides an opportune place where people may be drawn into the gallery without having specifically set out to do so. This depends on chance encounters with the objects in Bluecoat's galleries seen through the window. These people share a relationship to Bluecoat that conditions their socio-spatial

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[46] Arts Council England have just launched their next ten year strategic framework for 2020-2030 with the tag line 'Let's Create' (Arts Council England, 2020b). The new inflections in this strategy will come to bear at arts organisations over the next few years. However, as this research concerns events in 2017, the strategic priorities of 2010-2020 are operative.

proximity to the building: they have not self-selected as a member of Bluecoat's audience, and encounter the galleries while inhabiting Liverpool One. This is the second public studied in this chapter, which is in fact presented in moments of disaggregation, where Bluecoat fails to turn these interactions into a public. This is studied through attention to the window as a site of contestation.

(Bluecoat, 2017d)

The 'Private' Private View: Institutional Intimacies

This section studies the construction of a public during the private view of *In the Peaceful Dome*—a 'private view' is the celebratory event that opens an exhibition. Private views reflect and reinforce an art institution's narrative (or brand). For example, Bluecoat's neighbouring gallery FACT's private views have DJs, free cocktails and an after party at a local trendy venue, befitting a gallery for new technology. Tate Liverpool, by contrast, for a long time hosted private views which were invite only, befitting a gallery whose shows are predominantly behind a paywall.[47] Throughout the year of my fieldwork, private views were discussed in 'communications meetings' where Bluecoat managerial staff would discuss plans for the private view, including practicalities such as the weather and the building itself, as well as the private views of other galleries by way of comparison or inspiration [From field notes, 02/06/2017]. The private view can therefore be studied as a choreographed performance of Bluecoat's institutional narrative upon its stages. *In the Peaceful Dome's* private view two different elements, the most publicly prominent of which was the 'public' private view which was attended by the mainstays of Bluecoat's art audience: critics, colleagues from neighbouring galleries, artists etc. However, this was only one element of the event, which also provided the context for constructing a more 'exclusive' public. This section will discuss this invite only event.

On 12th February 2017 *In the Peaceful Dome* opened with a private tour at 5pm for 'friends of Bluecoat'. This was preceded by a drinks reception in the Bistro (called here the 'private' private view), the 'invite only' nature of which ensured that the guests arrived having already been positioned in a privileged relationship with Bluecoat (unlike the open invite to the later 'public' public view). The guests included academics, philanthropists, funders, board members and other long-standing 'friends of Bluecoat', predominantly of middle to senior age. The exclusivity of this event was materially reflected by the Bistro, a place with a more sophisticated appearance than the Hub below and which is often used for profile- or incoming-generating events (e.g. hosting the director of Arts Council England or being hired out for weddings). It also offered a place separate from those which were accessible to the 'general' public at the time, and only invited guests made their way through the rest of the arts centre to the drinks reception in the Bistro [From field notes, 12/10/2017].

The 'private' private view was staffed by Engagement Assistants who served free 'champagne' from behind the bar. The curator of the exhibition (and Bluecoat's Artistic

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[47] This has changed with the new Tate Liverpool director.

Director) as well as Bluecoat's CEO were present to greet guests as they arrived. Other of Bluecoat's office staff were present at the drinks reception, for example the Programme Assistant and Development Officer. These workers occupy low to mid-positions in the staff hierarchy. At the drinks reception, they circulated the space and engaged guests in conversation. Where the Artistic Director and CEO made sure guests were greeted, these low to mid-level office staff held sustained, interpersonal interactions with individuals or small groups of guests. The tour of the exhibition, which followed the reception, was given by the curator, and the invited guests therefore constituted the first public to see the entirety of the exhibition in its 'finished' form [From field notes, 12/10/2017].[48]

The direction of my observation here was conditioned by the flows of power that were operating at Bluecoat the time of the private view. I had been denied access to observe the tour of the 'private' private view, did not take my camera into the Bistro during the drinks reception, and changed my outfit to 'fit in a little better' [From field notes, 12/10/2017]. These were the conditions of my entry into the space as determined by the Artistic Director, demonstrating the ways in which my research practice was entangled and implicated in the social reproduction of the arts centre (i.e. I was only allowed to engage participants in certain publics, times and places, where the conduct of my research would not jeopardise the strategic practices of Bluecoat). For this reason, the 'private' private view does not feature in *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre.* However, these conditions of access also had implications for my position as a researcher at the event, as well as the object of my interest. I did not engage guests in conversations for research purposes, nor did I record them. Instead I spent the event talking closely with the Programme Assistant and Development Officer, with whom I had a longstanding research relationship, as and when they were not otherwise engaged.

I had established a research practice of following an object in order to shed light on its socio-material entanglements. In the 'private' private view, there was a series of objects that lent themselves to this pursuit: copies of an auction catalogue which were distributed around the Bistro. As introduced, a key strategy of Bluecoat's business plan (2015–2018) was a move towards private funding incentivised by state policies [From Business Plan, 09.02.2015]. In an early interview, the (former) Head of Development had detailed the UK governmental push towards diversifying the income streams of art institutions to include private and charitable gifts [From field notes, 18/04/2017]. The auction was one example of how this was put into

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[48] The volunteer gallery invigilators had been given a tour the previous evening while the exhibition was not quite finished.

practice, and was marketed as follows: 'As part of Bluecoat's 300th anniversary celebrations artists from the art centre's exhibition history have generously donated art works towards this fundraising auction' (Paddle8, 2017). However, the (former) Head of Development had also detailed the practices that surround the generation and incentivising of private giving, which he described as 'tactics' including 'drinks receptions… or private tours' offered to potential private donors [From field notes, 18/04/2017].

The auction catalogues had been scattered around tables, and guests would encounter them, pick them up and flick through [From field notes, 12/10/2017]. This provided a cue, or opening, for the Programme Assistant, Development Officer or other office worker to approach the guest, and they would then give information about specific art works (e.g. when they had been shown at Bluecoat, details about the artist etc.). These interactions were amiable in character, and the majority of the labour of these workers at the 'private' private view was to socialise with guests in a way that subtly brought their attention to the auction catalogues (including through gesture), and, consequently, to present the art works as significant and interesting.[49] Crucially, these were usually interactions between the staff and people they did not know, and towards whom they performed deference. The relationship was uneven: the workers constrained and regulated by the demands of work, while their interlocutors attended the event in the course of their social lives.

This work can be seen as the production or manipulation of affects (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 108). While affective labour usually refers to work such as waitressing which performs a service while instilling a sense of intimacy (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 108), at the 'private' private view affective labour was not performed alongside the selling of a commodity but in anticipation of future benefits to be gained by placing a certain individual into a close relationship with Bluecoat (e.g. bidding on an art work). As noted previously, contemporary philanthropic giving has been shown to be motivated by the intimacy with the recipient that the donor receives in exchange for their gift (Harvie, 2013, p. 185; Swanson & Davis, 2006). This correlates with the (former) Head of Development's comments that 'drinks receptions… or private tours' were strategic practices to engender an economically inclined closeness with Bluecoat. Although the guests of the 'private' private view were not purely identified due to their philanthropic proclivity, the presence of the auction catalogues—which occurred nowhere else in my field work—suggested that the invitees were considered uniquely likely to engage with the auction. As such, the affective labour that was appended to the catalogues

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[49] I benefitted from their habit of updating me after these interactions.

was the necessary work of establishing an institutional intimacy in the service of these potential strategic benefits—together, the catalogues and the affective labourers animated this potential relationship. Following the catalogues themselves made this clear, as when they were picked up by a guest, a member of staff was quickly in pursuit, entering into an interaction mediated by, and in physical reference to, the catalogue [From field notes, 12/10/2017].

Unlike material analysis elsewhere in this thesis, the auction catalogues as objects have not entered this analysis for their material affordances which mediated action, but rather as manifestations or catalysts of social relations. However, recalling the discussion of Chapter Three, this thesis resists understanding objects as a social or symbolic proxy. Rather, the physicality of the catalogues had determining effects on the unfolding action which became gathered around them. In tandem with the corresponding affective labour, the catalogues pulled guests into certain proximities, and the event became socially anchored around them. What is more, the catalogues were consistently made present in the interaction through the gestures of staff. This created the interpersonal, embodied intimacies in which workers like the Programme Assistant and Development Officer could establish the required affects.

I have suggested that objects can be studied within an understanding of the meshwork in two ways: Firstly, as material affordances which mediate action; Secondly, referencing Mauss (1925), as material surfaces which draw people together and shape the course of the relationship between them (Chapter Three). The catalogues served this second function at the 'private' private view. Although the catalogues themselves do not constitute a 'gift' (Mauss, 1925), they nonetheless were part on an attempt to charge the relationship between guests and Bluecoat in a certain way, and to categorise people in certain ways (e.g. donor). They provided a material surface on which the unfolding bonds of social life corresponded— not only did they carry information on the auction, the fact of their presence entangled the invitees with Bluecoat through the optics of charitable giving. This corresponded with the material context of the Bistro, the invite only nature of the event, the collateral objects like champagne flutes, and affective labour in the production of a public whose intimate relationship with Bluecoat was conditioned by the socio-economic demands of the arts centre. This is made pronounced by the fact that this was the only time the catalogues appeared in my research, despite the exhibition coinciding with the auction—they were not in the gallery space, Hub, café or 'public' private view.

The public being woven at the 'private' private view therefore had several characteristics. Firstly, it was a 'private' public, made unique by its distance from the 'public' private view. Secondly, it was composed of invitees who performed certain common social characteristics which set them apart from publics elsewhere at the arts centre—for example, guests had a higher age profile, smarter dress, and were predominantly non-art professionals compared to Bluecoat's audience statistics and the attendees of the 'public' private view.[50] Thirdly, it was mobilised towards auction catalogues and the generation of private income. Finally, it was animated by the affective labour of low and mid-level office staff who were themselves outside of this public. These characteristics are the shared 'interest[s] and experience' (Fine, 2010, p. 361) that turn the guests of the 'private' private view into a public, a public that Bluecoat requires to socioeconomically reproduce itself in a policy climate geared towards private income.

I have stressed throughout this thesis that Bluecoat's building is host to heterogeneous socio-material practices, while staking its essence as an arts centre on the consistent presence of art within it. I have also argued that a place and its objects are stabilised as art through the correspondence of material and social practices—i.e. as well as making exhibitions, Bluecoat also needs to make their publics. The public of the 'private' private view is one necessary public, but which is insufficient for the arts centre to be stabilised in the local context of the Liverpool arts scene. This is the public who animated the 'public' private view and who visited *In the Peaceful Dome* over the following months, and whose occupation of the gallery can be seen in *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre.*

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[50] Interestingly, it is required that publicly funded art institutions gather information on their audiences and attempt to engage publics from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. This is based on metrics from postcode analysis. It is an interesting comparison that the 'private' private view was based on an exclusively, and angled towards a public with an advantaged class profile. This suggests that while arts institutions strive to diversify their programme and open up access, in the current funding climate this relies on the cultivation of exclusive publics of private givers. This differentiates the publics, and benefits such as personalised private tours and receptions perpetrate and reproduce inequalities of access to art and culture.

The Window: Leaky Meshworks, Contested Publics

The previous section detailed the construction of a public at Bluecoat which was enmeshed with the institutional imperative to secure private income, and was studied through attention to auction catalogues. The public of the 'private' private view also constituted the first public to experience *In the Peaceful Dome* from within Bluecoat's galleries; while they were predominantly a public of the arts centre more generally, this was channelled through the specific exhibition. However, the following observation was made during the final hour of the gallery install: '*Genesis* was [playfully] ceremonially unwrapped by [tech] and [volunteer], ready to be displayed to the public. As soon as [it] was, passing members of the public stopped to peer through the window at the spectacle' [From field notes, 12/10/2017]. What is more, a final task of the install was the cleaning of this window, and the removal of finger-prints and other traces of the activity of the gallery techs. This suggests another group of people in a different relationship to the exhibition: those who encountered it from outside the 'stage' of Bluecoat, from the vantage point of the streets of Liverpool One as mediated by the window.

This section discusses the interactions with the exhibition that occurred at the site of the window in Gallery Three, through which *Genesis* was clearly visible. This window had consistently recurred as a discussion point throughout my field work as a site rich with potential for the communication of Bluecoat's narrative and the conversion of passers-by into gallery visitors. From the point of view of College Lane, this window is set in a contemporary façade, relatively seamless with the general design of Liverpool One— Liverpool One tightly police how this part of the city looks and the windows are surrounded by Liverpool One branding. Those engaging with Bluecoat through the windows, and who are unfamiliar with or unprepared for the gallery space, have been cued for the socio-material dressings of shopping. The window acts as a kind of fissure in Bluecoat's symbolising eco-system; the objects are set afloat, transgressing symbolic boundaries afresh with each new encounter. The window also acts a mediating film in the construction and containment of Bluecoat's publics.

Bluecoat is aware of the sensitivities and possibilities of this window. In staff parlance it is referred to as the 'shop window' and in staff meetings curators noted that people often peered through the window but could not, or did not, find the way into the gallery which is some distance away [From Minutes 'Communications Meeting', 02/06/2017]. The curators often place particularly eye-catching works in this window as an attempt to entice visitors into the gallery. This was the strategy behind placing *Genesis* in Gallery Three, facing towards

the window. A little while into the exhibition, vinyl was added to the window detailing the sculpture [From field notes, 25/01/2018]; the addition of window vinyl attempted to mediate engagement with the objects in Bluecoat's gallery, and encourage a way of seeing congruent with the order of sense-making within the gallery.

The window, as a material site, is studied in this section similarly to how the auction catalogues were studied in the previous: as a material correspondent in the creation of a public. The window features in many of my ethnographic observations, including during filming, in discussions with curatorial staff, and through time spent in the gallery: at one point, a passer-by helped me to make sure an art work was hung straight [From field notes, 08/10/2017]. However, this section focuses on the window at a moment in the life of the exhibition. As part of my observation of *In the Peaceful Dome* I was given shifts in the role of volunteer gallery invigilator, where I spent time sitting in Gallery Three, positioned by the window, observing interactions between passers-by and the objects in the gallery. This posed an ethical challenge as the fleeting nature of these interactions prohibited gaining consent forms from every participant. Instead, as at the 'private' private view, I chose to concentrate only on practices that were afforded by the window, and through this to minimise the personalised nature of the observation, concentrating instead on how material mediates practices. My ethical clearance was to conduct an ethnography in Bluecoat's public areas, broadly construed, and the observations of this chapter have an ethnographic character.

The following episodes occurred one such shift. As a gallery invigilator, I had been instructed to 'maintain a quiet and studious atmosphere in the galleries—much like a library, our galleries should be quiet and contemplative spaces where audiences are able to engage with art works without distraction' [From field notes, Volunteer Information]. Visitors to the galleries on the whole upheld this convention, engaging with the art works in a quiet, contemplative fashion, and from a distance (as seen in *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre).* This 'atmosphere' was the correlate of the white cube, and the sense-making practices befitting a gallery of contemporary art.

However, the 'atmosphere' within the gallery was occasionally punctured by lively and provocative interactions from outside. In general, most of these interactions were angled towards *Genesis*, as the most eye-catching object in the space. These interactions with the sculpture were regularly conducted with laughter, the following is two (of many) examples drawn from my field notes:

> Two women outside stop, look, point and laugh at *Genesis*…

A young kid on College Lane had a good laugh at *Genesis*, egged on by his Dad. He then did an impression of her, sticking out his belly and grabbing his crotch. Catching his Mum's eye [through the window], I shared a laugh with the family. [From field notes, 31/10/2017]

These are paradigmatic examples of the practices of interacting with *Genesis*, or the forms of interpretative attention, that arose out of the relation between a person and the sculpture, as vision was mediated by the affordance of the window. Their lively and playful character was pronounced for its difference to the way of being on the internal side of the plane of the window.

Laughter is a topic of philosophical and social science study (Berger, 1997; Billig, 2005; Foucault, 2005; Parvulescu, 2010; Emerson, 2016), and I draw on the incongruity theory of laughter, which understands laughter as a reaction to something that is 'unexpected, illogical or inappropriate in some way' (Morreall, 1983, p. 15). Incongruity theory looks not to the motivations of the person who laughs but rather to features of the world experienced as incongruous (Billig, 2005, p. 57). This relationality, between the world, an experience of it, and social expression, is what makes it useful for my purposes. Laughter can signify that something has been experienced as incongruous (rather than that something is essentially incongruous) and this is useful in my discussion of the window as a site of mediation and contestation between two spheres of sense-making.

The prevalence of laughter at the site of the window indicates the potentially incongruous way that an object such as *Genesis* can be envisioned by those not occupying the stage of the gallery. This is not to say that all interactions with art objects from the vantage point of Liverpool One 'failed', nor that *Genesis* appeared incongruous to all who encountered from without the gallery, nor that all instances of laugher prove meaningful incongruity. Rather, the character and prevalence of these interactions were qualitatively different from those that occurred within the gallery, suggesting that the spatial dimensions of a relationship between a person and an art object has determining effects on the ways in which the object is seen. It is not the appearance of the sculpture that changes through the glass of the window, but rather the forms of interpretative attention that tended to be insinuated through practices towards it.

The spatial dimension of this relationship suggests that the stage of the gallery acts as a necessary place ('truth-spot' (Gieryn, 2018)) or discursive backdrop ('object setting' (McDonnell, 2010)) for art, and a necessary precondition for its consumption. Both Thomas

Gieryn and Terence McDonnell have written on how buildings or urban settings lend validity to truth claims. In this example, occupying the interior of the gallery was bound up with a 'quiet and studious atmosphere' [From field notes, Volunteer Information], practices such as viewing an art object from a considered distance, referring to gallery guides, and lingering pensively around the sculpture (see closing scenes of *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre).* This spatial relationship allowed *Genesis* to be animated as art. The space of the gallery is entangled with the discourses of objectivity that are layered onto Bluecoat's meshwork and which render objects within it as art—the affordance of glass, however, allows the vision of the sculpture to seep beyond this boundary, and to become entangled with other meshworks, following other paths of interpretation.

What is more, the example makes clear that the practice (laughter) is not inherent in the person nor the object, but is a relational practice that emerges from the correspondence of two participants situated in different contexts. This follows from the description of agency put forward in this thesis, and mirrors the description of the auction catalogues as a material contributor to the character of an unfolding relationship. In this example, it is not the sculpture but the window that shapes the relationship, and this follows from both the affordance of glass and the social conventions of gallery spaces and retail spaces. The animation of an object as art therefore has spatial and relational contingencies.

This discussion of the window contributes to an understanding of the construction of publics at Bluecoat. Both the placement of *Genesis* in the window and the addition of window vinyl signal the strategic attempt to convert passers-by into visitors by piqueing their interest and encouraging them to make the journey through the arts centre into the gallery. Only by so doing can Bluecoat make a claim on these people as audience members, and quantify them in their visitor statistics. As above, an objective of both Arts Council England and Bluecoat is to bring new audiences to art. However, those engaging with Bluecoat's gallery from the vantage point of Liverpool One do not constitute an art audience, despite the fact that they may have leant interpretative attention to 'art' objects positioned in a gallery. Instead, the quantitative measurement of audiences built into state instruments (i.e. Audience Finder) require Bluecoat to not only present art, but to draw people into a specific spatial proximity to it, and to facilitate a certain kind of sense-making.

It follows that the interactions mediated by the window of Gallery Three, not only those of laughter but any that do not draw people into the interior of the gallery, represent the failure to construct a meaningful public of *In the Peaceful Dome*. I have defined a public as a group

of people bound by shared 'interest[s] and experience', localised in time and place (Fine, 2010, p. 361). The passers-by share the characteristic of occupying Liverpool One, or College Lane, without being entangled with Bluecoat. As such, their spatial and material proximity does not translate into a symbolic proximity. The kind of relationship that emerges, for example an experience of incongruity, is therefore not the basis of a relationship that draws a person into being a member of Bluecoat's public. This is contrasted to the 'private' private view, where auction catalogues and affective labour created relationships that produced a public that served Bluecoat's strategic aims. In this example, the interactions through the window fail to provide Bluecoat with a public on which it can claim to have realised 'Great Art and Culture for Everyone'. Rather, Bluecoat has afforded many people a vision of an object without consistently realising the potential of this object to be art.

This is not to imply that the failure to aggregate these people into a meaningful public of *In the Peaceful Dome* is necessarily negative. The example has instead been offered to demonstrate that the creation of publics, and therefore the animation of art exhibitions, depends on spatial proximities. This reaffirms the argument made throughout that the animation of art depends on the gallery, and further, that it depends on a relationship between a viewer and an object placed in the interior of a gallery. This interaction is also placed in time; the install, for example, does not provide the necessary temporal context for an object to appear unequivocally as art. The creation of a public of an exhibition, therefore, depends on establishing shared relationships between a group of people and a set of objects in time and place. Following Becker, an art object is not a material constant, but is reproduced on 'the many occasions on which a work appears or is performed or read of reviewed, each of which can be different from all the others' (Becker, 2006, p. 23). Each of these interactions realises, or fails to realise, the art object afresh; each of these interactions is therefore the contestation of the socio-material basis of Bluecoat as an arts centre.

Conclusion

This chapter has studied the practices of constructing publics at the arts centre. It has been argued that constructing publics is necessary in order for a space to be meaningfully animated as art. In this way it has offered a counterpart to the analysis of the previous chapter which focused on the backstage construction of the exhibition, and to *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre* which focused on the skill and atmosphere of this production. This chapter has taken analysis to the frontstage of the exhibition, including the private view and a day in the life of the exhibition, and considered practices which play out on these stages. In so doing it has added social detail to how an exhibition comes and continues to be.

This chapter presented two examples of contexts in which a public was made, or not made, at Bluecoat. Neither of these publics were studied from within the context of *In the Peaceful Dome.* The publics that predominantly consumed *In the Peaceful Dome,* for example those who attended the 'public' private view and those who feature in *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre,* constitute the public that correlates most completely with the exhibition. This public tended to follow the conventional practices of engaging with an exhibition, following sedimented socio-material cues. I have chosen instead to detail two publics which required specific work in order for them to come into being (or not) in a way that was meaningful for Bluecoat. This follows the general concern of this thesis with practices of production rather than practices of consumption. What is more, the approach throws into relief the relational contingencies, as well as the material affordances and affective work, of constructing art publics. Focusing on different relationships with Bluecoat befits a study of an arts centre. Many different publics make use of Bluecoat's building, but only some of these publics and their practices are angled towards the gallery. It is only those publics angled towards the gallery that provide the legitimising ground for Bluecoat to be animated as a place for the appreciation of art, and subsequently as an arts centre. The artist studios that are also housed at Bluecoat remain backstage, and do not therefore invite a public that ties Bluecoat to the art world.

The first example given in this chapter was the construction of a public that was exclusive, and angled towards auction catalogues and the generation of private income. This required the affective labour of low and mid-level office staff who were themselves outside of this public. The motivation of constructing this public was linked to the policy climate which incentivises a move towards private income generation. This public was studied through attention to the mediating role played by auction catalogues. It was a public of the arts centre

generally, and *In the Peaceful Dome* provided a useful pretext for bringing potential members of this public into a spatial proximity with the institution.

The second example was the failure to construct a public of *In the Peaceful Dome* out of the myriad passers-by of Bluecoat's window in Gallery Three. This was a potential public composed of people positioned on the streets of Liverpool One, and whose vision of the gallery was mediated by the window. The example of laughter towards *Genesis* was given to demonstrate an incongruity between a way of seeing emerging from the time and space of the street, and the objects in the exhibition. It was argued that these interactions do not signify a public, as they are not enacting the spatial or symbolic relationships with the gallery that is necessary for the animation of art. The desire to turn these interactions into a meaningful public, signified by the window vinyl, was linked to the social climate of the arts industry in which Bluecoat operates which priorities generating new audiences. This was not presented as a 'failure', but rather an example of practices and relationships that occur at Bluecoat and across its boundaries, but which exceed its discourses of objectivity. As such, this example shows that for an exhibition, art gallery and art centre to come and continue to be involves constant socio-material negotiation.

This chapter concludes the analysis of this thesis which has presented a case-study of the production of an exhibition. It has taken a socio-material approach, in which materials are entangled in social practices in ways that generate and animate the social life of an arts centre. Beginning with the skill of the gallery techs at the install, and concluding with a public beyond Bluecoat's boundaries during the life of the exhibition, the analysis has followed the paths of socio-material interactions in order to illuminate the broader currents in which they are caught up. It has stuck close to both objects and action, understanding them as correspondents, answering the call to bring objects into the sociology of art, to foreground action, and to avoid treating objects as only the imprint of symbolic categories. It has achieved this through both film and text, which each afford different registers of analysis and require different forms of attention. While this case study is deeply entangled with Liverpool, Bluecoat and *In the Peaceful Dome,* it nonetheless sheds some light on how art spaces objects become mobilised in the fabric of cities, and the publics and practices gathered around them.

Conclusion

This thesis has been an analysis of the socio-material production of an exhibition at Bluecoat, Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts. It has engaged with Bluecoat as a meshwork, understanding it as a constantly unfolding site in which social and material processes are entangled and corresponsive. Taken together, this thesis has evoked Bluecoat's gallery as it is made, experienced, and contested. The gallery provides a stage for art objects and different publics, while also depending on these presences for it to function as a gallery socio-materially distanced from the rest of the arts centre. Its focus has been with the backstage of the gallery as the spatiotemporal context in which objects are carefully positioned towards audiences—this perspective makes clear the determining influence of elements of the art world that remain invisible in its frontstage, specifically art-adjacent workers. This has required a study of the work required to produce the objects and publics of the exhibition, as well as how this work, its form, and organisation plays out in the lives of those who perform it.

The thesis set out to achieve three main things. The first was to illuminate the contribution of gallery techs' skilled labour to the construction of an exhibition through the development of a textural and sociological filmmaking practice. The second is a theoretical development of Becker's art world to take account of new sociological approaches to matter, particularly Tim Ingold's, which was applied to a description of different spheres of action in the production of an exhibition. The third was a theoretical/ ethnographic analysis of the ways in which one art institution makes objects and labour public, and the implication of this on the art-adjacent workers who achieve this. I will now identify where I have achieved each of these aims, and in so doing make clear what the original contribution of this thesis is to the sociology of art, and its methods.

The study of the contribution of gallery techs' skilled labour to an exhibition, through the development of a textural and sociological filmmaking practice.

In Chapters One and Two, I drew on Becker's *Art Worlds* (2008) to identify the importance of support personnel in the production of culture. I also introduced literature in the contemporary sociology of art which argued for the art object itself to be central to its analysis (de la Fuente, 2010), as well as how the art object is caught up in action (Krzys Acord & DeNora, 2008). This stressed that the art object should be analysed in a specific time and place. This is based on the understanding that the art object does not endure without work, and the 'many occasions on which a work appears or is performed or read of reviewed' are

each unique in spatiotemporal context (Becker, 2006, p. 23). As such, this research followed the processes by which objects become available for publics prepared to engage with them as art.

In the context of a gallery, this process calls on the work of a team of intermittently employed gallery techs. Following the suggestion of the 'new' sociology of art to attend closely to both objects and action, research was focused on the material practices of gallery techs, the protagonists of the backstage of the exhibition. These material practices were characterised as skilful, requiring a three-fold sympathy which recognised:

- The possibility that each of their actions diverts the artist's or curator's intention, and being aware of the traces their work leaves on objects;

- The conventions of the gallery space and the aesthetics that operate therein;

- The affordances of the material.

This skill is not usually foregrounded in the art world, which locates the authorship of objects with the artist (or curator). As such, their work can be understood as invisible in various ways: Firstly, it is not credited or made visible on the stage of the exhibition (in its completed form); secondly, the tacit knowledge of the techs is not made relevant in exhibition texts or tours; thirdly it remains outside of Bluecoat's staff structure and planning processes, and is hired according to the material needs of each install. This relationship with the employing gallery is negotiated by the gallery techs over the course of the install, and their social practices reflect a boundary between the tech workforce and the larger institution.

The skilled nature of tech work is therefore an important part of the meshwork of the exhibition, requiring methods suitable for the study and representation of skilled practice. This was found in the film camera, which suited the description of skill borrowed from Ingold as extra-textual and textural analysis—to recall Polanyi on tacit knowledge, 'we know more than we can tell' (1966, p. 4). The film camera was used as a tool to correspond with the techs skilled practice, without taking it out of the contexts and processes through which it proceeds. The install was approached through the film camera, offering a technology through which to conduct an emergent analysis, followed by a process of engaging with the footage in the production of a film which evoked the skill and atmosphere of the process. The resulting film, *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre*, was featured in Chapter Six and accounts for 16,000 words (two chapters). This research practice was characterised as a texturalist practice, drawing on Eduardo de la Fuente's 'After the Cultural Turn: For a Textural Sociology'

(de la Fuente, 2019). Practicing a textural sociology is to attend to 'both the literal 'surfaces' of everyday life as well as the metaphorical 'atmospheres', unspoken 'practical codes' and other implicit orderings at work in social and cultural life' (de la Fuente, 2019, 564). I argued that the film camera is uniquely poised to do so as the researcher can frame their shooting according to their interest in texture as well as films' unique ability to not only capture but cultivate an affect or atmosphere (Shaviro, 2010; Brinkema, 2014). This was demonstrated in the work of artists such as Cao Fei, Julie Brook, and Ben Rivers and visual anthropologists Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel. As such, the film is not only a visual testament to the skill of the gallery techs, but also an evocation of the sensory qualities of Bluecoat. I have argued that the film repays a sociologically and texturally attentive gaze.

The location of gallery techs as critical participants in a study of the production of an art exhibition has not been widely adopted. In her work, Yaneva focused attention on the site of the install, but focused attention on the agential qualities of materials rather than the formative work of the techs (Yaneva, 2003a; Yaneva, 2003b). Studying art-adjacent workers has also been undertaken by Danielle Child, although her work focuses on the outsourcing of artistic labour to fabrication firms (Child, 2018). As such, this close attention to gallery techs is itself a contribution the sociology of art. However, by centralising their skill, and understanding skill as essentially extra-textual, it introduces techs to the sociology of art while also developing a textural and sociological filmmaking practice.

A theoretical development of Becker's art world to take account of Tim Ingold's approach to matter.

Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* (2018) is seminal in the sociology of art. It describes the vast networks of labour through which cultural objects pass on their way towards an audience. This thesis borrowed from his focus on support personnel (art-adjacent workers), as well as his general description of the art world as the 'patterns of collective activity' or the complex 'cooperative networks through which art happens' (Becker, 1982 [2008], p. 1). Fundamentally, this is a world that 'contains people, who are in the middle of doing something that requires them to pay attention to each other' (Becker & Pessin, 2006, pp. 277–278). By this description, to study the art world is to study the interaction that take place between people as they coproduce art, its objects and its spaces.

However, in the light of the 'new' sociology of art, I have offered a device through which to represent the art world as the interaction between people and materials. To do so, I turned to the work of Ingold whose focus on action and movement fits with the production

perspective of this thesis. I introduced two of his concepts: correspondence, the relational and animated enacting of affordances; and meshwork, a descriptive term to describe a phenomenon in terms of the flows of action that constitute it. I added to his work a description of socio-material power as the ability and encourage action to flow in particular ways. Finally, analogous to Becker's 'fundamental indeterminacy of the art work' (Becker, 2006, p. 23), I introduced Ingold's description of objects as 'parliaments of lines' (Ingold, 2007a, p. 5). This makes clear an object only appears as the stable bedrock of a social interpretation by envisioning it outside the 'generative fluxes' (Ingold, 2007b, p. 5) of its material.

This led to a rereading of Becker's *Art Worlds* to take into account the theoretical framework of Ingold, as well as the arts-in-action approach. This presented the art world as a meshwork, with the following characteristics:

- o That it is fluid, in motion;
- o That action is interdependent: material with material, material with human, and human with human;
- o That this interdependence is an ongoing correspondence shaped by the material qualities and social powers vested in participants and places.

However, Ingold's work does not intend to provide proscriptive tools with explanatory power, which can be layered onto a research site. Instead, Ingold's work offers attitudes with which to approach the field site as a constantly unfolding and vital field of potentialities. Research is therefore the process of charting which of these potentialities come to pass and why. As Ingold writes, the researcher should 'join with the texture of [their] world' (2017, p. 101).

This description of the art world as meshwork did not only broaden the study to include materials and their affordances. It also served to condition the types of description that were offered of socio-material processes in the production of the exhibition. As such, following Becker observation and analysis was invested in moments of interaction, but these were expressed as the entanglement of lines which were in turn knotted up in the wider meshwork of Bluecoat. Across all channels of analysis (film and text), I follow how materials and practices correspond, as well as the organisation of these processes, and the two forms of research output are mutually reinforcing partners in the presentation of Bluecoat as a meshwork. I have found Ingold's work a fruitful way to reimage the art world as a constantly unfolding socio-material entanglement.

Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre stands in this thesis as an analysis of the practicing of skill, and the 'atmospheres' and 'implicit orderings' at work in the production of *In the Peaceful Dome* (de la Fuente, 2019, 564). However, the socio-material practices of making the exhibition are also subject to explicit orderings—they are bound by the conditions of labour relations at the arts centre, as well as by the conventions of sense-making in the contemporary arts. This was the concern of the written analysis chapters, which were informed by the contexts within which I was shooting for the film: the install, the private view, and the exhibition as it was visited by the public. However, this analysis was consolidated by the preceding office-based ethnography of the institution, which provided contextualising information on Bluecoat's organisations processes and staffing. This written analysis had three main subjects: the production of art objects as they appeared in the gallery; the production of the publics required by an arts centre; and the implications of performing this work on the art-adjacent workers who do so.

The production of art objects was described as the process of realising their apparently determinate form on which a discourse of objectivity could be layered. To do so, I detailed the process of cleaning and installing Jacob Epstein's *Genesis* (1929–1930). This required a negotiation, or correspondence, between a conservator and the affordances of the Servezza marble of which it is made. As a canonical work, this example demonstrated the manual labour involved in maintaining the objectified basis of art history. As with Bluecoat's gallery, the passage of time and the flux of materials pull art objects constantly into the future, constantly threatening the dissolution of the material basis of their historic position. A combination of material and symbolic work fights against this pull, and this is the work I detailed in the opening section of Chapter Seven.

I also used the example of Jo Stockham's works *Empire Made* (1989) and *Canon, Model 3* (1989–2017a). Both of these art works appeared in *In the Peaceful Dome* following a process of correspondence between their material and art world powers and structures. For example, as a 'Canon' was to be shown in London simultaneously to Bluecoat, Stockham made a new iteration of the work which differed subtly from previous versions. Similarly, *Empire Made* was stabilised in the exhibition according to a new interpretation applied to the art work by the curator after a material process had changed the work. Both of these examples were used to demonstrate the diverse socio-material factors that determine contemporary art

objects. While canonical or historical galleries undergo processes like the conservation of *Genesis*, contemporary galleries are constantly negotiating the material basis onto which their symbolic meaning is layered.

In the following chapter I studied the production of the publics which populate and animate Bluecoat, and on which the arts centre depends. The construction of publics was analysed through the example of the private view, as well as the mediating role played by the building itself. Two elements of the private view were discussed. One was an exclusive, invite only event at which the affective labour of low and mid-level institutional workers cultivated institutional intimacies. The other was a publicly accessible opening event, at which the same workers continued to perform affective labour, but were themselves implicated in the public they were creating. This was shown as the process of establishing publics, of placing groups of people into certain shared relationships with the institution of Bluecoat. These publics were constructed to achieve strategic goals of Bluecoat, whether to endear the institution to private donors, or to reaffirm its significance in the local and national art world.

The labour of constricting both art objects and public was shown to have impact the ways in which workers were organised, and socially organised themselves. In the case of the gallery techs, this was shown to depend on a distance between the techs and the Bluecoat as an institution. This was produced by both their contractual relation to the Bluecoat—they are intermittently employed and their work is more associated with the spatiotemporal context of 'the install' in general, rather than any specific institution.

This part of the analysis was carried out through text as it concerned socio-material organisational structures, rather than the practicing of skill itself. Both the written and filmic research outputs, however, contribute to an analysis of the production of *In the Peaceful Dome* in which the arts centre is approached as a meshwork. Unlike other galleries, Bluecoat's presentation as an arts centre requires a heterogeneity of socio-material practices within its site. Producing the exhibition is therefore the production of the gallery's distinction, the presence of which holds the arts centre together. This thesis has described the processes that produce this apparent distinction and the work this entails. True to the meshwork, and following from Becker's art world, this has been shown to be the shared work of a host of social and material elements. These elements are bound together for the duration of an exhibition, before continuing along their own paths as the exhibition comes to a close.

There are many ways that I would like to develop this project further. The first concerns the method of textural, sociological filmmaking. In Chapter Five I introduced the exhibit I developed for the *Situating Practices* exhibition at Temporary Contemporary, University of Huddersfield. I would like to continue this exploration, looking at how sociological moving-images can be taken off the screen, and made to interact with textural surfaces themselves. This has the huge potential of giving a tangible sensory quality to research outputs that reflects the sensory qualities of a field site. By so doing, I could move away from the 'haptic visuality' (Marks, 2000) of screen-based media, and evoke my field site by inviting 'viewers' into multi-sensory contexts which they can inhabit in a more fully embodied way. By this I do not mean simply recreating research sites, but reimagining how critical, textural social research can be made sense of (i.e. both rendered meaningful and physically sensed). As I introduced (Chapter Five) Ben Rivers does this with the viewing environments he builds for some of his films. I regret that *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre* is limited to the surface of the screen, and hope to develop further dimensions of sensory research outputs.

I opened this thesis with the struggle of art-adjacent workers at the New York Guggenheim. I have also detailed the protests surrounding the opening of the Centre for Contemporary Art at Goldsmiths, University of London, which organised under the banner 'Who keeps the cube white?' Both of these examples speak to a general trend in institutions of art presentation towards collective, worker-led organisation (Harris, 2019). Other examples include FemTech Nottingham. Made up of women based in Nottingham who work as art technicians, artists and curators, FemTech regularly comes together to discuss and share experiences and knowledge through skill shares and meet-ups. The group's main struggle is against the male domination of gallery tech work and by coming together, FemTech aims to foster a caring, co-working and mutually beneficial network. The proliferation and growing platform for these type of struggles, protests and organisations suggest that the status of art-adjacent workers is being contested and re-evaluated—both in terms of relative insecurity, as well as the inequalities within these art-adjacent professions themselves. The research of this thesis, or a development of it beyond Bluecoat, could contribute directly to these struggles. This would create a political sociology of art that is not limited to deconstructing the politics of art objects and the art historical canon. Instead, this would constitute a politically active sociology of how art is made public.

The sociology of art is somewhat haunted by the commonplace that 'sociology and art do not make good bedfellows' (Bourdieu, 2002). This thesis has attempted to avoid this antagonism, and instead to cross-pollinate the methods of sociology with the sensitivities of art practice, to allow the materials of art objects to be sociologically imagined as more than a scaffold for cultural meaning, and opened up the possibility for future sociological interventions in the socio-material, working contexts in which art in made public. It has practiced a sociology of art which corresponds, with material, textural sensitivity, to the processes, places and people which co-produce an art exhibition. The dividing line between art and sociology therefore can be reimagined as a connective thread in the meshwork, affording a sociology not of art, but with art.

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Inventory

This thesis is supported by a film, and there is a further film in the appendix. Hard copies of the thesis can find both on enclosed DVDs. Digital copies can follow this link to an online playlist: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpKWBS4KXnc51t6QYrHkjetxOzDjRN0O7

Both playlist and DVD have the same track list:

1) *Critical Focus: Study of an Arts Centre* (Chapter Six)
2) Temporary Contemporary (Appendix Five)

Appendix

One
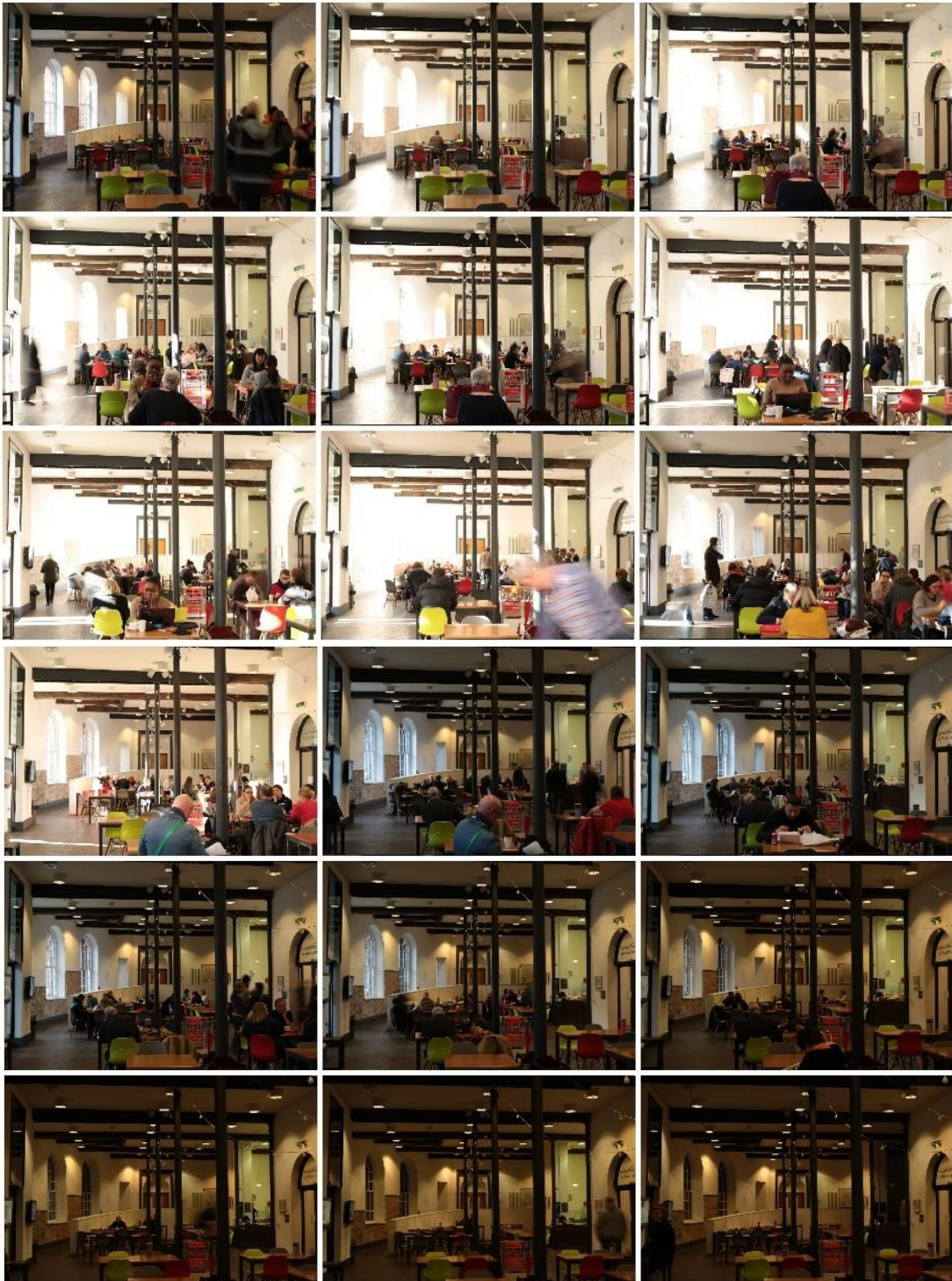
In the Peaceful Dome

Fri 13 Oct - Sun 8 Apr

Roderick Bisson / Sean Borodale / Fanny Calder / Edward Carter Preston / Julia Carter Preston / Paul Clarkson / Dan Coopey / Philip Courtenay & Yellow House / John Davies / Jacob Epstein / Fab Lab Liverpool / Edgar Grosvenor / The Grantchester Pottery / Janet Hodgson / Nathan Jones & Scott Spencer / Juniper Press / Sumuyya Khader / Donald Lynch /Joanne Masding / Syd Merrills / Grace Ndiritu / Uriel Orlow / William C. Penn / Jo Stockham / Visual Stress / Herbert Tyson Smith / Edmund Tan / Ann Whitehurst

Concluding Bluecoat's 300th anniversary, this exhibition brings together historic and contemporary art, new commissions and archival material, to set up conversations across time. It takes the idea of a continually evolving building to look afresh at some of the art Bluecoat has presented, reinvigorating it by finding contemporary resonances. How the past informs the future is explored through several themes: the building, its architecture and the passing of time; global trade and legacies of Empire; Modernism and fine and applied arts; gender and militarism; and the gallery as a site for critical engagement.

> *- Yon calm retreat, where screened from every ill,*
> *The helpless orphan's throbbing heart lies still;*
> *And finds delighted, in the peaceful dome,*
> *A better parent, and a happier home.*

Galleries One and Two

The exhibition title is from William Roscoe's 1777 poem 'Mount Pleasant', the extract above describing Bluecoat when it was a charity school. While *dome* signifies home (*domus*), might it also refer to the building's distinctive rooftop cupola? Roscoe suggests a place of refuge and succour, but behind the building's calm exterior lies a more contradictory reality: the harshness of school life, education supporting an exploitative mercantile system, and the sources of the wealth that funded the school.

Janet Hodgson questioned the philanthropic nature of this 'happier home' when in 1994 she projected repeated handwritten lines - "I must learn to know my place" - onto Bluecoat's façade. Referencing school punishment, she was also questioning the place of art, its public engagement beyond the institution and capacity for a more civic role. Represented here by a lightbox image, this was one in a trilogy of Hodgson's Bluecoat commissions. Film documentation of *History Lesson* (1999) reveals an imagined episode in the life of the 19th century school. The gallery was turned from 'white cube' into a film set, and back again, the resulting videos projected back into the spaces used. Completing the series, *Re-Run* (2008) is a disorienting film where reality and fiction collide, the past recreated in the present.

Pursuit sequences from famous films are staged, using Bluecoat staff as actors, in the empty building during refurbishment and construction of the new arts wing, where the film is now projected.

Several other artists have interrogated the building's past, as seen in documentation of interventions by **Susan Fitch** and **Geraldine Pilgrim** that drew on the school's history, and are shown alongside historical prints, including **Richard Ansdell's**, based on his 1844 boardroom painting. A Blue Coat old boy, he donated the painting in gratitude for his schooling, after which he became a successful artist and Royal Academician. His painting, *The Hunted Slaves,* hangs in Liverpool's International Slavery Museum.

Henry Hulsbergh's 1718 print of the building, still under construction, contains features long gone or, like the checkerboard paving, never realised. The idea of a building in a constant state of flux is reflected by artists who saw it ravaged by war over two centuries later – **Roderick Bisson's** painting of nearby devastation, and a small engraving by an unknown artist showing the building damaged in the May blitz. More recently, **John Davies** photographed the effects of a fire in the building in 2008, while **Edmund Tan's** animation imagines a post-apocalyptic future.

Bluecoat began life as a school for orphans, and was closely connected to the thriving port as maritime trade brought wealth to Liverpool's merchants, many of whom funded the school. As the 18th century progressed, the transatlantic slave trade became a significant source of funds, with successful slavers like Captain Crow, depicted here, contributing. This contradiction between barbarity and philanthropy has been interrogated by several artists' interventions, including **Andrew Robarts** in 1988, when he shackled cast concrete feet to Bluecoat's railings. That year, Liverpool performance group **Visual Stress** connected this history to the still unfolding story of rapacious global capital, in their first 'Urban Vimbuza' ritual, *Death by Free Enterprise*, which 'cleansed' the building of its slave past through a dramatic multi-media performance, captured in this video, staged the week *Tate of the North* (Tate Liverpool) opened in a former warehouse at Albert Dock.

Master mariner and Blue Coat school co-founder **Bryan Blundell** was also an amateur artist, painting ships including his own *Mulberry* (1696), the first to leave Liverpool's Old Dock. Built by the same engineer, Thomas Steers, and mason, Edward Litherland, who then constructed Bluecoat, the dock kick-started the global trade from which Liverpool prospered. International trade was a starting point for **Philip Courtenay's** 1992 live art project *LODE*, in which he traversed the globe, returning with symbolic cargoes that were brought from Albert Dock and unpacked at Bluecoat by young people from arts project **Yellow House**. 25 years later the work is being revisited in the context of globalisation's unstoppable march and the instant communication of the internet, and will evolve through public interaction during the exhibition.

Britain's global reach and the legacies of European colonialism are explored by two artists whose films reclaim histories relating to the African continent. In *Still Life/Textiles - White Textiles*, one of a video series that uses West African textiles, **Grace Ndiritu** takes control - through wrapping and revealing her body – of our gaze, provoking different emotional responses. In *The Fairest Heritage* **Uriel Orlow** appropriates films of the 50th anniversary in 1963 of Kirstenbosch, South Africa's national botanical garden. Flowers were excluded from the country's international economic boycott until the late 1980s, so botanical nationalism and flower diplomacy flourished unchecked. The films' protagonists (scientists, visitors etc.) are white, the only Africans featured being labourers. In this video, actor **Lindiwe Matshikiza** puts herself in these loaded images, inhabiting and confronting the found footage.

Liverpool has one of the oldest diasporic communities in Europe and, by the turn of the 20th century, one of the most diverse. Born in the city - his father from Barbados, his mother Irish - John Archer, went on to became London's first black lord mayor, in Battersea, in 1913. A Pan-Africanist, his political radicalism is celebrated in this painting by **Paul Clarkson**, also Liverpool born, whose ongoing interrogation of the port's largely unacknowledged black history began with paintings shown in 1992 Bluecoat exhibition *Trophies of Empire*.

Clarkson's portrait normally hangs in Liverpool Town Hall. Here, in 1964, The Beatles, having conquered America, returned to the city as honoured guests. Local MP Bessie Braddock had influenced the choice of musicians to accompany them: local black vocal group from her Toxteth constituency, The Chants (one of whom would later find chart success in The Real Thing), seen here with the Fab Four. The photograph speaks volumes, taken at a time when the Town Hall, focus of local political power itself adorned with symbols of Britain's imperial conquest, was exclusively white, a situation that appears to have barely changed.

In 1907, the *Sandon Studios Society* established an artistic presence at Bluecoat after the school moved out, securing its future as the first UK arts centre in 1927. Around this time, Sandon artist **William C. Penn** painted these distinctive portraits of black men, probably in his studio here. Their identity unknown, they may have been Liverpudlians, or passing through the port.

In contrast to these powerful yet conventional portraits, **Roderick Bisson's** *Red Woman, Black Man* (1932), is uncompromisingly modern, a startlingly original composition by an artist who has been overlooked in the history of British Modernism. Recently rediscovered, the painting is depicted in **Donald Lynch's** humorous pastiche of William Frederick Yeames' popular painting *And When Did You See Your Father?* in the Walker Art Gallery. Bisson, the committed avant-gardist, is being interrogated by the Sandon committee, his painting brandished as evidence of a radicalism at odds with the Sandon's prevailing conservatism. Completing this group of paintings is **Syd 'Spike' Merrills'** *The Village Funeral*, also featured on the wall of the Sandon dining room in Lynch's composition. According to Bisson's colourful history *The Sandon Studios Society and the Arts*, Merrills was a Liverpool prankster, credited with anticipating the Theatre of the Absurd.

Other Bisson paintings reflect an early adoption of Surrealism and currents in European art he was exposed to in the interwar years. His openness to Modernism echoes that of **Edward Carter Preston**, one of several Sandon artists who showed alongside Picasso, Matisse and others in the First Post-Impressionist Exhibition at Bluecoat in 1911. A version of Roger Fry's ground-breaking introduction of the European avant-garde to an English audience, staged in London earlier (and in Liverpool shown, significantly, with British artists), the exhibition had an impact on the Sandon. None more so than Carter Preston, whose two drawings from 1911 must have been completed shortly after. His rarely seen watercolours demonstrate an exploration of abstraction and distinctive approach to landscape and still life that has been overshadowed by his reputation as Anglican Cathedral sculptor and war medallist.

Gallery 3

A selection of Carter Preston's war-related work comprises medals and a wooden 'plychrome', designed as a recuperative model-making kit for disabled soldiers returning from World War One. An apparently anti-fascist Christmas card included here was probably produced in the late-1930s during the descent into war. His lost sculpture *Arms and the Man*, a futuristic robot figure in metal inspired by Fritz Lang's dystopian film *Metropolis*, has been interpreted as a 3D print using the latest digital manufacturing technology by **Fab Lab Liverpool**, based on little more than two photographs and a written description.

In 1931, nearly 50,000 people each paid sixpence to view **Jacob Epstein's** *Genesis*, the country's most debated sculpture, generating £1,000 for the hard-up *Bluecoat Society of Arts*. Its showing was a sensation, the subject of fierce controversy. Sermons were preached in local churches about the sculpture, which was later exhibited as a sort of curious entertainment at Madame Tussauds in Blackpool. Epstein said of the work, "I felt the necessity for giving expression to the profoundly elemental in motherhood, the deep down instinctive female, without the trappings and charm of what is known as feminine; my feminine would be the eternal primeval feminine, the mother of the race". In contrast to *Genesis*' first dramatic presentation at Bluecoat - with black velvet backdrop, security rail and top light, and entrance by ticket only - it now faces busy College Lane. It is accompanied by contemporary material, including **Herbert Tyson Smith's** audio account that mentions a thwarted publicity stunt proposed by Sandon artist, Syd Merrills.

Jo Stockham revisits works shown at Bluecoat in 1990, alongside other pieces reworked for the exhibition - a response, informed by feminism and peace studies, to war and nuclear proliferation, which, given the present geopolitical context, takes on added resonance. Themes relating to gender and militarism echo those found in Epstein and Carter Preston, while her use of ephemeral materials such as fabrics and found objects, contrast with traditional, predominantly male forms of sculptural expression, such as stone carving.

The Cloister

Reflecting a revival of interest in the crossover between fine and applied art, **The Grantchester Pottery** have created a new wallpaper, commissioned for the long wall in the Cloister overlooking the garden. Picking up on Bluecoat's 1911 and 1913 Post-Impressionist exhibitions, they adopt motifs reminiscent of some of the art from those shows.

Other artists' work is presented on the wallpaper and relates to literature and printed text, starting with a bookplate by Sandon founder member **Fanny Calder**, who was instrumental in the group moving to Bluecoat and led the campaign to save it in 1927. An accomplished artist, this design pre-dates her Bluecoat involvement but, with elements relating to music, craft and design, it anticipates the arts centre's multi-art form nature. **Sumuyya Khader** has been commissioned to interpret a quote from Calder, resulting in a drawing printed on a Risograph digital duplicator, while **Jonzo's** screenprint, produced in our print studio for 2015 exhibition *RESOURCE*, also references the arts centre's founding principles - 'the diffusion of useful knowledge' in the *Bluecoat Society of Arts* constitution.

Artists have been central to Bluecoat for over a century. Current studio holders include **Juniper Press** who celebrate the continuing appeal and vitality of letterpress. The prints here include quotes from **Beatrice Warde**, attesting to the importance of printing over five centuries. Current Bluecoat writer and artist in residence, **Sean Borodale's** *Lyrigraphs* (from Greek, concerning the lyre and writing) are transcripts of acts of writing made on location, screen-printed in negative, while his *Memory-Blocks* are metal castings of writings scratched into wax, records of the un-vocalised, or whispered utterance. Previous poet in residence, **Nathan Jones**, presents visual poems created with **Scott Spencer**, whose titles – *Orphan*, *Museums* and *Stairway* – have echoes of the building's history and architecture.

The Cloister also houses *sgraffito* ceramics by **Julia Carter Preston**, who had a studio overlooking the garden for many years, one of several Sandon artists who developed distinctive decorative arts practices, a tradition stretching back to the applied arts training of the 'Art Sheds', the University's art department from which the Sandon broke away in 1905 to form an independent art school. Craft and design continue to be supported in the building by Bluecoat Display Centre, one of the UK's earliest designer-maker galleries, founded in 1959. The lettering of its original wooden sign was cut by **Herbert Tyson Smith**, who ran a sculptor's studio next to the Display Centre for over 40 years and is known for his prominent public realm works, notably the reliefs on the cenotaph at St George's Plateau.

Tyson Smith's bronze sculpture was presented to Viscountess Leverhulme, whose husband (as William Lever) purchased the Bluecoat to help Charles Reilly, Liverpool University Architecture Department's head - in tandem with the Sandon – transform it into a cultural centre. Echoing the sculpture's mermaid subject, **Ann Whitehurst's** prints, shown in her 1994 Bluecoat exhibition *On the Map: Placing Disability,* reclaim the mythological female figure as a symbol of resistance against systemic discrimination that the social model of disability articulates. The exhibition interrogated disabling environments, and Bluecoat's own access shortcomings, through an installation involving a life-sized board game and fax communication.

Tyson Smith is one of four Sandon 'types' caricatured by **Edgar Grosvenor** alongside an expressive, great-coated painter, understood to be **Augustus John**, who was associated with the arts centre's early years. Another cartoon, similar to Grosvenor's later graphic style (and probably by him), depicts Tyson Smith in bow tie at the top of a cascade of acrobatic Sandon members. The swimming costumes being worn are perhaps a reference to the improvised pond that once occupied the secret garden outside the Sandon Music Room

Gallery Four upstairs

Plates by **Julia Carter Preston** are paired with works by two contemporary artists, **Dan Coopey** and **Joanne Masding**, that reference history and craft. For Coopey's rattan sculptures he employs one of the oldest forms of craft, basket weaving. Whilst appearing as useful vessels, and containing small objects such as gum and precious metals, these have been entirely sealed. Accessing the curious items inside would require breaking the sculptures, destroying their status as artworks but allowing them to function as baskets.

Masding invites the viewer to consider the allure of artefacts and the way histories are written through their collection. In *New Rehang (Series 1)* the text of a catalogue of British Museum artefacts and antiquities has been erased. Removed from the book's binding, each double spread now features pages entirely out of order, creating surprising collisions between objects of different eras and geographic origin. *New Rehang (Series 3)* uses similar imagery, fixed with a holographic finish onto hand moulded plaster.

Just as Coopey works between craft and contemporary art, decades earlier Carter Preston straddled fine and applied arts. Settling on a distinctive style, her work also moved between the commercially successful and artistically experimental. Her metallic glazes share the same allure as Masding's contemporary holographic sculptures.

Bryan Biggs, Bluecoat Artistic Director and *In the Peaceful Dome* curator.

In the Peaceful Dome continues until 25 March 2018, open daily 10am -6pm (and from 11am on Sundays).

The exhibition is accompanied by a programme of talks, tours and other events. to find out more visit **thebluecoat.org.uk,** or speak to a member of staff at our Tickets & Information desk.
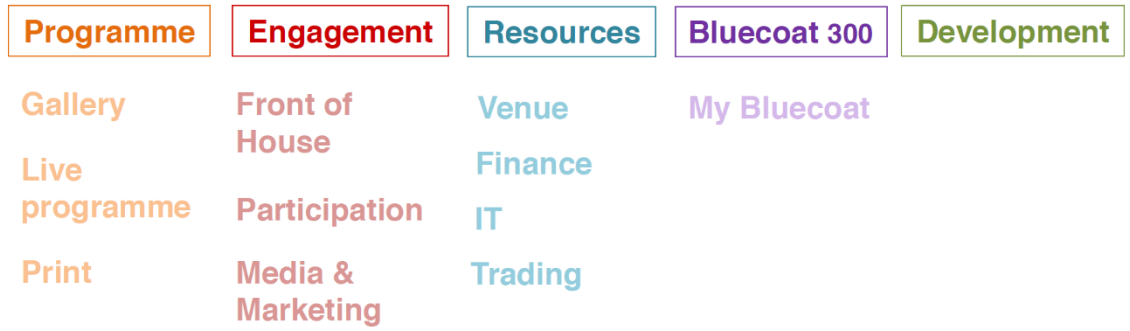
Bluecoat
CEO █████████

| Programme | Engagement | Resources | Bluecoat 300 | Development |

Programme	Engagement	Resources
Gallery	Front of House	Venue
Live programme	Participation	Finance
Print	Media & Marketing	IT
		Trading

Bluecoat 300: My Bluecoat

Programme Unit staff

Head of Programme
████████████

Curator
████████

Technical Supervisor
████████

Partnerships Coordinator
████████

Print Studio Manager
████████

Gallery Technician
████████

Programme Coordinator
████████

Engagement Unit staff

Head of Engagement

Front of House Manager

Participation Manager 3 days +

Media & Marketing Manager

Children & Families Facilitator

Front of House Supervisor

Blue Room Facilitator 3 days +

Press Officer 2 days

Front of House Supervisor

Inhabit Facilitator 2 days
Participation Coordinator 3 days

Engagement Intern
(shared between Marketing and Participation)

Front of House Supervisor

Participation Coordinator 3 days +

Engagement Assistants

Participation Assistant 2 days +

Participation Apprentice
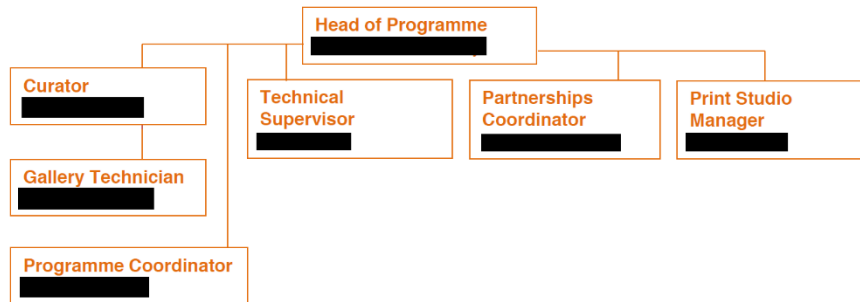
Resources Unit – interim arrangement

Head of Finance (temp)

Commercial Manager

Venue Manager

Hospitality Manager (temp)

Finance Officer

IT Officer

Maintenance Supervisor

Acting Head Chef

Event Sales Executive

Acting Sous Chef

General Assistant

Chef

Chef

Kitchen Porter

Bluecoat 300 staff

Artistic Director
███████████

My Bluecoat Project Manager
███████████████

My Bluecoat Engagement Coordinator
███████████████

Development Team staff

Head of Development
███████████

UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL
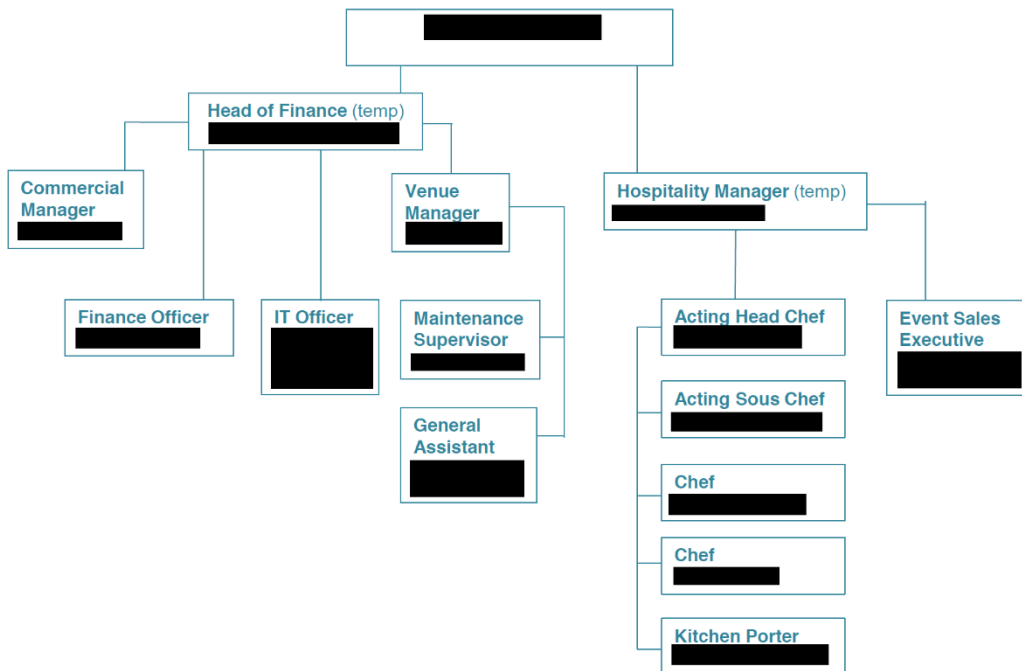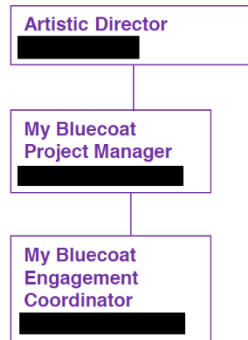
Participant Information Sheet

1. **Title of Study**

   The Role of the Contemporary Urban Arts Centre

2. **Version Number and Date**

   Version 1 – 3/2/2017

3. **Invitation Paragraph**

   You are invited to take part in a research project that is looking at the role that Bluecoat plays in the city. The project is a collaboration between the University of Liverpool and Bluecoat. Please take the time to read the following information, which will explain what is being asked of you, and why. If you have any questions, or if anything is unclear, please get in touch using the contact details given below.

4. **What is the purpose of the study?**

   This study is a part of a three-year PhD project that is looking at the role of arts centres in cities. Arts centres are considered to be places where several art forms take place, and often include social spaces such as a café. The research hopes to gather information on why people attend Bluecoat, how they think of the organisation and therefore what role Bluecoat plays.

5. **Why have I been chosen to take part?**

   You have been invited to take part in this research as you make use of Bluecoat and its facilities or are in some other way (such as professionally) in contact with Bluecoat. Participants have been invited from across Bluecoat, for example people that make use of the café, attend a class or visit the exhibitions. This is to ensure that a rounded picture of users of Bluecoat emerges.

6. **Do I have to take part?**

   Your participation is entirely your decision based on the information given here. You will be asked to sign a consent form to state you understand, and agree to, the study. You may withdraw at any time without reason. All information will be presented anonymously.

7. **What will happen if I take part?**

   - You will be asked to sign a consent form.
   - You will be part of an ethnographic study of Bluecoat which may involve your presence in the space being observed and described by the researcher, Laura Harris, a PhD student at the University of Liverpool (School of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology; contact details below).
   - You may be involved in short interviews or conversations with the researcher about your use of the site.
   - There may be audio or visual recordings made of the spaces in which you are present, or you may be asked to use visual recording equipment (supplied by researcher) to document your use of Bluecoat. You may request to not have your image reproduced, and measures will be taken to obscure identifiable features.
   - You will have no ongoing responsibilities to the project, but your comments may be included in research. Where this is the case all comments will be anonymous. No identifying data will be collected.
   - You will be able to access the outcomes of the study by reading the final thesis. To do so, please provide the researcher with your contact details. Alternatively, elements of the research will be made publicly accessible on the Bluecoat site.
   - Please visit the following website for information, provided by the funding body, on what to expect as a research participant (printed copies can be made available):

- Please visit the following website for information on the principles of the funding body:

8. Expenses and / or payments

No reimbursement is available to participants.

9. Are there any risks in taking part?

There are no risks to you in taking part in this study.

10. Are there any benefits in taking part?

This project offers no particular benefits to its participants.

11. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting researcher Laura Harris (l.harris2@liv.ac.uk) or the supervisor of the project, Dr Paul Jones (p.jones01@liv.ac.uk) and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Governance Officer at ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

12. Will my participation be kept confidential?

All information will be collected, kept and destroyed in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Any information identifying participants' data and responses will be held on a password protected computer accessed only by the researcher. Comments will be anonymised before use, but may be displayed in a public area (such as at Bluecoat), for which specific consent is requested.

13. What will happen to the results of the study?

Your responses will be included in the thesis which is drawn up at the end of the three-year PhD, and may be used by the researcher in other publications. The thesis may include a transcript of parts of the conversations. The results of the research may be shown in a public space (Bluecoat), which may entail your comments, or audio/visual recordings in which you are present, being shown publicly. Where this is likely to be the case, you will be specifically informed.

14. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

You may withdraw at any time, without explanation. Results up to the period of withdrawal may be used, if you are happy for this to be done. Otherwise you may request that they are destroyed and no further use is made of them. However, results may only be withdrawn prior to anonymization as, after comments have been made anonymous, the researcher will not be able to identify your specific contribution.

15. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

Please contact Laura Harris (l.harris2@liv.ac.uk) or Dr Paul Jones (p.jones01@liv.ac.uk).

Committee on Research Ethics

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: The Role of the Contemporary Urban Arts Centre

- **Researcher(s):**   Laura Harris (Student Researcher)
  Dr Paul Jones (Supervisor)

Please initial box

- I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated February 2017 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

- I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.

- I agree to take part in the above study.

- The information you have submitted will be published as a report; please indicate whether you would like to receive a copy, and if so, how this is best achieved (please use contact details below).

- I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications.

- I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.

- I understand and agree that my participation may be audio recorded/video recorded and I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for the following purposes: analysis and potential public display (Bluecoat).

- I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

- I understand and agree that once I submit my data it will become anonymised and I will therefore no longer be able to withdraw my data.

1

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| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Participant Name | Date | Signature |

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name of Person taking consent | Date | Signature |

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Researcher | Date | Signature |

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2

Five[51]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrsHDf90GDA&list=PLpKWBS4KXnc51t6QYrHkjetxOzDjRN0O7&index=2

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[51] This film can also be located through the Inventory (p. 229), where an online link is supplied.
Digital copies of this thesis have the film embedded (Flash Player needed). Hard copies of this thesis
have an accompanying DVD (Track Two).