System Gallery: What's the Point?

A Practice-Based Study of Value Generation in Artist-Run Initiatives

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Abstract

The term "artist-run" is often used to describe self-organized activities by artists, which can take many forms—including galleries, studios, and workshops. This research focuses on my experiences running *System*, a not-for-profit, predominantly volunteer-led artist-run gallery in Newcastle upon Tyne. In the study, *System* serves as a research site for collecting, testing, and disseminating data and findings through the day-to-day operations and organization of exhibitions.

The research investigates how autoethnography can be integrated into artist-curatorial practices as a self-reflexive methodology to contribute to shared understandings of value generation within Artist-Run Initiatives (ARIs). This approach acts as a tool for understanding and articulating value generation within *System*, fostering shared insights into how value is continuously generated, contested, and reshaped through interactions and relationships within these contexts.

Guibernau's conceptualization of 'belonging' and Massey's 'sense of place' are used as lenses to explore the multifaceted and contested nature of value within ARIs. Through these perspectives, value is understood both as an expression of the emotional and social bonds that constitute belonging and as a dynamic, relational construct that is continuously reshaped through interactions within specific places and contexts.

This research was presented as an exhibition at the Hatton Gallery, which spatially articulated the research findings. Drawing on the lineages of reflexive artistic-curatorial practices, such as those of Céline Condorelli and Gavin Wade, the exhibition weaves together a body of work that includes autoethnographic

artworks I produced during the PhD (including video game design, exhibition texts, sculpture, and karaoke) alongside objects like dustpans, beer boxes, and artworks. The result is a constellation of elements that thoughtfully and provocatively express forms of value generation within *System*. To this end, it provides a framework for developing and communicating an understanding of value generation that accounts for the interaction between its social, emotional, and spatial elements.

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Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction 1

1.1 Opening Statement 1

1.2 Background of the Study 5

1.3 Research Question and Aims 8

1.4 Significance of the Study 8

1.5 Limitations of the Study 10

1.6 Thesis Structure 12

Chapter 2. Literature Review 15

2.1 Overview 16

2.2 Part a. 17

2.2.1 Situating my Practice 17

2.2.2 What does it Mean to be Artist-Run? 24

2.2.3 ARI and Shared Values 26

2.2.4 ARIs and Autonomy 30

2.2 Part b. 33

2.2.1 What is the Value of Art? 33

2.2.2 Historical Understandings of Art's Value 38

2.2.3 Art as a Commodity 42

2.2.4 The Neoliberalisation of UK Arts and Cultural Policy 44

2.2.5 Instrumentalization of Artists' and ARIs 48

2.3 Part c. 52

2.3.1 How can Value be Understood in the Context of this Research? 52

2.3.2 Rationale for Study 56

Chapter 3. Methodological Approach 60

3.1 Introduction 61

3.2 Overview 62
3.3 Rationale for research approach 66
3.4 System as Research Site 69
3.5 Artistic-Curatorial Practice 70
3.6 Positioning the Researcher 74
3.7 Embedding the Autoethnography 76
3.8 Ethical Considerations 79
3.9 Data Analysis 82
3.10 Summary 83
Chapter 4. Space is the Place 85
4.1 Introduction 87
4.2 Material Space – (Abstract 'Other') 89
4.3 Embodied Space – (Singular 'I') 97
4.4 Relational Space – (Collective 'We') 105
4.5 Conclusion 120
Chapter 5. Is it Just a Hobby? 123
5.1 Introduction 124
5.2 Discussion 125
5.3 Conclusion 146
Chapter 6. The Research Exposition 148
6.1 Introduction 149
6.2 Politics of Friendship 150
6.3 "Dan Dan the System Man" 152
6.3.1 'System Wall' 157
6.3.2 'Detritus' 159
6.3.3 'Karaoke' 162

6.3.4 'Acknowledgements' 165
6.3.5 'Exhibition Texts' 167
6.3.6 'System Gallery RPG Demo' 170
6.3.7 'Artwork' 173
6.4 Conclusion 176
Chapter 7. Conclusion 178
7.1 Summary 178
7.2 Concluding Thoughts on Value Generation within System 181
7.3 Contributions to Knowledge and Art-practice 182
7.4 Avenues for Future Research 186
References 189
Appendices 208
Appendix A. Text written for Manner of Flying exhibition held at System Gallery in September 2019 209
Appendix B. Sample Research Information Sheet given to Interviewees 214
Appendix C. Draft Sample Interview Draft Schedule 218
Appendix D. List of System Exhibitions during the PhD 220
Appendix E. Exhibition Text and Images of 'Sentiment' by Meaghan Stewart 222
Appendix F. Exhibition Text and Images of 'Dishwasher Safe' featuring artwork by Frankie Casmir, Tommy Keenan, Grace Denton, jawbone jawbone, Joe Shaw, and Pippa Eason 227
Appendix G. Exhibition Text and Images of 'Manner of Flying' featuring artwork by Jason Carden, Evelyn Cromwell, Susannah Curran, Rachael Eden, Oliver Hoffmeister, jawbone jawbone, Mani Kambo, Tommy Keenan, Jenny Mc Namara, Meaghan Stewart, and Jay Weavers 234
Appendix H. Exhibition Text and Images of 'Insert Exhibition Title' featuring artwork by George Stewart, Jack Connor Kemp, Evelyn Cromwell, Jenny

McNamara, Matthew Young, Tommy Keenan, Dolores Hobby, Stu Mel Wilson, Sue Loughlin, and Genevieve Slater 241

Appendix I. 'Some Sinking Hopes, Floating Concerns, and Muddied Perceptions of an Artist-Run Curator' publication..... 246

Appendix J. Exhibition Text and Images of 'Manner of Falling' featuring artwork by Ella Louise Jones, Nellie Saunby, Gill Shreeve and Meaghan Stewart 258

Appendix K. Exhibition Text and Images of 'This is the Exhibition' by Dan Goodman 265

Appendix L. Questionnaire for 'Insert Exhibition Title'..... 272

Appendix M. Exhibition Map for 'Insert Exhibition Title'..... 273

Appendix N. Exhibition 'Blurb' and Images of 'Now That's What I Call Art' curated by Dan Goodman and Spaghetti Factory (Eve Cromwell and Jenny McNamara)..... 274

Appendix O. 'Thoughts on Art, Conversation and Care...and then some Stuff about Boats' produced as Artist-in-Residence for 'Field 2021'..... 279

Appendix P. Exhibition Text and Images of 'Four Pack' curated by Dan Goodman, Susie Curran, Eve Cromwell, Jenny McNamara, and Jessica Bennet and featuring artwork by Jenny Alderson, Beth Allsopp, Jason Carden, and Katie Watson 284

Appendix Q. Exhibition Text and Images of 'Folly' curated by Dan Goodman and featuring artwork by Jay Weaver, Meaghan Stewart, Oliver Hoffmeister, and Tommy Keenan 289

Appendix R. Images of Me Reclaiming Plaster and Ceiling Tiles from System's venue at Bamburgh House before it's Demolition 299

Appendix S. Exhibition Text and Images of 'Transience featuring artwork by Newcastle University Fine Art Students and GÂST 302

Appendix T. Notes from Performance at The Newbridge Project for Abel Shah's 'In Collaboration'..... 306

List of Figures

Figure 1. Taxonomy of types of value attributed to art. 34
Figure 2. Summary of data from 'Measuring the experience: the scope and value of artist-led organisations' by Susan Jones..... 50
Figure 3. Presentation slide from 'What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About the Artist-led'. 142
Figure 4. Photos of PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery. Photo Credit: Colin Davison. 155
Figure 5. Photo of 'System Wall' as part of PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery. Photo Credit: Colin Davison. 157
Figure 6. Photos of 'Detritus' as part of PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery. Photo Credit: First photo by Colin Davison. 159
Figure 7. Photo 'Karaoke' projected onto 'System Wall' as part of PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery. Photo Credit: Colin Davison. 162
Figure 8. MP4 files from "Dan Dan the System Man" of Karaoke music videos produced and performed with Tommy Keenan..... 164
Figure 9. Photos of 'Acknowledgements' as part of PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery. 165
Figure 10. Photos of 'Exhibition Texts' as part of PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery. 167
Figure 11. Photos of 'System Gallery RPG Demo' as part of PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery. Photo Credit: Colin Davison. 170
Figure 12. 'System RPG Demo' by Dan Goodman featuring video 'Dream Sequence' by Meaghan Stewart 172
Figure 13. Photos of 'Artwork' as part of PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery. Photo Credit: Colin Davison. First image: Artwork by Katherine Tyrrell Lewis. Second Image: Artwork by Mark

Duffy. Third Image: Artwork by Jason Carden (Left) and Oliver Hoffmeister (Right). Fourth Image: Artwork by Katie Watson (Left) and Jenny McNamara (Right) 173

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Opening Statement

This thesis builds upon literature debating the value of arts and culture and the often-cited but under-theorised area of artist-run initiatives (ARI). This autoethnographic study is informed by my experiences of running *System,* an artist-run gallery. In this research, *System* functions as the research site for the collection and dissemination of data through its day-to-day running and organisation of exhibitions.

Like many artist-run initiatives, *System* has operated out of meanwhile spaces – these are co-opted underused urban spaces secured through temporary contracts and tacit agreements with landlords. By employing and combining forms of autoethnography and artistic-curatorial practice this research draws on lived-experience and explores overlaps between the personal, social, and spatial to develop understanding of value generation within ARIs.

At Newcastle University all PhDs are required to submit a proposed project summary within the first 3 months of commencing study. This is to evidence that the project is achievable within the available timescale and that there are sufficient resources to support it. In this I wrote:

> Like many ARIs, System co-opts underused urban space, commonly referred to as 'meanwhile' space (Bain and McLean, 2012; Tonkiss, 2013), to offer early-career artists opportunities to exhibit work. It is widely acknowledged that these shared spaces, through their support of artistic

activity, offer social value to artists (Bain and McLean, 2012, p. 16; Eshun, 2015) in the form of:

> "…fluid, culturally specific forms of value embedded in experience and practice…created through unofficial and informal modes of engagement" (Jones, 2017, p. 21)""

Despite this original proposal lacking some criticality and specificity, I do not think that my research as it exists today is a dramatic departure from the spirit of what I was trying to express here. Bain and McLean (2012) and Eshun (2015) were not referring to 'social value', and Jones (2017) was referring to social value in heritage conservation and management. On reflection, I feel that I was attracted to this definition through a confirmation bias that all too neatly mapped onto my preconceived notions of what my study was going to find. It is important to note, the focus of my research now is **not** on 'social value' specifically, this is detailed more in the literature review. My motivation for undertaking the PhD was to reach an understanding of this value(s) that I could not articulate, but felt was not being captured by funders, local authorities, and arts institutions.

I first became involved with *System* when, after working for several years as a visual artist and completing my MA in Art Museum and Gallery Studies at Newcastle University, I was working at a commercial art gallery in a variety of roles over several years' - including arts and event technician, FOH, workshop manager, buildings facilitator, and assistant curator. Over time, I increasingly felt 'undervalued' by my employers and managers and grew frustrated with the workplace practices and conduct which I viewed as immoral and dishonest. This motivated me to seek other opportunities and I formed a curatorial collective with two friends. As part of this we approached the then curators of *System* asking if they would offer us the gallery space to host an open call exhibition. They did. We then hosted other exhibitions at *System.* Over this time, it became

clear the curators then were soon planning to move from Newcastle upon Tyne and they wanted somebody to take over running and curating of the gallery. At that time, they were running *System* voluntarily as an informal test bed for emerging artists that broadly bridged university or self-training with a wider Newcastle art community. On reflection, I feel the then-curators could see my shared belief in the importance of *System's* role in the local arts ecology. This understanding and appreciation were informed by my own experiences of graduating from an undergraduate art degree programme and immediately feeling completely clueless as to my next steps in pursuing a career as an artist. The then-curators then enquired if I would like to take the reins of *System.* I said 'yes'. Then it was as simple as them giving me the login details for *System's* email and social media, a USB stick containing unlabelled photos from previous *System* exhibitions (as well as some photos from a night-out) and the keys to the gallery. I remember it being communicated tangentially through several informal conversations that I will have autonomy over running *System,* with the implicit expectation that I would do so in accordance with a nebulous set of values in line with what had already been established at *System* by previous curators. We never explicitly spoken about these values, and they were not articulated anywhere in *System's* literature or marketing. As an aside, the conversational informality I describe here is a feature of many ARIs and presages the way I later articulate how *System* operates.

At the time of taking over *System,* I felt alienated by, what I viewed as the 'sorting mechanism', of arts funding policy, goals, and practices. I found value in the informality and reactivity of how I ran *System*, where there was no exhibition program, but an iterative sequence of exhibitions and events based on the needs of people who expressed interest in exhibiting or using the space. Any need or value was determined by the needs and values of the individuals who got in-touch, and my capacity and ability to work to meet these through *System*. The desired outcomes of the exhibitions were set by the artists, rather than being something I could commit to paper in the timescale demanded for by funders. To

my mind, the bureaucracy and administration surrounding funding became a border, which if I were to cross would mean having to operate completely differently at the expense of what I believe made *System* valuable. Instead, in my view, this bureaucracy and its benign protocols designed to prevent the risk of wasting of public spending conversely prevents more valuable work than it enables. My view was (and again is) that the institutional art system restricts necessary action and constrains the imaginary. In this case the value-orientated adhocracy of *System* would be superseded by the goal-orientated bureaucracy of the dominant system. This epitomises the conflict I felt within *System*, where through my desire to perform this activity that I saw as valuable, I was being presented with the choice to either be...

> …hamstrung by often not having the economic means to pay myself and others.
>
> …or being obliged by funding bodies to operate in ways which oppose my core values and beliefs.

A large portion of this thesis, both directly and indirectly, is dedicated to why I chose the former of these two options. The sense of value(s) informing this decision could be through the judgement or evaluation of *System's* worth, and with a goodness linked to ideas of utility, fairness, and justice. Again, I did not have the words or understanding to be able to express or articulate this clearly. Rather than deny or exclude any ambivalence, I feel it important to include this ambivalence as it played a significant role in the formation of my early thinking and impetus for much of my early autoethnography and artistic-curatorial practice. Although it is perhaps impossible to assertively trace the influence of this thinking and point to it, I feel it would be dishonest to sanitise this research. This is especially because this research has been an iterative process rather than a planned set of stages such as 1) refine research proposal, 2) conduct literature review, 3) generate methodology, 4) collect data, 5) analyse data, and 6) write

thesis. Rather, these steps for me often happened concurrently and out of sequence, and all the time whilst I was running *System.* What began perhaps as a search for a universal law or set of laws defining the value of ARIs like *System,* became an interpretive search for meaning. In this, the research draws on Guibernau's conceptualization of 'belonging' (2013) and Massey's 'sense of place' (2005) are used as lenses to explore the multifaceted and contested nature of value within ARIs.

1.2 Background of the Study

The term artist-run initiative is not universally defined, but instead there are several loosely defined typologies which fall under the ARI banner, including alternative spaces (Ault;Collective and Center, 2002; Rosati and Staniszewski, 2012), collective/co-operatives (Jeffri, 1980; Thompson, 2005; Byrne;Carroll and Ward, 2006), DIY (Grams, 2007; Westbury, 2007; Daniels, 2015), and grassroots (Bain and McLean, 2012; Bain and Landau, 2018). They can take many forms including art galleries, studios, social networks, and online platforms.

The slippery definition of ARIs is partially attributable to a lack of critical literature and legitimisation which draws a shared understanding accounting for the nuances of its cultural and historical entanglements. Equally, the temporality of many ARIs contribute to the problems of their recognition and definition as being distinct from other artistic practices and organisations. For instance, ARIs can be less permanent than municipal organisations, often only existing for the duration of an event or for the period of a lease on a property. Much of this activity goes by unrecorded due to its fleeting nature and the lack of resources or motivation (perhaps especially for ARIs with a low- or non-existent-income base) to do the necessary work themselves. Other ARIs last much longer, like *Printed Matter, Inc.* (founded in 1976 in New York) and *Transmission Gallery* (founded in 1983 in

Glasgow) which are both still operational today. Their longevity in no small part contributing to their capacity to build greater notoriety and comparative prominence in ARI and related discourses to many shorter-lived projects. Consequently, we are left with an uneven, slippery, and incomplete historicization of ARIs. It too, is well beyond the scope of this PhD to comprehensively address this gap.

ARIs are operative all over the world. For instance, *Supermarket – Stockholm Independent Art Fair*, an annually-held international artist-run has featured exhibitions from ARIs from more than 60 countries since 2007 (Supermarket, n.d.-a). Demonstrating the global presence of ARIs, *Supermarket 2019* featured exhibitions and presentations from ARIs based in Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Georgia, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Lithuania, Mexico, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom, and USA (Supermarket, n.d.-b). Referring to the articles listed in some of the most prominent readers on ARIs (Bronson;Detterer and Nannucci, 2012; Khonsary and Podesva, 2012; Rosati and Staniszewski, 2012; Hebert;Ault and Karlsen, 2013) you could add to this of countries with an ARI presence - Australia, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Spain, and Uruguay. Not only is there ARI presence all over-the-world, but many of these countries boast their own unique, rich, and diverse ARI history. For instance, Canada has its own lively ARI scene as demonstrated by 177 searchable ARIs across Canada through *The Directory of Artist-Run Centres and Collectives* published by Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference (ARCA, n.d.). Additionally, in the USA, according to Wallis 'by 1998, more than seven hundred identifiable alternative spaces existed throughout the United States' (2002, p. 165). Within these countries, ARIs often cluster around specific cities or regions. For instance, at the time of writing the Artist-run Alliance database identified 165 ARIs currently operational in Berlin, Germany (Artist-run Alliance, n.d.). This record presumably just scratches the surface, for instance it does not consider records not written or reproduced in English.

For many UK graduates, ARIs are the first step into the wider art world (A-N, 2008) 'generating a critical mass of energy, enquiry, experimentation and expertise' (Creative Scotland, 2016, p. 13), often through informal unpaid work which is seen as career enhancing (Ball, 2003; Ball et al., 2010). They are arguably vital in the development of emerging art practices and countering the alienation felt at this vulnerable career stage (Bronson et al., 2012; Rosati, 2012; Rosati and Staniszewski, 2012; Coffield, 2014; Murphy and Cullen, 2016). By often co-opting underused urban spaces, known as 'meanwhile spaces' (Bain and McLean, 2012; Tonkiss, 2013) ARIs are often precarious due to informal arrangements with landowners and local councils being pressured to see financial returns on the use of their public spaces (Pugalis, 2011).

There is much evidence to suggest that the commercial and economic values attributed to art (and by extension ARIs) from funders, are at direct odds with the intrinsic values underpinning and sustaining many artist-led practices (Jones, 2021b). In Jones' longitudinal study of the scope and value of artist-led organisations, the responses of individuals involved in those initiatives revealed that they considered their activity 'not to be an enterprise focused on economic gain, but a lifestyle which offers them creative independence and self-determination' (1996, p. 2).

It is broadly recognised that the shared spaces of ARIs and similar small-scale arts organisations can contribute to help form personal and collective identities, act as emotional support-structures, and produce public value and cultural value. Though what is not understood is an understanding of value generation with ARIs as part of a life lived. This is important as ARIs are often driven by political ideas and values which potentially distinguishes them from the economic priorities of funders and policy makers. As many ARIs 'borrow' the language of funders to be able to successfully bid for financial support, it presents a

potentially skewed image of their motivations and the nature of the value they generate for themselves and other artists (or at least as the artists understand the value). To this end, this project seeks to elucidate understandings of the generation of forms of value within ARIs combining elements of artistic research and auto-ethnography.

1.3 Research Question and Aims

This PhD has three aims to address its research question:

> How can autoethnography be incorporated into an artist-curatorial practice as a self-reflexive methodology and to inform shared understandings of value generation that can occur within artist-run initiatives?

Aim 1. Produce a thematic analysis of literature pertaining to value that is potentially applicable to forms of value generation within *System*.

Aim 2. Develop a reflexive curatorial practice incorporating autoethnography that articulates and expresses forms of value generation within *System*.

Aim 3. Evaluate key findings concerning forms of value generation developed from the reflexive curatorial practice.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The topic of artist livelihoods in the UK is a currently hotly contested debate (Jones, 2019; Jones, 2020; Jones, 2021a; Olufemi;Jacques and Tan, 2023).

These studies highlight the disparity of pay, conditions, and precarity of many of the arts and cultural workers in what Jones refers to as the ' extreme neo-liberal arts economy' (2021a). In this, ARIs like *System* can be grouped together with these other workers at the bottom of this economy, as part of what Shollette refers to as the 'dark matter' (2011) of the artworld - the broader creative culture that sustains a minority of elite individuals.

It is my view, that the weakness of much advocacy for the equitable treatment of artists and other cultural workers is its reliance on a generalised conception of arts' value to society. This PhD critically reflects on how I have come to understand forms of value generation within *System* with the hope to produce findings and insights to offer to others for them to debate and adapt based on their understandings. This PhD critically reflects on how I have come to understand forms of value generation within *System* with the hope to produce findings and insights to offer to others for them to debate and adapt based on their understandings.

In relation to the above, it shows how the narratives formed, re-told, and re-written within ARIs can inform the actions and beliefs of critical actors. As auto-ethnography, the dominant critical actor in this research is me. This runs the risk of research which is navel gazing. However, the intention and justification of such an approach is that, as stated by Wall in their discussion of using personal experience methods in social research, individuals cannot be separated from their social context and therefore reflexive personal experience can act as a key stone for further sociological understanding (Wall, 2008, p. 47).

The theorized anecdotes included in this research are analysed through an interdisciplinary lens, which draws on concepts from areas including fine art, cultural sociology, and human geography, to form a potent yet emergent analyses. In this, it does not rest on a specific methodology or discipline.

Through this I have been able to produce a methodological approach that could account for the complex personal and social world of *System.* This methodology could be applied or developed in other studies artistic-curatorial practice to concurrently produce and disseminate research which incorporates lived experience and self-narrative. The use of artistic and curatorial elements makes the research accessible to a wider and more diverse audience than academic research usually allows. This makes personal and social change possible for more people through encouraging them to consider my interpretation of forms of value generation within *System* and to debate and adapt it based on their pre-existing understandings of specific ARIs or the ARI field more generally. I took this approach in response to the difficulty of finding appropriate ways to articulate and express the value of *System* activity - specially forms of value generation which were tacit or contingent - by embedding its evaluation and expression into exhibition making. The iterative nature of this methodology reveals the limits of agency, advancing the PhD's argument that the informality, reactivity, ambiguity, and temporality of *System* were prime drivers in empowering me to be play an active role in constructing and recognising a sense of identity and belonging.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

As this PHD is practice-based, the final submission is a Research Exposition in the form of an exhibition and a written commentary (thesis). The main challenge of this thesis was to make communicable the experiential content of the significance of encountering and production of the research artistic material. As pointed out by Biggs (2004), the problem inherent in producing a critical commentary of artistic research is the exclusivity of experiential content to the individual and the difficulty in communicating it to second and third persons. Furthermore, the documentation of an artistic encounter runs the risk of '…diminishing (or even eradicating) the distinctive, living qualities of embodiment and encounter in time

and space [that is] singular, transient, site-specific and non-repeatable' (Hughes, 2014, p. 61). The incorporation of autoethnographic writing into this thesis is an attempt to avert or lessen that effect. In their consideration of the functions of the written text in practice-based PhD submissions, MacLeod identifies three types of higher degree practice research: 'positioning of practice', 'theorizing a practice', and 'revealing a practice' (2000). This research traverses the three, and in line with McCleod (ibid), theory that sits outside of the written is made or realised through the artwork. As McCleod states, practice-based research is a propositional conceptual framing dependent on '…the relationship between the written text and the artwork [that]… is demonstrative of the intellectuality of making [or doing], which is not the same as the intellectuality of writing' (ibid).

As a result of the ambiguous nature of *System*, I have observed how various stakeholders, such as audience and members, can take from *System* what they want and need. These observations took place prior and during the PhD - within *System* as well as other ARIs. This PhD is limited that it focuses on me and my interpretation of events. In this vein, the study is limited by its focus on forms of hybridised value generation that I witnessed. Similarly, given a lot of this analysis rests on my idiosyncratic perspective, this research will not apply to all ARIs. This is especially true considering the variety of forms they can take, operations they might perform, and contexts in which they might operate.

The exploration of value in this study is not systemic or absolute, but rather it draws together fragmentary narratives into a thematic analysis. As stated by Rhodes and Weller, narratives are not 'scientific truth' but rather what matters is how 'the story and its beliefs…continue to inform the actions of the [critical actors]' (Bevir;Rhodes and Weller, 2003, pp. 12-13). It is beyond the scope of this PhD to resolve all of the inconsistencies and contradictions in discussions of forms of value generated within ARIs in all their magnitude. This thesis does not aim to produce another form of generalised value which makes the impossible

claim of being generalisable to a diverse set of practices, organisational structures, priorities, and social, political, and cultural contexts. Rather, it seeks to reach an understanding of value generation within *System* that is 'possible in practice' (Peräkylä, 2004). That is to say, to investigate value generation within *System* with the hope to produce findings and insights to offer to others for them to debate and adapt based on their understandings. On this point, the research seeks to insert itself and contribute to the much larger and necessary conversation around the role and contribution of ARIs, and by extension the value of arts and culture more widely to society.

1.6 Thesis Structure

This thesis is arranged into seven chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodological Approach, Making Space, Is It Just a Hobby?, The Research Exposition and Conclusion.

The literature review critically collates and examines the breadth of literature concerning value generation within ARIs. It surveys the inconsistencies and multifariousness of the discussions surrounding this. From here it situates this research by explaining how the 'term' value is to be understood within the context of this research.

The Methodological Approach chapter describes the methodology and its theoretical underpinning to justify the centralising of myself as the research subject. It describes how aspects of artistic-curatorial practice and autoethnography were combined into a reflexive approach that connects the personal to broader social, political, and cultural concerns and contexts. It

justifies this approach through the emergent relational ontological understanding it fosters and captures.

The fourth chapter 'Making Space' explores my re-conceptualisation of *System* both socially and spatially over the course of the PhD in response to *System* losing its venue. Informed by Massey's conceptualisation of place (2005) it discusses *System* as a space, which, rather than being merely the fixed configuration of coordinates or material features, is '…open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming' (ibid, p. 59). This (re)formulation of *System* as understood through the limitless potentiality of the '…dynamic simultaneous multiplicity…' (ibid, p. 61) of Massey's conceptualisation of place, augmented forms of relational value through a positive sense of my interconnectivity within others.

The fifth chapter 'Is it Just a Hobby?' then explores how the ambiguity and informality of *System's* social space afforded a malleability that, through self-narrativization, I could reorient and redefine myself and my activities in relation to the world. Using Guibernau's concept of 'belonging' (2013) as a critical lens, the chapter examines how self-narrativization imbued System and my role within it with meaning, producing forms of emotional and social value.

The sixth chapter describes how the Research Exposition combined autoethnographic and artistic-curatorial approaches to consolidate the findings from the previous two chapters. It does this through a discussion of the politics of friendship, drawing largely on the research and artistic-curatorial practice of Céline Condorelli, and the value generation within System as expressions of belonging and sense of place.

The concluding chapter ties the previous chapters together and reviews their findings in connection to the research question and aims. It then outlines the research's contributions to artistic-curatorial and scholarly practice, and points to future avenues of research that could build on and expand these contributions.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

"Artists talk a lot about freedom. So, recalling the expression "free as a bird," Morton Feldman went to a park one day and spent some time watching our feathered friends. When he came back, he said, "You know? They're not free: they're fighting over bits of food."
(Cage, 2011, p. 298)

2.1 Overview

This literature review situates this research within a broad range of literature and draws connections between ideas across various topics and disciplines. It demonstrates how my work builds on and contributes to existing knowledge by exploring my practice in relation to the historical role of ARIs in the UK art ecology, with a particular focus on their contested relationship with institutions, policymakers, and funders, as well as traditions of advocating for the value of self-determined arts practice. It also situates my practice within a history of reflective artistic-curatorial practice, examining how art is produced, distributed, consumed, and valued within the field. In doing so, it justifies how *System* can be used as a case study to contribute to the ARI field.

This chapter is divided into three parts:

Part A – Contextualizes *System* and my artistic-curatorial practice, with particular attention to the history of ARI practice, the ecologies in which I operate, and contemporary activities that coalesce around ARIs due to a perceived lack of public support and infrastructure.

Part B – Examines understandings of the value of art, UK arts and culture funding, and governmental infrastructure. It also outlines scholarly perspectives on the differences in the value of municipal arts organizations and institutions compared to ARIs.

Part C – Justifies the study and its contribution to existing knowledge in the field. It identifies gaps in the taxonomy of art's value discussed in Part B and describes how value is understood in the context of this research.

2.2 Part a.

2.2.1 Situating my Practice

My artist-curatorial practice has developed through my running and curating of *System* since 2016. Prior to being a research site, *System* enabled me to develop a way to integrate myself within Newcastle upon Tyne's arts ecology through giving me something which I can offer artists – space to exhibit artwork. *System* had a social space distinctive from other exhibition spaces in the city due to it being volunteer-led and its informal housing in a space on an unused floor of a bar of a crusty punk bar.

This mean that I arrived at the PhD with an established set of tacit knowledges rooted in improvised learning through running *System* and its exhibition program. I began the PhD as an artist who also curated. These two practices being very distinct and separate, however, by the end of the PhD I would more distinctly class myself as an artist-curator who also happens to sometimes make art. This was an unexpected outcome of the PhD and the PhD process. I developed the practice to build a gestalt that combined the method and context of *System* and my research. This section of the literature review outlines the histories that my artistic-curatorial practice emerges from.

There is a shared history between the figure of the artist-curator and the development of ARIs. The latter contributing to the creating the conditions to produce the former. By 'displacing the artist from the studio' (Beech, 2005, p. 16) artists took on various curatorial and organisational roles challenging the assumed distinction between the role and function of artists and curators. Through this PhD, my role within *System* extended to include researcher and Higher Education teacher. I understand these roles being integrated within my artistic-curatorial practice because my practice is centred around a growing

contextual awareness of the ARI field and understandings of my position within it.

Labelling my practice as "artist-curator" is both an attempt to draw attention to discourse surrounding the interaction of the two disciplines, but also to suggest a possible negotiable middle ground. In the latter half of the 20th Century the role of the curator was emancipated from its purely traditional custodial function and blurred with the expanded fields of contemporary art practice, as O'Neill argues, 'the separateness of the artistic and curatorial gesture (is) no longer apparent' (O'Neill, 2007, p. 14).

For instance, artists Peter Nadin and Christopher D'Arcangelo co-founded the collaborative art site and ARI, *84 West Broadway* in 1978. Nadin an English painter who moved to the city in 1976, and D'Arcangelo a performance artist and leading figure of Institutional Critique. *84 West Broadway* merged the studio and the gallery by functioning as a site for the production and display of art. Similarly, it explored links between art and labour by converting a small living quarter for Nadin within the space.

84 West Broadway was an open-ended, improvisational art space featuring artworks produced by Nadin and D'Arcangelo, and their artist friends. These artworks would be made in situ and layered on top of others' work, lived in and upon, and allowed over time to wear and be destroyed. In running this way, it reflected aspects of their experience living within late 70s New York's art scene – where Nadin and D'Arcangelo and their artists friends were living economically, densely, ad-hoc, and together (often by necessity) (Hauser & Wirth, 2019).

84 West Broadway greatly influenced the artistic-curatorial practice and writing of Céline Condorelli who influenced the thinking behind my practice as it developed

through the PhD. Her work incorporates a wide range of artistic and curatorial methodologies and approaches which respond to and alter what she calls 'existing conditions.' These 'existing conditions' include the social, political, cultural, and material conditions and uses of objects, public space, institutions, and social activity (Condorelli, 2015, p. 79). One such 'existing condition' that she explores throughout her work is that of 'display,' in an interview with artist-curator Gavin Wade, she writes:

> "[Display] is generally understood as separate from the work in question – which relies on the idea of a certain autonomy, itself constantly undermined by the many lacks and needs that prompt us to frame it, hold it, protect it, repair it, explain it, stage it, insure it. I would like to integrate the role of display, of what it means to show things, within what is considered 'the work,' as an essential part of its coming into being. Display is intrinsic to artistic production and interpretation, as the process of taking shape that redefines notions of work and of exhibition."
>
> (Condorelli, 2015, p. 80)

In both the thesis and practice-based outcomes of the thesis, I develop and incorporate forms of visual autoethnography as part of my artistic-curatorial practice to forefront the 'existing conditions' of *System*. Like Condorelli, this is about thinking beyond 'display' as the use of certain techniques or ways of arranging objects in a given space, but rather as an act and social encounter, as Mason, Robinson, and Coffield describe:

> "To display something is an act [that] sets up and frames the visitor's encounter, not just with individual objects but with the past more broadly… the act of display can never be neutral, for it produces particular ways of knowing and valuing objects."

(Coffield;Mason and Robinson, 2017, p. 167)

Between 2003 and 2009, Condorelli collaborated with artist-curator Gavin Wade on the project 'Support Structure'. This explored this notion of display through a series of exhibitions, publications, and public interventions wherein publics could reinvent spaces in relation to their context. These are detailed in the accompanying publication *Support Structures* (Condorelli;Wade and Langdon, 2009).

'Support Structure's' first phase, 'In Support of Art', was commissioned as part of the exhibition 'I Am a Curator' (Hüttner, 2003), a process-based exhibition project by the artist Per Hüttner which took place at the Chisenhale Gallery, London in 2003. During the exhibition period individuals and groups of people with little to no experience of exhibition making, curated 36 exhibitions using artwork by 57 artists selected by Hüttner and five others (Hüttner;Wade and Drabble, 2019). For use in the exhibition, Condorelli and Wade produced a series of movable freestanding walls that functioned as artworks that would display other artworks, as Condorelli describes:

> "Support Structure's own brief was the (re)organizational potential of such an inversion in the exhibition-making process, through the provision of a complete display and storage system, used to develop and accommodate thirty exhibitions in 30 days, while being a piece amongst others in the exhibition itself. Support Structure phase 1 addressed notions of organization and display in the realm of art and its institutions through the provision of a hyper-functional exhibition system, critically questioning their relationship with art objects." (Condorelli, n.d.)

This theme of the public's relationship to the production and consumption of art would be explored throughout the distinct phases of 'Support Structure' and would culminate in its ninth and final phase 'In Support of Public.' This final phase was founding of *Eastside Projects*, a Birmingham-based gallery and ARI which Condorelli and Wade co-founded in 2008 together with artists Simon Bloor, Tom Bloor, Ruth Claxton, and James Langdon. Akin to *84 West Broadway, Eastside Projects'* curation is integrated into the design and management of the gallery space which evolves in collaboration with artists they invite (ibid.). As stated on the gallery website's 'About' page: "… we imagine Eastside Projects as a process, as a place where multiple narratives and experiences coexist, where we make visible an evolving set of possible realities." (Eastside Projects, n.d.)

In this approach and positioning *Eastside Projects* invites thinking around alternative modes of display and understanding of art production and consumption. Its inaugural exhibition, 'This is the Gallery and the Gallery is many Things,' took place as a sequential building site where artworks were installed over a 9-week period to gradually transform the space. The aim of which was to "[set] an ambitious framework for the future of the gallery and a diverse scope of relationships and connections designed to make visible cause and effect in the future life of the gallery" (Eastside Projects, 2008).

This approach to curation means that the gallery presents itself as the intersection for multiple overlapping social trajectories. This approach to imagining curation is discussed in chapter 4 in relation to *System* and Massey's wiring on space and place (2005). This mode of producing artworks and open-ended approach to curation makes visible the values of *Eastside Projects,* as detailed on their website:

> "SUSTAIN – Continuously develop a resilient, thoughtful artist-led multiverse supported by responsive, adaptable structures and networks.

> COLLABORATE – Work alongside others to create, support, commission, and share artworks, ideas and practices that demonstrate the many ways that artists are useful to society.
>
> BE OPEN – Be attentive, incidental, listen, take note, reflect & respond.
>
> EMBED – Be the dreamers and doers, collaborators and supporters, guests, and hosts, working alongside communities to imagine and co-evolve our civic infrastructure."
>
> (Eastside Projects, n.d.)

This aestheticization of the *Eastside Projects* values draws attention to the politics of artistic display and production, as well as foster and illustrate collaboration and community through co-production. Similarly in 2022, Jakarta-based artists' collective *Ruangrupa* led the Artistic Direction for the *Documenta 15* by using a more diffuse and devolved power and decision-making structure that fore fronted ethics of collectivity and communal resource sharing (Documenta Fifteen, n.d.). This was a subversion of the traditional *Documenta* format where a curator is chosen to make erudite and considered decisions around what they personally consider to be the latest and most important developments in contemporary art. A position which stages individualised power and privilege.

In keeping with *Ruangrupa's* ethos of *lumbung* – the Indonesian word for a communal rice barn, a place where surplus harvest is stored and shared amongst the community - participants of the *Documenta 15* each received an equal share of the production budget, and access to a separate reserve which the to use for

collaborative projects (Charlesworth, 2022). This decentring was visible in the exhibition through its less cohesive and looser curation, which included a far more geographically diverse collection of artist and curatorial voices than the typically Western-centred *Documenta*. Aiming to bring into focus the unequal balance of geopolitical power by utilizing the esteem, influence, and global reach of *Documenta.*

All of these practices share a concern with, and work within, what Condorelli terms "existing conditions." Some, like Ruangrupa, think globally by leveraging the esteem, influence, and global reach of Documenta to reflect on the unequal balance of geopolitical power, while others, such as 84 West Broadway, are much more localized, focusing on a close-knit network of friends and contemporaries.

Part of this research's contribution to knowledge is the development of a reflexive curatorial practice that follows and builds on these historical and contemporary art and curatorial practices. This practice is critically extended through the incorporation of visual forms of autoethnography. In this, it speaks to the work of Sophie Calle, whose anthropological and artistic practices often blur the lines between personal narrative and collective experience. Calle's work, like that of Condorelli, frequently foregrounds underlying social and relational dynamics.

In summary, this research integrates reflexive artistic-curatorial and autoethnographic methods drawing connections between a range of practices that forefront the social and relational contexts artwork is produced and consumed.

2.2.2 What does it Mean to be Artist-Run?

In prefixing 'initiative' with 'artist-run,' the idea of an initiative as an innovative and/or independent act or strategy intended to resolve a difficulty or improve a situation becomes potentially more equivocal through its connection with artists and/or artistic processes. The incorporation of the verb 'run' lends a temporal quality as it alludes to an activity or set of activities rather than a fixed state of being. In emphasising that it is one or a number of 'artists' that run a particular 'initiative,' presupposes that some level of agency is afforded artists and artistic activity. In this, ARIs are sometimes considered distinct from municipal art museums or galleries, despite sharing similar functions such as displaying artwork or delivering workshops for the public. Self-definition as an ARI often involves positioning oneself as 'grassroots', 'alternative', or 'counterculture' rather than 'institutional', sometimes through incorporating flatter or less-defined organisational and staffing structures; or acting in ways that express a disillusionment or questioning of the practices of art museums and galleries, or the ways in which they are supported by the state or market.

Withstanding the broadness of ARI definition and the contestation of its histories discussed here, this section provides context for my practice – specifically as it relates to ways in which individual artists and groups have coalesced around ARIs due to a perceived lack of and/or exclusion from public infrastructure their practice. This is particularly relevant to *System,* as it was initially awarded funding to increase student retention in Newcastle by providing exhibition opportunities and supporting emerging artists. In relation to this, Phillips articulates how romanticised narratives of the individuated and autonomous artist 'genius' obfuscates the inequalities of the art world post-university, they write:

> "Inequality is highly visible in the field of art, embedded and masked by the contradiction of [art's] value…Despite the prevailing modes of psychic

> and socially-claimed, civic values of openness and fairness, freedom of expression and rights to affective community-building proposed by many artists, institutions and their funders (under the rubric of providing a public good), new generations of artists are emerging from arts schools to be faced with no future of any sort… These people see inequality clearly at the Biennial, at the art fair, at the museum dinner (to which they are not invited)."
>
> (2015, pp. 115-6)

There is much literature which points to the vital role of ARIs in the development of emerging art practices through countering the alienation felt at this vulnerable career stage (Bronson;Detterer and Nannucci, 2012; Rosati, 2012; Rosati and Staniszewski, 2012; Murphy and Cullen, 2016). For instance, one of *City Racing's* founders, Matt Hale, describes how the desire to set-up the *City Racing* was born from a shared feeling amongst its founders of being 'fed up of waiting to be offered a show' (Wilson *et al.*, 2002, p. 20). To expand on this, in this quote from an article originally printed in Art Monthly cited in *City Racing: The Life and Times of an Artist-run Gallery*, artist Ross Sinclair muses on their involvement with ARIs *Transmission*, Glasgow and *City Racing*, London:

> "…artist run ventures are a valuable way of demystifying the business of art. They promote a sharing of information, skills, and experience while simultaneously nurturing relationships between artists which can often lead to a more genuinely horizontal and organically developing infrastructure of cultural activity. Often they provide resources which are outside the reach of individuals." (Wilson *et al.*, 2002, pp. 92-93)

This suggests that some ARIs can resemble 'communities of belonging' where people are willing to sacrifice their individual freedom to enjoy the comfort and

security of voluntary membership to groups/collectives. In her book ' Belonging : solidarity and division in modern societies' (Guibernau, 2013), Guibernau asserts that self-identity is constructed both through belonging and exclusion – and that these can be both personal choices and are imposed by others – and that, in either case, they suggest a strong emotional attachment go a range of communities and groups (ibid. p26). Being accepted within these 'communities of belonging' reassures its members as it confirms their personal value and through this collective recognition strengthen members' self-esteem (ibid. p34). Through this, Guibernau's writing offers a framework in which to identify and understand how communities and sets of values form around particular ARIs.

Just as identification of an initiative being 'artist-run' is performed through processes within the social field - the values upheld by them, and its members are context specific and contestable. However, conversely, much pervading literature on artist-run activity suggests that despite its diversity there are arguably a loose set of values attributable across the field.

2.2.3 ARI and Shared Values

Attempts to portray ARIs as having a shared set of values, culture, concerns, or characteristics as designated within a particular geographic location and/or time period (Ault, 2002; Tan, 2006; Rosati and Staniszewski, 2012; Murphy and Cullen, 2016) obfuscate the multiple understandings and sharp differences in practice. For instance, Ault (2002) in the discussion of the artist-run spaces in New York following the 'Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement, NYC' exhibition at the Drawing Center, New York (1996), contends that the featured spaces '…embody a cultural, political, and artistic movement – perhaps not as clear-cut or as unified as one might wish but a consequential movement nonetheless' (ibid, p. 4). For Ault, as implied through her definition of what constitutes a movement, the artist-run space movement in New York…

> "…shared concerns and overlapping agendas [that] conjures up social configurations and degrees of collaboration between individuals; it conjures up social configurations as well as communication and degrees of collaboration between individuals – one thing leading to another, migration of ideas and models, generative social processes… interdependency of individuals, groups, organisations, and venues… interconnectedness of principles, agendas, and practices."
>
> (ibid. p. 4)

Other authors contend that a shared artist-run culture, set of values, and practices exist across broader geographic locations. For example, Detterer, in their discussion of nine artist-run spaces, operating out of Canada, USA, Switzerland and Italy, concludes:

> "A specific sphere of ethical values involving common action, equality of status, reciprocal encouragement, and support with respect to the acknowledgement of individual art creation and the implementation of collective avant-garde art practices, …forms the common denominator of the artist-run spaces presented here."
>
> (Detterer, 2012, p. 45)

It is a broad claim to unequivocally state that **all** artists operating in artist-run spaces across the world conduct themselves in this way **all** the time. This is especially true when considering that those nine artist-run spaces represent a broad range of practices, including, galleries and spaces for a broad range of contemporary art practices, a print press, several archives, a radio station, a couple of magazines, a publisher, a consultancy, artists' networking and web content management (ibid, p. 183). Further dispelling Detterer's argument is the

fact that these artist-run spaces do not even self-identify under the same banner, for instance as 'DIY,' 'grassroots,' 'alternative,' 'independent,' 'not-for-profit,' 'institutions by artists,' or 'counterculture.'

This false equivalence is ubiquitous not just within academic literature, but more broadly. For instance, within *Supermarket – Stockholm Independent Art Fair,* an annually-held international artist-run fair featured exhibitions from ARIs from more than 60 countries since 2007 (Supermarket, n.d.-a). Similarly, *Supermarket 2019* featured exhibitions and presentations from ARIs based in Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Georgia, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Lithuania, Mexico, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom, and USA (Supermarket, n.d.-b). For the organisers, these ARIs from across the world are all characterised by '…non-institutional ways of organisation, flat hierarchy, and often experimental formats' (Supermarket, n.d.-a). This is an overly broad generalisation that echoes the generalisations of Ault and Detterer.

More critical voices work against this temptation to generalise the practices and culture of ARIs and allow space for the prevalent differences and contradictions within the field. For instance, Faguet in their comparative study of two artist-run spaces from the 1990s - *La Panadería* in Mexico that is often used as a model for alternative spaces in Latin America, and *Galería Chilena*, a nomadic commercial gallery that moved around Santiago, Chile – correctly identify that '…an alternative way of working in one context might be a necessary manner of operating in another' (2012). It is therefore especially important when speaking of the values of ARIs to not generalise or be absolute. Any discussion of ARIs and forms of value attributable to them, are subject to the interplay and interpretation of an ARI's relationship to social, political, geographic, temporal, and cultural factors. In this complex milieux and to skirt this line of generalisation and absoluteness, this research takes a heuristic approach to conceptualizing value as something which specifies a relationship between an individual or group of people and a particular goal. Values in this instance could be a set of guiding

principles, motivating behaviours, understandings of identity, or evaluative assessments. They can differ in their generality or abstractness and are relational in the sense that what one person values may not be what another person values even in the same situation.

Dickson discusses the diverse activities that have emerged in Glasgow since the 1980s in relation to what he calls the 'mythology of the artist-run space' formed of selective histories (1998). Following this, in their critique of developments of the artist-run scene in Scotland, Beagles writes:

> "Scottish artists returning from abroad frequently complain of the romantic, idealistic picture many seem to have of artistic life in Scotland (Glasgow specifically) as the home of egalitarian, socialist cooperatives where everyone supports and nurtures in a pseudo-cultural wonderland. The reality of course, is infinitely more complicated and contradictory."
>
> (1997, p. 9)

Thompson questions the levels of critical engagement within Scotland's artist-led scene and its proximity and relationship to the municipal and commercial art markets, describing such ARIs with dubious ties to these as part of a 'complicit feeder system to the symbolic Academy – the commercial art sector or 'old guard' establishment galleries' (2005, p. 12). Similarly, Beech in his discussion of England based spaces…

> "It is clear that a number of artist-run spaces are set up for no other reason than to catch the attention of the market and art's large public institutions in the spirit of entrepreneurial enterprise. Such spaces may be funded and run as independent concerns, but they are in no way ideologically or culturally independent."

(2005, p. 16)

One could draw a parallel here with Thompson's critique of ARIs in Scotland, where she identifies a separation between ARIs engaged in two distinct select histories of the ARI marked by a disjuncture in the values held by those involved.

> "It could easily be argued that the ironic popularity of alternative spaces and ARIs today stems not from the left-leaning, staunchly political young turks of 1970s and early 1980s Scotland, but from the explicitly entrepreneurial spirit of late 1980s yBa blockbusters such as 'Freeze' in 1988."
>
> (2005, p. 12)

This presents two very different and incompatible versions of self-determination and autonomy, the former a co-produced interdependence resembling what Beech refers to as 'Independent Collaborative Hospitality' (2005), and the latter resembling the independent neoliberal self.

2.2.4 ARIs and Autonomy

For Phillips, collectively artists are culpable in their own subjugation, she concludes that artists are trained '… professionally and in the mythologised ontology of their own object production – to make, desire and expect freedom of expression, autonomy, creative choice and forms of separation from the common world' (2015, p. 116). Underpinning the judgements of ARIs made by Thompson (2005) and Beech (2005) is a perception of the extent to which a particular ARI operates outside neoliberalism. Their judgement seems built on an ideal of the

artist 'self,' not as an entrepreneurial agent, but rather a self-determination which is collaborative and built with others. In this is an implicit rejection of the artist 'myth' that presents the artist or artist activity as something which exists outside of everyday social life.

One such reading of the historical connection between art and society can be found in Bürger (1984). Bürger believed art's development from the eighteenth century to the Aestheticism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was an intensification of art's separation from bourgeois society (ibid, p. XIII). He argues that as form becomes the preferred content it distinguishes art as part of lived experience rather than a separate sphere: 'The apartness from the praxis of life that had always constituted the institutional status of art in bourgeois society now becomes the content of works' (ibid, p. 27). Rather than the valuation of art constrained by art's separateness as traced by Bell, Bürger's analysis points towards an autonomy that brings art into closer proximity to lived experience beyond its own borders.

Traditionally the mythic artist was removed from the reality of real-life through the 'romance of the studio' (Jones, 1996a). In this, the studio played a role in the genius artist myth by demarcating the solitary world of the artist genius and the real world 'out-there.' It could be argued that ARIs can potentially counter this myth through their displacement of the artist from the studio to take on various additional curatorial and organisational roles, and effectively blur the role of artist with that of a curator, facilitator, studio manager, or building manager (Beech, 2005; Beech, 2019b). When also considering the forms that initiatives can take outside of being galleries or studios, such as those referred to in Artist-run Spaces (Detterer and Nannucci, 2012), the role of artist can be combined with others such as publisher, archivist, radio presenter, consultant, and web content manager. This has the effect of demystifying the artist by combining their role with other forms of work or jobs whose ontology is not romanticised.

Contrary to the mythos which presents the artist as a prototype unalienated worker by virtue of the symbolic status of art (For example see - Morris, 2003), Beech contends that artists '… are not special creatures but occupy a special place within the social division of labour' (2020b). Beech drew on this work in his keynote presentation (2020a) at 'What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About the Artist-Led' conference organised by The Exhibition Research Lab at Liverpool John Moores University. In this he situates the artist-run within a broader historical and anti-capitalist framework - rather than reducing ARIs to a series of movements or moments as connected geographically and/or temporally. Beech instead explores artist-run activity as a longer-term feature of the art world. He traces this lineage back to Joseph Wright's 1785 solo exhibition in Covent Garden that the artist self-organised as an antagonistic sleight to the Royal Academy with whom he had a rivalry over a disagreement about the display of his paintings two years prior (Beech, 2020a). As Beech alludes, similar examples of artist antagonism can be drawn throughout history, for example Gustav Courbet staged a solo invite-only exhibition during the 1855 Universal Exposition in Paris out of his indignation with the jury's selection (Morton, 2006).

Beech's historical account of ARIs is defined by a longstanding antagonistic dynamic between art and commerce that would lead to the separation of the academy and craft of the guild (2020a). He directly references Sears' concept 'infrastructures of dissent' (2005) - how collective agency is developed through sustaining common memories, providing alternate voices to dominant ones, and building collective visions. Beech argues that ARIs are uniquely positioned to do this through having the agency to maintain a position in the field where they operate in proximity to dominant institutions whilst remaining independent and critical of them. This relates to previous writing by Beech, where he describes the role for the individual artist is to choose to either fend off or give-in to what he refers to as 'money power' – the influence of dominant economic factors (2016, p. 279). Through this it is possible to develop an understanding of the value of

ARIs manifesting as a (partial or potential) realisation of self-determination, in a world which constantly threatens and constrains individuals' capacity for self-determination across all social spheres.

2.2 Part b.

2.2.1 What is the Value of Art?

In an exploration of the value of ARIs, it would be negligent to not explore the question "What is the value of art?" Much like the values attributed to ARIs, there are differing conceptions of art's value which encompass different ranges of meaning and often hold various levels of utility, esteem, and coherence across different contexts and social groups. In this regard, it is essential to consider that despite the ubiquitous fallacy of there being one singular unified 'art world,' it is actually a non-homogeneous and contested social field containing various competing understandings of art's 'value'. As Thornton states: '…the art world is not a "system" or smooth-functioning-machine, but rather a conflicting set of subcultures – each of which embrace different definitions of art' (2009, p. xix). Across these subcultures, these different definitions of art contain numerous conflicting understandings of arts' value:

> "…in "The Auction," art is positioned principally as an investment and luxury good. In "The Crit," it is an intellectual endeavour, lifestyle, and occupation. In "The Fair," it is a fetish and leisure activity – a slightly different commodity to that seen at the auction. In "The Prize," art is a museum attraction, media story, and evidence of an artist's worth. In "The Magazine," art is an excuse for words; it is something to debate and promote. In "The Studio Visit," it is all of the above… Finally, in "The

> Biennale," art is an alibi for networking, an international curiosity, and, most importantly, the chief ingredient in a good show."
>
> (ibid)

Additionally, if we broaden our focus beyond artists, curators, art collectors and art critics, there are many more contemporary and ongoing assertions of art's value. Many of these are embedded with its instrumental function to positively impact a broad range of things, including national and international health, opening of trade routes through the assertion of a nation's 'soft power,' social and cultural emancipation, education, social care, and the economic value of a neighbourhood, town, or city. The diversity of the forms of value attributed to art is displayed in this taxonomy (Figure 1.) They have been taken from a range of related sectors these are culture, art, heritage, museum, tourism, history, public service, and economics (actors from which may or may not encounter one another).

Figure 1. Taxonomy of types of value attributed to art.

VALUE CONCEPT	**DESCRIPTION**
Advocacy Value	The potential of an object/activity to advocate for social change.
Aesthetic Value	An object/activity's perceived beauty or other aesthetic preference.
Cultural Value	The perceived moral principles or beliefs held by a cultural group or community that dictates individual behaviour. These can also be contained in objects/activities related to these shared perceived moral principles and beliefs.

Deferred Value	The value an object/activity will deliver at some future time, this can be over a set or indeterminate length of time.
Economic Value	An object/activity's perceived economic benefit that can be derived from it.
Historical Value	An object/activity's connection to a significant part of history based on a particular viewpoint of history.
Instrumental Value	An object/activity's perceived value on its capacity to contribute to achieving a particular goal. Alternatively referred to as 'extrinsic value.'
Intrinsic Value	An object/activity that is perceived valuable as an end-in-itself (in a Kantian sense) may be regarded to contain Intrinsic Value.
Non-use Value	Tangible qualities of an object/activity that can serve some human requirement, want, or need even if the person assigning the value never/will derive direct use from. May be alternatively referred to as 'option value,' 'bequest value' 'existence value' or 'altruistic value'.
Psychological Value	The subjective importance or worth individuals attribute to various objects/activities/concepts which influence their decision-making processes and behaviours.

Public Value	An object/activity's perceived positive contribution to society.
Relational Value	Refers to the importance of desirable, meaningful, and often reciprocal relationships - between humans and nature, and among humans.
Social Value	An object/activity's connections between people that build and/or reinforce a sense of identity or community.
Spiritual Value	An object/activity's connection to religious, numinous, and/or the sublime.
Symbolic Value	A perception of an object/activity bearing significance to a shared cultural meaning, usually by a particular identified community.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss ARIs in relation to the full debate of their value across all these contested or contestable definitions. The descriptions I have provided are a simplification of their respective meanings. Similarly, the table is not an exhaustive list of all the possible of the forms of value attributable or attributed to it. Besides, as the world of art is so diverse and opaque, it is both difficult to generalise and impossible to comprehensively explain every detail (Thornton, 2009, p. xvii). It is important to note that not all these values are applicable to all instances or examples of art, however, it does point to the breadth of the discussions and debates of value around art, and by extension ARIs, that are both interrelated and fraught with contradictions. To shed some light on this and to offer a lens to interrogate how shared

understanding of art's value(s) is formed, it is useful to look to Bourdieu's Field Theory.

Bourdieu in his study of the sociology of art institutions shows how the contemporary value of art is better understood through an articulation of the constellation of social agents surrounding it, rather than being contained in the artwork itself (Bourdieu, 1993b; Bourdieu, 2013). For Bourdieu, the economic or symbolic distinction of any artwork is the product of the values and attitudes attributed by the actors making up the field of artistic production. Through their study of the sociology of art institutions, Bourdieu shows how class stratification is maintained and produced through cultural dispositions (Bourdieu, 1993b). The use here of "institutions," is in reference to institutions in the structural sense, such as museums, galleries, or funders, as well as interrelated systems of values such as shared moral orders between communities. For Bourdieu, the value of art is socially produced and contested in the interaction of participants with varying levels of agency and power, rather than existing out in the world to be discovered (Bourdieu, 2013). In Bordieuan thought, where broad consensus over the value of cultural products, like art, has existed (or has been given the appearance of doing so) it has done so through its attachment to a power base. However, position within the field is not fixed and instead power is culturally and symbolically continually (re)created and (re)legitimised through an interplay of agency and structure.

The difficulty and limitation of Bourdieu in relation to the value of artistic activity is his model's reliance on there being clearly defined borders between groups. The interrelatedness and opaqueness of the artworld means the value of art originate from several points at once, at the same time as it not being quite clear how understandings of art's value move between these groups. In an interview, Phillips correctly identifies how the judgement of art's value has been partially removed but where it has gone is not entirely clear:

> 'I think that what we've done is we have allowed judgement to be taken away from us, within the field of art, contemporary art, we've allowed judgement to be taken by others. However, we can't point to that other, so we can't say it's Nick Serota or it's Daniel Birnbaum, or it's the funding council, or it's the rector…'
>
> (Phillips;Critchley and Wilson, 2015, p. 22).

This PhD argues that hybridised forms of value generation that occur within *System* operate across this taxonomy resulting as expressions of 'sense of place' and 'belonging'. This is described fully in Part C of the Literature Review. First though, it is useful to interrogating the complexity surrounding the multiple understandings of the value of art, it is useful to consider its historical role in the political and cultural economy.

2.2.2 Historical Understandings of Art's Value

Early understandings of the value of art pre-enlightenment, such as those proposed by Kant (2001) and Hume (2022), lie in the aesthetic experience. That is to say, the receiving of pleasure through the immediate sensory enjoyment and objective perception of an artwork. The judgement of this value is, for both Hume and Kant, based on subjective states of mind and criteria justified and characterised in relation to some either natural or transcendental origin (Kulczak, 2001). For both, art is an end in itself rather than there to serve some political or social ends. For instance, Kant states that the occupation of an artist:

> "...must be free in the sense of not being a mercenary occupation and hence a kind of labour, whose magnitude can be judged, extracted, or

paid for according to a determinate standard; but fine art must also be free in the sense that, although the mind is occupying itself, yet it feels satisfied and aroused (independently of any pay) without looking to some other purpose."

(Kant, 2001, p. 321)

These discussions of art's autonomy would later become manifested in the bohemian creed of 'art for art's sake,' such as in the preface to Oscar Wilde's 'The Picture of Dorian Gray' where he writes:

"The artist is the creator of beautiful things.

To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim.

The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things."

(Wilde, 2003, p. 184)

As Wilde expresses, discussions of the aesthetic experience or encounter have commonly encompassed competing notions of beauty. Beech states of the history of art: 'Beauty and art were once thought of as belonging together, with beauty as among art's principal aims and art as beauty's highest calling' (2009, p. 12). The notions of beauty as proposed by writers like Kant and Hume are interconnected with dominant prudential and moral values, much of which purveyed from the early part of the eighteenth century to the end of the twentieth century (Guyer, 2005).

The symbiotic relationship of notions of beauty and art would later be questioned and refuted through post-enlightenment art movements such as romanticism, modernism, and avant-gardism (Beech, 2009, p. 16). For Clark, this was largely achieved by artists of these movements through performing what he called 'practices of negation' (1999b; 1999a). According to T.J. Clark, 'practices of negation' are '…decisive innovation, in method or materials or imagery, whereby a previously established set of skills or frame of reference… are deliberately avoided or travestied' (1985, p. 55). In reference to 'practices of negation', Beech surmises that the radical impact of the avantgarde movements, such as the Dada, Surrealists or Constructivists, would not have occurred were it not for the subversion of the taste of cultural elites (2009, p. 16). Rather than an adherence to a hegemonic shared symbolic order; for Clark these post-enlightenment art movements can be totalized through their refusal to cohere (1999a).

These movements questioned once established claims of the elevated status of art amongst other forms of experience. They also undermined the privilege afforded to historical versions of beauty and the dominant position of high art within culture due to its resistance to bourgeois culture generally (ibid). For instance, Romanticism, in its anticipation of Modernism, sought to separate bourgeois morality and objective standards from beauty and instead pursue subjective and individualistic understandings of the sublime (Banks, 2010). Modernism's adversarial stance towards the bourgeois social structure both produced and was the product of the loss of coherence in a shared culture and with that the shared valuation of that culture. Bell argues that Modernism's move to a 'democratization' of criticism informed part of the blurring of art and life because '…the touchstone of judgment is no longer some consensual agreement on standards, but each 'self's' judgment as to how art enhances that 'self' (1972, p. xiii). Modernism allowed artists to produce expressions of self with far less regard to conceptions of right/wrong or correct/incorrect as judged through an explicit hierarchically managed symbolic order.

As Bell alludes, the art movements which occurred post-enlightenment could be viewed as a markable shift to art manifesting as an individualistic expression of autonomy independent of the dominant value system. This rupture is closely linked to the romanticised, and in many ways pervasive, vision of the artist being '…that special, self-regulating being and 'free spirit' possessed of rare and precious gifts' (Banks, 2010, p. 253). In support of this claim, Negus and Pickering state: 'Since the days of Herder and Hegel and the European Romantics ... the artist has been heroized as the agent par excellence of original self-creation' (2004, p. 9). It is then perhaps through a particular view of the history and development of art since modernism, as told through 'practices of negation' (Clark, 1999a; Clark, 1999b) which conform to the thesis-antithesis-synthesis theory of change over time (Mueller, 1958), that we can understand Ault's diagnosis of the artist-run spaces of New York constituting an art movement.

Ault's claim is in reference to the prevalence of artists re-purposing derelict buildings left by de-industrialisation in 1960's New York, particularly in the East Village in Manhattan (Anderson, 2015). It is broadly understood that many artists did this as an antipathetic response to the commerce-oriented activity that had dominated New York's art scene, and to give more agency to the artists (rather than a curator or seller) to seize control of the promotion and distribution of their artwork, including artworks which were out of favour with the tastes of New York's bourgeoisie (Ault, 2002). A gesture which fits within the modernist canon as a breaking with the past in search for new forms of expression, as represented through the circumvention of New York's established cultural elite. A gesture she uses to contain the array of contradictory and disparate practices and motivations of these spaces – and making the false equivocal claim that these groups were somehow united in their disharmony.

Justifications for the grouping of disparate ARI activity, such as Ault's, could be understood through a conception as a 'practice of negation' (Clark, 1999b; Clark,

1999a) that places no bearing on the content of such gestures or a real appreciation of their meaning or implications. Therefore, to distinguish between ARIs which are a true alternative is a value judgement. This is not simply a matter of the good will or intentions of individual staff or members, or solely through self-definition. Rather, the classification of an ARI is based on the value judgement of the extent to which the ARI either fosters or restrains the self-determination of artists in their activity for the explicit purpose of serving a goal not desired or understood by that same individual artist or group of artists - whether that's through its relationship to funders, institutions, and/or the art market.

2.2.3 Art as a Commodity

In relation to questions of art's value, it is important to consider art's unique position under capitalism and neoliberalism, both in terms of the labour relations of its production and how it performs as a commodity. Both allow for the transferability of its value across different fields and capacity to hold different forms of value for different groups.

Through his understanding of neoliberalism as a 'programme for destroying collective structures which may impede pure market logic', Bourdieu claims that institutions impose a form of 'moral Darwinism' which 'institutes the struggle of all against all and cynicism as the norm of all action and behaviour' (1998). Bourdieu's thesis argues that through the pervasiveness of neoliberalism – which he viewed as a conscious attempt to restructure society by destroying systems of meaning and belonging - both art and culture have become subsumed by capital. Though perhaps in agreement with some of Bourdieu's conclusions, Beech disagrees with Bourdieu's diagnosis that art's value has been completely

subsumed by capitalism. For Beech, art's value is not equivalent to any other capitalist commodity, but rather that it is an exception to it (2015b; 2016). Beech, situating his argument in terms of 'the labour theory of value, labour power, surplus value, formal and real subsumption, self-accumulation, relative surplus value, and so on' (ibid, pp. 226-7), correctly asserts that the use value of art can be separate from its exchange value. That is to say, the value of art as a commodity to fulfil human needs as linked to its physical properties often has little bearing on the equivalence of its value to other commodities. Furthermore, for Beech, art does not behave like a typical capitalist commodity since artists sell a product or service for which the artist owns the means of its production, and the labour that goes into art making has not been totally organised and controlled at a social scale in order to maximise its economic profit (ibid).

Additionally for Beech, the fact that artists in the UK tend to be paid by the state in the form of a stipend rather than a wage as defined by Marx as 'a certain quantity of money that is paid for a certain quantity labour' distinguishes it from other labour relations (2019, p. 61). Phillips supports Beech's assertion of art's exceptionalism as a commodity when she writes: '[the] contradiction between price and value is significant and unique to art in as much as it is the most abstracted and least industrialisable of luxury goods' (2015, p. 105). For Beech, because artists work on making unique objects which cannot be reproduced (since so much of their meaning is bound by the context in which they were produced), their price is not indexable by the average labour time to produce it. On the matter of art's subsumption under capitalism, I agree with Beech, as to side with Bourdieu would be denying that the contestation of art's value and function within society is unresolved. It is my position that it is a very live debate. The contention of different versions of art and ARIs value happen synchronously across distinct groups, the answer to the question, 'What is the value of art?' and by extension 'What is the value of ARIs?' can only be meaningfully addressed when in relation to the question 'Value for who?'

What Bourdieu does illustrate however, is that conceptualisations of art's value can be highly discriminative and exclude a great area of meaning for individuals and groups operating within that same social field. This is true of the perceptions of art's value determined by taste-making and commercial activity, as it is for those that are exercised through public policy through delivering on political priorities. As most ARIs in the UK are not-for-profit rather than commercially driven, it is in the disjuncture between values exercised through funding priorities and those expressed and understood by many ARIs that especially provides a fulcrum for the debate of their value at the same time as pacifying it. This does not mean however that this PhD focuses on forms of value in way which is strictly procedural. As stated by O'Brien, funding decisions amount to '…a value judgment on the legitimacy or illegitimacy of a community's or individual's culture. ... cultural policy is … a legislative practice as much as it is an interpretive one' (2014, p. 49). In this sense, it is a sorting mechanism, that through its hierarchical power, determines what one can do, who can be what, and how.

2.2.4 The Neoliberalisation of UK Arts and Cultural Policy

UK Arts and Cultural Policy as it exists today are defined by the core concepts of modernity. Hall, Held and McGrew, describe modernity not as a single historical epoch, but rather an ongoing process with long-standing and complicated roots whose beginning is arguably represented by the Enlightenment (1992). The five characteristics of modernity that they identify (ibid, p. 6) are used to underpin the proceeding discussions of the Neoliberalisation of UK arts and cultural policy and ontology of artistic production, as well as the discussion of *System* and its value as discussed throughout this thesis. These five characteristics of modernity are:

- The domination of institutions that draw authority from secular rather than religious sources. For instance, the replacement of the state over the church in its dominance of organising social life.
- The authority of religious explanation is usurped by secular forms of reason and argument.
- Previously fixed social hierarchies are challenged by new social and economic dynamics.
- Changes in monetary exchange as mediated through these new social and economics dynamics (as defined by the prevalence of property ownership and market relations).
- An individualistic culture which is both the product and producer of the four other characteristics.
  (ibid)

Valuation is a key feature of modernity as it is an aspect of individualisation through personal expression, and the encouragement and prohibition of behaviours exercised by institutions through governance structures (O'Brien, 2013, p. 49). It is these two instincts that define the Neoliberalisation of UK Arts and Cultural Policy.

Immediately following World War II, we saw the emergence of political science - the notion of formal policy analysis (Lasswell, 1970, p. 19). This rise of professional policy analysis has contributed to the prominence of the market-failure model and the pervasiveness of microeconomics in public policy (Bozeman, 2002, p. 147). Under New Labour, the UK government began to prioritize the creative industries as a key driver of economic growth and ever since, under subsequent governments, UK arts and cultural policy have placed greater attention on economic outputs and the role of the arts in contributing to the economy (McGuigan, 2005; O'Brien, 2014; Hesmondhalgh *et al.*, 2015). One of the earliest developments in this regard was the establishment of Creative

Industries Task Force in 1997, whose purpose was to promote the economic value of the creative industries and highlight its challenges and find solutions. Through their findings, in 1998 the UK government launched 'Creative Industries Mapping Documents' (DCMS, 1998) as developed by the newly formed Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) overseen by then Secretary of State, Chris Smith. These were a series of reports mapping out the size and scope of the creative industries and outlined a policy that moved art from being built around a shared understanding of its intrinsic qualities to valuing creativity as an economic driver. Recent examples include national initiatives such as the Great Exhibition of the North (2018) and the Cultural Development Fund (2019) which were funded on the basis of their capacity to drive cultural investment and economic regeneration. On the motivations behind his decision to re-frame the value of arts and culture economically, Smith stated in an interview:

> "I knew that if I talked about beauty and truth, I wouldn't get anything at all… But if I talked about the practical economic implications of what creativity and the arts were all about, then I might have more success."
>
> (Barker, 2022)

The reframing of the arts under Smith's direction marked a clear, and thus far irreversible shift, from art being funded on the perceptions of its inherent or artistic value to perceptions of its commercial or economic value. As described by Pratt, this reduced culture and the creative industries to an 'instrumental sideshow' of UK economic policy (2008, p. 4). To avoid another generalisation, we should note that this is not the first time that art had been linked to money or commercial value. This shift however did have a profound effect on the infrastructures supporting many artists and ARIs, by completely transforming the funding landscape. McGuigan (2005), as helpfully summarised in Hesmondhalgh et al (2015), in their analysis of the relationship between neoliberalism and UK cultural policy, characterise the changes to the funding landscape as:

- Increased corporate sponsorship of culture in a move away from funding through public subsidy.
- Increased emphasis on the running of public sector cultural institutions as private businesses.
- Shifting away from culture to serve economic goals. Focusing on 'competitiveness and regeneration' (McGuigan, 2005, p. 238) and 'an implausible palliative to exclusion and poverty' (ibid.)

Pressures on the public sector were intensified through the UK austerity programme that was introduced in 2010 by the Conservative Party following the financial crisis of 2007-2008. The ideology behind this programme has been written about extensively (Blyth, 2013) – but in short, it can be understood as an attempt to reduce public debt through a reshaping of the state and welfare system. These pressures to reduce governmental spending has led to local councils significantly cutting their arts and cultural budgets, as Cooper observes '…councils in every region have cut their annual arts and culture budgets by more than a third – and by more than £15 per person' (Cooper, 2020, p. 13).

To deliver its vision, DCMS outsources the vast majority of its spending in England to several organisations outside direct government control, who allocate and formulate spending, these include Arts Council England (ACE), the British Film Institute, the British Library, Historic England, as well as fifteen major galleries and museums[1] (DCMS, 2024). On its website ACE offers three arguments for individuals and organisations '...to tell the story [of why] art and

[1] This includes the following: British Museum, Museum of the Home, Horniman Museum, Imperial War Museums, National Gallery, National Museums Liverpool, National Portrait Gallery, Natural History Museum, Royal Armouries, Royal Museums Greenwich, Science Museum Group, Sir John Soane's Museum, Tate Gallery Group, Victoria and Albert Museum, and The Wallace Collection.

culture matters' (Arts Council England, n.d.). Two of these three facts refer to the economic value of art and culture, these are:

- Art and culture contribute £10.6 billion to the UK economy - the UK has a creative economy worth £27bn and culture brings £850m to UK.
- Cultural institutions are a calling card worldwide and have important trading links from the US or Germany to China and South Korea. Last year National Portfolio Organisations earned £57m abroad.
  (ibid.)

The third fact that ACE offers for art and culture workers to argue for public investment in arts and culture, is that arts and culture venues helps tackle social injustice through bringing communities together and make life worth living (ibid). As stated by Andrea Phillips , this demands art to paradoxically perform across several territories as an 'elite transnational commodity that, uniquely, can care and at the same time accrue [economic] value' (2011, p. 41). A paradox that Phillips attributes describes elsewhere as '…a false and perverse economy shaped by patronage (colonial imperialism masked as charity) and the state apparatus (the Arts Council and its increasingly corporate demands)' (2017, p. 530).

2.2.5 Instrumentalization of Artists' and ARIs

As stated by Dillemuth et al (2007) the motives of the state and its institutional bodies are intertwined to the extent that the two are almost indistinguishable. A process in which the public is also implicated through their engagement with these institutional bodies, they write:

> "Cultural and educational institutions as they appear today are nothing more than legal and administrative organs of the dominant system. As with all institutions, they live in and through us; we participate in their structures and programmes, internalise their values, transmit their ideologies and act as their audience/public/social body." (Ibid, p. 378)

In Jones' view, the artist-led is also implicated in the internalisation and transmission of these ideologies and values. Jones describes how the London-based ARIs Space Studios and Acme, as well as the concentration of studios that emerged from the 1960s onwards in London's St Catherine's Wharf, provided a model of using ARIs to gentrify areas that has subsequently been employed across the UK (2021b).

The origins of the gentrification to which Jones is referring relate to New Labour's knowledge-based economy. The premise of a knowledge-based economy is that it would be built on higher learning and education levels, qualifications that help to ensure labour mobility and flexible working, both of which were largely already present in the working patterns of those in the creative industries (Oakley, 2004). These strategies of DCMS were heavily influenced by urban theorist Richard Florida, whose ideas became popular among many UK policy makers because they appeared to build on pre-existing plans (Oakley, 2004). Florida (2004; 2014) argues that in the knowledge economy, different regions can gain a competitive edge through quickly mobilizing the best 'creative workers' and resources to turn innovations into new business ideas and commercial products. His 'creative workers' are composed of a sizable cross-section of workers broadly defined as 'people in design, education, arts, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or creative content' (Florida, 2004, p. 8). In this, artists are grouped with scientists, engineers, academics, architects, musicians, and people in the media and entertainment industries. A

grouping that is largely mappable onto DCMS conception of the creative industries[2], which are defined as…

> '…those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (DCMS, 2001)

Jones study identifies the disjuncture between the intrinsic values underpinning and sustaining many artist-led practices and this instrumental application of the arts to serve extrinsic economic ends (2021b). In Jones' longitudinal study of the scope and value of artist-led organisations, the responses of individuals involved in those initiatives revealed that they considered their activity 'not to be an enterprise focused on economic gain, but a lifestyle which offers them creative independence and self-determination.' (Jones, 1996). Their recent reanalysis and condensing of the same data taken from 1993-1996 is captured in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Summary of data from 'Measuring the experience: the scope and value of artist-led organisations' by Susan Jones

Funding Bodies	**Artist-led Initiatives**

[2] Alongside advertising, architecture, antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software and computer services, television and radio

Artist-led valuable within short-term policy implementation: by fulfilling requirements for visual arts development, audience growth, community participation, access for disadvantaged groups, improvement of arts provision in (some way) or supporting artists' enterprises where these contribute to an area's economic well-being	Personal and artistic development and realising a vision over a longer time frame. Whether through setting up what others may describe as a small business or concerned with identifying new working processes and collaborations with other professionals, and generating different kinds of social relationships, a common factor is length of time for achieving any significant outcomes.

(Jones, 2021b)

One consequence of this disjuncture is that it benefits some activities more than others through increased odds of being awarded funding. As Jones states, funding bodies tend to favour '…aspects of the artist-led which are more palatable to and measurable by economics-based arts development yardsticks and are more easily cross-referenced to existing traditional institutional structures' (ibid). Furthermore, Jones notes that the majority of 'artist-led' organisations since 2018 that have been regularly funded by ACE as National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) are '…permanent, building-based charitable organisations' (ibid). This suggests a preclusion of a range of other ARI models for which such artist-led groups that benefit as NPOs '…are unwitting supporters of a biased and unfair art system for artists' (ibid).

The next section moves on from looking at the effect of the changes in UK arts and cultural policy over the past 25 years' and its current fractured and contradictory state. Instead, it looks at the shifts in understandings of the value of art through an art historical lens that relate to current conceptions of ARIs' value. As identified by Hesmondhalgh et al., neo-liberalism is only one part of the

sociological explanation of the changes to cultural policy since New Labour, but rather it occurred through the combination of '…neo-liberal, conservative and economistic conceptions of policy with the crisis of aesthetic value associated with 'postmodernism" (2015).

2.3 Part c.

2.3.1 How can Value be Understood in the Context of this Research?

The ambiguity and contestation of value can be understood as a reflection of the context-dependent and relational nature of value that is never fixed but always contingent on the specific social, cultural, and spatial contexts in which it is produced and consumed. The art world is an arena where different conceptions of value are contested by actors (individual and collective) that differ in terms of bias, agency, and positionality. It is also a site where these actors, at various points, work together either by choice or necessity. The art world is messy, opaque, and contradictory. Consequently, across the social field of art, value has been expressed in terms of various dyadic distinctions. Eiss and Pederson, in their discussion of value, inadvertently and succinctly capture the breadth of the debate presented in this literature review:

> "Value is about measure or meaning; it is material or symbolic, secular, or sacred, abstract or concrete, individual or collective, qualitative or quantitative, global or local. Its origins and concepts can be found in either production or in exchange, in structures or in process."
>
> (Eiss and Pedersen, 2002, p. 283)

ARIs are a particular social constellation within the social world of art, defined and contested through their perceived affiliation with a contested set of values. Depending on their form and structure, these ARIs can traverse various parts of the art world where their value is understood differently.

Given the ambivalent nature of the social field, coupled with the ambiguity of the term 'value,' it is necessary to define and narrow the parameters of this thesis' discussion.

This thesis focuses on the concept of value in a sociological sense. Value is understood as a 'keyword' (Bennett;Grossberg and Morris, 2005)) that operates within a network of related words, where the meaning of each word on its own is ambiguous and has several potentially contradictory meanings or connotations. It is understood that the ambiguity of the term 'value' is used, whether consciously or not, to impose one worldview while excluding others, and often the most appropriate meaning or connotation that suits a given person's agenda or matches their worldview is chosen, with inconvenient alternatives ignored. In this sense, value is experiential, conditional, subjective, social, and political. This is perhaps lucidly articulated by Berkert and Aspers (2011) , as cited in Phillips (2015), in there speculation on what makes something considered valuable they write:

> "Value has several interrelated dimensions. In social life, different forms of value are present simultaneously, such as moral value, aesthetic value, and economic value. Each form of value has a scale used for evaluating the things that value covers. An activity may be judged as more or less ethical, and an object may be more or less beautiful, more or less appropriate, or more or less expensive. These different scales of value exist concurrently…"

(ibid, p. 6)

As evidenced through this chapter, there are several concurrent understandings of value attributable to ARIs. Thornton's depiction of the art world as a cluster of conflicting subcultures) illustrates that the actors of the 'art world' do not necessarily exist in one 'subculture' alone, but rather generally move from one to the next and/or commonly exist as members of several simultaneously (ibid). As such, different understandings of the value of art and ARIs cut across and coexist within these fields and are not necessarily unique to a particular one (ibid).

On the transferability of transference of one value across settings, it is useful to consider Appadurai's term 'regimes of value,' which he explains, "…does not imply that every act of commodity exchange presupposes a complete cultural sharing of assumptions, but rather that the degree of value coherence may be highly variable from situation to situation and from commodity to commodity" In this sense, ARIs are understood as value systems, meaning they can be seen as visible constellations of values (including interrelated norms, beliefs, fictions, models, ideals, and so forth) that exist around an activity. In Thornton's (2009) conception of the 'art world,' an ARI would be one value system within a network of value systems. These values are internally conceived by individuals through their interpretation of personal events and experiences. As such, it is through the process of valuation and measurement that these values appear. For instance, Dewey writes:

> "…speaking literally, there are no such things as values. … There are things, all sorts of things, having the unique, the experienced, but undefinable, quality of value. Values in the plural, or value in the singular, is merely a convenient abbreviation for an object, event, situation, res, possessing the quality. Calling the thing a value is like calling the ball struck in baseball, a hit, or a foul".

(Dewey, 1923, p. 617)

Dewey is pointing to the abstract nature of value and values when removed from an activity or experience to attach it to. In this sense value and valuation are part of the same act. As Muniesa (Muniesa, 2011) outlines, Dewey's thinking, collapses the question of value as being either subjective or objective: as real or of simulacrum but as action linked to experience.

Considering value as the product and process of experience, and its context-dependent and relational nature, this thesis provides two complementary novel frameworks for understanding value in *System.* The first being Massey's 'sense of place' (Massey, 1991; Massey, 2005) that highlights the dynamic and relational processes that continually reshape value within *System.* The second being Guibernau's 'belonging' (Guibernau, 2013) to shows how value generation in *System* is rooted in social identities and collective experiences. Together, these concepts offer a nuanced understanding of how value is constructed, experienced, and contested in the messy, opaque, and contradictory world of *System.*

This thesis argues that value within *System* is contestable and fluid because it is continually being renegotiated through lenses of belonging and spatial relations. The thesis argues that value is the result of complex interplay of the valuation activities of between belonging, place, and politics of friendship. *System*, as both a social and spatial entity, is shaped by the collective identities and social bonds of their members (belonging) and by the dynamic interactions and power relations within and between these spaces (sense of place).

2.3.2 Rationale for Study

This work contributes to a growing body of literature on the value of ARIs and artist-run activity by centring the process and experience of valuation within *System* – which accounts for the 'potent emotional content' (Guibernau, 2013) contained it.

In this vein, I propose an autoethnography that places focus on individual forms of self-narrative, identity-making, and sense of belonging that can offer a critical and reflective understanding of the processes of operating an ARI to inform understanding of the forms of value this can produce (in this case myself and *System*). By using my access there lies an opportunity to meaningfully contribute to the conversation around value generation within *System* as an insider looking out, rather than an outsider looking in.

This study uses *System* as a site for the generation, dissemination, and discussion of ideas around the forms of value generated within artist-run initiatives (ARI). Given the breadth of ARI practice, it is important to acknowledge that *System* is a specific mode of ARI operating within a specific context. It is based in the northeast of England and its purpose is enabling the display of art that is produced in relation to modern discourses of art within locations relating to similar discourses – usually in 'meanwhile spaces' (Bishop, 2012) that approximate the appearance of traditional gallery interiors. As stated earlier in this chapter, the intention of this thesis is not to arrive at some arcane-radical-meta-theory. Instead, the aim is to work towards an articulation of value generation within *System* that potentially resonates among others' experience of other ARIs without generalizing. This research is not justified so much through finding a 'gap' in existing knowledge or crafting a novel research proposal, rather it seeks to build on the work of others and enter into and contribute to ongoing discussions as a collaboration (For example see Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011).

Despite the prolificacy of ARIs it is an under-researched area as presented in the disparate range of sources drawn on for this literature review. There is however an emerging body of research and researchers addressing this gap in the literature which this research complements and supports, including several recently completed PhDs. For instance, Wright's PhD (2019) explores the notion of friendship and its role in the formation and continued life of artist-led collectives, drawing heavily on the work of curator-writer Condorelli[3] (2010). Similarly, Prescott's PhD (2018) offers an exploration of the interrelationship between art and urban space evident in the experimental practices, materialities, and infrastructures through an ethnographic study of artist-run spaces contained within the East Pilgrim Street Block, Newcastle-upon-Tyne[4]. Additionally, Coffield's PhD (2014) explored cultural construction within ARIs through three case studies all based in the United Kingdom: *85A* in Glasgow, *Empty Shop* in Durham and *The Mutual* in Glasgow. Pryde-Jarman's (2013) practice-based PhD questions how curatorial practices within artist-curator-run spaces can work in ways as to contest hegemonic structures within the field through exploring the role of critique within curatorial practice. Schofield's PhD proposes a new terminology and critical reimagining of 'artist-led' culture particularly as it developed in the UK since the 2007 Financial Crisis (2021).

As this study focuses on *System* this study primarily takes place in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the research project has local relevance to the city. Newcastle-upon-Tyne contains several ARIs that continue to make up a key part of its cultural landscape and recent and ongoing research activity on ARIs in and around the city. Both Coffield and Prescott were part of the team for *Mapping*

[3] Condorelli's work though not referenced hugely in this research were key in the development of my early thinking. For instance, Appendix A. owes much to Condorelli's writing on often-hidden, notional ideas of support and friendship.

[4] *System* for a time was based in *Bamburgh House* which was a tower block leased by *Breeze Creatives* as a multi-storey collection of creative workspaces. For a time over my PhD, *System* was based on one of the floors of *Bamburgh House,* however this was after the timeframe Prescott was conducting their study.

Gateshead, an ESRC funded five-month project surveying and reimaging creative and cultural activity in Gateshead (Gateshead., 2022) They are also both part of the core group of researchers (Coffield as Principal Investigator and formed of staff from *Newcastle University*, *Northumbria University, Newcastle City Council,* and *The Newbridge Project*) on *More Than Meanwhile Spaces*, a collaborative and transdisciplinary project exploring long-term futures for artist-run initiatives and workspaces in the Northeast of England. This has been extended into a subsequent project, *Making the Clayton Street Corridor.* which the *More Than Meanwhile Spaces* team between April 2022 and December 2022 ran a series of workshops and created resources to 'support meaningful collaboration between grassroots artists/creative practitioners and policymakers' on the development of a Creative and Cultural Zone in Newcastle-upon-Tyne's city centre (Making the Clayton Street Corridor, n.d.). The report produced at the end of the project identified several key actions to be taken forward, including '…to get better at storytelling / 'consciousness raising' so that the concerns of grassroots artists (and what they do) is really powerful' (Coffield *et al.*, 2023, p. 66). The inference here, is that it will help to create more mutual understanding between the 'grassroots artists' and stakeholders in the hope of securing more relevant and substantial support for the former. It is a strategy that is used by grassroots advocacy initiatives beyond just Newcastle-upon-Tyne, such as *Industria's* and *a-n The Artists Information Company's* recently published report 'Structurally F–cked' that has gathered testimonies from over 100 artists to advocate for publicly funded institutions to offer better pay and working conditions for artists (Olufemi;Jacques and Tan, 2023).

The power of personal testimony and autobiographical account, such as that in 'Structurally F-cked,' comes from the writers' ability to draw out the emotion of their individual experience at the same time as writing about a collective social experience (ibid). The weakness of the report in my view however, and other reports like it that advocate for more equitable treatment of artists and other cultural workers, is that it is reliant on a very generalised conception and

discourse surrounding arts' value (See WAGE., 2022). Whilst sympathetic to the cause[5], in demanding the status of 'worker' and demanding wages from the shared wealth of the state is equivalent to, as stated by Beech, a demand for '…wealth justified by the status of art' (2019, p. 61).

It also runs counter to claims of artist autonomy, as the classification of artist as worker places the state as consumer of a particular product or service, over which it has authority (ibid, p. 62). As such advocacy for more equitable pay and better working conditions for the arts, including ARIs, needs to be delivered with an articulation of the forms of value it generates as well as an articulation of the conditions necessary to foster that value. My positionality within *System,* offers an opportunity to contribute to this need through offering an understanding of value which contains the messy, ambivalent, and emotional elements within a specific case study in *System.* To this end, the next chapter discusses the study's methodological approach and its theoretical underpinning.

[5] Especially as someone that often falls into the groups these reports are advocating for.

Chapter 3. Methodological Approach

"Stories are compasses and architecture, we navigate by them, we build our sanctuaries and our prisons out of them, and to be without a story is to be lost in the vastness of a world that spreads in all directions like arctic tundra or sea ice."

(Solnit, 2013, p. 3)

"Visual arts asks the grandest questions, about the most essential ingredients of existence: about time, space, perception, value, creation, identity, beauty. It makes mute objects speak, and it renews the elements of the world through the unexpected, or it situates the everyday in a way that asks us to wake and up and notice. This kind of art raises fundamental questions about the act of making, about what it means, whom it is for, what happens in that engagement with materials and history and embodied imagination."

(Ibid, pp. 192-193)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes this PhDs' methodology and its theoretical underpinning. Through this it justifies using an autoethnography that centralises myself as the research subject and reflexively connects my subjective experiences to broader social, political, and cultural concerns and contexts. It justifies this approach through the emergent relational ontological understanding it fosters and captures to make a meaningful contribution to the discussions and debates in the literature outlined in the previous chapter. This autoethnography takes both written and visual forms in its incorporation of artistic and curatorial methods and objects for their capacity to, as stated by Butt, ' [move] into or out of the realm of the sayable' (Butt, 2012). This theoretical underpinning will set the ground for subsequent chapters where aspects of autoethnographic writing sit alongside academic writing. This interaction between the forms of writing that describe the development of my thinking, and sense of identity and purpose in relation to *System* to reveal an understanding of the shifting and multiple forms of value contained within *System*.

This chapter is split into several sections. Firstly, it offers an overview of the approach and the methods employed. Secondly it justifies the approach in terms of how the findings could contribute to academic and public discourse of the value of ARIs. The third and fourth sections justify *System* as the research site and myself as research subject and highlights how I incorporated reflexivity into my approach to account for potential bias and ensure the findings had applicability beyond *System.* The fifth section explains the ethical considerations in this approach and how these were navigated. The sixth section outlines how data was analysed – specifically the relationship between my subjective experiences or interpretation of events, and broader social, cultural and political discussion. In relation to this, the seventh section explains how the autoethnographic writing sits alongside the academic writing and the decision to 'show' rather than simply 'tell' my findings (Ellis and Bochner, 1996, p. 4). Finally,

the chapter concludes by summarising the key parts of the chapter together and leads into the next chapter.

3.2 Overview

I have foregrounded this chapter with two quotes taken from Rebecca Solnit's *The Faraway Nearby* (ibid) to paint a picture of the theoretical underpinning of my methodological approach. Solnit's book defies easy categorization as it is a collection of various types of writing, including, but not limited to memoir, prose poetry, literary criticism, and fairy-tale. In her book these are interwoven to effectively draw and map territories of storytelling that each of us use to reframe how we see ourselves and present ourselves to others. As captured in the latter quote, for Solnit, these stories can be encapsulated in and perceived through artworks. As part of this research, I produced a methodological approach to marshal the capacity of stories to explore and reflect on forms of value within *System*.

The methodological approach outlined in this chapter has been formed through many interwoven stages of doing, thinking, feeling, and revision across various points of time. As with practice-based research these processes are tacit, internal, emotive, bodily, and littered with serendipitous happenings (du Preez, 2014). The validity of such an approach to this project is not measured by how closely another researcher will be able to replicate the same process(es) and arrive at the same result. Rather, I understand the methodology of art practice-based research as necessarily often improvisational by nature. As stated by Hughes (2014), arts practice-based research needs to be able to…

> "…develop autonomously, on its own terms and according to its own precepts (the artist's assumed prerogative), while yet being charged with a revitalising function to add new methods and imaginative possibilities to established scientific conventions."
>
> (Ibid, p. 55).

In line with this, a substantial part of this research has centred on the iterative development of the method to addressing the research question. This bears some resemblance to Law's (2004) writing on 'messy' subjects. Regarding this, Law states 'we're going to have to teach ourselves to think, to practise, to relate, and to know in new ways … to know some of the realities of the world using methods unusual to or unknown in social science [that are] broader, looser, more generous' (Ibid, p. 4). To this end, this research incorporates art practice-based research and autoethnography to study understandings of value that emphasise embodiment, experiential understanding, and intimate encounter.

This study uses the following research methods:

- Autoethnography – creative writing, participatory observations
- Art-practice – curation, poetry, photography, moving image, recorded performance

Although presented as two separate threads here, these two methodologies were unified as part of the same methodological approach. In this, I accept autoethnography has the capacity to function as a work of art by possessing the aesthetic properties to do so. Also, vice-versa, an artwork can demonstrate a reflexivity that allows it to perform as an autoethnographic product or the

process of its production to form part of an autoethnography. Over the course of this PhD, I used both aforementioned research methods not through a set of linear stages or concrete research design, but rather an iterative, emergent methodology that through later stages of theoretical analysis and revision 'fed back' into the research design. As a result of this process, the finalised research exposition emerged as a bricolage of moving image, photography, creative writing, and curated material from *System.* As proposed by Borgdorff, art practice qualifies as research when…

> "…its purpose is to expand our knowledge and understanding by conducting an original investigation in and through art objects and creative processes. Art research begins by addressing questions that are pertinent in the research context and in the art world. Researchers employ experimental and hermeneutic methods that reveal and articulate the tacit knowledge that is situated and embodied in specific art works and artistic processes. Research processes and outcomes are documented and disseminated in an appropriate manner to the research community and the wider public."
>
> (2006, p. 8)

As such, as much as this written commentary documents and traces the development of the practice-based outputs and processes and serves as a critical commentary of the research project and findings. It is also a way of framing my PhD examiners' encounter with the finalised research output in an 'appropriate manner' that demonstrates how it has expanded shared knowledge and understanding of the topic. Additionally, I want the finalised research product to enable a wider public and community of artists, who unlike my PhD examiners, may not feel obliged to read this written commentary. As such the research exposition needs to function on its own, albeit by communicating a different type

of knowledge. This type of knowledge, to paraphrase Bochner and Ellis, is the kind that helps an audience use my sorrows and triumphs to reflect on or recontextualise their lives (1996, p. 28).

In this thesis I refer to the final presentation of the practice-based element of the PhD as the 'exposition.' This is done to distinguish it from being either artistic practice or academic research, but something which operates **between** the two. This aligns with Schwab and Borgdorff's statement on the contribution and purpose of practice-based research outputs, that is to present 'a reflective distance within itself that allows it to be simultaneously the subject and the object of an enquiry' (2014, p. 15). Therefore, the function of the exposition bears some similarity to the 'show and tell' of autoethnography (2011). This is where 'showing' in autoethnography offers readers the distance to think about events more abstractly than more formalised academic writing, and 'telling' that concisely conveys the necessary information for readers to appreciate what is being 'shown' (*Ibid.*).

In this, the research exposition can be understood as a visual autoethnography presented as an exhibition. A visual autoethnography, as the name suggests, is an autoethnography which utilizes visual elements as part of core part of it, these visual elements are typically produced by the researcher (Pink, 2021). The Research Exposition features artworks produced by artists besides me and also artworks made in collaboration with other artists, the justification, for both is that collectively they represent the social bonds and 'sense of place' of *System.* My authorship is in the artistic-curatorial framework of these objects. This is discussed in Chapter 6.

This chapter focuses on the justification and development of the methodological approach that I developed and used in this PhD.

3.3 Rationale for research approach

Church assesses the level of social analysis accomplished from an autoethnographic approach as being based on two assumptions, firstly, '…it is possible to learn about the general from the particular…' and secondly, '…the self is a social phenomenon' (Church, 1995, p. 5; Ellis;Adams and Bochner, 2011). In defence of these two assumptions, they continue: 'writing about myself is a way of writing about these others and about the worlds which we create/inhabit… Because my subjective experience is part of the world, the story which emerges is not completely private and idiosyncratic' (ibid, p. 5). Autoethnography connects individual lived experience to shared experience and broader social and cultural realities. As stated by Mykhalovskiy, 'to write individual experience is, at the same time, to write social experience' (Mykhalovskiy, 1996, p. 141). In exploring oneself you inevitably write about others, as noted by Schwalbe:

> "…reflecting on my reactions to [other] activities, in light of my own biography helped me to understand …Every insight was both a doorway and a mirror – a way to see into their experience and a way to look back at mine".
>
> (1996, p. 58)

Establishing links between personal experience and social processes through autobiographical research (such as autoethnography), points to the fallacy of the dichotomies of self/other and individual/social (Sparkes, 2002, p. 217). In

autoethnography and art practice-based research meaning is co-produced as viewers/readers are collaborators as they resist, accept, or identify different intended or unintended meanings. My approach is justified in part politically, as it accommodates the possibility of a multiplicity of understandings of the value of ARIs whilst centring my experience as being vital in and to the research process. It means that although my research centres on my experiences it does so in the hope to connect with wider conversation around the forms of value through and within ARI activity. In line with Ellis, positing an understanding of my experiences allows others to reflect on and manage their lives (2004, p. 50). This combined with a reflexive awareness and constant questioning of my own position, adding depth and sensitivity to my research through acknowledging any prior knowledge and values. This is my contribution to existing and emerging literature on the study of ARIs, which consists of ephemeral material from practitioners, and historical accounts based on location, time periods or specific ARI (Arts, 2001; Ault;Collective and Center, 2002; Wilson *et al.*, 2002; Detterer and Nannucci, 2012; Rosati and Staniszewski, 2012), a number of recently completed PhDs (Pryde-Jarman, 2013; Coffield, 2014; Prescott, 2018; Wright, 2019; Schofield, 2021) and survey research (Jones, 1996).

The incorporation of art practice-based methods into the methodological approach enabled me to explore and point to tacit meaning or forms of value where '…the seeable moves into or out of the realm of the sayable' (Butt, 2012). As Butt further states, 'if a concept can be captured clearly in academic writing…what would be the point of making art with it?' (Ibid). The point is that art research can be an invaluable tool to understand and express forms of value which are inarticulable or unnameable, or at least in written or spoken word alone.

Criticisms of autoethnographic and art practice-based methods and approaches often hinge on their subjectivity and perceived lack of validity in their research

findings. To paraphrase du Preez, I would counter this by stating that often the validity of practice-based research is not measured by how closely another researcher will replicate the same process(es) and arrive at the same result, but that instead the methodology is something which is tacit, internal, emotive, bodily, and littered with serendipitous happenings (2014). Similarly, Ellis, Adams, and Bochner state:

> "For autoethnographers, validity means that a work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible that the feeling what has been represented could be true."
>
> (2011, p. 282)

In this, it is a question of credibility rather than necessarily just validity that is the desired aim of both the autoethnographer and art practice-based researcher. Building on this, Pink describes visual autoethnography as the…

> "…process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture, and individuals) that is based on the ethnographer's own experiences. It does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers' experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced."
>
> (Pink, 2021, p. 22)

Therefore, my positionality and level of access within *System* is an opportunity to represent an 'honest' account or understanding(s) of the forms of value generation which occur. The validity *and* credibility of such an account hinge on

my capacity to be reflexive in my research and writing rather than a depersonalised account. I return to this point later in this chapter.

3.4 System as Research Site

The selection of *System* as research site and myself as autoethnographic subject, is not based on either being remarkable or unique in the ARI field in any way. Given the diversity of the contexts ARIs operate in and forms they can take, it would be incorrect to describe *System* as 'typical' of an ARI or myself as a 'typical' ARI practitioner. However, both *System's* and mine lack of remarkability means that the reality presented, and subsequent findings are applicable beyond itself by, to refer back to Schwalbe, functioning as a 'doorway and mirror' (1996, p. 58).

More than a case study, *System* is used as the research site within which data is generated and findings (often in-progress) are disseminated and shared. The justification for this is primarily to utilise my intimate access through a sustained approach that accommodated *System's* complex social world as recommended in the approach to autoethnography outline by Adams, Jones, and Ellis (2015, p. 9). This approach is justified through Thornton's observation of the splintered nature of the 'art world' that consists of multiple social worlds (2009). *System* is one social world which artists move through and are part of. Like the lives of artists and many ARIs, *System's* activity is precarious, transitory and takes place across different places at multiple times.

As *System's* curator my practice is a social and collaborative one which hinges on brokering relationships with multiple actors. This means that I am well-positioned to make first-hand observations over a sustained period across multiple locations

- including serendipitous run-ins, conversations on social media/email, and meetings in pubs/cafes. Like all social worlds, *System* is messy, uncertain, and fraught with emotion. For instance, during the research *System* was forced to vacate its premises, which through my autoethnographic approach, I was able to capture and explore the potential emotional impact of the precarity within *System.* In many ways my perceived (and changing) relationship between myself and *System* in these various capacities is central to this PhD, an opportunity afforded by my methodological approach. In accordance with this, Kohn writes…

> "…personal accidents and emotion-laden incidents generate lasting but changing memories or reflections – they can quite literally be where 'shit happens' …through the passage of time and space and the maturation of memory, they may come to be recognised as productive sites of anthropological and self- knowledge."
>
> (Kohn, 2010, p. 185)

I captured this through the development and utilisation of a subjective and reflexive 'self' to excavate 'significance through time and space as the tale is remembered, told and re-remembered' (ibid, p. 189). This methodological approach allowed the understanding of self to be revealed as a conscious embodiment of 'actions and understandings of interactions as it reacts to movement through social time and space' (ibid). This allowed for the unveiling of subjective understanding of forms of value generation within *System* as not **separate to** but **interwoven with** personal and social experience.

3.5 Artistic-Curatorial Practice

Within the Literature Review chapter, I locate my PhD within the context of reflexive artistic-curatorial practices such as those of Céline Condorelli and Per Hüttner, as well as ARIs such as *Eastside Projects* and *84 West Broadway*. Through this I provide a theoretical underpinning and contextualisation of my artistic-curatorial practice. This section of the chapter addresses how this manifested through the PhD and was incorporated through and into the methodology.

As practice-based research and *thinking through doing* – I have not had a pre-formed fixed approach to this research. Rather, I have been feeling my way through with a hunch and then pausing to reflect, potentially changing direction and starting again. As stated by Bergdorf in 'Artistic Research within the Fields of Science', practice-based research is about '…searching, exploring and mobilising – sometimes drifting, sometimes driven' (2009: p21), The justification for such an approach to practice is its capacity to respond to the interweaving of various intractable elements that extends to the personal, social, spatial, and cultural.

I began the PhD as an artist who also curated - with these two practices being very distinct and separate - but as my practiced evolved through the PhD I would class myself as an artist-curator who also happens to sometimes make art. This was an unexpected outcome of the PhD and reflexive process of autoethnography. This would become informed heavily by my understanding of *System* as a relational space as described by Massey, for instance, where she writes that space is 'constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny' (Massey, 2005, p. 9). This is discussed further in chapter 4 in exploring the social space of *System* and by extension myself as an agent within it.

My practice is situated in-between rational academic and intuitive experiential practices. The practice that developed and employed in this practice-based

research speaks to Schön's notion of the "reflexive practitioner" (Schön, 1992). The reflexive practitioner is someone who relies on both a knowledge communicable in words and a tacit and intuitive learning rooted in practice. In this vein, I began this PhD with several years' experience of running *System* which meant I arrived at the PhD with an established set of tacit knowledges rooted in improvised learning. Through the autoethnographic process, my understanding of myself and the context I operated in developed further.

Through my improved understanding of my positionality and agency through *System* came a responsibility to 'make space' for others – even within the typically individuated process of completing a PhD – that became my practice. This 'making space' was always part of my practice at *System* prior to beginning the PhD, in that I figuratively offered 'space' for artists and curators to use to publicly exhibit their artwork, raise their profile, develop professional skills and experience, and/or test and develop ideas. I therefore considered it key that the PhD captured some sense of the community and social world surrounding *System.* These became manifested particularly in the exhibitions I curated which featured artworks produced by artists who I had collaborated with *System* throughout the years. This was done with the intended reciprocity where artists' inclusion would contribute to the production of my PhD and in turn I would offer 'space' to artists and curators in the same ways in which I mentioned prior.

Through the PhD, I extended my practice 'making space' in line with the development and increased recognition of my hybridised role as artist-curator and researcher – and the agency this afforded. For instance, my combined experience and knowledge as a practitioner and researcher enabled me to bridge communication links between different stakeholder groups in my role as research assistant for *More Than Meanwhile Spaces* - a collaborative project with academics, art industry leaders, and Newcastle City Council exploring long-term futures for artist-led spaces and workspaces. Through the combination of my

academic knowledge and positionality and trust with the grassroots art's community, I was able to bridge discussion between groups acting as 'translator' of individual's experiences and jargon and 'make space' for grassroots artists to be directly heard and understood by policymakers and be part of the discussion and decision making that potentially impact their lives. Similar, it is about being able to position myself to share my experiences to enable artists and ARI practitioners to look back at their own experiences – through artist residencies, published text, and through conversation with collaborators, exhibition audiences, and other publics. This is presented in the research exposition and detailed further throughout other sections of the thesis, specifically in the discussion of the conclusion chapter when discussing the project's contribution to knowledge.

As detailed within Part a. of the Literature Review, my practice centres around a reflexive approach to my positionality and the field in which to return to Condorelli's term, one of the 'existing conditions' of *System* and my practice is that of friendship and kinship which develop through working conspiratorially with others. This involves me working with others to work towards their goal for an exhibition or project. These goals are often a combination of professional or artistic development, highlight a political or social cause, or broaden their professional or personal networks.

This practice is akin to Eagleton's (Eagleton, 2018a)'reciprocal self-realisation' where my fulfilment is contingent on my collaborators' fulfilment or development in their desired area. Where this has been reciprocated has created the conditions for friendship to form. This is friendship as a social practice rather than necessarily sentiment. Over time collaborating with different people, this created a community and forms of solidarity with my practice and *System* at the centre. Like how Condorelli describes with her practice, friendship is both an enabler and an intended outcome of my practice, she writes:

> "…working together can both start from and create forms of solidarity and/or friendship, which are therefore pursued as both condition and intent, motivating actions and allowing work undertaken."

(Condorelli, 2012, p. 222)

The social space of *System* is discussed further in Chapter 4 and how that created the sense of purpose and allegiance discussed in Chapter 5. The politics of friendship as chapter 6 in relation to how I produced the exposition. I do this in reference to ideas of value located within *System, ARIs,* and artist-led exhibition making practice.

3.6 Positioning the Researcher

The 'reflexive turn' (Clifford and Marcus, 1986) marked a growing consideration and concern for the positionality of the researcher within their research and the conclusions drawn from it. Contained within the idea of the 'reflexive turn' is the acceptance of multiple meanings rather than one single 'truth.' This is reflective of Haraway's 'situated knowledge's' (1988), in that all knowledge stems from positional perspectives and social practices which are entrenched culturally, socially, and historically. It is therefore important to state that my view of the world is through that of a white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, working-class (with middle-class-ness in arms reach) male lens. There are several affordances that come with this that impact my view of the world and ability to navigate the world, which may be different for other people who identify or are perceived differently by others. I am also an anarcho-communist meaning I believe in the decentralisation and democratisation of cultural production and consumption (among other shared public commodities). By extension I am opposed to

hierarchical and centralised policymaking that allocates the spending of public money. In this, part of my motivation for undertaking this PhD was born out of a dissatisfaction with the perceived unfair and ineffective ways in which Arts Council England and DCMS serve the public. Rather, in my view, that enact a neoliberal agenda which mostly serves the needs of an elite minority. This research is not explicitly Political with a capital 'P' but aspects of it could be understood through that lens.

I was partially attracted to use autoethnography as a methodology as it can be used to challenge canonical ways of performing research and to question what is considered knowledge within research (Richardson, 2003). By not claiming neutrality and using tenets of autobiography and ethnography, autoethnography treats research as a socially-just and socially conscious act (Jones and Adams, 2016). The result is a process and product, which is self-consciously value-centred rather than value-free. By using myself as an ethnographic exemplar within this research, this explicitly becomes **my** positional perspective of the research field based on **my** cultural, social, and historical understanding of my relationship to the world. Whilst positionality 'reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study' (Savin-Baden and Howell-Major, 2013, p. 71) this is shaped within various culturally ascribed and subjective and contextual experiences that took place before the research began. Rather than trying to eliminate any bias or separate myself from the research I identified and used my biases, preconceptions, and positionality as part of the research material, focusing on the intersubjective, relational nature of any research encounter.

My perspective and understanding of the 'research field' changed repeatedly throughout the time of my study. This was shaped by the research process itself and several events which had a direct impact on me and *System.* These events included situations which happened strictly within the context of *System* (such as the loss of venue) and the wider world (such as Covid-19). Throughout the

research I have endeavoured to lay out my biases and preconceptions (and misconceptions) and to present them as such rather than a canonical truth. In accordance to Adams, Jones, and Ellis' understanding of the purpose of autoethnography, the goal was to use a reflexive approach to interrogate the relationship between myself and the social, cultural and political and to show myself '…in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of [my] struggles' (2015, p. 2). As such the research was grounded in active self-reflexivity as performed through a continual careful consideration of the ways in which my past experiences, opinions, and position as *System's* curator impacted how I interacted with and interpreted the research scene. The writing and revision of writing (including the autoethnographic, artistic, and this written commentary) and production of practice-based outcomes were integral to this as discoveries emerging from them drove the research inquiry (Richardson, 2003).

3.7 Embedding the Autoethnography

Autoethnography and practice-based artistic research are an approach to research in which the process and the product are bound. Thus far, much of this chapter has focused on my methodological approach as a process and its theoretical underpinning. As I have described, the writing and artefacts are ways of telling stories that connect my subjective experiences with broader social, cultural, and political contexts, and to co-construct meaning through readers and audiences reflecting on and potentially revaluating their opinions and experiences. This written commentary is used to capture the research as a standalone text but also to contextualise and work **with** the final research exposition.

Using myself as an ethnographic exemplar enables me to illuminate the contours of the social-cultural life of *System* by showing myself in '…the process of figuring

out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of [my] struggles' (Adams;Jones and Ellis, 2015, p. 2). Therefore, this research is in-flux as any understanding of value is always fleeting because, as discussed in the later chapters, it is in response to a shifting set of social conditions and developing sense of identity and belonging. My experience of writing this written commentary has at times been like trying to catch smoke. In this sense the writing has become a key part of the data gathering and analysis. As it is with autoethnography, the purpose of this research is to show the process of me performatively (re)constituting myself and self in relation to *System* through the telling of stories or interpretation of events.

In the proceeding chapters there are, broadly speaking, two writing styles that sit side by side and at times are interwoven: autoethnography offering personal narrative and critical analysis connecting the personal to broader social, cultural, and political issues. That certainly is not to suggest that autoethnography cannot be critical or analytical on its own, but adopting assorted styles allowed me to focus on aspects of the research and to be reflective. The combination of these different writing styles had four advantages in, to paraphrase Ellis and Bochner again 'showing' rather than to 'telling' the reader (1996, p. 4) . These were:

1) The first reason being to find an authentic voice through which to give the reader a sense of me as a full human being. Writing autoethnography frees oneself from traditional conventions of academic writing. In this instance, the use of colloquial and informal phrasing (including expletives) in some of the writing was a way of revealing myself as a full human being (Sparkes, 2002, p. 14). The slippages and ruptures between the more informal, diaristic and traditional academic ways of writing, were a way of demonstrating different forms of knowing and understanding and their relationship to one another as it relates to my multiple perspectives as *System's* curator, PhD researcher, and an individual. It was a way of

writing my positionality into the text as it shifted and was constantly shifting.

2) Similarly, it allowed me to draw attention to the writing style and presentation to show how the aesthetic of writing '…declares a reality but simultaneously reveals itself to be make believe' (Sparkes, 2002, p. 19). This was to highlight the constructed nature in how I used stories of or connected to *System* to produce various personal narratives as to understand my life experience as coherent, intelligible, and meaningful as well as frameworks of meaning through which I act, think, interpret, and relate. It was also used to point toward the constitutive nature of concepts like identity and belonging that feature prominently in the research.

3) As much as autobiographical stories contain an emotional foreshadowing where the narrator knows at the beginning of the story what they could have known only at the end, they have a temporary and temporal nature to them. The telling and retelling of stories is a way of reflecting the fleeting and unresolvable nature of concepts like value and meaning, and the precarious nature of *System* itself.

4) Beyond providing a meta-narrative, the incorporation of autoethnography allowed for the possibility to reach audiences beyond academia. This can make personal and social change possible for more people (Hooks, 1994; Goodall, 2006; Ellis, 2010). As value-centred work, I hope to increase my own consciousness but also to enable others to reflect on their own lives through reflecting on mine.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

As Law (2004) argues, research methods do not simply describe social realities but also help create them. The implication being research is always political. It also significantly raises the question of what kind of social realities we want to create. Following Law, this research emphasises the virtue of the methodological process as both theoretical and practical; as a non-neutral means of producing knowledge; and as ongoing, iterative, and evolving. Methodology, insights, and conclusions were continually informed and reassessed throughout.

Early in the research stages I conducted several interviews with artists at *System* and people affiliated with other ARIs in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This was done with the intention of critically extending the autoethnography, however this data was not used in the end. Instead, *System's* vacation from its premises of over 10 years and my subsequent shock and (re)writing of self and self in relationship to *System* seemed too valuable and opportunistic a moment to pass-up. Therefore, the focus was shifted onto focusing solely on the autoethnography to highlight the personal struggles and revelations this moment uncovered. The worry was that in performing both the autoethnography and the interviews I would risk spreading myself too thinly by not allowing myself the necessary time to be reflexive in processing and revealing my emotions and responses to what was a personally traumatic event.

Even though that interview data was not used in the PhD, it was captured and stored. All interviewees were made aware of the purpose of the study and how their data will be stored through giving them a research information sheet (Appendix. B) and the opportunity to ask me any questions before signing over their interview data to the study. Appendix. C is a draft sample interview schedule for the semi-structured interviews. It was explained to all interviewees that their participation was completely voluntary and that they had the right to

withdraw at any time. In this instance any data involving that interviewee or where they are mentioned would have been removed also. Interview transcripts together with field notes and other writing are written in a way as to prevent the identification of individuals (attempting to remove data that may have rendered individuals recognisable to others, to the best of my ability) unless permission was granted to do so. All the interview recordings were uploaded onto a password-protected computer, and both the recorder and the computer were kept securely. All interview participants were provided a copy of interview transcripts and encouraged to highlight any potentially sensitive or identifying information and offered the option to omit any or all their interview transcript. This research was approved on 29th November 2018 by Newcastle University's Ethics Committee. This is a requirement of all HaSS (Humanities, Arts, and Social Science) students at Newcastle University to ensure projects are valid, appropriate, and incorporate good ethical standards.

Just as with the interviews, my autoethnography followed common principles of ethics research including ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent from named individuals – in addition to making decisions to consider the wellbeing of others whenever incorporating them into my own story. Even with the best intentions I could not however guarantee anonymity for those who I have not been able to seek approval from, as anything I may have considered unidentifiable might not have been for others. As with all research, particularly those exploring a specific community group, those involved often know they are being discussed and can identify other individuals. Additionally, in autoethnography 'when we write about ourselves, we also write about others' and run the same risk that readers could identify featured individuals (Ellis, 2007, p. 14). In some cases, these individuals may have not consented to be portrayed in ways which reveal their identity, or if they had, not fully understand to what they had consented to (Ibid). Regarding this, to garner and recognise mutual respect, dignity and connectedness between myself and others I utilised relational ethics in line with Ellis (Ibid). The spirit of this relational ethics is:

'Being true to one's character and responsible for one's actions and their consequences on others' (Slattery and Rapp, 2003, p. 55 cited in ; Ellis, 2007). Given the unpredictability of the research environment and the embedded nature of my methodological approach, this meant that my responses or behaviours within situations could not be planned ahead of time. Considering the 'mess' (Law, 2004) of the social reality I was exploring, the exercising of reflexivity was at times a reactive process, which in the words of Frank means:

> "We do not act on principles that hold for all times. We act as best we can at a particular time, guided by certain stories that speak to that time, and other people's dialogical affirmation that we have chosen the right stories…The best any of us can do is to tell one another our stories of how we have made choices and set priorities. By remaining open to other people's responses to our moral maturity and emotional honesty…we engage in the unfinalized dialogue of seeking the good."
> (Frank, 2004, pp. 191-192)

This sometimes meant making ethical judgements over which stories and aspects of those stories to tell through the research. One such instance is of the story I tell of *System* being vacated from the top floor of *Bar Loco.* This story felt like an important one to tell as the precarious arrangements around building use is common for ARIs, and the effect upon '…platitudes of resilience and mild acceptance' (Welsh, 2020) written in a column for Corridor 8 about a presentation I gave at a conference telling a version of this story. As a value-centred enquiry the inclusion of stories was done in the belief it could potentially perform a caregiving function for readers when they need it (Mairs, 1993). As this research is rooted in lived experience, like in life, I had to make choices in difficult and ambiguous circumstances. It is worth pointing out also, that I protected to the best of my ability the anonymity of this individual by not revealing their name or providing any detail that may make them identifiable. Rather, as with the rest of the research, I only included the detail and

information to retain the essence and meaningfulness of the story whilst retaining as much anonymity as possible (Bochner and Ellis, 2003). The way these stories are told is in the process of me trying to understand rather than me reaching a point of understanding and casting judgement or implicating anybody. This is done with the intention of, through the writing, entering a dialogical relationship with the reader around what that the (potential) meaning of the circumstances in the story is rather than make or invite moral judgements, particularly ones based on my one perspective and/ or partial knowledge of the situation.

3.9 Data Analysis

This PhD and the stories contained in it exist to 'show' rather than to 'tell' (Ellis and Bochner, 1996, p. 4). These stories are intended to be reanalysed, revised, and retold rather than settled and theorized. As stated in earlier chapter, this research is an interpretive study in search of meaning rather than an experimental scientific one in search of universal law. Like creative or artistic practice, data analysis can be improvisational and messy (Murchison, 2010, p. 181). As the motivation behind adopting a practice-based PhD rather than a text-based one was to have the capacity to accommodate the ambiguities and uncertainties contained within *System*. As revealed in the later chapters, these two characteristics are integral features of *System* and my experience of it. Themes were however identified from rereading field notes and texts, but also the writing process itself was a way of sorting through my experience and to also connect it to wider themes and contexts.

Additionally, this research was a transgressive activity, and therefore the findings and products of this research are something to be 'used' rather than 'received' (Bochner and Ellis, 2003, p. 507). They are an invitation for readers or viewers to

consider what it potentially **means** and how it potentially **feels** to be involved in *System* and how this might inform or shape the forms of value within it. Therefore, some analysis of the 'data' was conducted in conversation with different audiences, and their behaviour and responses to the work were invaluable in pushing the development of the practice and research (Candy, 2011, p. 40). This was done through seminars and presentations of work (both in-progress and finished) with PhD peers, my supervisors, invited academics and artistic researchers, all of whom contributed to this research by sharing with me their experiences with and understandings of ARIs.

Similarly, some exhibitions that I curated under the banner of *System* (Appendix. D) were used to test and disseminate works/ideas in-progress and discuss with *System's* artists and visitors. Through discussion and observation, I was able to assess the extent to which the research products engaged readers and viewers intellectually, emotionally, ethically, and/or aesthetically, and their ability or willingness to engage. They were also opportunities to use my access and position within *System* to converse with exhibiting artists, audience members, and members of other ARIs within my network. Usually this was done informally and serendipitously as to remain embedded within the research field. To paraphrase Fine, this enabled me to conduct my research project 'with' and 'for' the *System's* artists rather than 'in' and 'about' them (2003). The type of questions asked, and topics of the discussion would be informed by ongoing findings from my data analysis and fed back into it.

3.10 Summary

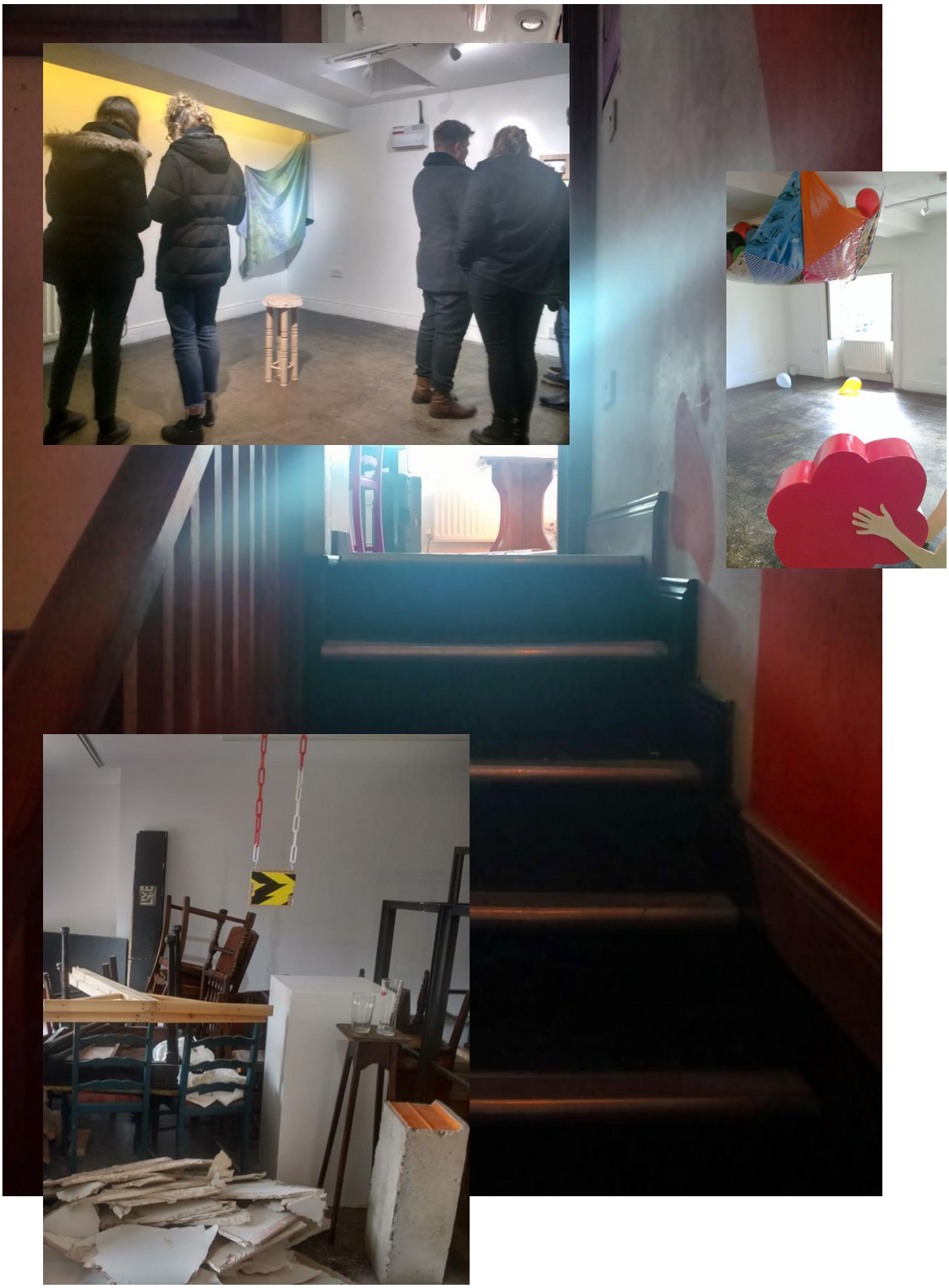
In summary, what has been outlined here is not a directly replicable set of processes but rather a theoretical underpinning and set of tools to interrogate my life within *System.* This approach had the benefit of both being embedded

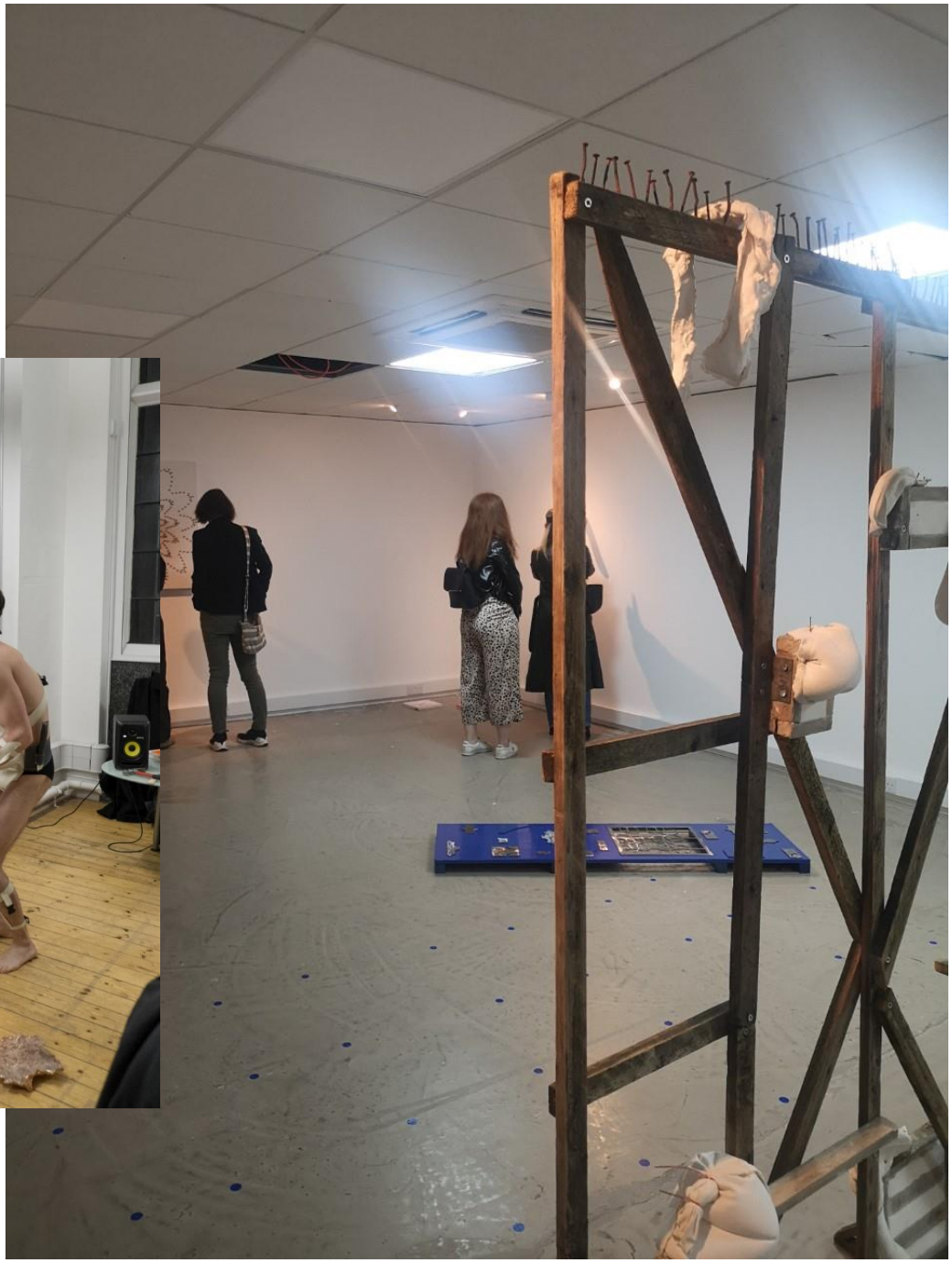
intellectually and emotionally into *System*, but also in the practice of running *System.* Importantly it did this whilst retaining or allowing for the critical distance for me to reflect and connect my subjective experiences with broader social, cultural, and political contexts. This is so my PhD and its findings will have use beyond *System* and to feed into ongoing discussions and debates of forms of value generated within ARIs within and beyond academia. The retention of distance meant that I could critically interrogate those experiences and how they speak to different understandings of value generated within *System.*

Later chapters reveal how weaving these stories into different self-narratives generated different understandings of value generation within *System*. This thesis argues that it in developing a greater understanding lived experience of value generation leads to more nuanced insights on the forms of value being generated.

Just as Dewey's conceptualisation of 'experience' (1934) emphasizes the interaction between individuals and their environment, where meaning is constructed through lived experience. Lived experience is directly tied to value generation, as Dewey posits that values emerge from the quality of experiences and the consequences they produce, with richer, more fulfilling experiences fostering more optimal conditions for value generation (ibid.).

Chapter 4. Space is the Place







Previous page: centre image of stairwell leading to *System's* gallery above *Bar Loco,* clockwise from top left - Photo taken at preview of *Sentiment* exhibition (Appendix E.), install photo of *Dishwasher Safe* (Appendix F.), install photo of *Manner of Flying* (Appendix G.).

Current page: Left image of Tommy Keenan's performance as part of *Insert Exhibition Title* (Appendix H.).

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reflects on my autoethnographic writing drawing on Doreen Massey's thought on 'sense of place' (Massey, 1991; Massey, 2005) to reveal the social space of *System* as being nebulous, permeable, multiplicitous, and ever-evolving.

Massey's conception of space is best articulated as a set of three intertwined propositions –

- Space is the product of social interrelations.
- Space is the sphere of the possibility of co-existent multiplicity.
- Space is process and is always *under construction.*

(Anderson, 2008, p. 228)

In this, Massey's conceptualisation of 'space' is an open, dynamic environment where various social interactions occur (2005; 2010). Central her theory of space is her perception of the problematic of hierarchical dualisms of space and time that implicate space as being inert and devoid of politics (Werner et al., 2018). Massey's concept of 'Place' exists as a localized manifestation of broader interactions within her wider field of interrelations. A 'sense of place' refers to a specific configuration of space that carries a distinct identity due to its unique combination of social relations present there. Applying this lens to the *System*, it can be understood as a constellation of social trajectories across space and time, making it multiplicitous and open-ended. By conceptualizing space as dynamic and relational, the associated understandings of value generation are, by extension, also dynamic and non-static.

During my PhD, through the analysis of the *System* exhibition and promotional material, and my autoethnographic writing, I noticed that I would refer to System using different perspectives: as a singular 'I,' a collective 'we,' and an abstract 'other.' I used these perspectives interchangeably, often switching within the same piece of writing, both knowingly and unknowingly. The overarching structure of this chapter is built around these three interrelated and concurrent conceptions of the 'space' of *System*:

- Material Space – (abstract 'other')
- Embodied Space – (singular 'I')
- Relational Space – (collective 'we')

These conceptualizations of *System*'s space place different emphasis on its personal, social, and spatial aspects, reflecting its multifaceted nature. In doing this, I hope to uncover how the fluid and dynamic qualities of *System* both shape and are shaped by the people involved, the physical spaces it inhabits, and the relationships cultivated therein. In this, the autoethnographic texts show me in the process of 'figuring out' what *System* is. This process of discovery is inherently tied to the nebulous and permeable nature of *System*; just as Massey describes places as being open and dynamic, my understanding of *System* is also in a state of constant negotiation and redefinition.

These three conceptions are used within the Research Exposition to formulate curatorially and spatially *System* and forms of value generated therein. Some specific elements of the exhibition refer to either the material, embodied, or relational spaces – or a combination thereof. This understanding of the 'sense of place' through the interaction of these concurrent conceptions of space are also

used to describe forms of value generation within *System* and lay a groundwork for the proceeding chapter.

4.2 Material Space – (Abstract 'Other')

This refers to the physical and tangible aspects of *System,* specifically the material qualities of the environments in which it has been situated. This 'abstract other' encompasses the external world that interacts with and influenced *System* yet remaining somewhat distinct from the personal experiences of the individuals involved. The material space of *System* is expressed in the Research Exposition primarily through the elements 'System Wall' and 'Detritus' and 'Artwork'.

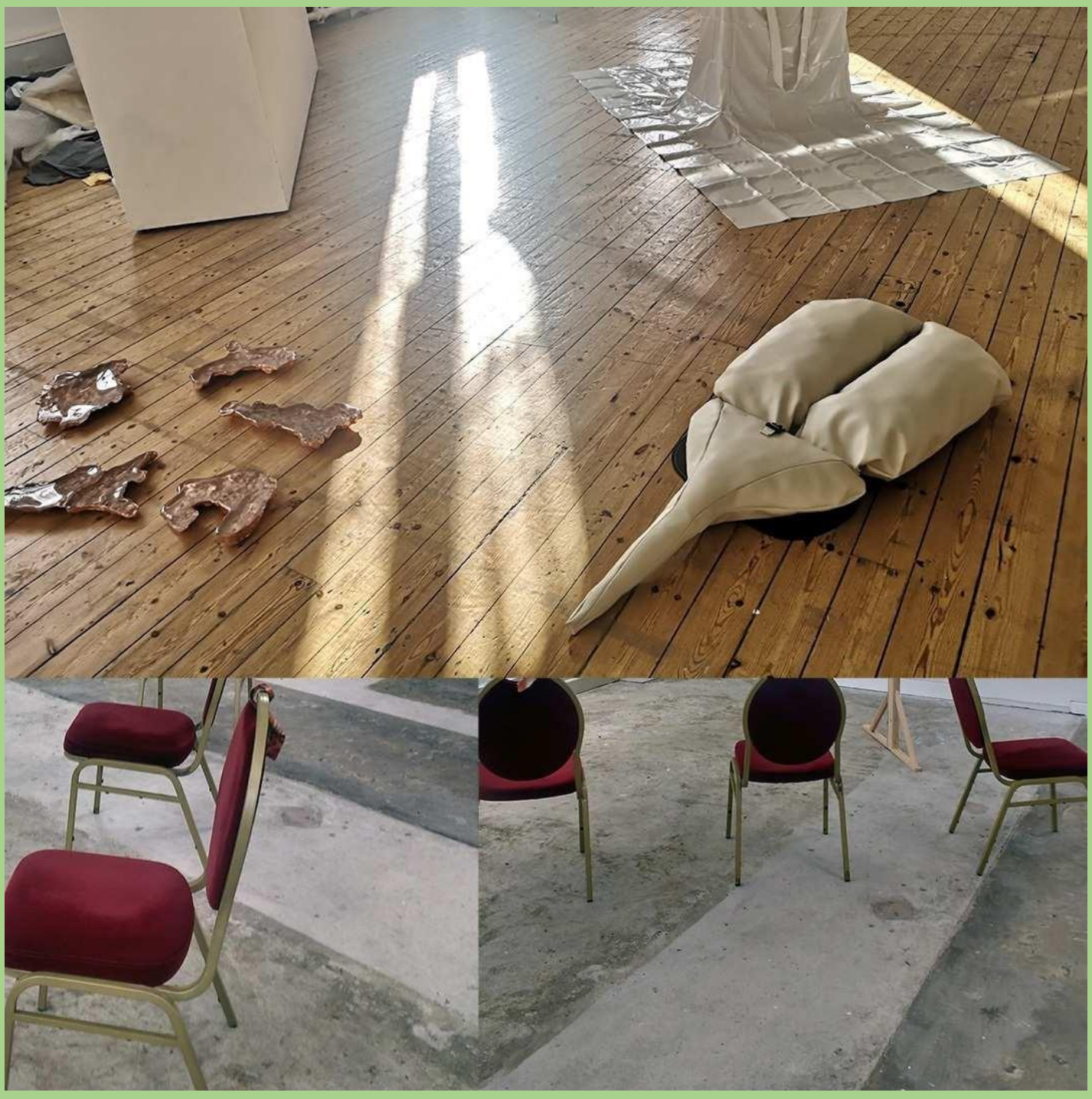
For over ten years, *System's* gallery was based on the top floor of *Bar Loco.* At the time it was agreed with the owner of *Bar Loco* that the tax rate relief they could claim on housing *System*[6] would be treated as rent-in-kind. To my knowledge there was never a signed or formal agreement made with the landlord around the terms or length of a lease beyond a handshake agreement. Despite the reality of the precariousness of *Bar Loco* being under no obligation to give *System* any notice or reason to evict it, I never really considered it a possibility until it did happen. This was shortly after *Bar Loco* fell under new ownership. In the proceeding autoethnographic text, this possibility previously did not feel 'real'. This text was produced as part of a small book titled 'Some Sinking Hopes, Floating Concerns, and Muddied Perceptions of an Artist-Run Curator' (Appendix I.). It is a collection of fragments of similar writing about my thoughts, feelings, and attitudes towards *System.* These fragments of writing were produced over a

[6] Due to *System* operating under a charity called *Creative Culture Trust* whose mission is to: '…advance the education of the general public in the appreciation of the arts in all their forms and to promote the arts for the public benefit by providing arts charities, non-profit, community organisations or individuals with access to property in otherwise vacant units on a non-commercial basis who are unable to afford the baseline occupancy costs with the object of encouraging and providing free access to the arts for all.' (Creative Culture Trust CIO, n.d.)

period covering a few months before and after learning of *System's* eviction and collected into a publication as a piece of visual autoethnography.

“I have a slightly odd attachment to the floors of the galleries with which I have worked. I have spent many hours sweeping and cleaning them. This is usually the last job to do before opening the gallery up to the public on a preview. This was often the case at the old System space. You pick up the debris from the time installing the work. Making sure to find nails and screws where you can, pry off loose bits of tape, gather up your tools and belongings. There is a sense of satisfaction in that moment where the show is installed. This is coupled with a sense of anticipation for people starting to arrive. I usually have a beer by this point, part-celebration, part-relief, part-having-something-to-do-with-my-hands-when-talking-to-people. Gallery floors never change, you are kinda stuck with them. You can change the colours of the walls or re-coat them. Scuffs and marks on the floor stay. In a sense they do change then. Hopefully, you know what I mean.”

“I kinda miss brushing those floors. That room use to get so dusty. I miss the shit half-broken broom that kicked up more dust than it effectively swept. I miss the rituals of setting up the donation box and the bar. I miss putting the posters up. I miss moving plinths. I miss getting the keys from the bar. I miss having to go down two flights of stairs for a wee. I miss doing these things for something. For people. Very simple gestures of giving, you do these things to keep the gallery running.”



“I wish that I had updated my phone sooner so that I would have better photos of the old System space. I forget what floors look like, or at least the detail of what they look like beyond a blurry pixelated image. Out of all the things that I wish that I had a better picture of though, it is this plug socket. I had to screenshot this from an old Instagram account. Out of all the people, objects, and events – it is this. Why? Because of the story attached to it? Did it typify the make-do-ness of the space? Because of the interesting problem it presented in having to work around it? Because of it being the image used in the promo of the last exhibition in that space? Now I have just got this low-res image.”

“Despite my better judgement I kind of felt that space would last forever, or at least I would be the one to walk away. I remember being annoyed, as well as comforted/grateful, at some people’s expressions of loss when we announced we were losing that space. Who did they think they were to try to own my grief? ‘Grief.’ That is what it was.”

“Even now the precarity of System does not feel real. I guess now because in a sense it is not. ‘Real’ I mean. Doing exhibitions as ‘System’ outside of that space has kinda abstracted it. These ‘scars’ (the plug, the marks on the floor, the scuffs on the wall) are permanent reminders that something really happened.”



In this space, System is perceived as an entity that exists beyond individual control, shaped by broader social, economic, and cultural forces. The materiality of System is not static; it evolves with the changing contexts in which it operates, reflecting Massey's idea of place as an intersection of social relations, constantly in flux.

Typical of much of my writing from this time, there is a strong emphasis on the materiality of the gallery space and an affinity that I built with it over time. Contained within the text is a sense of my sadness over having little to remember *System* by, except for a 'low-res image.' Contained in that statement, and repeated throughout the text, there is an implicit question of what *System* is without a physical venue. The material of the space in this text is described as a 'symbol of belonging', which is to say that it is a representation of my perceived sense of identity or place within a community or wider society (Guibernau, 2013).

I understand the 'grief' that I describe in the text as being linked to this. The circumstance of *System* losing its venue threatened how I understood my self-identity and place within the world. My apparent slight bitterness towards those who expressed loss of the venue, and what I potentially interpreted as them trying to co-opt my grief, was borne from feelings of my own inadequacy, being misunderstood, or fears of being forgotten by *System's* community. This is corroborated by Guibernau's writing on the potential freedoms and constraints offered by feeling accepted within a social group.

> "Being accepted as a member 'reassures us'; it confirms our value as sound, legitimate human beings since we seek in collective recognition a strengthening of our own self-esteem. However, belonging can also become a source of anxiety and stress whenever individuals feel inadequate, undervalued, misunderstood or ignored within the group." (Guibernau, 2013, p. 34)

The anxiety and stress of the situation were not rooted purely in the loss of the symbolism of the material space. The text describes how the scuffs on the wall represent activity and action that had occurred before, and ends by presenting the material space as a palimpsest containing traces of events/activity that were continually being added to:

> Doing exhibitions as 'System' outside of that space has kinda abstracted it. Perhaps these 'scars' (the plug, the marks on the floor, the scuffs on the wall) are permanent reminders that something really happened.

The material space of *System*, like all symbols, had value and meaning to those able to recognise what it stands for. Here it is representative of a performativity of identity. The text shows how the material space of *System* functioned as a site for the performance of rituals of belonging. (Guibernau, 2013). That is to say these are activities that are both the presentation of values but also maintaining a status quo or culture (Guibernau, 2013). These rituals included hosting art exhibitions but also, as described in the text, picking up screws and sweeping the floor using the 'shit half-broken broom'. For me, that space represented a function or set of functions I performed that had a positive impact, as Whitehead and Lanz discuss in reference to museum displays: '…belonging exists in representational form… as implicit or explicit projections of group identity.' (Whitehead and Lanz, 2018, p. 40). Just as the material space symbolised my servitude to a particular set of values and sense of community and service, Massey states: 'in the spatial present what we are is what we do' (Massey, 2005, p. 194). The loss of the venue in this text then could be presented as a loss of 'symbol of belonging' and capacity to perform 'rituals of belonging' (Guibernau, 2013).

The text also represented the first rupturing or fragmentation of the space of *System*. As I wrote in the text:

> I remember being annoyed, as well as comforted/grateful, at some people's expressions of loss when we announced we were losing that space. Who did they think they were to try to own my grief?

Here I inadvertently switch between referring to *System* as a collective 'we' to a singular 'I.' The message being conveyed in the text is confused as I acknowledge 'their' grief at the loss of *System's* venue, then immediately in the next sentence refer to how they were trying to own 'my' grief. Once I noticed this, I went back and re-read other texts I had written and saw similar slippages in my writing. It is here that I recognised that, on some level, I imagined simultaneously existing social configurations of *System*.

4.3 Embodied Space – (Singular 'I')

The embodied space of *System* is where personal and subjective experiences are emphasised. It is here that the 'singular I' emerges, representing my engagement with *System* on a deeply personal level. The embodied space is intimate and introspective and recognises how personal identity and subjectivity are intricately linked to *System's* spatial and social dynamics. This resonates with Massey's notion that space is not just a backdrop for action but is actively produced and experienced through our actions and emotions.

In the period after *System* lost its venue, I very quickly hosted several 'System' exhibitions. Within the space of about 4 months (including the Christmas break) I

organised three exhibitions – 'Manner of Falling' (Appendix J.), at Ex Libris Gallery, 'This Is The Exhibition' (Appendix K.) at GAS Contemporary, and 'Insert Exhibition Title' (Appendix H.) at Ex Libris Gallery. I produced autoethnographic writing for the last two of these exhibitions. These texts were included in the corresponding exhibition and are the focus of discussion for the rest of this chapter. These texts were an attempt to highlight the social and material conditions of the exhibitions themselves and how forms of value were potentially being produced through the process of organising and installing those exhibitions. These will be discussed later. First, I want to discuss the exhibition text for 'Insert Exhibition Title':

ARTISTS: George Stewart, Jack Connor Kemp, Evelyn Cromwell, Jenny McNamara, Matthew Young, Tommy Keenan, Dolores Hobby, Stu Mel Wilson, Sue Loughlin, and Genevieve Slater

This ?Exhibition? forms part of my ongoing PHD investigating the tacit value of artist-run initiatives. It is the ?fourth? show of ?? which so far has covered my curatorial project System being given the boot from above a bar to now being based-ish in a former bank in a shopping centre.

This show was meant to be the second half of a two-partner in the XL. But due to a misunderstanding the space was not secured for the first one (my own fault). This only became known to me a few weeks before Christmas, at which point I had to secure another venue. The time spent sorting this meant that this show had to be sandwiched in. Rather than leave the space empty I thought it would be better to offer the space to artists looking to test new work or just get stuff out of the studio.

As it replicates some of the last-minute-ness of a lot of DIY artist-run activity it is useful as a bit of action research for me too. Probably.

TBH I'm really fucking stretched. Is burnout a credible curatorial strategy?

Dan Goodman
System Gallery Curator

(Goodman, 2020)

I personalise this exhibition text by directly addressing the audience and signing it off like a letter. The exhibition text, rather than discussing the artwork being displayed, focuses on my anxiety and exhaustion, framing *System* around myself as an individual. *System's* existence as a physical or material entity is questioned as it refers to it being 'based-ish' in another venue. This is in reference to a short time where I was involved in GAS Contemporary, an artist-run gallery attached to a block of studios in North Shields. To offer some context, my involvement came about as I approached them after *System* lost the space above Bar Loco to see if I could use their space to hold *System* exhibitions. This relationship was never formalised, but I did host 'This Is the Exhibition' and later a residency under the *System* 'banner'. There were preliminary talks about being involved more regularly in GAS Contemporary's exhibition programming; however, before these could develop further, GAS and the studios were cleared out by the landlords to turn it into an NHS COVID-19 vaccination centre.

Bochner and Ellis state that autoethnography's purpose is to show 'people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles'. (2002, p. 111). The exhibition text and incorporation of other forms of autoethnographic writing invited readers to consider their own lives by connecting my experiences with theirs. This is in the understanding that '…to write individual experience is, at the same time, to write social experience'. (Mykhalovskiy, 1996, p. 141). In view of this, I made the following piece of automatic writing and displayed it within the same exhibition.

Sat outside…

Sat outside Fine Art dep at 15:50 wondering 'why do I do this?' Several times today I just thought to myself what a strange activity this stuff all is. Why do I do it? It seemed clear before and I wonder if it was the N. Shields, losing the System space, or a combination of all of the above. Why do I carry on? The PhD perhaps, or maybe it's still who I am. Is it all I know? What is scariest out of the alternatives, the idea of an alternative, or what I am doing now? I wonder if I will feel different after the preview. That's happened before. Am I just exhausted? I did the conf Friday, finished off that paper over Sat and Sun, and then Monday from 8-10 caught up on emails, was on hand for dropping off of work and handling questionnaires, then faffing with cutting and weeding the vinyl lettering in the evening (I also produced some graphs illustrating this activity which decided to not put in the show). Tuesday was then the install, again a fucking faff, - this time sorting the exhibition map and guide. What is all this stuff? Wtf am I doing? This activity is surely odd from outside? Why does this show exist? Why does any of it exist? Why hide how the show comes together when that is ultimately the most interesting thing? It's such a bizarre activity which I think I took for granted. Artists exhibit things. Maybe Susie is right, I am an emo? Why am I having such an existential crisis? Perhaps I'm tired, stressed and hungry.

I bumped into Mary who lives opposite yesterday outside my house. She was showing concern over the quality of the fit of my recently installed windows. I could feel my anxiety build up as I thought about. Urgh the thought of having damp or a leak causes such stress. I've barely got time to feed, clothe and shower myself let along tackle my mountain of laundry or sort the windows out. "Next week" I tell myself, after the show is down and I've dealt with my emails and stuff. Anyway, so I'm sat outside Fine Art dep at 15:50 wondering 'why do I do this?' I go back inside the gallery and carry on, just a few bits left to arrive I think (I'm writing this a couple of hours before the preview). There are some nice bits. I don't feel particularly excited or curious to see them. Not at least how I use to. There are some lovely and interesting things though. It all just seems a bit odd still. Again, tired. The artists feel like somewhat of an obstacle, to pin them down and get stuff here. If they had much simpler lives I could probably all get them here for a time and do that. But as it stands, I'm jumping between being in the gallery and then going

back to a computer which is about a five min walk to do other prep. I check my phone and realise that I've done about 15,000 steps today. I'm still tubby though. Must be that poor diet and booze. You're over 30 now, Dan. I'm just waiting around now for one artist who said they'd be at Uni for 3 for a meeting and they'll see me after. It's close to 5 and I can't reach them, I'm torn between staying and waiting, or going to Wilko to buy some shelving brackets. I'm still waiting. Hang on, wait, I realise that I've just skipped a day. NVM it is about 5 on the Wednesday. I decide to just go then enroute to Wilko I get a message. Figures. "Meeting overran" "I'll drop things off". But I say, "You can't get into it because it's locked". Not a big deal, we sort out them dropping stuff off tomorrow. It is a theme which re-emerges through throughout the install, where I am bound in space and time by the artist and the show. I sit down to type this down and my phone's battery goes. Typical.

As I'm waiting for an artist to test some bits, I'm currently sat on the floor of the gallery. I'm currently at 25,000 steps today, it's nice to rest. Dodgy knees. Just read one of the questionnaires (Appendix L.) which was emailed through. One of the things they mention was about being available to make art. Got me thinking yet again about artist's preoccupation with space and time (both of which are often combined with money). Money can buy you time and space. I think of these three things as a pyramid with money at the top straddling both time and space. But I'm not sure it is as simple as that. We've all sacrificed money for time and for space. Dunno. I think that curation is a perfect medium, itself formed of time and space, to tell something or investigate of the precarious reality of being an 'emerging' artist. The use of co-opted space as well, itself a drain on time and in many ways has a direct relationship with money through market-driven politics (fuck austerity). WTF are you going on about, Dan? As the exhibition text alludes, I've kinda subtly tested some ideas here, but of course this isn't my show (or at least just my show), plus I've not had much time to do so. The most successful of these 'interventions' is the map of the show (Appendix M.). I see it as a document recording some of the ad-hoc changes of the show, such as TK' speakers going towards the back by the table, I then felt I had to amend them, so it was clear I was not taking credit for the music. They were already printed, and I didn't have the time to change them, nor did I feel it was worth wasting the paper. I was also in a different place and so didn't have access to a black pen like I did with some other changes. This wasn't done deliberately but it was incidental of my movements around the Uni in the day. But I don't think I curate because of an interest

in space, time or money. Just because of the potential for nice things to occur. And not something which ACE could call a measurable output. But stuff like trying to make a shelf to display something how the artist wants it to be displayed. I wonder if there is something more valuable in the gesture of failing whilst trying to do that without the right means and for no direct financial gain, rather than being paid to do that and having the technicians and that can spotlight that shit really nice for you. That's the stuff I like. It is things like this which lift me out of my cynical emo self. It is why I will continue to do this stuff; I think. It is the stuff that matters, least for me. I wonder if 'acting out of a genuine decency' should be one of ACE's priorities. Or maybe I mean a 'genuine attempt to be decent'. Everybody is fallible and gets it wrong. I think it would be great if this could be accurately measured. I could think of some institutions, venues and individuals who might struggle. The exhibition has the potential to do so much, and it does without even trying sometimes or it goes unseen. And it can come unexpectedly but I get great satisfaction from helping create the conditions to allow myself to help others and for them to help each other. Most things mean more than art.

(Goodman, n.d.-d)

Described here is my 'lived space' of *System* as understood through Lefebvre's theory of the social production of space (1991). In their essay on understanding Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, Schmid identifies that first one must 'break with the widespread understanding of space imagined as an independent material reality existing "in itself"' (Schmid, 2008, p. 28). Following this epistemological starting point, space does not simply exist but rather is socially produced. Within the triad of Lefebvre's theory, 'lived space' straddles the two poles of 'perceived space' and 'conceived space' without being reducible to either (Watkins, 2005). The former being the properties of the space we can perceive with our senses – vision, touch, smell, and sound. The latter being how we understand space through our knowledge. In this, it is the space of subjective human experiences (ibid.). By applying Lefebvre's lens, the changes in my subjective and emotional understanding of my experiences of the 'space' of *System* could be attributable to changes in its 'perceived space' and 'constituted space'.

The previous autoethnographic text alludes to an ontology of *System* built around me and a roaming set of principles that I carry and act on. This 'embodied space', as I have framed it here, is not just about how I understand myself but also how I want to be perceived by others. This is evidenced through the ways in which I seem to want to be perceived as 'acting out of a genuine decency'. This is framed within a negatory description where Arts Council England and some funded organisations are, by my expressed reckoning, potentially failing to do so. Like my conception of 'singular space', the narrative resembles a moral story of good vs evil. This perception of *System's* spatial configuration was formed through the interplay of the lived reality of *System* to, as I understand it through hindsight, restore my 'ontological security'. (Anthias, 2002). In Giddens, 'ontological security' can be understood as a coherent narrative composed of fragments of an individual's life that they construct to emotionally deal with crisis (1991, p. 38) and provide a sense of 'continuity across time and space' (*ibid,* p. 51). In this inadvertent rewriting of *System*, my

adjusted perception of and relationship to *System* alleviated my anxieties and insecurity at the time by redirecting them into purpose and action. This is explored further in the next chapter through the lens of 'belonging' (Guibernau 2013).

Within the Research Exposition, echoes of the embodied space are carried through my voice in the 'karaoke' element, traces of my handicraft through familiar DIY methods such as tape and inkjet printing for 'Acknowledgements' and 'Exhibition Texts', and in the story told 'System Gallery RPG Demo' that centres around me.

4.4 Relational Space – (Collective 'We')

The relational space of *System* represents the interconnectedness of individuals within *System*, emphasizing the social relations underpinning it. The 'collective we' is prominent, highlighting the collaborative and communal aspects of *System*. Like Massey's 'sense of place', it is formed of activity, interactions, dialogues, and shared experiences that occur within the project, creating a sense of belonging and collective identity. It is in the relational space of *System* that value generation becomes most evident, as it is where the boundaries between the self and the other blur, creating a shared space that is both personal and collective.

Several months removed from *System's* eviction from above *Bar Loco,* I developed a piece of autoethnographic writing reflecting on this time. It was displayed as part 'This Is the Exhibition' (Appendix K.). This text was heavily influenced by Massey and her three intertwining propositions as articulated by Anderson. For context, *System*, when it was based above Bar Loco, shared the

venue with other social groups, organisations, and events. The vast majority of these were booked through the bar staff, who would arrange them as best they could around *System's* exhibition and event calendar. For more 'lively' events, such as raves and private parties held during the run of an exhibition, the staff would inform me, and either I or the bar staff would store any work that might get damaged. *System* and all these other events held an equal claim to the space. The different claims to the 'space' housed above Bar Loco listed in the text below are taken from publicly advertised events on Bar Loco's Facebook events page. The text has been written solely by me. I have included the text in its entirety despite the '…' at the end, which suggests a potential continuation.

___ is the Space

Space implies an absence, emptiness, and lack of something. Literally an empty area that only becomes real when there is a purpose or activity for it to 'attach' to. It becomes a gallery space, rehearsal room, meeting place, classroom etc. System is a pluralistic space in this sense. Or perhaps, more accurately it is one of many functions of the space. When the space is occupied by other groups for different activities, for example by cellists to rehearse, it does not stop being System in your mind. However, to others it is a room above a bar where they come to learn Spanish or dance salsa, and that room is sometimes used as a gallery.

To the bar owners it is perhaps a rentable space that they can use to bring in additional revenue or customers, such as when they offer you the space to use as a gallery. Until an incident a couple of months ago, you had always thought of System in one sense as 'being' the physical space. This changed when on the day of setting up for an exhibition there was a large immovable table in the space. You had never seen this table before in your life. It filled half the room and was bright fucking red. The implication of this is that it was not a table which you would choose to have in your space.

Those connected to System are aware that the space is used for other purposes. You are certainly used to walking into the gallery and there being rows of chairs set-up from some movie screening the night before or decks from a party. What was most offensive about this was the impossibility of moving it and taking it out of the space. It was something alien that had pierced the sanctity of the space. It didn't belong and the lack of consideration of how this would affect System was a reminder that you were only a guest in this space. You could no longer offer the full space to the artist. After having been promised the whole space by you the artist was now having to share it with this other object. This other object which was not part of the space. It didn't belong, or maybe it was a reminder that you didn't belong. It was not your space.

Much like the space itself, System is an empty abstraction. It only becomes real when it has an activity, purpose or need for it to 'attach' to. In this sense, it is the convergence of these social trajectories far more than the physical space it sits in.

System is the Space.

Much like System, Newcastle Marxist Society is a pluralistic space. Or perhaps, more accurately it is one of many functions of the space. When the space is occupied by other groups for different activities, for example by artists as a gallery or cellists to rehearse, it does not stop being Newcastle Marxist Society in your mind. However, to others it is perhaps a room above a bar where they

come to learn Spanish or attend an exhibition preview, and that room is sometimes used for you. To the bar owners it is perhaps a rentable space that they can use to bring in additional revenue or customers, such as when they offer you the space to use as a meeting room.

Until an incident a couple of months ago, you had always thought of Newcastle Marxist Society in one sense as 'being' the physical space. This changed when on the day of setting up for a meeting there was a large immovable 'sculpture of sorts' in the space. You had never seen anything like this before in your life. It filled half the room and was bright fucking red. The implication of this is that it was not something which you would choose to have in your space.

Those connected to Newcastle Marxist Society are aware that the space is used for other purposes. You are certainly used to walking into the room and there being tables and chairs left from an introductory Spanish language class or empty glasses from an exhibition preview the night before. However, what was most offensive about this was the impossibility of moving it and taking it out of the space. It was something alien that had pierced the sanctity of the space. It didn't belong and the lack of consideration of how this would affect you was a reminder that you were only a guest in this space. After having been promised the whole space, you were now having to share it with this other object. This other object which was not part of the space. It didn't belong, or maybe it was a reminder that you didn't belong. It was not your space.

Much like the space itself, the Newcastle Marxist Society is an empty abstraction. It only becomes real when it has an activity, purpose or need for it to 'attach' to. In this sense, it is several social trajectories converging together for one purpose, far more than the physical space it sits in.

Newcastle Marxist Society is the Space.

Much like System and Newcastle Marxist Society, House Disciples: August Bash is a pluralistic space. Or perhaps, more accurately it is one of many functions of the space. When the space is occupied by other groups for different activities, for example by artists as a gallery or comrades reflecting on the ills of market-driven politics, it does not stop being House Disciples: August Bash in your mind. However, to others it is perhaps a room above a bar where they come to learn Spanish or attend an exhibition preview, and that room is sometimes used for you. To the bar owners it is perhaps a rentable space that they can use to bring in additional revenue or customers, such as when they offer you the space to use for your raves.

Until an incident a couple of months ago, you had always thought of House Disciples: August Bash in one sense as 'being' the physical space. This changed when on the day of setting up for a dance party there was an oversized stylised bust of Karl Marx. You had never seen anything like this before in your life. It filled half the room and was bright fucking red. The implication of this is that it was not something which you would choose to have in your space.

Those connected to House Disciples: August Bash are aware that the space is used for other purposes. You are certainly used to walking into the room and there being tables and chairs left from an introductory Spanish language class or empty glasses from an exhibition preview the night before. However, what was most offensive about this was the impossibility of moving it and taking it out of the space. It was something alien that had pierced the sanctity of the space. It didn't belong and the lack of consideration of how this would affect you was a reminder that you were only a guest in this space. After having been promised the whole space, you were now having to share it with this other object. This other object which was not part of the space. It didn't belong, or maybe it was a reminder that you didn't belong. It was not your space.

Much like the space itself, the House Disciples: August Bash is an empty abstraction. It only becomes real when it has an activity, purpose or need for it to 'attach' to. In this sense, it is several social trajectories converging together for one purpose, far more than the physical space it sits in.

House Disciples: August Bash is the Space.

Much like System, Newcastle Marxist Society and House Disciples: August Bash, Spanish for Beginners: Level 1 is a pluralistic space. Or perhaps, more accurately it is one of many functions of the space. When the space is occupied by other groups for different activities, for example by artists hosting an exhibition preview or partygoers getting 'mashed' it does not stop being Spanish for

Beginners: Level 1 in your mind. However, to others it is perhaps a room above a bar where they come to score blow or raise money for charity, and that room is sometimes used for you. To the bar owners it is perhaps a rentable space that they can use to bring in additional revenue or customers, such as when they offer you the space to use as a classroom.

Until an incident a couple of months ago, you had always thought of Spanish for Beginners: Level 1 in one sense as 'being' the physical space. This changed when on the day of setting up for a lesson there was a leather sofa in the shape of a sensual set of women's lips. You had never seen anything like this before in your life. It filled half the room and was bright fucking rouge. The implication of this is that it was not something which you would choose to have in your space.

Those connected to Spanish for Beginners: Level 1 are aware that the space is used for other purposes. You are certainly used to walking into the room and there being rows of chairs set-up from some movie screening or rows of clothing racks from a charity fashion show the night before. However, what was most offensive about this was the impossibility of moving it and taking it out of the space. It was something alien that had pierced the sanctity of the space. It didn't belong and the lack of consideration of how this would affect you was a reminder that you were only a guest in this space. After having been promised the whole space, you were now having to share it with this other object. This other object which was not part of the space. It didn't belong, or maybe it was a reminder that you didn't belong. It was not your space.

Much like the space itself, the Spanish for Beginners: Level 1 is an empty abstraction. It only becomes real when it has an activity, purpose or need for it to 'attach' to. In this sense, it is several social trajectories converging together for one purpose, far more than the physical space it sits in.

Spanish For Beginners: Level 1 is the Space.

Much like System, Newcastle Marxist Society, House Disciples: August Bash and Spanish for Beginners: Level 1, Crusties Presents: Thrust is a pluralistic space. Or perhaps, more accurately it is one of many functions of the space. When the space is occupied by other groups for different activities, for example by students learning their male and female pronouns or artists installing an exhibition, it does not stop being Crusties Presents: Thrust in your mind. However, to others it is perhaps a room above a bar where they come to learn Spanish or attend an exhibition preview, and that room is sometimes used for you. To the bar owners it is perhaps a rentable space that the bar owners can use to bring in additional revenue or customers, such as when they offer you the space to screen a movie.

Until an incident a couple of months ago, you had always thought of Crusties Presents: Thrust in one sense as 'being' the physical space. This changed when on the day of setting up for a screening of a half-length Newcastle Scene Video filmed and edited by Phil Steavenson, there were 50 boxes filled with copies of

‘Practice Makes Perfect: Learning Spanish’ left in the room. You had never seen anything like this before in your life. They filled half the room and were bright fucking rojo. The implication of this is that it was not something which you would choose to have in your space.

Those connected to Crusties Presents: Thrust are aware that the space is used for other purposes. You are certainly used to walking into the room and there being rows of chairs set-up from some movie screening or empty glasses from an exhibition preview the night before. However, what was most offensive about this was the impossibility of moving it and taking it out of the space. It was something alien that had pierced the sanctity of the space. It didn’t belong and the lack of consideration of how this would affect you was a reminder that you were only a guest in this space. After having been promised the whole space, you were now having to share it with this other object. This other object which was not part of the space. It didn’t belong, or maybe it was a reminder that you didn’t belong. It was not your space.

Much like the space itself, Crusties Presents: Thrust is an empty abstraction. It only becomes real when it has an activity, purpose or need for it to ‘attach’ to. In this sense, it is several social trajectories converging together for one purpose, far more than the physical space it sits in.

Crusties Presents: Thrust is the Space.

Much like System, Newcastle Marxist Society, House Disciples: August Bash, Spanish for Beginners: Level 1 and Crusties Presents: Thrust, Namaste A While Sustainable Fashion Event is a pluralistic space. Or perhaps, more accurately it is one of many functions of the space. When the space is occupied by other groups for different activities, for example students practising rolling the 'R' sound or skaters watching footage of the near-perfect execution of a backside power slide, it does not stop being Namaste A While Sustainable Fashion Event in your mind. However, to others it is perhaps a room above a bar where they come to learn Spanish or dance till the early hours, and that room is sometimes used for you. To the bar owners it is perhaps a rentable space that they can use to bring in additional revenue or customers, such as when they offer you the space to stage a fashion show.

Until an incident a couple of months ago, you had always thought of Namaste A While Sustainable Fashion Event in one sense as 'being' the physical space. This changed when on the day of setting up a fashion event there was a 24-inch-high vert in the space. You had never seen anything like this before in your life. It took up half the room and was plastered in the fucking Red Bull logo. The implication of this is that it was not something which you would choose to have in your space.

Those connected to Namaste A While Sustainable Fashion Event are aware that the space is used for other purposes. You are certainly used to walking into the

room and there being rows of chairs set-up from some movie screening or empty glasses from an exhibition preview the night before. However, what was most offensive about this was the impossibility of moving it and taking it out of the space. It was something alien that had pierced the sanctity of the space. It didn't belong and the lack of consideration of how this would affect you was a reminder that you were only a guest in this space. After having been promised the whole space, you were now having to share it with this other object. This other object which was not part of the space. It didn't belong, or maybe it was a reminder that you didn't belong. It was not your space.

Much like the space itself, the Namaste A While Sustainable Fashion Event is an empty abstraction. It only becomes real when it has an activity, purpose or need for it to 'attach' to. In this sense, it is several social trajectories converging together for one purpose, far more than the physical space it sits in.

Namaste A While Sustainable Fashion Event is the Space.

Much like System, Newcastle Marxist Society, Newcastle Literary Salon, House Disciples: August Bash, Spanish for Beginners: Level 1, Crusties Presents: Thrust and Namaste A While Sustainable Fashion Event, Greenpeace Newcastle: Christmas Pub Quiz is a pluralistic space. Or perhaps, more accurately it is one of many functions of the space. When the space is occupied by other groups for…

(Goodman, n.d.-c)

This text shows a growing awareness of *System* as relational and shared space based on the simultaneous plurality of claims on it. This is what Massey describes as the sphere 'coexisting heterogeneity'. On this subject, Massey writes: 'possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity' (2005, p. 9). This lends a temporal quality to *System* as it is formed from these converging trajectories that coalesce intermittently for a period of time. In the case of *System,* it is shared, and socially constituted space is articulated around moments, such as exhibitions and events. As Massey states:

> "… what gives a place its specificity is not some long-internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus. […] Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a larger proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself" (Massey, 1991, p. 28)

In this, *System* is also always fleeting and changing. Even now post *Bar Loco* where *System* operates nomadically through co-opting venues for the duration of a singular event.

Repeated throughout the text I express disappointment that I had not been able to truly 'offer' the space to the exhibiting artist that is demonstrative of a sense of allegiance and responsibility I felt within *System.* The expression of care is a condition and outcome of a growing awareness of this relational space brought about by my perception that the sanctity of *System* had been pierced in some

form. This makes sense, when understanding care as a relational practice. Just as Massey sees space as constantly shaped by interactions and experiences, care practices also continually shape and are shaped by the relationships within them. Reflecting on spatial transformations in relational practices, Verwoert describes how care is a collective process of shaping and being shaped by those around us. Massey's view of space as relational and dynamically produced aligns with Verwoert's emphasis on care as a relational practice, for example they write:

> "This is a notion of care as a risky act empowered by the need of the other, yet not based on secure knowledge or competence, and without a clear mandate, an impossible promise always bearing the risk of exhaustion".
>
> (Verwoert, 2009)

Care given and received contributes to the evolving nature of relationships, much like how spatial experiences are continually redefined. These autoethnographic texts represent a growing sense of responsibility extending out from the physical and myself, to *System,* and then finally beyond.

This informed the development of 'Now That's What I Call Art' (Appendix N.) which has been held twice at Newcastle Contemporary Art in collaboration with the Northeast curatorial duo Eve Cromwell and Jenny McNamara, who operate under the name *Spaghetti Factory*. The premise of the show is that it is an open call with no selection process or criteria, allowing artists to curate their own work. The callout for artists was made with the following text, which encapsulates the spirit behind organising the show. This spirit, as I perhaps understood it at the time, is that value is generated through the interrelation of disparate social trajectories, and our role was to foster the conditions for that. This is captured in the excerpt from the callout for submissions:

> "Art and culture are the common property of everyone, and so the opportunity to shape it should be treated as a fundamental human right. As art and culture are a public commodity, the galleries which house it should be public democratic spaces. This is not an 'open call' it is an 'open invitation'. We are keen to see the exhibition transform from an empty white box to a shifting gathering of artworks, ideas and processes. Over December 2021 and January 2022, we invite artists at all stages to display one artwork or set of artworks. There is no selection process, and we will support as many artists as we can to exhibit their work, but there may be a cut-off based purely on the space, the number of artists and the time we have available. For complex works which may require a bit more construction or planning please reach out and we'll do our best to accommodate. We are happy to support and offer advice and help installing your work. To be part of Now That's What I Call Art 2021 you just need to arrive with the work ready to install and collect it before the exhibition ends. The deinstall will happen whilst the exhibition is still open to the public and your work will be collectable after the closing event on 7th January."
>
> (System Gallery, 2022b)

The first iteration of this show attracted over 120 artists – at which point we decided to stop accepting more due to the physical capacity of the venue. The second iteration of Now That's What I Call Art was limited to 76 artists who were accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. All of these 76 places were claimed in the first hour and a half after the callout went live on Eventbrite. The significance of these two pieces of information is that they affirm the mobility of *System's* social plurality based on, referring back to Verwoert's definition of care, an accurate assessment of people's needs and the production of an offer with the capacity to fulfil them. The accuracy of our assessment was also supported by positive feedback received through social media, and from participating artists, audiences, and other arts organisations before, during, and after the event. This

understanding of the need was developed through a proximity to working with and within Newcastle's community of artists over time. The initial iteration was timed to happen shortly after COVID restrictions had lifted, and people were keen to socialise again. It also took place shortly after the selection for BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art's 2021 Open Submission had taken place, and it served as an almost consolation prize for disappointed artists who were not selected for the exhibition. The timing of the first Now That's What I Call Art meant that it also carried an implicit criticism of the 'openness' of BALTIC's Open Call being undermined by its selection process. This was linked to broader criticism of BALTIC, which, among many artists, has a reputation for being disconnected from local networks.

Additionally, the format of Now That's What I Call Art was a way of reaching out beyond *System's* existing immediate community. By opening *System* through this 'open invitation', we valued the opportunity in and of itself. Being on hand to work with artists as a resource, rather than to fulfil a specific agenda, allowed those exhibiting to set the terms of their engagement. In this way, the exhibiting artists had multiple motivations for participating and attributed different values to the experience. Some examples include wanting the opportunity to meet other artists, to document work, to exhibit previously unshown artwork, and to share their experiences as refugees in a public space.

4.5 Conclusion

The point of this chapter again, is not to develop an ontological conception of space generally but to trace how my spatial understanding of *System* shifted and how *System* contains multiple shifting conceptions of space that co-exist and interrelate. I have discussed how these have shifted and developed over time in relation to my lived experience of *System* and understanding of it. Using Massey's conception of space (2005), I argue that *System* augmented a positive

sense of its (and mine) interconnectivity within and beyond *System*. These conceptions of space afforded me the affirmative sense of self as part of a collective produced within the symbolic 'spaces of belonging' and 'rituals of belonging' (Guibernau, 2013). These are both expressed through *System's* material space. The chapter also demonstrates the affirmative potential and dissident capacity offered through being an autonomous individual (singular space) within a permeable and shifting community (socially constituted space). The openness of the latter suggests opportunity through multiple entry points and the flexibility to engage on their own terms. This is built on an understanding that contained within 'coexisting heterogeneity' (Massey, 2005) was the dormant potential for the generation of value through the interaction of the multiple people that form it.

Whilst these three spaces - material, embodied, and relational—are presented as distinct, they are deeply interconnected, each influencing and shaping the others. The material space provides the physical context within which the embodied and relational spaces unfold. The embodied space brings personal experience into dialogue with the material, grounding abstract concepts in lived reality. The relational space, in turn, weaves together these individual experiences into a collective narrative, constantly reinterpreting the meaning of *System.*

In reflecting on my autoethnographic writing, these conceptualizations of space have allowed me to see *System* not as a fixed or singular entity but as a dynamic and multifaceted process. Through the interplay of material, embodied, and relational spaces, *System* becomes a living project, continuously evolving and adapting in response to the people, places, and ideas that constitute it. A living project where space, identity, and relationships are in constant negotiation. This provides a framework for exploring the complexities of *System* value generation within *System.*

In drawing on Massey's theories of space, this chapter reveals the importance of recognizing the multiplicity and fluidity inherent within *System.* Massey's lens allows shows how different forms of value generation are interconnected as part of a broader network of social relations. This framework resonates with themes explored in the exhibitions 'This is Gallery and the Gallery is Many Things' (Eastside Projects, 2008) and "This is Gallery and the Gallery is Many Things X" (Eastside Projects, 2018) both held at *Eastside Projects.* The exhibitions' exploration of the dynamic and multifaceted nature of galleries, parallels this chapter's focus on how various forms of value within *System* are woven into a complex web of social and spatial relations. This lays the groundwork for the next chapter but also, as mentioned, the theoretical underpinning for the research exposition.

Chapter 5. Is it Just a Hobby?



Image taken at end of deinstall of *Four Pack* exhibition (Appendix. P)

Pictured bottom [left to right]: Me, Eve Cromwell, Jessica Bennet, Susie Curran, Jenny McNamara

Pictured top: Sainsbury's stone baked margherita pizza (yellow sticker reduced)

5.1 Introduction

Where the previous chapter describes the relational space of System and defines my relationship and positionality within a wider artist community (as discussed in relation to Massey's conceptualisation of space), this chapter explores how *System* fostered a sense of 'belonging' (Guibernau, 2013) within this social world.

This sense of belonging is achieved through a developed sense of emotional attachment I feel towards *System* that manifested as a sense of identity, loyalty, and solidarity with artist communities. In-turn, this gave me the ontological security and understanding of self to withstand perceived attacks on *System's* legitimacy. This sense of self and loyalty to *System* and the communities it represents fostered advocacy value, self-determination, social value, and emotional value. In this sense, 'belonging' is a valuation activity and demonstration of what one values from which these hybridised forms of value are produced from. This chapter helps to deepen our understandings of ARI practice beyond an antithetical response to misgivings of what the art market, policy makers, funders and/or institutions value in art and artistic activity. By focusing on individual, emotional, and internal processes this chapter reveals that value generation within *System* was the result of me being afforded the opportunity to undertake open-ended and self-directed valuation activity.

This chapter discerns patterns of my personal and interpersonal experiences within *System* by retroactively and selectively writing about past experiences to produce an aesthetic and evocative thick description told through alterations of authorial voice and using facets of storytelling such as character and plot development (Ellis;Adams and Bochner, 2011). Just as Strecker and Tyler state, ethnography is a 'performance emplotted by powerful stories' (2009: 2). As such, the autoethnographic texts teeter between being artistic and anthropological in nature.

The autoethnographic texts and their use within the chapter was informed by the art practice of Sophie Calle - particularly her works exploring identity and vulnerability using her own life and subjective experiences as a lens. For instance, her work 'Take Care of Yourself' was created in response to a breakup email she received from her then-partner. The title of the artwork deriving from the concluding words of the email. For the work, Calle invited 107 women from various professions to analyse and respond to the breakup email — including a physicist, a judge, a psychologist, an actor, a linguist, and even a parrot. By performatively obsessing over this statement, Calle's 'Take Care of Yourself' explores how people make sense of personal experiences. Similar to the academic discipline of autoethnography, it imbues the personal with a more universal relatability. Like how 'Take Care of Yourself' keeps reverting back to the same statement, this chapter uses a similar literary device in that keeps reverting back to a small number of related questions. In this chapter I explore and reveal how I made sense of my experiences within *System.*

5.2 Discussion

In the preface to the 25th Anniversary Edition of his social interactionist monograph, *Art Worlds,* Becker (2008) reflects on the insight that complaints of research participants/subjects offer to understanding organisational activity of the art world (ibid. xv-xvi). For Becker, these complaints highlighted what he describes as the 'convention' of those in the art world (as practitioners and admirers of art) to regularised understanding and behaviour tacitly shared and taken for granted within that group (ibid). He describes how in his experience as a sociologist, centralising the 'troubles' or 'difficulties' of an organisational field reveals what is otherwise implicit and hidden (ibid).

As described previously, I arrived at the beginning of this PhD with a very loose and ambiguous instinctive understanding that *System* was valuable to myself, and others involved. In paying close attention and reflecting on my experiences within *System* through my research*,* it became apparent that the various 'problems' and 'difficulties' that I experienced in the field brought into focus my understanding of value generation within *System*. This chapter focuses on a particular example of this that took place during November 2019. Where during a seminar alongside other Fine Art PhD candidates at Newcastle University, an invited academic asked me:

"What would you say, if I were to ask you is *System* just a hobby?"

My initial internalised response to this question was "fuck you." I didn't say that, but it is what I said in my head and possibly to some extent through my facial expression. I had interpreted the phrasing of this question as them trying to undermine me, my research, or both. This was early-on in my PhD and I was not particularly confident in the practice part of this practice-based PhD. In hindsight however, I think it was a particularly good question.

If I were to answer it now, I might say it is a hobby but not 'just' a hobby. It is an identifier through which I live, work, socialise as well as 'hobby-ise' (not a word, but you get it). It is a way of being in and engaging with the world. I sometimes get paid to do it or get paid to do other things for my expertise as demonstrated and developed through running *System.* However, there are far more effective ways that I could make money and I have always had to subsidise my income with additional forms of work. Like many working in the arts and cultural sector I operate within what Jones refers to as 'triangle of precarity' (2019), where my precarity occurs economically through low pay, emotionally through no guarantee of work, and structurally through a lack of agency or status to meaningfully advocate for better working conditions. Additionally, like

many artists, the boundary between my personal and professional life is very blurred. In a sense, *System* is concurrently a value-driven vocation and avocation. However, the phrasing of the 'hobby' question proposed a polarity – was it 'just a hobby' or something more meaningful? Rather than directly addressing this question I want to use it and the story attached to it, as an anchor point to explore my understanding of what value is generated through *System* and how this understanding is formed.

First it is necessary to articulate the points of difference between my own ideas and my understanding of the values promoted, demanded, and articulated by UK cultural funders and institutions. As stated throughout the thesis, this is not done with the intention of working towards some arcane radical meta-theory to interrogate or understand forms of value generation within ARIs or *System.* It is to illustrate how my understanding of the socio-political context surrounding *System* has constrained and enabled my ability to organise meaning from what I have seen, heard, and experienced through running it. I am going to begin by sharing a text that I wrote in March 2022. The text begins with a version of a paragraph that I have used to contextualise my research for academic papers, conference abstracts, preparatory reading for seminars, administrative processes for the university, and various drafts of this thesis. The rest of the text attempts to shift from a macro and passive perspective to a more personal and emotive understanding.

In recent decades, the term ‘artist-run’ has been used to describe self-organised activity by creative practitioners that can take many forms – amongst them galleries, studios, workshops, zines, archives, and radio stations. They often operate in non-commercial contexts and serve as an alternative to, or at times in opposition of, the social hierarchies and conditions imposed by the institutional art system. For most UK art graduates their first introduction into the wider art world beyond university is through artist-run initiatives (A-N, 2008). These initiatives individually or as part of an informal network of initiatives, can generate a critical mass of support, experimentation, and expertise for creative practitioners in facilitating their artistic and professional development (Ball;Pollard and Stanley, 2010; Creative Scotland, 2016).

Despite the institutional art system being reliant on this broader creative culture fostering new ideas and practices, the role of the artist-run in the arts ecology is often overlooked and undervalued by this same system (Jones, 2021a; Jones, 2021b). Artist-run initiatives largely operate in the shadows of the institutional art system as part of what Gregory Sholette refers to as the ‘dark matter’ of the art world in his book of the same name (2011). The aspects that are highlighted or co-opted by funders and institutions, tend to be those which can be most easily reframed within economics-based arts development models (Jones, 2021a; Jones, 2021b). Within this neoliberal framework public spending is understood as a vital function of economic growth that sets art and culture the contradictory mission of accruing economic value whilst caring for society through artistic production and delivery (Phillips, 2011, p. 41).

Since the 1990s we saw the remit of the UK arts policy broadened and greater focus placed on inclusion and the broadening of access for previously excluded demographics as defined by protected characteristics. Coinciding with this we saw a ‘boom’ of institutional managers, administrators, and a professional class often-dubbed ‘cultural leaders’ who are overall disproportionally rewarded to artist-run initiatives and creative practitioners in terms of pay, job security, and agency (See Mirza and Policy, 2006). In reference to this, Burrows (2019) states that ‘the employment ecosystem has doubled down on its tendency to reward roles in inverse proportion to their proximity to production.’

That is not to say that people across all those groups have not also suffered because of diminishing public spending on arts and culture, however it does present a paradox. On the one hand, the increased administration of arts spending aims to open the sector up whilst simultaneously on the other hand it further entrenches traditional hierarchical power structures that disenfranchise those on the outside (Phillips, 2011).

This demarcation is echoed through the rhetoric of 'public benefit' that is used by funders to evaluate the funding application of claimants, thus creating a 'beneficiary' and 'benefactor.' It perpetuates a deficit model that assumes the 'beneficiary' is lacking in a way which requires fixing from the 'benefactor.' Additionally, the whole notion of the public produces a territorial divide between a group of people assigned the title of 'the public' who somehow exist separately. Where artist-run initiatives and creative practitioners have sought to blur these boundaries or make them less distinct, institutions and funders have systemically maintained them (ibid). This is performed through a paternalistic liberalism. Like fucking hell, would it be so 'out-there' to opt for a theory of change that treats people as individual active agents with the understanding that art and culture are the shared property of everyone?

Rather than a one-size-fits-all / top-down / mother-knows-best approach, I agree with Dave Beech who, in his critique of participation in art, calls for a '…constellation of overlapping economies of agency, control, self-determination and power' (2008). You know, I don't wanna work for DCMS by proxy through applying through ACE or working with some institution, but my choices are pretty fucking limited (See Jones, 2020). The 'trickle-down' economic framework that institutions like DCMS and ACE are wedded to keeps the full extent of arts' emancipatory potential dormant. It is in writing ACE funding bids that I have most felt my own economic and emotional precarity, and the disparity between the intrinsic motivations informing my practice and the extrinsic measurements they are asking for most apparent. No amount of telling me that "I need to play the game" is going to make me feel any better.

Oh - the pains of being fucking pure at heart, eh?

You know, I fucking hate ACE. My reason for hating ACE is succinctly captured in this quote from Dave Beech:

> *"Hell is other people who insist on ethical principles which contradict your own. A variety of hell therefore is having your art administered or reviewed by someone who insists on an ethical regiment that you regard reproduces the social values that you are trying to overcome."*
>
> (2015a)

As a socialist (anarcho-communist to be more specific) I feel a moral obligation to work towards uniting the means of cultural production and cultural consumption which have been separated by late-capitalism. I believe in the decentralisation and democratisation of cultural production and consumption, and so I believe in the abolition of any centralised cultural agenda which can be used to malign the benefit of one group to the advantage of another. I believe that we are all morally obliged to be working towards a situation where the purposes and direction of art and culture should be in the hands of the creative practitioners and the community.

This means that the validity of someone's practice should not be determined by how well it aligns with a centralised agenda, but rather it should be shaped through the self-determination and self-definition by individuals and communities.

As I stated before, I wrote this in March 2022 which was well into my PhD. Therefore, it almost represents an endpoint to a journey. This text's relevance to this research is not necessarily about whether I am right or wrong in my assessment, but rather I am interested in how this framework has been constructed and used to attach meaning and value to *System.*

In short, this framework has been shaped by detecting and establishing links between my account of events and experiences at *System* and my interpretation of others' experiences of *System* as seen or told to me*.* Additionally, as the bank of contextual knowledge and academic literature I have been able to draw on has grown, it has changed my perspective and enabled a shift towards a more considered meaning-making. The values I attached to *System*, however, are ever evolving and unresolvable, and have been built around stories that I tell myself and tell others.

Rebecca Solnit in *The Faraway Nearby* (2013) describes the ways in which we construct meaning to our lives in this way and how we are connected by empathy, narrative, and imagination. In it she writes:

> "Stories are compasses and architecture, we navigate by them, we build our sanctuaries and our prisons out of them, and to be without a story is to be lost in the vastness of a world that spreads in all directions like arctic tundra or sea ice."
>
> (Ibid p3)

If *System* was both a self-identifier and a story, then we could understand it through Giddens for whom self-identity was reliant upon a story of the self that is 'routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual' (1991). Additionally, for Guibernau, 'self-identity is constructed through

belonging and through exclusion' (Guibernau, 2013, p. 26). Central to Guibernau's argument is how in 'belonging by choice,' individuals are both empowered and limited, for once someone has joined a group, they are 'compelled to act in a particular manner and to comply with the group's rules and values' (ibid: p.28). It is important to address here a complication in that I, in a sense, am *System* **and** it is just a moniker that I sometimes operate under (as discussed in more detail in chapter 4). So, to say that I voluntarily belong to *System* does not make sense. However as much it could be understood that I am *System*, it also existed before me and 'inherited' many values and practices that were established by other people before I took over *System*. Regardless, I do not feel I subsumed the established values and practices of *System* (by which I mean *System* in the collective rather than singular sense) as Guibernau alludes.

It is important to note there is a logical contradiction in Guibernau's argument: as it posits that identities are constructed whilst values are somehow fixed. It suggests that people who join a community, participate in its activities, and invest its norms are somehow constructing the values that they are also supposedly surrendering. I do however still maintain that Guibernau has much to offer as a lens through which to frame and interpret the 'potent emotional content' (2013) associated with belonging, identity, and values (for instance see Emma Coffield's PhD on cultural construction within ARIs (2014)). However, the essentialist elements of Guibernau's hypothesis sits at odds with the conclusions drawn from this research. As evidenced through analysing my writing my values shift over time in relation to (my interpretation of) context and experience. In this regard, Anthias's concept of 'narrative of location' has much to offer. It can be understood as '…an account that tells a story about how we place ourselves in terms of social categories…[and]… often mirror as well as produce social ontologies' (2002, p. 498). They continue:

> "The narrative is also both a story about who and what we identify with (a story about identification) and is also a story about our practices and the practices of others, including wider social practices and how we experience them."
>
> (2002, p. 499)

I am keenly aware of the *emergent and contradictory* nature of the story(ies) I am telling here in this thesis and have told through words and objects during the PhD. For the purposes of this PhD, these things have to be presented in some order. However, I have tried to retain the impression of the looseness of thought and narrative building. This thesis therefore is not only a representation of this narrative (of myself and *System*) it is also a record of it being (re)produced.

These narratives function as 'narratives of location' – these are accounts that tell stories to ourselves and others about our place in the world in terms of social categories (Anthias, 2005, p. 42). On this, Anthias writes:

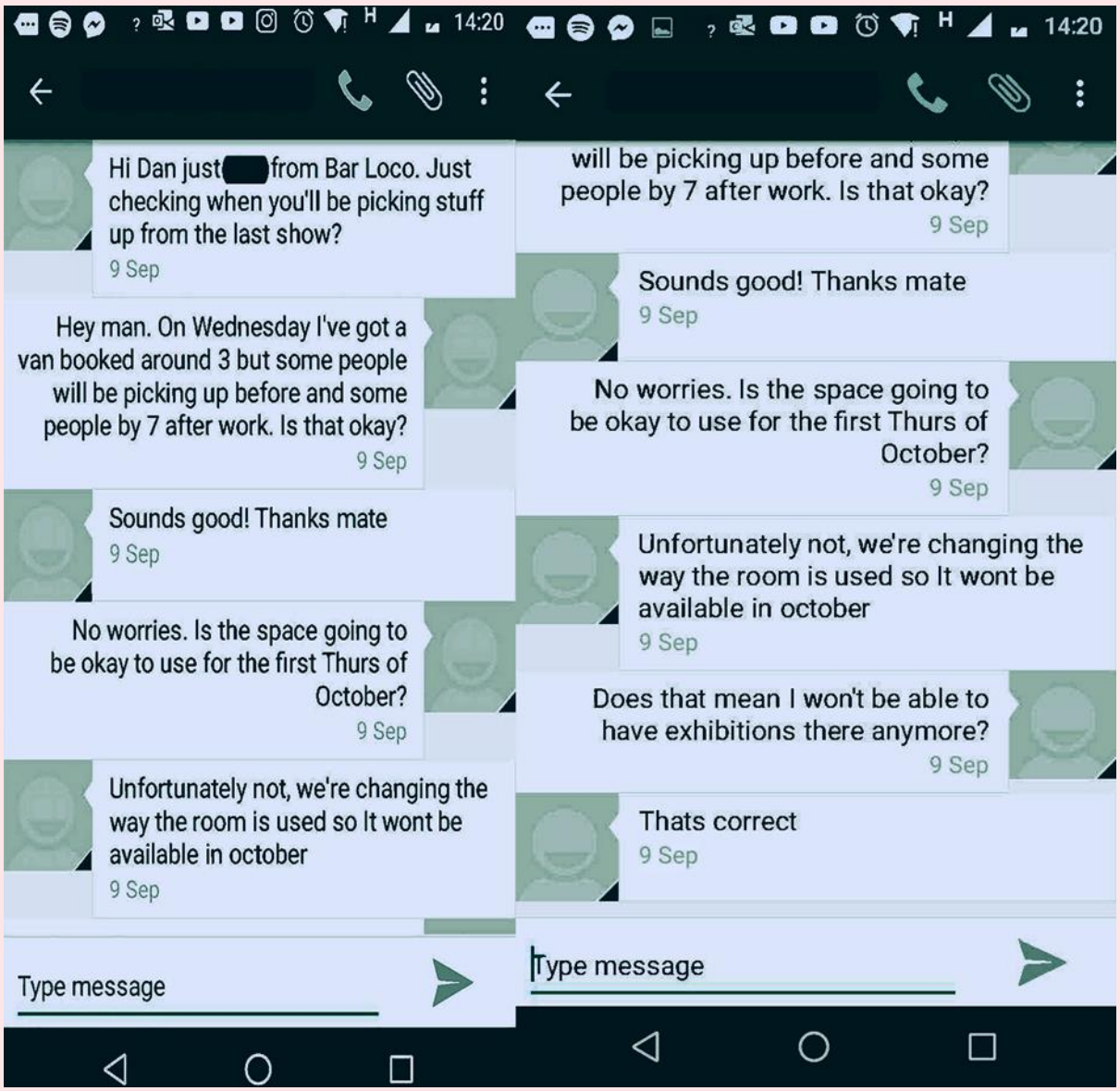
> 'The narrative is both a story about who and what we identify with (i.e., a story about identification) and it is also a story about our practices and the practices of others, including wider social practices and how we experience them.' (*Ibid.*)

'Narratives of location' are formed more through a rejection of what one is <u>not</u> rather than what one <u>is</u> (Anthias, 2002, p. 501). In that previous text, I declare *System* as being in opposition of *the social hierarchies and conditions imposed by the institutional art system,* without offering a clear formulation of what *System* is. This is echoed throughout ARI literature and rhetoric, and similarly found myself doing it repeatedly in retrospectively analysing my own writing and notes. This conveniently brings us back to the instance when I was asked:

"What would you say, if I were to ask you is *System* just a hobby?"

The academic posed this question to me in the Q-and-A part of the seminar in response to a short story about my PhD and a text that I read to the group. I had written the text to be displayed at a *System* exhibition group show called *Manner of Falling* that opened on 5th September 2019 (Appendix J.). This show was held at the Ex-libris Gallery in Newcastle University. It was the first *System* exhibition to be held anywhere other than on the top floor of *Bar Loco* (which at the time was a kinda-crusty-punk-euro-bar). The exhibition was within one month of another *System* exhibition that was entitled *Manner of Flying* (Appendix G.) that opened on 4th October 2019. The significance of the closeness of the dates these exhibitions were held and that they were held at different venues, was because *System* had been vacated from its premises of 10 years. The circumstances around this are detailed more in the text. I wanted to tell a story of resilience to myself, *System's* artists and audience, and people that I knew linked to other local organisations and venues.

After 10 years of our gallery being based above Bar Loco for the past 10 years or so, we were dispassionately told that we could no longer use the space for exhibitions. This text conversation went as follows:



The story that the somewhat insensitive 'booting' tells is not of someone who is necessarily unsympathetic, but of someone who perhaps doesn't appreciate the symbolic value that space held and the emotional impact of their actions to those attached to it. In a previous essay I wrote, I described how I always thought of that space above Bar Loco as being System whereas in fact it was just one function of that space. To us that space was System, but to the Spanish classes, drama groups, musicians, and everybody else who

used that space it was something else. To the owners it was theirs to do with as they please (quite reasonably maybe as they had bought it), however so much activity contained within that space was ours. Our labour. Our personal connections and friends. Our memories. And not to sound too much like a jilted ex, but for years we had filled that place with people for them to spend money at the bar and to be given the heave-ho with no warning felt a bit like a kick-in-the-teeth.

Even having known the precariousness of System's situation and suspecting that the new owners weren't as happy for us to be there as the previous ones, being told we could no longer use that space was a shock. I wondered around the city aimlessly for a good half-hour feeling part angry, part lost, part grief. I could feel my eyes go wet. "That's correct." Fuck you.

It took an hour or so of contemplating the opportunities within this new situation and a chat over coffee with a mate to get my head right. There was now a mixture of feeling free and no longer being tied to that space, albeit coupled with a slight guilt-worry of having to let down the artists I had scheduled to show in the coming months.

Shit.

I emailed the artists to let them know and apologise.

Yuck.

I then messaged System's co-curator over Facebook to let her know…

"So, I've just been told that we can no longer use the space above Bar Loco. Forget every time I've defended them, they're fucking shits. Not sure what the plan is yet, whether I want to bother finding another permanent space or to have pop-up shows. We should probably meet to discuss what's next at some point…"

She responds pretty quickly…

“Ah shit, that’s so so shit.”

“Yes, let’s meet up and discuss.”

“First thought: CLOSING PARTY!”

“Trash the place!!”

That made me feel a bit better.

A few days later, it was time to start working on a ‘statement’ to let System’s audience know about the situation and that the gallery in a state of transition. Hmm. I remember Transmission releasing an open letter when its funding from Creative Scotland was withdrawn. That strikes a good tone. CTRL. CTRL. I can tweak that a bit and put this in. Cool. Oh yeah, I can take this bit from the last exhibition’s text.

Hmm…this is quite cathartic. What do I want to say?

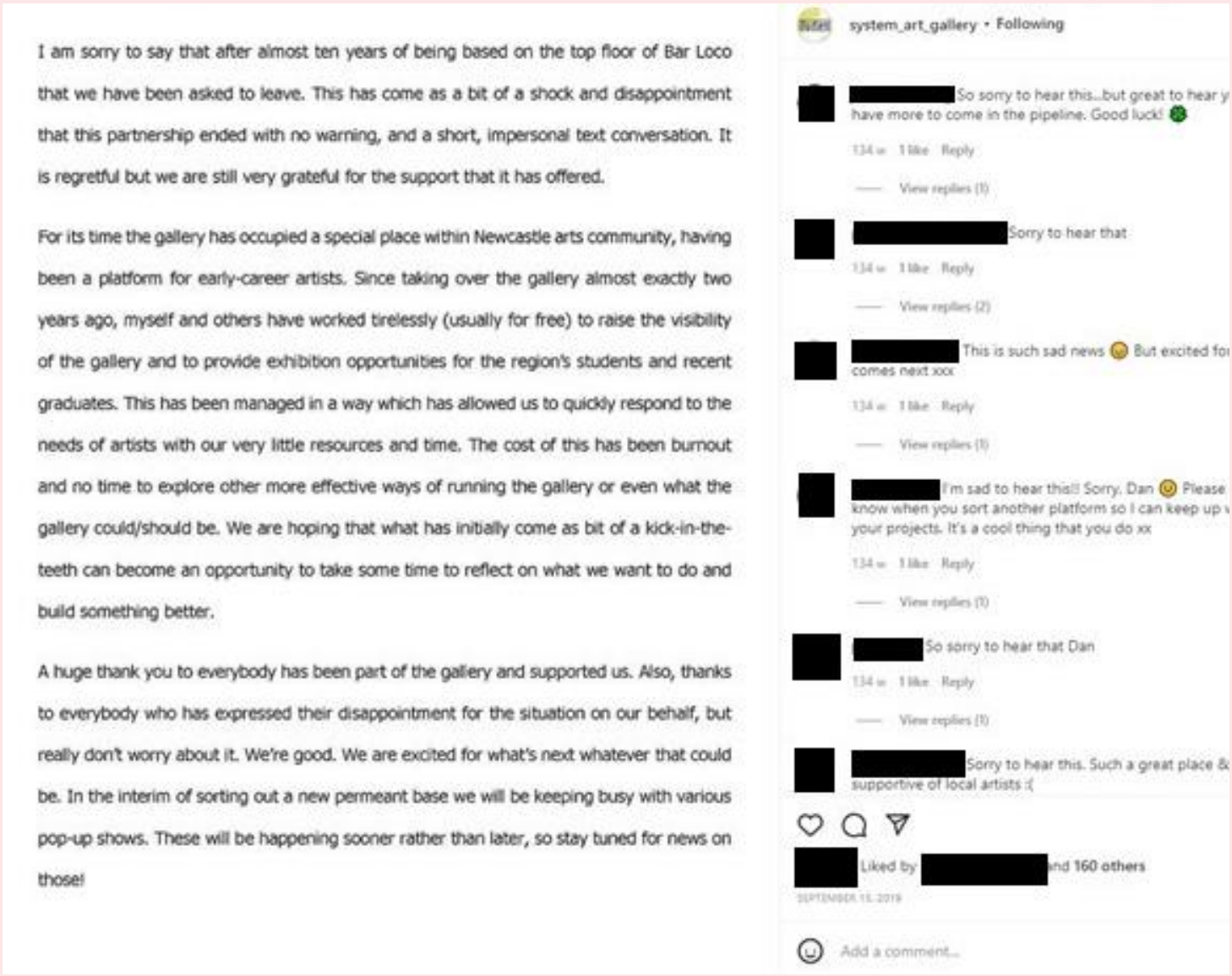
I finish up and reformat.

Quick proofread.

Save as PDF.

Save as Jpeg.

Post to System’s Instagram.



I am sorry to say that after almost ten years of being based on the top floor of Bar Loco that we have been asked to leave. This has come as a bit of a shock and disappointment that this partnership ended with no warning, and a short, impersonal text conversation. It is regretful but we are still very grateful for the support that it has offered.

For its time the gallery has occupied a special place within Newcastle arts community, having been a platform for early-career artists. Since taking over the gallery almost exactly two years ago, myself and others have worked tirelessly (usually for free) to raise the visibility of the gallery and to provide exhibition opportunities for the region's students and recent graduates. This has been managed in a way which has allowed us to quickly respond to the needs of artists with our very little resources and time. The cost of this has been burnout and no time to explore other more effective ways of running the gallery or even what the gallery could/should be. We are hoping that what has initially come as bit of a kick-in-the-teeth can become an opportunity to take some time to reflect on what we want to do and build something better.

A huge thank you to everybody has been part of the gallery and supported us. Also, thanks to everybody who has expressed their disappointment for the situation on our behalf, but really don't worry about it. We're good. We are excited for what's next whatever that could be. In the interim of sorting out a new permeant base we will be keeping busy with various pop-up shows. These will be happening sooner rather than later, so stay tuned for news on those!

That felt a bit weird. It feels very 'proper.' Like I am a 'proper' curator and System a 'proper' gallery.

The response to the post was surprising and better than anything I'd ever posted by a long way. For two-rooms above a pub it meant a lot to people, and it meant a lot to me for them to show appreciation for our efforts. Not only were the 'likes' flooding in but so were the comments with words of condolence and encouragement. My phone starts vibrating with much of the same where people had messaged me, like I'd announced

someone close to me had died or something. I shrugged it off, but I think that I was in a kind-of mourning.

This shit is personal. Over the course of running the space for two years I had become increasingly imbedded within it, and it became a way of identifying with and by others. I was the ‘System guy.’ I now felt slightly bound by it, at times it was a pain-in-the-fucking-arse but the feeling of being connected and contributing to something far outweighed this.

What am I going to do now?

(Goodman, n.d.-a)

One thing which is clear early in the text is the discordance between the impassive and cordial text conversation and the emotional turbulence I describe that it caused me. You could infer in this text that the representative from *Bar Loco* may have, like the unnamed academic, considered that *System* was just a hobby. However, I clearly took being 'given the heave-ho with no warning' personally and felt hurt by it. The source of this hurt was not just a perceived betrayal, but the loss of feeling like I was 'connected and contributing to something' that the venue offered*.* It could also be understood from how I felt better through the words of support and encouragement I received, the catharsis of posting the statement on *System's* social media, and the combination of the two making me feel 'proper', that in-part the hurt I felt was because of the implicit realisation that how I saw myself and *System* potentially did not tally up with the perspective of other people. This was displayed here by the apparent disparity between mine and *Bar Loco's* representative's perception of me and *System,* and me feeling deserving of being given notice in recognition of the mutual benefit *System* and *Bar Loco* had enjoyed over the years. Reading this text now, the reformulation or reconstruction of my 'narrative of location' (Anthias, 2002) through the processing of this new situation and circumstance is quite clear. To explore this topic further, it is useful to refer to Gidden's concept of 'ontological security' (1991).

According to Giddens, 'ontological security' blocks out feelings of unease and fear for individuals 'through transitions, crisis and circumstances of high risk' (ibid., p. 38). The times in which this 'ontological security' was threatened, such as the dispassionate text exchange informing me that *System* is being vacated from its venue, forced me to reconstruct a version of *System* or myself in relation to it, or value attached to both. The malleability of *System's* form, function, and purpose, and my agency over it, gave me a level of agency over these choices within the social, cultural, and material constraints surrounding *System.* The text asking, 'What am I going to do now?', indicates a transition for how I saw *System* and myself in relation to it. Similarly, the writing of the text itself was potentially the

start of an internal transition where I could reject certain forms of professionalism (such as not using expletives when addressing *System's* audience) whilst still feeling like a 'proper' curator.

A similar discordance potentially contributed to my ill-feeling when it was implied *System* may just be a hobby whilst I was early on in my PhD and the construction of my identity as a researcher and a different type of artist than what I had been previously[7]. In this instance and the loss of the venue above *Bar Loco*, there is an element of legitimacy of my claim to a particular identity being brought into question. It is not just about how I personally saw myself or understood *System,* but how I wanted myself and *System* to be understood by others. I am not trying to make any false equivalences here as the two situations are vastly different, but to allude to a pattern between the two. Both instances show me rejecting others' perceived understandings of *System* and its value or legitimacy through referring to it as 'just a hobby' or impassively informing me that I could no longer host exhibitions above *Bar Loco*, whilst at the same time wishing validation from them.

I performed a version of the text that I read at the seminar at Liverpool John Moore's University for a presentation I gave as part of a conference entitled 'What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About the Artist-led' (2000). Of my contribution in a review of the conference, it was written that:

> "Goodman… presented a slide in which he deconstructed his own restrained public statement announcing the closure, adding in a fair few fucks and home truths that he felt unable to disclose at the time. This raised an important retrospective point: why do we resort to platitudes of resilience and mild acceptance when, as Goodman suggests, anger and an

[7] My undergraduate degree was in painting & drawing and my master's degree in art museum and gallery studies, rather than creative writing or contemporary art curation.

> acknowledgement of loss might be more productive forces when rallying against capitalist hegemony?" (Welsh, 2020)

The slide Welsh was referring to is this one (Figure 3). The text in black are quotations taken from the public statement I wrote regarding *System's* vacation from *Bar Loco,* and the text in red were my reflections on those parts of the statement.

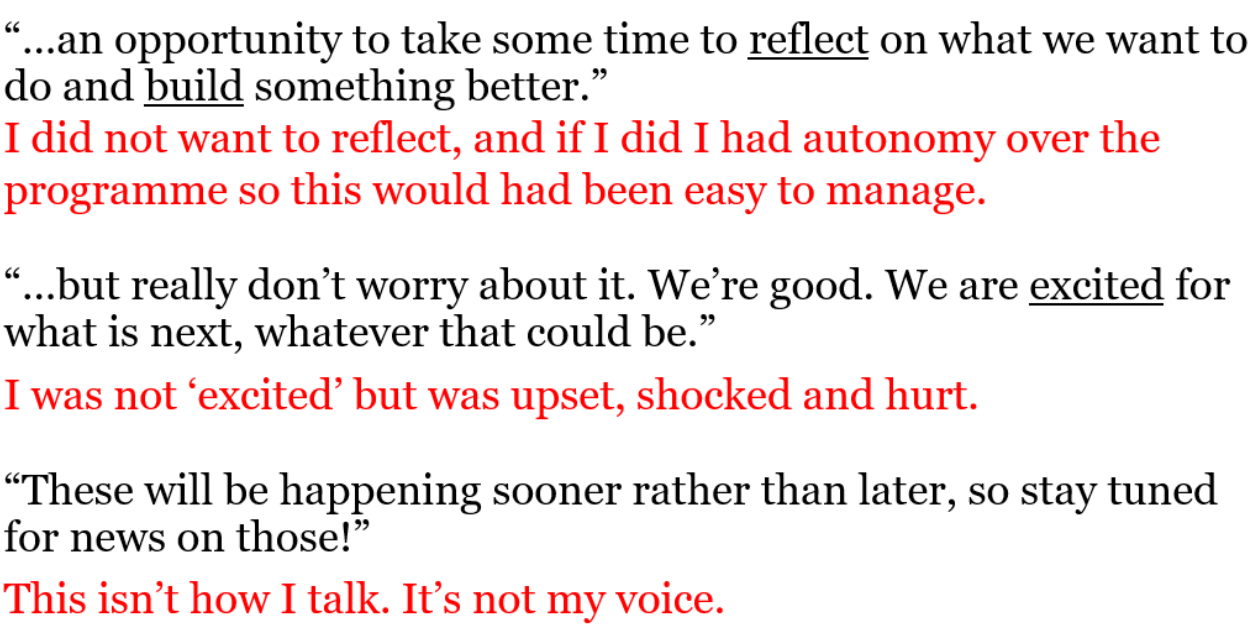


Figure 3. Presentation slide from 'What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About the Artist-led'.

The presentation was well-received, and I remember taking so much pride in that review that (embarrassingly!) I would frequently go back and re-read it. A few people who were either present at the conference or watched the recording after-the-fact have praised my presentation. I attribute this positive response to the focus of the conference attracting an audience formed of ARI members, creative practitioners, and people sympathetic to the struggles of ARIs. The

audience's receptiveness bears some resemblance perhaps to Bourdieu's concept of an inverted economy, wherein cultural agents gain status and peer esteem (in the form of symbolic and social capital) based on the distance they are able to put between themselves and established measures of economic capital and power (1993a: p39). In this 'loser wins' (ibid) economy, the 'fundamental principles of all ordinary economies' are reversed (ibid). The story of the dispassionate exchange of text messages as compared to my personal emotional hurt*,* were a badge of honour that affirmed my legitimacy to myself and others.

The offence I took from the proposition of *System* being a hobby, suggests there is an emotional function or need for me believing it is more than 'just a hobby.' To believe that *System* was 'just a hobby' would mean revising my 'narrative of location' (Anthias, 2002) through reinterpreting past events and producing, reproducing or rejecting links between said past events. Consequently, it could involve reimagining my self-identity, sense of belonging and drawing new lines of allegiance.

To understand 'hobby' as leisure time pursuit, it is hard to say what parts of *System* are 'inside' or 'outside' of my regular employment. *System* does not exist 'outside' but rather has existed 'alongside' other occupations such as university teaching and as a freelance curator and artist. Also, it is worth highlighting that though I have often found *System* enjoyable and rewarding, it is also stressful and exhausting. As already evidenced in this chapter, it is hard emotional work that requires continually anticipating potential loss or adjusting to actual loss.

This chapter has emphasised the agency offered through *System.* For Guibernau (2013), underlying the pursuit for belonging is a tension between independence and constraint, on the latter she writes:

> "I understand [constraint] as a limitation to act… individuals are constrained by institutions such as the state… they are also constrained by norms, dogma, law, tradition, public opinion, threats…, the community of the group they belong to and the self. Lack of knowledge also acts as a constraint – even if the individual is not aware of it – because it limits the individual's ability to discern and make an informed choice." (2013, p. 59)

In relation to this, For Guibernau 'belonging' (2013) by choice, helps individuals overcome the 'dizziness of freedom' (Kierkegaard, 1980). Kierkegaard uses this term to describe instances where in the individualisation of society through modernity, people have the freedom to choose how they want to live their life and act on it but in the knowledge that they alone will be the one who must deal with any consequences. For Kierkegaard, this anxiety has a potentially generative function as it can deliver us from operating via an unconsciousness reactivity to one of self-conscious reflection. Therefore, the presence of anxiety in the story fragments I have presented, suggests a capacity to make choices based on a self-directed growing knowledge or confidence, and the freedom to evaluate these out and develop them. One part of *System's* value is the agency it afforded me to make these choices within the security of a 'narrative of location' (Anthias, 2002) and sense of 'belonging' (Guibernau, 2013).

In the process of gaining agency or freedom outside of authority, such as that evidenced through self-realisation and self-determination, Fromm says we are often left with feeling hopeless until we can combine 'freedom from' with this sense of 'freedom to' (1942). The former being working against or within imposed obstacles or constraints, and the latter being the 'possibility to autonomously determine and achieve individual or collective purposes' beyond imposed obstacles or constraints (Berlin, 1996). In this case, put rather simply, the 'freedom to' build an alternative to the institutional values (presented in its procedures and instrumentalization) at the same time developing a 'freedom

from' the 'inner restraints, compulsions, and fears which tend to undermine the meaning of the victories freedom has won' (1942, p. 91).

The lack of a definitive or fixed definition of what *System* 'is' - for instance as constrained within policies, mission statements, or constituted legal framework - lends itself to this. Through its interwoven relationship with my own identity and the way it bleeds into my personal, social, and professional life, *System* is a statement and process of realisation of what I value and ways of acting on that or creating meaningful work through it. It is a set of values and of value generation with myself and the formation of my identity at its centre.

This is to reveal in-part, the value of *System* as being a narrative device through which I can position myself in relation to the world. For instance, through its malleability *System* can both be a hobby, and a bastion fighting the evils of the institutional art world. However, this is a double-edged sword, as it leaves it vulnerable to questions of its legitimacy and value (or potentially dismissed by others as 'just a hobby').

To answer the question, "What would you say, if I were to ask you is *System* just a hobby?" my honest answer might still be the same. Not because I feel the need to legitimise it above being 'just a hobby,' but because it was asked in bad faith. As to what the 'point' of *System* is*,* that is its value is as a practice that garners creative independence and self-determination with others. This is as part of a life lived - an ongoing story produced and told through fragments to myself and others to create an emergent but satisfactory whole as a 'narrative of location' (Anthias, 2002).

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter explores my continuous process of (re)narrativizing my struggles in stories to imbue them with meaning. It shows how this narrativisation allowed me to transform or reimagine a self-identity and purpose through a reconfiguration of *System*. This chapter reveals how *System's* malleable and ambiguous nature enabled informal, reactive, and temporal modes of operating which foster the realisation of self-determination. This is used to not only combat feelings of alienation, but to galvanise that sense of alienation into action. *System* in giving me the capacity to reflect on my position within the world has given me the purpose, capacity, and desire to improve the world or reimagine my position within it. This imbued meaning galvanised a transformation or reimagination of self-identity and purpose made possible through *System's* malleability and ambiguity.

Through the experience of belonging, we can understand *System* as valuation process through which forms of value generation occurred. It presents a counterintuitive argument where the social benefits and value of *System* did not occur because of goal setting, but rather an intuitive, self-deterministic valuation process coupled with an independence **with** rather than **from** others.

Just as value is both the process and product of experience (Dewey, 1934; Muniesa, 2011), 'belonging' is offers a useful framework to understand forms of value generation that are rooted in lived-experience. As shown in this chapter, the sense of belonging I felt within *System* was tied to a sense of identity, shared values, and common goals, which in turn shaped the way in which I perceived and ascribed forms of value, including, emotional value, psychological value, social value, and cultural value. These forms of value generated from the relational context of *System* outlined in the previous chapter and the self-determinacy and agency it afforded me.

As well as informing shared understandings of ARIs, this knowledge and framing may be useful to practitioners to better understand their practice. Particularly as the focus on valuation process of 'belonging' roots the discussion to nuances of experience, process, and practice that is often lost when focusing primarily on named forms of values.

The next chapter discusses how I communicated and extended the research findings *System* in the Research Exposition. Within the Research Exposition I approach the potent emotional, spatial, and social dimensions of *System* discussed so far as 'existing conditions' that are realised spatially as a visual autoethnographic exhibition.

Chapter 6. The Research Exposition



Image: Vinyl text from PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery.

6.1 Introduction

Across the thesis I have detailed how I developed an autoethnography centred around my experiences running *System* and my artistic-curatorial practice. It describes ways that I have shared my autoethnographic writing throughout the PhD with practitioners, researchers, and policy makers by delivering conferences, seminars, and other presentations, and producing text as part of artist residencies and within exhibitions held at *System.*

This chapter shifts focus to discuss the development of the practice-based Research Exposition. This took shape as a group art exhibition called 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at the Hatton Gallery as part of Newcastle University's 2023 annual summer show of Newcastle University's post-graduate artists. 'Dan Dan the System Man' was an exhibition within an exhibition, housed and curated within its own room.

In developing 'Dan Dan the System Man,' I curated an exhibition called 'Folly' (Appendix Q.). The title referring to architectural follies. This was a tongue-in-cheek comment on the element of fakery or disguise in the 'Folly's' construction and purpose in that it was a test rather than a final research output. Many of the elements of 'Folly' were reconceptualised or developed afterwards for 'Dan Dan the System Man.' This is consistent with how my practice involves reactive and iterant ways of working, as detailed in the Methodology chapter. Underpinning my practices and *System's* value-oriented adhocracy is a politics of friendship that I articulated spatially in the Research Exposition. I will outline this politics of friendship first in the context of *System* to situate later discussion of how my research exposition 1) contributes to histories of reflexive artistic-curatorial practice and 2) expresses forms of value generation that occur within *System* and potentially similar ARIs.

6.2 Politics of Friendship

By combining the frameworks of Guibernau and Massey to the context of *System*, we can see how value is intricately linked to the politics of friendship. The social bonds that define 'belonging' and 'sense of place' are not just peripheral but central to value generation within *System*. The dynamic and relational nature of value reflects the ongoing negotiations and power dynamics that Condorelli examines in her work on friendship and collaboration.

The Research Exposition's title, 'Dan Dan the System Man,' is in reference to a tongue-in-cheek nickname given to me by George Stewart whose work I exhibited as part of 'Insert Exhibition Title' (Appendix H.). I had known George for several years prior to this as he was close friends with several other artists who exhibited at *System.* After George first coining the nickname, its use was then adopted by some of our mutual friends and is one example of the informal and fluid networks of kinship that formed around *System.* Similar sentiments of kinship are echoed throughout the research exposition.

In its presentation of friendship as both a sentimental relationship and political relationship of advocacy and solidarity, 'Dan Dan the System Man' highlights how friendship within *System* is both an enabler and intended outcome of it. As with George and others, my proximity and collaboration with artists fostered close bonds, personal relationships, and forms of allegiance, which over time created a community with my practice and *System* at the centre.

I consider friendship in 'Dan the System Man' as an 'existing condition' for *System* and the research. Within this research my way of working with others became an organising principle from which forms of value derived. This links to my practice of 'making space' wherein my motivation for and approach to

collaborating with artists was to respond to their perceived or expressed need(s) – whether that was to include the opportunity to evaluate and/or receive feedback on new artwork, gain exhibition experience, or just an excuse for us to 'hangout.' Additionally, pointing to the network of friendships and kinships underpinning the organisation of ARIs like *City Racing* or *84 West Broadway.*

Politics of friendship revolve around notions of allegiance and responsibility. Eagleton (2018b) draws a relationship between interdependence, friendship, and kinship to freedom. He argues it is when individuals no longer consider themselves autonomous agents and can situate themselves within the context of a wider world that they can understand what freedom means (ibid). As Beech seconds, "collaborative independence, involving hospitalities within hospitalities, is a form of independence that does not delude itself that autonomy (self-determination) is equivalent to isolation (the myth of the self-created self) … The 'self' of 'self-determination' is understood, within collaborative independence, to be co-produced with others" (Beech, 2005). The sense of responsibility and autonomy that I found in *System* came through the emotional aspects of belonging as I outline in Chapter 5.

In exhibition texts and other forms of writing I articulate aspects of friendship through ideas of care and support (Appendix A. Appendix G. Appendix I. Appendix N. Appendix O. Appendix T.). I discuss care and support both as political relationships and *System* as a burden and source of personal emotional support. For example, in reference to my practice of running and curating *System* within the exhibition 'Manner of Flying' held at System Gallery in September 2019 (Appendix A.), I write:

> "It is a practice of care and self-care, both of which sustain the other. It provided a great antidote for some personal issues that I was battling through 2017, but equally, it can be a pain-in-the-fucking-arse."

(Goodman, n.d.-b)

If friendship is judging who one would rather devote their time and energy to, then 'making space' was driven by a form of kinship that extends to strangers. This kinship with others was maintained through my recognition of and identifying with the vulnerability and interdependence of others. This speaks to Condorelli's definition of cultural production within her practice, which she describes as "the process of connecting things, establishing relationships, which in many ways means befriending issues, people, contexts" (Condorelli, 2012, p. 222). This points to a version of friendship that goes beyond a political or sentimental relationship, but a practice of being in and engaging with the world.

Curation, friendship and Condorelli's definition of culture contain an inherent plurality. Exhibitions explore this spatially through the placing of one thing (artworks, objects, ideas, and people) in relation to another. It too, is the 'process of connecting things.' Curation and friendship bears resemblance to the latent simultaneous plurality in space too, particularly when understood through Massey's conceptualisation of space as the overlap of multiple distinct social trajectories in time and space (2005). Through this, the Research Exposition speaks to the practices of Per Hüttner, *84 West Broadway*, and *Eastside Projects* as discussed previously in the thesis.

6.3 "Dan Dan the System Man"

'Dan Dan the System Man,' though in-part a group exhibition involving the display of other artist's artwork, is a spatially configured visual autoethnography that presents and reflects on my experiences and understanding of *System's*

politics of kinship and friendship. It does this through understanding friendship and kinship as part of the 'existing conditions' of *System* - this is similar to how Condorelli has spoken of her practice (2012). 'Dan Dan the System Man' also foregrounds the 'existing conditions' of *System* presented in the context of the Hatton Gallery.

The *Hatton Gallery* is situated within Newcastle University's Fine Art building and co-managed between the university on behalf of Newcastle City Council by Tyne and Wear Archives and Museum. It was founded in 1925 and named in honour of Professor Richard George Hatton, a former Head of the university's School of Art. The gallery is housed within a Grade II listed building and recently underwent a £3.8 million redevelopment in 2017 to conserve its architectural and historical elements whilst modernising its exhibition spaces. The funding was used also to conserve and update exhibition interpretation for Kurt Schwitters' *Merz Barn Wall* that gallery bought and incorporated into the interior of the gallery in 1965. The *Hatton Gallery* houses a collection of over 3,000 works from the 14th – 20th centuries including works by other prominent artists such as Francis Bacon, Prunella Clough, Richard Hamilton, Palma Giovane, Patrick Heron, and Paula Rego (Hatton Gallery, n.d.).

The Hatton Gallery's national and international status within the art world as well as Newcastle and the wider region's cultural offer served as an interesting counterpoint to *System's* DIY and hyperlocal positionality. I was also conscious that many of *The Hatton Gallery's* audience may not have encountered *System* or were conscious of practices like it. There seemed then an opportunity to play with audiences' preconceptions and to juxtapose *System* with the *Hatton Gallery* through a playful antagonism reflecting the 'existing conditions' of the exhibition. For instance, balancing some carefully considered curatorial decisions with a shoddily put together free-standing wall held upright by sandbags to backdrop of intermittent recordings of karaoke songs I half-jokingly made in honour of

System. The wall itself a playful reference to Schwitters' much more acclaimed *Merz Barn Wall.*

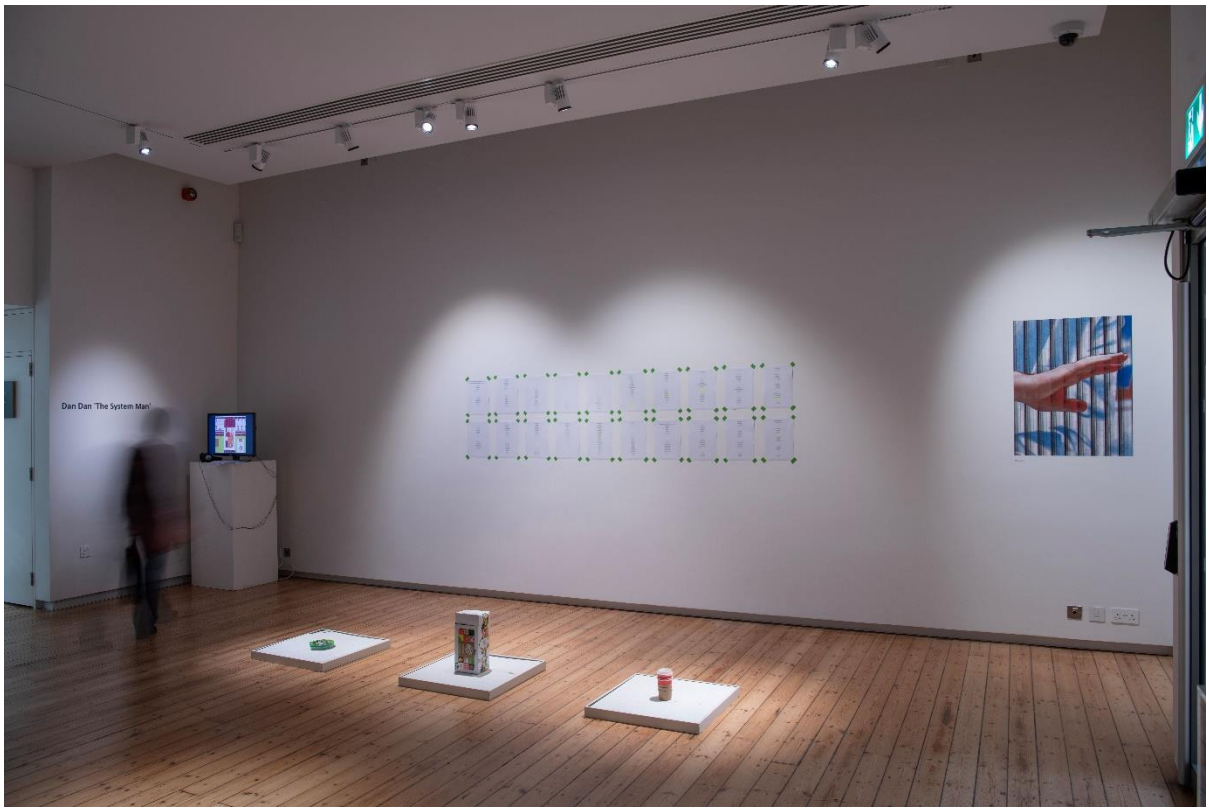
The exhibition's aim was not to pit value generation within *System* or way of working against *Hatton Gallery's*, but rather to use it as a counterpoint to *System's* context. For example, the low visual quality of the video work. Similarly, some objects in the exhibition were secured to the wall using brightly coloured masking tape. These aesthetic choices were made to draw the audience's attention to the authored nature of the exhibition.

The design of the exhibition was conceptualised through the three interrelated spaces of *System* discussed in chapter 4:

- Material Space – (abstract 'other')
- Embodied Space – (singular 'I')
- Relational Space – (collective 'we')

It is through the interaction and interrelation of these concepts that value generation is realised in the research exposition. The next section of this chapter discusses individual elements of the Research Exhibition. The chapter's conclusion then outlines how these elements worked together together to present forms of value generation that occurred within *System*, and by extension how the Research Exposition reflects on forms of value generation that potentially occur within similar ARIs.

Figure 4. Photos of PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery. Photo Credit: Colin Davison.









6.3.1 'System Wall'

Figure 5. Photo of 'System Wall' as part of PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery. Photo Credit: Colin Davison.



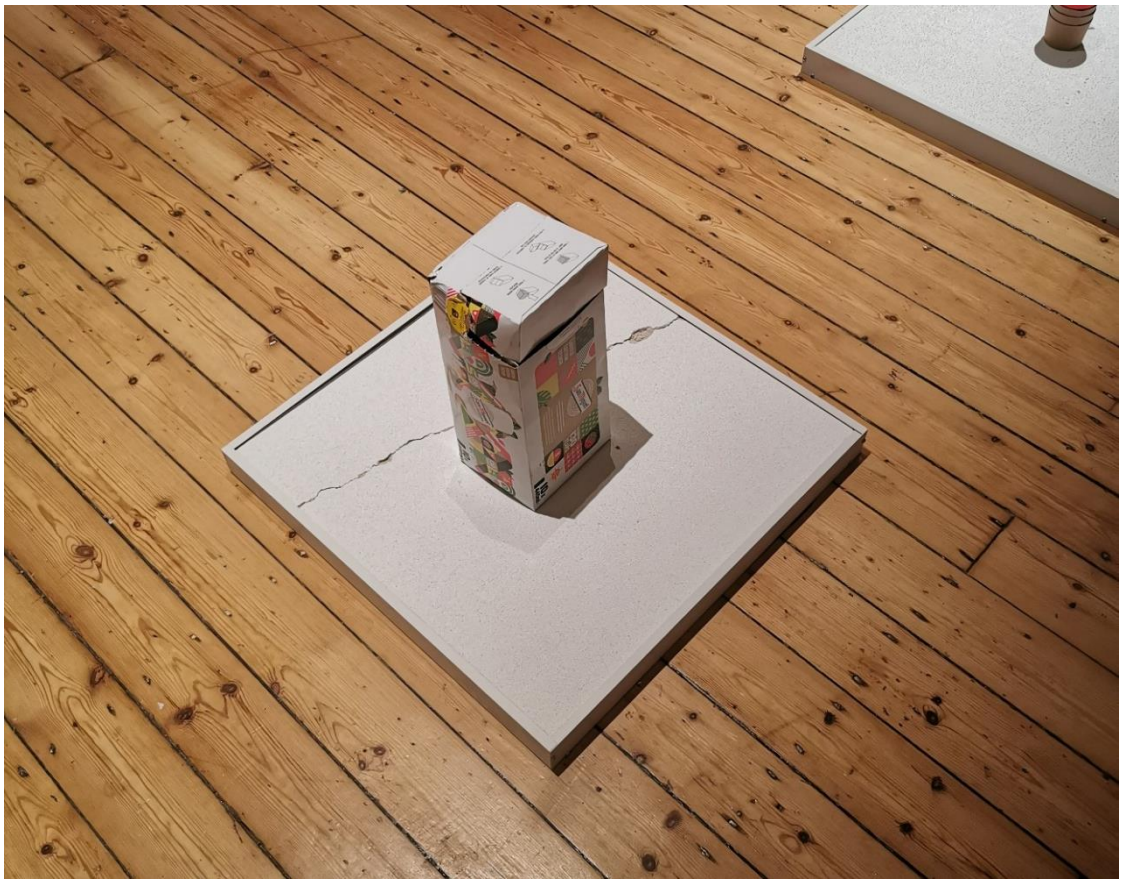
‘System Wall’ is a free-standing structure composed of a wooden frame and legs, combined with reclaimed broken plaster. This plaster was salvaged from a previous *System* venue located at Bamburgh House on Pilgrim Street, Newcastle. While the venue and its history may be familiar to those connected with earlier iterations of *System*, I will provide some context here.

Breeze Creatives, a visual arts organization that offers studio spaces for artists and creative groups across Newcastle and Sunderland, granted me free use of a floor at Bamburgh House—a multi-story studio block and gallery in a former office building—where System operated for several years. Alex and Zoe Breeze, the organization's directors, have long supported me and *System* by offering gallery space at no cost in previous venues. This support was always offered informally, and I infer that their decision was based on their perception of the value of both me and *System*. However, the exhibition program at Bamburgh House was frequently disrupted by the UK's COVID restrictions, preventing it from fully taking off. During this time, the building's landlords served notice to all tenants, including *System* and *Breeze Creatives*, to vacate the premises within a few months as the building was slated for demolition and redevelopment. Images of me removing the plaster (Appendix R.) are featured in one of the karaoke music videos.

The broken plaster on the wall symbolizes the materiality, precarity, and resilience of *System*. I hope that the act of reconstructing *System* conveys a sense of reverence and a slightly desperate longing that, in its absurdity, is both humorous and melancholic. This work references Condorelli’s concept of ‘support’ in exhibition display, as it literally ‘supports’ the artwork of some of System’s artists, which is hung on the crumbling plaster. For those unfamiliar with this aspect of System’s history (or System in general), the story unfolds through the wall, images in the karaoke video, and the framing of ‘Dan Dan the System Man.’

6.3.2 'Detritus'

Figure 6. Photos of 'Detritus' as part of PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery. Photo Credit: First photo by Colin Davison.






FROGTAPE



In reference to the materiality of *System* I also included other pieces of venues past - ceiling tiles, Fire Exit signs, hand disinfectant, empty boxes of beer cans, and a ceramic jar left by Jay Weaver who exhibited it as part of *Transience* (Appendix S.), a group exhibition held at *System* in May 2018. I wanted *System* audiences to be able to recognise themselves in the show through their familiarity of such stories, and to then be able to reflect on their experiences of *System.*

As with the 'System Wall,' audiences outside of System's community may not recognize Jay Weaver's vase or the story behind it to understand the joke. For the exhibition's general audience, I aimed to create a humorous contrast between the seemingly mundane items and the visible care taken in presenting them on spotlit plinths and in a museum case.

For all audiences, these objects signify the occurrence of social activity and collective labour—both in the production of 'Dan Dan the System Man' and in *System's* earlier activities. I wanted to present *System* as a collective articulation across people, time, and space. In an interview with Gavin Wade on the concept of display as 'making public,' Condorelli states:

> "I do think that implicit in any definition of exhibition is the notion that somebody needs to be there, at least potentially! Some might be physically present; others are there through their labour. Which means that it is first and foremost their public aspect that characterizes exhibitions, their capacity to qualify space as public. An exhibition is always for me a form of collective production."
>
> (Condorelli, 2015, p. 80)

In this vein, 'Dan Dan the System Man' acknowledges and highlights the exhibition and *System* as the product of collective labour and relationships to open discourse on the forms of value generated within similar ARI activity.

6.3.3 'Karaoke'

Figure 7. Photo 'Karaoke' projected onto 'System Wall' as part of PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery. Photo Credit: Colin Davison.



This audio-visual piece consists of a recording of me singing, instrumentals provided by Tommy Keenan (an artist who has exhibited multiple times at *System*), and music videos created mostly from slideshows of still images of *System* and its events.

Many of *System's* artists and audiences would be familiar with Tommy and our shared history through *System*. Tommy was the first artist I worked with as

System curator on an exhibition called 'Dishwasher Safe' (Appendix F). We met through a chance introduction from a mutual friend at an opening event at another art gallery. Tommy told me he had an idea for an exhibition featuring artwork by him and his friends, who were all about to graduate from the Fine Art undergraduate program at Northumbria University. They wanted to do this group show to commemorate the friendships they had built and to mark their transition. I agreed on the spot, and without realizing it at the time, this encounter encapsulated what I wanted *System* to be—a space that could respond to the needs of artists, operating non-hierarchically and informally. This was an early expression of the ethos of 'making space,' which would eventually underpin my artistic-curatorial practice.

The launch of 'Dishwasher Safe' drew an unexpectedly large turnout, which was formative for both me and Tommy. For him, it marked the beginning of his career as an artist outside the university context. For me, it was the start of my *System* journey, as the excitement of being part of this successful event filled me with new drive and purpose. Tommy has since exhibited numerous times with *System* and has helped in various ways, leading to a friendship.

Asking Tommy for help in recording the music allowed me to reflect on our collaborative dynamic and on collaboration more broadly. I present some of these thoughts in a text (Appendix. T This presentation took place as part of Abel Shah's series of events called In Collaboration, held at *The Newbridge Project*. During this presentation, I stated:

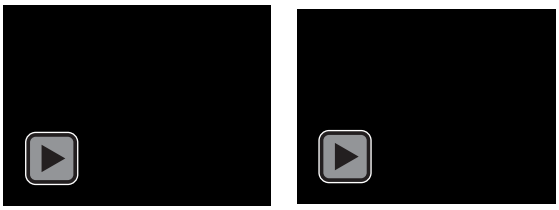
> "When I compare my experiences of working solo as an artist and working collaboratively within *System*, I would say the former is more about production and the latter more about maintenance. Collaboration is about care. David Graeber described care as '…action which is oriented to maintaining or increasing another person's freedom.' He also said that

> ‘Play is the ultimate expression of freedom for its own sake.’ Similarly, I would claim that as a purposeful form of play, art can be a similar expression of freedom.” (Goodman 2022)

The karaoke, in its purposeful playfulness, was an expression of the freedom I found through belonging to *System*. I chose the songs based on how they resonated with my personal experiences of *System*. For example, ‘In My Life’ by The Beatles is a song about remembering friends and lovers, which I used as an ode to *System*’s past venues and communities. Similarly, the lyrics of ‘I’ll Always Remember You’ by Hannah Montana refer to moving into a new chapter in life while holding onto memories of the past. In contrast, ‘Wrecking Ball’ by Miley Cyrus describes the deterioration and aftermath of a relationship breakup, which I used to flippantly refer to *System* losing its venue.

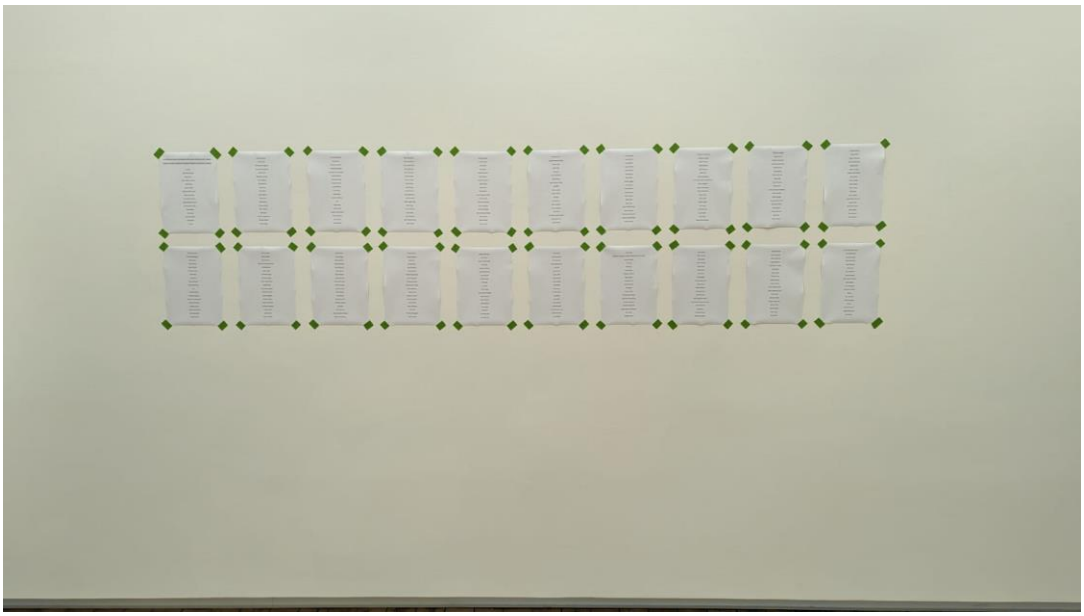
This collaborative performance with Tommy of my individual experience of *System* presents the audience with the complexity of *System* as a collective activity that fosters personal identity through association.

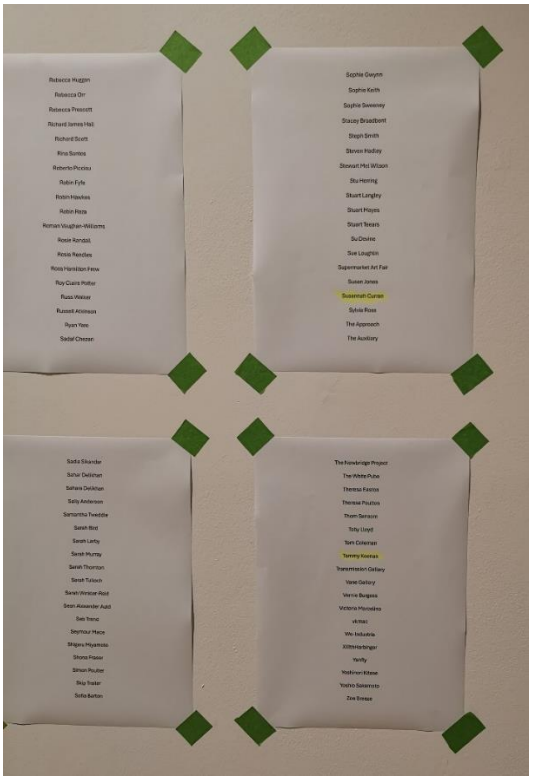
Figure 8. MP4 files from “Dan Dan the System Man” of Karaoke music videos produced and performed with Tommy Keenan

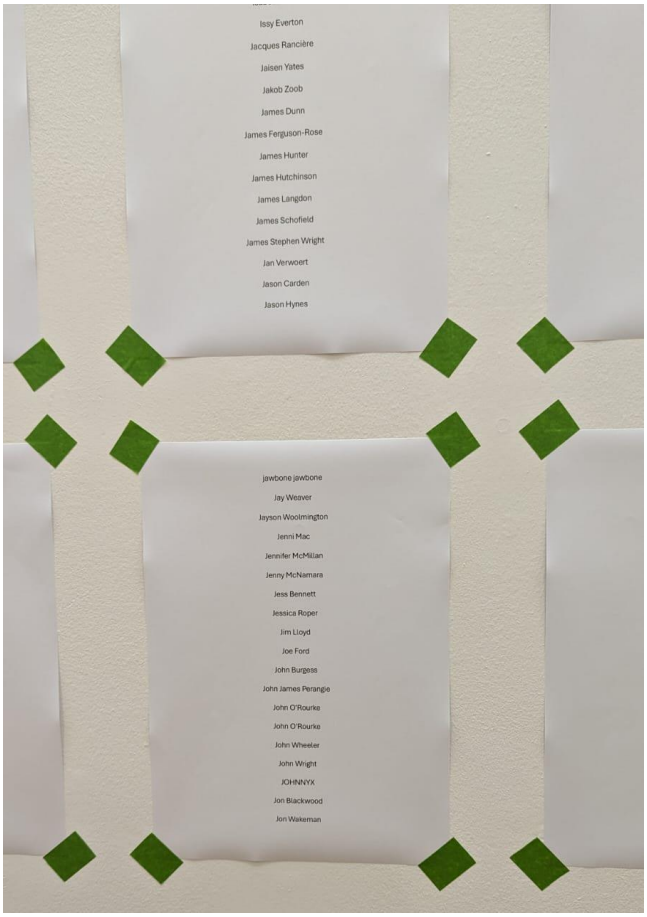


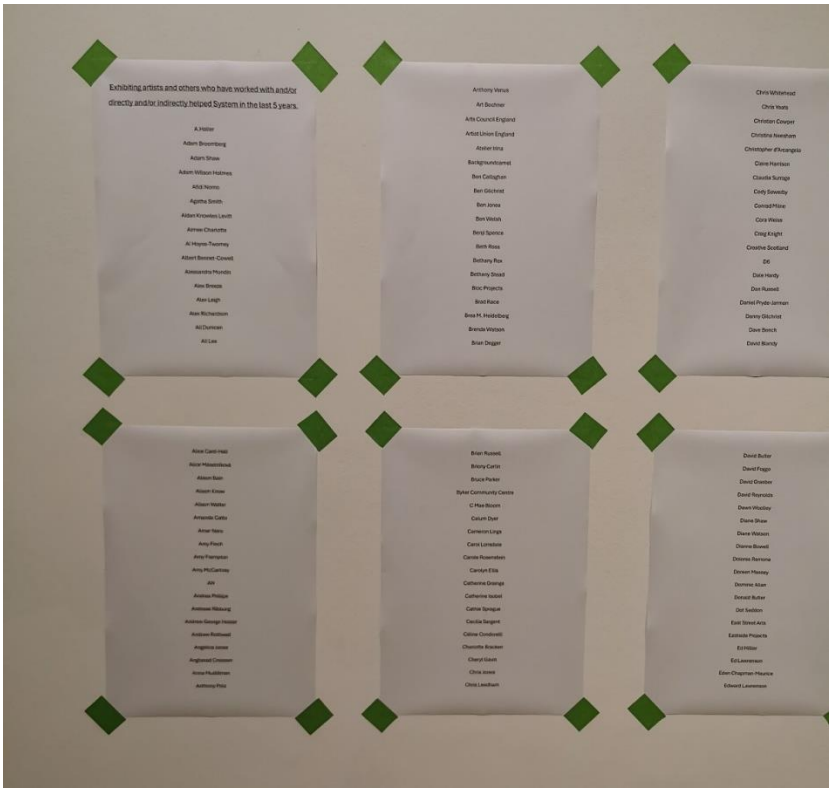
6.3.4 'Acknowledgements'

Figure 9. Photos of 'Acknowledgements' as part of PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery.





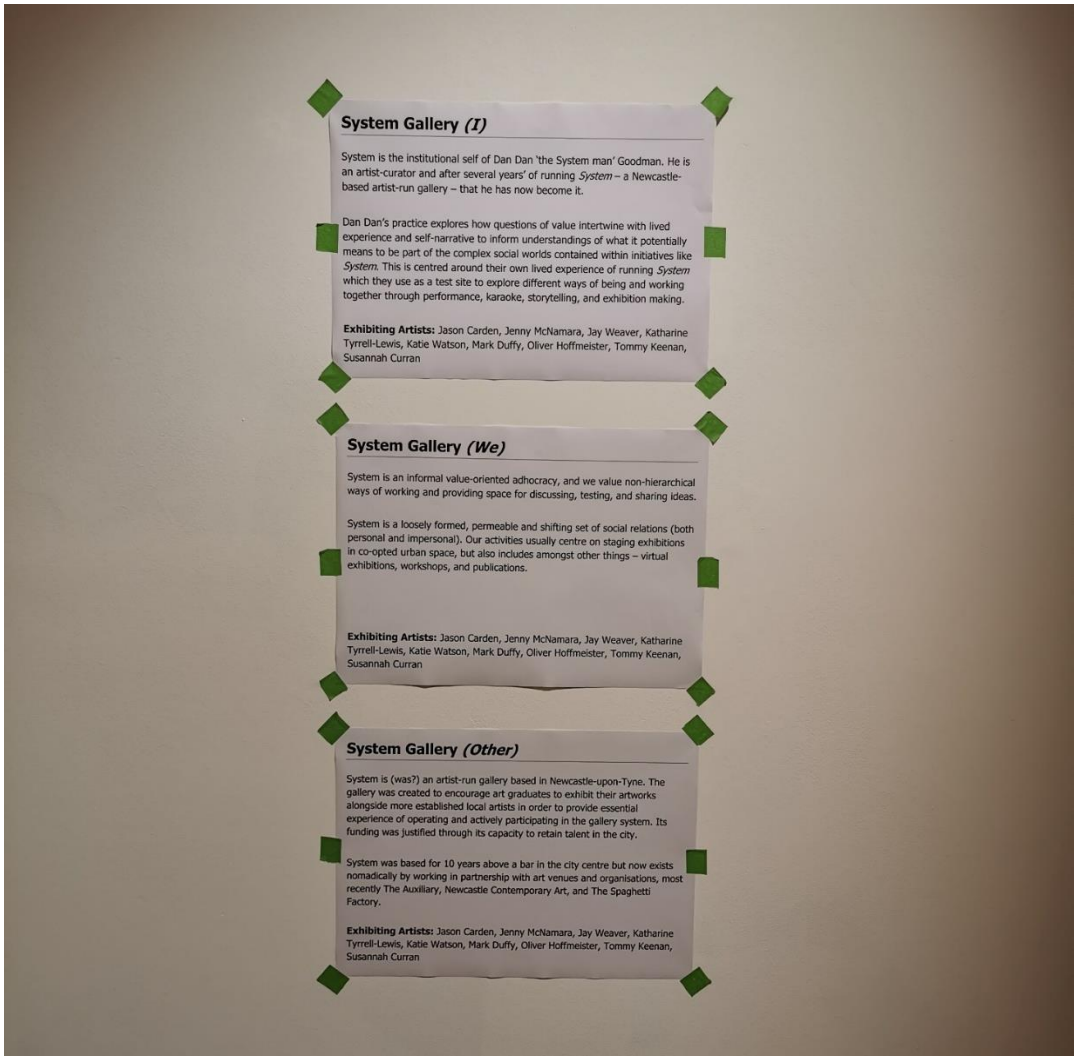

Issy Everton
Jacques Rancière
Jaisen Yates
Jakob Zoob
James Dunn
James Ferguson-Rose
James Hunter
James Hutchinson
James Langdon
James Schofield
James Stephen Wright
Jan Verwoert
Jason Carden
Jason Hynes
jawbone jawbone
Jay Weaver
Jayson Woolmington
Jenni Mac
Jennifer McMillan
Jenny McNamara
Jess Bennett
Jessica Roper
Jim Lloyd
Joe Ford
John Burgess
John James Perangie
John O'Rourke
John O'Rourke
John Wheeler
John Wright
JOHNNYX
Jon Blackwood
Jon Wakeman

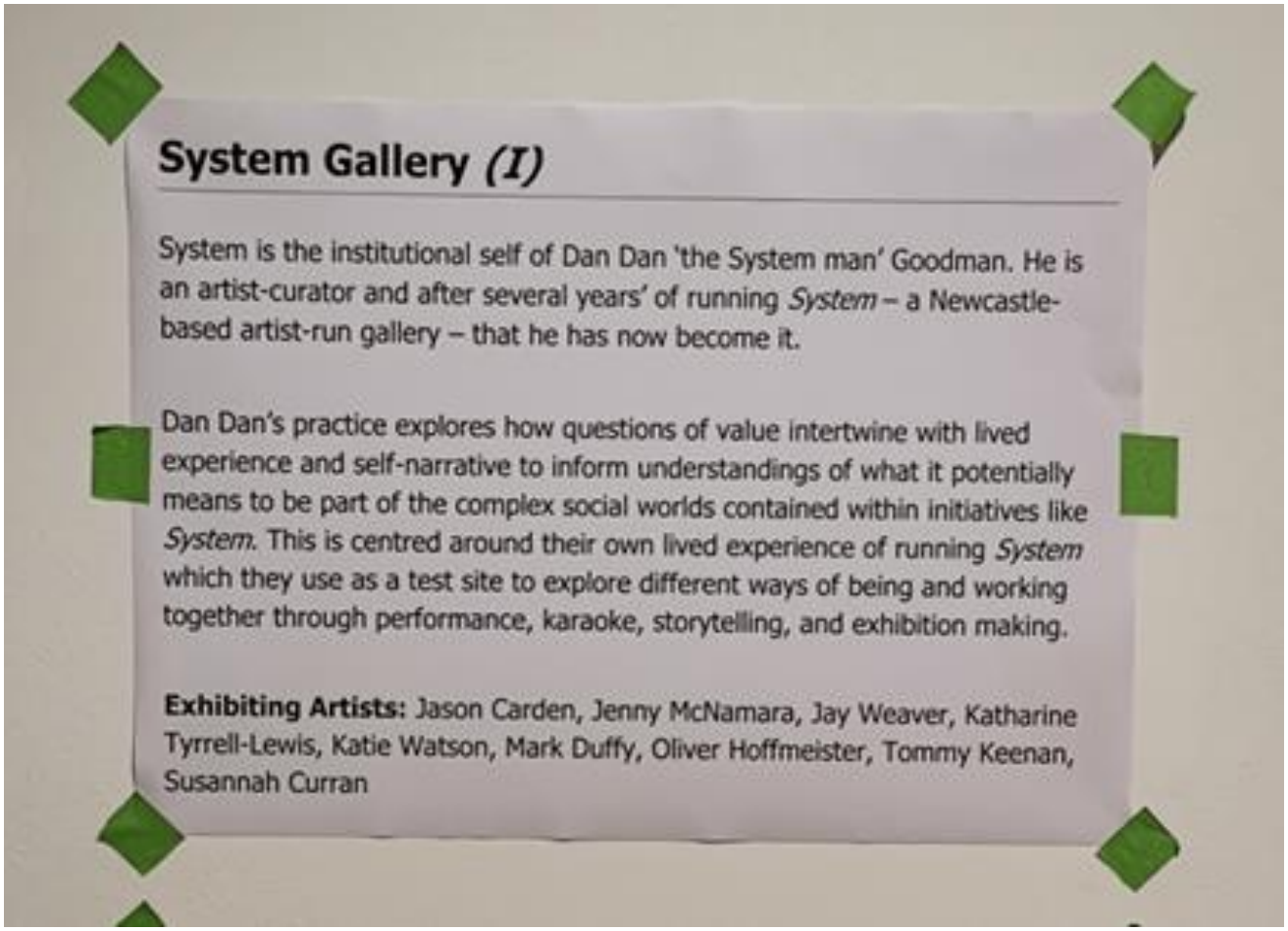

Exhibiting artists and others who have worked with and/or directly and/or indirectly helped System in the last 5 years.
A.Hellier
Adam Broomberg
Adam Shaw
Adam Wilson Holmes
Akiti Nomo
Agatha Smith
Aidan Krowles Levitt
Aimee Charlotte
Al Hayes-Twomey
Albert Bennet-Cowell
Alessandra Mundin
Alex Breeze
Alan Leigh
Alan Richardson
Ali Dunnean
Ali Lee
Anthony Varus
Art Bochner
Arts Council England
Artist Union England
Atelier Istra
Backgroundcrawel
Ben Callaghan
Ben Gilchrist
Ben Jones
Ben Welsh
Beryl Spence
Beth Ross
Bethany Rox
Bethany Stead
Bloc Projects
Brad Race
Brea M. Heidelberg
Brenda Watson
Brian Degger
Chris Whitehead
Chris Yeats
Christian Cowper
Christina Newsham
Christopher d'Arcangelo
Claire Harrison
Claudia Surrage
Cody Sewedly
Conrad Milne
Cora Weiss
Craig Knight
Crosthe Scotland
D6
Dale Hardy
Don Russell
Daniel Pryde-Jarman
Danny Gilchrist
Dave Beech
David Blandy
Alice Card-Hall
Alice Mikaelsfeuk
Alison Bain
Alison Knee
Alison Walker
Amanda Catto
Amar Nero
Amy Finch
Amy Frampton
Amy McCartney
AN
Andrea Philipe
Andreas Rikburg
Andrew George Hooper
Andrew Rothwell
Angelina Jones
Anghaud Crossman
Anna Muddiman
Anthony Pritz
Brian Russell
Briony Carlin
Bruce Parker
Byker Community Centre
C Mae Bloom
Calum Dyer
Cameron Lingis
Carol Lonsdale
Carole Rosenstein
Carolyn Ellis
Catherine Grange
Catherine Isobel
Cathie Sprague
Cecilia Sargent
Celine Condorelli
Charlotte Bowden
Cheryl Gaon
Chris Jones
Chris Leedham
David Butler
David Fogge
David Gresher
David Reynolds
Dawn Woolley
Diane Shaw
Diane Watson
Dianne Bowell
Dolores Romone
Donnen Massey
Dominic Allan
Donald Butler
Dot Seddon
East Street Arts
Eastside Projects
Ed Hillier
Ed Lawrenson
Eden Chapman-Maurice
Edward Lawrenson

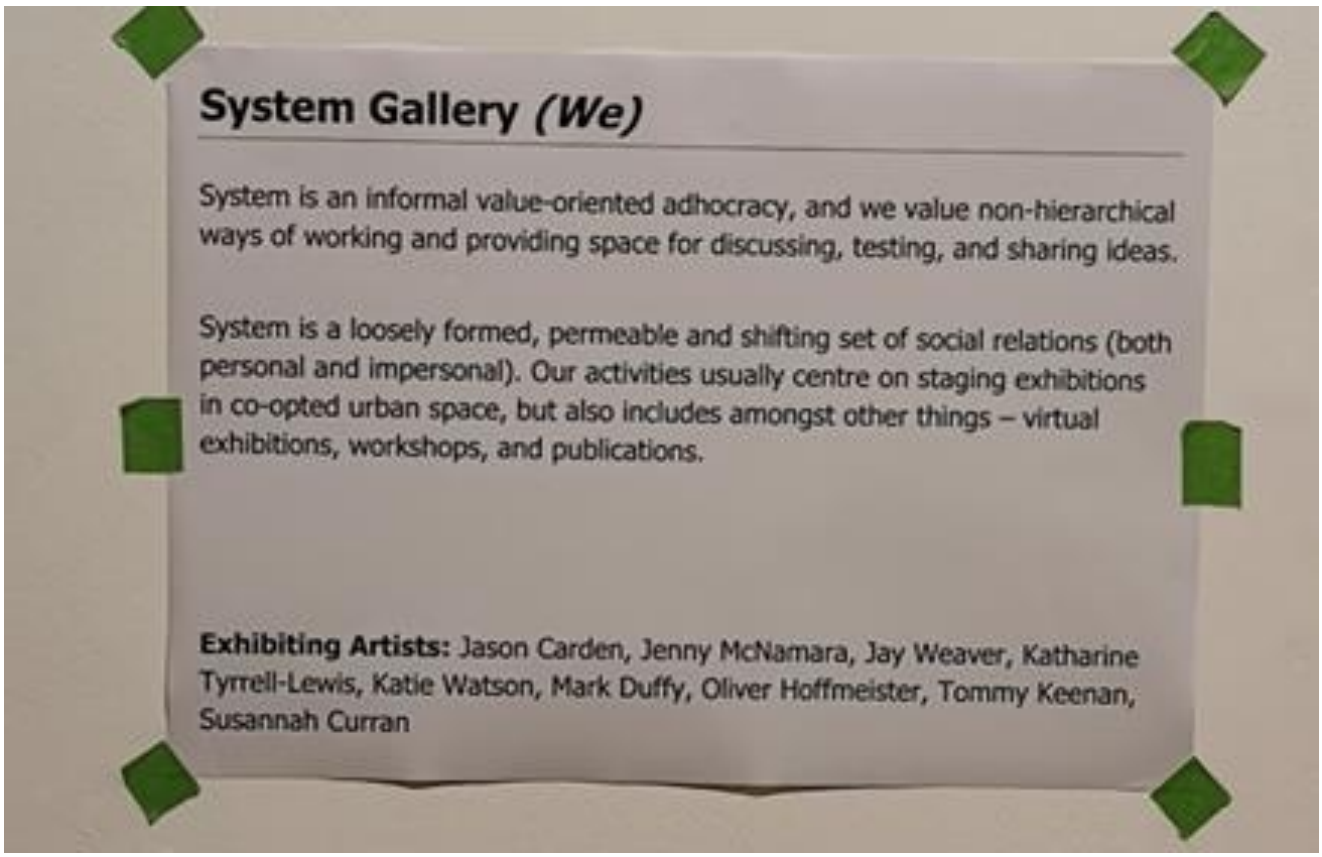
This is an extensive list of alphabetized names of people and organizations who I consider to have contributed directly or indirectly to the development of myself, *System,* or the PhD over the past five years. It references Condorelli's practice of ensuring that the names of all art technicians supporting her exhibitions are included, acknowledging their invisible labour. Like Condorelli, I wanted to highlight the exhibition as a social process involving forms of physical, emotional, and intellectual labour. It also points to notions of self-realization produced with others in relation to *System*.

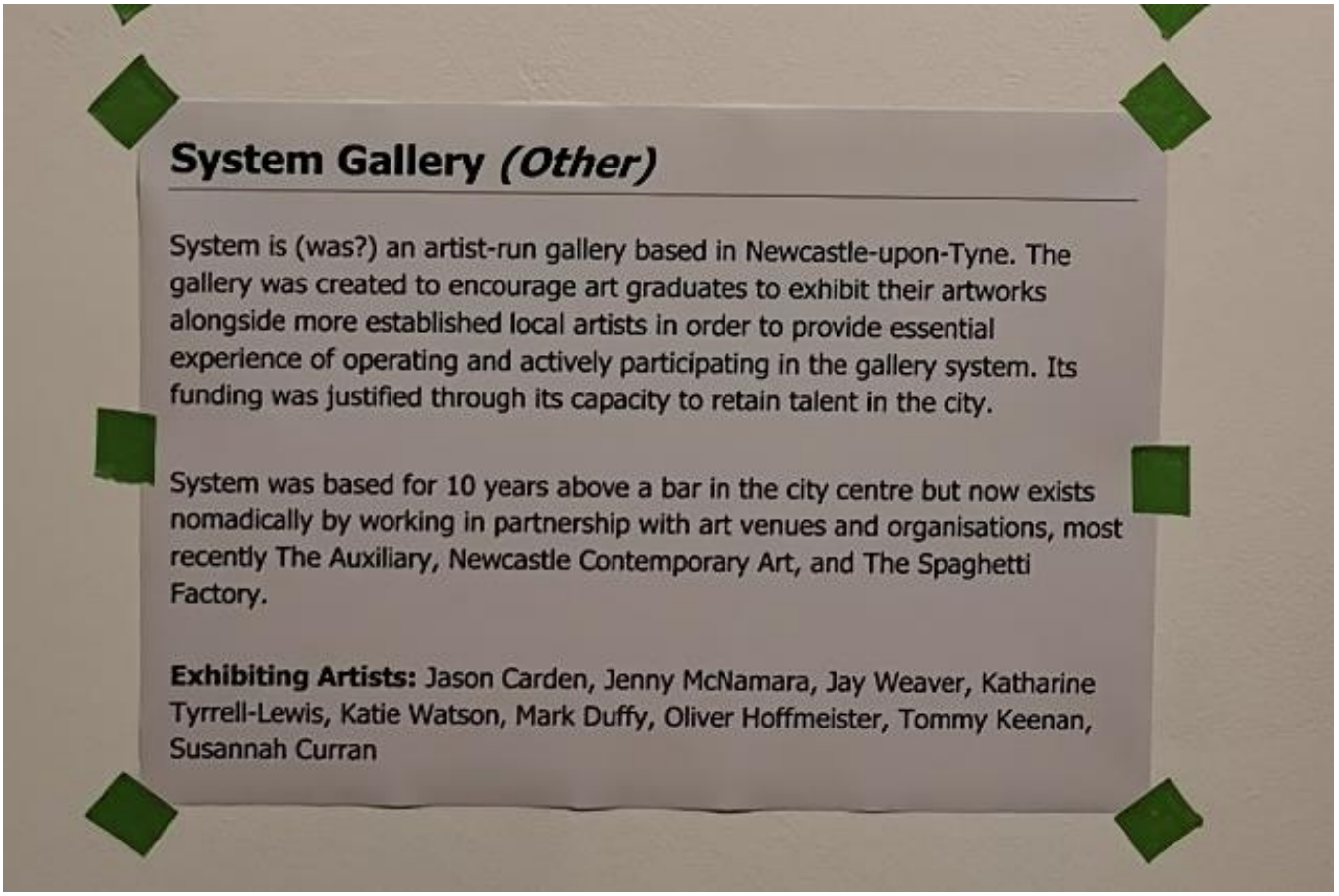
6.3.5 'Exhibition Texts'

Figure 10. Photos of 'Exhibition Texts' as part of PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery.




System Gallery (I)
System is the institutional self of Dan Dan 'the System man' Goodman. He is an artist-curator and after several years' of running System – a Newcastle-based artist-run gallery – that he has now become it.
Dan Dan's practice explores how questions of value intertwine with lived experience and self-narrative to inform understandings of what it potentially means to be part of the complex social worlds contained within initiatives like System. This is centred around their own lived experience of running System which they use as a test site to explore different ways of being and working together through performance, karaoke, storytelling, and exhibition making.
Exhibiting Artists: Jason Carden, Jenny McNamara, Jay Weaver, Katharine Tyrrell-Lewis, Katie Watson, Mark Duffy, Oliver Hoffmeister, Tommy Keenan, Susannah Curran


System Gallery (We)
System is an informal value-oriented adhocracy, and we value non-hierarchical ways of working and providing space for discussing, testing, and sharing ideas.
System is a loosely formed, permeable and shifting set of social relations (both personal and impersonal). Our activities usually centre on staging exhibitions in co-opted urban space, but also includes amongst other things – virtual exhibitions, workshops, and publications.
Exhibiting Artists: Jason Carden, Jenny McNamara, Jay Weaver, Katharine Tyrrell-Lewis, Katie Watson, Mark Duffy, Oliver Hoffmeister, Tommy Keenan, Susannah Curran



In 'Dan Dan the System Man' I included several exhibition texts (Appendix. Q) printed on A4 paper and attached to the wall with green masking tape. The texts present different framings of *System*—a singular 'I', a collective 'we', and an abstract 'other'. These relate to the three conceptions of space described in Chapter 4.

The performative act of framing *System* in these exhibition texts serves to 1) inform audiences that this was an exhibition about an artist-run gallery called *System* and provide context for their experience, 2) draw attention to the interrelated personal, social, historical, and spatial aspects of *System*, and 3) highlight the exhibition as a self-authored process. The third point is echoed in the positioning and cutting of the tape, which in their imperfection show traces of someone's work and presence—especially when combined with my presence in

the videos, audio recording, and vinyl text on the wall of "Dan Dan the System Man."

6.3.6 'System Gallery RPG Demo'

Figure 11. Photos of 'System Gallery RPG Demo' as part of PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery. Photo Credit: Colin Davison.





This is a video game with a fictional narrative based very loosely on the events of *System*. The text for the game was adapted from a variety of autoethnographic texts I had written to experiment with Gavin Wade's practice of 'Upcycling' through the co-option, incorporation, and recycling of other texts in response to existing conditions. I was influenced too by the introduction to Wade's 'Upcycle this Book,' told as a story of *Eastside Projects* with fictionalised elements including time travel (Burrows, 2017). I was thinking about the role of stories in *System*, specifically as they related to my sense of purpose, identity, and belonging.

For the video game, as I did for the karaoke work, I entered myself into a collaboration where I was an amateur—despite a strong interest in video games over my life, I have no design or computational programming ability in that regard. The collaborative element came from the large swathes of freely available code and tutorials online for the software program I used to develop the demo (Figure 12.). Some of these names are credited as part of

'Acknowledgements.' The demo was also a collaboration with Meaghan Stewart, an artist who has a long historical involvement with *System*, as she contributed a 'dream sequence' video section in the middle of the recorded demo.

Figure 12. 'System RPG Demo' by Dan Goodman featuring video 'Dream Sequence' by Meaghan Stewart



Like in the early part of the 'Hero's Journey,' over the course of the video, we see the game's protagonist receive a call to action and some supernatural aid. He is presented with several challenges which an unlikely helper helps him overcome. Like the other elements of the 'Hero's Journey's' narrative template, the video game's story alludes to a future transformation, atonement, and rebirth through overcoming an imposing threat that the protagonist needs to face.

The structure of the story, gameplay elements, and aesthetics of the game bear resemblance to Japanese tactical role-playing games of the late 1990s—popularised by titles such as 'Final Fantasy VII'. They are often known for their intricate stories that start with a tragic element or call-to-action that allows the protagonist to go on their journey. Here, I am satirically drawing parallels to how I have narrativized *System*, specifically the story that I have told and re-told of *System* being evicted from Bar Loco.

The video game is playable; however, it is presented as a video—using screen-captured footage of me playing the game—to emphasise the telling of the story. Similarly, I wanted to show the limitation of choice and agency afforded to the player. Despite being in control—in the sense that the player is free to move around the screen and interact with parts of the environment—this is often undermined by someone telling the player that their avatar cannot go into a particular house or the player being required to move to or speak to a particular character to trigger the next part of the story. Through the tension between elements of independence and control within the video game, I was thinking about notions of choice and constraint within System as it pertains to Guibernau's conceptualisation of belonging (i Berdún and Guibernau, 2013).

6.3.7 'Artwork'

Figure 13. Photos of 'Artwork' as part of PhD Research Exposition and exhibition, 'Dan Dan the System Man' held at Hatton Gallery. Photo Credit: Colin Davison. First image: Artwork by Katherine Tyrrell Lewis. Second Image: Artwork by Mark Duffy. Third Image: Artwork by Jason Carden (Left) and Oliver Hoffmeister (Right). Fourth Image: Artwork by Katie Watson (Left) and Jenny McNamara (Right)









he final element is a group exhibition of artwork produced by artists with some previous association with *System*—such as a previously exhibiting artist, collaborator, or audience member. This was not only to tie the visual autoethnography together but was in accordance with my practice of 'making space.' It references the relational ethics of Ruangrupa employed for Documenta 15, albeit operating on a much smaller context than the geopolitics at play in Documenta. It felt important to the ethics of my practice to share the platform and audience at the Hatton Gallery with others. This act speaks to the 'hospitalities within hospitalities' that Beech references (2005).

The artists that were included in the exhibition were not selected based on the themes of their work, but rather I put a number of 'feelers' out through direct messages to individual artists asking if they had any artwork they wanted to include in, what was then, an untitled exhibition. I did this a few weeks before the exhibition install. I chose artists based on my own intuitive sense of whether this exhibition would be useful for them, whether as a chance to show or test

new work or for exhibition experience for their CV. I did not ask for images of any work and accepted any offers until I had what I felt was a 'manageable' number of artists for the show. The ad-hoc and informal nature of this reflects the practices of much artist-run curatorial activity as part of the art world's 'dark matter' (Sholette, 2011).

6.4 Conclusion

Dan Dan the System Man' sought to immerse and draw audiences in, through my obsessive search and expression of meaning, purpose, and value within *System*. In this aspect, it references the work of Sophie Calle, including projects like 'Take Care of Yourself.' Through its individual elements, it shows me in the process of finding a sense of belonging through a developed awareness of self in relation to others. This is achieved through bringing to the fore *System's* politics of friendship through curatorial strategies and visual autoethnography.

Together, the elements of the exhibition produce a 'space of appearance'—a term used by Arendt referring to the common or increased visibility of actors generating the potential for collective action (Arendt, 1961). It is a concept that Condorelli often returns to in her writing and practice where it is often discussed or used to foster public engagement and public discourse (Condorelli;Wade and Langdon, 2009). In this, it too draws on the work of Gavin and the curatorial approach and ethos of *Eastside Projects*, he writes in reference to *Eastside Projects*...

> "What we need is an art that provides people with the space to devise new strategies for engaging with and renegotiating [capitalism]; tools for

> everyday resistance, a new kind of social space that offers hope for how we might live better."
>
> (Wade, 2017, p. 34)

My contribution to traditions of reflexive artistic-curatorial practices, such as those of Condorelli and Wade, is to expand them through the incorporation of visual autoethnography. It also contributes to the field of visual autoethnography by showing how it can incorporate exhibition making to produce immersive environments to transmit social, relational, and experiential knowledge to audiences. Both practices, as evidenced through this Research Exposition, have the potential to be co-opted by other ARIs, arts organisations, artist-curators, and researchers to demonstrate tacit and intangible forms of value and value generation that occur within similar environments. The benefits of this are to 1) expand our shared understanding of value generation, specifically those rooted in experience; 2) create critical discourse and enable artists and ARI practitioners to elucidate meaning from their experiences; 3) develop tools to advocate for specific ARIs or for the value of open-ended and self-directed ARI activity to relevant audiences—including funders, policy makers, the general public, and artists. This PhD's findings and contributions to knowledge are described and summarised in the next concluding chapter.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

7.1 Summary

This concluding chapter draws the research findings together in connection to the research question and research aims, summarises the PhD's contribution to academic knowledge and artistic-curatorial practice, and identifies avenues for future research.

Across this thesis and my practice-based research outputs I have explored value generation within ARIs through my lived experience of *System.* As stated throughout the thesis, this PhD cannot make a hermetic claim to knowledge nor is it an attempt to do so. This PhD in its entirety is a fragmentary collection of possible insights, propositions, statements, ideas, and conceptual lenses. This was a deliberate choice as it was a more truthful representation of the fragmentary and fleeting nature of value generation within *System.* This thesis and the Research Exposition are invitations for readers and viewers alike to consider my experiences in relation to theirs.

Considering this, to 'conclude' at all seems like a slight misnomer that is at odds with the messy and relational nature of what I have learnt and the process that I have undertaken to learn them. These discoveries are made more equivocal when considering them alongside the nebulous nature of *System* and value generation therein. These concluding thoughts can then be understood as a progress-so-far for work which I feel will continue into my academic work and artistic-curatorial practice beyond the PhD. I feel that the PhD has served its purpose, and it is a convenient point to assess and evaluate that progress-so-far

as to consider what directions I may take in future that could prove generative to myself or others. As stated by Becker: 'The lesson I draw from my experience is… that we are never through, but occasionally stop to tell our colleagues what we have learned' (Becker, 2008, p. xxi). In the spirit of Becker's statement, I tell you what I have learnt. In the introduction to this thesis, I proposed a research question:

> How can autoethnography be incorporated into an artist-curatorial practice as a self-reflexive methodology and to inform shared understandings of value generation that can occur within artist-run initiatives?

This research question had three corresponding aims. I am now going to explain how this research addresses each of these aims individually.

Aim 1: Produce an analysis of literature pertaining to value that is potentially applicable to forms of value generation within System.

This first aim is addressed in my literature review. In the literature review I draw together a wide range of material setting out the ways in which multiple understandings of value pertaining to art and its associated activities (such as ARIs) have been discussed and debated. I trace multiple interwoven historical trajectories – including perceptions of art's value pre- and post-enlightenment, changes to UK arts and cultural policy during and since New Labour, artistic production and its relationship to capitalism, and discourse around ARI and related activity. I also situate my research within histories of reflexive artistic-curatorial practice. By reconciling the different and conflicting understandings of value, through Guibernau's concept of 'belonging' and Doreen Massey's 'sense of place', I arrive at a definition of value which is both an expression and product of emotional and social bonds.

Additionally, through chapters 4, 5 and 6 I introduce further academic literature, relevant examples of artistic practice, and lenses to draw out and critically extend findings that emerge from the research.

Aim 2: Develop a reflexive curatorial practice incorporating autoethnography that articulates and expresses forms of value generation within System.

In chapter 3 I justify the incorporation of autoethnographic and artistic methods. This is done through expressing the complementary epistemological underpinning of both. I explain how I developed a research approach which was critical and could account for the 'potent emotional content' (Guibernau, 2013) contained in the lived experience of *System* without being reductive. Similarly, considering that the practice of *System* is value-driven, I argue that my self-conscious and openly value-centred methodological approach rather than restricted by the imposition of being (or appearing to be) value-free. This is discussed through my related artistic-curatorial practices and 'making space'. This autoethnographic approach is then embedded in Chapters 4 and 5, and then also incorporated in the Research Exposition 'Dan Dan the System Man' as detailed in Chapter 6.

Aim 3: Evaluate key findings concerning forms of value generation developed from the reflexive artistic-curatorial practice.

The third aim is discussed across Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Across which I show how through *System* I garnered a sense of purpose, belonging, and self-identity through the 'ontological security' (Anthias, 2002) it afforded me. The informal, reactive, and ambiguous nature of *System* accommodated a self-narrativization that could restore my 'ontological security'. This claim, through utilising artistic-

curatorial practice and autoethnography, has been developed and evaluated through a critical reflection of processes of **doing** and **being***.* Reflecting on critical incidents such as *System* losing its venue above *Bar Loco* helped crystallise on what it means to **do** and to **be** within *System.* This has been presented through embedding portions of the autoethnographic writing in chapters 4 and 5, and also in the Research Exposition as detailed in Chapter 6.

7.2 Concluding Thoughts on Value Generation within System

In consolidating…

…the role of emotional, psychological, and social connection in Chapter 4

…the emphasis on emotional, psychological, and social connections in Chapter 5

…and the spatial configuration of value understood through a politics of friendship in Chapter 6 and the Research Exposition…

…this PhD arrives at a holistic understanding of how value is generated, experienced, and contested within *System.* It identifies three interweaving and concurrent forms of value generation.

Value Generation as an Expression of Belonging

People value what resonates with their identity and sense of belonging to specific groups or communities. Value within *System* is deeply tied to the social and emotional bonds between individuals that can be understood as expressions of Guibernau's 'belonging' (Guibernau, 2013). 'Belonging' within *System* fostered generative and interwoven forms of emotional, cultural, social value.

Value Generation as Dynamic and Relational

Value generation within *System* is not static; it is constantly being shaped by the interactions, relationships, and interplay of agency within it. Just as Massey describes places as intersections of social relations, the value in *System* can be viewed as emerging from the dynamic interplay between different actors, contexts, and power relations. This helps explain the variability of produced value but also shows as it being inseparable from experience and understanding of self in relation to this context. Within *System,* this borne forms of autonomy value, public value, emotional value, psychological value, and relational value.

Value Generation as 'Sense of Place'

System can be understood as a 'place' in Massey's sense — in that it is continually shaped by the intersection of people, ideas, and practices. Value generation within *System* is then the both the process and product of the specific constellations of value that arise within it. Therefore, this value generation is deeply tied to the other two forms of value generation, therefore linking Guibernau's and Massey's frameworks.

7.3 Contributions to Knowledge and Art-practice

This PhD's claims to contributions to existing knowledge can be divided into two interrelated areas: my reflexive artistic-curatorial practice, and the application of this reflexive artistic-curatorial approach and practice using *System* as a case study to reveal understandings of value generation within ARIs. The outcomes of these resulted in five interrelated contributions to knowledge within the field:

'Making Space'

Firstly, the Research Exposition weaves together a layered body of artistic-curatorial inquiry encircling the research trajectory. Additionally, throughout the PhD I make a number of other contributions to the field of art through the

development and dissemination of practice-based outputs, such as exhibitions (Appendix G. Appendix H. Appendix J. Appendix Q.), an artist residency (Appendix O.), and performance (Appendix. T). In a practice and ethos that I describe as 'making space,' I combine this activity with other forms advocating for the value of ARIs and similar artist-run activity in society. This is part of an ongoing response to the PhD's line of enquiry constituting contributions to the development of contemporary artistic-curatorial practice and ARI field running throughout and continuing beyond the PhD.

Understanding of Value Generation within ARIs

Secondly, as decisions for the allocation of public funding for arts and culture in the UK are determined by legislative and bureaucratic procedures based on value claims, my methodological approach centring lived experience offers a different lens through which to understand value generation within ARIs. In understanding value and valuation as part of the same process, using Guibernau's conceptualisation of 'belonging' and Massey's 'sense of place,' I articulate an understanding of value generation within ARIs that is 'possible in practice' (Peräkylä, 2004). It reveals value within *System* as both an expression of the emotional and social bonds that constitute belonging and as a relational construct that is continuously reshaped through interactions within specific places and contexts. This integrated perspective allows for a deeper understanding of how value operates within ARIs Beyond *System* through offering a framework for others to interpret, debate, and adapt on their experiences and understanding.

ARIs and 'Sense of Place'

Thirdly, in applying Massey's concept 'sense of place' I argue that *System* is the product of social and spatial relations that means it 1) has multiple identities 2) is a process rather than product 3) is a shifting set of social relations with no clear distinctions between inside and outside. I argue that the relational space of *System* fostered bonds of allegiance and solidarity with artist communities

through an increased recognition of an independence produced **with** rather than **from** others. This offers a lens for conceptualising and better understanding lineages of ARI activity situated within anti-capitalist and collective action frameworks.

Extension of Reflexive Artistic-Curatorial Practice

Fourthly, my artistic-curatorial approach developed over the course of the PhD culminating in the Research Exposition, builds on traditions of reflexive artistic-curatorial practices by turning the exhibition into an immersive visual autoethnography with the capacity to experientially transmit and foster discourse on hybridised forms of value generation within ARIs. To this end, and in particular reference to the writing and practice of Céline Condorelli, I develop a repertoire of artistic-curatorial strategies to forefront *System's* politics of friendship that reflects and builds on these traditions of reflexive artistic-curatorial practice. By linking artistic-curatorial practice with autoethnography, this research provides a framework for artist, curators, and researchers to develop deeper understandings of the social, emotional, and relational dimensions of value that could be applied to other ARIs and contexts.

ARI Advocacy

Finally, in framing value and valuation as part of the same cylindrical self-maintaining processes, this thesis identifies self-deterministic and open-ended collective activity as key drivers for identity-making, belonging, social value, and emotional value. This is counter to the prevailing logic of UK funding that often abstracts value from lived experience through its focus on predetermined and named deliverables, as such this PhD's findings could be used to advocate for the UK arts and cultural infrastructure to support open-ended and self-driven collective artistic and cultural activity.

As part of a practice-based PhD, this written thesis has the dual function of performing as a standalone text describing and disseminating my research and its findings, as well as contextualising and documenting the Research Exposition. As du Preez states, art practice-based research is internal, emotive, bodily, and littered with serendipitous happenings (2014). To echo Butt, art practice-based research has the capacity to move '…into or out of the realm of the sayable' (Butt, 2012). To this point, the Research Exposition, as produced through the reflexive artistic-curatorial practice that I developed over the course of this PhD, has the added ability of making my research communicable to different audiences and to accommodate and express the ambiguities and uncertainties of *System* where language alone perhaps cannot.

The biggest challenge therefore of the thesis has been in articulating the tacit and internalised aspects of value generation that occurred within *System.* It also bears repeating, as I have done throughout the thesis, that this is not a 'complete' understanding of value generation within ARIs nor does it systematically detail every occurrence and aspect of value generation within *System.* The selections and omissions I made in the production of this thesis and the Research Exposition were necessitated by the limited word count and timeframe of the PhD. I have attempted to produce narratives and framings which can be understood without readers or viewers having experienced *System* firsthand themselves. Similarly, I have maintained critical distance and been as rigorous and fair as possible. Relating to this, due to my unique positionality, habitus, and bias, this is an articulation of my singular perspective and experience. It is not intended to be absolute, but rather my contributions to knowledge and practice are an offer and invitation for questioning, testing, adapting, and extending by others.

7.4 Avenues for Future Research

Building on this PhD's contributions to existing knowledge and artistic-curatorial practice, I have identified several avenues for future research that can further expand and deepen the understanding of the value generation within ARIs and the wider socio-cultural implications of such activity.

Exploration of Policy Implications

Given the disconnect identified between understandings of value generation rooted in lived experience and the value frameworks used by UK arts funding bodies, future research could explore the policy and societal implications of adopting more experience-based valuation methods. This research could focus its investigation on how policy changes might better support ARIs and similar grassroots artistic activity, with a view to pursing a more equitable, inclusive, and dynamic cultural funding landscape.

Comparative Studies of Value Generation in Aris:

This research in its adoption of *System* as case study and research site places it within a specific socio-political context. Future research could expand the scope of the research inquiry through the inclusion of comparative studies across different cultural and geographical contexts utilising and adapting the autoethnographic and artistic-curatorial methods. In understanding how ARIs operate, and value generation occurs in other national and global settings, we can gain a broader understanding of the diverse ways in which ARIs contribute to the cultural landscape and enrich discourse on the global significance of artist-run activities.

Development of Collaborative Ethnographic Studies of ARIs

The autoethnographic approach of his study allowed me to utilise my positionality within *System* and unique access to its activity. These studies could involve multiple artists, curators, and members from different ARIs benefit allowing for a more nuanced and in-depth exploration of the social dynamics, activity, and context within ARIs. By involving individuals from these different groups as co-researchers, these studies could produce findings that are more reflective of the lived experiences and collective knowledge of multiple actors to offer multi-perspective understandings of value generation within ARIs. Longitudinal studies could be conducted to track the long-term impact of ARIs on both local communities and the broader art ecosystem and provide valuable insights into the sustained value of this activity. In assessing the lasting effects of ARIs on community engagement, cultural production, and social cohesion over time, such studies could offer empirical evidence to support the advocacy for continued funding and support for these ARIs.

Further Development of Reflexive Artistic-Curatorial Practices

Building on the immersive visual autoethnography approach, future research could experiment with new forms of reflexive artistic-curatorial practices. This could involve integrating emerging technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) to create even more immersive and interactive experiences. Additionally, researchers, artists, and curators could explore how these practices can be used to engage broader audiences and make communicable hybridised forms of value generation within ARIs.

Further Investigation the Role of Friendship in ARIs

Further exploration of the role of friendship, solidarity, and social bonds within ARIs, as highlighted by primarily in the politics of friendship section of Chapter 6, could yield deeper insights into the relational dynamics underpinning much ARI

activity. Research could examine how these social bonds influence artistic collaboration, community resilience, and the overall sustainability of ARIs, providing a richer understanding of the human elements that drive ARIs.

Interdisciplinary Approaches to Understanding Value Generation within ARIs

Future research could adopt interdisciplinary methodologies, further incorporating perspectives from art, sociology, economics, cultural studies, and political science to further dissect the processes of value generation within ARIs. By integrating these diverse viewpoints, researchers can develop a more holistic understanding of how ARIs contribute to social, emotional, and cultural value, thereby enriching the theoretical framework presented in this thesis.

In pursuing these suggested areas of research, future scholars, artists, and curators can continue to build on the foundational work of this PhD, contributing to a richer, more nuanced understanding of the critical role of ARIs and artistic-curatorial practices in contemporary cultural ecologies.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Text written for Manner of Flying exhibition held at System Gallery in September 2019

This text was featured as part of the group exhibition as a handout. The exhibition at the end is described as '…the first of a series attempting to understand what System is and what it means to myself, collaborators and exhibiting artists. Through this I hope to shed some light on ways in which space can constrain and enable the giving and receiving of care, support, and belonging.' This was based on an earlier conception of the research which was intended to have a much more ethnographic focus before deciding to switch to an autoethnographic approach.

Space, support and belonging - Daniel Goodman - 28/08/2019.

Space implies an absence, emptiness, and lack of something. Literally an empty area that only becomes real when there is a purpose or activity for it to 'attach' to. It becomes a gallery space, rehearsal room, meeting place, classroom etc. *System* is a pluralistic space in this sense. Or perhaps, more accurately it is one of many functions of the space. When the space is occupied by other groups for different activities, for example by cellists to rehearse, it does not stop being *System* in my mind. However, to others it is perhaps a room above a bar where they come to learn Spanish or dance salsa, and that room is sometimes used as a gallery. To the bar owners it is perhaps a rentable space that they can use to bring in additional revenue or customers, such as when they offer us the space to use as a gallery.

This is different to many other spaces within Newcastle that offer studios and exhibition opportunities. Even when someone has a wedding in the *BALTIC*, they are guests having a wedding in a gallery space. *BALTIC* never periodically ceases to be a gallery in the same way as *System* does.

Until an incident a couple of months ago, I had always thought of *System* as 'being' the physical space. This changed when on the day of setting up for an exhibition there was a large immovable table in the space. I had never seen this table before in my life. It filled half the room and was bright fucking red. It was quite revealing the amount of irritation and stress that this table caused. There was an element of it partially 'not belonging here', with the artist and other curator both commenting on the fact it had built-in ports for laptops and resembled a table from a university library. The implication of this is that it was not a table which you would choose to have in an art gallery.

Those and I connected to *System* are aware that the space is used for other purposes. I am certainly used to walking into the gallery and there being rows of chairs set-up from some movie screening the night before or decks from a party. I think what was most offensive about this was the impossibility of moving it and taking it out of the space. It was something alien that had pierced the sanctity of the space. It didn't belong and the lack of consideration of how this would affect us was a reminder that we were only guests in this space. I could no longer offer the full space to the artist. After having been promised the whole space, the artist was now having to share it with this other object. This other object which was not part of the gallery. It didn't belong, or maybe it was a reminder that we didn't belong.

This physical and symbolic encroachment of space led me to think about the provision of space as a form of care or support. Care has been described as a "risky act empowered by the need of the other, yet not based on secure knowledge or competence, and therefore without a clear mandate, an impossible promise always bearing the risk of exhaustion"[8]. Much like space, care thought of in isolation is an empty abstraction. In order to exist it is reliant on there being a perceived need for it to exist. The same is true again of support; its existence reliant on the presence of something for which to bear or hold-up.

The provision of space, care and support is inconsistent within *System.* This is partly a matter of practicality. A lack of finance means that *System* is significantly short on time and resources and is completely reliant on voluntary labour and reactive ways of working. In this sense, I am an accomplice in the exploitation of my own labour and that of others.

[8] Verwoert, J. (2009) 'Personal support: How to care', in Condorelli, C., Wade, G. and Langdon, J. (eds.) Support structures. Sternberg Press, pp. 165-177.

Apart from a couple of attempts at writing an ACE bid, I have done little to remedy this situation. This is partially due to a lack of the non-retrospectively billable time or energy required to put together another application. But also, a genuine concern over sacrificing *System's* autonomy and way of working in exchange for getting paid doing something that I would do for free.

Much like space, care and support, *System* is an empty abstraction. It only becomes real when it has an activity, purpose or need for it to 'attach' to. In this sense, *System* is the provision of space, care and support far more than the physical space it sits in. If I were successful in being awarded project funding for *System,* it would mean having to promise the delivery of a number of 'measurable' outcomes. Plenty of valuable work is funded and done in this way, but it does have its drawbacks. My view as a slight outsider to funded individuals and members of institutions, is that the reduced autonomy to how they work means that they often appear/act in ways which are not personal but institutional. I think that there is something uniquely valuable in someone giving themselves to help someone for free. That's not to say that *System* doesn't have its limitations. I have had to apologise to artists because we can't access the space for me to show them around as I wasn't aware that the Newcastle Marxist Society has it booked for a meeting. However, these are not conditions which are created by *System* as an organisation, rather they are put upon us as a group of individuals with the artist. We are in the same position as they are.

I've been in situations where I've negotiated payment as the person using the space has received external funding. I believe that in the past this has caused the dynamic to shift considerably. It has turned *System* into a bookable space and that interaction into a transaction. On one such occasion, I offered the space for a group show, and when I arrived on install day everything was in progress. Everyone was working and the work already mostly up without any sort of discussion with myself. In fact, things were being done with the fabric of the building which I wouldn't had allowed, however by this point it was too late. I wondered around a bit and tried to engage with it, but just thought "fuck it" and left. I was around for the preview out of a sense of duty to sell beers to pay for the upkeep of the space. There was little engagement from the artists, and I had felt like I was at a party that I wasn't invited to. For me they had missed the point of the space completely. Maybe they got what they wanted from the experience. I don't know.

When accepting the responsibility to manage *System*[9], I was thinking of the range of possibilities and opportunities that managing a space would offer. However, I had not considered that the more embedded I would become within *System* the more that I would become bound by it. As *System's* artistic director[10], I have received a lot of help with this from various members who have mostly come and gone. However, as the one regular member of *System* I have not had the luxury of the same mobility as others involved, and ultimately am the one responsible for the delivery of monthly exhibitions, maintaining positive relations with exhibiting artists, and ensuring exhibitions are promoted. This combined with several jobs has resulted in a poor work/life balance and much additional stress. However, I have also continued to work on exhibitions whilst severely sick (later resulting in a trip to the hospital) despite insistence from the artist and co-curator to "go home and rest" and "I didn't need to be there" I knew that they were right. I think that I stayed out of a need to feel connected and contribute to something. To 'give back' maybe.

When first taking over *System* I was aware of how privileged I was to 'have' a space and the possibilities that that presented. From the start I knew that I wanted it to be a space that I could offer to others. The first exhibition that *System* had with me as curator was a group show called *Dishwasher Safe.* This came about through first being introduced to one of the artists at a preview by a mutual friend. We then agreed for him to send some more details of what he wanted to propose by email and then at a later point meet for a pint to plan further. What was a revelation for me about this show, was how much more fascinated I was by the group's dynamic rather than the artwork and concept behind the show[11]. All of the exhibitors were friends who upon graduating will be split up as some of them return to their hometown or move elsewhere to study/work etc. I saw the exhibition as a way of them reconciling their feelings towards this significant change and the marking of an 'end-of-an-era'. The exhibition was a huge success with an incredible turnout at the preview and the exhibiting artists spoke highly of their experience. I felt elated to be a part of it.

Just like all groups need symbols and rituals in order to survive, so does an art community. To exhibit, is to make something public. An exhibition is the process of making something

[9] The previous curators, Egle Dubinkaite and Jacob Zoob, offered me the space as they were moving down south.
[10] Self-appointed title
[11] No offense.

public but also of ‘forming’ publics through engaging individuals in the collective sharing of ideas and values. To support this statement, the success of *Dishwasher Safe* formed the basis of a number of friendships between myself and the exhibiting artists which would extend well beyond the duration of the exhibition. In this regard *System* is far from a selfless pursuit. By voluntarily giving my time, I get the same back. It connects me with people that value the same things that I do, contributing to my own sense of belonging to an arts community and self-definition as a curator/artist. It is a practice of care and self-care, both of which sustain the other. It provided a great antidote for some personal issues that I was battling through 2017, but equally, it can be a pain-in-the-fucking-arse.

MANNER OF FLYING is the first of a series attempting to understand what *System* is and what it means to myself, collaborators and exhibiting artists. Through this I hope to shed some light on ways in which space can constrain and enable the giving and receiving of care, support, and belonging.

(Goodman, n.d.-b)

Appendix B. Sample Research Information Sheet given to Interviewees

Title of Study: A Practice-based Study of Value Generated within Artist-run Initiatives

Invitation and Brief Summary

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read this information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. However, you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without any penalty or loss of benefits.

What is the purpose of the research?

This practice-based study investigates the tact and hybridised forms of value generated within artist-run initiatives. My curatorial practice will grant me unique access to these often cited but under-theorised environments. By employing ethnographic approaches, data will be collected through participatory observations and recorded conversations. Supporting this, interviews will be conducted with stakeholders from various artist-run initiatives, including, curators, exhibiting artists and audiences. This data will inform the development of an exhibition programme culminating in a final exhibition acting as research exposition. Through increased understanding of the types of value generated through artist-run initiatives, I will develop curatorial strategies that can improve and better articulate their offer to stakeholders and artist communities.

What does taking part involve?

To be participate in a recorded interview for approximately one-hour on your involvement with artist-run initiatives.

What information will be collected and who will have access to the information collected?

I will use your name and email address to contact you about the research study. I will use your initials for processing. Individuals at Newcastle University may look at your research data to check the accuracy of the research study. The only individuals at Newcastle University who will have access to information that identifies you will be individuals who need to contact you to audit the data collection process.

If you agree to take party in the research study, your data will become part of a dataset which can be accessed by other users running other research studies at Newcastle University and in other organisations. These organisations may be universities or NHS organisations. Your information will only be used by organisations and researchers to conduct research.

Your data will be held in a data repository which other researchers can request access to. This data can be combined with information about you from other sources held by researchers, the NHS or government.
Where this information could identify you, the information will be held securely with strict arrangements about who can access the information. The information will only be used for the purpose of research, or to contact you about future opportunities to participate in research. It will not be used to make decisions about future services available to you. Where there is a risk that you can be identified your data will only be used in research that has been independently reviewed by an ethics committee.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been selected through your active with an artist-run initiative.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

No direct benefits can be promised, however, benefits may be experienced by others, in the future, as a consequence of discovery through research.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Every effort will be made to prevent any potential risk to your confidentiality, including, anonymising interview transcripts and storing these and recorded data on password protected devices.

Who is the sponsor and data controller for this research?

Newcastle University is the sponsor for this study based in the United Kingdom. Newcastle University will be using information from you in order to undertake this study and will act as the data controller for this study. This means that Newcastle University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

The lawful basis for carrying out this study under GDPR is Task in the Public Interest, (Article 6,1e) as research is cited as part of the University's duties.

Your rights to access, change or move your information are limited, as Newcastle University need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, Newcastle University will keep the information about you that has already been obtained. To safeguard your rights, the minimum personally identifiable information will be used.

You can find out more about how Newcastle University uses your information at https://www.ncl.ac.uk/data.protection/ and/or by contacting their Data Protection Officer Maureen Wilkinson, rec-man@ncl.ac.uk.

Has this study received ethical approval?

This study has received ethical approval from Newcastle University's Ethics Committee on 29/11/2019.

Who should I contact for further information relating to the research?

Daniel Goodman, d.goodman2@newcastle.ac.uk

Who should I contact in order to file a complaint?

Daniel Goodman, d.goodman2@newcastle.ac.uk

If you wish to raise a complaint on how your personal data is handled, you can contact the Data Protection Officer who will investigate the matter: Maureen Wilkinson, rec-man@ncl.ac.uk

If you are not satisfied with their response you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO): https://ico.org.uk/

Appendix C. Draft Sample Interview Draft Schedule

1. How would you describe your creative practice?
   Do you identify as an artist?

2. What do you think of Newcastle's arts scene?
   Is there a lot of support for artists? What kind?
   Where do you think spaces like *System* sit within this?

3. Can you tell me about *EXHIBITION NAME*?

4. Why did you choose to show at *System?*

5. Describe how you approached *System?*
   How would you describe how everybody worked together?
   How do you feel that the exhibition may had been different had it been at another gallery?

6. How do you feel that the *EXHIBITION NAME* went?
   How was it received by the artists? Audience?

7. What did you want to get from the experience?
   Did it meet those expectations?
   Is there anything that you would have done differently?

8. What did you learn from the experience developing doing *EXHIBITION NAME*?
   How, if at all, have you changed from your experience of *EXHIBITION NAME*?
   What have you learnt about the sector?

9. How does this exhibition fit within the development of your creative practice?
   Do you think doing exhibitions like *EXHIBITION NAME* is important in developing a career in the arts sector? If 'yes', how? If, 'no' why not?

10. What longer term plans do you have for your artistic career?
    When do you think you will be able to make this happen?

Appendix D. List of System Exhibitions during the PhD

All exhibitions are curated by me unless otherwise stated. More details and images can be found here.

> https://www.instagram.com/system_art_gallery <

> https://systemgallery.co.uk/ <

2018-10	'Let Me Down Gently' curated by Susie Curran and featured work by Katie Elizabeth Brown, Emma Goring, Jak Humes, Nellie Saunby and Sophie Soobramanien.
2018-11	'Sentiment' solo show by Meaghan Stewart.
2018-11	'Macrocosm' featured artwork by Kat Parker, Laura Ann, and Rebecca Perry.
2019-01	'Bloc' featured artwork by Gulmehar Jilani, India Hibbs, Heather Carr, Zoe Armstrong, Roberto de Abreu Preciosa, Lauren McCartney, Lauren Kelly, and Merlyn Bradshaw
2019-01	'Vessel' solo show by Paul Goodfellow.
2019-03	'Close Encounters' solo show by Rachael Eden.
2019-04	'Good as Yours' duo show by Calum Bayne and Ailish Treanor.
2019-06	'Tactual' solo show by Ella Louise Jones.
2019-07	'Four Pack' co-curated with Susie Curran, Jessica Bennett, Eve Cromwell, and Jenny McNamara. Featuring artwork by Jenny Alderson, Beth Allsopp, Jason Carden, and Katie Watson.
2019-08	'Foolish Fire' solo show by Oliver Hoffmeister.
2019-09	'Manner of Flying' featured artwork by Jason Carden, Evelyn Cromwell, Susannah Curran, Rachael Eden, Oliver Hoffmeister,

jawbone jawbone, Mani Kambo, Tommy Keenan, Jenny Mc Namara, Meaghan Stewart, and Jay Weavers.

2019-10 'Manner of Falling' featured artwork by Ella Louise Jones, Nellie Saunby, Gill Shreeve and Meaghan Stewart.

2020-01 'This is the Exhibition' solo show by Dan Goodman.

2020-02 'Insert Exhibition Title' co-curated with Susie Curran and featuring artwork by George Stewart, Jack Connor Kemp, Evelyn Cromwell, Jenny McNamara, Matthew Young, Tommy Keenan, Dolores Hobby, Stu Mel Wilson, Sue Loughlin, and Genevieve Slater.

2020-09 'Fresh Start' featuring artwork by Angelica Jones, Angharad Creissen, Boy Latex (Aidan Knowles Levitt and Ben Welsh), Pheobe Riley Law, Rachel Jadé Davison-Emmott and Sarah Larby.

2020-10 'This Feels like an Omen' duo show by Mark Bletcher and Oliver Hoffmeister.

2020-10 'Conditions of Present Existence' solo show by Gill Shreeve.

2021-01 'An Ink-Stained Hand Reaches Across the Void' solo show by Meaghan Stewart.

2021-08 'Folly' featuring artworks by Oliver Hoffmeister, Tommy Keenan, Gill Shreeve, Meaghan Stewart and Jay Weaver.

2021-09 'Vault' featured artwork by Muara Hawkes, Lucy Thomas, Liam Aldridge, and Millie Avis.

2021-12 'Now That's What I Call Art' co-curated with Eve Cromwell and Jenny McNamara featuring over 120 artists – listed here > https://www.visitnca.com/exhibitions/now-thats-what-i-call-art

2023-04 'Now That's What I Call Art 2' co-curated with Eve Cromwell and Jenny McNamara featuring 74 artists – listed here > https://www.visitnca.com/exhibitions/now-thats-what-i-call-art-2

Appendix E. Exhibition Text and Images of 'Sentiment' by Meaghan Stewart

Exhibition Text

Sentiment
Preview Tuesday 20th November 6-8pm

Sentiment is an exhibition of works by Meaghan Stewart, a final year Fine Art student at Newcastle University.

--

"In my practice I use video and photography to explore the Everyday through my own family relationships. In my practice I have begun to examine what it means to be 'working-class' through exploring maternal relationships, domesticity, and class division.

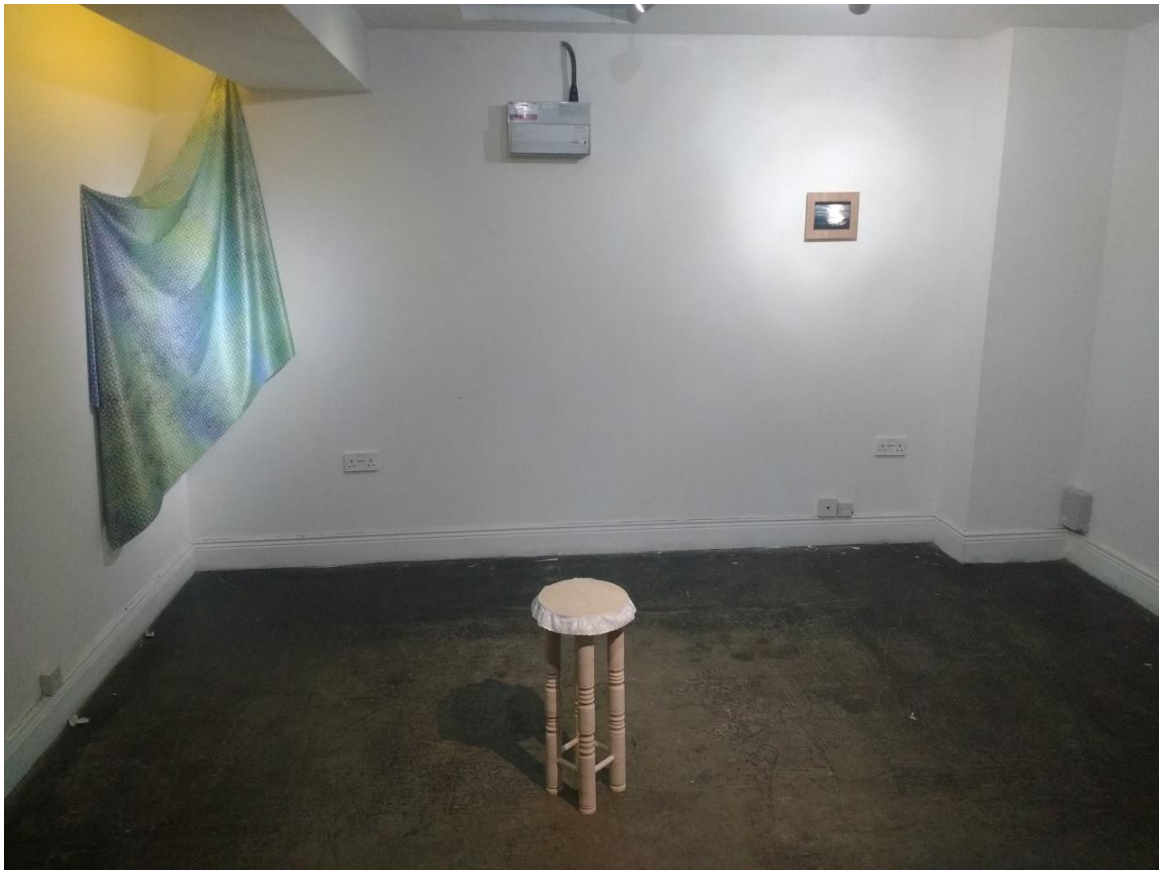
I currently share a bed with my mam in my gran and granddad's house, located within a council estate. By extracting elements of this house - or rather "my home" - my work subverts ideas around homemaking. "

(System Gallery, 2018b)

Images (start on the next page)

All artworks pictured are by Meaghan Stewart. Photographs by me.











Appendix F. Exhibition Text and Images of 'Dishwasher Safe' featuring artwork by Frankie Casmir, Tommy Keenan, Grace Denton, jawbone jawbone, Joe Shaw, and Pippa Eason

Exhibition Text

"WHERE: System Gallery, Leazes Park Rd, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 4PG (above Bar Loco)
EXHIBITION PREVIEW: Thursday 10th August 6-9PM
EXHIBITION RUNS: 11th August - 11th September 2017
All welcome.
--
The artists in this show share a similar approach to making work. They use sculpture, print, paint and text to point back out to every day. The artists are based across Newcastle and Manchester and were drawn together by a collective aesthetic of the bright, the absurd, the almost ugly, the outlandish, the pixelated and the artificial.

Frankie Casimir re-incarnates objects that belong to the category of the throw away, remoulding them and giving them a new body. The bright colour palette that runs through their new skin connects them as a group, enhancing their individual attributes. Seeing how these objects interact with one another brings them together, like a family. She takes viewers on a journey through the placement of these objects, an expedition of connectivity.

Tommy Keenan's practice initially stems from the repudiated notions of ambiguous sexualities in binary gender. These notions have led to the reflection of scenarios experienced in relation to what modern day society often avoids addressing. Through the expression of sculpture, a manipulation of both

readymade materials and blatant suggestiveness form to create an amalgamation of an incoherent whole.

Grace Denton weaves performance, text, video and sculpture to explore personal facade, authenticity, artifice, and imposter syndrome within the art world. The work often borrows the imagery of clowning and slapstick to complicate the actions seen within the work, and hint at layered meanings. Her works walk a line between absurd humour and serious enquiry.

jawbone jawbone are habitual re-users of imagery, generating motifs that appear in various forms. They take elements from previous works, jostling and repurposing them into new forms. They refer to these 'elements' rather than specific mediums, allowing a multi-disciplinary approach to material and collaborative making with a strong sense of freedom and playfulness at its centre. Working in the space between 2D and 3D, their work appears to have fallen out of a digital screen or been illogically flattened.

Joe Shaw's installations and sculptures deal with the acceleration of forced obsolescence of technology post 2000. Central to the themes in the work are notions of liquidity and transience in our environment and the confusion that we face in a world of broken technology and fake realities. Shaw’s work employs a lo-fi aesthetic and black humour to comment on this instability and the resulting distrust it brings about in both individuals and of objects.

Pippa Eason makes sculptural/digital observations of the abstraction or perception of technology, social media, and accelerationism within the young contemporary art scene. They act as outlandish props for the near fictional imagery displayed on screen; they characterise themselves, crumbling from the cocoon of reality, into the pixel generated sub-human culture. The multi layered

objects/digital counterparts serve as a signifier for the aesthetics of contemporary commerce, and internet scroll culture."

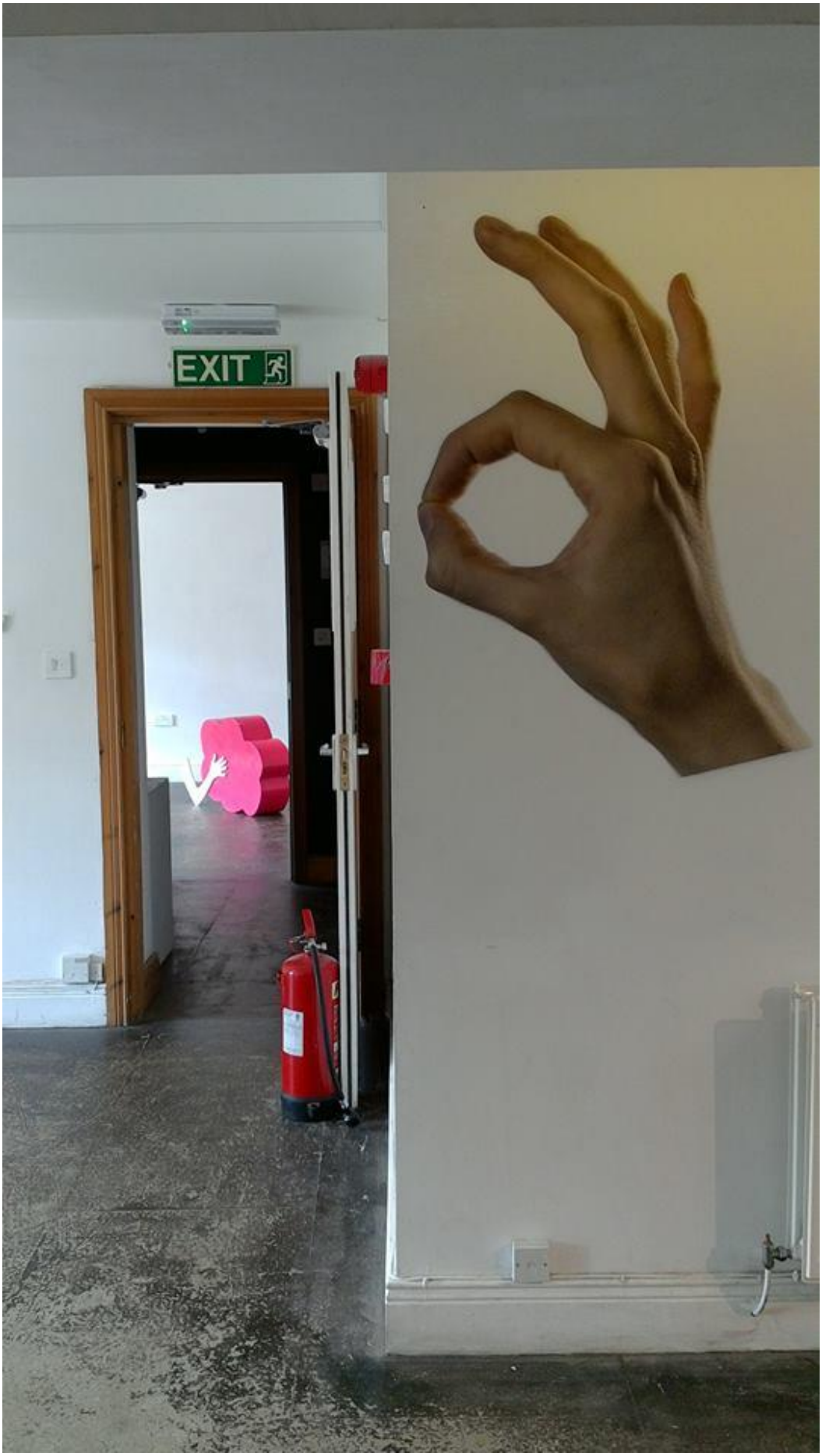
(System Gallery, 2017)

Images (start on the next page)

All images taken by me. All artworks in the first image are by Tommy Keenan. In the second image all artworks are by jawbone jawbone. In the third image the artwork at the top is by Grace Denton and the bottom by jawbone jawbone. In the fourth image the artwork is by Pippa Eason.

The images are grainy because of the quality of the camera on my phone at the time, and the blurriness just down to my poor photography ability. I feel this is somewhat indicative of my attitude and sense of responsibility within *System.* This was the first exhibition I curated are having taken the reins of *System* and was very formative in terms of what the show meant to the artists involved and my involvement in being able to offer and be part of that.




EXIT





Appendix G. Exhibition Text and Images of 'Manner of Flying' featuring artwork by Jason Carden, Evelyn Cromwell, Susannah Curran, Rachael Eden, Oliver Hoffmeister, jawbone jawbone, Mani Kambo, Tommy Keenan, Jenny Mc Namara, Meaghan Stewart, and Jay Weavers

Exhibition Text

MANNER OF FLYING

Preview: Thursday 5th September

Exhibition Run: 6th – 10th September

MANNER OF FLYING is the first of an 18-month series of exhibitions produced by System's curator Dan Goodman. It is an attempt at exhibition making which brings the background work of artist-run spaces to the forefront. The exhibition brings together the work of old friends, including, previous exhibitors, curators, and collaborators.

The spaces housing artist-run projects are often temporary. In absence of regular public funding System has existed on the top floor of Bar Loco for around 10 years. It has been able to do so through an informal arrangement with the owners who have kindly offered the space for free. This situation presents a double-edged sword, with complete autonomy and self-sustainability on one end, and uncertainty and reliance on voluntary labour on the other.

MANNER OF FLYING explores this dichotomy to contextualise the social world/s of those directly involved in artist-run spaces. The exhibition is a form of 'thinking aloud' reflecting on the generation of tacit value within artist-run spaces. It uses System as a research site to explore the emotional dimension underpinning the value of these spaces that stems from the need for artists to generate an

emotional attachment capable of fostering a shared identity, belonging, and solidarity amongst art communities.

MANNER OF FLYING contemplates the gallery site in terms of its physical space, but also as a symbolic space capable of legitimising artistic identities and practices. Much like the spaces themselves, the support that these spaces are able to offer is temporary. Akin to scaffolding, the hope is that when the supporting structure is removed what is being constructed will be able to support itself. The supporting structures in MANNER OF FLYING have been made using materials donated by artists connected to System, acknowledging System's DIY ethic and the reciprocal co-construction of support within it. These structures both take up the space for works, but also offer themselves to be used as space. They present System as a scaffolding, a temporary (and often-invisible) abstraction bearing the work of others.

EXHIBITING ARTISTS

Jason Carden, Evelyn Cromwell, Susannah Curran, Rachael Eden, Oliver Hoffmeister, Jawbone Jawbone, Mani Kambo, Tommy Keenan, Jenny Mc Namara, Meaghan Stewart, and Jay Weavers

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Dan Goodman is director and a curator at System and is also working towards a practice-based Fine Art PhD at Newcastle University. He is interested in the social worlds and tacit forms of value generated within artist-run initiatives. He will be using System as a research site to test his ideas, collect data, and share findings. Dan is research assistant for More Than Meanwhile Spaces, an interdisciplinary project working to secure long-term futures for artist-led initiatives in the region. Within this he is responsible for bringing together a regional network of artist-led initiatives over five 'strategic dialogue' events to pool existing knowledge and

research, co-develop actions, and advocate for sustainable artist-run futures in the region.

REFERENCES

Condorelli, C., Wade, G. and Langdon, J. (2009) Support Structures. Sternberg Press.

Guibernau i Berdún, M.M. (2013) Belonging: solidarity and division in modern societies. Cambridge: Wiley.

Noë, A. (2016) Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

(System Gallery, 2017)

Images (start on the next page)

All images taken by me. First image is from the preview event. The second image features artwork by [left to right]: Rachael Eden, Jenny McNamara, and Jason Carden. The third image features artwork by Mani Kambo [on the wall], and jawbone jawbone [on the floor]. The fourth image features artwork by [left to right]: Meaghan Stewart, Jason Carden, Jenny McNamara, and Mani Kambo. The fifth image features artwork by [left to right] me and Eve Cromwell amongst the unexpected destruction when walking into the space to install that same day. The sixth image features artwork by [left to right]: Oliver Hoffmeister and jawbone jawbone.








HALF!


System is the space
The space is not System
System is impermeant
he space is permanent
System provides space
System is provided space
System supports practice
System is supported by practice



Appendix H. Exhibition Text and Images of 'Insert Exhibition Title' featuring artwork by George Stewart, Jack Connor Kemp, Evelyn Cromwell, Jenny McNamara, Matthew Young, Tommy Keenan, Dolores Hobby, Stu Mel Wilson, Sue Loughlin, and Genevieve Slater

Exhibition Text

WHERE: XL Gallery, Newcastle University
PREVIEW: 5th February 5-8pm
EXHIBITION RUNS: 6TH – 8TH FEBRUARY
ARTISTS: George Stewart, Jack Connor Kemp, Evelyn Cromwell, Jenny McNamara, Matthew Young, Tommy Keenan, Dolores Hobby, Stu Mel Wilson, Sue Loughlin, and Genevieve Slater

This ?Exhibition? forms part of my ongoing PHD investigating the tacit value of artist-run initiatives. It is the ?fourth? show of ?? which so far has covered my curatorial project System being given the boot from above a bar to now being based-ish in a former bank in a shopping centre.

This show was meant to be the second half of a two-partner in the XL. But due to a misunderstanding the space wasn't secured for the first one (my own fault). This only became known to me a few weeks before Christmas, at which point I had to secure another venue. The time spent sorting this meant that this show had to be sandwiched in. Rather than leave the space empty I thought it would be better to offer the space to artists looking to test new work or just get stuff out of the studio.

As it replicates some of the last-minute-ness of a lot of DIY artist-run activity it is useful as a bit of action research for me too. Probably.

TBH I'm really fucking stretched. Is burnout a credible curatorial strategy?

Dan Goodman

System Gallery Curator

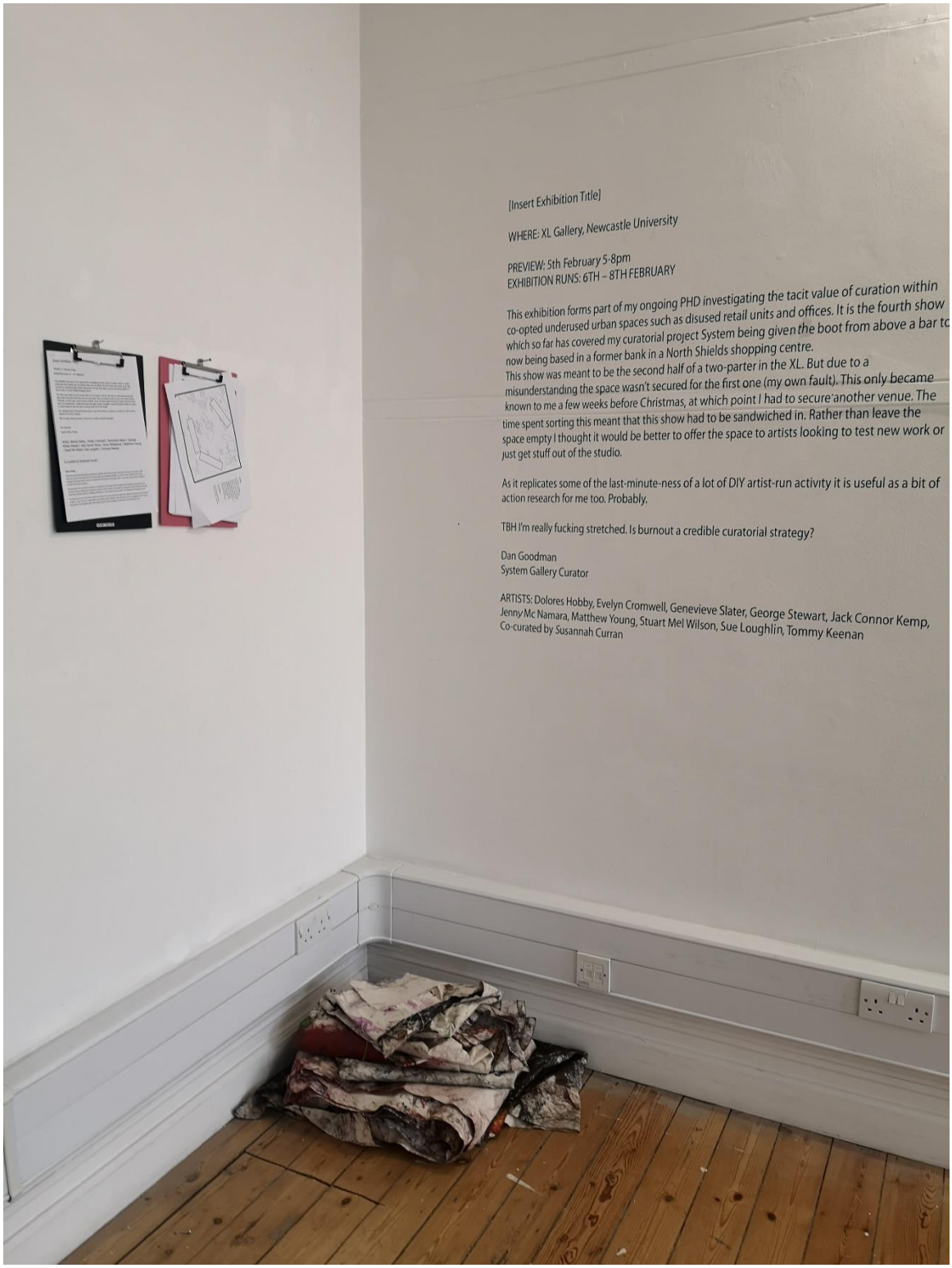
(Goodman, 2020)

Images (start on the next page)

All images taken by me apart from the first one which was taken by Euan Lynn. First image is a photograph of Tommy Keenan's performance during the preview evening. Second image is broad shot of the exhibition. Third image is the exhibition text and guide and Matthew Young's artwork. The fourth image is broad shot of the exhibition.






[Insert Exhibition Title]
WHERE: XL Gallery, Newcastle University
PREVIEW: 5th February 5-8pm
EXHIBITION RUNS: 6TH – 8TH FEBRUARY
This exhibition forms part of my ongoing PHD investigating the tacit value of curation within co-opted underused urban spaces such as disused retail units and offices. It is the fourth show which so far has covered my curatorial project System being given the boot from above a bar to now being based in a former bank in a North Shields shopping centre.
This show was meant to be the second half of a two-parter in the XL. But due to a misunderstanding the space wasn't secured for the first one (my own fault). This only became known to me a few weeks before Christmas, at which point I had to secure another venue. The time spent sorting this meant that this show had to be sandwiched in. Rather than leave the space empty I thought it would be better to offer the space to artists looking to test new work or just get stuff out of the studio.
As it replicates some of the last-minute-ness of a lot of DIY artist-run activity it is useful as a bit of action research for me too. Probably.
TBH I'm really fucking stretched. Is burnout a credible curatorial strategy?
Dan Goodman
System Gallery Curator
ARTISTS: Dolores Hobby, Evelyn Cromwell, Genevieve Slater, George Stewart, Jack Connor Kemp, Jenny Mc Namara, Matthew Young, Stuart Mel Wilson, Sue Loughlin, Tommy Keenan
Co-curated by Susannah Curran


NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Appendix I. 'Some Sinking Hopes, Floating Concerns, and Muddied Perceptions of an Artist-Run Curator' publication



My name is Dan Goodman and I curate System, a Newcastle-based artist-run space. I am an artist-curator and researcher who is interested in the overlap of ideas of space as a set of shifting interrelations and forms of community within artist-run initiatives. My practice shrinks, expands and moves between sites incorporating written material, video, photography and the display of others' artwork. Most importantly though it is a process of allowing for instantaneous multiplicitous limitless potentiality. In this vein, the photographic collages of System exhibitions are accompanied by unedited* pieces of autonomous writing on my thoughts of running the space.

(Incomplete) System History
In 2010 (??) Alex Breeze and Leanne ??? founded Moving Gallery, a Newcastle-based nomadic curatorial project. When its pot of money ran out the owner of one of the venues (Bar Loco) offered the upstairs of their bar on the understanding that it treated the rate relief they could claim as rent-in-kind. It was renamed to System Gallery.

It passed hands a few times whilst it was based above Bar Loco, first being ran by Alex Breeze, then Stu Herring, and then Egle Dubinkaite and Jacob Zoob who handed it onto me in 2017. Susannah Curran joined in 2018 as part of an ERDF funded placement after her graduation, and after that she stayed on as an important part of System. Helping where she needed to, her activities include but are not limited to, curating shows, improving the social media, and promoting events.

Then in late 2019 System was asked to vacate Bar Loco, as the bar was sold, and the new owners decided that they didn't want the gallery there. With no place to go it returned to functioning as a nomadic space for 4 months or so, having exhibitions at GAS Contemporary and the Ex-Libris Gallery. At the time of writing, the plan is to take over the second floor of Bamburgh House for the next year.

*** Bar some typos and major grammatical errors**

Book design, images and text by Dan Goodman 2020
Depicted artworks are by various exhibiting artists at System curated exhibitions 2017-2020





I can't quite remember why I took the photos for these collages (the previous two and the next three). I was de-installing a System exhibition at Ex-Libris Gallery in February this year. That feels like forever ago now. That was bit of a strange show. I was exhausted and despondent a chunk of it. Part of this was slightly orchestrated as part of some kinda 'action research' through working to exhaustion. These photos were taken whilst I was coming out of being exhausted, but a bit cheerier now the show went well and was then glad I did it. I don't know why I get surprised by this or why it always feels like a bit of a revelation, why in the moment any of the shows feel different to others. I felt it was important to document the traces of things which had happened there before, before and including this exhibition. I have bit of a bug bear about the insistence of creating a 'pure' space to present work in. I'm more interested in the production of art display and artists as a group of people - rather than art objects. Do we always have to destroy what was there before and deny the context in which you're showing, why not build on it. On a similar note, why put the drills and hammers away after installing an exhibition? Why must the curation be something which is always hidden? I'm not pretending this is a particularly novel question. Just stuff that was going through my head whilst I was documenting some of the holes left by nails and screws, scuffs on the floor, and eraser rubbings.







"It is kinda odd whilst I write, think and spout a lot about ideas of community, that I don't really have many images of people. But then when I think about the space and the artworks, it is these through these that I connect with people. Or at least the activity around these things. I am nowhere near as interested in other ways of connecting with people - it is quite a specific way of being/working with people. Maybe it is about a positionality or identity. Though that space has made me a lot more appreciative of other forms of organising. It has also helped my temperament. I am calmer and more patient for it. I also know what I value more, who I am more. Does being around art, and not the 'art market' or 'state art', make you a more conscientious person? What a pretentious twattish thought...

...Nah, I think what I am really interested in is, why artist-run spaces specifically? What is happening here and how do you capture it? What is its value?

...It has certainly changed me, and probably largely for the better. I'd find it hard to stop, even at the expense of my own mental and physical well-being. It has shaped parts of my personality for real. Other bits are performed. Like a job. I've voluntarily carried on installing an exhibition in between bouts of secretly farting blood in the loo. Why? I didn't need to. They could had carried on without me, perhaps I needed me to be there"

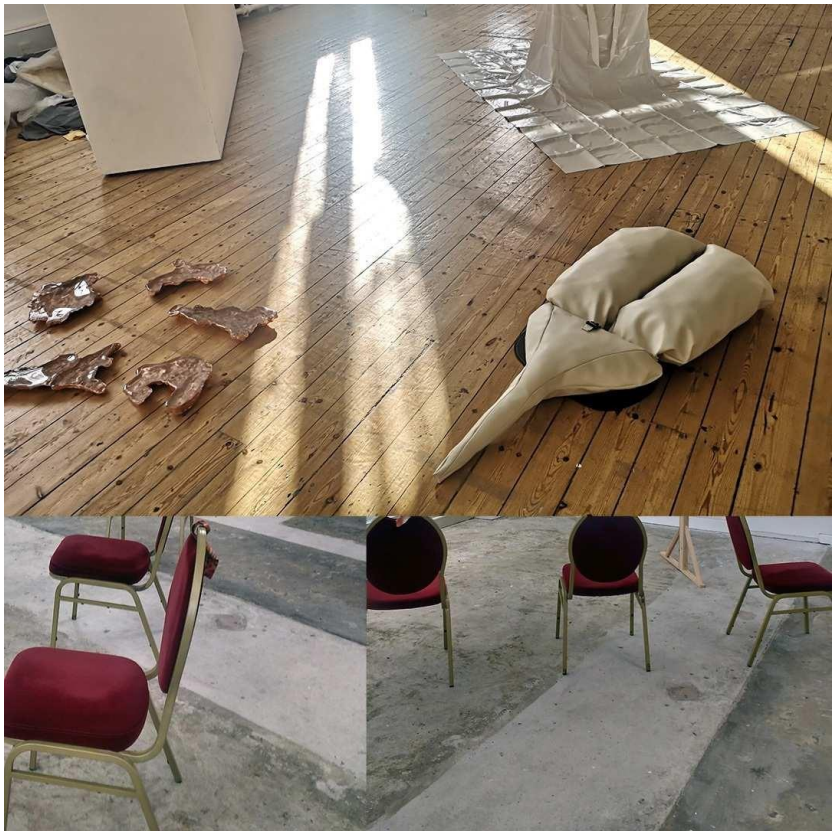






"I have a slightly odd attachment to the floors of the galleries that I have worked with. I've spent many hours sweeping and cleaning them. This is usually the last job to do before opening the gallery up to the public on a preview. This was often the case at the old System space. You pick up the debris from the time installing the work. Making sure to find nails and screws where you can, pry off loose bits of tape, gather up your tools and belongings. There is a sense of satisfaction in that moment where the show is installed. This is coupled with a sense of anticipation for people starting to arrive. I usually have a beer by this point, part-celebration, part-relief, part-having-something-to-do-with-my-hands-when-talking-to-people. Gallery floors never change, you're kinda stuck with them. You can change the colours of walls or re-coat them. Scuffs and marks on the floor stay - in a sense they do change then. Hopefully you know what I mean.

I kinda miss brushing those floors. That room use to get so dusty. I miss the shit half-broken broom, that kicked up more dust than it effectively swept. I miss the little rituals of setting up the donation box and the bar. I miss putting the posters up. I miss moving plinths. I miss getting the keys from the bar. I miss having to go down two flights of stairs for a wee. I miss doing these things for something. For people. Just simple gestures of giving, you do these things to keep the gallery running."



“I wish that I had updated my phone sooner so that I would have better photos of the old System space. I forget what the floors look like, or at least the detail of what they look like beyond a blurry pixelated image. Out of the all of the things I wished I had a better photograph of though, it is this plug socket. I had to screenshot this one from an old Instagram account. Out of all the people, objects and events - it is this. Why? Because of the story attached to it? Did it typify the make-do-ness of the space? Because of the interesting problem it presented working around it? Because of it being the image used in the promo of the last exhibition in that space? Now I've just got this low-res image.”

“Despite my better judgement I think I kind of felt that space would last forever, or at least I'd be the one to walk away. I remember being annoyed ,as well comforted/grateful, at some peoples’ expression of loss when we announced we were losing that space. Who did they think they were to try and own my grief? 'Grief'. That's what it was.”

“Even now the precarity of System doesn’t feel real. I guess now because in a sense it isn’t. ‘Real’ I mean. Doing exhibitions as ‘System’ outside of that space, has kinda abstracted it. Perhaps these ‘scars’ (the plug, the marks on the floor, the scuffs on the wall) are permanent reminders that something really happened.”







“Multiplicity isn't enough. It is limiting. Previously I worked at a gallery which would have four exhibitions a year of like a hundred odd artists at a time. This was really exciting at first but there are only so many ways you can combine things. Or at least how one can imagine combining things. What would get me excited though was not knowing what exactly was going to arrive and having to deal with it. At that moment there was limitless potential in terms of what the exhibition could be. But what good is the arrangement of objects if it doesn’t affect people in some way? For some exhibitions I've relinquished controls of selecting works/artists - asking people I trust to contact artists without telling me. Or inviting artists based solely of recommendations with no idea of their work. Hardly ground-breaking, but not everything has to be. This makes things exciting for me. Afterall I’m a ‘stakeholder’ too. Perhaps there is some wider point here about this being a big difference to the artist-run and the municipal or institutional.”

“I do feel responsible for helping people. In that a multiplicity, and beyond that a plurality, is essential. But I am not sure that should be the end goal in of itself. What would our institutions look like if rather than communicating how many people were involved in the project, they were instructed to use them as indicators for a project’s potential? And having an open definition of what that could be. What if they could take those kinds of risks? I think this is certainly one value of the artist-run - there is greater autonomy to do this - in some ways, I guess. I think that's why I do it anyway.”

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Appendix J. Exhibition Text and Images of 'Manner of Falling' featuring artwork by Ella Louise Jones, Nellie Saunby, Gill Shreeve and Meaghan Stewart

Exhibition Text

CLOSING PARTY: Friday 4th October 5-8pm
EXHIBITION RUNS: 30th Sept-4th Oct
VENUE: XL Gallery, Newcastle University Fine Art Building

MANNER OF FALLING is part of an 18-month series of exhibitions produced by System's curator Dan Goodman. They are an attempt to work towards a way of making exhibitions which bring the background work and context of artist-run spaces to the forefront. This exhibition brings together the work of old friends and previous exhibitors of System.

This programme of shows was originally planned to be taking place at System's gallery above Bar Loco, where it had been housed for around 10 years. However, System was abruptly and unceremoniously told they could no longer use the space to hold exhibitions. The story that the somewhat insensitive 'booting' tells is not of someone who is necessarily unsympathetic, but of someone who perhaps doesn't understand the symbolic value spaces hold and the emotional impact of their actions to the arts community.

In the text for what would be its last exhibition above Bar Loco, System was described as a space which supports and bears the work of others. Since the news of the venue, this is clearly reciprocated as shown through the kind and encouraging words from many of the arts community. Many of us are subject to the same precarity and through that a sense of shared struggle has kept many much-needed initiatives like System going.

The multiplicity of the use of that original space, as a dance hall and Spanish class among other things, means System was always short on time. This combined with the constant momentum of curating shows on a monthly basis (at times more) has led to burnout and maybe a lack of time to think about what System is, does and could be. Having inherited various ways of working, along with their limitations, this new situation is an opportunity to hopefully rebuild something better.

For MANNER OF FALLING, Dan will be spending the duration of the exhibition in the gallery space experimenting with different arrangements of works and producing texts/drawings/whatever to be incorporated into the show. He will combine these with various photographs from System's catalogue of exhibitions reflecting on his own curatorial practice within/without System and what this could mean going forward.

--

EXHIBITING ARTISTS

Ella Louise Jones / Nellie Saunby / Gill Shreeve / Meaghan Stewart

--

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Dan Goodman is director and a curator at System and is also working towards a practice-based Fine Art PhD at Newcastle University. He is interested in the social worlds and tacit forms of value generated within artist-run initiatives. He will be using System as a research site to test his ideas, collect data, and share findings. Dan is research assistant for More Than Meanwhile Spaces, an interdisciplinary project working to secure long-term futures for artist-led initiatives in the region. Within this he is responsible for bringing together a regional network of artist-led

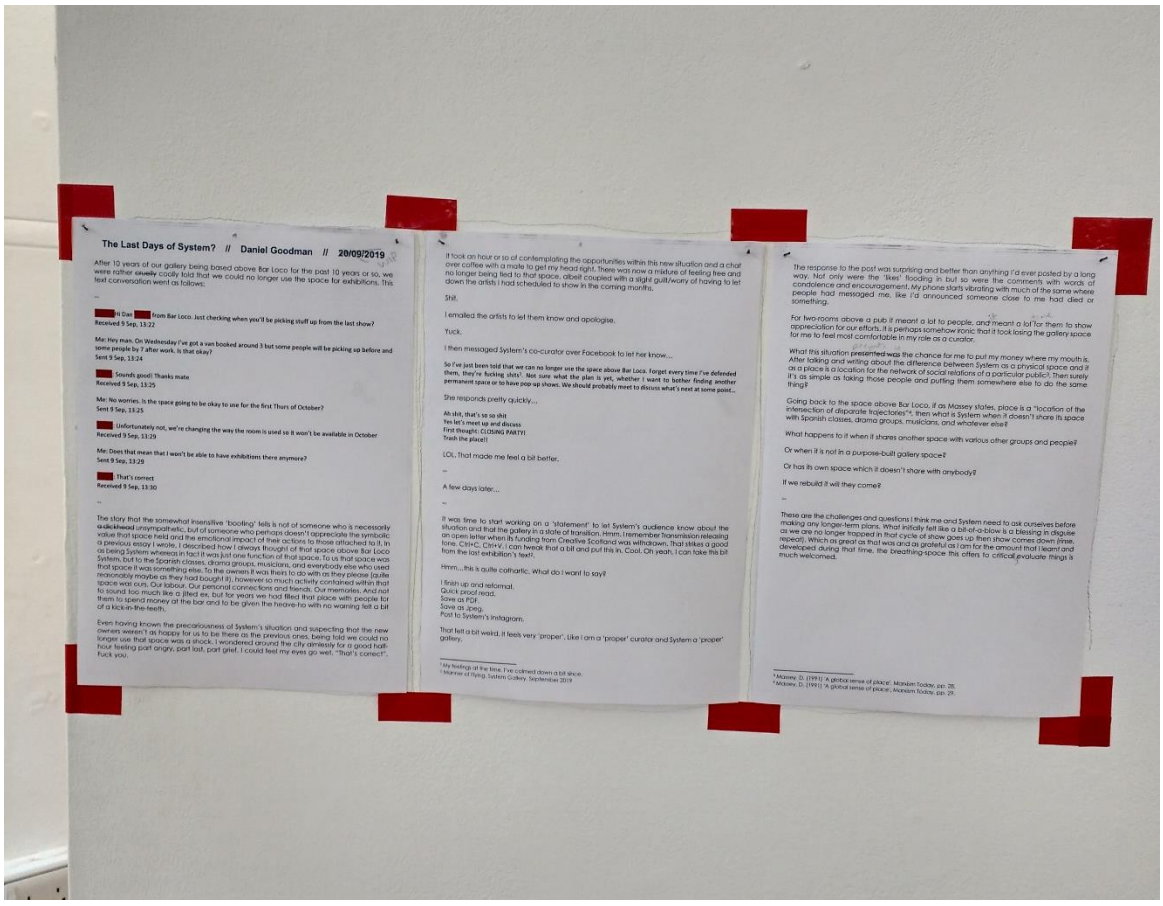
initiatives over five ‘strategic dialogue’ events to pool existing knowledge and research, co-develop actions, and advocate for sustainable artist-run futures in the region.

(System Gallery, 2019)

Images (start on next page)

All images taken by me. First image is a broad shot of the exhibition. Second image is a photo of my text as included in the exhibition. Third image features artwork by Gill Shreeve (projected video) and Ella Louise Jones (sculpture). The fourth image is a broad shot of the exhibition with an intervention by me foregrounded – for the exhibition I was experimenting with highlighting some of the exhibition process in the output by having coloured tape represent considerations over the location of works. The fifth image features artwork by Nellie Saunby.





The Last Days of System? // Daniel Goodman // 20/09/2019

After 10 years of our gallery being based above Bar Loco for the past 10 years or so, we were rather **cavalierly** coolly told that we could no longer use the space for exhibitions. This text conversation went as follows:

~

[redacted] Hi Dan [redacted] from Bar Loco. Just checking when you'll be picking stuff up from the last show?
Received 5 Sep, 13:22

Me: Hey man. On Wednesday I've got a van booked around 3 but some people will be picking up before and some people by 7 after work. Is that okay?
Sent 5 Sep, 13:24

[redacted] Sounds good! Thanks mate
Received 5 Sep, 13:25

Me: No worries. Is the space going to be okay to use for the first Thurs of October?
Sent 5 Sep, 13:25

[redacted] Unfortunately not, we're changing the way the room is used so it won't be available in October
Received 5 Sep, 13:29

Me: Does that mean that I won't be able to have exhibitions there anymore?
Sent 5 Sep, 13:29

[redacted] That's correct
Received 5 Sep, 13:30

~

The story that the somewhat insensitive 'booting' tells is not of someone who is necessarily **cackhead** unsympathetic, but of someone who perhaps doesn't appreciate the symbolic value that space held and the emotional impact of their actions to those attached to it. In a previous essay I wrote, I described how I always thought of that space above Bar Loco as being System whereas in fact it was just one function of that space. To us that space was System, but to the Spanish classes, drama groups, musicians, and everybody else who used that space it was something else. To the owners it was there to do with as they please (quite reasonably maybe as they had bought it), however so much activity contained within that space was ours. Our labour. Our personal connections and friends. Our memories. And not to sound too much like a jilted ex, but for years we had filled that place with people for them to spend money at the bar and to be given the heave-ho with no warning felt a bit of a kick-in-the-teeth.

Even having known the precariousness of System's situation and suspecting that the new owners weren't as happy for us to be there as the previous ones, being told we could no longer use that space was a shock. I wondered around the city aimlessly for a good half-hour feeling part angry, part lost, part grief. I could feel my eyes go wet. "That's correct". Fuck you.

It took an hour or so of contemplating the opportunities within this new situation and a chat over coffee with a mate to get my head right. There was now a mixture of feeling free and no longer being tied to that space, albeit coupled with a slight guilt/worry of having to let down the artists I had scheduled to show in the coming months.

Shit.

I emailed the artists to let them know and apologise.

Yuck.

I then messaged System's co-curator over Facebook to let her know...

So I've just been told that we can no longer use the space above Bar Loco. Forget every time I've defended them, they're fucking shits!. Not sure what the plan is yet, whether I want to bother finding another permanent space or to have pop-up shows. We should probably meet to discuss what's next at some point...

She responds pretty quickly...

Ah shit, that's so so shit
Yes let's meet up and discuss
First thought: CLOSING PARTY!
Trash the place!!

LOL. That made me feel a bit better.

~

A few days later...

~

It was time to start working on a 'statement' to let System's audience know about the situation and that the gallery in a state of transition. Hmm. I remember Transmission releasing an open letter when its funding from Creative Scotland was withdrawn. That strikes a good tone. Ctrl+C. Ctrl+V. I can tweak that a bit and put this in. Cool. Oh yeah, I can take this bit from the last exhibition's text!.

Hmm... this is quite cathartic. What do I want to say?

I finish up and reformat.
Quick proof read.
Save as PDF.
Save as jpeg.
Post to System's instagram.

That felt a bit weird, it feels very 'proper'. Like I am a 'proper' curator and System a 'proper' gallery.

[1] My feelings at the time. I've calmed down a bit since.
[2] Manner of Flying. System Gallery. September 2019

The response to the post was surprising and better than anything I'd ever posted by a long way. Not only were the 'likes' flooding in but so were the comments with words of condolence and encouragement. My phone starts vibrating with much of the same where people had messaged me, like I'd announced someone close to me had died or something.

For two-rooms above a pub it meant a lot to people, and meant a lot for them to show appreciation for our efforts. It is perhaps somehow ironic that it took losing the gallery space for me to feel most comfortable in my role as a curator.

What this situation **presented was** the chance for me to put my money where my mouth is. After talking and writing about the difference between System as a physical space and it as a place is a location for the network of social relations of a particular public[3]. Then surely it's as simple as taking those people and putting them somewhere else to do the same thing!?

Going back to the space above Bar Loco, if as Massey states, place is a "location of the intersection of disparate trajectories"[4], then what is System when it doesn't share its space with Spanish classes, drama groups, musicians, and whatever else?

What happens to it when it shares another space with various other groups and people?

Or when it is not in a purpose-built gallery space?

Or has its own space which it doesn't share with anybody?

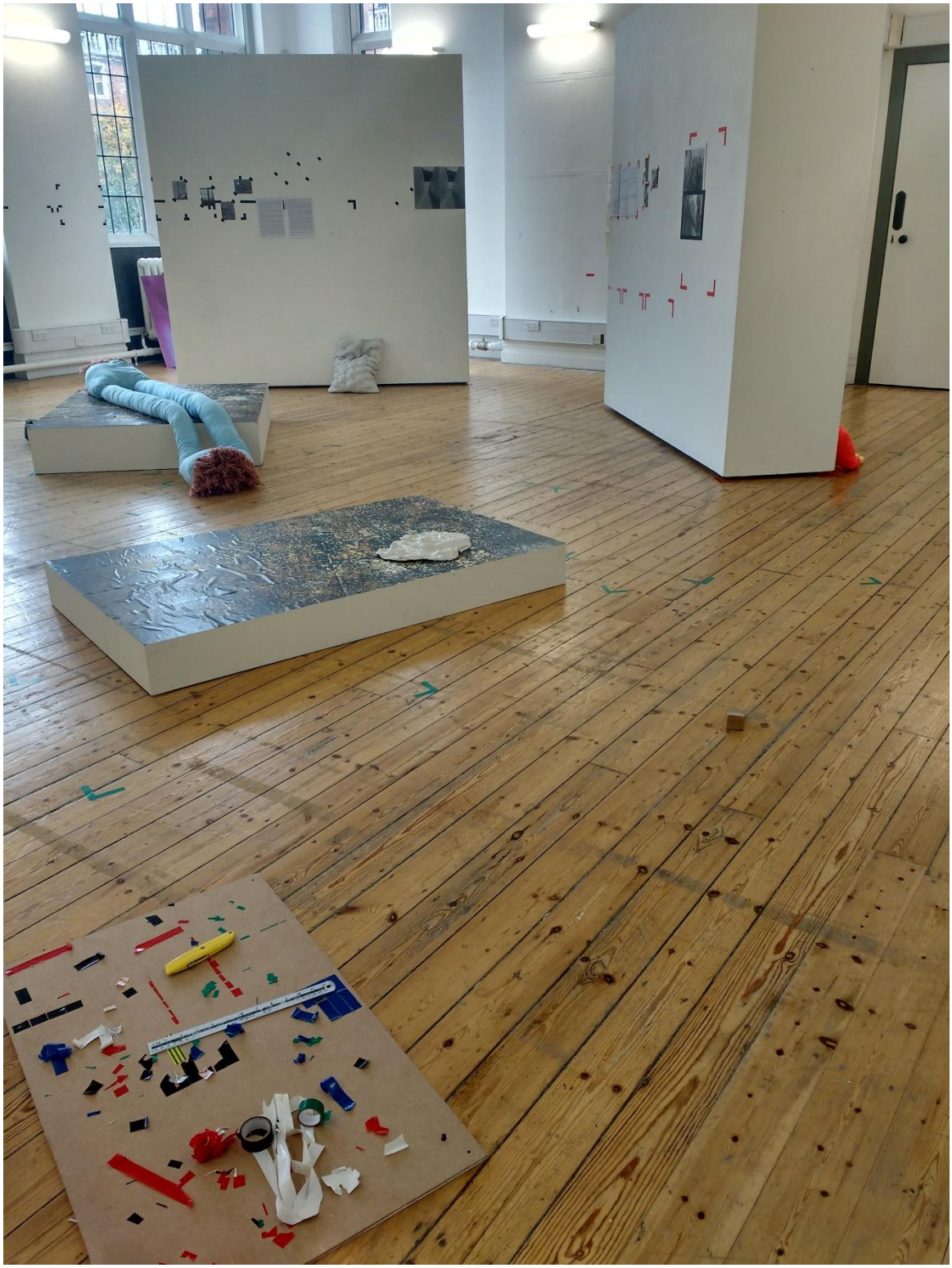
If we rebuild it will they come?

~

These are the challenges and questions I think me and System need to ask ourselves before making any longer-term plans. What initially felt like a bit-of-a-blow is a blessing in disguise as we are no longer trapped in that cycle of show goes up then show comes down (rinse, repeat). Which as great as that was and as grateful as I am for the amount that I learnt and developed during that time, the breathing-space this offers to critical evaluate things is much welcomed.

[3] Massey, D. (1991) 'A global sense of place'. Marxism Today, pp. 28.
[4] Massey, D. (1991) 'A global sense of place'. Marxism Today, pp. 29.






I hope
Youre doing
Fine today
I hope
You have a
good day

Appendix K. Exhibition Text and Images of 'This is the Exhibition' by Dan Goodman

Exhibition Text

This Is the Exhibition
Dan Goodman
GAS Contemporary, North Shields
Preview: Wednesday 15th January 6-8pm
Exhibition Runs: 15th – 18th January

This Is the Exhibition is part of an 18-month series of exhibitions produced by System's curator Dan Goodman. They are an attempt to work towards a way of making exhibitions which bring the background work and context of artist-run spaces to the forefront.

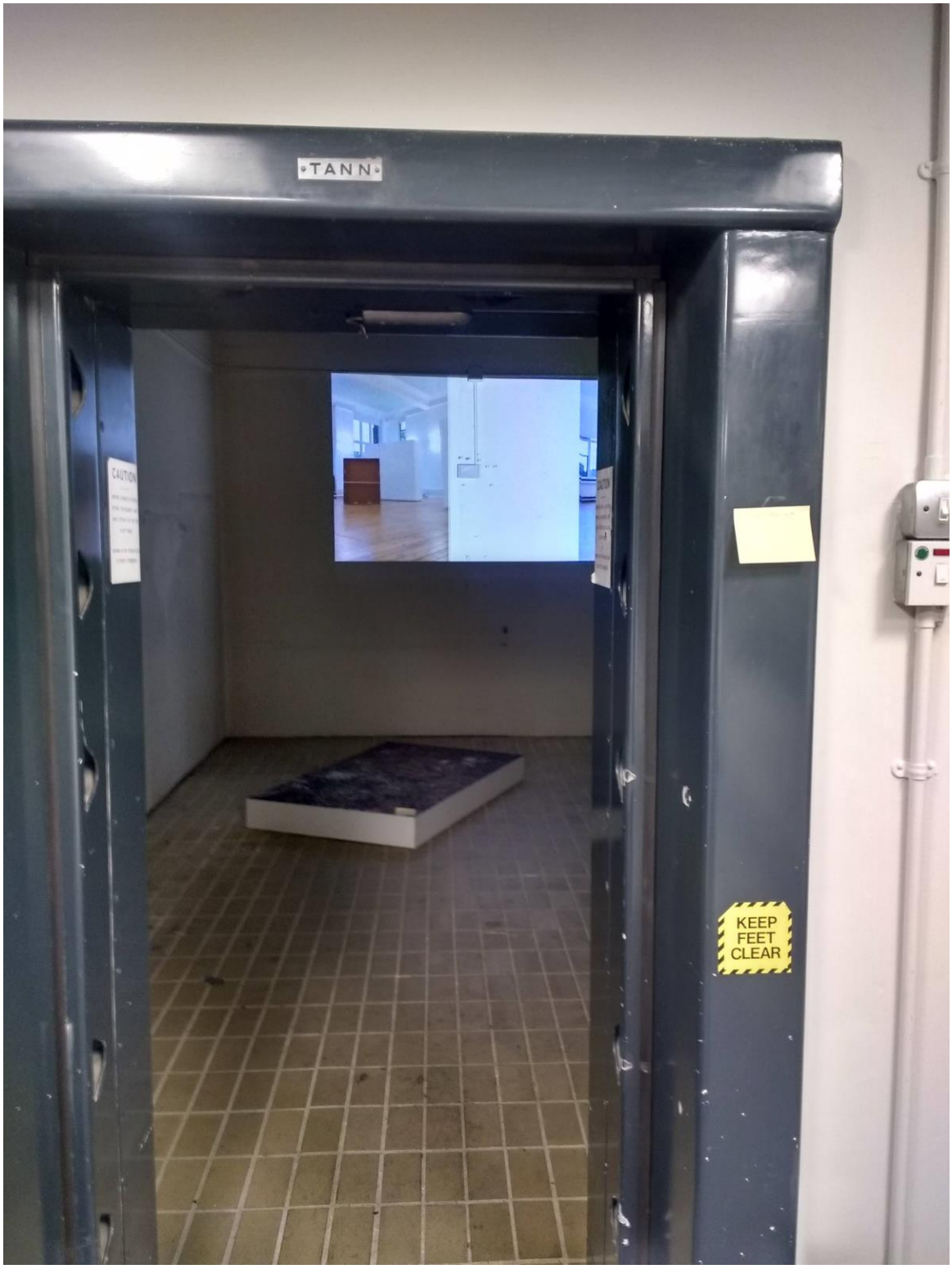
This exhibition focuses on how curating a space as an artist can shift one's imagining of space from the physical to relational. Influenced by the writings of human geographer Doreen Massey, This Is the Exhibition explores space as being fluid, multiplicitous, and produced through the interweaving of social trajectories. Based on his experiences of directing System, Goodman explores the emotional potentiality of artist-run spaces to shape identities and foster a sense of belonging to a community.

This Is the Exhibition is a test site for the development of several works in progress consisting of text, vinyl lettering, scribbled notes, interviews, and video.

(System Gallery, 2020)

Images (start on next page)

All images taken by me. All artwork by me. Post-it notes were part of discussions, workshops, and seminars held in the space based around the excerpts of my autoethnographic writing. This was a way to informally invite feedback and to initiate group discussion.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KEEP
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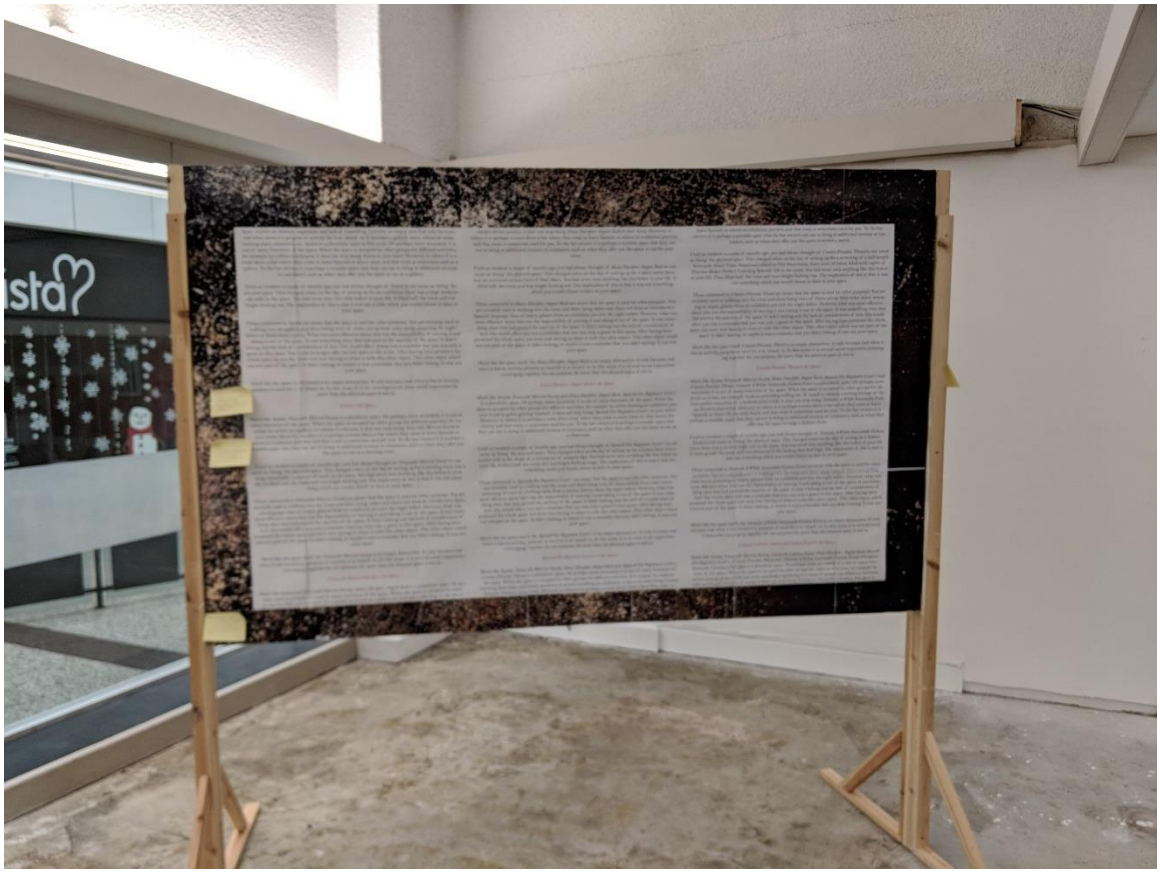
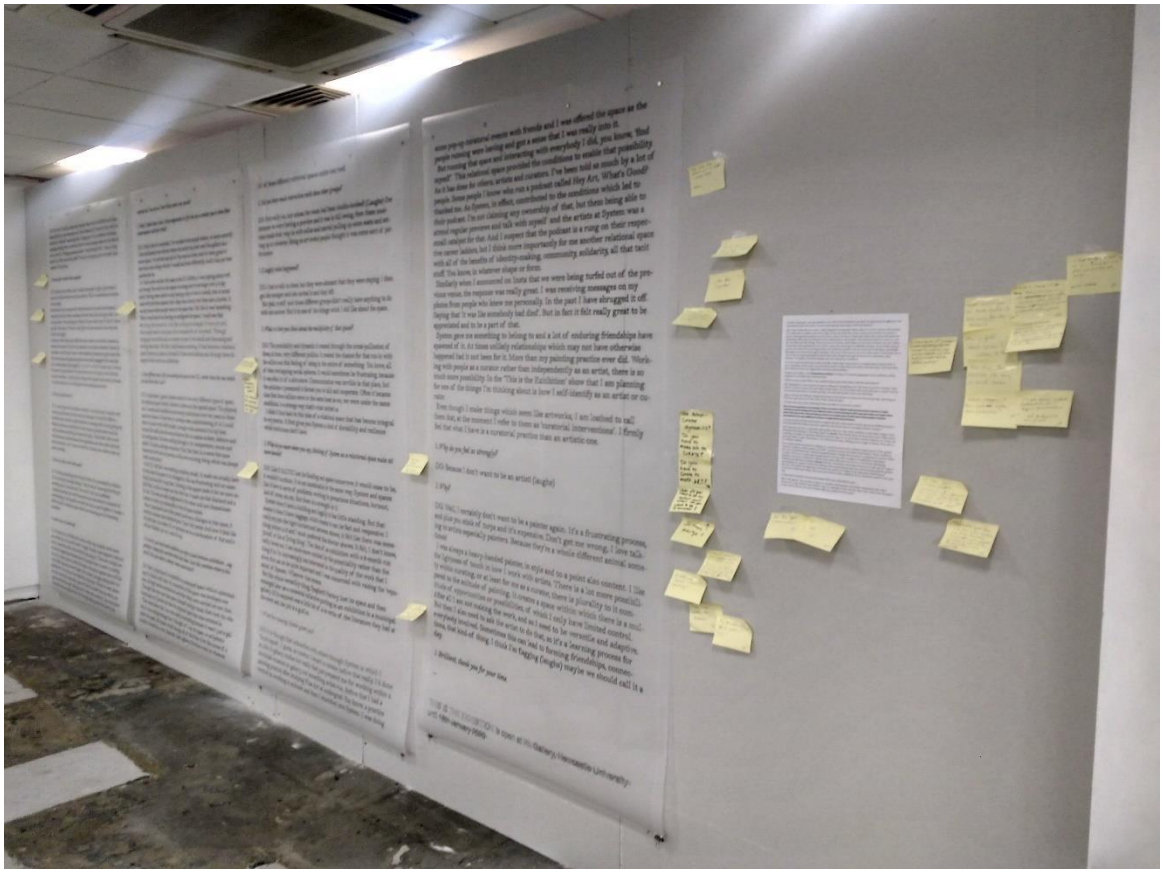
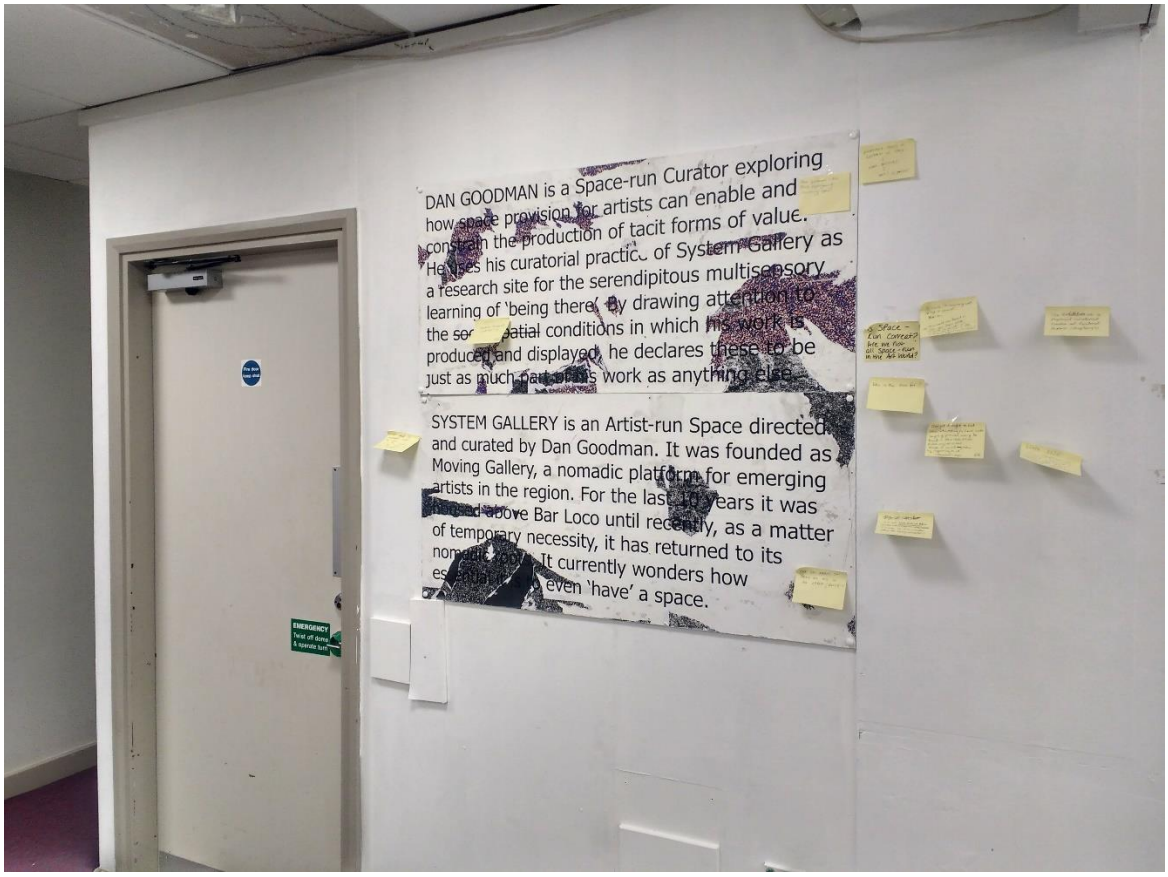
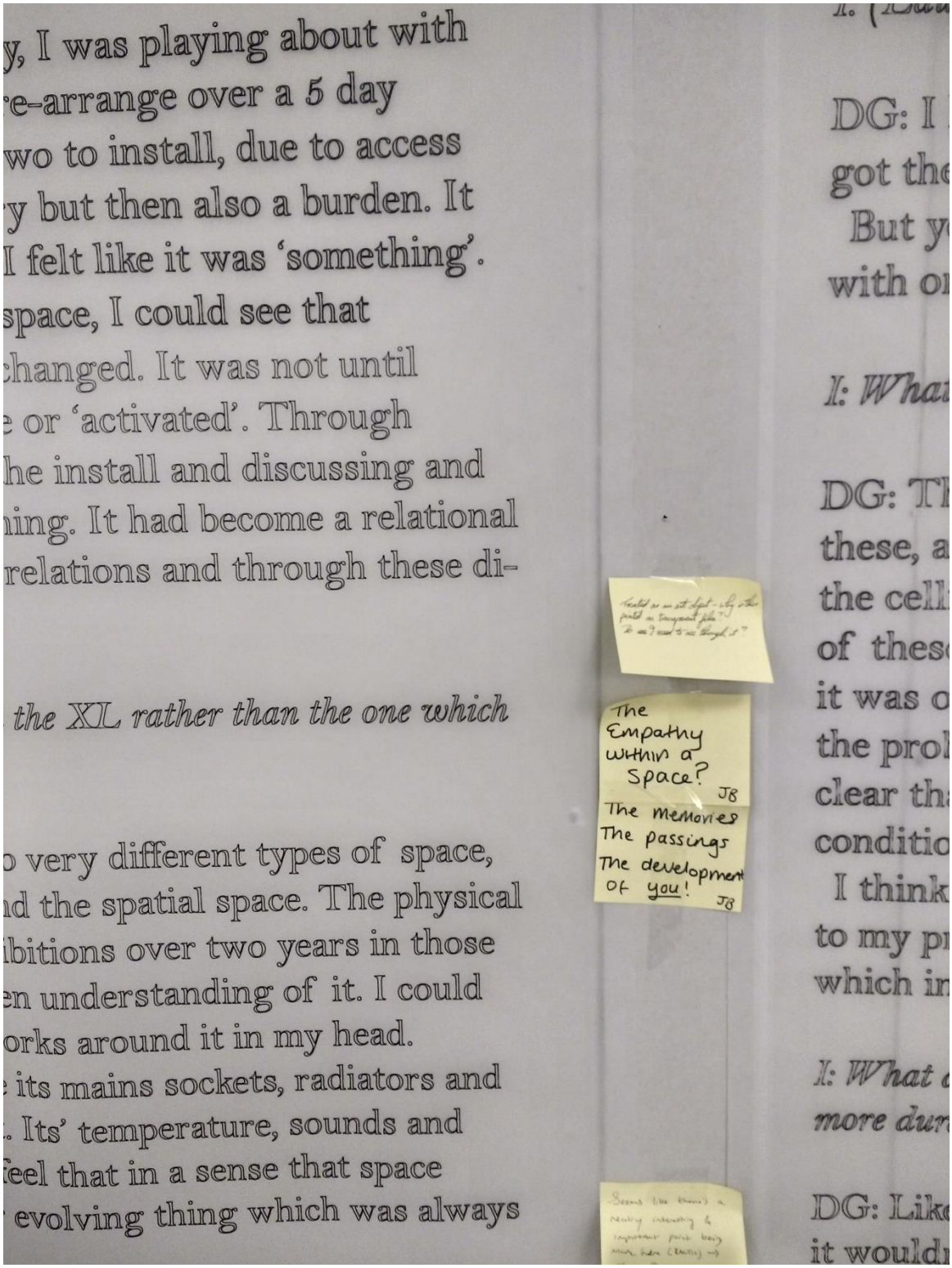





DAN GOODMAN is a Space-run Curator exploring
how space provision for artists can enable and
constrain the production of tacit forms of value.
He uses his curatorial practice of System Gallery as
a research site for the serendipitous multisensory
learning of 'being there' by drawing attention to
the social spatial conditions in which his work is
produced and displayed, he declares these to be
just as much part of his work as anything else.
SYSTEM GALLERY is an Artist-run Space directed
and curated by Dan Goodman. It was founded as
Moving Gallery, a nomadic platform for emerging
artists in the region. For the last 10 years it was
housed above Bar Loco until recently, as a matter
of temporary necessity, it has returned to its
nomadic roots. It currently wonders how
even 'have' a space.
EMERGENCY


Smoking Strictly
Forbidden
Fire Hose Reel


y, I was playing about with
re-arrange over a 5 day
wo to install, due to access
y but then also a burden. It
I felt like it was 'something'.
space, I could see that
changed. It was not until
e or 'activated'. Through
he install and discussing and
ning. It had become a relational
relations and through these di-
the XL rather than the one which
o very different types of space,
nd the spatial space. The physical
ibitions over two years in those
en understanding of it. I could
orks around it in my head.
its mains sockets, radiators and
. Its' temperature, sounds and
feel that in a sense that space
evolving thing which was always
The Empathy within a Space? JB
The memories
The passings
The development of you! JB
DG: I
got the
But y
with o
I: Wha
DG: T
these, a
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I: What
more dur
DG: Like
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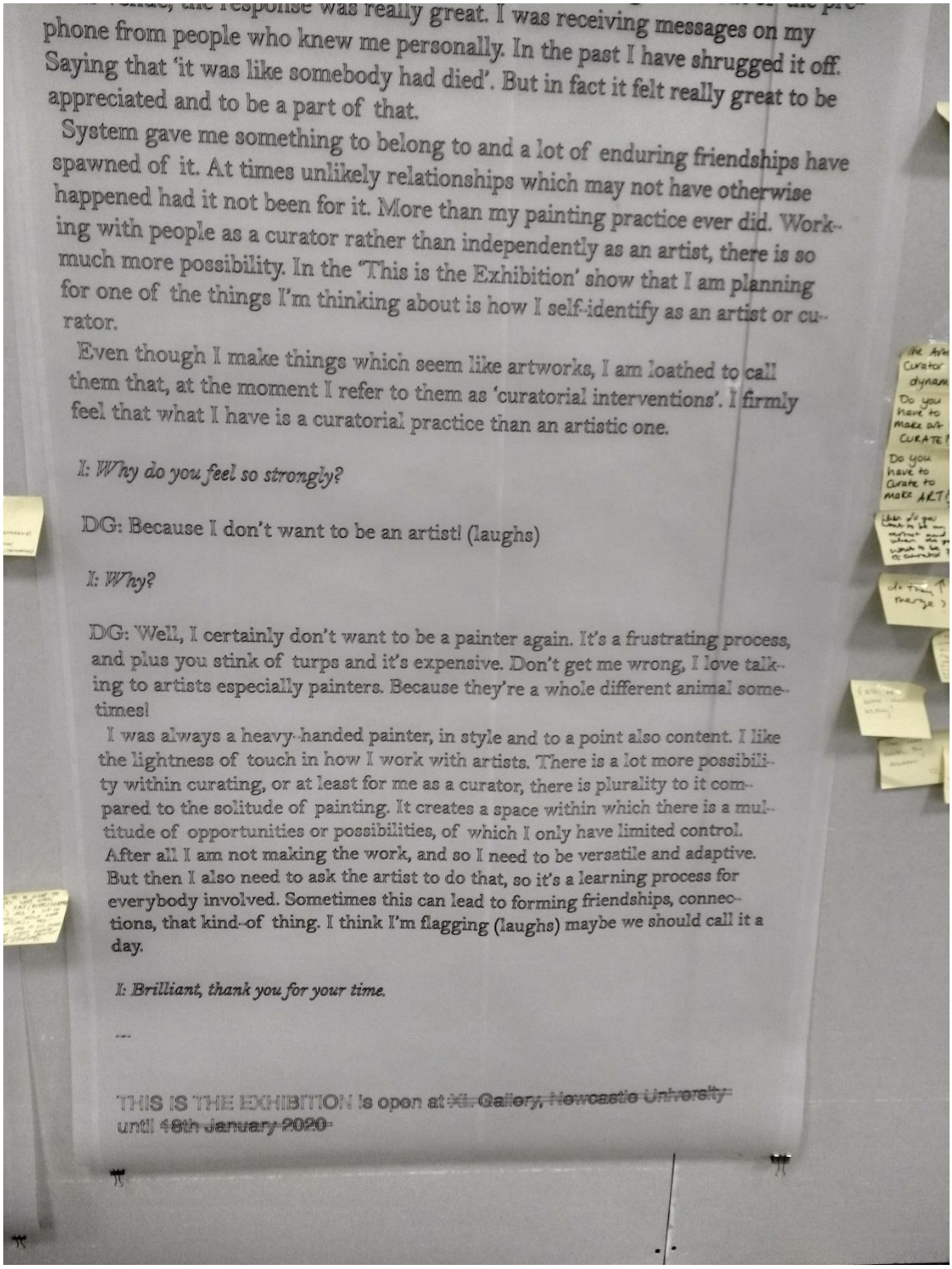


phone from people who knew me personally. In the past I have shrugged it off. Saying that 'it was like somebody had died'. But in fact it felt really great to be appreciated and to be a part of that.

System gave me something to belong to and a lot of enduring friendships have spawned of it. At times unlikely relationships which may not have otherwise happened had it not been for it. More than my painting practice ever did. Working with people as a curator rather than independently as an artist, there is so much more possibility. In the 'This is the Exhibition' show that I am planning for one of the things I'm thinking about is how I self-identify as an artist or curator.

Even though I make things which seem like artworks, I am loathed to call them that, at the moment I refer to them as 'curatorial interventions'. I firmly feel that what I have is a curatorial practice than an artistic one.

I: Why do you feel so strongly?

DG: Because I don't want to be an artist! (laughs)

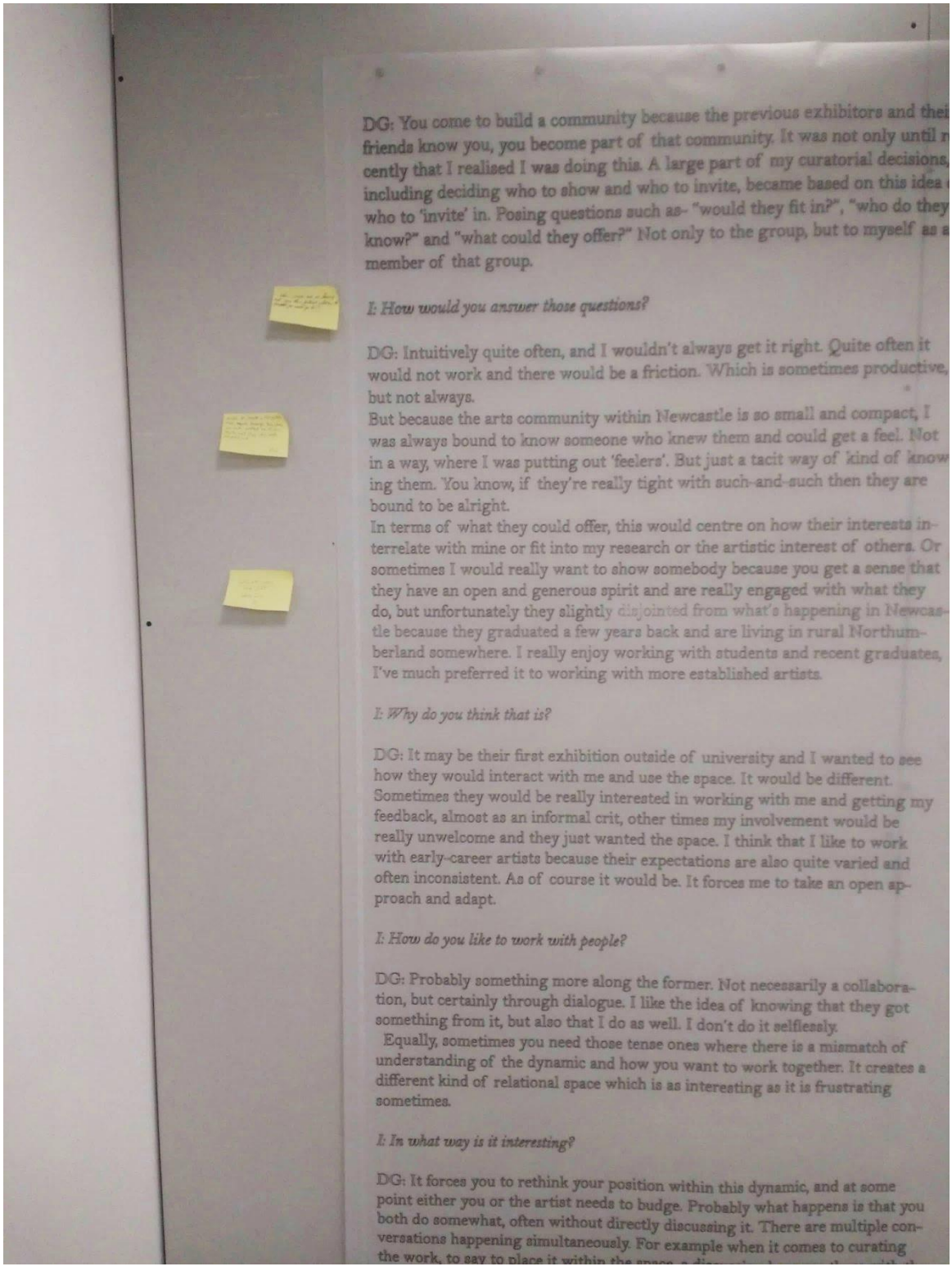
I: Why?

DG: Well, I certainly don't want to be a painter again. It's a frustrating process, and plus you stink of turps and it's expensive. Don't get me wrong, I love talking to artists especially painters. Because they're a whole different animal sometimes!

I was always a heavy-handed painter, in style and to a point also content. I like the lightness of touch in how I work with artists. There is a lot more possibility within curating, or at least for me as a curator, there is plurality to it compared to the solitude of painting. It creates a space within which there is a multitude of opportunities or possibilities, of which I only have limited control. After all I am not making the work, and so I need to be versatile and adaptive. But then I also need to ask the artist to do that, so it's a learning process for everybody involved. Sometimes this can lead to forming friendships, connections, that kind-of thing. I think I'm flagging (laughs) maybe we should call it a day.

I: Brilliant, thank you for your time.

THIS IS THE EXHIBITION is open at ~~Xi. Gallery, Newcastle University~~ until ~~18th January 2020~~



DG: You come to build a community because the previous exhibitors and thei friends know you, you become part of that community. It was not only until r cently that I realised I was doing this. A large part of my curatorial decisions, including deciding who to show and who to invite, became based on this idea who to 'invite' in. Posing questions such as- "would they fit in?", "who do they know?" and "what could they offer?" Not only to the group, but to myself as a member of that group.

I: How would you answer those questions?

DG: Intuitively quite often, and I wouldn't always get it right. Quite often it would not work and there would be a friction. Which is sometimes productive, but not always.
But because the arts community within Newcastle is so small and compact, I was always bound to know someone who knew them and could get a feel. Not in a way, where I was putting out 'feelers'. But just a tacit way of kind of know ing them. You know, if they're really tight with such-and-such then they are bound to be alright.
In terms of what they could offer, this would centre on how their interests in- terrelate with mine or fit into my research or the artistic interest of others. Or sometimes I would really want to show somebody because you get a sense that they have an open and generous spirit and are really engaged with what they do, but unfortunately they slightly disjointed from what's happening in Newcas- tle because they graduated a few years back and are living in rural Northum- berland somewhere. I really enjoy working with students and recent graduates, I've much preferred it to working with more established artists.

I: Why do you think that is?

DG: It may be their first exhibition outside of university and I wanted to see how they would interact with me and use the space. It would be different. Sometimes they would be really interested in working with me and getting my feedback, almost as an informal crit, other times my involvement would be really unwelcome and they just wanted the space. I think that I like to work with early-career artists because their expectations are also quite varied and often inconsistent. As of course it would be. It forces me to take an open ap- proach and adapt.

I: How do you like to work with people?

DG: Probably something more along the former. Not necessarily a collabora- tion, but certainly through dialogue. I like the idea of knowing that they got something from it, but also that I do as well. I don't do it selflessly.
Equally, sometimes you need those tense ones where there is a mismatch of understanding of the dynamic and how you want to work together. It creates a different kind of relational space which is as interesting as it is frustrating sometimes.

I: In what way is it interesting?

DG: It forces you to rethink your position within this dynamic, and at some point either you or the artist needs to budge. Probably what happens is that you both do somewhat, often without directly discussing it. There are multiple con- versations happening simultaneously. For example when it comes to curating the work, to say to place it within the space,

Appendix L. Questionnaire for 'Insert Exhibition Title'

Completed versions of these questionnaires were anonymously filled out by artists exhibiting as part of 'Insert Exhibition Title' and displayed as part of the exhibition.

Why do you choose to make art / exhibit art work? (Please answer in a few sentences or a drawing)

What would be a good reason to stop? (Please answer in a few sentences or a drawing)

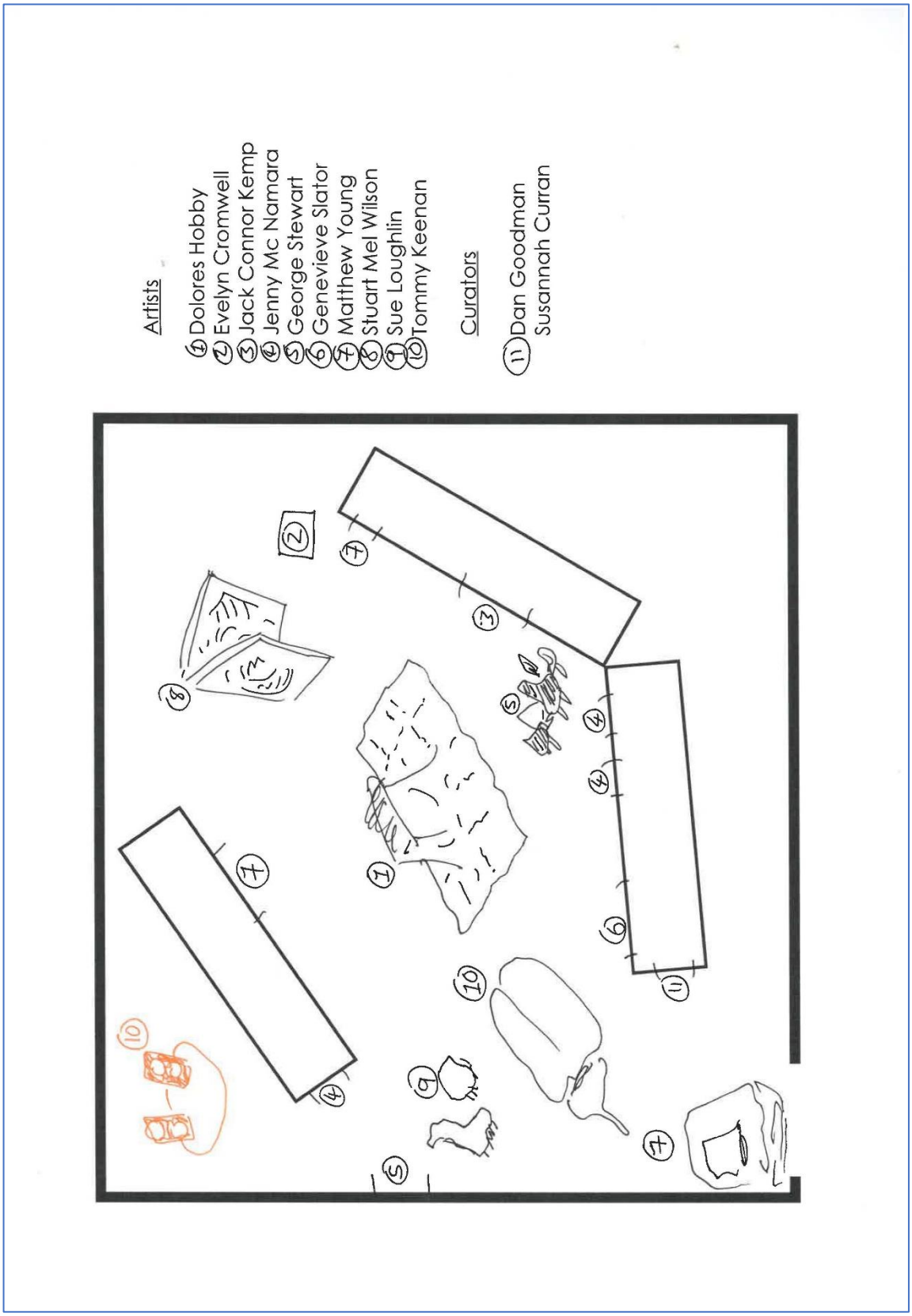
What are some of your unresolved ambitions in art? (Please answer in a few sentences or a drawing)

Why did you agree to be a part of this show? (Please answer in a few sentences or a drawing)

Have you got anything else you would like to add? (Please answer in a few sentences or a drawing)



Appendix M. Exhibition Map for 'Insert Exhibition Title'



Appendix N. Exhibition 'Blurb' and Images of 'Now That's What I Call Art' curated by Dan Goodman and Spaghetti Factory (Eve Cromwell and Jenny McNamara)

Exhibition 'Blurb'

NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL ART

THURSDAY 16TH DECEMBER - SATURDAY 15TH JANUARY

This was a collaboration between two North East-based artist-led projects, System Gallery and Spaghetti Factory. Artists at all stages of working, were invited to display artwork. There was no selection process and we supported as many artists as we could to exhibit their work.

Art and culture should be the common property of everyone, and so the opportunity to shape it should be treated as a fundamental human right. The galleries which house it should present themselves as public, democratic spaces.

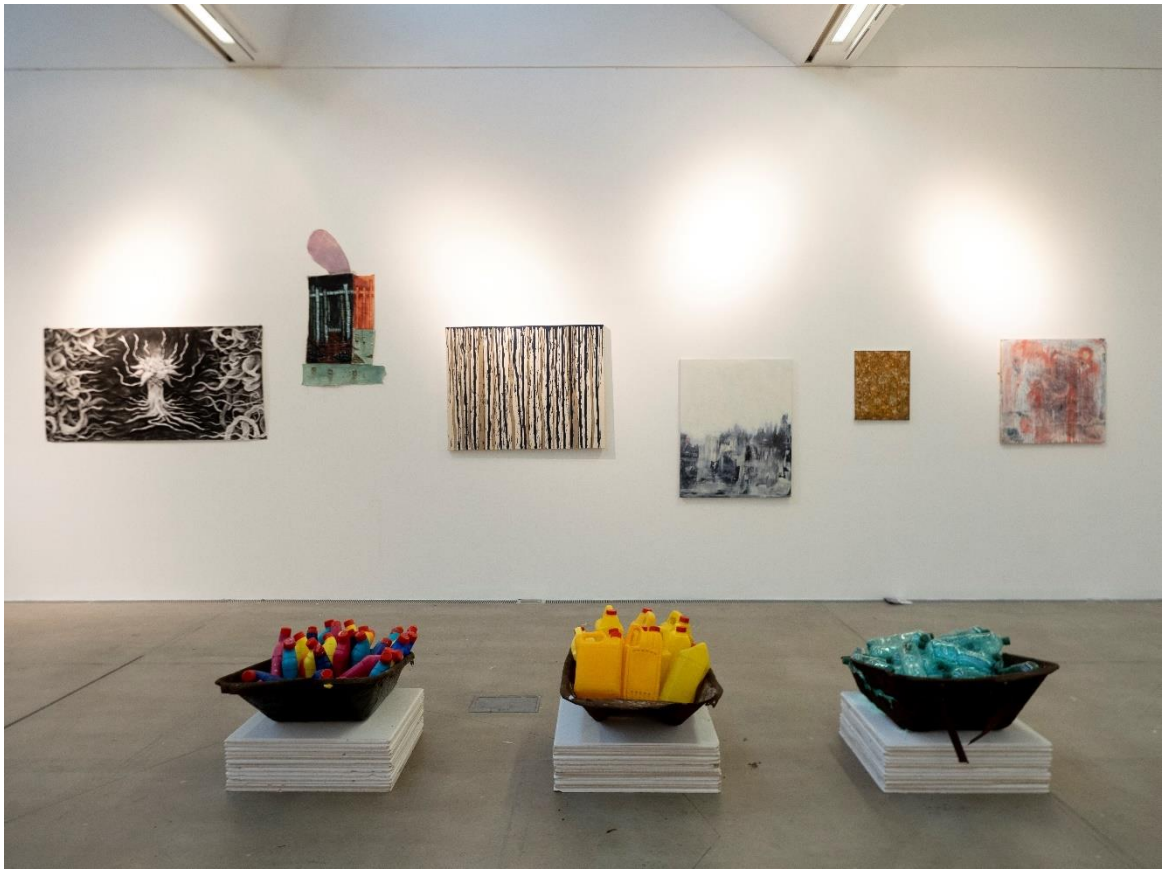
This was not an 'open call'; it was an 'open invitation'. We were excited to see the exhibition transform from an empty white box to a shifting gathering of artworks, ideas and processes.

(Newcastle Contemporay Art, n.d.)

Images

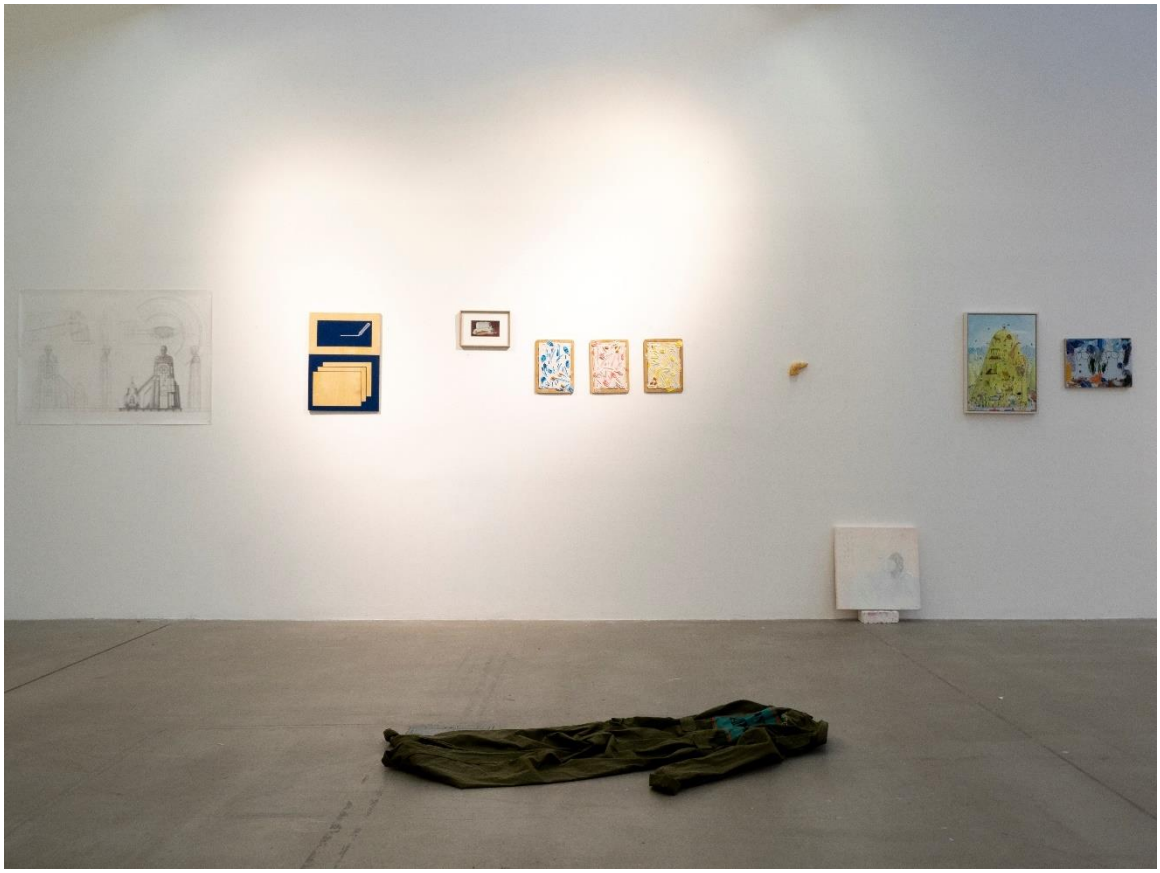
All photos by Mark Duffy and feature broad shots of the exhibition. A complete list of the 128 exhibiting artists can be found on Newcastle Contemporary Art's website (*ibid*.)















Appendix O. 'Thoughts on Art, Conversation and Care…and then some Stuff about Boats' produced as Artist-in-Residence for 'Field 2021'

A conversation is a collaborative act — it means entering somebody else's practice/discipline/knowledge/experience and offering a way for people to enter yours. A conversation works best when all sides are purposefully generous. Therefore, conversation is about maintenance, and it is about care.

To care is an imaginative act as much as it is an emotional virtue — it is dependent on being able to recognise another person's needs and to anticipate how one might fulfil them. This is reliant on the generosity of the person doing the caring to listen and empathise, but also the other person to openly share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. In this sense, conversation is a shared practice of caring and of being cared for, and the two feeding into and sustaining the other.

I see care as a fundamental part of the value of art. David Graeber argued for a political reimagining of caring labour as "action which is oriented to maintaining or augmenting another person's freedom." He continues to say that "play is the ultimate expression of freedom for its own sake." (Butler and Graeber, 2019) I believe that as a purposeful form of play, art is, among other things, an expression or manifestation of freedom.

Meritocracy is not compatible with freedom or care, and so it does not belong in art. I believe that the dominant modes of valuing art or artistic activity are, overall, counterproductive to social, political, and economic freedom. The good stuff that happens (of which Field is one) does so despite policy and institutional structures and not because of them.

I believe that art should be considered a fundamental human right and treated as such. As a form of culture, art is the shared property of everyone. Therefore, all roles involved in its production, including artist, critic, curator, teacher, and facilitator should be available to everyone and not just an *educated* few [12]. I put *educated* in italics because one of the important functions of art is to question and refute the authority of positivist and dominant modes of knowing by leaning towards the unresolved or unnameable.

Art is beyond words and language, and it is not measurable. Anything which has an outcome or impact that is fully mapped out and defined at the outset is not art. Anything which is and/or declared as such is probably of little to no interest to me. I am a believer in process over product and potentiality over named outcomes.

Most kids know more about art and what it means to be an artist than most adults. They are more resourceful and far less likely to be embarrassed to admit when they are unsure. We are all novices in relation to one another – it is an opportunity.

Grab it with both hands.

At the start of each afternoon Field conversation, Alister and Kat would say: 'It is not about answers, but about the journey.' With this in mind, I've been thinking about 'The Yes of the No' by Emma Cocker; she writes:

[12] Influenced by: Freee Art Collective's 'Manifesto for Art' (2009)

> There are certain things in the world that only really come into being in those moments when they are activated or brought into action by other things. A boat is much like any other vessel until it is brought into contact with water, and it is this relationship to the water that in part makes a boat a boat. So too, the specificity or singularity of the boat is furthermore made evident during the act of sailing, for sailing epitomises the mode of being which is a boat. (2016, p. 26)

In Cocker's text, she describes how a boat is brought into existence through a particular kind of interaction with the outside world. Art, care, and value(s) only exist as empty abstractions until they have an activity, purpose, or need to 'attach' themselves to. *Make that connection.* Just as Cocker describes the practice of being a boat as the lifelong and daily practice of sailing, we are only as much an embodiment of anything as to how much we actively do it, day in and day out.

We are all skippers of our own boats. Despite having no control of external forces like the wind and rain, as the skipper, we do have control of how we choose to navigate them. As these forces change and consequently how we choose to navigate these forces change, so will the impact that we have on those around us.

Think and act with care.

Refusing to follow prescribed routes may take us into uncharted waters. *Remember that this is a good thing.* It is here that we will learn most about ourselves. If we arrive at a destination having learned nothing, then we must ask, what was the point?

It is time to get back in the boat, turn around, and head off in some other direction.

The point is to get lost, and to either keep getting lost or stay lost. Surrendering oneself to being lost is the ultimate freedom. It transcends us from ourselves and brings us in closer proximity to the world and people around us.

Get lost in conversation.

Get lost together.

It's in the various overlaps of our individual journeys that we see the interconnectedness of things. *Be receptive to this.* One of the ways in which funders, policymakers and institutions fail, and can only ever fail, is that they are cartographers rather than explorers. They draw maps, and through that they fix boundaries around activities and around people. The problem is that the real world is not fixed, and these boundaries are permanently shifting and permeable.

Not to criticise any individuals, but institutions, funders and policymakers cannot and do not care. As I said before, to care is an imaginative act. This is only possible through proximity to and familiarity with others. Care is about knowing oneself, and oneself in relation to others. It is not about shaping one's practice to neatly fit into policies or institutional priorities. Sometimes we must do this to secure funds or gain agency, but it is not the goal.

Be wary of anyone who can only talk through the verbiage of the institution that they work for.

I find it a strange coincidence whenever someone espouses values that perfectly mirror those of their employer whose values perfectly mirror those of their funder whose values perfectly mirror those of their policy maker. There is no criticality in any part of this chain. Institutions cannot think – *so you must.*

I am reluctant to offer anything beyond this imaginative proposition because what applies to me may not apply to you. Care is a relational practice and therefore context specific. For instance, I have been in a process of (un)learning through movements such as BLM and Me Too. As my understanding of the world and my relation to it continues to change, I question my own authority and position.

However, what I do know is that just as being a boat is about sailing every day, to care is about waking up every day and doing it and figuring out ways to do it better. Just as good skippers do, we need to actively pay attention to our conditions, and how best to navigate them and help others do the same. Just like the sea, the world is in constant flux and so we must be prepared to change too. It is easy to get lost, but sometimes you need to get lost to find what you're looking for. To paraphrase Alister and Kat… "It is not about the destination, but about the journey."

Appendix P. Exhibition Text and Images of 'Four Pack' curated by Dan Goodman, Susie Curran, Eve Cromwell, Jenny McNamara, and Jessica Bennet and featuring artwork by Jenny Alderson, Beth Allsopp, Jason Carden, and Katie Watson

Exhibition Text

PREVIEW: Thursday 4th July 6-8pm
EXHIBITION RUNS: 5th July - 9th July

FOUR PACK brings together the work of four artists: Jenny Alderson, Beth Allsopp, Jason Carden, and Katie Watson. The exhibition has been curated by Jessica Bennett, Evelyn Cromwell, Susannah Curran, Dan Goodman, and Jenny McNamara.

--

Jenny Alderson
Jenny creates objects and spaces which are at once familiar and strange. Using a combination of everyday and leftover materials, she likes to give the same attention to the off cuts as the cuts, finding authority and beauty in the abstract shapes and materials left behind from processes such as dressmaking and building. She likes to combine materials from different worlds, questioning and challenging the hierarchies and connotations associated with materials.

Beth Allsopp
Beth's work addresses material qualities and seeks to highlight the tactile knowledge which we all share. Through a careful selection of materials for their inherent characteristics, she is concerned with tackling the significance we give to materials and how we understand their functions. Beth's practice questions how

specific substances can be manipulated to make us consciously aware of our own bodies and the objects we produce to surround our bodies with.

Jason Carden

Jason's practice is a critical reflection of the human condition and what it is that makes us unique. He uses photography to explicate socio-cultural, psychological and perceptual theory within post-modernist discourse. Through his work, Jason subverts photography's authority in presenting the 'real-world' within this information-saturated age.

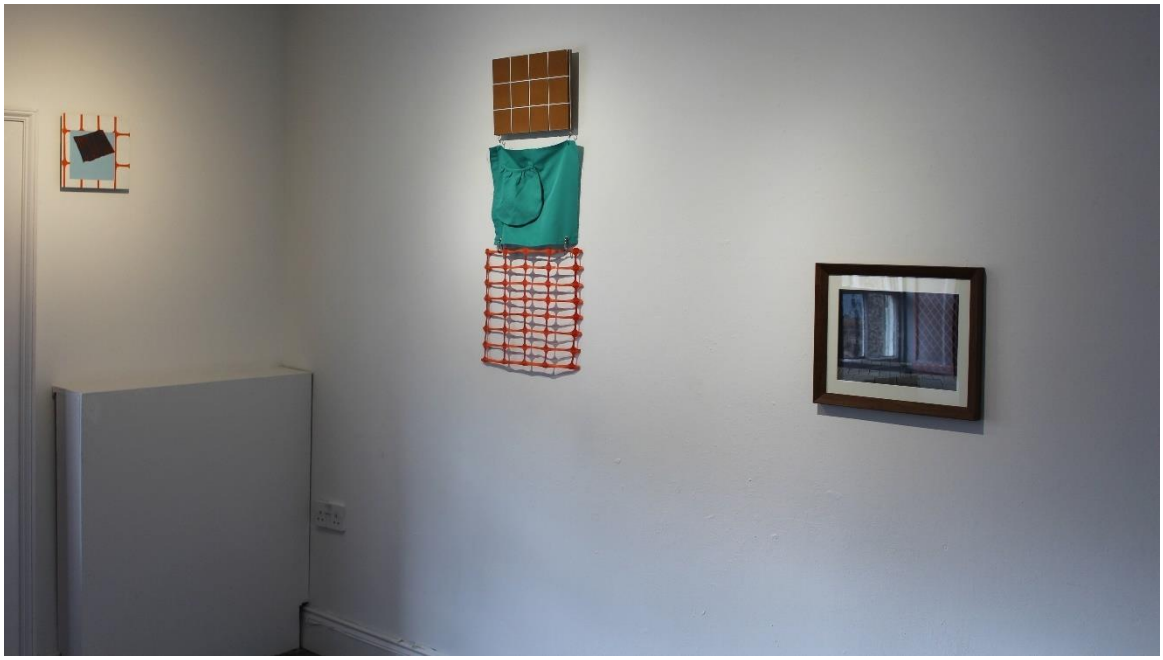
Katie Watson

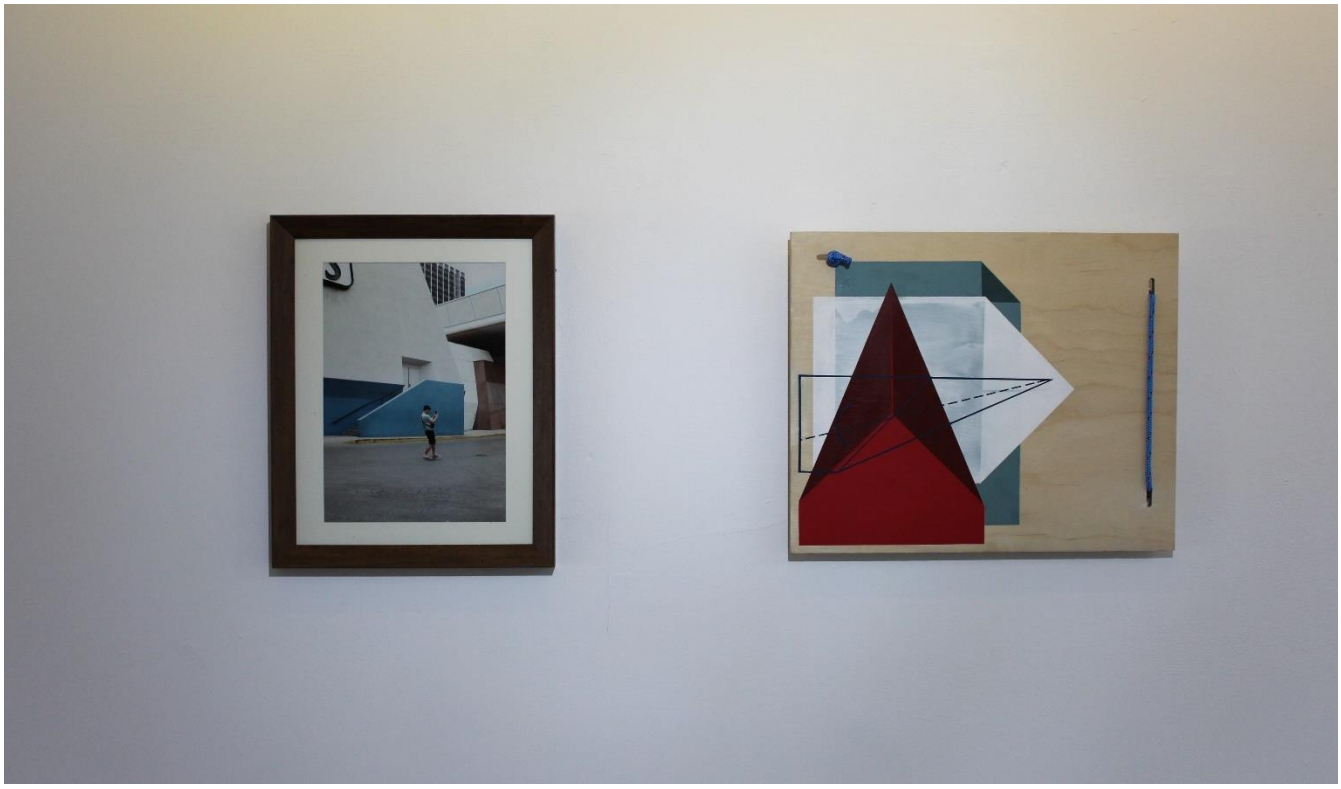
Katie Watson's current practice examines the abstract qualities of banal forms in contemporary culture, the universal language of visual information, and how this is interpreted and processed. Watson’s practice pursues a disjointed discourse, translating methods of “do it yourself” assembly into painting, visually describing movements and processes which are ubiquitous and universally understood.

Images

All images by me. First image taken at opening event and featuring artwork by Beth Allsopp. Second image features artwork by (left to right) Katie Watson, Jenny Alderson, and Jason Carden. Third image features artwork by (left to right) Katie Watson, and Jason Carden. Fourth image features artwork by (left to right) Beth Allsopp and Jason Carden. Fifth image features artwork by Jenny Alderson.











Appendix Q. Exhibition Text and Images of 'Folly' curated by Dan Goodman and featuring artwork by Jay Weaver, Meaghan Stewart, Oliver Hoffmeister, and Tommy Keenan

Exhibition Text

Location: Hatton Gallery
Exhibition runs 21st August - 3rd September

Contributing artists: Oliver Hoffmeister, Tommy Keenan, Gill Shreeve, Meaghan Stewart and Jay Weaver*

Based on System Man Dan's research from Wikipedia (the free encyclopaedia), in architecture a folly is a building constructed primarily for decoration but suggesting through its appearance some other purpose.

Folly explores ways of exhibition making which bring the background work and context of artist-run spaces to the forefront, rather than necessarily focusing on the exhibition as an output to present the public.

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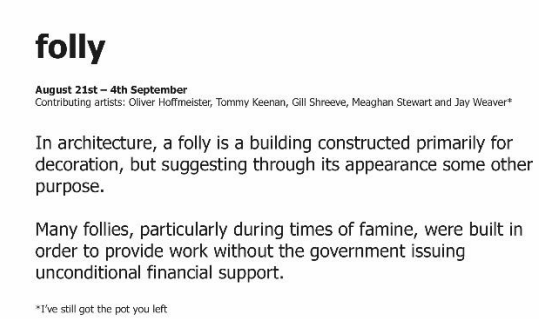
*I've still got the pot that you left

(System Gallery, 2022a)

Images

The first two images are of copies the exhibition texts featured in the show. All subsequent images are by Colin Davison and are broad shots of the exhibition and focused shots of my artwork.



folly

August 21st – 4th September
Contributing artists: Oliver Hoffmeister, Tommy Keenan, Gill Shreeve, Meaghan Stewart and Jay Weaver*

In architecture, a folly is a building constructed primarily for decoration, but suggesting through its appearance some other purpose.

Many follies, particularly during times of famine, were built in order to provide work without the government issuing unconditional financial support.

*I've still got the pot you left



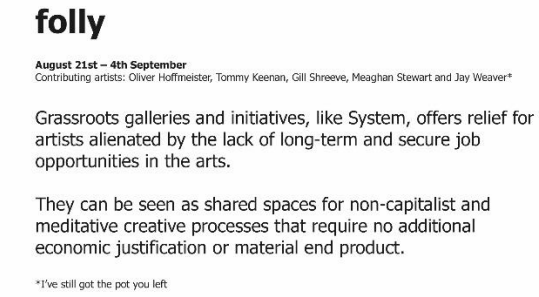
folly

August 21st – 4th September
Contributing artists: Oliver Hoffmeister, Tommy Keenan, Gill Shreeve, Meaghan Stewart and Jay Weaver*

Folly explores ways of exhibition making which bring the background work and context of artist-run spaces to the forefront.

It centres on System which was based in Bamburgh House until recently when it was forced to vacate make room for redevelopment. Some of the gallery has been reconstructed here using original material collected from the site.

*I've still got the pot you left



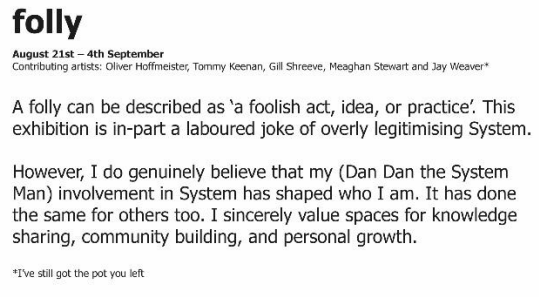
folly

August 21st – 4th September
Contributing artists: Oliver Hoffmeister, Tommy Keenan, Gill Shreeve, Meaghan Stewart and Jay Weaver*

Grassroots galleries and initiatives, like System, offers relief for artists alienated by the lack of long-term and secure job opportunities in the arts.

They can be seen as shared spaces for non-capitalist and meditative creative processes that require no additional economic justification or material end product.

*I've still got the pot you left



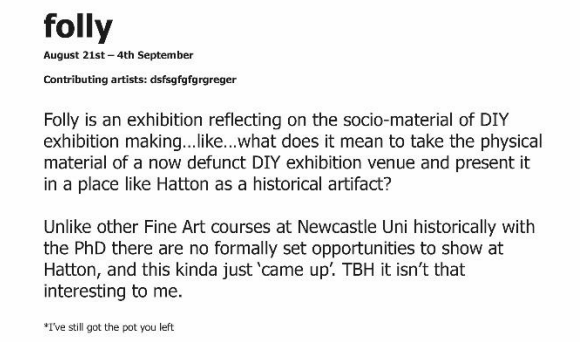
folly

August 21st – 4th September
Contributing artists: Oliver Hoffmeister, Tommy Keenan, Gill Shreeve, Meaghan Stewart and Jay Weaver*

A folly can be described as 'a foolish act, idea, or practice'. This exhibition is in-part a laboured joke of overly legitimising System.

However, I do genuinely believe that my (Dan Dan the System Man) involvement in System has shaped who I am. It has done the same for others too. I sincerely value spaces for knowledge sharing, community building, and personal growth.

*I've still got the pot you left



folly

August 21st – 4th September

Contributing artists: dsfsgfgfgrgreger

Folly is an exhibition reflecting on the socio-material of DIY exhibition making…like…what does it mean to take the physical material of a now defunct DIY exhibition venue and present it in a place like Hatton as a historical artifact?

Unlike other Fine Art courses at Newcastle Uni historically with the PhD there are no formally set opportunities to show at Hatton, and this kinda just 'came up'. TBH it isn't that interesting to me.

*I've still got the pot you left



folly

August 21st – 4th September
Contributing artists: Oliver Hoffmeister, Tommy Keenan, Gill Shreeve, Meaghan Stewart and Jay Weaver*

Folly explores exhibition making as a form of self-reflection rather than necessarily privileging the exhibition as an output to present the public.

The folly temple of philosophy at Ermenonville, was left unfinished, to symbolise that knowledge would never be complete. Some of the works in this exhibition are unfinished to allude to System being a permanent WIP, and poor time management.

*I've still got the pot you left

System Gallery

October 2012 – October 2019

System is an independent artist-led gallery situated on the top floor of Bar Loco bar in the heart of Newcastle's city centre.

The gallery was created to encourage art graduates to exhibit their works alongside more established local artists, providing essential experience of how to operate and actively participate in a gallery system.

System Gallery

June 2018 - Current

System Gallery is run and curated by Dan Goodman and Susannah Curran. We are interested in non-hierarchical ways of working with artists at critical stages of their practice by providing space for discussing, testing, and sharing ideas.

Usually, it just means being open to other peoples' ideas and saying stuff like "Yeah, alright. Let's do that".

System Gallery

August 2017 (circa) – Current

System is the institutional self of Dan Dan 'the System man' Goodman. He is an artist-curator and after several years of running System has now become System. He is interested in the overlap between ideas of emotional value, the social, and the spatial within artist communities. Goodman uses modes of curatorial framing to explore the social world of art and what it means to be part of it.

System Gallery

September 2018 – Mid 2022

System is the research site for Dan Goodman's practice-based PhD exploring forms of value generation within artist-run initiatives.

It uses activities and exhibitions at System to generate data and disseminate research in an iterative, self-reflexive search for personal and shared meaning.

System Gallery

October 2019 – September 2020 / April 2021 - Current

System is a loosely formed, permeable, and shifting set of social relations that centre primarily on the staging of exhibitions in co-opted urban space, but also includes amongst other things - virtual exhibitions, co-authored publications, higher education teaching, mentoring, consultancy, storytelling, videogames, residencies, and crits.

System Gallery

September 2020 – October 2020

It has been about a year now since we've had a regular venue. We were offered this space at Bamburgh House just before the UK went into lockdown and disappointingly had to just sit back and wait. Now after 6 months, it feels really good to finally be doing something with the space. With that in mind, we are keen to fill the gallery with as much activity as possible.

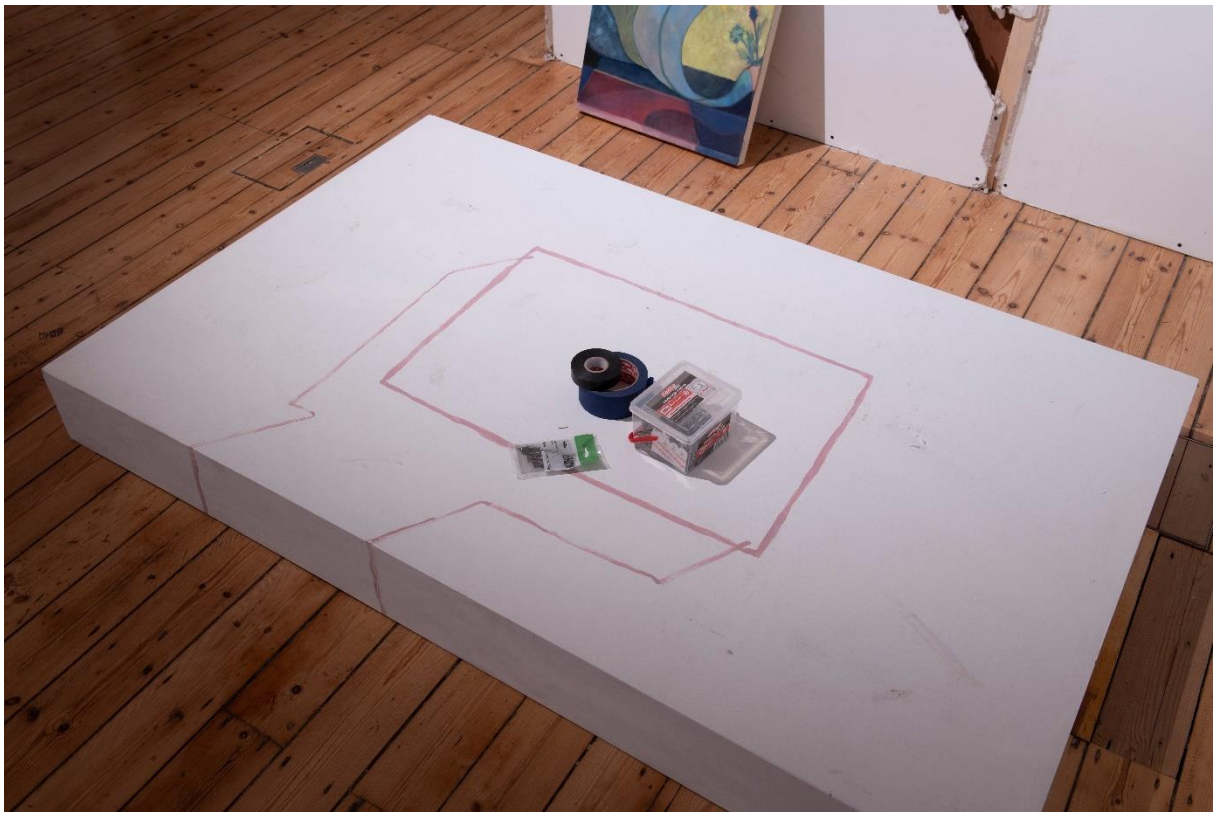


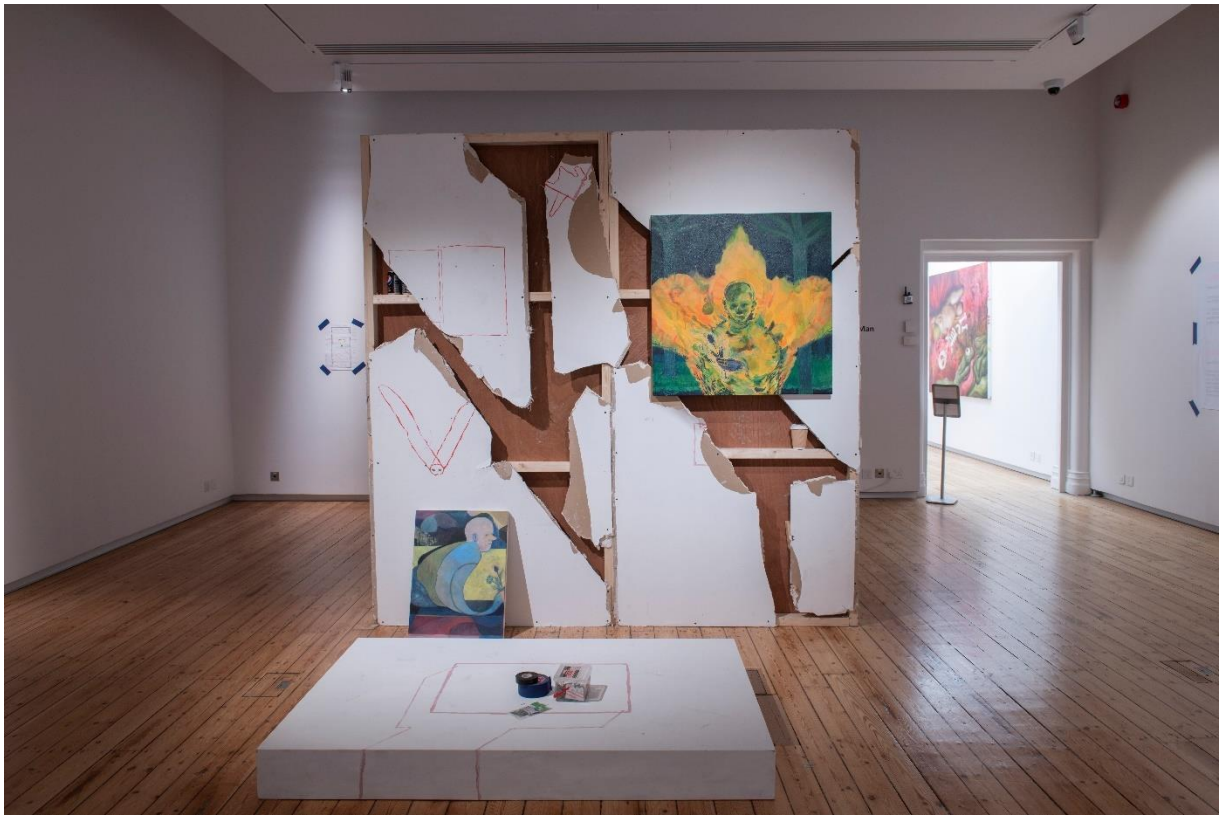







"Listen.... I realise that I am dropping a lot on you. Sadly however, we are short on time. System is in danger."
SAMSUNG

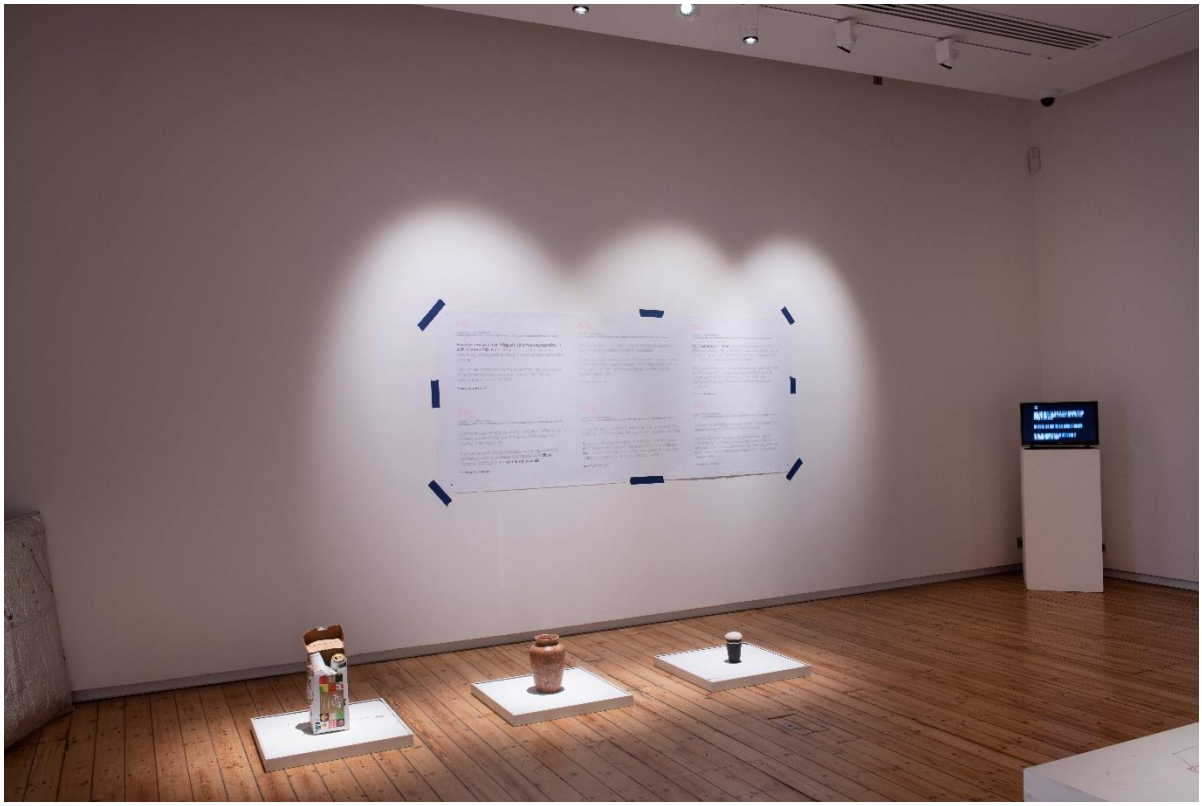









folly
Based on research from Wikipedia (the free encycl
folly
EXIT





Appendix R. Images of Me Reclaiming Plaster and Ceiling Tiles from System's venue at Bamburgh House before it's Demolition









Appendix S. Exhibition Text and Images of 'Transience featuring artwork by Newcastle University Fine Art Students and GÂST

Exhibition Text

Transience is an exhibition showcasing work by Newcastle Fine Art students, alongside established artist collaborative GÂST.

All of the work here was produced as part of the residency in Berwick last November when the students were invited by GÂST to take part in futurist games of chance which encouraged the students to engage with the rural landscape. On show here is each of the artists' own unique approach to incorporating these experiences into their own practices.

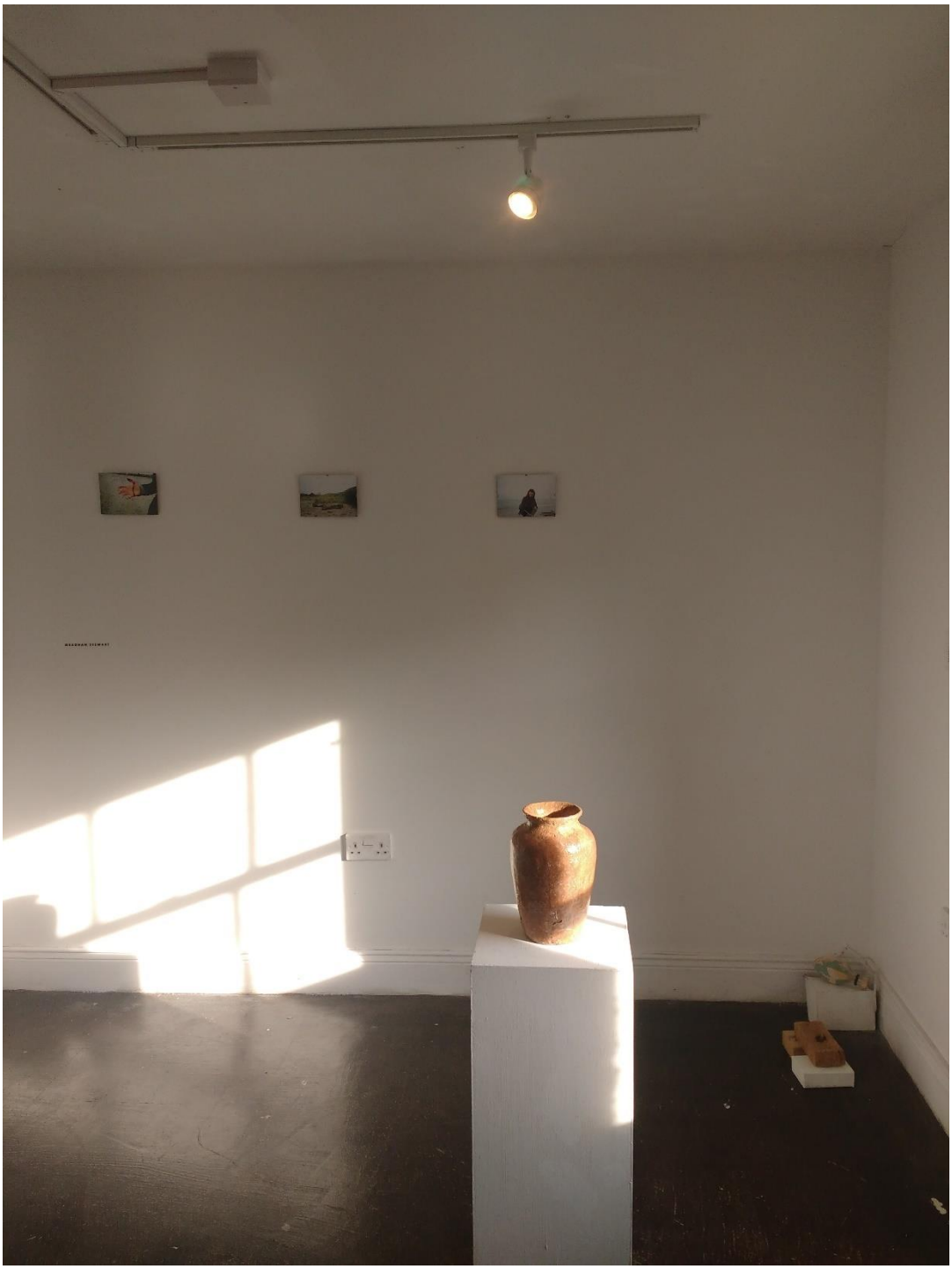
About GÂST
GÂST is the collaborative practice of Glasgow based visual artists, Laura Mahony and Dale Fearnley, who are currently Artists in Residence at Berwick Visual Arts in partnership with the Centre for Rural Economy, Autumn 2017—Spring 2018.

PREVIEW: Wednesday 16th May 6-9pm
THE LATE SHOWS: Saturday 19th May 6pm-late
EXHIBITION RUNS: 17th May - 30th May

(System Gallery, 2018a)

Images

All images are taken by me. The first image is of photographs by Meaghan Stewart and ceramic works by Jay Weaver. The second image is of artwork by Harry Pick-up. The third image is a broad shot of one of the rooms of the exhibition. The fourth image is of artwork by Carole McCourt. The fifth image is of artwork by Oliver Hoffmeister.




HARRY PICKUP




Path to
Golden Square



Appendix T. Notes from Performance at The Newbridge Project for Abel Shah's 'In Collaboration'

Just to introduce myself and give some context. I run System, which is a small artist-run gallery here in Newcastle. It receives no regular funding and is largely volunteer run, and set-up as an informal test space for ideas. For 10 years it was above Bar Loco but now it is in Bamburgh House. I am doing a PhD which is about the social world of things like System and what it means to be part of them.

Currently I am making creative writing and performance exploring the different 'voices' I use to talk about System and combining these in various ways to try and produce new meaning. I am doing something similar here. I will talk in this 'voice' then present something at the end which is very different. Hopefully by presenting these things together it says something about collaboration and care within System and more widely. I've put together some thoughts on collaboration and care within System and broken them down to three interrelating ideas or concepts. Apologies if the language is a little stiff in some places, but I have just largely copied these from another working document…

Collaboration = Care = Freedom:

When I compare my experiences of working solo as an artist and working collaboratively within System, I would say the former is more about production and the latter more about maintenance. That is to say, collaboration is about care. David Graeber described care as '…action which is oriented to maintaining or increasing another person's freedom'. He also said that 'Play is the ultimate expression of freedom for its own sake'. Similarly, I would claim that as a purposeful form of play, art can be a similar expression of freedom.

Within System things are as much about my freedom as well as the exhibiting

artists' freedom. Therefore, it is a practice of care and self-care, both of which sustain the other.

Listening and Acting with Care:

So, this is the bit I find harder to articulate. One of the reasons I have not really chased Arts Council funding is because it would not allow me to work how I want to work. In writing a bid you identify some need you are going to fulfil and then demonstrate your project's ability to fulfil it. This is then how you also measure the success of your project. I think that the mechanisms surrounding arts and cultural policy/funding have care ass backwards. Care does not work top-down, but collaboratively.

Fundamentally care is an abstract concept. It only exists when there is an identifiable need for it to exist, and you cannot begin understanding what that is without first actively listening. It is a feeling out process about trial-and-error. What you understand at the start for the need or the aim to be, might be completely different by the end. I want to work in a way where I can accommodate this, and at the moment I would rather accept precarity for the freedom to do this.

Be a novice:

The novice works with resourcefulness and is not embarrassed to admit that they are unsure. Collaboration involves working within someone else's practice / discipline, and forces all involved into being a novice. In this all sides are forced to be purposefully generous. System through its precarity and make-shift-ness, positions me as a novice, or at least, not strictly as a professional. It fosters an environment where it is okay to make mistakes or at least to not be too precious. After all, you cannot be too precious when you are exhibiting in a former call centre with missing ceiling tiles or in two formerly disused rooms above a crusty-

punk bar. In short, I much prefer the type of collaboration where everyone is unclear as to where to begin, how to finish, or perhaps even what the point is.

I have prepared a video to illustrate this:

- Play music video -

(Goodman, 2022)