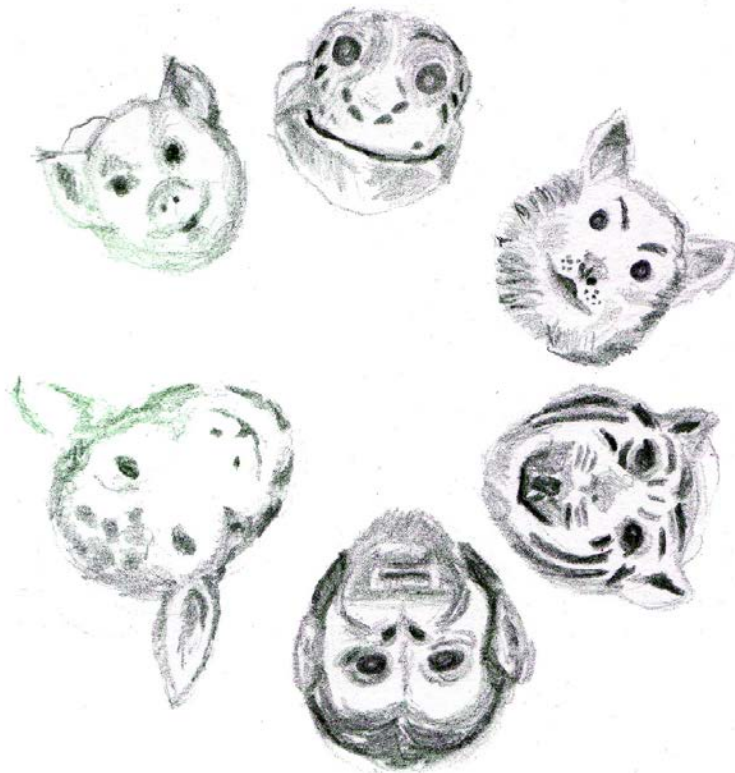


**Participating in the ‘Wrong’ Way?**  
**Practice Based Research into Cultural Democracy and**  
**the Commissioning of Art to Effect Social Change**

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**Signed Declaration**

**I declare that the work presented in the thesis is my own:**

**Date:**

## **Abstract**

Through this practice based research I argue that cultural democracy as a way of thinking contests dominant models of commissioning art to effect social change. A method of generative metaphor of critical distance emerges through four projects based on a contextual and theoretical framework that tests the conditions for recognising cultural democracy as a critical practice. Cultural democracy is distinct from the democratisation of culture, which means providing free, accessible professional culture to all. The socially engaged art commission is, I argue, an example of the democratisation of culture based on predefined economic, aesthetic and social values. Cultural democracy disrupts expected forms of participation and communication of culture, drawing attention to these values. As an uninvited act of disobedience, it is thought and practised as individuals reclaim the right to express themselves, creating conflicts with expected norms of behaviour.

This research project began in 2006, nine years into New Labour's administration, and reflects an urgent question of the time: what are the implications of increasing dependency on a culture of commissioning art to effect social change that might perpetuate, rather than radically rethink, social injustices? These concerns are even more significant in a political and economic climate where public funding for critical, non-conformist participation in culture slips further down the agenda. My own career is a symptom of New Labour's neoliberal policies of social inclusion and the arts. A new period of 'austerity' may imply fewer paid opportunities for this professional class of socially engaged art workers, coupled with a distancing of the recognition of cultural democracy as a possible alternative, with further reliance on free, precarious cultural labour. For this reason, I hope this research will be of use to those who also find it an urgent task to address these issues critically and practically.

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>List of images</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2. Contextual framework: The democratisation of culture as the commissioning of art to effect social change</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 The 1960s: The Labour movement shows signs of democratising culture and artists make demands of the Arts Council.	14
2.2 The 1970s: The Arts Council starts to fund ‘community arts’.	18
2.3 The 1980s: The GLC funds political art. The campaign for cultural democracy is launched. The economic benefits of the arts are explored.	22
2.4 The 1990s: Emphasis returns to the social impact of the arts. Concerns over measuring the value of the arts re-emerge.	28
2.5 The 2000s: The struggle for evidencing the impact of the arts continues. Growing criticism of New Labour’s cultural policy. Cultural democracy is revisited.	34
<b>3. A Theoretical framework for cultural democracy</b>	<b>38</b>
3.1 Emancipation through critical knowledge in the context of the art commission	39
3.2 Enforced sociability	44
3.3 Positionality of artists and participants: critical pedagogy	47
3.4 Cultural democracy in action?	51
<b>4. Methodology</b>	<b>56</b>
4.1 Interdisciplinary research	57
4.2 The hyphen	62
4.3 Beyond a mere ‘stir within the frame’	63
4.4 The power and position of the researcher	64
4.5 Editing, false generosity and embezzlement: Walking the line of authorship	66
4.6 Performative research and generative metaphor	69
<b>5. ‘Het Reservaat’</b>	<b>71</b>
5.1 Introduction	72
5.2 About ‘Beyond’	75
5.3 Repressive tolerance of critical practices: The case of ‘Beyond’	77
5.4 Het Reservaat and cultural democracy	83
<b>6. ‘Critical Friends’</b>	<b>88</b>
6.1 Introduction	89
6.2 About ‘Peninsula’	90
6.3 ‘In a League of Our Own’ and ‘Now Hear This’	92
6.4 The framework of the commissions	95
6.5 “Is my participation different to yours?”	98
6.6 A reluctance to participate (an unwillingness to be empowered)	101
6.7 Community entertainment and the parameters of critical practice	103
6.8 Participating in the ‘wrong’ way	107
6.9 Art’s role in effecting social change	108
6.10 Oblique performances of participatory democracy: The case of ‘Peninsula’	111

<b>7. ‘Performative Interviews’</b>	<b>117</b>
7.1 Introduction	118
7.2 Developing the ‘Performative Interviews’	121
7.3 Part 1: Negotiating rejection and failure	123
7.4 Part 2: Taking a Stand	125
7.5 Revealing the cracks in the commissioning process	126
<b>8. ‘FUNding FACTORY’</b>	<b>128</b>
8.1 Introduction	129
8.2 The funding of the ‘FUNding FACTORY’	131
8.3 Testing the parameters of critical practice	132
8.4 Collectively constructing the cultural production line	134
8.5 “An ideological shot in the knee?”	142
<b>9. Conclusions</b>	<b>145</b>
Appendix A: Logbook #1–4	151
Appendix B: ‘Critical Friends’ Magazines 1 and 2	156
Appendix C: ‘Performative Interview’ questions and information sheet	159
Appendix D: Summaries of ‘Performative Interviews’	161
Appendix E: Summaries of ‘Performative Interviews’ for ‘FUNding FACTORY’	168
<b>Glossary of key terms</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>183</b>

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## List of images

- Image 1:* Entrance of 'Het Reservaat' (Photo: Jeroen Wandermaker)
- Image 2:* Visitors to 'Het Reservaat' watch a scene of 'tai chi'. (Photo: Jeroen Wandermaker)
- Image 3:* Visitors to 'Het Reservaat' wave to the band 'Eitherway'. (Photo: Jeroen Wandermaker)
- Image 4:* A guide explains archaeological finds at 'Het Reservaat'. (Photo: Jeroen Wandermaker)
- Image 5:* Part of the staged protest at the entrance of 'Het Reservaat'. (trans. 'art is useless') (Photo: Sophie Hope)
- Image 6:* 'Critical Friends' making one of their cut and paste magazines. (Photo: Sophie Hope)
- Image 7:* A 'Critical Friends' meeting. Left to right: Anthony Nicolaou, Rebecca Maguire (facilitator), Ann Webb and Rachel Gibson. (Photo: Sophie Hope)
- Image 8:* Still from 'Serious Research' ('Performative Interviews' Part 2: Taking a stand')
- Image 9:* Still from 'Interlude'. ('Performative Interviews' Part 2: Taking a stand')
- Image 10:* Still from 'Cornflake: Shooting in the dark'. ('Performative Interviews' Part 1: Negotiating rejection and failure)
- Image 11:* Still from 'The Egg Liberation Front'. ('Performative Interviews' Part 2: Taking a stand')
- Image 12:* Installation shot of the 'FUNding FACTORY'. (Photo: Sophie Hope)
- Image 13:* Detail of the 'FUNding FACTORY'. (Photo: Sophie Hope)
- Image 14:* Detail of the 'FUNding FACTORY'. (Photo: Sophie Hope)
- Image 15:* Taking a break from the 'FUNding FACTORY'. Left to right: Christoph Srb, Sophie Hope, Corina Vetsch, Domenico Muehle and Tina Raffel. (Photo: Reinhold Zisser)

## *Introduction*



## 1. Introduction

This **practice based research**<sup>1</sup> is concerned with the tensions that exist between **artists' commissions** that promote certain forms of **participation** and **empowerment** in a way that follows a historical pattern of the **democratisation of culture** (making professional culture more accessible) and the notion of **cultural democracy**. Cultural democracy is a term that may seem outdated and yet I found it important to revisit because it opens up a crucial form of critique of a dominant model of art funding based on the democratisation of culture. In its theoretical and practical form it implies more complex, self-directed interruptions that contest predefined parameters and frameworks of commissioned art. As reclaimed emancipated reflections and actions, cultural democracy can offer a space for drawing attention to the inherent problems of an industry that constructs scenarios of empowered participation through 'consensual collaboration' but often leaves power-relations intact. My key area of concern here is the development of **socially engaged art** practice in the UK, its relationship to ideas and legacies of cultural democracy and the ways this practice has been funded and commissioned. While some of the practices and theories of socially engaged art and cultural democracy may be shared internationally, the economic and political narratives that have led to an increase in professionalism and funding of socially engaged art under New Labour from the late 1990s are particular to the UK.<sup>2</sup> Socially engaged art emerged as a term in the UK in the mid 1990s and in my contextual framework chapter I trace the evolution of this framing of a practice through 'community' and 'experimental' art in the 1960s and 70s. I would like to suggest that while there is a correlation between cultural democracy and socially engaged art, cultural democracy, as I understand it, is a way of thinking or an approach taken towards social engagement and that not all socially engaged art embodies or relates to cultural democracy. Focusing on the development of socially engaged art in the UK, however, has allowed me to consider an area of practice that overlaps with philosophies of cultural democracy whilst at the same time highlighting the issues that are raised when socially engaged art becomes a site for economic investment. Instead of abandoning **socially engaged art** as an instrumentalised branch of the civil service, or as a de-radicalised and neutralised practice, I aim to rethink how cultural democracy can open up a different way of understanding and critiquing the conditions of commissioning art to effect social change.

Despite the amount of time, money and energy spent on artists' commissions that claim to provide social, critical and economic services to society, such projects are often accused of not being useful

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<sup>1</sup> Words in bold are defined in the glossary.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that this PhD was started in 2006 and the research I spent four years developing came out of a critique of the New Labour years. Since the completion of my research, the UK has entered a new climate of 'austerity' and Conservative-Liberal Democrat politics. In my conclusions I address the directions this research into cultural democracy could take given these changing economic and political circumstances.

enough for effecting ‘real change’ or ‘worthy’ and therefore not taken seriously as ‘real art’. To what extent does the funding of culture lead to its neutralisation in critical and political terms? Does the commissioning of artists to address inequalities and ‘**social exclusion**’ lead to further exploitation and oppression? Addressing these questions through the format of a doctorate has allowed me to research the complexity of the subject, resulting in an analysis that is not dictated by the agendas of funders or commissioning bodies. This is not always the case with evaluation reports of publicly funded art commissions, which can often read as advocacy documents that emphasise how well the project has met its aims and objectives. Researcher Eleonora Belfiore has written about ‘bullshit’ in cultural policy practice and research. It was a similar frustration with the evaluation industry which led me to embark on this research. Belfiore reminds us of the importance of weeding out the bullshit:

...philosophers and scholars have struggled to describe and understand the way that people respond to the arts uninterrupted since the times of Plato. Any simple, straightforward solution to this riddle, or any impact evaluation toolkit that promises to evaluate the transformative power of any form of aesthetic experience in ‘ten easy replicable steps’, thus bypassing or refusing to address such complexity, is likely to be – let us be honest – bullshit. (Belfiore 2008, p.24)

She argues for researchers to possess what Ernest Hemmingway described as ‘a built-in, shockproof crap detector’. The approach I have taken through this research is to challenge some of the underlying assumptions carried forward in practices, policies and evaluations, and unearth the complex relationships and agendas at play in these encounters between artists, participants and commissioners.

The thesis is centred on four projects I carried out from 2006-2009, which I use to unlock a more detailed interrogation of the artists’ contract.<sup>3</sup> How does this professionalisation of contracting artists to work in specific sites, perhaps with specific groups, over fixed timeframes and with set budgets, affect understandings, experiences and possibilities of a critical practice? What happens to critiques of economic, social and political life when art practice is framed as a key player in providing creative, profit-based solutions to its problems? This research reflects on the meaning of participation as the enactment of the contract and the inherent power relations between, for example, the inviter and invited, the funder and funded, the paid worker and the volunteer; distinctions which the artists’ commission frames as a form of **wage labour**.

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<sup>3</sup> See Logbooks #1-4 in Appendix A, which summarise and document the projects. Whilst there is some overlap in the written thesis, the Logbooks have been made in a format that could be distributed independently of the PhD.

The research explores the tendency for those involved in commissioned situations to expose, reflect and disrupt those mechanisms of exploitation and oppression which they are complicit in strengthening, and questions this contradictory desire to disrupt expectations of the function of art whilst fighting for the right to be paid to do that dismantling. I explore how the artist's contract can be a negotiated site of **repressive tolerance** (Marcuse 1965) as performances of **participatory democracy** and suggest that cultural democracy as an '**intersubjective**' experience occurs when the parameters of the contract come sharply into focus and the mechanisms of the industry are exposed. This research is an exploration of how artists, commissioners and participants negotiate, challenge and are themselves challenged by the expectations of constructed frameworks (identified as contracts, projects, invitations and commissions). By rethinking the relationship between cultural democracy and the democratisation of culture I hope to bring to light new possibilities in understanding and practising the critical potential of socially engaged art.

I begin this thesis by giving an outline of key policies and practices in England from the 1960s to the present that have influenced an approach to funding based on the democratisation of culture. I also refer to attempts to question this trend by artists and others involved in **community arts** and cultural democracy movements. Commissioned socially engaged art cannot be interpreted in isolation from fluctuating political, economic and social agendas that influence funding, as these are essential ingredients in understanding **cultural production**. Following this contextual grounding, I go on to present a theoretical framework for cultural democracy based on notions of **critical knowledge**, **critical pedagogy** and '**la perruque**'.<sup>4</sup> This theoretical framework is reflected in my methodology which I explain in relation to the four projects. The projects are then dealt with in turn based on these contextual, theoretical and methodological concerns.

The projects follow an iterative process, demonstrating the development of a method using **generative metaphors** of critical distance to elicit spaces for cultural democracy to occur.<sup>5</sup> The first project, 'Het Reservaat' in Leidsche Rijn, the Netherlands, came out of a residency I did in the town and applied time travel as a way of opening up a process of **collective critical reflection** on the conditions of contemporary urban living and the role art plays in shaping that, resulting in a one

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<sup>4</sup> Michel de Certeau (1984) refers to 'la perruque' (translation: wig) to describe the ways in which people subvert dominant powers in everyday life by adopting 'tactics' as temporary parasitical occasions or blips in the system which allow them to reclaim time for their own actions. 'La perruque' refers to someone performing his or her own work whilst at work. It might look as though they are working but in fact this is concealing the fact that they are spending time on their own, unofficial activity, such as "writing a love letter on 'company time'" or "a cabinetmaker's 'borrowing' a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room" (de Certeau 1984, p.25).

<sup>5</sup> The projects span four different countries (The Netherlands, UK, Austria and Ireland), which reflect the nature of my own peripatetic existence as a freelance practitioner reliant on invitations from other cultural organisations to develop and sustain my practice.

day community performance. The experience of this commissioned project which invited participation from the residents who had inadvertently paid me to be there, led me to develop the second project, 'Critical Friends' in Greenwich, England. This involved establishing a group of participants in socially engaged art projects to become the critical researchers of the commissioning process in a way that re-directed the focus of attention away from 'residents to be empowered' through participation in these art projects and onto the mechanisms and ideologies of the art commissioning industry itself. This led me to discover more about how this industry operates and is negotiated through a series of '**Performative Interviews**', an interview technique I developed as a space to critically encounter the parameters of the commissioning industry. This method opened up discussion on the motivations, limits and possibilities of a professionalised critical practice, taking the research deeper into contractual obligations and opportunities through a collation of performative testimonials from artists, curators and commissioners about 'failed' projects. The fourth and final project, 'FUNding FACTORY', demonstrates a progression in the practice that questions the notion of participation even further through a practical experiment in collective production with a group of art students in a way that reflected and transformed our critical relationship to cultural production as a form of wage labour.

This research considers how art is thought, practised and funded rather than assuming that to fund and practice it is a good thing. It suggests that the path towards increased professionalism in art may improve the working conditions of the artist but leave power relations unchanged.<sup>6</sup> At the heart of this study is the issue of how one positions oneself in relation to power and exploitation by identifying who is setting the agenda, who is being paid and for what and for whom one is working. I conclude my thesis by addressing the significance of these issues in the current context of dwindling resources for a socially engaged art industry that was comparatively well funded until recently, and which has been the focus of this critique. What are the consequences of my analysis for **practitioners**, commissioners and participants now that the rules of the game have shifted?

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<sup>6</sup> The power relations I refer to here are between the funder, commissioner, artist(s), participant(s) and curator(s). The dynamics between these entities are outlined in the Manifesto of Possibilities (Cartiere and Hope 2007).

## *Contextual Framework*

## **2. Contextual Framework: The democratisation of culture as the commissioning of art to effect social change**

Central to my research are the implications of the consistent misinterpretation of cultural democracy as the democratisation of culture, one of the legacies of which I suggest has been the development of the artists' commission to effect social change. I give an overview of the history of this substitution, which, for the purpose of this study, I date back to 1960/1 with the Trades Union Congress's (TUC) Resolution 42 and the work of Arnold Wesker through Centre 42, and to 1965 with the new Arts Minister Jennie Lee's white paper, 'A Policy for the Arts: The First Steps'. I have chosen to limit my study to the UK and the evolution of public policy from this period so as to focus on the relationship between funding and practice. While there is a cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices internationally during this time, I want to focus on the trajectory of policy and funding which is specific to the UK, and how this is informed by, and in turn informs practices of community arts and later socially engaged arts in the context of UK economics and politics. In this chapter I outline how self-organised community art activity in the 1960s developed into campaigns for funding in the 1970s and 1980s, and how policy changes led to the increasing professionalisation of socially engaged art practices in the 1990s. At the time of beginning this PhD in 2006 the commissioning of artists with a remit to effect social change had been normalised. This shift has led to further criticism of artists uncritically carrying out **neoliberal** agendas of regeneration and social inclusion. There is a further paradox to address in that proposals for cultural democracy threaten the professional status of the artist, which the democratisation of culture goes some way to protect.<sup>7</sup>

### **2.1 The 1960s: The Labour movement shows signs of democratising culture and artists make demands of the Arts Council.**

The Trades Union Congress passed Resolution 42 in 1960 to address the role of art within the trade union movement and demanded greater access to the arts for the working classes: "Congress recognises the importance of the arts in the life of the community especially when many unions are securing a shorter working week and greater leisure for their members" (Kershaw 1992, pp. 105-6). Centre 42, whose elected artistic director was the playwright Arnold Wesker, was set up in 1961 to work with Trade Unions to realise this resolution.<sup>8</sup> Wesker stressed the aim of Centre 42 was to

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<sup>7</sup> I have chosen to go into some detail in this section in order to ground my theoretical and practical understandings of cultural democracy and the democratisation of culture. The research is based on archival research (using the Arts Council archives and British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection at Central Saint Martins) and published material (such as *Another Standard Journal*, 1981-86, Braden, 1978, Kelly, 1984 and Dickson, 1995). There is scope for further contextual research through interviews with artists and Arts Council officers.

<sup>8</sup> Centre 42 started with a £10,000 grant from the Gulbenkian Foundation as a touring festival combining poetry, folk music, art exhibitions, "readings in factory canteens" and theatre. In 1964, Wesker started to use an old Victorian engine

“find a popular audience for the arts, NOT an audience for popular art as was its frequent mistaken description” (Wesker n.d.). Wesker’s ambitions for Centre 42 were accused of democratising culture by bringing art to the masses rather than supporting ‘working class culture’ itself.

Wesker and Centre 42 were accused of cultural imperialism, trying to force middle-class art on the masses, by both left-wing and right-wing critics. The attacks turned out to be fatal. The unions withdrew their support... (Kershaw 1992, p.106)

Resolution 42 and Centre 42 continued a programme of the democratisation of culture that the Pilgrim Trust had started in the 1930s (set up by American railway millionaire Edward Harkness to conserve British heritage), which sent music and drama organisers to ‘distressed areas’. This was followed by the touring exhibition ‘Art for the People’ organised by the Institute for Adult Education in 1935. The drive to civilise, distract and entertain the masses continued through the second world war period with the work of the Entertainments National Service Association established in 1938 (ENSA) and the Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) which was formed by the Pilgrim Trust and Board of Education in 1940. CEMA’s original ambitions continued these intentions to democratise culture through the “preservation in wartime of the highest standards in the arts of music, drama and painting” and the “widespread provision of opportunities for hearing good music and the enjoyment of the arts generally” (Hewison 1995). Focusing their funding outside London, CEMA’s early intentions were also “the encouragement of music-making and play-acting by the people themselves” which they did with the help of unemployed professional artists who were given jobs as ‘animateurs’ to ‘stimulate local drama and music making in rural areas and small towns’ (ibid., p.33). This glimmer of what could be understood as an introduction of cultural democracy into CEMA, was short lived, as when John Maynard Keynes took over as chairman in 1942, he restructured the organisation (which became the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1945), and focused on supporting professional organisations (including those in London). According to Kenneth Clarke, Keynes “was not a man of wandering minstrels and amateur theatricals. He believed in excellence” (ibid., p.38).

In 1965, with a new Labour government, responsibility for the Arts Council of Great Britain was moved from the Treasury (where it had resided since the war) to the Department of Education and Science; Jennie Lee was appointed as the first Minister responsible for the arts. Her White Paper: ‘A Policy for the Arts: The First Steps’ (Lee 1965) outlined the need for more State investment in the arts in order to encourage more people to enjoy the arts. At this time public funding, distributed

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shed (which later became the Roundhouse) for their activities, with the aim of turning it into a “workers fun palace and a Mecca for the socialist arts” (Farren 2002, p.72).

through the Arts Council, was focused on securing national treasures, British heritage and existing arts organisations rather than individual artists (Castillejo 1968a). There was increasing pressure on the Arts Council to support individual artists, and growing awareness and concern that public subsidy for the arts was not reaching working class taxpayers. Lee's appointment and her 'Policy for the Arts' led to the government increasing the Arts Council's grant by 45% in 1966/67 and by a further 26% in 1967/68 (Fisher 2006) as part of the programme to increase access and widen audiences to the arts.

With their intentions to democratise culture and take 'quality art' to the working classes, the TUC, Centre 42 and the Labour government in the 1960s missed the opportunity to recognise cultural democracy by failing to acknowledge or fund the 'cultural practices of the working classes'.<sup>9</sup> The novelist and cultural theorist Raymond Williams dated this lost opportunity even further back to the 1940s.

I still believe that the failure to fund the working-class movement culturally when the channels of popular education and popular culture were there in the forties became a key factor in the very quick disintegration of Labour's position in the fifties. (Williams cited in Cultural Policy Collective 2004, p.16)

Alan Tomkins, art officer at the Greater London Council in 1984, remarked how it was John Maynard Keynes, founding member of the Arts Council in 1946, who helped "define incorrectly, cultural policy as a problem of finding audiences for the artists' work rather than vice-versa" (Tomkins 1984, p.21). Tomkins goes on to state, "this tension between, on the one hand, centralisation, professionalisation and 'standards', and on the other, diffusion, democracy and popular appeal remains with us today" (ibid.). It is this approach to the democratisation of culture, and the possibilities of cultural democracy within it, that I am investigating through this research.

According to Lord Goodman, Chairman of the Arts Council (1965 – 1972), by the end of 1968 the Arts Council was being 'bombarded' with funding applications from arts laboratories, theatre groups and 'loosely knit bodies of young people' and that these new applications for support were unfamiliar activities to the Arts Council, not coming under any of their existing categories (Goodman 1970). Based on this increase in applications, the Arts Council established a New

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<sup>9</sup> This confusion over cultural democracy or democratising culture could be mapped onto more common debates on populism versus elitism in the arts, but I would argue that while there are similarities of cultural democracy to populism, I take cultural democracy to encompass a more complex, self-organised and critical practice in the everyday that maintains tensions between production, distribution and consumption of culture. Populism implies the democratisation (market-led distribution) of culture.



Activities Committee (under the chairmanship of Sir Edward Boyle) to investigate these new activities and decide “whether in all this fret and foment there is something worthy of public support from public funds” (ibid.). The New Activities Committee was criticised, however, by those inside and outside the Arts Council. An artists’ group, Friends of the Arts Council Operative (FACOP) was formed in response to the Arts Council’s New Activities Committee, which they saw as corrupt and undemocratic. FACOP campaigned to replace the Arts Council with an Artists’ Council to take back control from bureaucrats into the hands of artists. While it may have been clear to some in FACOP that it was crucial to critically engage with the funding system, however, for others it was a case of just taking the money and running. The latter approach was thought by some to be tantamount to supporting the system that the ‘activists’ were trying to change. Gustav Metzger, at a FACOP conference in May 1969, for example, recognised these conflicts of interest within FACOP and the potential problems they may cause.

An objective understanding of the conflicts engendered between those artists attempting to change society, and others concerned with personal economic survival and tied to the numerous hang-ups of the art world, is basic to the functioning of groupings such as FACOP. Unless such objectivity is established, the compromise and time wasting will become intolerable – precluding results in terms of useful social change. Yes: the slogan is ARTISTS AGAINST ARTISTS. (Metzger cited in FACOP 1969b, p. 5)

Such a slogan could be used to underpin the notion of cultural democracy later taken up by the Shelton Trust in their Manifesto for Cultural Democracy (Kelly 1984). In June 1969 the Arts Council, under the chairmanship of Michael Astor, established a new New Activities Committee, but did not take on board FACOP’s suggestions and instead continued to meet behind closed doors. Michael Astor and the New Activities Committee deemed FACOP’s proposals for an Artists’ Council “unworkable and unacceptable” (FACOP 1969c). Sir Edward Boyle, in a speech to the House of Commons, supported the move to fund the work of contemporary artists, breaking down what he meant by ‘new activities’ as being about those which do not fit into any ‘recognised tradition’, activities which are ‘ephemeral’ and which do not have ‘a conventional end product’; “this is work which its practitioners feel enhances the quality of life and may provide a real sense of group therapy but it is not meant to be lasting”, art that “crosses frontiers between different kinds of art” and “those people who are interested in these new activities are particularly concerned with participation” (Boyle 1970, p.2). FACOP and the New Activities Committee could not agree on fundamental issues, however. In a letter from Astor printed in the *New Statesman* (22 May 1969), he remarked that,

..the large majority of young aspiring avant-garde artists that I encountered were not primarily politically orientated. Many of them were idealists, many of them were impressively unacquisitive and selfless in their aims. Confusion arose primarily where they interpreted art to mean anything they wanted it to mean. In spending the taxpayers' money I took the view that the Arts Council must recognise certain artistic standards however esoteric these might be. (ibid.)

This highlights the fundamental differences in approaches taken by FACOP and the Arts Council – namely that the Arts Council understood their role as securing ‘standards’ in art as their public service and yet it was the very notion of ‘standards’ that the artists and activists involved in FACOP were contesting as well as questioning who should decide on such standards.

## **2.2 The 1970s: The Arts Council starts to fund community arts**

Community arts had formed an aspect of the ‘new activities’ that the Arts Council had been investigating from 1968. Following the work of the New Activities Committee of 1968-1970 and Experimental Projects Committee’ from 1970-73<sup>10</sup>, 1974 marked the year that the Arts Council established a Community Arts Committee and published Professor Harold Baldry’s report entitled ‘Community Arts in Great Britain’. The Committee was set up to investigate whether it was the responsibility of the Arts Council to fund community art, and was followed by the establishment of a Community Arts Evaluation Working group from 1975-77.<sup>11</sup>

Baldry raised the issue that community art may have nothing to do with the values of art and excellence promoted by the Arts Council and therefore might not be the responsibility of the Arts Council.

Community artists are in most cases rendering a service to society and deserve public help, financial and otherwise. The question arises whether their work has any relevance to the aims of the Arts Council, and whether in consequence the Arts Council should be involved. (ibid., p.2)

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<sup>10</sup> Applications to the Experimental Projects Committee from 1970-3 fell into categories of performance or community arts (BIT Information Services 1969). Harold Baldry (1974), in his report, points out that community art was a distinct category to ‘experimental art’, explaining how ‘experimental’ was not an appropriate term as it implied a relationship to an accepted tradition, which he wrote, in the case of community art, did not exist. He stated, “while community arts work is new and therefore in a sense ‘experimental’ by no means all experimental work in the arts belongs to community arts, and therefore the two do not coincide” (Baldry 1974, p.1).

<sup>11</sup> The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and Manpower Services Commission (the government organisation for retraining unemployed people) were also funding community art activities at this time (Braden 1978).

In terms of Arts Council funding, it was clear from the outset that community art (as defined by the Community Art Committee in the late 1970s) would be funded on the basis that it was art, not political or social work. Robin Guthrie, chairman of the Regional Committee at the Arts Council (1979-81) reflected on the decisions to fund community art at that time describing two issues that were discussed in the Arts Council: “one is the instinct that all community arts activity is left wing and politically orientated, and the other is that community art is against the whole idea of standards”, myths that needed to be dispelled (Guthrie 1982, p.8).

If community art was simply about social change and justice and inequality and the fight, as it were, then the Arts Council need have nothing to do with it. If it was about art then regardless of whether its message was also social then the council had everything to do with it... If it hadn't been for the Arts Council there wouldn't be much community art; not in artistic terms anyway. (ibid.)

The introduction of a funding stream for community arts within the Arts Council triggered wider questioning of the existing criteria and value-judgements advocated by the Arts Council. It was suggested that community art could not be judged (in terms of what to fund) in the same way as the type of art they had hitherto been funding. For East Midlands Arts Association, for example, there were issues that their main focus had been on funding the fine arts and professional artists and that community art “stands our previous policy on its head” as it “is concerned with the participation by the masses of the people in all the creative processes of art production and the realisation of their own potential for creativity” (East Midlands Arts Association 1976, p.1). Roy Shaw (Secretary General of the Arts Council, 1975-83) refers to how the poet Roy Fuller resigned from the Arts Council in 1977 because he thought it was “wasting money on community arts” and that “public money for the arts cannot properly be dispensed without a strong regard by the dispensing body for standards of excellence and principles of value” (Shaw 1986, p.88). There were concerns that the ‘standards of excellence’ set and maintained by the Arts Council were being jeopardised by the introduction of community arts.

Shortly after the Arts Council report on the ‘Community Arts in Great Britain’ was published in 1974 Lord Gibson wrote the Arts Council report ‘The Arts in Hard Times’ (1975), which illustrated these antagonisms towards the funding of community art. In it, Gibson condemned the term ‘cultural democracy’ being used by community artists as “this demographic doctrine insults the very people it is supposed to help” and accused politically motivated artists of naïve

romanticism. Artist Owen Kelly (1984), however, argued that Gibson had misunderstood community art as a way of getting more people to like and understand art, that this was not a primary motivation of community artists, who were more concerned with enabling people to have more power and say in the direction of their own lives. For Kelly and others in the community arts movement the goal was not an increased access to the arts, but meaningful participation in democracy *through* the arts.

In 1972, a conference at the ICA on community art led to the establishment of the Association of Community Artists (ACA).<sup>12</sup> Owen Kelly (1984) describes how ACA lobbied the Arts Council for funds for community art but as their applications were accepted, that this marked the beginning of the depoliticisation of community art through state funding. Kelly remarked that funding directed community artists “away from the areas of danger in which its founders had been dabbling, and towards altogether safer pastures” (ibid.). While it appears that the Arts Council were responding to demands from ACA, there were many unclear side effects of this dramatic shift in Arts Council policy on community art practice. Some critics of the Arts Council’s adoption of community art saw it as a patronising democratisation of culture which further strengthened and maintained the values of the state at the expense of those fighting for cultural democracy (ibid.). Artist David Harding, for example, stated how in the mid 1970s he believed artists should have been negotiating directly with local authorities, and did not need the Arts Council to intervene on their behalf. He suggested that as the Arts Council started to take up this role of intermediary, they did so with the modernist value systems used for art as the only way they knew how, and as a result created “barriers and obstructions between artists and the constituencies”, stating: “The possibilities being explored by artists were seriously damaged by this growth in art bureaucracy and led, for a crucial period, to a neutralisation in the development of public art” (Harding 1997, p.15).

The Arts Council’s introduction of a Community Arts Committee marked a shift towards an understanding of community art as being more about providing solutions to social problems than about radical cultural democracy. Saul Albert (2003) goes on to point out how this move to financially support community art in the 1970s meant that the radical elements of the practice were eliminated, and were interpreted as artists who “worked with children” and “disadvantaged elements of society”. Albert makes this link between community art and socially engaged art: “...this was when policy-makers and state funders first encountered the idea that ‘socially engaged art’ could be a picturesque and inexpensive alternative to social services” (ibid.). Other critics thought the top-down prescription of community arts by the Arts Council was missing a vital

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<sup>12</sup> Founding members were Bruce Birchall, Martin Goodrich and Maggie Pinhorn.

ingredient – the communities themselves. Penny McPhilips, of North West Arts in a letter to Elizabeth Thomas (Chairman of Community Arts Community, Arts Council) argued that while the Community Arts Committee had “stimulated academic interest among journalists, arts administrators, professional artists, community and social workers it had not directly influenced communities themselves, chiefly because it is too remote”. (Mc Philips 1976, p.1)

In 1978 arts worker Su Braden embarked on a Gulbenkian funded research project to compare the practice of “artists who were placed by funding bodies in new social contexts” with that of artists who had set up situations themselves. She mentions the gap between the concepts of the funding bodies and the artists who have set up their own residencies: “This difference can be summarised in the conflict between the notion of popularising art and the notion of artistic democracy” (Braden 1978, p.113-4).

An artist ‘placed’ in a new context appears all too frequently to feel the job in hand is to take his or her art to the people, with the consequent expectation of a response or degree of participation that is based on a relationship between ‘professional’ and amateur’. Rather the community artist expects / insists creative equality with members of those communities. (ibid., p.108)

Braden was aware of the dangers of an increasingly professionalised, short-term, project-based approach to commissioning community art and highlighted the lack of long term funding, stressing that proposals should come from the communities themselves rather than advertising for community artists to be ‘placed’ in communities (ibid., p.121). Braden wrote how contrived proposals relied on the “unfortunate widespread view that community art can be prefabricated with a set of components” (ibid., p.123). Her study found that ‘professional’ artists responding to advertisements to work in deprived areas to ‘animate’ communities were rarely successful remarking that this was based on the confused misunderstanding of ‘taking the arts to the people’ and that “the causes of deprivation in such an area, apparent as they are, are ignored” (ibid.).

Braden preferred it if the artist was working in an area already, through a self-initiated project and then for the community to seek funding to keep the artist there. She stated how this required a new kind of long-term commitment from funders and suggested that one-off funding grants were both “alienatory and temporary” (ibid., p.124). It is interesting that over 30 years later Braden’s suggestions have been largely forgotten, and instead the format of short term artists’ commissions

is now commonplace.<sup>13</sup>

### **2.3 The 1980s: The GLC funds political art. The Campaign for Cultural Democracy is launched. The economic benefits of the arts are explored.**

In London during the 1980s there were contradictory policies and approaches to arts funding being carried out simultaneously. The increasing conservatism of an official, national cultural policy in the 1980s was at odds with the Labour-controlled Greater London Council (GLC)<sup>14</sup> which was able, over five years (1981-86) to support relatively radical, socialist, politicised art practices and campaigns before its eventual abolition by the Conservative Government in 1986.<sup>15</sup> The GLC's Community Arts Committee was tasked with supporting the "making of a popular culture" consisting of "cultural activities which are 'of the people', which belong to, and are part of ordinary people's lives and experiences" (GLC 1986, p.19). This signalled the emergence of a funding programme that supported practices of cultural democracy through the redistribution of funds. The Committee funded projects that demonstrated the participation of communities in both decision-making processes and in production, in order to "give working people a voice" (*ibid.*, p.41).<sup>16</sup> Section 142 of the Local Government Act of 1972 was one of the sections under which the GLC could support community art projects, as it allowed local authorities to fund "information projects and processes".<sup>17</sup> It was this loophole that the Conservative government wanted to abolish, due to the political campaigning it encouraged (Mulgan and Worpole 1988, p.79-82). Dermot Killip reminded the readers of the first edition of the community arts journal *Another Standard* (May/June 1981) that the funding of 'radical activities' by the state was fairly recent and that,

...the reason that community artists, as well as other community activists, fought for it was because they believed that the working classes did not benefit from the activities the state

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<sup>13</sup> There have been a number of recent initiatives to 'improve' the commissioning process of socially engaged and public art. The 'Manifesto of Possibilities: Commissioning Public Art in the Urban Environment' (Cartiere & Hope 2007) was a poster of recommendations on the role of art in urban change. Shelly Wallis (Cartiere & Willis 2008) has outlined the issues of the public art commissioning systems in the USA and Paul O'Neill has been researching 'durational praxis' and long term commissioning projects through his research for Situations, 'Locating the Producers'.

<sup>14</sup> The GLC were the top-tier local government administrative body for Greater London from 1965-1986.

<sup>15</sup> In 1983 the Conservative Government produced the report 'Streamlining the Cities: Government proposals for Reorganising Local Government in Greater London and the Metropolitan Counties' which led to the dismantling of the GLC and Metropolitan County Councils in 1986 despite public demonstrations (Blessing 1984, p.25 and Tomkins 1984, p.22). This 're-organisation' was seen to benefit the established 'centres of excellence' (such as the Royal Opera House) at the expense of the "community arts, ethnic arts and women's groups" (Green and Mort 1982, p.12).

<sup>16</sup> Projects that received GLC funding in the 1980s included the Brixton Gallery (which ran from 1983-1988), *City Limits*, an alternative arts and listings magazine, set up in 1980 by striking staff of *Time Out* and the Docklands Community Poster Project founded in 1981 by artists Peter Dunn and Loraine Leeson which ran for ten years during the redevelopment of the Docklands.

<sup>17</sup> It was under this section, for example, they were able to fund film projects dealing with issues of nuclear defence, public transport issues, women's issues and policing (Mulgan and Worpole 1988, p.79-82).

funded, yet still had to pay for them out of their taxes and so the state should be forced to alter its pattern of provision to take account of them. (Killip 1981, p.3)

Killip goes on to caution readers that “if we really were successful our work would be directly or indirectly hostile to the state as presently constituted and our grant would be cut” (ibid.). Ken Worpole warned, however, that community art could “sink into an uncritical populism” and that just because the working classes might gain the means of production this does not imply they will produce progressive, socialist actions, but, Worpole suggests, in this case, the “politics of production are perhaps more important than the politics of content” (Killip and Worpole 1982, p.7-10). Worpole is suggesting, here, that the GLC’s move towards redistributing resources and decision-making powers to a broader constituency, beyond that of artists, was more politically significant than directing the content of that work towards political aims.

This redistribution of unrestricted funds, while representing a shift in thinking towards cultural democracy and an opportunity to provide resources for people to manifest their own culture, did not mean that cultural democracy became an established or recognised mode of operating. For example, in the election year of 1987 the Labour Party published its ‘Charter for the Arts’ which was described by Brian Sedgmore in *Marxism Today* as “bitterly disappointing” in that it “refuses to recognise the notion of cultural politics and the idea that art is a necessary instrument of social change” and that it did not reflect the integration of cultural, economic and social policies or deal with “awkward issues such as radical practice versus populism” nor was there an attempt to unite community, ethnic and high arts (Sedgmore 1987, p.39-41). For Nicholas Green and Frank Mort, this continued, “ranking of certain cultural forms above others, by standards of taste and excellence, is a subtle way of disciplining disruptive social groups.” (Green and Mort 1982, p.13). They criticised Labour for continuing this tradition of democratising culture, of “bringing art to the working man”: “Unrespectable cultural norms – the street, the pub, the fairground – have never been recognised as culture at all. They are dealt with by the police and the local magistrate.” (ibid.) It is these ‘unrespectable cultural norms’, which could perhaps be understood as manifestations of participating in the ‘wrong’ way in relation to otherwise standardised forms of cultural activity, that one might find undeclared signs of cultural democracy.

Jean Battersby in her report, ‘The Arts Council Phenomenon’ (1981)<sup>18</sup> remarked that there was a political purpose to the community arts movement aimed at realising cultural democracy:

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<sup>18</sup> ‘The Arts Council Phenomenon’ was a report of the Conference of Commonwealth Arts Councils sponsored by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation at the University of Kent in April 1979.

...some community artists see their work as the spearhead of the cultural democracy attack, a somewhat politicised movement with a strong and trenchant intellectual thrust or with unjustifiable intellectual pretensions, according to your point of view. The cultural democrats' aim is to undermine what they see as insidious attempts by the instrument of a state establishment (the arts council) to impose an alien culture on the working class, thereby indulging in cultural colonialism or cultural imperialism. (Battersby 1981)

She goes on to clarify the difference between the democratisation of culture, which “implies efforts to make traditional and the best of contemporary culture more widely accessible” compared to cultural democracy as “a viewpoint [that] sees no particular value in doing any such thing and demands that priority should be given instead to developing the creative capacities of individuals with the help of amateurs and community artists” (ibid., p.40). In 1985 the Shelton Trust for Community Arts (under the chairmanship of Owen Kelly and before him Bernard Ross) adopted a campaign for cultural democracy (Kelly, Lock and Merkel 1986). Kelly (1984) described this struggle for cultural democracy as a socialist project; that it was about equality of access to the means of production, rather than consumption of an already defined culture (ibid., p.101). The focus on redistribution of resources (in terms of time and means of production) raises an important question: what role does the trained, professional artist play in this socialist project? The programmes of democratising culture and cultural democracy are not necessarily mutually exclusive, with both approaches managing to co-exist. The democratisation of culture implies an individual artist figure holds the power of production and communication of culture, which in turn is made available to others (non-artists) to appreciate. Cultural democracy undermines the authoritative status of the artist, who becomes a facilitator, generating artistic, critical knowledge among those they are working with.

The more recent development of the socially engaged art commission, I argue, overlaps these approaches, as it is a model that employs the professional, trained artist to both impart their own artistic vision and to draw out the relevant knowledge of others in the process. Both cultural democracy and/or socially engaged art, to varying degrees, dilute the artists' singular vision, and while there are varying degrees of artistic, critical knowledge being articulated, the artist (identified as the one who initiates the process and/or the one who is paid) often directs the methods and interpretations of these encounters. What, then, is gained and what is lost in the process of cultural democracy? Were artists' skills and knowledge being compromised, ignored or taken for granted? Not all of the members of the Shelton Trust took up the campaign for cultural democracy, for



example, as it was considered *too* politicised for some (Morgan in Dickson, 1995, p.24) and by the late 1980s the cultural democracy movement began to fragment.<sup>19</sup>

The professionalisation of ‘animateurs’ and facilitators continued, and those who had begun as community artists, self-organising and surviving ‘on the dole’ because “something needed to happen”, began to accept funding, and finally they demanded it (Morgan in Dickson 1995, p. 16).<sup>20</sup> As funds were still relatively limited and highly sought after, competition between the different community art groups increased, as did the need to clarify and justify the role of community arts (Morgan in Dickson 1995, p.23-24). The funding of community art became increasingly based on short-term projects, which was in stark contrast to the long held notion that community art “involved a long-term commitment to one particular community” (ibid., p.23).

Those ‘communities’ which have been manufactured by directive professionals...[do not] change and develop internally. Instead the opposite occurs; they ossify a specific set of relationships which have the professional at their centre, and they continue only as long as the professional remains at their centre. (Kelly 1984, p.50)

This statement is relevant to the development of socially engaged art through the 1990s, as funding has predominantly followed a model of parachuting in artists to communities for fixed time periods. The pressure to articulate community art’s unique values meant that the struggle towards being the most professional candidate for funding was a fight only those with certain administrative skills could take part in, leaving those without such skills out of the race. During such games of one up man-ship the players were accused of ignoring whom the fight was for, and of redirecting funds from those who needed it.

We must be aware that at any time, perhaps already, we will be faced with an elitism in Community Arts of a political, social and artistic nature as serious as any elitism in the traditional arts...What efforts has the Committee made to reach Communities / Community

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<sup>19</sup> A discussion group produced a paper in response to the Manifesto called ‘Another View’ in which they stated, “Our work is valuable and can be empowered as long as it does not create false hopes either for the people we work with or ourselves... There is strength in defining and recognising our limits. There is positive value in preparing for change” (Morgan in Dickson, 1995, p. 24). The Shelton Trust went on to rename itself ‘Another Standard’ and a working party called ‘Cultural Democracy and the Labour Movement’ was proposed to “develop exchanges of information concerning activity within the context of struggles against the state, problems and obstacles of negotiating with the Labour Movement” (ibid., p.25). As documented in ‘Another Standard Journal’ (May 1981-October 1986) and Owen Kelly (1984), the long-term ambition of the community arts movement was cultural democracy, which, says artist Sally Morgan, by 1994 most people have never heard of and have no “sense of the history and heart of the movement” (Morgan in Dickson 1995).

<sup>20</sup> Telford Community Arts (established in 1974) chose, in 1990, “voluntary disbandment rather than compromise their principles and accept all the restrictions being imposed by their funders” (Morgan in Dickson 1995, p.26).

Groups who are unaware of the growth of community arts and know nothing of the funds available? (Day 1976, p.1)

The calls in the mid 1980s to establish monitoring of how GLC funding was spent (Mulgan and Worpole 1986) were based on this concern that funding was not reaching the people who needed it most. The increase in competition and need for validation by the funding bodies meant some community art workers felt that the agenda was now being set by the funders rather than the **practitioners** or communities themselves. Dermott Killip published a letter to Roy Shaw in *Another Standard* (March 1982) that highlighted this concern: "...the drive to educate people can be a way of shifting the responsibility for people's exclusion onto themselves, rather than examining the reason behind their exclusion" (Killip 1982, p.18). Tomkins also stated that, "many of the attempts to democratise 'resources' have simply given an opportunity for the middle classes to increase their share and consolidate their ideological power" (Tomkins 1984, p.22).

In response to these accusations, the GLC commissioned Comedia to prepare a report on whether their community arts policy had reached the people it was intended for.<sup>21</sup> The report recommended that,

...all future arts programmes should be regularly monitored to find out which precise sections of the population were using them and why...Too many arts projects have for too long made extravagant claims about who uses them, claims which have never been tested to any degree of accuracy. (Cited in Mulgan and Worpole 1986, p.88)

Kelly (1984) acknowledged that with increases in funding, the original community arts groups became more marginalised and that "community artists became known for providing a kind of extended play facility for children" (Kelly 1984, p.24), stating that the solution to teenage unemployment had become, "let them paint walls". The plethora of community mural paintings facilitated by community artists during the 1980s demonstrated how impotent the community arts movement had become during a 'decade of grant addiction' (ibid., p.35).

I believe, that a liberal pragmatism served early on, to cripple the political development of the community arts movement...community artists are increasingly told what to do, and

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<sup>21</sup> Charles Landry set up Comedia in 1978 as a consultancy on art and urban development (their website states "We see ourselves as critical friends rather than as consultants"). Their report was based on interviews with 900 people across three districts where there were a number of GLC funded community art projects and found that 40% of those had used one of the community art facilities in the last year and 50-70% of those had qualifications at 'O' Level or above (cited in Mulgan and Worpole 1986).

how to do it, by people whose motivations often directly contradict the alleged aims of the community arts movement. We have become foot soldiers in our own movement, answerable to officers in funding agencies and local government recreation departments. (ibid., p.3)

What began as a victory for the community arts movement in terms of securing funds and recognition of the role community arts played in society, became a setback as artists started to question their “funding addiction” and their roles as civil servants, “safety valves” or as “another outpost of the social services” (Kelly 1982, p.15).<sup>22</sup> This switch from radical demands on the State to artists becoming the “foot soldiers in their own movement” was the result of major compromises in their original political motivations and practices; as Kelly remarks, “State funding has rendered the field politically neutral” (Kelly 1984, p.37). Community art was now “exploited as a safety valve to keep popular discontent within regulated limits” (Foster 1982, p.13) and “public space murals [became] a celebration of the domination of the local state over its subjects” (Kelly 1984, p.115).

While there was rising criticism of the instrumental role community arts was playing, Ed Berman (Conservative politician – Michael Heseltine’s advisor at the time) welcomed the professionalised status of community artist as service-provider, stating that community art was the “junior partner of the private sector – the partner with the public brief” (Berman 1983, p.7-9). Investment in a commission could now be accounted for or justified in terms of savings in marketing, consultancy or PR.<sup>23</sup> John Myerscough’s 1988 publication, ‘The Economic Importance of the Arts’ has been credited with providing evidence that direct spending on the arts led to spending in other sectors which would in turn increase wealth and job prospects. Myerscough came up with a persuasive case for art’s economic impact leading to subsequent investments by local authorities on the grounds that the arts increased employment prospects (Myerscough 1988, p.4-5). Towards the end of the GLC years, Conservative Arts Minister, Norman St John-Stevas warned that the art world “must come to terms with the situation and accept the fact that government policy in general has decisively tilted away from expansion of the public to the enlargement of the private sector” (Shaw 1986, p.40). Despite increasing demands from artists and arts organisations for public funding

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<sup>22</sup> Funding agendas were accused of ‘diluting’ community arts activity, such as the Manpower Services Commission, which was more about supporting “mobile arts and crafts or leisure activities” rather than established community programmes, to the extent that this potential funder was seen as a threat to the community arts movement (editorial, *Another Standard*, Summer 1982, p.3).

<sup>23</sup> A property developer proudly announced during an Urban Land Institute seminar I attended in 2008 (‘Value of art in Property Development’, 24 June 2008): “Doing art to save on our advertising budget, that’s good enough for me.”

through the Arts Council<sup>24</sup>, the Conservative government was preparing the ground for increasing restrictions on funding, creating their own demands that the arts sector become more self-sufficient, commercially viable, and less dependent on Britain's tax-payers.

#### **2.4 The 1990s: Emphasis returns to the social impact of the arts. Concerns over measuring the value of the arts re-emerge.**

Through this timeline of changes in cultural policy one can see how changes in government are reflected in the funding of culture and how the political and economic ideals of elected governments influence the supposedly arm's length work of the Arts Council. Throughout the 1990s we see the development of an increasingly instrumental arts policy that leaves the political, radical and experimental aspects of community arts further behind. Tony Blair in a speech one month after being elected in 1997, said he wanted to "tackle what we all know exists – an underclass of people cut-off from society's mainstream, without any sense of shared purpose" (cited in Kleinman 1998, p.7). In 1998 the Social Exclusion Unit was established and published the report 'Bringing Britain Together: a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal' (Cabinet Office, 1998). As a result of this report 17 Policy Action Teams (PAT) were established, with PAT10 being tasked with investigating the best way arts, sport and leisure could engage people in poor neighbourhoods. The report concluded that arts, sports, cultural and recreational activity

...cannot only make a valuable contribution to delivering key outcomes of lower long-term unemployment, less crime, better health and better qualifications, but can also help to develop the individual pride, community spirit and capacity for responsibility that enable communities to run regeneration programmes themselves. (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, DCMS, 1999, p.2)

Previously, during the Conservative administration, a number of reports highlighted the economic and employment benefits of the arts.<sup>25</sup> New Labour embraced these findings along with those of PAT10, consolidating the social and economic benefits of the arts. On coming to power in 1997 they set up the **Creative Industries** Task Force that published a mapping document (DCMS 1998a), which embedded the creative industries in national strategies for economic competitiveness and development (ibid., p.10-11). At a time when Britain and other post-industrial, post-manufacturing nations were moving towards more service-based economies, the creative industries

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<sup>24</sup> In 1980 the Arts Council established the Education Unit to cope with increasing demands for advice and guidance from both arts and education bodies.

<sup>25</sup> 'Culture as Commodity' (Casey, Dunlop and Selwood 1995) for example, gave evidence that the cultural sector was a major employer. Other reports at this time that predicted the rise of employment in the culture industries included Feist and O'Brien (1995) and Pratt (1997).

were becoming a recognised sector of employment and investment (ibid., p.9). In 2007 Tony Blair was quoted as saying that Britain survives and prospers on “the talent of its people” (BBC News 2007).

The integration of a social agenda for art based on economic and employment benefits and a framework of accountability and evidence-based policy making was well established within the New Labour plan by the time they came to power in 1997. The discourse was based on the notion that there is an underclass of people who are excluded from **citizenship** but need to “win a place back in society by gaining a job” (Field 1990 cited in Levitas 2005, p.16). Employment became the deciding factor as to whether someone was included in or excluded from society. Sociologist Ruth Levitas in her publication ‘The Inclusive Society?’ (2005) quotes Charles Murray (author of ‘The Emerging British Underclass’ 1990), who described the underclass as a disease spread by people “whose values are contaminating the life of entire neighbourhoods” (ibid.). Mark Kleinman in his paper, ‘Include me out? The New Politics of Place and Poverty’ (1998), rejected the term ‘underclass’ and the way it was used interchangeably by Blair with social exclusion (“As a description it is inaccurate, as analysis worse than useless, and as a guide to policy positively harmful”, ibid., p.8). Kleinman preferred the term social exclusion although he was wary of it becoming a cliché “to cover almost any kind of social ill” (Kleinman 1998, p.10). Crucially, he states: “Focusing on social exclusion is politically attractive because it avoids the difficulties associated with addressing inequalities and power relations in the wider society.” (ibid., p.10) Kleinman stresses the difficulty in distinguishing between the ‘economic’ and ‘social’ aspects of regeneration, saying that while the economic may prevail, “social capital is as important to economic development as economic capital” (ibid.). He advocates employability as one of the key factors in tackling exclusion:

...I do not mean to imply that individuals are to blame for their unemployment. I mean that in a competitive, open economy, those individuals that have the least competitive attributes will find it most difficult to gain access to jobs. (Kleinman 1998, p.6)

New Labour moved a step further away from socialism’s objectives of redistribution towards redistributing (job) opportunities: “if everyone is included, everyone must work” (Levitas 2005, p.36). Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell confirmed New Labour’s agenda in 2004 as being about creating “equality of opportunity to material wealth and chances for material fulfillment” (Jowell 2004, p.14). The Cultural Policy Collective also picked up on the fact that, as Levitas stressed, the social inclusion policy advocated by New Labour is based on “equality of opportunity” through education, training and access to paid work, rather than actual equality through measures granting

collective rights and the public redistribution of resources (Cultural Policy Collective 2004, p.5).<sup>26</sup>

Inclusion may appear a progressive ideal, but in reality it means incorporating the poor into a capitalist economy driven by accumulation beyond human need, an economy founded on their exploitation. (ibid., p.6)

There were a number of reports and research projects in the 1990s that have tried to respond to the endless quest for defining the role of art in delivering this social inclusion agenda, each offering various methodologies and toolkits for capturing these impacts.<sup>27</sup> 'How the Arts Measure Up: Australian Research into Social Impact' (Williams 1997), for example, drew out some of the contradictions between the social and economic ambitions for 'participatory' or 'community' arts and raises the point that community-led, bottom-up schemes are at odds with a government "primarily concerned with 'bottom line' economics and short election terms" (ibid., p.12). Matarasso's 'Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts' (1997), according to Reeves, "produced a step change in recognition of the sector's contribution to social development" (Reeves 2002, p.16). Having outlined some of the key findings of the social benefits of participatory art projects, Matarasso concludes that it would only take a small adjustment to introduce participatory arts initiatives into cultural and social policy in order to "deliver real socio-economic benefits to people and communities" (Matarasso 1997, p.vi). Matarasso felt there had been a bias in studies on the economic impact of the arts, which "miss the real purpose of the arts, which is not to create wealth but to contribute to a stable, confident and creative society" (ibid., p.vi). His report focused on beneficial impacts, finding that participation in the arts improves self-confidence, practical and social skills, contributes to social cohesion, nurtures local democracy, renews public images of cities and generally make people happier.

Despite the focus on social impacts, Matarasso also found economic benefits in terms of the amount of voluntary labour participatory arts relies on, that amounts to "a boost to the country's education resources worth hundreds of millions of pounds" (ibid., p.ix). Stating that these projects also contribute to carrying out other public services (such as child care, social services, health promotion and crime prevention), Matarasso points out that participatory arts projects are often funded from "communities' existing resources, with marginal support from the state" (ibid., p.ix). This could be read as a money saving solution for the government as artists and participants carry out underpaid or voluntary social work in order for the government to make savings. The report

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<sup>26</sup> The Cultural Policy Collective set up culturaldemocracy.net to offer an alternative vision for cultural politics in Scotland and published the pamphlet 'Beyond Social Inclusion: Towards Cultural Democracy' in 2004.

<sup>27</sup> These include: Matarasso (1996), Lingayah, MacGillivray and Raynard (1996), Reeves (2002), Arts Council England (2004), Holden (2004), Cowling (2004), ixia (2005), Prevista (2005) and Arts Council England 2006.

advocates for participatory arts projects as effective, flexible, cost-effective, problem solving devices that social policy could ‘make use of’. He even goes as far as claiming that art can “reduce public expenditure by alleviating social problems which the state would otherwise be obliged to put right” (ibid., p.ix and p.93). He asks, “How far does the state really want to empower or raise expectations of its citizens?” Unfortunately, he does not think it is the role of his research to answer these questions, “which are proper subjects for *political* debate” (my italics), implying that he does not deem his own research political.

Five years after ‘Use or Ornament?’ was published, Paola Merli wrote a critique of Matarasso’s research, saying it was “flawed in its design, execution and conceptual basis” (Merli 2002, p.1). Merli unpicks the methodological problems in the research, claiming that the data collected did not support the report’s conclusion and she accuses Matarasso of formulating questions that led to biased answers that “rule out the possibility of negative impacts” (ibid., p.4).<sup>28</sup> Merli was also critical of the underlying conceptual bias that art can carry out all of these objectives, saying that rather than changing

...people’s daily conditions of existence-it will only ‘help’ people to accept them. However, making deprivation more acceptable is a tool to endlessly reproduce it. Social deprivation and exclusion arguably can be removed only by fighting the structural conditions which cause them. Such conditions will not be removed by benevolent arts programmes. (ibid., p.8)

Whilst the government-driven need to measure had started during the 1980s with the Conservatives, New Labour “attempted to bring culture closer in line with government policy, and required that the cultural sector justify its funding by demonstrating the social impact it was making, particularly in the area of social inclusion” (Selwood 2002, p.5). As part of this policy, and due to the Public Service Agreements introduced in 1998<sup>29</sup>, the DCMS introduced three-year funding agreements “placing clear responsibilities on those bodies to deliver against demanding targets” (ibid., p.7) which “implied closure on any possibility of ‘grants for grants sake’” (ibid.). Many freelance consultants, artists and evaluators were eager to contribute to, and prove these policies in order to continue to receive funding. This has led to a wealth of documents providing ‘evidence’ that art can do all these jobs rather than questioning the targets themselves. As Belfiore

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<sup>28</sup> Merli states that Matarasso judged other people’s quality of life according to his own standards, pointing out that Matarasso used predefined indicators (constructed by the researcher without preliminary discussions with the ‘participants’ of the projects he is researching) which did not allow for the research to capture and discover the unpredictable aspects of the projects, which he defined as the very strength of participatory arts (Merli 2002, p.4).

<sup>29</sup> Public Service Agreements meant government departments were required to account for spending and delivery on the Government’s agenda.

and Bennett (2007) have pointed out, this has led to a “proliferation of methodologically unsound impact studies that have been the subject of some quite extensive scholarly critique” (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007, p.3).

During this period we see the development of a hybrid approach to commissioning artists based on artistic quality, employability and social impact. Through the prescribed democratisation of culture, certain values and notions of citizenship were being promoted rather than radically transformed or critiqued. Despite many criticisms of increasingly funding-led community art and mourning over lost political ideals of the movement, in the 1990s there was a reappraisal and lobbying for the recognition of art that involved people and tried to effect social change.<sup>30</sup> Ten years on from the Shelton Trust’s original campaign, Morgan (writing in 1995) suggested it was time to revive the campaign for cultural democracy (ibid., p.26). Dickson in his introduction to ‘Art with People’ (1995) mentions ‘socially engaged arts’ in his description of the practice:

Far from being unimportant in arts work with people, quality and excellence are central to it. Certain fine art practices and high arts are protected from the yardstick which is used to measure more *socially engaged arts*. It has been easy for art world supremacists to dismiss whole areas of practice as ‘social art’ – seen as decoration, community work, art therapy or play. That it is not considered equal to those other ‘proper’ art forms which cater to a minority of tastes and to which the majority of funding goes deflects any challenges to the mainstream. (Dickson 1995, p11, my italics)

The continuing professionalisation of community arts as a socially engaged art industry in the 1990s in the UK was accompanied by an increasing number of publications and debates both in the UK and US that theorised and problematised practices of participatory, collaborative, process-based and performative art.<sup>31</sup> **New genre public art**, for example, was a term used in the US from the early 1990s to describe a move away from sculptural site-specific public art to a more ‘community-specific’ one, involving marginalised groups as “active participants in the conceptualisation and production of process-orientated, politically conscious community events or

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<sup>30</sup> For example, the South Wales Intercultural Community Arts was established in 1990 and in Northern Ireland a Community Arts Forum was set up in 1992. In the same year there was a conference entitled ‘Art and Communities’ in Stirling and in 1995 Artists’ Newsletter readdressed the significance of community arts with their publication ‘Art with People’ (Dickson 1995).

<sup>31</sup> For example, in 1998 at the conference, ‘Critical Sites: Issues in Critical Art Practice and Pedagogy’ in Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, organised by Littoral, Grant Kester delivered his paper on dialogical aesthetics (Kester 1999). In 2000 students of the curating MA at The Royal College of Art exhibition brought together socially engaged practices in an exhibition called ‘Democracy!’ In 2003, the Arts Council organised a series of symposia called ‘Interrupt’ about “socially engaged, participatory and education arts”. By the 2000s there were a number of other publications to come from the UK and other parts of Europe relating to socially engaged art, including Wallinger and Warnock 2000; Doherty 2004; Harding 2005; Bishop 2006; Raunig 2007, Bradley and Esche 2007, Butler and Reiss 2007 and Cartiere 2010.



programs” (Kwon 2002, p.6 and Lacy 1994). **Dialogical aesthetics**, developed by Grant Kester in the US from the late 1990s, was used to describe the transformative potential of an aesthetics based on reciprocity and collaborative encounters (Kester 1995, 1998, 1999 and 2004). These writings informed practices that in the UK came to be labelled socially engaged art, by offering theoretical frameworks for repositioning notions of participation, community and the role of the artist. The context-specific nature of these practices, however, meant there was not one, unified movement or model of practice that was being played out.

Tackling the complex relationships between critical thinking, culture and labour was one of the subjects dealt with by Raymond Williams, who explored the Marxist notion of cultural materialism to understand the social and material conditions of cultural production. In his 1958 essay, ‘Culture is Ordinary’, for example, Williams stated how culture should be interpreted in relation to its underlying economic systems of production. The focus of this study is the socially engaged art commission that evolved in the UK as a framework for delivering social policy and funding cultural practices. The area of socially engaged art in the UK, I argue (in line with Williams’ approach), cannot be considered in isolation from the political, economic and social landscape in which it was shaped. As some art practices came to be labelled, socially engaged and funding opportunities became more prevalent during the New Labour government; artists departed to some extent, from previous and concurrent practices of community art due to their associations of being a social service devoid of any critical or artistic integrity. Partly because of the form of the contract and demands of these commissions, and partly due to the reluctance of artists to become social workers, socially engaged art has become mainly characterised by an artist-led approach, rather than one of artist as facilitator or animateur that was more common to community arts (although methods of facilitation, participation and collaboration are often central to processes of socially engaged art). As Kwon has pointed out with regard to new genre public art, such projects can further the separation between art and life by, for example, relying on the mythical status of the avant-garde, disruptive, outsider artist, despite claims to the contrary (Kwon 2002, p.6). Interruptions or disruptions to this process (such as when someone chooses not to participate in this myth-making, or engages in the process in an unexpected or undirected way), I argue, throws some light on the construction of the artists’ contract which relies on a particular notion of the artist and expects a certain kind of participation and engagement from others. By focusing on the ways in which these expectations are temporarily abandoned or ignored (elements that do not usually make evaluation reports), I hope to throw the commission into a new light. This is important because it allows us to challenge the conditions of participating in a socially engaged art practice that purports to effect change. The implications of this are that it requires us to rethink the framework of the

commission in relation to the construction of an idea of socially engaged art from different perspectives, and to identify what is important to these diverse constituents.

### **2.5 The 2000s: The struggle for evidencing the impact of the arts continues. Growing criticism of New Labour's cultural policy. Cultural democracy is revisited.**

Nearly ten years after Morgan's call (in Dickson 1995) to reinvigorate the cultural democracy campaign, in 2004 a group of cultural workers, academics and policy makers under the name Cultural Policy Collective suggested another re-examination of the possibilities of cultural democracy was needed, referring to the efforts in the early 1980s towards cultural democracy as being 'swiftly neutralised' by the Thatcher government. The Cultural Policy Collective called for a recognition of this defeat in order to move forward and re-activate cultural democracy (Cultural Policy Collective 2004, p.10). In 2007, social scientists Rosie Meade and Mae Shaw's special issue of the Community Development Journal on 'Community Development and the Arts: Reviving the Democratic Imagination' (Meade and Shaw 2007) also called for a reappraisal of cultural democracy by "reaffirming the importance of humour, risk, uncertainty and emotion in sustaining and enriching community development" (ibid., p.420). They outlined the expectations placed on art to empower people and improve wealth, and the increasing pressures on artists to prove their transformational, therapeutic and problem solving abilities. They argued that there had been a politicisation of the arts "as government extends its reach" and demands that art carries out social and economic agendas (ibid., p.415). What this can result in, they warn, is art that "can provide a convenient means of political displacement, distracting attention from the real causes of social problems" (ibid., p.416). This echoes Braden's assertion made thirty years previously, that 'taking art to the people' could mean, "the causes of deprivation in such an area, apparent as they are, are ignored" (Braden 1978).

Despite these renewed calls for cultural democracy, the Arts Council's spending review of 2007 declared their future as being about encouraging "even more people attending and participating in the arts" still convinced that the arts "can achieve remarkable outcomes, ranging from improvement in pupils' attainment and attitude to learning, to providing the catalyst for economic and social regeneration, to helping young offenders on the path to rehabilitation" (Arts Council England 2007, p.9). The Arts Council produced a report in May 2004 outlining "some research evidence" of the impact of the arts. The review focused on the impact of art on social inclusion (through employment, education, health and criminal justice) and regeneration (including social capital and sustainable development). In the introduction, the author states that despite the numerous claims about the impact of the arts, "there are still many gaps, particularly in the area of social impacts",

and that the Arts Council is committed to “strengthening the existing evidence base on the impact of the arts” (Arts Council England 2004, p.3). In 2006, the Arts Council produced ‘The Power of Art: Visual arts; evidence of impact’ in which it claimed that:

The visual arts have a positive impact on the people who engage with them. While there is qualitative and anecdotal evidence, there is limited robust research evidence of the reach and effects of the visual arts on individuals, communities and localities. (Arts Council England 2006, p.8)

This admission to not having adequate evidence or the correct tools to measure art had already been acknowledged by the then Culture Minister, Estelle Morris in 2003:

I know that arts and culture make a contribution to health, to education and crime reduction, to strong communities, to the economy and to the nation’s well-being, but I don’t always know how to evaluate it or describe it. We have to find a way of describing its worth. (Estelle Morris 2003, cited in Arts Council England 2006, p.10)

A year after Morris’s call for more robust data, her concerns over a lack of evidence were echoed by the Cultural Secretary Tessa Jowell in her speech on Government and the Value of Culture in which she called for the recognition of the intrinsic value of art (Jowell 2004). Jowell declares there is a “poverty of aspiration” which she says, “compromises all our attempts to lift people out of physical poverty” but that engagement with ‘high’ culture can help alleviate this poverty of aspiration (ibid., p.3). Jowell asserts that it is the government’s responsibility to deliver “intelligent public subsidy” to “complex cultural activity” (ibid., p.7), which is “access to the best” (p.7 and 16), whereas “[a]ccess to the substandard is access to disappointment which will translate into an unwillingness to keep paying...That is why excellence has to be at the heart of cultural subsidy” (Ibid., p.16). Again, we have come full circle. As the pressure to measure becomes too much, in order to justify public spending on the arts the government turns to art’s ‘intrinsic values’ which are applied to notions of quality, ‘high’ culture.

In 2004 the Arts Council published ‘The Art of Inclusion’ (Jermyn 2004) which called for the recognition of individual testimony and “participation and engagement in the arts as an end in itself”, saying that only long-term studies with established projects or organisations would be conducive to providing evidence of the contribution of the arts on wider social and economic outcomes (ibid., p.i), something the Arts Council were obviously unable to fund at the time. Jermyn focused on “participatory arts projects” of 28 arts organisations that had been selected by the Arts

Council as “exemplars of good practice”. It is interesting that the study from the beginning was focusing on what were already considered to be “good practice”, therefore cancelling out any openness to negative impacts that the research may have exposed. Jermyn reveals that none of the case studies chosen were ‘community-led’ but that staff in arts organisations had initiated each project. This perhaps reflects the move away from community-led projects in the 1960s, 70s and 80s and suggests that ‘inclusion’ has become a top-down process that acts upon the ‘excluded’, thus setting the scene for a decade of commissioned socially engaged art projects.

Through the projects carried out as part of this study I address this drive to justify or advocate the social and economic impacts of the arts by exploring ways of questioning these agendas from different perspectives. While on the one hand there is a desperate scramble for evidence to back up funding applications and evaluations, some artists and critics with their own predefined agendas of what constitutes art, have expressed their disappointment with those artists who take up commissions and deliver New Labour’s social inclusion agenda. Curator and researcher Claire Doherty, in her essay ‘Social Work, Social Sculpture’ (2000), maps some of these criticisms, referencing claims that policies of “accessibility” relate to a “devaluation of the role of the artist in a so-called audience-led culture” leading to a “crisis of social remedy over content”. Art critic Peter Suchin, for example, suggested artist Loraine Leeson, once part of Art of Change with Peter Dunn, (who carried out the Docklands Community Poster Project), is the “text book political artist”:

It is rather unfortunate then, that Loraine Leeson’s current alignment with New Labour’s lip service socialism can only serve to smooth-and indeed consolidate – Labour’s false image as promoters of equality, access and integration. Encouraging schoolchildren to make ‘art’ about their experience of disenfranchisement and exclusion is, intentionally or not, nothing less than the neutralising of dissent in advance of its potential manifestation. (Suchin 2007, p.10-11)

Suchin’s critique suggests artists such as Leeson were delivering New Labour’s policies rather than critically engaging with them, and that such practices were strengthening these systems of exclusion. I would suggest, however, that collaborative practices often involve more complex negotiations, and that accusations of neutralising dissent need to be looked at more carefully. Art critic JJ Charlesworth has also described how this ‘new art’ is obsessed with audience inclusion above “artistic insights” giving it the “credentials to become the official art of the new

administration” (Charlesworth 2000a).<sup>32</sup> Claire Bishop in ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and its discontents’ (Bishop 2006a) argues that this work needs to be analysed in terms of its criticality as art (rather than politics or ethics), which she says is particularly pressing in Britain due to the fact that,

...New Labour uses a rhetoric almost identical to that of socially engaged art to steer culture towards policies of social inclusion. Reducing art to statistical information about target audiences and ‘performance indicators’, the government prioritises social effect over considerations of artistic quality. (Bishop 2006a)

For Bishop, it seems clear that social effect and artistic quality are quite different things. She asks if the ‘non-believers’ (who reject any connection between art and social effects) and the ‘believers’ in social change have any (conceptual) place to meet? The ‘social turn’ in art is coupled, she suggests, with an ethical turn in art criticism that prefers process to product and collaboration (or ‘authorial renunciation’ which she equates to the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice) over singular authorship. She suggests that, “accusations of mastery and egocentrism are levelled at artists who work with participants to realise a project, instead of allowing it to emerge through consensual collaboration” as “emphasis is shifted away from the disruptive specificity of a given work and onto a generalised set of moral precepts” (ibid.). Such criticisms are what have led me to choose a theoretical framework for cultural democracy which I hope goes some way to challenge debates, politics and commissioning models that re-enforce such dichotomies between collaboration and authorship; criticality and social change.

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<sup>32</sup> Other critics of the instrumentalisation of culture through New Labour cultural policy include the Manifesto Club in their ‘Championing Artistic Autonomy’ article (Manifesto Club 2006) and Munira Mirza in ‘Culture Vultures’ (Mirza 2006).

## *Theoretical Framework*

### **3. A Theoretical framework for cultural democracy**

I have outlined the social and political contexts in which the democratisation of culture has evolved into an industry of commissioning art based on its social and economic impacts. In this section I present a theoretical framework for cultural democracy in this context, and how it applies to the four projects carried out as part of this study. This framework is configured to problematise the terms culture and democracy rather than take them as affirmative concepts. It presents a space to question the function, mediation and communication of these terms when they are used together and I suggest that this in itself is a way to rethink cultural democracy as a critical practice.

I have chosen to take the volition to ‘wake-up’, de-alienate and emancipate oneself and others from a capitalist unconsciousness through critical knowledge as a starting point, because I understand this to be integral to both art and political practices. I then go on to address critical pedagogy as a way of acknowledging the position from which one is ‘liberated’ to ask where one speaks from, and who one speaks to? This leads me to a discussion on intersubjectivity and dialogical exchange as an important characteristic of cultural democracy before ending with an analysis of the possibility of **dialectic**, performative acts of subversion in the everyday. Together, these theoretical anchors allow me to reflect on the extent to which my own practice negotiates spaces for cultural democracy to occur.

#### **3.1 Emancipation through critical knowledge in the context of the art commission**

Cultural democracy and democratising culture both have their roots in the notion that involvement in art is connected to emancipation, liberation and empowerment, but of course the political and economic frameworks of these terms vary dramatically depending on the agendas of who is using them. In the context of New Labour’s cultural policy, for example, claims of participation or mere association with art were often linked to reducing crime, improving employment prospects and increasing tourism, to name just a few. While there may be a nod towards ‘artistic quality’, ‘innovation’ or ‘risk’ in an artists’ brief, these terms are rarely contested. The aims and objectives of a project can incorporate different (conflicting) sets of politics and ideals, but they are (to different degrees of transparency) based on the agendas of those funding, delivering, initiating and participating in the process. The reason a project is funded, the motivation for an artist to accept that invitation and the expectations of participants are linked to the ethics, mores, praxis, political ideals and economic circumstance of those involved, and these can vary significantly, even among one commissioned project. I am locating cultural democracy in the concept of ‘critical knowledge’, and suggest that this could, at times, conflict or cause friction (if working well, I argue) with the frameworks and agendas involved in commissioning art to effect social change.

Artists are often left to covertly or subtly weave their critical practice into a commission, hoping the 'right people' will pick up on it. I am proposing here, however, that while it may be the aim of some artists to pursue a 'critical practice', in terms of cultural democracy this is not solely reserved for the artist to do so. I am specifically linking criticality to the process of questioning, making visible and subverting systems of power and oppression. This negotiation of power and oppression stems from the Marxist notion of 'critical knowledge' which connects to the idea that art could act as an antidote to the alienating effect of capitalism – as a wake up call from delusions of freedom and 'false consciousness'. Specifically, I am concerned here with the meaning and application of critical reflection in the context of art as labour. I am framing the democratising of culture as the artists' commission which relies on a distinction between paid artists and commissioners and the voluntary participation of others.

Cultural theorist John Roberts has described collaborative art as a 'self-conscious process of production' where "art's place within the social division of labour is made transparent as a form of socialised labour" (Roberts 2004, p.557). Socialised labour is de-skilled, alienating work based on a capitalist value-formation that separates the intellect from labour as a precondition for economic growth (ibid.). Roberts points out that "from Romanticism to the Frankfurt School the sensuousness of art (its non-instrumentality) has played a defining role in the *imagined* de-alienation of socialised labour" (ibid., p.560, my italics). What is significant, however, is the way in which the individualisation of freelance, self-sufficient creative labour is not necessarily the idealised goal of a practicing critical thinker but just another, different form of alienated labour still predicated on economic growth but without the security and employment rights full time work once offered. Cultural theorist Angela McRobbie asks: "How can the relentless process of individualisation in the world of cultural work be kept apart from the seeming inevitability of local and global neoliberalism and be re-directed as a force for re-vitalising the democratising process?" (McRobbie 2003). Alongside the necessary urge to develop a critical, reflexive attitude and practice ("thinking creatively is now at the heart of the new knowledge economy", ibid.) one must ask what a turn towards critical thinking is for, and what the implications are. The 'will to critique', just as the 'will to empower' needs problematising in terms of moving from one form of exploitative labour to another. It is not enough to accept and protect cultural work to enact this 'emancipation' through critical knowledge, rather there is also potential to critique the need for professional cultural work in the first place. The context of the contract as represented in the form



of the socially engaged art commission is therefore worthy of critique.<sup>33</sup> A contract in this instance implies a formal agreement between two (or more) parties that may exist as a written and signed document or as a verbal understanding rather than a legally binding document such as a brief set by a commissioner or an invitation from an artist to someone else to participate in a workshop.<sup>34</sup> The analysis of the contract, I argue, can expose the inherent power relations in the commissioning process. Such a contract implies the beginning of a relationship that can sometimes be balanced, and at others the scale tips in favour of one party over the other. Like a pair of scales trying to reach equilibrium, the bond tightens, acting as a site of negotiation and constant re-evaluation by both sides as they constantly reconsider the value placed on the encounter.

The modernist avant-garde notion of the artist as problem solver, critic, outside observer and free agent, underpins recent developments of the socially engaged art commission in which artists are employed to perform this particular role. The expansion of culture as an industry (as predicted by Adorno and Horkheimer in 1944) has seen the development of the service-industry style contract for artists who are able to use their skills in facilitation and creativity to entertain, consult and critique within capitalist conditions of wage labour. The contract, however, can be both a form of participation and of manipulation which perhaps benefits a practice able to identify and work towards specific goals, but it is perhaps more difficult to apply to an open brief or way of working which does not have a set of predefined aims and objectives. Sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2007), for example, describe the idea of the contract as a form of exploitation that the worker voluntarily enters into, as an enforced commitment to work. The creative industry model of artistic commerce seems to have been wholeheartedly embraced by many politicians, commissioners, funders and artists as a productive means to support an ‘experience economy’ and even help the economy out of its current troubles. However the models of commissioning outlined here are not profit-making – at least not directly for the people carrying out the work – indeed, artists are generally underpaid for the hours they work and the majority, if not all of the participants, are rarely paid at all.

John Hartley in ‘The Creative Industries’ (2005) states how these industries are “a case of democratising culture in the context of commerce” (ibid., p.18). Citizens are framed as consumers and democracy becomes another term for consumer rights. The social function of creativity,

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<sup>33</sup> Janna Graham and Robert Sember (working as part of the art collective UltraRed), for example, described their interest in analysing and reflecting on the invitation itself as ‘the unfolding performativity of the invitation’ (Graham & Sember 2009).

<sup>34</sup> In the projects I carried out there has sometimes been a physical contract (outlining fee, ownership, aims and objectives) but always a symbolic contract that remains unwritten (and often unspoken) that occurs during informal encounters with others.

Hartley goes on to write, is based on the ability of creative individuals to “find places where access, capital, infrastructure, regulation, markets, property rights and large-scale process can monetize that creativity” (ibid., p.28). He describes the creative industries as working in the name of global capitalism rather than against it: “‘Art’ needs to be understood as something intrinsic, not opposed, to the productive capacities of a contemporary global, mediated, technology-supported economy” (Hartley 2005, p.8-9). Josephine Berry and Anthony Iles (2009) on the other hand, ask: “what recourse do artists critical of the ‘creative industries’ model have to making art in public? Is it even possible to make critical art publicly any more?” (ibid., p.20). Many arts practitioners are wrapped up in this industry (willingly or not) and so it seems crucial to ask: what does it mean for a critical and committed practice that not only contests the commercialisation of creativity but also the bedrock of ownership that it relies on, to resist being defined as a creative industry? This also leaves the question as to the relevance of the artist framed as a professional, with qualifications, daily rates and contractual obligations. How does the notion of the professional artist fit with cultural democracy or is this a contradiction in terms? A socially progressive practice, such as cultural democracy, one could argue, goes against the grain of an increasingly professionalised creative industry which relies on the individual ownership and selling on of ideas.

Henri Lefebvre refers to critical knowledge in his ‘Critique of Everyday Life’ (1947): “There can be no knowledge of the everyday without critical knowledge of society (as a whole). Inseparable from practice or praxis, knowledge encompasses an agenda for transformation” (Lefebvre 1991, p.98). He stresses the significance of critiquing society in order to understand the alienation brought about by capitalism. Lefebvre’s first volume of the ‘Critique of Everyday Life’ was influential to Guy Debord and the Situationist International in the 1950s. Following the line of Marxist critique of capitalism, Debord’s ‘Society of the Spectacle’ (1967) suggested that people needed ‘waking-up’ from the hypnosis of the spectacle of mass media by a series of radical ‘situations’ which reorder life, politics and art. With the acknowledgment of power and oppression comes the dilemma of what to do about it, beyond skirting around the issues, making excuses for them, and inadvertently strengthening them in the process.

When and how does critical knowledge occur? A **dialogical encounter** with someone else may then lead to a realisation of one’s oppressed and/or oppressive position. Paulo Freire has termed this ‘conscientization’ (Freire 1972, p.15). Jacques Rancière in ‘Problems and Transformations in Critical Art’ (in Bishop 2004), has also described the intention of critical art as raising consciousness of the “mechanisms of domination in order to turn the spectator into a conscious agent in the transformation of the world” (ibid., p.83). The Cultural Policy Collective described

how cultural democracy “emphasises the importance of reflective knowledge and meaningful communication for a healthy polity” (The Argument, Cultural Policy Collective 2004). Kester (2004) also refers to how, as a distant observer, the artist is able to “shock us out of this perceptual complacency, to force us to see the world anew...[lifting] the viewers outside of the familiar boundaries of a common language, existing modes of representation and even their own sense of self” (Kester 2004, p.12). Brian Holmes, in 2007 described what he calls an ‘oppositional device’ as a social tool, something between a prop and a performance that produces or provokes public speech. He asks who makes use of such devices: “Who takes up that fundamentally performative speech act that can change daily life? And then who tries to take over that public speech, to take it into their own hands?” (Holmes 2007, p.38). Bertolt Brecht was one of grandfather’s of this critical aesthetics who, through his theory and practice of ‘epic theatre’, employed ‘alienation’ or ‘defamiliarisation’ techniques, such as actors directly addressing the audience or reading stage directions out loud. This aimed to encourage viewers to critically reflect on the play as a fictional world, provoking them to go and effect change in the real one (Kershaw 1992).

There is also a tradition of Victorian morality and pedagogy of civilising the working classes through educational reform where the ‘deformed subject’ is transformed into a good citizen (ideally a property-owning, Christian, middle-class tax payer) – a tradition that underpins current commissioning processes. This legacy of the Christian socialist movement, I argue, is still one of the foundations of funding for such commissions. Artists become (paid) reformers or missionaries, out to improve, connect-up, rescue and ‘harvest’ the working classes by working with “a given subject who is defined a priori as in need of empowerment or access to creative/expressive skills” (Kester 2004, p.137). There are often cultural, social and economic differences between the artist and their ‘subjects’ and in most cases (as Braden pointed out in 1978) the artist does not live in the same area as their ‘subjects to be transformed’ (ibid., p.80).

Who is in a position to initiate these ruptures, reflections and devices? What conditions are needed for these ruptures to occur and what are the consequences? How is this process resisted? It is not a case of isolating these ‘ruptures’ and romanticising or aestheticising them, but of understanding the role of the artist and others in this process and considering this practice in terms of its embeddedness in the realities of working life. The commissioning process as a vehicle for ‘empowerment’ or ‘emancipation’ through critical knowledge needs problematising. There is a difference between ‘enforced’ critical knowledge, imposed from above through a creative service industry that delivers a certain kind of enlightened ‘awareness’ and acts of unprogrammed cultural democracy that break with this programme. The commissioning process often relies on the artist-figure as imbued with

an all seeing eye with superior insight, able to see the bigger picture. Participants are then as “hapless victims of cognitive incompetence who must be guided and ‘catalyzed’ by the insight-laden artist” (Kester 2004, p.80). There is an assumption that the art(ist) can awaken the viewer or participant into a state of critical self-consciousness. A familiar model is for a commissioner to select an individual (with a track record), promote them to the position of instigator and imbue them with the tools to enact a loud collective wake up call. Kester calls this the ‘orthopaedic aesthetic’ which “conceives of the viewer as an inherently flawed subject whose perceptual apparatus requires correction” (ibid., p.88). Implying that the viewer is in some way flawed, ignorant or ill up until this point, the artist then applies their unique concoction of conceptual participatory art to remedy this imperfection. The commission therefore provides a framework to push against, and in the case of the projects carried out as part of this research, such interactions can disrupt the mechanisms of a creative service industry and what constitutes participation in it. These interventions, I suggest, constitute cultural democracy, and occur in spite of, rather than because of, the commissioning of art to effect social change.

### **3.2 Enforced sociability**

The underlying assumptions that people are better off if they talk to each other; that to socialise holds potential agency (through empowering people to help themselves) and that art can facilitate that process, influences the investment of funding in socially engaged art commissions such as ‘Het Reservaat’ and ‘Critical Friends, two of my projects which form part of this research’.<sup>35</sup> Reigniting a lost sense of community and activating an otherwise passive community, for example, are driving forces for the commitment shared by commissioners and the artists they work with. Jayne Murray, one of the artists commissioned by Stream as part of the ‘Peninsula’ programme for example, stated how she thinks “socialising with other people” is a basic human need (Murray 2008) and I myself was keen to develop a project in Leidsche Rijn with the people who had inadvertently paid for me to be there. The ‘Peninsula’ projects in particular are seen as having a role in bridging the gaps between diverse communities, and aim to prevent the area from becoming segregated whilst encouraging people from different parts of the area to meet and work together. Referring to ‘In a League of Our Own’, for example, a resident reflects, “It is a nice idea...probably quite old fashioned, a way of meeting” (Stitt 2008).

Kester has written about the history and instances of artists as problem solvers or rather taking on a role to find ways to see a problem differently, not necessarily change it (Kester 2004, p.66). He gives the Austrian art collective WochenKlausur as an example, who carry out ‘concrete

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<sup>35</sup> The term ‘invest’ is purposefully used here to suggest that even ‘grant-giving’ expects a return on the investment made in a project no matter how intangible that result might be.

interventions' by identifying specific problems, and setting clear goals for solving them (ibid., p.98). WochenKlausur are happy to use art in an instrumental way in order to get something done and have developed a methodology over time which they apply in various contexts in which they have been commissioned.<sup>36</sup> Despite its similarity to social work and activism, they label their work as art because they think this allows them to think beyond boundaries of discipline and 'outside hierarchies' (ibid., p.101). While WochenKlausur's methodological approach is useful to consider here, the extent to which their practice is 'outside hierarchies' is questionable when they are embroiled in specific invitations, commissions and contracts. In a commissioning culture the artist is often treated as the expert who can 'solve' social problems by implementing a liberating experience (an orthopedic aesthetic).<sup>37</sup> The artist is praised and rewarded for their good work but how do we assess what has changed on the ground? How are people used as subjects in artists' performances of liberation?

Barbara Cruikshank in her book 'The Will to Empower. Democratic citizens and other subjects' (1999) wrote about 'technologies of citizenship' as participatory and democratic schemes that aim to make individuals politically active and capable of self-governance (i.e. turning subjects into citizens). But, she argues, as citizens, we are still made by and therefore subject to power. Commissions such as 'Het Reservaat' and 'Critical Friends' could be understood as exercises in such technologies of citizenship. Cruikshank unpicks the history of empowerment and citizenship by questioning the underlying assumption that to empower is to gain agency, political power and freedom. She suggests that citizenship is based on the notion of the state helping people to help themselves and is still a mode of control rather than emancipation and agency: "the will to empower contains the twin possibilities of domination and freedom" (Cruikshank 1999, p.2).

Cruikshank described her investigation as trying to understand how democracy is thought and practiced rather than suggesting what it should be and that it is automatically a good thing. Democracy is still fraught with power struggles that do not disappear even if one considers oneself an empowered citizen with agency. There is a perpetual cycle of attempts (and industries built on providing this empowerment service, such as the art commissioning industry) to encourage participation, which aim to turn supposedly apathetic, dependent subjects into thinking,

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<sup>36</sup> WochenKlausur's projects start with an invitation from an art institution, which provides them with an 'infrastructural framework and cultural capital'. They usually have a strictly limited timeframe of eight weeks to realise a project and work towards concrete goals. They describe their process as requiring 'cunning strategies and trickery' (WochenKlausur n.d.).

<sup>37</sup> For example, I evaluated a large-scale series of art commissions (2006-7) called 'Art U Need' curated by Bob and Roberta Smith and commissioned by Commissions East and Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership (TGSEP). The artists' commissions were tasked with economic regeneration and reducing crime and fear of crime among other objectives, which were in line with TGSEP's plans for South Essex. The ironic title of the scheme and resulting projects went some way in testing the relevance of such specific output-orientated objectives to artist-led public art projects.

responsible, pro-active, independent, self-sufficient citizens. Participation has become a term used to imply a path to such empowerment.

This will to empower can also be connected to the UK government's policy of social exclusion and inclusion developed by New Labour in the late 1990s, outlined in the previous chapter, which provides the backdrop to funding criteria for many art commissions, such as 'Peninsula'. Ruth Levitas (2005) has written a thorough critique of social inclusion and the diminishing role of the state in a neoliberal society that is increasingly outsourcing the management of poverty.<sup>38</sup> She refers to Amitai Etzioni<sup>39</sup> who advocates social responsibility as a "remoralisation of social life" and an increase in unpaid voluntary work through services to communities and families (Levitas 2005, p.91). Levitas asks who Etzioni expects to disregard their own individual interests (the bedrock of capitalism) and carry out this unpaid social work on which communities apparently depend (ibid., p.94)?<sup>40</sup> She also refers to John Gray (1993) who suggests that welfare provision should be provided by families, neighbourhoods, churches and friends before the State steps in (ibid., p.100). This is extremely relevant where commissioned art is concerned, which tends to side step radical redistribution in favour of helping people to help themselves due to the framing of commission. Through the socially engaged art commission, artists often become the facilitators of this self-provision and act as catalysts for Etzioni's 'remoralisation of social life'.

Echoing Braden's (1978) critique of artists' commissions that 'take art to the people' and animate communities, there continues to be growing concern over the ways in which the rhetoric of social exclusion has led to tokenistic projects that claim to encourage participation but leave little evidence of how participants have been 'empowered' through this process. This failure to empower could be because of the top-down nature of the projects themselves that prevent power from changing hands and instead strengthen the existing power structures. Recent research, for example, has pointed to claims that art projects devised to tackle social inclusion are not necessarily effecting change on the scale they set out to. Researchers at Leeds Metropolitan University (2002), for example, have found that projects that were meant to tackle social inclusion appear to have had little success in opening up wider decision-making process beyond the project (Leeds Metropolitan

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<sup>38</sup> Levitas maps the notion of inclusion as employment. The 'Borrie report' published by The Commission on Social Justice (Borrie 1994), for example, stressed the interdependency of economic efficiency and social cohesion (Levitas 2005, p.33) and from this point on, "the ethics of community" were combined with "the dynamics of a market economy" and equality was based on equality of economic opportunity (ibid., p.34).

<sup>39</sup> His publications include 'The Spirit of Community' (1995) and 'The New Golden Rule' (1998).

<sup>40</sup> This is echoed in the current Prime Minister, David Cameron's plans for a 'Big Society' based on promoting a culture of volunteerism.

University 2002, p.6).<sup>41</sup> They found that projects were considered to have ‘worked’ according to the “instinctual response of the professionals responsible for the projects” rather than evidence from the socially excluded participants themselves. The report highlighted the fact that arts organisations delivering these projects may not have the capacity to carry out sufficient evaluation capable of ‘proving’ the case, and that often the pressure to present the project in a good light means “there are clear imperatives to present a positive impression of the work of projects” (ibid., p.7). The focus is on collating outputs rather than developing more comprehensive studies of outcomes.<sup>42</sup> What counts as a desirable benefit to one person, may not be the same to another, and the criteria of success may change according to the politics of the funders (ibid.). So while the criteria for successful or beneficial outcomes are dependent on the views of those measuring the projects, it is also of concern that these criteria are often set and measured by those funding or delivering the project rather than the so-called ‘participants’, which is something I have tried to address through my practice. Just as cultural democracy creates ruptures in the will to critique, so it disrupts the drive to empower. I am looking for moments of cultural democracy that weave their way uncomfortably through the prescribed frameworks of imposed art-as-service contracts in a way that exposes the structures and frameworks of these contracts.

### **3.3 Positionality of artists and participants: critical pedagogy**

I want now to ask, who initiates and participates in these radical situations, oppositional devices, concrete interventions, conscientization and orthopaedic aesthetics? In the early 1970s Freire suggested the fight for liberation must come from the oppressed themselves who must find mechanisms for becoming independent and no longer dependent on their oppressors.

Only as [the oppressed] discover themselves to be ‘hosts’ of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy...The oppressor shows solidarity with the oppressed only when he [sic] stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with... (Freire 1972, p.25-6)

Freire described how it is for the oppressed to reveal the situation of oppression, and through their praxis, commit to its abolition. Only then, once transformation is successful, does such pedagogy become a process of liberation for all (oppressors included) (ibid., p.31). This does not imply that the oppressors are the liberated ones; indeed, according to Freire, it is the responsibility of the

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<sup>41</sup> According to Leeds Metropolitan University researchers, social inclusion projects should foster involvement in decision-making and agenda setting, exercising rights and taking responsibilities, while individual projects might “work hard to welcome participation” (Leeds Metropolitan University 2002, p.6).

<sup>42</sup> An output is the result of a process; an outcome refers to the effects and changes that are a result of that output.

oppressed to liberate themselves and their oppressors (ibid., p.21). Freire argues that the oppressed must 'reflectively participate' in their own liberation: "The presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation but committed involvement" (ibid., p.44). It is not for the 'oppressors' to lead the oppressed on a path to liberation, in fact, as Freire points out, "it would be a contradiction in terms if the oppressors not only defended but actually implemented a liberating education" (ibid., p.30). This predicament is of paramount concern to my research and connects to the notion of empowerment as an illusion of freedom from oppression that can instead leave power relations intact (Cruikshank 1999). Elizabeth Ellsworth, for example, refers to the empowering aspect of critical pedagogy as "treat[ing] the symptoms but leav[ing] the disease unnamed and untouched" (Ellsworth 1989, p.307), and Becky Flores has described empowerment as "endors[ing] a hidden curriculum that reinforces the status quo it seeks to interrogate" (Flores 2004).

The position from which critical pedagogy occurs should therefore also be the subject of critique. What is the presumed ideological framework of criticality, pedagogy, culture, democracy and liberation that dictates a certain kind of participation? Flores refers to Peter McLaren (1988) who stressed that in order to develop critical pedagogy, it is crucial to consider the premise of 'a social critique of ideology' in order to avoid "reproduc[ing] the very structures it is seeking to displace" (McLaren 1988, p.177). Ellsworth has also pointed to the problem with the term 'critical' as it becomes a code word that hides the political agenda. While collaborative art projects may claim to be political or critical – how have power relations shifted in practice? The task is to avoid the presumption that critical pedagogy refers to one, universal, rational version of critical knowledge and practice, based on freedom from oppression (Ellsworth 1989, p.305). Whose version of freedom are we signing up to when we practice 'critical pedagogy' or cultural democracy? Political theorist Chantal Mouffe, for example, argues for political philosophy's role in proposing different interpretations of justice, equality and liberty, rather than tasking itself with their 'true meanings' (Mouffe 1993, p.115). Projects that set out to be critical may hide an implicit agenda of how the instigators think the world should be, and expect a certain critical outlook that reaffirms that agenda. Flores goes on to remind us that, "empowerment is trapped within its own ideological framework where the only question that is begging is empowerment on whose terms?" (Flores 2004). I understand cultural democracy as a critical practice through which to ask this question and develop a critique of the ideologies and conditions which frame that practice.

How does one move beyond this stultifying situation where critical approaches to tackling oppression politely leave the power structures in tact, maybe even a little strengthened? Freire



refers to the need for the oppressed to recognise themselves as hosts of the oppressors, and it is this critical self-awareness that I think is key to understanding cultural democracy. What happens when people refuse to perform the role of the rational, critical thinking democratic citizen? What happens when people start participating in the ‘wrong’ way, not according to the rules of the game? Recognising the ‘rules’ and how and why they need challenging can lead to purposeful participation in the ‘wrong’ way through acts of subversive disobedience. In 1979 the writer, poet and activist Audre Lorde wrote about the need of the oppressed to abandon the ‘tools’ of the oppressor in order to effect change (Lorde 1984). In ‘The Master’s Tools will Never Dismantle the Master’s House’ Lorde addressed the Second Sex Conference in New York and in accusing the feminist movement of racism she called for the necessity of the interdependency of difference within the theory and practice of the movement. By recognising differences, refusing to ignore them and working with others excluded from the master’s house, women, she suggested, would be able to gain strength and effect change. Change, she argued, must come from the recognition of those differences and the interdependency of those differences, rather than any affiliation or reliance on the ‘master’s house’ for support. Continuing to use the tools of patriarchy, she stated, will only strengthen the house, keep the excluded out while letting the few in who are brandishing those tools, but it will never lead to the dismantling of the house itself in order to effect real change.

The issue of how and where an individual positions oneself in relation to power, the master or oppressor is not a clear or easy task. The artist, writer and film-making Trinh T. Minh-ha, for example, has stated how, “in many ways, I think it is women of colour who are often best placed to engage and also disengage with master discourses, since our entry into the ‘master’s house’ continues to be a forced entry rather than a polite invitation” (Minh-ha 1999 p.155). Minh-ha uses her films and writing to reflect on the “tools and the relations of production that define us... By doing so, what I hope for is to provide myself and others with tools not only to beat the master at his own game, but also to transform the terms of our consciousness” (Minh-ha 1999, p.157). This reflects the concerns of Cruikshank (1999), Ellsworth (1989) and Flores (2004) in that there needs to be a critical transformation of the underlying consciousness of the oppressed not just a focus on fighting the oppressor.

It is important to note that the context I am researching here is one based on formal invitations rather than forced entry. I am asking: to what extent can these commissioned socially engaged art practices disengage with master discourses when they are being employed by them? Such disengagement would surely dash any chance of continued employment from the ‘master’ on

which artists and others have come to depend. I argue that the framing and commissioning of socially engaged art further strengthens invisible power and illusions of emancipation and ask: how does this industry work to regulate and institutionalise ‘free subjectivity’ (Barnett 2003, p.96)? If commissioning has become another means to organise, govern and regulate cultural life (ibid.), to what extent are these projects a means of placating governed subjects?

Power and oppression represented by the ‘master’s house’ are not overtly embodied in an identifiable enemy figure but are much more evasive, omnipresent and perhaps unrecognisable in the context of neoliberal society, and this is where the philosopher Jacques Rancière’s writing provides some insight. Lorde took the position that there was an ‘outside’ to fight from and an obvious ‘enemy’ to dismantle but as with Freire’s oppressed/oppressor dichotomy, this is problematic. The argument falls too easily into an, ‘us’ versus ‘them’ argument. Whereas community artists in the 1960s and 1970s were interested in facilitating community action connected to campaigns for change, equality and rights, by the late 1990s, artists had become paid facilitators, employed by the same people whom they would have been working against twenty to thirty years ago.

Rather than thinking in these dichotomous terms, Rancière puts forward the notion of the **distribution of the sensible** which refers to the allocation of sensory experiences that frame participation in a community (Rancière 2006, p.43). Sensory experiences put people in their place as ‘embodied allegories of inequality’, revealing, “who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed” (ibid., p.12). He suggests aesthetics are at the core of politics: “Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of space and the possibilities of time” (ibid., p.13). This way of thinking about community seems to provide a much more nuanced and complex way of approaching what is common and what is uncommon to a community and how this distribution is negotiated and disrupted. Philosopher and critical theorist Slavoj Žižek, for example, refers to how Rancière endeavours to “elaborate the contour of those magic, violently poetic moments of political subjectivisation in which the excluded (‘lower classes’) put forward their claim to speak for themselves” (ibid., p.69). Rancière states that artistic practices are not ‘exceptions’ to other practices, rather they “represent and reconfigure the distribution of these activities” (ibid., p.45). I locate cultural democracy in this act of reclaiming the right to speak for oneself from other iterations.

The arts are only ever able to lend to projects of domination or emancipation what they are able to lend to them, that is to say, quite simply, what they have in common with them: bodily positions and movement, functions of speech, the parceling out of the visible and the invisible. Furthermore, the autonomy they can enjoy or the subversion they can claim credit for rest on the same foundation. (ibid., p.19)

Rancière contests the “vicious circle of critical art” (ibid., p.83), which implies every act of resistance leads to a strengthening of the dominant oppressors. Meanings, he writes, are transmitted by ‘ruptures’, not just spectacles that “lead to an ‘awareness’ of the state of the world” (ibid., p.63). He suggests instead that ‘suitable political art’ negotiates the ‘political readability’ of a work that threatens the ‘sensible’ aspect and the ‘radical uncanniness’ that threatens to destroy all political meaning’ (ibid., p.63). Critical art, he suggests, needs to,

...negotiate the tension that pushes art towards life...It’s this negotiation between the forms of art and those of non-art that permits the formation of combinations of elements capable of speaking twice: from their readability and from their unreadability. (ibid., p.84)

Such a dialectic approach to critique allows for the tension to remain between political readability and radical uncanniness of a process. Adorno describes such a dialectic critique (participating and not participating in culture) as a potential way to increase “cultural criticism until the notion of culture itself is negated, fulfilled and surmounted in one” (quoted by Bernstein in Adorno 2007, p.17). The artist and writer Trinh-T Minh-ha, for example, tries to create a ‘hyphenated play’ between political discourse and poetic language (Minh-ha 1999, p.219). I locate cultural democracy in this paradoxical and conflictual distribution. It is a site of struggle and negotiation of power that strives for political relevance and readability but also relies on a radical unreadability to distinguish it from other forms of co-opted practice and invisible power. How can we negotiate the conditions that suppress or encourage this tension between political readability and radical uncanniness?

### **3.4 Cultural democracy in action?**

Articulations of different models of citizenship that may be at odds with dominant praxis could be understood as a **radical democracy**, which recognises the significance of conflict and agonism and the illusion of a unified, homogeneous community (Mouffe 1993, p.104-5). Cultural democracy as ruptures or expressions of conflictual models of citizenship, are still, however, embedded in a network of power relations. To what extent is an act spontaneous and autonomous when as citizens we are regulating our behaviour by consenting to being governable actors (even as we display

moments of radical agency) (Barnett 2003, p.83)? I want to look at the paradoxical situation that assumes an individual has the will and ability to attain autonomy whilst considering the guidelines and rules that ascribe that autonomy (ibid.).

There is a further paradox in that critical knowledge as cultural democracy requires liberalism (characterised by a pluralistic, individualised, subjective approach) coupled with democracy (characterised by equality, consensus, and a collective 'we'). While it may seem that these positions are incompatible (a crisis according to political theorist Carl Schmitt), it is the tension that arises as they collide that, according to Mouffe, is so essential to a **radical democracy** (Mouffe 1993, p.104-5). The answer is not to apply supposedly shared moral guidelines for the common good to curb rampant self-interest, rather, Mouffe suggests, that we need to rethink the ethics of the political (ibid., p.113). If, as Schmitt suggests, in a democracy "equals are to be treated equally; this necessarily implies that unequals will not be treated equally" (ibid., p.105), then we need to acknowledge that there is a "permanent 'constitutive outside'... an exterior to the community that makes its existence possible" (ibid., p.114). What is needed, Mouffe asserts, are "different modes of conceiving of our role as citizens, and to visualise what kind of political community we want to constitute" (ibid., p.115).

Perhaps one way of conceiving of our role as citizens is through understanding the significance of these ruptures as autonomous expressions of free will. If a homogenous democracy of governed subjects requires citizens to behave and act in certain ways, what are the possibilities for occupying, temporarily, a 'constitutive outside' and acting in a way that is not in accord with the 'rules' of that given situation – would this then be a process of participating in the 'wrong' way? This offers us a new way of approaching the complexities of how, as individuals we think about, critically reflect upon, and interact with society. We both participate in, and reject norms of behaviour by 'squatting' social contexts, parasitically feeding off it and nourishing it with our actions. Michel de Certeau writes that it is the cultural activity of the non-producers of culture – the consumers - that make up a marginalised silent majority. Their "inferior access to information, financial means, and compensations of all kinds elicits an increased deviousness, fantasy, or laughter" (De Certeau 1984, p.xvii), as they become 'poets of their own acts', improvising and inventing their own ways of 'making do' (what de Certeau refers to as 'bricolage'). De Certeau's 'Practice of Everyday Life' (1980, 1984 – English translation) focuses on the ways in which people appropriate aspects of everyday life as a practice of 'tactics' (as opposed to 'strategies' which are imposed by authority and institutions). A 'tactic' is temporal rather than spatial because it does not have a place in society. It must be 'seized on the wing' and "constantly manipulate events in order

to turn them into ‘opportunities’” (ibid., p.xix). They are, according to de Certeau, decisions and ‘clever tricks’, which allow the ‘weak to make use of strong’. The consumer subverts their consumption and becomes the producer in that moment, without taking control of it or capitalising on it; it becomes a different kind of free exchange. De Certeau gives an example of this tactic as ‘la perruque’ (the wig) - “the worker’s own work disguised as work for his employer”, as “diverting time from the factory for work that is free, creative and precisely not directed towards profit” (ibid., p.25). I understand ‘la perruque’ as everyday, self-initiated, uninvited acts, which go against the grain of expected, acceptable behaviour or participation. De Certeau describes an act of ‘la perruque’ “may be as simple a matter as a secretary’s writing a love letter on ‘company time’ or as complex as a cabinetmaker’s ‘borrowing’ a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room” (de Certeau 1984, p.25). Such practices are often ignored, penalised or brushed under the carpet as irrelevant (ibid., p.26), and yet it is these diversions that I want to engage in and understand as examples of cultural democracy – as ways of thinking differently about the complex way in which culture is produced in society. These everyday acts of subversion and disobedience, I argue, help to understand agency and critical knowledge by reclaiming social and cultural critique of the ideologies and conditions that frame the distribution of the sensible.

Whilst ‘la perruque’ implies an individualistic impulse to act, I am interested in conflating this approach with a communal or collaborative (democratic) outlook, thus keeping the dilemma between these concepts rather than allowing one to overcome the other. Conflictual consensus or ‘dissensus’ (Mouffe 2000) may be a way of understanding this conflation of the concepts of individual and communal structures. Mouffe identifies an **agonistic struggle** as one where principles are agreed but interpretations of them differ and coexist. Rosalynd Deutsch has also written about open, pluralistic public space, which relies on a conflictual relation “between a social identity and its ‘constitutive outside’” (quoted in Fotiardi 2009). Sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas’ public sphere is the site of tension between the self-interested and collective motivation where participants can express themselves, but who “must adhere to certain performative rules that insulate this discursive space from the coercion and inequality that constrain human communication in normal daily life” (Kester 2004, p.109). Participating in this sphere, according to Habermas, can lead to ‘self-transformation’: “This self-critical awareness can lead, in turn, to a capacity to see our views, and our identities, as contingent and subject to creative transformation” (ibid., p.110). The extent, to which these idealistic notions are practicable, in an increasingly privatised and controlled public sphere such as the UK, is questionable.

Conflations of public and individual interests are played out through ‘intersubjective’, dialogic

exchanges. For example, if an artist is working with an existing ‘politically coherent group’, the exchange can be more two-way as “active listening and intersubjective vulnerability play a more central role” (ibid., p.151). The commission or contract as a site of investigation, reflection and action is a ‘common’ ground for ‘intersubjective communication’ (a term used by Wolfgang Zinggl, co-founder of WochenKlausur, quoted in Kester, ibid.). My research explores the temporary occasions for the mingling of subjectivities which lead to the manipulation, morphing and transformation of the original commissions and artists proposals, reflecting the journey of critical knowledge, positionality and acts of ‘la perruque’. Referring to collaborative art practices, John Roberts introduces the idea of recouping the technologies that have been responsible for alienating labour, which offers another example of ‘la perruque’.

While the mass worker under Fordism and post-Fordism was only able to re-establish his or her autonomy through the sabotage of machines, under the new digital economy the worker-as-technician ‘enjoys’ an increasing capacity to re-appropriate computer technologies for other ends. (Roberts 2004, p.562)

Roberts argues that it is the contradiction between increased routine waged work and the crisis of waged work that has an impact on collaborative practices in the 1990s. By appropriating forms of socialised labour, collaborations are working towards a critique of ‘value-form’ capitalism, dissolving or reclaiming these use-values into everyday practice (ibid., p.562-3). Collaborative practices redistribute authorship and become the agency for the dissolution of autonomy (ibid., p.563). Kester takes artist Stephen Willats’ method of working with residents as an example of ‘collaborative interaction’ between the artist and residents, “to help them distance themselves from the life-world of the estate and to reflect back critically on the network of visible and invisible forces that pattern that world” (Kester 2004, p.93). While Willats applies an ‘orthopaedic aesthetic’ that assumes critical reflection is what the residents need, the findings and responses to the questions they have set themselves, are apparently arrived at collectively as the “product of a collaboratively generated insight” (ibid., p.95). As artists meet others,

...both the artist and his or her collaborators will have their existing perceptions challenged; the artist may well recognise relationships or connections that the community members have become inured to, while the collaborators will also challenge the artist’s preconceptions about the community itself and about his or her own function as an artist. What emerges is a new set of insights, generated at the intersection of both perspectives and catalyzed through the collaborative production of a given project. (ibid., p.95)

This metamorphosis of people (participants or artists) over a given time incidentally, due to, or in spite of, an action that has been labelled art relates to philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of dialogical exchange "that opens both participants to the 'excess' that is made possible by the provisional blurring of boundaries between self and other" (ibid., p.123).

This blurring is fleeting, however, before the roles and responsibilities embodied in the model of commissioning often take their distinct shapes again and the artist becomes a 'tourist of the disempowered', "travelling from one site of poverty and oppression to the next and allowing his or her various collaborators to temporarily inhabit the privileged position of the expressive creator" (ibid.).<sup>43</sup> On the one hand, the commission has come about because of the autonomy ascribed to art but it also expects to transmit opportunities for others to attain their own autonomy by association with the commission. There is an invitation to think and act critically, but the power structures and framing of the commission as creative service economy wage labour imposes a certain kind of participation. There is a risk, I argue, that such commissioned collaborative practices reassert the distribution of the sensible rather than manage to disrupt it. Through the analysis of my practice in the following chapters I address the experiences and implications of this dilemma, and the conditions in which cultural democracy might occur.

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<sup>43</sup> Through the methodology and analysis of the projects, I make explicit my own role in initiating and manipulating the projects and thus unravel the points at which I have control and also, significantly, when this control slips away.

## *Methodology*



#### **4. Methodology**

Rather than using a predefined set of parameters and rules, the methodology for this research has evolved and come into focus *through* my practice. The methodology reflects the theoretical framework for cultural democracy outlined in the previous chapter in that it attempts to build a method for cultural democracy within a context of democratised culture, whilst interrogating the meanings and implications of this. The four projects follow an iterative process as generative metaphors of critical distance. They are honed and more deeply explored at each stage, resulting in a more nuanced understanding and practice of cultural democracy. While the four projects are distinct bodies of work, each based on specific contexts, it is the emerging method that allows for dialectical critical reflection and collective action that concerns me here.

I firstly clarify what I mean by practice based research as being located at the interstices of art and social science disciplines, why this reflects my chosen theoretical framework for cultural democracy and how this has informed the direction of the projects. Crucial to a methodology that claims to be participatory or intersubjective is acknowledging and problematising the power and position of the researcher/artist, which I go on to discuss in relation to the role editing plays in the projects and how issues of ‘**embezzlement**’ and ‘**false generosity**’ have been dealt with. Finally, I focus on the application of a generative metaphor of critical distance in the projects in relation to intersubjectivity and performativity.

##### **4.1 Interdisciplinary research**

I began my doctorate alongside social scientists, purposefully wanting to locate the research beyond the discipline of fine art or curating as I felt that the subject of my research had as much in common with ethnography, anthropology and sociology as it did with art and art histories. During the process of developing the research, however, I have come to realise that, while there are striking similarities, there are also fundamental differences in approaches, directions and motivations of social scientists and artists, and it is these differences that are crucial to sustain and bring to the fore. While a socially engaged art practice might look similar to empirical research methods (my projects have involved observations, workshops and interviews, for example), the purpose and framing of it might be very different. In my case, the practice has developed as an emerging methodology in order to rethink both the subject of the research and how it is researched and practiced.

The objectivity of the researcher has been questioned since the 1970s, marking a move towards a reflexive sociology and critical ethnography. Feminist discourses, for example, have for a long time

argued for a 'feminist objectivity'. Cultural critic and feminist philosopher Donna Haraway has suggested, "a doctrine of embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects: Feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledge" (Haraway 1988, p.581). This contests the notion of the objective researcher reliant on a professional distance, remaining unaffected by and not influencing their research. The feminist researcher, as I understand it, is embodied in a research process of permanent partiality (Haraway 2004, p.31). There is no false separation, but there is an awareness of one's own non-innocence, subjectivity and position in the research. The neutrality of the researcher is thrown into question, while the power relations in the research are placed under the spotlight. This has played out in the projects as I have tried to map my own agenda in relation to those of the commissioners, participants and funders. I do not consider the projects to have started from a position of neutrality, rather they are the results of a complex network of merging expectations and values.

Trinh T. Minh-ha's films have been a source of inspiration for me to rethink the relationship between research and practice. Her work disorients viewers who might expect 'information', 'documents' and 'truths' by problematising the relationship between artist/researcher and subject, issues of translation and the role of narrative, poetry and fictions in re-thinking cultural politics and theories. Her films from the 1980s, such as 'Reassemblage' (1982) and 'Surname Viet Given Name Nam' (1989) make use of her ethnographic research which she then reinterprets, scripts and re-works. 'Surname Viet Given Name Nam', for example, incorporates reflections on the methods she has chosen (such as how many interviews and what criteria she has used for the selection). Her voice comes through at different moments ('I find myself closer to fiction') and parts are left untranslated. Minh-ha explains how she makes films not,

...to teach someone a lesson. Nor am I interested in making films that induce people to cry, that solicit identification with the image seen, and facilitate consumption through a well-formulated story-spectacle or well-packaged information. I am however, interested in making films that *further engage filmmaking*, and contribute to the body of existing works that inspire and generate other works. (Minh-ha 1991, p.108)

The iterative nature of the projects carried out during this period of research moved from creating a collective performance of the future archaeology of a new town on to facilitating a group of 'Critical Friends' to research the commissioning process through to setting up a series of performative interviews with commissioners and practitioners and ended in creating a 'cultural production line' to collectively reflect on the mechanisms of collaborative production and art as

labour. This process is composed of an accumulation of meeting points and enactments of cultural democracy that *further engage cultural democracy*. Jean Pierre Greff (Director of Geneva Art School) describes the objective of art practice as research as engaging with the means of art to “develop the field of art and create new possibilities for the work” (Greff quoted in Douglas 2008, p.2). Artist and researcher Anne Douglas goes one step further and suggests:

Research led by the practice of the arts is concerned with how one can engage with the means of art to develop the field of art *and its role in the public sphere and create new possibilities for the work as well as new insights into how we live or might live in the world working alongside other disciplines and sectors*. (ibid.)

Each of the projects involved artists and non-artists but rather than emphasise the distinctions between these labels, the experiments focused on what it means for those involved to critically engage in a process (by participating in the ‘wrong’ way, for example). In this sense, the practice-led research developed the field of research and practice of cultural democracy and the commissioning of art to effect social change but also new insights into the nature of collaboration, participation and critical practice more broadly. ‘Het Reservaat’, for example, led me to think of a way in which the critical reflections of participants of socially engaged art could be recognised and taken seriously, which influenced the formation of ‘Critical Friends’. Through this latter project, it became apparent that certain issues relating to the parameters of the commissioning process were perhaps commonplace but normalised to such a degree that they were brushed aside rather than considered as an option to change. This led to my interest in setting up a series of interviews with other commissioners and practitioners about their experiences of the ‘edges’ of their commissions for which I developed the method of ‘Performative Interviewing’ as a way of going public with these experiences. While the interviews offered anecdotal evidence drawn together through a performative process, I also wanted to find a way of involving people in a process that was ‘transformative’ in bringing people together for a series of performative, intersubjective exchanges that foreground conflictual, critical reflection among those involved, which led me to my final project, the ‘FUNding FACTORY’.

I want to address further the conflation of art practice and/as research and some of the issues raised through this coming together of disciplines. In her essay, ‘Shared expertise in Fieldwork, Research Process, Artistic Presentation and Representation’ artist Lea Kantonen (2008) defines the difference between presenting work as art or as research:

One of the most obvious differences is that the art community doesn't insist on the artists having to report their methods. An artist doing fieldwork can quite freely make a presentation of her field. She can present results from any phase of the knowledge production without having to justify her method in public. She can select documents, contrast them with one another, edit them and frame them as artworks. She does not have to explain if the documents have been produced with similar methods, or if they represent real or fictive worlds. (Kantonen 2008, p.191)

Sociologist Kip Jones suggests that research material does not need 'academically analysing' but instead can be left open to interpretation so that the reader becomes part of the process (Jones 2006, p.79). Artist Jan Kenneth Weckman opens up this question of knowledge production further, referring to the notion of knowledge as coming from 'abductive hunches' (philosopher and scientist Charles Sanders Peirce wrote about an empirical hunch as an educated guess in his writing on abductive reasoning in the 1870s) and that the "field of art could be seen as a fictitious laboratory for knowledge production" (Weckman 2008, p.48). Artist Tone Hansen (2008) also problematises expectations of art in the context of academic dissertation writing; a methodology is required to explain the process and direction the research will take so as to describe and defend the artist/researcher's actions. This formalises and professionalises the method as art practice and, Hansen fears, ties the practice down, noting, "in the artistic field, to verbally describe one's method means separating it from the work itself" (Hanson 2008, p.33). I would contest the notion that I do not have to present and justify my methods just because I am presenting research through practice. The contextual practice of cultural democracy and commissioned art requires and thrives on processes of creative justification, negotiation and exploration in order to move the practice on and it is precisely the acknowledgement and awareness of the context in which culture develops that is crucial to considering this field. I am not proposing that practice should speak for itself, or that it has a mythical status that transcends explanation, description or analysis. Instead, I propose that textual and practical elements are interrelated, inter-dependent and intersubjective. Minh-ha has pointed towards the difficulty of,

...creating a field/art that defies the notion of discipline/art. Of importance, then, is how the malaise of categories is materialised as well as how the exercise of coercive power implied in the notion of 'professionalism' and its hierarchical system of classification is nullified. (Minh-ha 1991, p.110)

She states how an interdisciplinary approach necessarily implies losing ownership of both one's own discipline and the shared field that throws into question the notion of specialism, expertise and professionalisms. To live with this heterogeneity, she suggests, artists have to be so polyvalent "as to make the very label of 'artist' appear simplistic and reductive" (Minh-ha, 1991, p.108). I apply this polyvalence to my own role in the projects and that of those labelled 'participants' as we took on multiple roles and subjectivities. Helen and Newton Harrison are artists who also occupy this heterogeneous, polyvalent position. They have referred to their way of working as a 'conversational drift': "the unanticipated new images and forms of knowledge generated by open-ended dialogue across disciplinary boundaries, focused on a given ecosystem...the storytelling is what causes the conversational drift" (Kester 2004, p.64-65). 'Conversational drift' allows the Harrisons to cross disciplinary boundaries and develop a methodology, which in itself is interdisciplinary. Similarly, artists Mike Bode and Staffan Schmidt describe their project 'Off the Grid' as interview-based artistic research and themselves as 'interpretive intermediaries'.<sup>44</sup> They compare their ways of working with the qualitative method of autoethnography and anthropology, specifically the work of George Marcus and Michael Fischer's 'creatively parasitic' approach to anthropology (Bode and Schmidt 2008, p.210). It is important to Bode and Schmidt that they present their research as 'situated and partial' (ibid., p.205).

It is perhaps obvious, expected even, for research defined as art practice to be described or presented in these ways. It would perhaps be considered a more radical gesture for a social scientist to do so. For Bode and Schmidt there is a need to "respect the transgressive character of creativity by not subsuming the tension between art and research, [nor] to bring one under the rule of the other" (ibid., p.203). Frequently, however, art is often used to communicate social science findings and artists appropriate social science methods in their work. This runs the risk of re-enforcing these pillars of knowledge production rather than finding a place to meet. I consider my research to be led by the methods I chose in developing the projects in a way that suspends the practice between art and research. It is through the act of *doing* the projects that I have learnt more about the tensions between cultural democracy and the commissioning of art to effect social change as my expectations, values and understandings have been contested and challenged by other people involved in the projects (such as what it means to spectate, participate and critically reflect with the 'Critical Friends' and the challenges of imposing collective production in the case of the 'FUNding FACTORY').

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<sup>44</sup> Bode and Schmidt's research connected eight residents in a Stockholm suburb to people in eight self-made homes in New England and upstate New York by asking questions about self-definition, travel and community (Bode and Schmidt 2008, p.197).

## 4.2 The hyphen

Using a combination of methods could be considered a queer methodology, which “attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other” refusing “the academic compulsion towards disciplinary coherence” (Judith Halberstam quoted in Holliday 2000, p.517). According to Holliday, for example, queer methodology “disrupts the notion of a ‘natural world’ to study. Instead it seeks to uncover ‘truths’ (instead of one universal truth) as they are experienced and represented, through the context-specific discourses...” (ibid., p.518). I have taken my cue from such approaches to art and social science that question the boundaries of their own disciplines, question the authority of the artist/researcher and challenge assumptions and power-relations of what it means to create critical knowledge. I have been developing a practice that is self-reflexive, critical, co-authored and open to interpretation and this has its roots in elements of community arts practices as well as feminist and queer approaches to researching, where the researcher becomes more self-reflexive and the participants of the research become recognised as co-constructors of the work. While I have initiated these projects, they have involved varying degrees of collaboration with others. The projects have become increasingly about collaborating on forms of critical reflection and interaction with the framework of the project in a way that transforms the project. My role has been to study these modes of participation and transformations so as to shed light on new understandings of cultural democracy and the commissioning of art to effect social change, which informs the political slant of my research. I am both a participant in the research and the researcher, drawing together the strands and reflecting on the meanings produced through the practice. Sociologists Mary Gergen and Kenneth Gergen present the idea that their social science methodologies are embedded with politics and ideologies: “our methods are always grafted onto our politics” (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.1021):

Gergen and Gergen foresee a future where research becomes more relational, where working the hyphen becomes easier, and more difficult, for researchers are always both sides of the hyphen... The subject in performance ethnographies becomes a performer. We study performers and performances, persons making meaning together, the how of culture as it connects persons in moments of co-creation and co-performance. (ibid., p.1021-2)

A feminist-queer methodology offers a dialectic position from which to research and this approach also reflects my understanding of cultural democracy as a refiguring of the personal-political-cultural. As a heterogeneous, dialectic concoction, the research moves from representations of experience towards inhabiting and practising new ways of articulating the inherent power-relations and systems that support and surround the researcher.

Minh-ha (1991) writes about the hyphen in terms of its transformative in-between status: “The challenge of the hyphenated reality lies in the hyphen itself: the *becoming* Asian-American; the realm in-between, where predetermined rules cannot fully apply” (p.157). Sociologist Maggie O’Neill also refers to Minh-ha’s concept of the hyphen as a third space: “Combining ethnography with arts, working in the hyphen, the space in between, offers a critical theory in praxis” (O’Neill 2008). O’Neill’s methodology of ‘ethno-mimesis’ aims to create a third space that is a reflective safe potential space for dialogue, images and narratives to emerge (ibid.).

Haraway (2004) has described ‘cyborg writing’ as “about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other” (p.33). I understand this as a re-politicisation of the self, a ‘recoding’ or reprogramming that tells stories in different formats from intersubjective perspectives. The projects I carried out try to recognise and re-configure the hierarchies in commissioned art that privileges the artist over the participant, drawing attention to these roles and identifying what constitutes a critical engagement (or dis-engagement) as an act of cultural democracy in the contrived environment of a socially engaged art commission. This in-between, dialogic, hyphenated third space is one of negotiation between self and other, objectivity and subjectivity and is a position from which I have tried to practise this research.

#### **4.3 Beyond a mere ‘stir within the frame’**

While reflexive spaces are valid, constructive sites for reconsidering one’s relationship to a situation, to what extent does the work become more than a comfortable talking-shop and transform into action? Social scientists Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) explain the shift from thinking in terms of dichotomies (either, or) to thinking in dialectic terms (never either, always both, p.575). I am coming from a dialectic understanding of ‘practice’ as reflexive: “to study practice is to change it, that the process of studying it is also ‘political’, and that its own standpoint is liable to change through the process of action” (ibid., p.578). The researcher is embedded in the situation with one foot in and one foot out of the ‘practice’, not commenting from above or on the edge, but from a dialectic position.

According to Denzin, “a good performance text must be more than cathartic, it must be political, moving people to action and reflection” (Denzin 2000, p.905). How can research as practice be both critically reflexive and useful? Rancière refers to the political readability (usefulness) and radical uncanniness (unreadable) possibilities of art, and it is in this nexus that I position acts of

cultural democracy. This has played out in the projects as the social implications of performed acts are brought to the fore, as in the case with the ‘Critical Friends’ discussions on the impact of performances of participatory democracy on the social and political fabric of Greenwich. How do commissioned art projects move beyond being spectacles that merely create ‘awareness’ of the state of things, or is this enough? This concern with moving beyond a stasis of self-reflection towards a political readability is shared by some social scientists. Theorist Ruth Holliday, for example, refers to a critique of anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s understanding of self-reflective research, in that it is not enough for the ethnographer to employ a practice of self-reflection as this ignores and obscures those being researched (Holliday 2000, p.506). Who gets to do this self-reflecting and what are we reflecting upon? Minh-ha also asks this of reflexivity: “how is it understood and materialised? If it is reduced to a form of mere breast-beating or self-criticism for further improvement, it certainly does not lead us very far...” (Minh-ha quoted in Holliday 2000, p.507). Minh-ha goes on to say how reflexivity must move beyond a critique of its own discipline, beyond a ‘mere stir within the frame’ (ibid.).

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a social science method that draws on practices and theories of community development and notions of ‘empowerment’ through critical reflection. PAR goes some way to test the objectivity of the researcher and ‘move people to action and reflection’. The roots of PAR lie in liberation theology, neo-Marxism and human rights activism. Whereas Minh-ha’s films are the result of her editing process of a period of research, PAR involves participants in the co-production of the research from start to finish and aims to effect change in the situations being researched (Kemmis and McTaggart in Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.568). The ‘participant’ is considered an actor / agent in the process and their expertise, specialities and critical knowledge are considered as no less relevant than the researcher who may have initiated the research or project. PAR is relevant to my methodology as it introduces an intersubjective process that means the people involved see things from multiple points of view (Kemmis and McTaggart in Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.574). The participants’ perspectives are recognised as relevant in their own right and their self-reflexivity and intersubjectivity implies the nature of their participation does not need analysing by another researcher. I would argue, however, that this obscures the role and responsibility of the researcher, a position that needs drawing attention to in practice based research that involves others in the formation of the work.

#### **4.4 The power and position of the researcher**

During this period of research I have been ‘employed’ as an artist (‘Het Reservaat’), evaluator (‘Critical Friends’), researcher (‘Performative Interviews’) and curator (‘FUNding FACTORY’).



While these labels have been useful to define and introduce the nature of the contract with the people I have been working with, I prefer to label my role as ‘practitioner’ which encompasses a variety of methods in practice-led research and avoids preconceptions which potential collaborators might have of more specialised labels such as ‘artist’ or ‘evaluator’. There is an inherent contradiction in the inter-disciplinary practice described above and the status of specialised art worker/researcher. While I search for a way of practicing/critiquing the former I cannot deny my position as the latter: I am working as a funded practitioner inviting others to join me to develop that research. Philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin explained this in-between status of the research:

The fact that he [sic] carries a tape recorder with him wherever he goes designates him in his objective capacity as a ‘scientist’, while daily contact shows him to be a human being like everyone else. In fact he must be both practitioner and friend. He must be like everyone else and also the possessor of special knowledge like the priest or the doctor. (Morin 1967, p.158)

According to cultural theorist Anne Gray, the researcher needs to be poised between familiarity and strangeness (Gray 2003, p.85). The researcher provides just one perspective of a period of research. If any of the participants of this research, such as Joost de Groot, Ann Webb, Christoph Srb or Frances Williams were doing this doctorate, for example, they each would analyse the case studies differently, take different positions and construct a unique argument based on their experiences and readings of it. There may not be an infinite number of interpretations or perceptions, but there is a multitude, as writer and activist bell hooks pointed out twenty years ago:

There can never be one critical paradigm for the evaluation of artistic work...a radical aesthetic acknowledges that we are constantly changing positions, locations, that our needs and concerns vary, that these diverse directions must correspond with shifts in critical thinking. (hooks 1990, p.111)

Recognising multiple perspectives, however, does not mean I can ignore my role in a process described as being participatory and collective. Artist and writer Lea Kantonen, for example, raises the issue of power in her essay on shared expertise in fieldwork, research process, artistic presentation and representation:

Participatory research isn't symmetrical. The researcher wants to get knowledge about the community in question, she [sic] strives towards a close relationship with members of the community, and formulates the knowledge both by listening to them and by relating to the traditions of the academic institutions. Though dependent on her collaborators only she is rewarded for her accomplishments in the academic community. She is applauded for 'refraining' from her authority and 'sharing' her expertise with the researched. The same asymmetry concerns community-based art. The artist shares the authorship with the community, but only the artist is rewarded and recognised by the art community. (Kantonen 2008, p.184)

This re-framing of a collective or collaborative process as one that privileges the individual artist or researcher is perpetuated through the forms of dissemination (such as conferences, exhibitions) that validate academic or artistic work. Sociologist Barbara Sherman Heyl also acknowledges that "researchers have considerable control over the 'reporting' and the outcome, while still striving to empower the respondents through respectful listening" (Heyl 2001, p.376). Rather than assume a passive, invisible authorial position, I have developed a role through the projects that is heavily interventionist in a way that opens up spaces for other people to become involved in creating the conditions of cultural democracy. I did this by introducing generative metaphors of critical distance (time-travel, critical friends, masks and re-telling and a factory production line) as a framework to work with participants. As the practitioner/researcher I have orchestrated controlled situations in which acts of non- or wrong- participation occurred. The participants of 'Het Reservaat', 'Critical Friends', 'Performative Interviews' and 'FUNding FACTORY', for example, became the performers on 'stages' I had constructed to perform the research. How we each then reacted on these stages is the subject of this analysis. I co-devised frameworks and made invitations to residents of a new town to a futurology workshop, participants of socially engaged art to become 'Critical Friends', cultural workers to confess failed art projects and art workers to build their own cultural production line. The method evolved depending on how those invitees reacted within those frameworks and challenged or transformed them. My role has been to facilitate these interactions and maintain the tensions between readability, unreadability; useful bullet-pointed lists and nuanced fictionalised storytelling; consensus and dissensus without the practise falling deeply into either camp. This has been a more pro-active role than perhaps an observant, silent, 'objective' researcher might take. I have consciously interfered with the research, polluting it with my own subjectivity as I perform the role of researcher.

#### **4.5 Editing, false generosity and embezzlement: Walking the line of authorship**

As with the process of research itself, the recruitment of participants in a commissioned socially engaged art project is often followed by moments of collective production followed by a period of editing by the artist when they reflect on what has gone on, then the edited material is sometimes represented back to the participants to elicit further discussion. The artist/researcher generally has control over the process and presentation of the project. While there is an interest in opening up the project to the influence of others, the artist/researcher remains the one responsible for overseeing, documenting and editing the project and the legal property right of the work often remains with the commissioned artist.<sup>45</sup>

An important part of my research has been a period of capturing and editing the material generated through the practice. In some visual methods used in social sciences, a camera acts as a fly on the wall, objectively documenting and not interfering; the uninterrupted footage is then analysed by the researcher. By drawing attention to the means of documentation and by editing the material, the objective eye of the camera is disrupted. The biases of the researcher are reintroduced, rendering the work 'artistic' rather than 'scientific' and therefore not to be taken seriously as research (Holliday 2000, p.505). I have tried to reintroduce this bias, emphasising it and make a point of the intrusion of the researcher. In the case of the 'Performative Interviews', for example, by separating the speech from the interviewee, through editing, re-enacting, costume, camera angle and characterisation, the verisimilitude of the resulting films confronts the viewer inviting them to create their own interpretations. It is in this editing space that I draw out commonalities and create new narratives that can feed into understandings of cultural democracy and the commissioning process. As with the case of PAR, this has at times been a collective, shared process and at others I have taken on the role of editor. In the case of 'Het Reservaat', for example, the material from the futurology workshops and meetings were re-interpreted into a plan for a one-day performance by Joost de Groot, Daphne de Bruin and I, which in turn involved people in re-enacting scenes of everyday life. After the residency had finished I made drawings of the 'Het Reservaat' process as a way of distilling the questions and experiences I had. The material and ideas collectively generated throughout the process were constantly reworked and reconsidered. While others were involved in the co-creation of the event, it was mainly de Groot, de Bruin and I who had access to the critical reflection and re-interpretation of an otherwise collective process. With 'Critical Friends' critical reflection was the core work of the group who co-edited their findings in the format of cut and paste magazines; there was a feedback loop which involved discussing the issues, doing research through observations and interviews to find out more about these issues and then distilling these

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<sup>45</sup> One of the artists commissioned as part of 'Peninsula' for example said how he was "very interested in making work that is participatory in some way, where the outcome is influenced by a wider group of people" (Temple-Morris 2009).

reflections in the magazines followed by more discussions and research. With the 'Performative Interviews', the interviewees chose their mode of address and I took on the role of editing and compiling their stories. In the 'FUNding FACTORY' the 'editing' or constructing of the factory was laid bare and this process revealed the nature of the critical engagement of those taking part. Such editing processes can be considered as subjective, reflexive and interpretative sites where meanings are co-produced.

If research/art claims to be collaboratively or collectively produced this could result in what Paulo Freire has called 'false generosity' (Freire 1972, p.21) or what sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu called an act of 'embezzlement' (Bourdieu 1986 and Kester 2004, p.148) where "the delegate claims the authority to speak for the community in order to empower him- or herself politically, professionally and morally" (ibid.). Artists often speak through, with, about, or on behalf of other subjects or aim to provide platforms of 'unmediated expressivity' (ibid., p.147-8), but as Kester points out: "Discursive violence occurs whenever one individual speaks for another, no matter how firmly he or she is anchored within a given collective" (ibid., p.130). As with the issue of a social worker getting too emotionally involved with their clients, or an anthropologist 'going native' in the communities they study, so artists are accused of confusing participants for friends.<sup>46</sup> The professional status of the artist/researcher in the case of commissioned art projects, however, often relies on them not being considered part of that community but visiting outsiders. Not only are members of a community subject to the artist/researcher's observations and scrutiny, they are also expected to volunteer themselves to participate in co-constructing the art/research as the act of participation will supposedly resuscitate their 'self-esteem' and empower them to "become participants in their own reclamation" (Kester quoting Wolper ibid., p.151).

Moral equivalence or 'empathetic identification' (Kester 2004, p.149-50) is often used by artists/researchers as a way to get to know people through a process of reciprocal exchange. This might begin by observing others, acting accordingly by acknowledging one's own interests (rather than presuming to act neutrally), and then creating 'provisional alliances' based on identification with the other (ibid., p.78). This process of 'empathetic identification' and subsequent patterns of dissemination and validation are imbued with power relations between artists/researchers, funders and participants where these different agents use each other and their experiences for mutual or self-gain. This research tries to draw attention to the conditions that produce inequalities in the commissioning process. My research process itself is also reliant on other communities (of

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<sup>46</sup> Suzanne Lacy's concentric rings and Stephen Willats' 'socially interactive model of art practice' are diagrams that illustrate the relationship between artist, participants and audiences of art (Kester 2004 and Lacy 1994).

interest), and while I claim no authority to speak *for* the people I have met and worked with on these projects, I cannot deny I have been using my experiences with them to empower myself (politically, professionally and morally). Through my practice I have tried to take a position *alongside* the voices presented in this research rather than attempt to speak *for* them.

#### **4.6 Performative research and generative metaphor**

Sociologist Kip Jones has written on the development of ‘performative social science’ and in his own work has used relational aesthetics<sup>47</sup> as a theoretical and practical framework through which to develop a more collaborative approach to working with research participants as co-authors and co-performers of the research (Jones 2002, p.72).<sup>48</sup> Maggie O’Neill’s method of ‘ethno-mimesis is a ‘performative praxis’ which combines ethnographic research and its representation in visual/artistic form (O’Neill and Giddens 2001, p.109 and O’Neill 2008).<sup>49</sup> While Jones, O’Neill and Giddens illustrate fruitful areas of cross-fertilisation between art and social sciences, there is perhaps a tendency for art to be used as a visual, performative means of illustrating a piece of social science research just as artists might appropriate methods of anthropology, ethnography and sociology in their work. One discipline politely borrows methods from the other in order to improve and restate its own underlying assumptions and theories.

I have chosen to apply generative metaphor as a method to open up spaces for collective critical reflection on the commissioning of art. Critical distance becomes a trip back to the present from 1000 years in the future; combining alliance and participation with critical questioning through ‘Critical Friends’; mask-wearing and re-telling to provide anonymous, performative evidence and constructing a factory installation that reflects the conditions of art as labour. These metaphors of critical distance have provided fictional platforms from which to perform discussions and experiences that would perhaps otherwise be more difficult to address.

Turning an account of an experience into a performance can highlight certain elements, throwing into confusion the distinctions between fact and fiction, history and memory. These performative

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<sup>47</sup> Relational aesthetics was a term devised by Nicholas Bourriaud in 1997 to describe installation art that invites interaction with the viewer. While relational aesthetics is linked to my research into cultural democracy and commissioning art, I am not using it as a theoretical framework for a number reasons. For example, relational aesthetics is often cited in relation to socially engaged art (Bishop 2004), however, I understand it to be quite different in that relational aesthetics is a) predominantly used with reference to gallery-based art projects; b) has no overt political motivations or aspirations beyond reframing the art gallery context and relationship between art and audience and c) is focused on creating ‘social exchanges’ that rely on and re-enforce the artist-as-author.

<sup>48</sup> Jones uses a text from a biographic narrative interview to create a ‘relational performative biographic production’ by using coloured text fragments to create an improvised and intuitive ‘post-modern narrative collage’ (Jones 2002, p.75-77).

<sup>49</sup> O’Neill collaborated with artist Sara Giddens on a project called ‘Not all the time... but mostly....’ which represented the experiences and life stories of women working in prostitution. Transcripts of the interviews with the women were reworked to create videos and choreographed performances.

gestures have been ways of creating remote subjectivities from which to analyse present conditions. Philosopher Judith Butler has contested the idea of an already existing subjective agency that freely chooses to act; rather the subject is formed through the performative process (Butler 1997). Subjectivities are not pre-existing or self-determined acts of agency lying dormant, waiting to be analysed or awakened by researchers and artists, rather, subjectivity is formed *through* the performative act itself.<sup>50</sup> The projects attempted to be open enough for participants to rework their own subjective interpretations and influence the direction of the research/projects. They also revealed the ways in which participants, artists and commissioners often re-perform roles that reinstate certain stereotypes.

It is not just a case of assuming that the metaphor works to create new understandings; rather an analysis of the power of metaphor to shape understanding is needed. There is also the issue that people bring different, conflicting 'frames' generated by different, conflicting metaphors. How, then, are these dilemmas reconciled and what are the implications (Schön 1978, p.139)? Some metaphors can lead to new, alternative, transformative understandings and new knowledge, at others times the metaphor may break down, be too forced or just provide another description of the same thing. For a generative metaphor to work might imply experiencing it in practice. It becomes performative in the sense that in the act of doing, new directions and ways of thinking are experienced. How do forms of generative metaphor disrupt existing, prescriptive values and restructure them rather than re-inscribe them? These generative metaphors can, Schön suggests, become tools for critical reflection on the construction of certain issues as they open up an awareness of familiar situations through new, different analogies and a re-framing that maintains these dilemmas rather than overcoming them (*ibid.*, p.15). I have applied generative metaphors to open up new ways of understanding a situation, twisting the existing descriptions and expectations of behaviour and understanding of a given scenario, framed here in the context of the commission. Rather than re-describe situations, these experiential devices aim to generate metaphors that influence and re-frame the parameters of the conditions they stem from.

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<sup>50</sup> Augusto Boal's forum theatre could be understood to be such a method, where audiences (or 'spect-actors' as he called them) who represent the oppressed interrupt a scene of oppression being acted out and suggest alternative directions.

*'Het Reservaat'*

## 5. 'Het Reservaat'<sup>51</sup>

### 5.1 Introduction

'Het Reservaat' took place in Leidsche Rijn, a new town being built near Utrecht, The Netherlands, as the result of a residency I did there in 2006-7 with 'Beyond', the art commissioning agency for the town. It was a one day open-air museum of life in 2007 seen from the perspective of people living in the year 3007, as if remnants of the town had been re-discovered and brought to life in a living history museum (the site we used was the archaeological site of an old Roman fort, now an orchard and public park). Over 500 (mainly residents of Leidsche Rijn) arrived at the entrance of the museum throughout the day and were encouraged to think they were living in the year 3007 enjoying a day at a 'reservation' depicting everyday life in 2007. They were given a guided tour around fifteen scenes devised and performed by different interest-groups living in Leidsche Rijn, who carried out their everyday activities, such as practicing tai chi, discussing 'democracy', performing music, feeding animals, filling a car with petrol, playing board games and drinking coffee (about 100 people were involved in 'performing' on the day). Each of these everyday scenes was slightly exaggerated or misinterpreted by the performing guides, echoing the improvisation often required to interpret life in the distant past. Putting these everyday scenes together, slightly exaggerating or misinterpreting them, combining absurdity with celebration, aimed to provoke residents of this new town to question their ways of living in contemporary society.<sup>52</sup>

The commissioning organisation for the development of Leidsche Rijn, 'Beyond', contacted me via email in 2006 to invite B+B<sup>53</sup> to visit Leidsche Rijn:

We would like to ask you to consider the current situation of Leidsche Rijn, with its mix of urban and rural qualities. Zooming in on the topicality of the visual arts and the challenge of a specific building site, a project can be developed and implemented on [a] hit-and-run notice. (Dölle 2006)

The fee for the residency was 6000 Euro with travel, accommodation and production covered separately. The projects usually took place over a three month block but I negotiated with 'Beyond' to spread the three months over one year with trips to Leidsche Rijn every couple of months.

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<sup>51</sup> See Logbook #1 in Appendix A for further documentation of this project.

<sup>52</sup> For example, the visitors were told the band playing had been bigger than the Beatles in 2007 and every hour they would screech around the park in an orange jeep followed by paparazzi (a groups of local photography enthusiasts) and the guides warned the visitors not to approach the older people ('grandmas and grandpas' playing board games) as they may be in danger of being hugged and might not let you go. To see such old people, was a shock to the visitors from 3007.

<sup>53</sup> B+B was a curatorial partnership I co-founded with Sarah Carrington that ran from 2000-2006. We developed a research-based practice supporting and critiquing socially engaged art through exhibitions, residencies, writing and archiving (Carrington and Hope 2006).



During this period, B+B was disbanding as a curatorial duo and I was branching out on my own. The invitation from 'Beyond' came at an opportune time and offered me a chance to apply some of the research and curatorial work we had done as B+B to my own independent practice. Following my first research trip to Leidsche Rijn in May 2006, my original response to the place was how,

...the design and use of public/private space embraces the ideal of the individual. There is an air of self-sufficiency based on the co-dependent relationship between consumer and market. The family can drive where they want, when they want, choose their home-entertainment and avoid their neighbours in the process. The lack of communal centres, cafes, community centres and religious centres in Leidsche Rijn reflects this preference for a private over public life. (Hope 2006)

Urban planner Riens Dijkstra and architecture historians Michelle Provoost and Wouter Vanstiphout had previously written about the new town of Leidsche Rijn:

The shift in attention from collective to individual now requires an urbanism based on such generative concepts as contrast, temporal uncertainty, market conformity, image (in the general, cultural sense) and ambiguity. (Dijkstra, Provoost and Vanstiphout 1995)

The increasing fragmentation, atomisation and privatisation of communal life hit home when I visited Leidsche Rijn for the first time, as did the paradox of artists then being employed by 'Beyond' to undo these factors through developing community participatory projects in the town. I was interested in the picture of desire for individualism and freedom being promoted by the Leidsche Rijn marketing team in their brochures advertising a 'common dream' of independent living for people to invest in. In my proposal I went on to ask:

What happens when others enter this club of individuals, behave differently and do not share the same dream? Are they then excluded and if so how? How does Leidsche Rijn deal with these different dreams and collective moments that do not prioritise or fit the individual, 'self sufficient' worker / consumer? (Hope 2006)

I proposed to build a fictional narrative about Leidsche Rijn as a microcosm of the liberal-capitalist global village by collectively imagining a future archaeology of Leidsche Rijn. What, for example, is the future of a gated, individualised community which 'selects' its population based on its

property-owning potential? How will future archaeologists digging in this area in a thousand years time interpret their findings?

I was imagining innocent sporting events turning more sinister as the different parts of Leidsche Rijn became more gated, resources more scarce and battles commencing between these communities. What happens to social responsibility and interaction when life becomes increasingly housebound? What will happen to the landscape as people become more interested in individuality over community? (ibid.)

The plan was to develop a science fiction story, play or performance about the discovery of Leidsche Rijn one thousand years in the future, composed of the existing concerns and experiences of local people (gathered during meetings and workshops) and the wider issues of Leidsche Rijn as an ideal liberal-capitalist model of living.



*Image 1.*<sup>54</sup>

As part of this residency I went on to develop a series of futurology workshops with residents of the town (invited through word of mouth, invitations to previous participants of ‘Beyond’ projects and my visits to local clubs, groups and societies). This involved a contrast between an open-ended process and setting a framework for participation. My process of working also involved: meeting people to find out about their experiences of living in Leidsche Rijn (although this proved difficult, as there were few public, communal places where adults in Leidsche Rijn could meet)<sup>55</sup>; two projects in local primary schools run by Brigit Postma and Marielle Hendriks, artists based in Leidsche Rijn, a period of editing and consolidating material and the employment of an artistic

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<sup>54</sup> Refer to the List of Images for titles and credits.

<sup>55</sup> I met with local journalists, politicians, schools, a teenage rock band (Eitherway), tai chi class, the local vicar and staff at a local second-hand shop, among others.

director, Daphne de Bruin and producer, Joost de Groot to work with me on developing the performance which resulted in ‘Het Reservaat’ on 15 July 2007.<sup>56</sup>

During the futurology workshops we discussed the themes: landscape, environment, education, family, work, play, property, security, health, art and religion in both 2007 and 3007.<sup>57</sup> The act of imagining life in 3007 meant the group had to leave their experiences of current realities behind and enter the realm of fantasy, an exercise that some found easier than others. This generative metaphor of critical distance as collective mental time travel allowed the group to talk about difficult subjects with the protection of fantasy as a buffer zone. Thinking about the future of a newly-built town was a way of unveiling different ideologies and perceptions people have of today by imagining future triumphs and failures of such an ‘ideal place to live’. As a facilitation method, I found it revealed the different hopes and fears of individuals in the group about life now, but through the lens of the future. Ideologies and political points of view were allowed to clash because participants of the workshops temporarily and collectively inhabited a different time zone. Encapsulating these differences became a crucial aspect to the development of the project as it was not about coming up with a shared vision of the future, but that any future is based on the diverse opinions of the present being heard. The resulting one-day community performance, ‘Het Reservaat’ (which involved most of those people who had taken part in the initial workshops as well as many others), incorporated different stories and misinterpretations of the present from the perspective of 3007.

## **5.2 About ‘Beyond’**

The art programme ‘Beyond’ ran from 2000-2009 during the building of the new town Leidsche Rijn and was initiated and managed by the Municipality of Utrecht with a budget of 7 million euros.<sup>58</sup> The title ‘Beyond’ was inspired by a quote from the architect Rem Koolhaas: “For each project there is a ‘Beyond’. A domain where no jury will follow” (Koolhaas and Mau 1995). By the end of 1997 building work on Leidsche Rijn, the largest new-town development in the Netherlands had begun (with 30,000 new homes to be completed by 2015), and from the outset the municipality

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<sup>56</sup> De Bruin and de Groot had extensive experience of producing community performances, something I had never done before and were instrumental in developing the concept of the performance and working with me and the other participants to turn the ideas into a realistic format. They were also invaluable in maintaining and developing contacts in Leidsche Rijn during the run up to the final event.

<sup>57</sup> 1000 years into the future constitutes ‘big time’, a temporal distance that is awesome and difficult to comprehend. It stretches beyond a more manageable 200 years of safe futurology, beyond that imaginations drift into the realm of fantasy and science fiction. I wanted to move beyond immediate daily complaints (parking, dog dirt and rubbish collection) and see what happened when we time travelled together and saw things from a different perspective.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Beyond’ had a working budget of 7 million euro over 15 years (€3.5 million from Utrecht City Council, €900.000 from the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, €550.000 from SKOR and contributions the K.F. Hein Foundation and the Elise Mathilde Fund).

had considered the possibility of art in Leidsche Rijn's public spaces.<sup>59</sup> With the advice of the municipality's Advisory Board of the Arts, co-operation with SKOR (the Foundation for Art and Public Space) and the establishment of a Project Team, a 'scenario' for the arts in Leidsche Rijn was launched in the beginning of 2001 (Colenbrander 2001), which the council agreed to by the middle of that year and the first commission was installed in late 2002.<sup>60</sup> The original objective of 'Beyond' was to stimulate and attract "an international and urban cultural climate in Leidsche Rijn, in which particular attention was given to art projects that fit in with citizens and interested parties" (Sponselee 2009, p.177). Artists were invited to create links with architecture, re-landscaping and urban development and react to the phenomenon that is Leidsche Rijn: "The art of 'Beyond' establishes roots in the material (soil, landscape, archaeology), searches for connections with old and new culture, and subsequently allows itself to be dragged along in the unrelenting flow of time" (Colenbrander 2001, p.91). Curator and writer Paul O'Neill described the programme as aspiring "to create interventions into a cultural landscape in which the unexpected acts as a catalyst for how local inhabitants think about acting upon their environment" (O'Neill 2009, p.130).

'Beyond' developed a number of commissioning strands that resulted in sculptural interventions, social events and architectural projects and concluded in 2009 with the opening of a sculpture park.<sup>61</sup> 'Het Reservaat' was part of the Action Research strand which was tasked with putting art on the map of Leidsche Rijn but for the art to create or contribute to the making of that map rather than respond to the place from a distance. Leidsche Rijn was considered the 'field of study' for the invited artists (ibid.) where "place emerges, submerges and re-emerges through social praxis, as an evolving and ever-changing multitude of identities" (ibid., p.141).

The Action Research strand was based on inviting individual artists for three-month residencies to spend time in Leidsche Rijn (staying at Nomads in Residence<sup>62</sup>) and develop work in relation to the place. This commissioning model of inviting international artists to Leidsche Rijn to make work in response to the place was at times controversial as residents of Leidsche Rijn felt that large amounts of money were being spent on this type of commission at the expense of nurturing existing 'amateur' cultural activities in the area. Writer Lotte Haagsma, for example, described how in 2005

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<sup>59</sup> Leidsche Rijn is a Vinex (new town) being developed on former agricultural land and incorporates two existing villages (Vleuten and De Meern).

<sup>60</sup> The first 'Beyond' commission was 'Stadium' by Dennis Adams, a series of bright orange football stadium-style bucket seats installed in various locations in Leidsche Rijn, all facing towards the city centre of Utrecht.

<sup>61</sup> The strands of 'Beyond' were: Action Research (temporary projects and interventions by artists), Director Artists (artists designing infrastructure projects), Artist Houses (houses designed by artists), Parasites (mobile architecture experiments), White Spots (staging art projects in building plots temporarily removed from the building programme) and Looping (communication projects that inform and involve residents and others).

<sup>62</sup> Nomads in Residence (No.19) was a converted container designed by Bik van der Pol and Korteknie Stuhlmacher to house the artists' who were in residence on the 'Beyond' programme. During my residency, No.19 was situated on the edge of the new development and seemed like a spaceship that had landed to survey foreign territory.

local criticism of the ‘Beyond’ programme ‘rose to new heights’ when threats of funding cuts to grants for ‘amateur arts’ were made, with journalists pointing out that the authorities had spent 3.5 million Euros on the ‘Beyond’ programme (Haagsma 2009, p.78). While cuts were not in fact made in the end, from this point on, Haagsma noted, “frequent efforts were made [by ‘Beyond’] to involve the people of Leidsche Rijn directly in the process” (ibid.). Looping, for example, became an important strand to the ‘Beyond’ programme as it acted as the public relations arm of their activities and was a way of distributing information to residents.<sup>63</sup> In the original ‘scenario’, the Looping strand was described as “an intensive means of communication between citizens, government, and the makers of art, looping aspires to be an instrument of democracy” (Heezen, van Gestel and Zonnenberg 2009, p.90). Such an instrument of democracy did not stretch to involving citizens of Leidsche Rijn in the decision-making processes of ‘Beyond’ or selection of artists. I want now to look at if and how ‘Het Reservaat’, as an example of commissioned art activity, neutralises critical knowledge and dissent through its promotion of the democratic participation of residents in an art project that they had no role in commissioning.

### **5.3 Repressive tolerance of critical practices: The case of ‘Beyond’**

This section considers the ‘Beyond’ commissioning model as an example of the democratisation of culture or ‘repressive tolerance’. Based on this analysis I reflect on whether ‘Het Reservaat’ was able to offer any possibility of cultural democracy to occur and if a commission semi-embedded in Utrecht City Council can have had any influence on the ability to effect change in that system. Philosopher and sociologist Herbert Marcuse in his essay, ‘Repressive Tolerance’ (1965) outlined how tolerance had become a form of oppression and suppression of alternative opinions, attitudes and peoples. Voting, protesting and freedom of speech, he suggested, were merely accepted as a “trade-off for a life of servitude” (Marcuse 1965, p.2). In a ‘civil’, ‘liberal’, ‘free’, ‘democratic’ system opposition, dissent and creative forms of critique are tolerated, he suggests, unless they incite or practice violence against that society. But, Marcuse asked, could this tolerance be repressive and work against social change? (ibid., p.5). If so, such tolerance could be understood as a form of social control and any subversive acts made by those ‘dissenters’ could work towards strengthening the ‘engines of repression’ that allows them to go about their dissenting business. Marcuse suggested a ‘rupture’ was needed to allow people to find what is true and what is false in society, however, he writes that such ruptures cannot occur within an established framework of

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<sup>63</sup> For example, ‘Leidsche Rhino’ was an online alter ego of ‘Beyond’ which acted as a ‘squatted weblog’ documenting people taking the role of the Rhino to create art interventions in Leidsche Rijn and ‘Vicky Vinex’ was a fictional local character, played by Daphne de Bruin who attended events and wrote about the activities of ‘Beyond’ on her blog.

repressive tolerance as such ruptures would not be recognised.<sup>64</sup> Marcuse suggests that if a socialist society is the negation of existing, established societies, it is its qualitative features that make it different which must create a 'radical break', a 'leap into the realm of freedom' (Marcuse 1967, p.177). Taking the example of demonstrators shooting at the public clocks on churches and palaces during the Paris Commune of 1871, he suggests such a symbolic attack on the regulation of labour means a new era is brought into being that radically breaks with the established order (ibid.).

Peter Kuezli and Martin Mulder (of Leidsche Rijn Project Office and involved in developing the 'Beyond' programme) suggest 'Beyond' is a perfect example of Marcuse's notion of 'repressive tolerance' – in that the establishment "tolerates undesirable ideas in the hope of draining them of their effect" (Wijn 2009, p.101). Bernard Colenbrander (also on the original 'Beyond' team) states how

...we think up projects like 'Beyond' because we are dissatisfied about ourselves. We are fully aware that reality is shaped by market forces and try to compensate by inserting scope for recalcitrant ideas.... But the question arises of whether art can act as a countervailing force against the commonplace or if it just a placebo. Perhaps creating scope for art is only a kind of repressive tolerance: a way of subsuming ideas regarded by the establishment as undesirable into the status quo precisely to neutralise them. (ibid.)

While 'Beyond' was made up of a series of individual commissions through its five strands, it was its position in the bigger, strategic picture which apparently allowed this scale and duration of arts commissioning to come about:

The plan for 'Beyond' is a form of cultural property development. The plan generates added value through strategic and dynamic investments, methodically integrated as far as possible into the regular spatial development. The revenues created by this added value flow back into the art and culture of Leidsche Rijn. And so, as they say, you have to speculate to accumulate: on balance, a larger budget is available than would have been the case with the traditional method of awarding commissions. (Colenbrander 2001, p.95)

The fact that 'Beyond' was an initiative of Utrecht City Council, was supported by the Council, and remained embedded in the Council was perhaps one of the reasons it continued to exist for nine

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<sup>64</sup> Marcuse argued for 'discriminating tolerance', which would involve "withdrawal of tolerance from regressive movements, and discriminatory tolerance in favour of progressive tendencies", which, he says, would be tantamount to the 'official' promotion of subversion" (Marcuse 1965, p.10).

years (although the original plans talked about a fifteen year plan but 'Beyond' wound down after nine years of activity with many projects unrealised). It has been this embedded-ness and commitment from the municipality combined with an ability to programme with relative independence from the Council which has appealed to others looking into models of commissioning public art. Paul O'Neill, researching on behalf of another commissioning organisation, Situations (based in Bristol, UK), refers to 'Beyond's',

...semi-autonomous position within the overall planning and municipal process, being both within and outside the city's central administrative structure. It has resisted reducing the prevailing tendency, arising from commissioning in urban renewal contexts, to restrict art either to short-term social impact or to problem-solving. (O'Neill 2009, p.134)

While 'Beyond' may have avoided commissioning short-term, problem-solving style art commissions, its semi-autonomous position may also account for its ineffectiveness in terms of impacting on the development of Leidsche Rijn. O'Neill goes on to suggest the commissions are neither 'autonomous nor overregulated' (ibid., p.140). If this is the case, what position do they claim to occupy? The money for 'Beyond' had been ring-fenced allowing for a semi-autonomous fund for artists projects that did not need approval at every stage. This suggests a guaranteed fixed amount of income, implying a freedom to spend without having to justify monies spent. Even if this autonomous status is exaggerated, it cannot be compared to the situation in the UK where funding targets for publicly or privately funded projects are much more explicit and often shape the criteria for evaluating the work.<sup>65</sup> It is significant, however, that due to increasing criticism from local residents, the 'Beyond' programme actively strove to involve more residents in the projects from 2005 (Haagsma 2009, p.78). In this light, 'Het Reservaat' could therefore be understood as a public relations exercise for 'Beyond' in improving links with local residents and journalists. 'Beyond' aimed to act as a productive critical feedback loop involving residents and those beyond the City Council. To an extent 'Het Reservaat' did this by involving local politicians, archaeologists, and a futurologist from the local council and received a lot of positive publicity in the local newspapers during the run up to the event. This may have been because I chose to meet regularly with two local journalists, one of whom had, up until that point, been a harsh critic of 'Beyond'. All of this would have helped to improve the public image of 'Beyond' in Leidsche Rijn, perhaps adding to its placebo effect.

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<sup>65</sup> In the Netherlands there is not a culture of evaluating public art as there is in the UK. 'Het Reservaat', for example, was not evaluated by 'Beyond'. The resulting publication (Heezen, van Gestel & Zonnenberg 2009) draws together different reflections and could be seen as evaluative documentation of the issues and processes developed through the programme.



*Image 2.*

There is an inevitable contradiction in the implementation of an art programme within a development such as Leidsche Rijn between the process of development based on market demands and the open, relatively unproductive activities of artists during this juggernaut of change. Art is justified in terms of it having some knock on financial rewards for the developers – it looks good to be incorporating a critical, artistic practice into the process of the development as it might increase property prices. Peter Kuenzli, former director of property development of Leidsche Rijn states:

To some extent ‘Beyond’s’ role was cosmetic, but it definitely had added value nonetheless...What matters most to me is the creation of [cultural] facilities...which compliment the programme dictated by market trends in important ways. This should be part of every process of spatial transformation. (Kuenzli 2009, p.109)

The ‘Beyond’ model of commissioning perhaps enjoys a position *between* ‘autonomous’ and ‘overregulated’ where artists tried to work towards illusive propositions for instrumental change through communal ‘disruptive’ art practices. Even with the embedded status of the art programme in the mechanisms of planning and development at the City Council, however, it is difficult to gauge the extent to which the individual projects or overall programme have developed a rigorous critique and/or influenced the mapping, planning and implementation of change in Leidsche Rijn. Writer Domeniek Ruyters seemed convinced such a critique was happening:

What comes through most strongly in these programme is ‘Beyond’s’ critical stance towards Leidsche Rijn. Its clear reservations about the Vinex suburb can be gleaned from almost all of the projects that have been realized. (Ruyters 2009, p.152)



Cor Wijn, co-ordinator of 'Beyond' also points to the paradox of 'Beyond' in that it was a local authority initiative that aimed to "agitate the establishment and challenge prevailing views" (Wijn 2009, p.102). Wouter Vanstiphout (an architectural historian who was involved in the masterplanning stage of Leidsche Rijn) contests this semi-autonomous position 'Beyond' supposedly occupied and points out that this model of art commissioning cannot achieve 'the real 'Beyond'' ("a domain where no jury will follow"):

You can't be embedded and steer an autonomous course. As part of local government, 'Beyond' falls under a process manager, a civil servant, a local council member and so on. Content and execution are then mixed up by people who are not content-oriented in the first place...the process becomes the ultimate goal, and you can perhaps do things that are interesting on a temporary basis, but you don't achieve the real Beyond... (Vanstiphout 2009, p.175-6)

Did 'Het Reservaat', in its demand on spectators and participants to travel in time to reflect on the here and now achieve 'the real Beyond'? As it shot off into the land of beyond, or elsewhere, did this project have a chance of effecting changes in real-life scenarios of Leidsche Rijn or are such fantasies forgotten as naïve and unrealistic? If there has been a colonisation of utopia by contemporary capitalism (Hutchinson 2009, p.54) and the future has already been co-opted and sold back to us for easy transition, how did 'Het Reservaat' offer a critique of masterplanned, predetermined model utopian living? The future as a realm of fantasy is no longer a foreign land, funfair or dreamscape, instead, fantasies are sold in the form of beautiful new housing developments. Within this context, how did critique and reform jostle for publicity in 'Het Reservaat'? To what extent did it remain a satire of these structures or did the work have more impetus from this critical position? Ultimately, what did the playful and fantastical elements of 'Het Reservaat' offer beyond an escapist self-help exercise that merely improved the image of Leidsche Rijn and 'Beyond', reaffirming the 'distribution of the sensible' in the process?



*Image 3.*

While an original ambition of ‘Beyond’ was to ‘boost urban processes’ (ibid., p.151), it could be said that projects such as ‘Het Reservaat’ remained in the sphere of art or community entertainment and never entered the realm of urban planning. Chris Dercon (then director of Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam), for example criticised the ‘naïve and opportunistic faith’ of ‘Beyond’ in the artists’ expertise while the deregulation, outsourcing and privatisation of Leidsche Rijn continued apace (Wijn 2009, p.102). While Dercon accused artists and commissioners of turning a blind eye to the realities of the development, Vanstiphout goes a step further and suggests it was problematic to outsource and siphon off the experimental ideas for the area into an art programme in the first place rather than insist this be embedded throughout the planning process:

It seems it was a deliberate strategic choice to incorporate real meaningful ideas for the area...into an art project. Art then becomes a kind of playground for substance, hipness and culture. But this is obviously a cover up, with art reduced to an alibi for the bureaucratisation of urban planning. (Vanstiphout 2009, p.173)

By performing a recalcitrant role, ‘Beyond’ (and the artists it commissioned) were perhaps being counter-productive by staying on the periphery, but by definition, this is the only place art *can* occupy. Wijn points out that art should be at the heart of a development not a ‘functional supplement’ (ibid., p.110). According to Colenbrander, however, while ‘Beyond’ “tried to engineer intervention and provocation...it did not touch the heart of the system” (ibid., p.108). Kuelzli and Mulder have also written that “what we have learnt from this whole experience, perhaps, is that a cultural programme cannot penetrate to the heart of that big machine [of urban development]” (ibid., p.100). The paradox is that art already has the mandate to go ‘beyond’ and when it ‘gets real’ (i.e. artists start to think they can grapple with the planning department), its

project is undermined and instrumentalised. Outsourcing the experimental aspects of Leidsche Rijn to a series of distinct art projects suggests one must kiss goodbye to real experimentation happening through Leidsche Rijn's design, conception and realisation.

It is perhaps naïve to assume that art can influence decisions on planning as bigger forces are at play in terms of the deregulation of building, design and planning. Art will perhaps always remain at the edge of this, becoming a card that is played in a larger marketing campaign for a new development. By creating a semi-autonomous position from which to critique the development, the critical practice of 'Beyond' remains marginalised. It becomes self-ghettoised, with self-installed CCTV cameras with a direct feed to the planning department to monitor the artist's every move rather than creating a feedback loop to inspire the course of the development. The framing of the commission ensures its political unreadability and instead is encountered as an uncanny performance of democratic participation.

#### **5.4 'Het Reservaat' and cultural democracy**

I want now to reflect on the extent to which cultural democracy as collective critical reflection and action was able to occur through 'Het Reservaat' and the tension this caused with the model of commissioning implemented through 'Beyond'. Artists, participants and commissioners can at times complement and at others contradict the economically driven decision making of urban development. Participants (homeowners perhaps) for example, also have a vested interest in increasing property prices in Leidsche Rijn as do the developers. Does the artist share this goal or acknowledge and resist this as one of the motivations for the participants and commissioners to have invited them there in the first place? According to Ruyters: "...while staying in the dormitory suburb amid grassy meadows and pram-pushing mothers, [artists] were plagued by doubts about the meaning of art in a location as anonymous as a housing development under construction" (Ruyters 2009, p.159). He mentions how Apolonija Sustersic and Barbara Visser, previous 'Beyond' artists in residence in Leidsche Rijn both "expressed doubts about the usefulness of having an art programme for new housing developments" (ibid.). This reservation may not lie in the concern that the area is too anonymous or uninspiring to the artists landing there, rather, in the fundamental question: is this the best use of resources when the place itself lacks cultural infrastructure such as libraries and meeting places? According to Ruyters, for example:

This scepticism even comes to the fore in several of the projects that were realised. Sophie Hope, for example, one of the artists invited to take part in the Action Research programme, visited Leidsche Rijn and decided to design a theme park showing in no

uncertain terms her own surprised reaction to life in a Vinex location. In Hope's 'archaeological' theme park, ['Het Reservaat'] - a look at the present from a future perspective - Leidsche Rijn residents were portrayed as museum curiosities featuring a typical living room, an SUV, clothing and food. (ibid.)

'Het Reservaat' reflected, in an exaggerated and misconstrued fashion, everyday life back at the residents. The place was considered odd and disturbing enough to re-enact as a way to engage people in a critical reflection on their part in its success. The question remains, what was gained from presenting a slightly off kilter image of life in Leidsche Rijn back at the communities who lived there? This in itself is a relatively obscure and futile gesture and yet the experiences of those involved and visiting the performance were multifarious and it remains to a large extent unknown if the impact of that experience has affected the psyche of the town's inhabitants.<sup>66</sup> The fact that this is near impossible to document and evaluate is one of the dilemmas for creating such occasions for undirected or non-prescriptive responses and is perhaps one of the characteristics of acts of cultural democracy - that they remain ephemeral or undisclosed. The project avoided prescribing a certain format for participation and simply held up a mirror (albeit slightly broken) to invite people to critically reflect on their conditions and forms of behaviour in the everyday, a spectacle that may have ruptured or reconfirmed those behaviours to varying degrees.

To some extent, 'Beyond' existed in the interstices between the democratization of culture and cultural democracy. The programme was based on the notion that Leidsche Rijn *needed* culture - that as a new community it did not have culture yet and the 'Beyond' programme was tasked with either shipping that in from outside (inviting artists to respond to the place) or encouraging artists to administer their 'orthopaedic aesthetic' to existing communities to establish their own cultural expressions. While 'Het Reservaat' fell mainly in the second camp at times I found I was imposing my own critical interpretation on the community, assuming that this may be an uncomfortable experience for some people. The fact that this was in turn challenged and contradicted through the workshops by other critical readings of the place by people who lived there perhaps suggests that the space I had created was open enough for people to have their own say.

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<sup>66</sup> For example, everyone attending 'Het Reservaat' was given a pair of blue swimming goggles when they entered the open-air museum so they could see the exhibits - implying a future archaeology of the new town would have to take place on the sea bed as in 3007 most of Northern Europe may be under water. Some of the children were apparently still wearing their goggles to school weeks after the event.



*Image 4.*

In order to implement and share these critical reflections I felt ‘Het Reservaat’ had to be more than a fun day out for all the family. But to what extent did people collectively critically reflect? Did it need an artist for this to happen? My desire to maintain an element of absurdity or uncanniness to the proceedings, which I saw as a trigger for opening up a questioning of both the context of the new town itself and art’s role in that was a struggle to maintain as it confronted a desire for a family friendly entertaining day out. Commenting on the ‘Beyond’ programme the poet Ingmar Heytze wrote how it was promoting ‘unsolicited art that challenges, interrogates and disrupts’ whereas residents would have perhaps preferred ‘culture that forges ties between people’ (quoted in Haagsma 2009, p.78).

Did continually opening up the process to more participants mean it was harder to maintain a critical approach that interrupted rather than advertised Leidsche Rijn and ‘Beyond’ and was this welcomed or rejected by residents who perhaps needed or wanted something more easy-going, affirmative and entertaining? I had given myself a role of watchman, making sure things stayed irregular, disruptive and did not get too comfortable, thinking that if I took my eye off the ball, things would descend into ordered, polite, celebratory consensus, with the participants (including myself) having their positions confirmed rather than confronted. The more people and agendas that got involved meant it was harder to justify my own role and presence in what was becoming a multi-authored process and yet this made it even more prescient that I define my role in orchestrating (and monitoring) an open process that allows for this multi-agenda situation to take place. Rather than assume a back seat, the manipulative role of the artist in this context unfolds numerous contradictory expectations and experiences of cultural democracy in action.



*Image 5.*

To visualise this dilemma I staged a protest outside the entrance to the museum, using cardboard placards tied to lampposts with statements from the local media about earlier 'Beyond' art projects, such as, 'waste of money' and 'art is useless'. The protest could have been seen as a critique directed at the event, pre-empting some of the visitors' comments, or as part of the performance itself but, apart from being approached by the police whilst installing the signs, the action seemed to go largely unnoticed by the commissioners and public attending the event and so did not necessarily succeed in creating a poignant critical remark on the commissioning of art.

'Het Reservaat' used the metaphor of time travel to illicit collective imaginings of the future, and future misinterpretations of the present, as a way of developing a self-reflective, critical relationship with the world and for that to resemble some form of political agency that moves beyond an escapist fantasy or self-help exercise. Play and humour can trigger these moments of self-reflection and enable us to laugh at ourselves collectively. I wanted to try out critical reflection on the conditions of contemporary urban living and the role art plays in that on a mass scale and so exaggerated the notion of critical distance to 1,000 years in the future. This exercise was not about 'workshopping' a shared vision of how we wanted the future to look like; rather the metaphor of time travel enabled us to critically reflect on our hopes and fears in the present moment but through the lens of 1000 years time. It was not a purely fantastical, escapist exercise and its value lay in the metaphor generating different, conflicting views and interests of a community that was being master-planned, top-down, by developers.

The metaphor breaks down, however, when those accessing it see through it. It requires an element

of playing along and performing a role that some people resisted.<sup>67</sup> ‘Het Reservaat’ straddled reality and fantasy by re-presenting the everyday through the lens of the future. There is an issue, however, that the performance remained just beyond reach, its political readability forever obscured by the framing of the project as absurd, escapist entertainment. ‘Het Reservaat’ brought out the tensions between setting a framework (a constraint) and the freedom of people to intervene and interrupt that framework as the audience became the performers, bringing their own stories, judgments and ‘scripts’ to the event. This led me on to develop the next project, ‘Critical Friends’ by working with the participants of other socially engaged art commissions in order to draw out these tensions further.

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<sup>67</sup> This was more so during the event than the workshops when some of the visitors to ‘Het Reservaat’ refused to play the game and took the performance literally and disagreed with the stories the guides were telling them, but even then, generating frustration may have led to new thinking on contemporary Dutch new town life and art’s role in shaping this.

*'Critical Friends'*



## 6. 'Critical Friends'<sup>68</sup>

### 6.1 Introduction

'Critical Friends' was devised by Rebecca Maguire and I in response to an invitation from an arts organisation based in East Greenwich called Stream, to evaluate their three year programme of public and collaborative art commissions called 'Peninsula' (2008-2011). I evaluated the previous phase of 'Peninsula' (2005-7) and wanted to test an alternative methodology that involved participants of commissioned socially engaged art to become the critical eyes and ears of the commissioning process rather than just the receivers. Like 'Beyond', 'Peninsula' applied a model of commissioning artists (usually from outside the area) to develop projects with residents of a particular area. 'Critical Friends' was an attempt to have a long-term conversation with a group of those residents. The project was not directly addressing cultural democracy, rather it was about critiquing the commissioning process from the perspectives of those people the projects claim to empower, and through that to see if I could further my understanding of what the conditions might be for cultural democracy to occur.

Maguire and I put together a proposal for carrying out a series of workshops with residents and past participants of 'Peninsula' projects to start a group called 'Critical Friends'. In our original proposal we suggested:

...critical deliberations are often confined to discussions among artists and commissioners and ['Critical Friends'] would be an opportunity for other participants to think about how the specific 'Peninsula' projects relate to wider issues of 'community cohesion' and the role of art in areas of regeneration. By going on this journey with a core group of people who are experiencing socially engaged art, this could provide a unique model of evaluation as it encourages participants to develop their own considered insights and evaluations of the projects. (Hope and Maguire 2008)

'Critical Friends' have included: Rachel Gibson, Arthur Hayles, Anthony Nicolaou, Pete Smith, Dave Sharman, Bre Stitt, Rich Sylvester, Jamie Walker and Ann Webb (all residents of Greenwich). The budget of £5000 allocated for 'Critical Friends' is being used to pay Maguire and I a fee for convening, organising and facilitating the monthly workshops and the photocopying costs of the 'Critical Friends' magazine.<sup>69</sup> 'Critical Friends' evolved as an experiment in

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<sup>68</sup> See Logbook #2 in Appendix A for further documentation of this project and Appendix B for the 'Critical Friends' magazines.

<sup>69</sup> While this budget does not cover all of our time over three years it was agreed with Stream to have regular monthly meetings from the beginning of 'Peninsula' in order to build up momentum with the 'Critical Friends' and that the rhythm and needs of the group would be reassessed as it progressed.

collectively deciding who, what and how art commissions are researched and evaluated and has involved the ‘Critical Friends’ interviewing commissioned artists, staff of Stream, a Board member of Stream, recording responses from neighbours, visiting other examples of commissioning art and observing and participating in the projects themselves. There has also been an ongoing process of the group constantly rethinking and questioning the role of ‘Critical Friends’ as a project itself. The group describe their work as “developing creative ways of investigating, critiquing and feeding into the commissioning of public and collaborative art, specifically in relation to Stream's ‘Peninsula’ art programme” (‘Critical Friends’ 2009). A self-published magazine and monthly workshops have been sites for the writings, documentation, performances and presentations created by ‘Critical Friends’ (see Appendix B). Through the workshops we have been identifying questions to ask of the commissioning process, reflecting on what it means to ‘participate’ in socially engaged art and trying out different ways of evaluating public and collaborative art from the perspective of participants. The magazines aim to communicate some of that research so that it can feed into the process of commissioning, producing, critiquing and participating in public and collaborative art.



*Image 6.*

## **6.2 About ‘Peninsula’**

‘Peninsula’ is a three-year programme of artists’ commissions in North Greenwich, London initiated by the arts organisation Stream in 2008 and funded by the Big Lottery Reaching Communities Scheme with a budget of approximately £90,000.<sup>70</sup> Stream is a registered charity based in North Greenwich since 1983 that commissions artists to produce public and collaborative

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<sup>70</sup> This is Phase 2 of ‘Peninsula’. Phase 1 ran from 2005-7 and had a similar sized budget. Unlike ‘Beyond’, ‘Peninsula’ is not embedded in the local council or directly connected to the urban developments in the area, although its aims are connected to raising awareness of the changes in the area and the impact these may have on residents. Stream is partly funded by Greenwich Council and therefore it could be argued that the local authority has a vested interest in the projects they commission. The position of ‘Peninsula’ could therefore be understood as being semi-autonomous of the local authority but perhaps slightly more autonomous than ‘Beyond’ which is more embedded in the Council.

art.<sup>71</sup> Their programmes bring together “innovative art practice and local people” and they invite artists,

...to find inspiration in the geographies, peoples and locales in which our projects are sited and offer a stimulating environment in which to realise ambitious new work. We work in collaboration with the artists we commission to realise the full potential of projects, and are committed to creative excellence and meaningful participation in all the work we produce. We look for artists whose practice combines a conceptual sophistication with a lightness of touch, and are keen to support the professional development of the artists we commission. (Stream 2009b)

‘Peninsula’ is taking place in the Peninsula Electoral Ward of Greenwich (a population of approximately 8,650 according to the 2001 census). Previously known as Greenwich Marshes, the area was re-branded as the Greenwich Peninsula by developers (Housing and Communities Agency, Lend Lease and Quintain) with the strap line, “a place where you can”. It is a place of industry, housing, retail and entertainment and where a new “1.4 million square metre master-planned community” (Meridian Delta Ltd 2007) consisting of 10,000 new homes is in the process of being developed.<sup>72</sup> To the south of the Peninsula, on Woolwich Road, East Greenwich District Hospital was demolished in 2006 and the site continues to stand empty in anticipation of redevelopment into 645 new homes (up to 50% of which will be ‘affordable’) by the developers First Base and Homes and Communities Agency. The new developments on the old industrial land of the Peninsula are flanked to the south by existing residential areas of post war estates and Victorian terraced housing.

During an early ‘Critical Friends’ meeting, Andrew Parry (of Greenwich Waterfront Regeneration Agency) expressed concern that the residents in the new developments on the Peninsula “become insular and do not integrate physically, culturally or emotionally with the surrounding

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<sup>71</sup> Stream was originally called Tipp (then Independent Photography) and worked as a community-based audiovisual resource. It was re-branded as Stream in 2008 and now commissions artists to do public and collaborative art. It is interesting to note this shift the organisation has gone through from being a community resource towards curating artist-led participatory projects. This perhaps mirrors in some way the broader shift towards commissioning artists to effect social change since Stream was established in the 1980s.

<sup>72</sup> It is worth noting that the Greenwich Peninsula developers commissioned a public art strategy (by Muf Architecture / Art) in 2005 that started to be implemented in 2008 as ‘Art on the Greenwich Peninsula’. This one-year programme of commissions involved the strands: temporary interventions, built places and spaces, events and performances, debate and education and artists on the design team. This first phase came to an end in February 2009 with the “intention to develop and launch phase two of the programme as delivery on the Peninsula gathers momentum” (Reiss & Sawyers 2009). While the ‘Art on the Greenwich Peninsula’ model of commissioning has perhaps more in common with ‘Beyond’ as both programmes are initiatives of the developers of large scale housing schemes, the ‘Peninsula’ programme initiated by Stream offers a different relationship to the regeneration (perhaps a counterpoint) and therefore adds another layer of investigation into how the position of these commissions affect approaches to criticality and participation.

communities” (Critical Friends November 2008). He explained how this was a concern that “troubles all of us dealing with the regeneration in the area, [and is] something we’re working hard to ensure does not happen” (ibid.). The issue of dividing communities as a result of regeneration (the fear that as one area gets all the attention there is no trickle down effect of economic and social benefits) is the backdrop to the ‘Peninsula’ programme, as is a more general concern that communities themselves are fragmented and anonymous. Isabel Lilly (director of Stream), for example, expressed her concern that the area “doesn’t become a contained, controlled space, that’s lost its life blood” due to the redevelopment (ibid.). A resident of North Greenwich stated how “the Millennium Village is way out there, not linked to anything, cut off from East Greenwich. Both are the poor relation to Greenwich itself”. (Stitt 2008)

‘Peninsula’ has four main aims; to investigate the Greenwich Peninsula, through local collaboration and participation, to stimulate debate to generate action and change, to develop connections and relationships between people across the Peninsula and experiment with different models of creative practice. There are three main strands to the programme; Community Voices, “a community information project to build community relations around common local issues of concern and to encourage involvement in issues around the area’s regeneration” (for example ‘Now Hear This’ by Holy Mountain), Youth New Media Training which involves an ongoing youth radio programme called Fresh FM and A Sense of Place (which became Performing Social Space) which has included alternative mappings and events in the area, such as Jayne Murray’s ‘In a League of Our Own’. To some extent, the Community Voices and Sense of Place / Performing Social Space strands of commissioning are forms of action research, similar to that applied by ‘Beyond’ to commission ‘Het Reservaat’ (although action research is not a term referenced in any of the Stream documents outlining the projects). Both ‘Beyond’ and ‘Peninsula’ invite artists to administer creative participatory projects that act as antidotes to the ongoing schemes of development in an area. In this analysis I look at the extent to which ‘Peninsula’ managed to intervene or influence this process or create debate about these changes, if and why it be considered as a model of top-down democratising of culture and what opportunities for cultural democracy have there been because of or despite of this.

### **6.3 ‘In a League of Our Own’ and ‘Now Hear This’**

For the purpose of this study I will focus on two of the ‘Peninsula’ projects the ‘Critical Friends’ have been investigating, ‘In a League of Our Own’ by Jayne Murray and ‘Now Hear This’ by Holy

Mountain.<sup>73</sup> The budget for each of these projects was £5,000, which included the artist's fees and materials, and the costs of any outcomes (e.g. events, performances, interventions, including publicity, marketing and documentation), and was to stretch over six months. The Sense of Place brief written by Stream, outlined an invitation for proposals for a participatory project "which produces a multilayered response to the complexity of the area" and that "might *offer a challenge to the aspiration of creating a singular identity and a unifying sense of place through the process of regeneration*". The project will culminate in some form of outcome, whether event, exhibition, and/or distributed products" (Stream 2008b, my italics). The brief stressed how "meaningful participation by a range of community members is central to the commission's aims, as is the opportunity for innovative approaches to this challenge" (ibid.). The chosen proposal, 'In a League of Their Own' by Jayne Murray, proposed an, 'egalitarian and open space for participation'. Murray's original proposal outlined the project as:

Similar to a sporting league with teams, players and characters that relate to place, 'In a League of their Own' will offer each community in Greenwich the opportunity to participate and represent themselves through the activity of their choice. It is imagined that there will be overlaps geographically as different activities are part of the league and form different networks. The league will not be limited to sports - crafts and more informal social events such as coffee mornings would also be eligible - but will have fixtures and results that will be published. As a participatory project the emphasis will be on the taking part, and not the competition. (Murray 2008a)

Murray proposed to use existing social centres and meeting places in the area as "starting points for meeting and recruiting". People would be invited to form teams to play 'fixtures' where the groups would carry out their activities in the same place, and documentation of these league fixtures would be posted up in public to garner further interest. Murray positioned the project as a "leisure activity for people to have fun and enjoy, while creating networks and learning from each other's perspective" by bringing together "disparate groups within Greenwich under one banner" (ibid.). Murray described her process of working as going through four stages: research (meeting people), engagement (the fixtures) and then dissemination of a book documenting the process followed by evaluations of the overall process (Murray 2009b). Fixtures that materialised during this commission were an event for local birdwatchers at the ecology park, a social evening at Greenwich Millennium Village and 'One Minute of Your Time' at the Greenwich Town Social

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<sup>73</sup> These two commissions are based on artists' responses to a brief set by Stream. At the time of writing, the 'Critical Friends' had also been observing 'Fresh FM', a youth radio project that would also an interesting case study to go into in more detail, as it is a longer-term project providing radio broadcasting skills to young people.

Club where people were invited to bring memories, photos and stories of the local area (the project did not evolve in the form of ‘fixtures’ with different groups congregating to carry out their activities together). The project culminated in a pub quiz at the Pilot Inn on the Peninsula on 11 June 2009 where local teams came together to answer questions developed by Murray during her meetings with people in the area with prizes donated by local businesses and organisations.

Community Voices is a strand of ‘Peninsula’ that focuses on building “community relations around common local issues of concern and to encourage involvement in issues around the area’s regeneration” (Stream 2008a). The projects commissioned through this strand aim to build and maintain,

...new channels and tools for information locally, increasing skills levels and bridging the digital divide and providing a strong voice for the community, necessary when it comes to negotiating with government and multinational companies such as those developing the Peninsula. (ibid.)

It has been described as “a community resource for community action, inclusion and empowerment” that provides “an authentic local voice using the virtual and physical media produced by local people, rather than the corporate PR agencies developers tend to bring in” (ibid.). In their first brief for requesting proposals for Community Voices, Stream outlined how they had “become aware of many different issues raised by residents and workers” such as environmental worries, provisions for young people, public spaces and facilities, transport and regeneration. This commission focused on gathering these issues and potentially using radio and online broadcasting as vehicles for giving local adults a voice.

The production company Holy Mountain (founded by Boz Temple-Morris and Alisdair McGregor) was successful in having their ‘Now Hear This’ proposal selected which aimed to “gather, amplify and debate the issues of importance to people who live or work in East Greenwich, Greenwich Peninsula and Charlton” (Holy Mountain 2009). In March 2009 they launched the project with a public call out (by distributing flyers locally) inviting people to phone in ‘despatches’ about “a burning issue connected to the local area and the changes affecting local residents” and encouraged participants to phone in their despatch from a location relevant to the issue so as to capture the sounds of the environments they were in. The phone-in despatches were then collated to create a ‘menu’ of local issues to be used during their ‘Local Conversation’, a café-style event at the East Greenwich Pleasaunce on 21 September 2009. Visitors to this event used the menus to trigger

discussions, which were recorded and re-edited to make two ten minute audio pieces launched on 22 April 2010 in East Greenwich.

#### **6.4 The framework of the commissions**

With Stream being a constant presence in the area of North Greenwich, the artists they employ on short-term contracts could be considered as the variables (similar to the case of 'Beyond'). The projects continue along a trajectory managed by Stream and while the projects have fixed timescales with aims and objectives, the ideas and participants spill over into one another. Ann Webb, a 'Critical Friend', referring to 'In a League of Our Own', for example, asked, "what if people want to carry on? The project doesn't just stop! The project can spur people on to carry on meeting and continue the work" (Critical Friends February 2009). Webb used the analogy of blotting paper to describe the way an artist may initiate a project but for its participants the experiences bleed into one another:

I find it very difficult to put a value on these things because they're not just for now they spread over. My experience would be based on things that have happened, my enjoyment will be ongoing. It's not just confined to the project...and my enthusiasm goes to other people. People I've shown the [Critical Friends] magazine to ask, 'oh what did you do, what's that about?' It's like blotting paper. (Critical Friends July 2009)

This analogy of the blotting paper reflects a way of working employed by the artists working with Stream. This often involves artists having informal meetings with local residents (as was the case with 'Het Reservaat') that go on to inform the development of the work which then feeds into further encounters with residents. This fluid, flexible way of working is then programmed into a project with a slightly expandable timescale but fixed budget. Murray, for example, highlights in her blog how she felt her project would need a longer run in time to build relations with people:

The League is really a long-term project that needs years rather than months – not so much that it could run for years, but rather that it needs years to build up the knowledge of people and networks for it to run successfully and eventually become self-sustaining...For the defined project area and this place/people – it was perhaps naïve to expect the project to work within the framework of given resources. (Murray 2009b)

While the projects appear as variables, they utilise and remap the contacts Stream have been building on for a number of years. Whereas the 'Beyond' Action Research strand was based more

on a residency model where artists developed ideas in response to the place during a period of stay, Stream's 'Peninsula' programme is based on selecting artists on the strength of project proposals made in response to a brief. Due to the nature of the process-based work they commission, however, it is common for timescales for the commissions to overrun and the artist and Stream staff to work longer hours on projects than they are paid for. Murray, for example, stretched her contracted time from six to nine months with no extra funding. This appears to be the informal rule rather than exception in cases of commissioned art such as 'Peninsula'. Isabel Lilly, Director of Stream remarked "if we can we always do try and extend times because you don't want to stop something if it needs more time so somehow we try and manoeuvre it a bit" Lilly 2009). Below, is an extract that documents a dialogue between 'Critical Friend' Ann Webb and artist Jayne Murray about how this tends to happen. Ann Webb:

Is that because of the novelty of the situation and there's no real time scale you can set for reaching certain targets, as you said it took a while to establish relationships.

Jayne Murray: Yes, I think there's probably always something that leads you to spend more time on it than others but people generally, you know, I mean it's hard to hold back I find and you always want to do a little bit more... Because it's a hard thing to quantify anyway...

Webb: I mean once you're in it, it's hard to contain it, you want it to spread.

(Murray 2009a)

There is perhaps an incongruous relationship between a process based, time-consuming practice and a time and budget specific project. This relates to Braden's research from 1978 in which she highlighted the fact that 'professional' artists are being employed to animate and enliven a community rather than artists and communities initiating projects and collectively applying for funding together (Braden 1978, p.123). For practitioners such as Murray and Holy Mountain, planning, meeting and organising are crucial and integral aspects to a practice that attempts to work with people to create a shared outcome. There are tensions between opening up the projects to keep the process flexible and semi-devised by the participants; the artist maintaining control of the overall concept and the host organisation ensuring the project is workable and feasible within time and budget constraints.<sup>74</sup> Stream acknowledge this tension between an artist wanting to be open and

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<sup>74</sup> There were a couple of incidents for example, where the 'Critical Friends' thought potential participants were treated disrespectfully, such as inviting a choir to sing against the traffic on a foot bridge so their voices cannot be heard may be an interesting concept but it could have at first come across as disrespectful to the singers. Also, during the 'fixture', 'A Minute of Your Time', it was felt that Murray did not give the people who had come with material to show her enough attention. Rather, the artist was apparently more focused on her own objective of making a series of short films in their presence (see 'Critical Friends' Magazine 3, Appendix B).



responsive, and their responsibilities as commissioners to ensure the project ‘works’, “i.e. that there is some form of tangible outcome as well as supporting a flexible process – within constraints of limited time and budget” (Lilly, Malik Okon and Murray 2009). While Stream is setting the aims and objectives of these projects, they are aware that the artists may be slightly critical of them (Robinson in Critical Friends March 2009). For example, based on the feedback from the ‘Critical Friends’ and Murray’s own concerns, Stream thought ‘In a League of Our Own’ needed to be ‘less abstract’ in order to entice people to participate.

Murray did not want to be prescriptive and wanted the project to evolve depending on who got involved in the framework of ‘fixtures’ she had devised. This was a catch 22 situation: the openness of her brief to potential participants was too open and people did not know how or why they should get involved which potentially put some people off. Without participants however, she was unable to develop the brief with them and therefore had to be more prescriptive which may also have potentially put people off participating. She acknowledges that it is much more difficult to take a ‘ground up approach’ but that if you are too prescriptive at the outset you “don’t discover anything because the sense of place doesn’t become apparent”. She suggested that “if you’re hoping to do something that can carry on after you’ve left, you need to let people make their own connections and have their own ownership of it” (Murray 2008b).



*Image 7.*

‘Now Hear This’ and ‘In a League of Our Own’ swayed between artists, participants and commissioners ‘taking the lead’ at different times. The artists, however, are the ones endowed (contracted and paid) with the responsibility to keep the project on track and to devise some kind of feasible outcome. There is a tension between enabling the voices of the participants to come

through and having editorial control as artists. This is even more pertinent when an artist's invitation to others to participate is met with silence or negative responses. Holy Mountain, for example, described the way they tried to "take a measure of people's feelings and opinions and their relationship to the place where they live" and tried to balance the "authenticity of those feelings and opinions with the artistic integrity of the project" (Temple-Morris 2009). Temple-Morris:

How do you feel after you have expressed something and then you've watched your expression being transformed into something else? That's what this piece is about.

Webb: Well that's provoking too, as it may not be transformed the way you originally found.

Temple-Morris: It may not be, no absolutely not...it isn't about expressing everybody's view individually, what it is about, is saying that we are looking at this area and asking people to talk about this area, and this is what everybody together has said, and so the final programme should give some reflection of what these people as a group have said, which of course is not going to be the same as some of the individuals. (ibid.)

This has followed through to the 'Critical Friends' who have been developing their own visual identity and making magazines to distribute their findings. Cutting and pasting around the table together, the group have been working out the best way to display the information they are compiling as well as the kind of information they are wanting to find out and the methods for going about it. While there is an ongoing, inbuilt self-reflexive discussion about our roles and responsibilities as 'Critical Friends', however, there is still a reliance on Maguire and myself as paid facilitators for answers and direction.

### **6.5 "Is my participation different to yours?"**

One of the aims of 'Peninsula' was to 'investigate the Greenwich Peninsula through local collaboration and participation'. There are many different types of participation that have occurred through the 'Peninsula' projects, from collaboration to spectatorship. Ann Webb, for example, referring to her observational role of 'Fresh FM' and fellow 'Critical Friend' Rachel Gibson's more hands on role with 'In a League of Our Own', asked Gibson the pertinent question, "Is my participation different to yours?" (Critical Friends February 2009). Webb's role in 'Fresh FM' has been to observe some of the sessions and feedback to Stream and the leaders of this project. She also sat in on some of the evaluation meetings with the participants of the radio station. She stated how she was happy being an observer of the process rather than a participant (Hope 2008).

Gibson's role in 'In a League of Our Own' involved her contributing a short film she edited using footage that she and a friend had taken of the building of the Greenwich Millennium Village (GMV) where she and her son live which was screened at one of the 'In a League of Our Own' events in the GMV. In a previous Stream project, '100 Cauliflowers' by Kerry Morrison (2007) both Webb and Gibson were tasked with 'babysitting' cauliflower seedlings in preparation for their planting on the Peninsula.<sup>75</sup>

Webb and Gibson are what one could call, 'serial participants' in that they have been involved in most of Stream's commissioned art projects. Gibson, during a 'Critical Friends' discussion stated: "It's not my fault people keep ringing me up and asking me to participate" (Critical Friends March 2009). Gibson also talked about how Murray came to visit her and how she spent two hours 'giving Jayne ideas'. In response to this, Lilly stated, "that's what it's about, 'collaboration'". The group went on to discuss the meaning of collaboration when one person is paid to develop someone else's ideas that they have given for free (Hope 2008). The 'Critical Friends' have identified different modes of participation and have suggested that spectating or being the audience of a project is not any less significant than directly participating and that they do not necessarily feel like they are co-authors of the work (and that this was not a problem for them as the project was 'someone else's baby'). Webb, for example, has stated, "I don't see what I do as art, I'm assisting art" (in Lilly 2009) and Gibson has talked about how the audience's role was as crucial to the success of a project, just as with a live music performance. While their participation meant the sum of the whole was greater than just one person's part, Webb acknowledged that she was happy to participate and allow the artist to bear the responsibility. Rachel Gibson:

Sometimes you wonder exactly what its all about but in a sense that's stretching the imagination as well...They are other people's projects, I'm just a participant or a spectator almost.

Sophie Hope: What's the difference between participating and spectating?

Gibson: Participation is looking after cauliflowers, eating the cauliflowers, watching them being cooked, I'm participating, but then I'm also a spectator. I can't say that I met the artist. I probably did meet the artist but I didn't know because we were all cutting the cauliflowers down and cooking them, so we were all participating at the same time...Everyone wanted to know what I was doing with cauliflowers on my terrace; it's

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<sup>75</sup> '100 Cauliflowers' by Kerry Morrison was produced in association with 'Art on the Greenwich Peninsula' and involved the temporary creation of a public allotment on the Peninsula where 100 cauliflowers were grown, harvested, cooked and eaten at a community feast in May 2008.

different, babysitting cauliflower seedlings, it's not something you do every day, but I'm only too pleased to have been of help!

(Gibson 2009)

It is significant that there is not a sense of co-authorship from Gibson or Webb over the projects and that this was not of concern to them, challenging the notion that there is an imperative to co-author or co-produce an artist-led project and that perhaps such acts as listening, 'assisting' and spectating are valid forms of critical engagement in themselves. Rancière, in his text, 'The Emancipated Spectator' (2007), refers to the 'paradox of the spectator' and the assumption that 'spectating' is passive as it does not embrace critical knowledge. In a previous text, 'The Ignorant Schoolmaster' (1991) Rancière revisited the theory of Joseph Jacotot, who in the beginning of the nineteenth century suggested that, based on the 'equality of intelligences', "an ignorant person could teach another ignorant person what he did not know himself". The 'ignorant schoolmaster' ignores inequality but relies on a distance: "The same thing that links them must also separate them" (ibid., p.6):

The distance that the 'ignorant' person has to cover is not the gap between ignorance and the knowledge of this master; it is the distance between what he already knows and what he still doesn't know but can learn by the same process...The student learns something as an effect of his master's mastery. But he does not learn his master's knowledge. (ibid., p.5-6)

As with Freire's proposal that the oppressors cannot liberate the oppressed, this process is not about turning the ignorant person into the master of her masters which throws into doubt the assumed benefits of the master imparting knowledge to the ignorant students. This is also the underlying premise of the move to democratise culture in that the masses needed to be educated by being exposed to art. By attempting to reduce the gap between knowledge and ignorance (actor/spectator), Rancière argues, one continually has to re-instate that status of knowledgeable and ignorant subjects – one is forever destined to reinstate the unequal hierarchy that one constantly tries to redress (Jacotot called this 'stultification', the opposite of which is 'emancipation'). As with Lorde's call for acknowledging difference, the difference between spectator and actor should be made explicit and it is that difference (and distance) through which strength and change can occur. The artist is to acknowledge their difference to their participants in order for emancipation to occur (perhaps in the form of cultural democracy). Emancipated spectators such as Gibson are active interpreters, translators and storytellers in their own right but are not always understood or acknowledged as so. The artists' role therefore need not be obsolete.

The dynamics between artist and participant are challenged through acknowledging their differences, allowing spectators to emancipate themselves on their own terms.

### **6.6 A reluctance to participate (an unwillingness to be empowered)**

While Webb and Gibson are often one of the first ports of call for artists commissioned by Stream, a previous ‘Critical Friend’ Rich Sylvester, a storyteller and expert on local history, has received payment from Stream for his advice he gives the commissioned artists: “I’ve been both the willing participant and almost a consultant in a sense. I’ve benefited from the projects but I’m a little bit at sea as a local resident as to the overall legacy or purpose of some of the projects” (Critical Friends March 2009). There are numerous ways and means for people to participate in culture and society depending on time, budgets and motivations. The assumption that one form of culture or a certain mode of engagement is more worthy and important than the next (participating in an art project over going to see a band or film at the ‘O2’) is patronising to say the least, and yet, what makes an experience a critical encounter that leads to ‘concientization’, critical knowledge, critical pedagogy and ‘la perruque’, those aspects of cultural democracy I identified earlier? I found through the experiences of ‘Critical Friends’ and ‘Het Reservaat’ that an expanded notion of participation is required, that at times defies the parameters or expectations placed on participation in an art project. Sylvester, for example, has suggested he interview some of his colleagues who live in the area about why they have actively decided *not* to participate in Stream’s projects to find out what their skepticism is about. Significantly, one of the ‘Critical Friends’ felt she had to give up being part of the group because she,

...found it really difficult to record my reflections on the [League of Our Own] project. This is partly down to me not having any headspace at the moment...but I feel perhaps the whole process is not really for me in any case. I know it can only be a short blog entry each week, but I feel it needs more time than that to think and reflect and I don't want to do something half-baked which wouldn't be doing it justice. (Stitt 2009)

Freire has written how he thinks “every human being, no matter how ‘ignorant’ or submerged in the ‘culture of silence’ he may be, is capable of looking critically at his world in a dialogical encounter with others” (Freire 1972, p.12). Engaging in a dialogical encounter that might lead to critical reflection, however, is not necessarily a shared aim. An East Greenwich resident, for example, remarked how “everyone’s kind of in their own little circle, they’ve got friends, they’ve got family. This might sound really anti-social but do I really want to meet other people? I’ve got enough friends” (Stitt 2008). Another stated how they would not attend any of the ‘In a League of Our Own’ events if they saw a poster: “I’m not a person that would be involved in any community

event anyway. I find it hard to believe it will work without pushing people to do it, offering a big incentive” (ibid.). The motivation to make connections, get involved and create a sense of community identity is met with an unwillingness to be empowered on the terms and conditions set by the artist or commissioner: “To what extent are the projects imposed?” asked a ‘Critical Friend’ (Critical Friends April 2009). Are people living in wealthy areas expected to communicate with each other and create a sense of community or is it accepted that the middle classes are defined by their empowered sense of independence and privacy? Why is it that artists are parachuted in as catalysts, researchers or irritants when they rarely have the time, inclination or funds to do this in the neighbourhoods where they live? If the ‘empowerment industry’ is constructed to provide professionals with incomes, to what extent does it rely on perpetuating systems of exclusion and illusions of social inclusion in order to keep the industry afloat and the professionals in work?

Murray found it difficult to encourage people to participate in ‘In a League of Our Own’, writing that she was “genuinely surprised at how many people have not participated, out of all the contacts and places she visited. But this in itself is part of the place – reflecting people’s values and attitudes” (Murray 2009b). The failure to create performative interactions between disparate communities is blamed on what is understood to be the fragmented nature of the area as its true sense of place. The area’s ‘sense of place’ that ‘In a League of Our Own’ revealed, for example, has been described as “lots of disparate people who are unconnected to each other and seem unwilling to make connections and move beyond their known environment” (Lilly, Malik Okon and Murray 2009). Even the pub quiz, which brought different groups together, was considered problematic in that “they didn’t necessarily interact with one another” (ibid.). There is perhaps a lost opportunity here to refocus the critique away from the individuals and onto the notions of empowerment (that such art projects sign up to), which require and promote certain, ‘correct’ forms of participation in society.

...I think there’s a really strong sense of self and prioritising the self as opposed to prioritising over some other kind of community or social need...What’s becoming apparent is people don’t want to mix... you just wonder if they’re more interested in themselves. And I don’t know if that’s particular to here, or if it’s more particular to Greenwich or if it’s more particular to London.... Maybe people mix with people in smaller proximities but that was the whole idea about working with groups, was that people were already choosing to be in those groups, but it’s like the groups just want to stay in those groups. (Murray 2008b)

Does this unwillingness to take part come down to a lack of time, a reluctance to engage in dialogical critical encounter and/or a rejection of being directed by artists? Does it tell us more about the construct of the socially engaged art commission than the communities it attempts to engage? Is an artist's or commissioner's will to empower met with a participant's unwillingness to be empowered by that means? The projects may seem too open or too prescriptive, leaving no room for the participants to define their own means of participation. The invitation may be unclear but expect a certain type of participation (that leaves the artist as author intact). Perhaps the artists' notion of developing a critical response to a place is different to that of the participants who may have an alternative set of issues or priorities they want to explore.

As Murray noted, people need to participate in order to 'get it' and find a way of being involved, but they often do not want to participate until they know what it is they are participating in. While some people are willing to get involved in all sorts of communication (depending on time and other commitments etc), other people "like things to be easy", something they "already understand and can follow" (Murray 2008b). This may account for the reason why the same people get involved in community or participatory events and local politics. This kind of community interaction suits some people more than others who cannot think of anything worse than getting involved in an event with lots of people they do not know and have no intention of getting to know. Communities themselves have learnt to rely on or ignore these activities in their neighbourhoods as something they have a right and reason to engage in or that they find irrelevant to their cultural needs. One can take or leave these extra-curricular activities in one's life depending on time, information, resources and interest. It is assumed that the professional, trained artist can bring a conceptual approach and high-quality experience of art to a culturally barren landscape of deprivation that did not realise what it was missing. The local populace pay inadvertently through taxes and lottery tickets for a service they never asked for or may never use.

### **6.7 Community entertainment and the parameters of critical practice**

"I thought maybe she was the secret millionaire" was an interpretation by a resident when they heard about 'Peninsula' artist Jayne Murray being in the area (in Stitt 2009). This misunderstanding can perhaps be easily made – an unknown visitor enters a community and starts asking strange questions, perhaps offering to help and is recruiting volunteers to get involved in a community project. It might be disappointing to discover it is only a cash-strapped artist who is in town. The artist is not just offering a service to help the community, however, but wants to critically engage that community to rethink the environments they live and/or work in. This is not a financial gift but apparently something much more rewarding - an invitation to critically reflect and a proposition for

communal action.

Creating moments of visible community interaction are often instigated by various organisations, such as the church, local charities and the Council. ‘The Big Lunch’, for example, took place in East Greenwich in July 2009, where local residents came together for a picnic:<sup>76</sup>

What I’d like to see is more of the actual conversations on the ‘Peninsula’, because apart from the people who were invited, people will just walk past in that locality. Like that Big Lunch, that was amazing. It was a London-wide big breakfast [sic] and ... it was splendid because it [involved] people who might live in the same block but never see one another. (Webb in Critical Friends October 2009)

‘In a League of Our Own’, ‘Now Hear This’ and ‘Het Reservaat’ were similar cases of communal activities that relied on local residents taking part and aimed to bring people together who do not usually get to meet. This does beg the question, then, what makes these projects art and ‘The Big Lunch’ a communal picnic? Does there have to be a distinction? What is it that makes a pub quiz, café style public conversation or an outdoor performance, art? Are they any different from a community picnic, funfair or circus? Is the seemingly useless (dysfunctional, futile, performative) element enough to assume it is art (not politics) or is the knowledge that an artist was commissioned to come up with the concept and that it was framed as art enough to give credence to the work as art? Such a practice treads a fine line between concepts of critical art and communal gatherings and therefore the question of whether an artist or art commission is needed for this to take place is an issue because if they are not, perhaps resources could be directed elsewhere. When asked, what makes ‘Now Hear This’ art, Temple-Morris replied:

Translation, in the sense that, what this kind of art means to me, is this idea that you would, as an artist, look at something and in this case, not make up your own mind about it, but open the door and allow people in to express themselves, and what we then do, or the artist’s job, is to translate all of these individual voices into this one single piece that you can listen to. And in listening to that piece, all of the single voices are lots of single voices, but the final piece is a piece of art in that sense. And our approach in doing that, is as artists as distinct as to, lets say, documentary film makers, who are also artists, but it’s a slightly different approach, as we’re not seeking to document something purely, we’re also seeking to respond to it. (Temple-Morris 2009)

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<sup>76</sup> The event was a nation-wide event initiated by the Eden Project as “a simple but profound act of community” (Eden Project 2009).



When Murray was asked the same question about 'In a League of Our Own', she replied:

I think it's in the process. It's not about making an object. It's not about a commodity, it's about experiences I suppose and it's about putting those experiences together in a different way... So what I'd ultimately be aiming for this to do is to be a critique of this area. (Murray 2008)

Murray and Holy Mountain observe, listen, collate, edit, translate, critique and respond. While they offer a way for multiple voices to come through, their own critical voices also shape the content and the result is their own subjective take on an otherwise collective process. The 'Critical Friends' have referred to the 'Peninsula' commissions as including an element of peculiarity to them. For example, Nicolaou remarked how, "art doesn't have to be serious; it can be fun; it can be pointless; and can create a certain reaction or emotion from the spectator or participant and that can be very uplifting" (Critical Friends March 2009). Gibson describes how the arts projects are,

...odd, peculiar, fresh and new; something that's not normal everyday life that people find it difficult to get a grasp of but that this is what captures your imagination and leads you to ask more questions...sometimes when things are confusing and complicated at least it makes it remotely interesting and you've got to try and get your head round it and work out what it is. (ibid.)

Webb also remarked how "these projects open people's eyes to something they have never thought of before" (Critical Friends February 2009). This intangible aspect of the work perhaps distinguishes them from community events that have not been instigated by artists but it still leaves the question as to what constitutes this element of the work. Lilly, for example, asked: "Why are projects described in a certain way, e.g. 'off the wall' etc. What does that mean?" (ibid.).

While the participants may be content with not becoming the artists during the process, they seem to be either frustrated or appreciative of the part of the project that is obscure, unknown or 'pointless'. In response to a statement made by Sylvester: "I don't believe all art is political. The best art misbehaves", Robinson suggested that while,

...as commissioners [we] sometimes create aims which are slightly idealistic or utopian...but interestingly the artists we seem to be very attracted to working with do come

with a healthy dose of that misbehaviour spirit within them and I sense that in Holy Mountain and I wonder how that is going to play out, that relationship between that mischief and misbehaviour which we warm to as an artistic process but which perhaps quite healthily plays with some of the aims that we create which might be routed in realism and changing things. (Critical Friends March 2009)

Nicolaou then remarked that “if the misbehaviour is something that can be shared amongst the participants, then that’s fine” (ibid.). There is a sense that the ingredients used to distinguish the work as art should be shared among those involved (as collaborators and spectators) and not just kept back for the private amusement or benefit of the artists and commissioners.

It could be that these unexplainable, peculiar, misbehaving, pointless, uplifting aspects identified by ‘Critical Friends’ allow access to a form of critical engagement or cultural democracy. These forms of critical engagement happen at the point of encounter between people and an experience they are having as they start to question what is happening and why as the edges of the commission become apparent and the conditions of participation are put to the test. This requires critically reflexive beings capable of empathy and openness to other subjectivities, being willing to recognise their own relation to power (Adrian Piper in Kester 2004, p.73):

To empathize with another is to comprehend viscerally the inner state that motivates the other’s overt behaviour by experiencing concurrently with that behaviour a correspondingly similar inner state one-self... We must modally imagine to ourselves what that state must be as we observe her own overt behaviour. (Piper, quoted in Kester 2004, p.210)

Minh-ha describes this as ‘subjective perceptions of fragmentation’ (Minh-ha 1992, p.154): “For me, the political responsibility here is to offer meaning in such a way that each reader, going through the same statements and the same text, would find for herself (or himself) to carry on the fight in her (or his) own terms” (ibid.). The process is opened up and transformation comes through the viewer’s own interpretation. This of course poses a risk – the meanings can be mis- or re-appropriated and used in a way the artists did not intend, but that is a risk some artists, such as Minh-ha are willing to take (ibid., p.213). I suggest that a protagonist produces their own aesthetic through a series of decisions they make as they build up to and respond to an encounter. Kester (2004) describes a process where a project is open enough so it, “transform[s] the consciousness of both the artist and host or her co-participants” (ibid., p.128). These critical encounters are often

beyond the grasp or comprehension of the instigators (artists and commissioners) who are perhaps more focused on their own critical encounters. Acts of 'la perruque' are going on as moments of (private) subversion in the everyday, in and among, to the side of (and perhaps despite of) the platforms generated by commissions such as 'Peninsula'.

### **6.8 Participating in the 'wrong' way**

Critical engagement as cultural democracy could lead someone to respond in a way that is not expected. As people develop self-directed responses which question the contexts they are in they may respond and participate in the 'wrong' way. The emancipation of spectators might result in a rejection of the artists' project (by both participating and not participating; appreciating and questioning) as the participant displays a renewed confidence in pursuing their own critical cultural production instead of relying on others to provide it for them. They start to see through the illusion of the theatre of democracy and begin to reclaim it. As Žižek has pointed out: "From Ancient Greece, we have a name for the intrusion of the Excluded into the socio-political space: democracy. Our question today is whether democracy is still an appropriate name for this egalitarian explosion" (Žižek 2009, p.99). This also relates to the ruptures described by Rancière and Holmes as a way of drawing attention to and potentially disrupting the 'distribution of the sensible'.

'Critical Friends' involves 'unprofessional' (as in unpaid) participants investigating professional (paid) artists and commissioners. The process reverses the usual direction of critique and has at times meant the distinctions between roles are blurred. The conflictual or dissensual nature of the conversations among the group about the role of art also follows through to the disagreements about what it means to be critical. Rebecca Maguire:

It's critiquing rather than saying 'we don't like it'...

Ann Webb: Critical doesn't have to mean 'negative', it can mean questioning.

Sophie Hope: It can mean questioning but not justifying; I think that's really different.

Webb: I'm loading my own feeling on to it

Rachel Gibson: We're appreciating.

Webb: Absolutely, absolutely.

Hope: But you can appreciate it and question it, as well.

Webb: Yes, but that's being blurred with me because I'm so full of admiration for it and I'm getting such a kick out of the things I see people doing.

(Critical Friends July 2009)

At times the ‘Critical Friends’ challenged Stream’s model of commissioning and at others they supported it and thought the art was better carried out by the professionals as they do not want to be in a position where they consider it their job or responsibility. To what extent can the ‘Critical Friends’ become the commissioners or commissioned artists themselves? Do they condone, abandon or adapt this commissioning model Stream is using? At the time of writing, for example, the ‘Critical Friends’ are negotiating a position on the selection panel of artists and to have a ‘Critical Friends’ representative on the Board of Stream. They have also begun to consider their role in informing the writing of the artists’ briefs. There is a potential difficulty with this in terms of already stretched budgets and the wider concern that this could strengthen the model of commissioning rather than dramatically reconsider it. While Barbara Smith, a Stream board member, during an interview with the ‘Critical Friends’ stated how she felt the group were gathering ‘high quality and helpful information’, this is coupled with the ‘Critical Friends’ uncertainty that Stream will listen to and take on board their comments and critique and feed that back into the commissioning process.

The ‘Critical Friends’ process risks being reduced to a series of statements of support as evidence of participation, acting as advocates for funding for more ventures or even as a recruitment drive to get more participants involved in the commissions.<sup>77</sup> While the conversational role that the ‘Critical Friends’ have with others in the area and the way they can feed that information back to Stream is an important part of Stream’s research and long term commitment to the area, ‘Critical Friends’ could be seen as a (free) public relations service to promote the good work of Stream, as was the issue with my Action Research residency with ‘Beyond’ in Leidsche Rijn. A longer-term question might be: to what extent could ‘Critical Friends’ take on its own life, autonomous of Stream?

### **6.9 Art’s role in effecting social change**

There is an assumption that the official channels of participating in local democracy (such as attending Full Council meetings, writing letters directly to elected Councillors or contacting relevant officers) are insufficient, dysfunctional or redundant. The ‘Peninsula’ commissions, for example, aim to provide opportunities for alternative modes of engagement in social and political life in Greenwich by ‘stimulating debate to generate action and change’ but what is meant by action and change? Does the programme offer valid alternatives or are they ironic, performative gestures that point to the inadequacies of a political process whilst potentially raising expectations of the participants who are led to believe their voices will be heard? Lilly has talked about the work Stream commissions as having an ‘obliqueness of touch’ in that the projects do not tackle issues

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<sup>77</sup> Stitt, for example, introduced ‘Critical Friends’ to Murray when she interviewed her, as a group that is trying to “get local residents to participate more in some of the projects” (Murray 2008b).

head on but are “trying to do something in a way that might be intriguing, that [makes] people think, ‘that sounds interesting, I’ll find out a bit more about that’” (Lilly 2009).

The ‘Critical Friends’ have been debating the disparities in the projects that encourage people to have their say whilst offering an oblique or poetic, side-on encounter with issues. Projects, such as ‘Now Hear This’, for example, offer more of a performative gesture towards action and change rather a direct path towards change. There is a contradiction, as Rancière has pointed out, between the readability of a project as politically useful and its uncanny, poetic futility that threatens to end any pretensions the project may have of effecting change. For Lilly, change is “something that could be a thought that triggered something for somebody or it could be something that’s much more significant than that... We don’t want to define what change is, we want to leave it open” (ibid.). Andy Robinson (member of staff at Stream) has stated how for Stream, “we might be more interested in the medium to large scale view of changes in both the physical environment but also social relations within this area...I think what [‘Now Hear This’] is trying to do is offer a place for a broader discussion about ones area” (Critical Friends March 2009). To what extent did the projects provide a catalyst for these “medium to large scale view of changes”?

There is confusion over the extent to which the projects are useful, and to whom. Referring to ‘Now Hear This’, Critical Friend, Anthony Nicolaou asked,

Are they going to create something that is presented as purely art? Or is it going to be a documentary? ... Is it about giving people a voice and some political power to bring about changes in their area? Who are they hoping to aim these dispatches at? ... If it is about bringing about positive changes who are the beneficiaries? Are they individuals within the communities, are they groups? Is it for the whole of the community? And the people that engage in producing these dispatches, what information are they given about the aim of this work? (ibid.)

Arthur Hayles, a Critical Friend who visited ‘The Local Conversation’ (an event as part of Holy Mountain’s ‘Peninsula’ commission, where people discussed local issues with each other, salon-style around tables) also questioned the ability of an art event to ‘stimulate debate to generate action and change’, relating it to his own experience as a Green Party campaigner:

Although I asked what was being done with the recorded conversations, the mechanism, if any, for translating good ideas from ‘The Local Conversation’ into local practical action

was not clear to me. My own and colleagues' possibly futile experience has consisted of knocking on every door in street after street in East Greenwich and asking the residents for their views, in order to inform political policies and (hopefully eventually) 'appropriate action by the appropriate authorities'. However, the danger is that 'appropriate action by the appropriate authorities' may mean either inaction or that, with intense surveillance, what participants are recorded as saying and doing may be used against them by the authorities, particularly in 10 years time, after what are likely to be two increasingly reactionary central governments under increasing economic pressure. The ancient art of voice giving has often led to harassment, imprisonment or worse, not least of artists. (Hayles 2009)

Here the issue being raised is that encouraging debate could result in inaction, neutralising potential political action or even further oppression. 'Now Hear This' encouraged people to express their views about local issues and perhaps inevitably invoked a barrage of criticisms on dog dirt, rubbish and parking issues via its telephone message dispatches but also broader political and social issues during the 'Big Conversation'. While 'Now Hear This' aimed to provide a space for declaring one's "opinion on whatever you think is the most important local issue of the moment" there were still questions about where all this information was going and how such a forum compared to the more formal channels for effecting change, such as public Council meetings, direct contact with the departments in the Council or campaigning, which may not be as engaging or accessible. Referring to 'Now Hear This', Gibson suggested, "we need a 'Now Do This'. Once you've heard, what do you do?"<sup>78</sup> Interestingly, Barbara Smith (Board member of Stream) responded, "then it becomes political, not art" (Critical Friends October 2009). A question posed by Gibson was, whose responsibility is it to take action based on what has been heard? Nicolaou talks about fusing art and politics in this context:

If it is going to be about people sharing their experiences with the aim of bringing about some change there is a faster political track to achieving that. But this is where politics and art seem to be infused in some way and it's going to create something different. I still find it really interesting. The big question is, what happens following the broadcast? Another powerful thing could be simply sharing their ideas with each other; I mean that itself can be a very powerful thing can't it? When they come across other likeminded people who have the same sort of value systems or have the same concerns. And that can be very good for a community. (Nicolaou in Critical Friends March 2009)

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<sup>78</sup> 'Now Do This' became the title of the second 'Critical Friends' magazine (see Appendix B).

Rich Sylvester remarked how he does not see these projects leading to a potential unifying, consensual politics, rather, “people will pop up at this imaginary, future meeting and find that people are beating different drums, and that’s the way it is.” (Sylvester in *ibid.*). While Stream, artists and participants are interested in creating alternatives to the more obvious channels of local democracy there is a recourse to these traditional modes of ‘having a say’ in the end. Perhaps this comes with the realisation that such platforms generated by art commissions fail to be taken seriously by the ‘appropriate authorities’ and remain as performative representations of ‘community voices’.<sup>79</sup> There is a grey area in the commissions: they look like they are channels for effecting change but are in fact performances of mini-democracies. Instead of opening up direct paths to local leaders, they offer platforms for participants to negotiate their own agency, following a notion of empowerment based on helping people to help themselves. The projects to some extent (in their failure as political tools) point to the absurdity and potential futility of that agency in terms of participatory democracy, shedding light on these systems and expectations of participation. Those who took part, however, do not all necessarily share the absurdity of these gestures.

On the one hand the programme could be accused of being too open by not unifying people enough or defining clearly how it intends to effect action and change. On the other hand it could be accused of trying too hard to claim its importance as an alternative unifying political process that can only ever pass under the radar of the power brokers in the area because of it being framed as art. This tension between the useful and uselessness of the process is perhaps where intersubjective agency occurs. Such experiences may be untraceable, and yet there is an ongoing requirement to present evidence of participation in a reduced form as bullet points and recommendations, an act that is often unsatisfactory, inadequate and not representative of the experiences. While the projects themselves offer alternative platforms for traditional manifestations of agency to be reconsidered, the core ideas and critical encounters are sometimes simplified in their translation into the very forms of democracy the projects set out to critique. It is assumed that in order to affect ‘real change’, familiar linguistics and formats have to be used in order to be understood and yet even these are found to be inadequate mechanisms for ‘having a say’.

#### **6.10 Oblique performances of participatory democracy: The case of ‘Peninsula’**

Following on from the analyses of ‘Het Reservaat’ and ‘Beyond’ as possible cases of repressive tolerance, I want now to address the case of ‘Peninsula’ as commissioned performances of

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<sup>79</sup> The final two ten minute ‘Now Hear This’ audio pieces by Holy Mountain, for example, were criticised by the ‘Critical Friends’ as not representing the process well enough. The melancholy of the final piece presented a bleak picture of the area and was not something the ‘Critical Friends’ identified with. While it presented a cacophony of issues, it was felt it did not go far enough to represent the complexity of the voices.

participatory democracy. To what extent is 'Peninsula' and the projects commissioned through this programme uncritically delivering social inclusion policies in a way that continues to disguise or obscure unequal power relations and the inefficiencies of participatory democracy? I would like to remind the reader of the Cultural Policy Collective's call to expose the hypocrisy of a neoliberal agenda that relies on the notion of artistic autonomy in order to 'socially include' the excluded but without having to change or disrupt power structures. For them, social inclusion policy functions mainly as a "cosmetic mask to disguise unequal power relations" (Cultural Policy Collective 2004, p.11). Agambon reiterates the concern that "inclusion has become the very form by which exclusion is perpetuated" (Berry and Iles 2009, p.16). He calls it 'inclusive exclusion' when intensities and antagonisms are mediated and diffused:

How then can 'communities' manifest without lending themselves to the state's need to 'activate' them for a pre-defined purpose...Those in positions of power (i.e. artists) comfortably echo the once radical gestures of the avant-garde while keeping faith with the doxa of (neoliberal) economic health. (ibid.)

One could argue that systems of commissioning such as 'Peninsula' rely on the notion that poverty (one of the key criteria of disempowerment) is the fault of the individual, not the system. Subsequently, the commissioned artists' energies are focused on individuals (usually residents in poor neighbourhoods) rather than on the systems of governance and power. As Kester has pointed out, "The effect of this rhetoric can be to elide any analysis of the systematic causes of poverty and to put in its place a closed circuit of creative personal transformation presided over by the artist" (Kester 2004, p.138). It is up to the artist who, Kester says, is being positioned as a kind of social service, to challenge this situation (ibid.). Outsourcing and privatising art as social work in turn diminishes the role and responsibility of the State (or commercial developers) to carry out this work and works towards eradicating the notion that poverty is a political, structural and systematic problem the State shares, rather than being the fault of individuals. By taking up these outsourced positions in the form of the socially engaged art commissions offered by 'Beyond' and 'Peninsula', one could argue that critical voices become commissioned adverts and artists the harbingers of privatised social work, helping to build a pathway to social inclusion which is reliant on the individual's self-transformation out of poverty. How, then, is 'Peninsula' critically engaging with this dilemma?

'Peninsula' could be seen to be replacing direct action as a more tolerated, fundable, 'neutral', platform-giving form of culture. During a Stream event, for example, I was advised not to show the



'Critical Friends' magazine (which contains extracts of the interview with the director of Stream) to Stream's funders who were present, as there was concern this could jeopardise their funding. This is a worrying reaction as the 'Critical Friends' hoped to reach the funders as one of the audiences for the magazines. This perhaps shows the sensitivity of going public with critical accounts that question socially engaged art commissions rather than providing evaluation reports which merely promote and justify this way of working.

Are programmes such as 'Beyond' and 'Peninsula' sure-fire ways of not having to challenge or change the market-led processes of development? Such programmes make it look like the developers have a social conscience but in their support of such programmes (which create an appealing rougher surface to an otherwise too slick-looking development through the "official promotion of subversion" Marcuse 1965, p.10), the critical potential of these projects is neutralised and might only be able to exist as performative representations of an alternative planning process. Art projects replace tangible change in the way they create 'pretty' pictures of imaginative, experimental and challenging ideas that remain on the drawing board with the temporality of the events providing no great threat to the development.

There is justified concern that commissioned art programmes such as 'Beyond' and 'Peninsula' strengthen the power-gap; perpetuating an illusion of freedom rather than fundamentally undermining this corruption despite claims to the do the contrary. Zizek has termed the tendency of repressive tolerance to effect change in order that things remain the same with the same power structures intact, as 'interpassivity' (Hutchinson 2009). One could apply this term to artists' working in commissioned contexts that have been employed to alleviate social problems. The more artists accept jobs to alleviate these social problems (as socially engaged art), the more the poverty-alleviation industry grows and the roots of poverty and social injustice ignored or bypassed. Kwon (2004) also states how community art can,

...exacerbate uneven power relations, remarginalize (even colonize) already disenfranchised groups, depoliticize and re-mythify the artistic process, and finally further the separation of art and life (despite claims to the contrary). (Kwon 2004, p.6)

Berry and Iles (2009) have described this as the,

...pseudo-embrace of community in public art schemes where artists are employed to fabricate totemic symbols of integrated communities (which are usually undergoing a

traumatic transformation and disintegration at the hands of the very parties who are funding the art work). (Berry and Iles 2009, p.15)

One could argue that the provision of commissioned art is a necessary ingredient in the continuation of neoliberal capitalism; it represents business as usual (Hutchinson 2009, p.52). Rather than emancipation from the expectations of its funders, could art instead be engaging with the (support) structures that leverage the art into place in order to tackle the engines of 'oppression'? 'Critical Friends' goes some way to refocus on the commissioning process itself and the wider conditions of arts funding, local democracy and notions of participation and agency. Berry and Iles ask, for example, "Rather than writing off art altogether as either 'for or against' regeneration, could we apprehend aesthetic experiments in the tensions they establish with their contexts and the forces which attempt to direct them?" (Berry and Iles 2009, p.9).

Referring to Zizek, Hutchinson (2009) suggests that: "To avoid interpassivity, artists must be engaged with their immediate conditions. Transformation must be critically self-aware: agency is the unity of theory and practice in practice" (ibid., p.53). The entwined role of commissioned art with agendas of social inclusion, cohesion and regeneration has meant that those delivering this work have to negotiate their own ethics and politics of participation. What is happening in this process is a reconsideration of the role of the artist as (ignorant) complicit exploiter and gentrifier. Iles and Berry (2009) are concerned that "community is killed off only to be 'regenerated' in zombie-like form, a living dead state of social (non) reproduction and officially orchestrated sham spectacles of being together" (ibid., p.14-15). These cases of interpassivity and repressive tolerance, where projects are created to enable small incremental, perhaps insignificant changes may not manage fundamental shifts in power because they are locked into a (staged) cycle of supply and demand. To step outside this cycle (to challenge its existence) would risk the demise of the industry (on which commissioners, artists and a few locals have come to depend) and yet I suggest that it is in this risky space that cultural democracy manifests itself.

If art practice becomes too committed, it is accused of becoming a campaign, and if it relies too heavily on critical reflection, the practice remains on the ethereal fringes of potential action. Again, this brings us back to Rancière's notion of finding the tension between political readability and radical uncanniness. Kester also identifies this tension, asking:

How do [artists] negotiate between the tactical demands of a given community struggle (which may require more conventional modes of political expression) and the sceptical,

self-reflexive attitude toward coherent forms of identity that is so central to the avant-garde tradition? (Kester 2004, p.130)

There is a dilemma that faces attempts at retaining the tension between a critical or radically uncanny and useful, politically readable practice: to totally commit to a 'cause' (to turn the practice into campaign, for example), is to risk becoming submerged in that campaign (becoming a 'groupie'), leaving one unable to question the bigger perspective (Cruikshank 1999, p.26). On the other hand, the theatricality of critique can overshadow the political and prevent these spaces opening up for transformation. The agency perhaps acquired through getting involved and participating in politics is "possible only at the cost of refusing to inquire into [agency's] construction" (Butler quoted in *ibid.*, p.130). Freire also thought that to be entirely subjective risked the 'radical' slipping into sectarianism and irrational 'destructive fanaticism' (Freire 1972, p.17). He held on to the notion that there was a concrete objective reality that was in need of changing and that this therefore required a 'rational radical' whose subjectivity and objectivity joins knowledge and action (*ibid.*). This radical would not be blinded by faith in a particular cause, rather "the more radical he is, the more fully he enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he can better transform it" (*ibid.*, p.18-19).

'Beyond' and 'Peninsula' seem to be grappling with the tension between the useful committed campaign of direct action and a relatively futile reflexive, critical practice. Looping as an instrument of democracy and 'Now Hear This' as a 'big conversation' about local issues, for example, are frameworks for participation devised by artists and commissioners. One of the most 'harmful' aspects of commissioned art, however, is often considered to be that of 'raising expectations' of empowerment when this cannot be accommodated or sustained in current systems of governance. Opportunities to reconstruct, disband or reshape the framework of those systems (including the commission itself) are not often considered an option. While commissioning models such as 'Peninsula' and 'Beyond' are presented as empowering, it is often a disappointing realisation to learn that, still, despite this creative approach, no one in power is listening as art is not taken seriously. Instead, a melancholy cacophony of local issues and performances of skewed everyday life offer an ironic performance of empowered citizens. It is the very impotency of such commissions, however, that might inadvertently allow for emancipatory forms of communication and interaction (cultural democracy) to occur that disrupt expected norms of participation in society (creating ruptures in the distribution of the sensible). It is in acts of participation where the edges of the commission come into focus that such a dialectic position of a 'rational radical' occurs. Acts of non-participation or participating in 'wrong' or unexpected ways are where radical transformation

as cultural democracy has the potential to take place. It is these edges of the commission that I went on search of through my next project, a series of 'Performative Interviews' with practitioners, curators and commissioners to discover stories that reveal the limits the art commissioning industry.

*‘Performative Interviews’*

## 7. 'Performative Interviews'<sup>80</sup>

### 7.1 Introduction

The 'Performative Interviews' are a selection of filmed interviews with artists, commissioners, community development workers and curators based in the UK about examples of commissioned projects that had 'gone wrong', failed, been censored, cancelled or remain unfinished.<sup>81</sup> Following on from 'Het Reservaat' and 'Critical Friends' I wanted to find out how people negotiate their 'contracts' as commissioners or commissioned artists and what happens when, through the act of participating in the 'wrong' way, the parameters of the commission or contract come into focus. I suggest that it is when the mechanisms of the democratisation of culture come into focus and are critically reflected upon, that new opportunities for cultural democracy are reclaimed as people start to find their own voices in the process.

While the 'Performative Interviews' are a quest for information and anecdotal evidence, they also represent an experimental method that draws attention to the very real issue of going public with sensitive stories that could jeopardise careers, reputations and funding. Being prepared to take this risk and compromise one's professional status, however, is perhaps the ultimate consequence of a critical practice that seeks to draw attention to the inequalities and inadequacies of a system that frames one's very practice.

Building on the analysis of 'Het Reservaat', and 'Critical Friends' the 'Performative Interviews' introduce a shift in perceiving the artist as automatically empowered to the artist as a participant negotiating a networked series of contracts and relationships. How these contracts are negotiated, exploited and nurtured is explored through the voices collated through the films. The interviewees reflect on the conditions of their art-labour and the inherent paradox of developing a critical practice within a contract informed by contradictory or limited notions of criticality and participation. The interviewees did not necessarily have any opinion or allegiance with the term cultural democracy; rather, I wanted to create a space for the interviewees to critically reflect on their 'mis- or wrong- participation' and allowed for the contradictions to emerge between expectations and frameworks of the commissioning process and the way it played out in practice. The structure of the 'Performative Interview' was a way of making visible these colliding agendas, allowing critical voices to emerge from that collision.

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<sup>80</sup> See Logbook #3 in Appendix A for further documentation of this project.

<sup>81</sup> Some interviewees took part in an audio recorded discussion based on a set of the questions previously sent to them (see Appendix C), others participated in a filmed 'Performative Interview' where they chose a disguise and got more involved in directing the filming of their interview. I then made a selection of the material and edited it to make the compilation found on the DVD at the back of Logbook #3 (summaries of the 'Performative Interviews' can be found in Appendix D).

The purpose of the interviews was to see how people identify and negotiate a contract on the point of collapse. During these tense moments the construction of the industry of commissioning art comes into focus as do artists' and commissioners' implicated role in building it. This chapter, along with the films themselves, analyses and dramatises these experiences of failure, compromise and censorship. The original interviewees are professionals who make a living out of their work as artists, curators, arts development workers or commissioners. The re-presentation of their stories in the form of 'Performative Interviews' aims to articulate a critique of the structures of administration and production of commissioned art as well as the process of gathering such anecdotal evidence and critiquing the format of the interview itself.

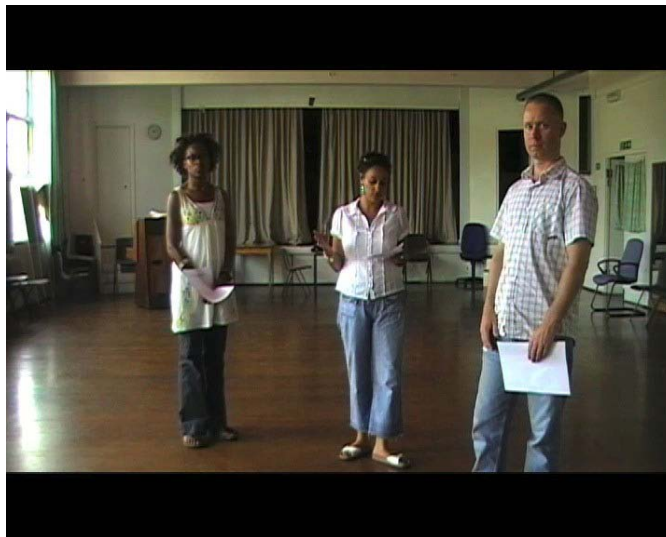


*Image 8.*

The performative aspect began as a practical solution to offer the interviewees anonymity and became an integral part of this method. Some interviewees were happy to be named and not disguised (some made the point that it would be unprofessional of them to be disguised as they should be able to stand with conviction next to their statements), for others, the disguise allowed them to address specific issues they would not otherwise be happy to talk about publicly. The performative aspect playfully deconstructs the interview format itself as a fact-finding exercise and offers a new way of reworking the anecdotal evidence by the interviewees disguising themselves in masks (usually animal masks) or re-playing extracts of interviews with actors, creating generative metaphors through which to access new ways of thinking about the issues of a commissioning culture. Some interviewees took the lead and improvised or rehearsed the 'Performative Interviews', for others I selected and edited extracts of interviews. It has been important to be able to strike a balance between the absurdity and usefulness in these encounters as there is a danger

that the drama overrides the seriousness of the content. At the same time, those playful aspects can draw attention to the issues being addressed. How these portraits are judged also depends on who is viewing them, what they are looking for and to what extent the performative elements attract or distract them from the issues being discussed. They attempt to walk the line between ‘political readability’ and ‘radical uncanniness’ outlined by Rancière (2006).

I approached the interview process not just as a means for gathering information from subjects but as a mechanism to rethink the way one might go public with sensitive (self-censored) information, and as a process of sharing controversial, potentially hazardous material, that otherwise goes unsaid. As I explored in the previous chapter, the critical knowledge of cultural democracy perhaps occurs when the frame (of the interview as a constructed site for ‘evidence gathering’ and the commission as a site of art labour) comes into focus. In the case of the ‘Performative Interviews’, the slippages between fact and fiction, absurdity and seriousness are perhaps where the subject can play and revisit the experiences they have had and communicate these with others. By releasing the pressure valve, the ‘Performative Interview’ as a confessional process aims to provide a space for critiquing the relationships people have to the work they do. It is a method that offers a site for critical reflection but also the possibility of strategic action.



*Image 9.*

The ten ‘Performative Interviews’ are divided into two parts. The first five deal more specifically with how the protagonists position themselves in relation to specific contractual obligations and resulting experiences of rejection, miscommunication and negotiation. These are: ‘Self-interview: Very Disappointing’, ‘It’s not all flipping roses!’, ‘Cornflake: Shooting in the Dark’ and ‘Duck, Frog and Horse on Crater 5’ and ‘Learning to say no’. The contexts and details of the commissions



are not the focus here, rather it is the points of contention and reasons for these projects failing that are recounted by the interviewees. The second five 'Performative Interviews' deal not so much with failed projects rather they are snapshots of inspiration, resilience and upheaval that have made the protagonists rethink their relationship to the work they do as artists, curators and commissioners. This includes justifying the choice to return to study as a mother ('Serious Research'); negotiating the power games and political discrepancies of cross cultural collaboration ('The Egg Liberation Front'); how tragedy can cause one to dramatically reconsider the role and responsibility of art ('The Source of Art...') and a long term collaboration between a local authority community development officer and artist ('Banging on Doors'). I suggest the reader now views the DVD in the back of Logbook #3 before continuing to read the rest of this chapter.

## **7.2 Developing the 'Performative Interviews'**

The notion of the confession has been explored by critical theorist Michael Renov in 'Resolutions: Contemporary Video Practices' (1996) who sees confessional video-making (e.g. video diaries) as an empowering process where the diarist performs their own identity to camera, to the extent that it can turn passive viewers of traditional media into active producers (Holliday 2000, p.511). This has also been explored by artist Gillian Wearing in her video 'Trauma' (2000), for example, in which people choose a mask and are filmed talking about traumatic experiences in their lives. This combination of absurdity and serious confession is similar to my objective with the 'Performative Interviews'. Another example of this would be the Guerrilla Girls who, since 1985 have used disguise by taking the names of dead women artists and wearing gorilla masks in performances, interventions, poster campaigns and pamphlets as a way to hide their identities and draw attention to inequalities within the art world. By wearing the masks, they create a myth around their real identities and the focus becomes more about the issues they are campaigning on rather than their personalities.

Sociologist Norman Denzin (2000, p.905) refers to 'mystories' as "reflexive, critical stories...that enact liminal experiences. These are storied retellings that seek the truth of life's fictions via evocation rather than explanation or analysis" (ibid.).<sup>82</sup> The aim is for readers or viewers watching or reading the performed texts to relive the experience as if it had happened to them, "interpreting the past from the point of view of the present" (ibid.). This can be seen in the performed re-readings of interview transcripts in some of the 'Performative Interviews'. Similarly, the artist, actor and researcher Anna Deavere Smith has been developing an ongoing project called 'On the Road: A search for American Character' where she has been trying to find 'American character' in

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<sup>82</sup> The practice of 'mystories' are expanded in Gregory Ulmer's 'Teletheory' (1989, reprinted in 2004), which explores pedagogy in a digital age.

the ways that people speak. She introduced her project to her interviewees as “If you give me an hour of your time, I’ll invite you to see yourself performed” (in Denzin 2001, p.33). She turns the transcripts of her interviews into scripts and performs the interviewees on stage using their words. She describes these interview texts as ‘physical, audible, performable vehicles’ (ibid., p.34).

Another example of this method of re-performing transcripts can be seen in the video piece, ‘Kamera Lauft! [Rollig!]’ For this, the collective Kleines Postfordisches Drama (Small Post-Fordist Drama, KPD) interviewed a number of cultural producers about their ‘work life’ and used the transcripts as scripts that a cast of actors performed to camera. They describe how the film set, “represents not only the place of performance and staging but is at the same time always a place where the immediate working conditions are being negotiated, with all the associated potential for conflict” (Kleines Postfordisches Drama n.d.). This is similar to a method called ethnodrama developed by Jim Mienczakowski in which “co-performers read performance scripts based on fieldwork and interviews conducted in the fieldsetting” giving “the text back to the readers and informants in the recognition that we are all co-performers in each other’s lives” (Denzin 2001, p.26). The idea is that ‘informants’ control the text and its representation:

Ethnodrama sits within an extant school of theatre which searches for social change but differs from other forms of similar theatre in that it adheres to the principles of formal and recognizable ethnographic research methodology, above and beyond the artist demands of aesthetics, in its attempt to produce cultural critique. (Mienczakowski 2001, p.470)

Mienczakowski suggests that performed ethnography might be more accessible than traditional written reports. The methods of ethnodrama, mystories, confessional video-diaries, Deavere Smith’s search for ‘American character’ and KPD’s performances are examples of the performative potential of practice based research that have informed my approach to the ‘Performative Interviews’. Telling, sharing, re-telling, editing, performing and re-sharing are processes that open up the research process to multiple interpretations, drawing attention to the mode of research itself and the fallibility of the interview process as a staple research tool. Sociologist Barbara Sherman Heyl, for example, remarks on the problematic power relations of the interview: “for some respondents, the research interview may not be an appropriate place to ‘tell all’” (Heyl 2001, p.376). In a formal interview situation the interviewee may tell the interviewer what they think they want to hear – providing a kind of fiction. Recognising that it is not about presenting authentic experiences but testing what it means to present experiences as authentic:

...what the interviewees choose to share with the researchers reflects conditions in their relationship and the interview situation. Central to this is how interviewees reconstruct events or aspects of social experience, as well as how interviewers make sense of what is being said to them. (ibid., p. 370)

The ‘performed’ element adds an aesthetic layer of drama and absurdity to the interview process, throwing the purpose of interviewing as evidence gathering into question. This may allow us to create and produce new languages and ways of interpreting and discussing experiences and of creating new work rather than representations and documents of past events. The stories become parodies and vignettes that viewers may relate to differently than they might to a survey, statistical information or transcript: “The dialogic interview exposes its own means of production. In contrast, the documentary interview hides behind the apparatuses of production, thereby creating the illusion that the viewer and reader have direct access to reality” (Denzin 2001, p.33). As Judith Butler has explored, one’s subjectivity and agency are created *through* these performative acts, drawing attention to the different possibilities of interaction and interpretations of the interview format itself as a site where the subject performs itself into being.

### **7.3 Part 1: Negotiating rejection and failure**

In each of these stories we hear how proposals to turn the lens of critique towards the organisations that commissioned them have ended in rejection, cancellation and/or compromise. For example, we hear how an invitation to work with front of house staff led to a project that challenged the hierarchical staff structure of a museums service and the project being pulled (‘Self-interview: Very Disappointing’); a publication about a public art project which was to act as a gift to the community led to the removal of a critical text that reflected on the controversy the artwork caused (‘It’s not all flipping roses!’); a proposal for a performative intervention into an arts festival that parodied the antagonism their commissioners claimed to endorse went a step too far and the artists were un-invited to take part (‘Cornflake: Shooting in the dark’); artists who risked rewriting a public art brief that steered art away from providing a ‘gateway’ feature were shunned by the commissioner for being too conceptual and ephemeral (‘Duck, Frog and Horse on Crater 5’) and finally, we hear an example of how someone found the resources and confidence to say ‘no’ in order to avoid further compromises and situations of ‘repressive tolerance’ (‘Learning to say no’). The friction caused by these acts of rejection are often not highlighted or considered of merit and are usually brushed under the carpet as embarrassing mistakes. It is in these frustrating compromises or acts of participating in the ‘wrong’ way, being ‘un-invited’, ‘de-commissioned’ or removed from the projects, that I suggest one can find a sense of agency and critical engagement as

the frame of the commission comes sharply into focus in a way that forces one to reconsider one's critical relationship to it.

We are left asking if compromise is an inevitable part of the art commissioning process and that if an artist is not willing to make these compromises, should they be commissioned in the first place? To what extent does the commissioner have to compromise or change their expectations of the process too? The artists reflect on how perhaps there was not the time, space (or inclination) to unpick what was expected of them and that in these situations it is important to listen to yourself and ask what is going wrong: "maybe it's having the bravery, foresight and financial reserves to say no to something", as the Frog on Crater 5 remarks. There is a glimmer of hope in someone being self-empowered to say 'no' to organisations, commissioners or funders that demand too much or make irrelevant requests. The issue of capacity of an organisation or individual to deal with the demands (and opportunities) is a real issue and allows little time for reflection in order to build on or question the work being done.



*Image 10.*

These five short films also reveal experiences of miscommunication and crossed wires between artists and commissioners that develop out of a lack of dialogue. While the briefs may not have been clear from the outset, the artists found in the end that they were participating in the contractual relationship in the 'wrong' way. The format of these interviews also makes us question the validity of the voices – who is speaking for whom? There are slippages as the woman sitting in front of the fire addresses the camera as if it is not her who this had happened to ('Self-interview: Very Disappointing'); two actors speak the words of someone absent ('It's not all flipping roses!'); the men in their handmade disguises become cartoon-like as they retell an experience they had to walk away from ('Cornflake: Shooting in the dark') and one voice wearing different masks performs three perspectives on the same event ('Duck, Frog and Horse on Crater 5'). How do we know

which one is ‘real’ or are they all contrived? The performative aspect exaggerates the ways in which the protagonists have to perform expected roles in the contracts they enter into and highlights the moments when performances are not good enough and expectations are not met.

#### **7.4 Part 2: Taking a stand**

The accounts in Part 2 reveal something about the ways in which the protagonists renegotiate a sense of agency in themselves and the people they are working with, for example, the women in ‘Serious Research’ are declaring the very real dilemmas they face as mothers in justifying to their friends and families that their return to study is valid. That they are trying to find their voices through both their hysterical laughter and the pressures of performing the roles of mother and dedicated student is a powerful testament to the complex contractual relations that stretch beyond the commission and bleed into all aspects of life.



*Image 11.*

‘The Egg Liberation Front’ presents a metaphor of a failed cross-cultural collaboration between two curators (Fox and Wolf) as their ideas and expectations of artists (chickens) collide. It is maybe these differences and conflicts that are more valid than false or forced representations of cultural exchange. How do you create a platform of support without dictating the content or activity that may then take place? Wolf’s call for an ‘egg liberation front’ could perhaps be reinterpreted as a call for cultural democracy if it liberates art/ideas/culture from oppressive frameworks of commissions; from the supposed ‘owners’ of culture – artists, curators, funders and commissioners to broader notions of cultural production. Such a liberation front would not necessarily be plotted in a secret base in a centralised, ritualized way, rather through the existing actions of people finding ways to be radical in the everyday. There are many different forms in which people critique the situations they are in on a daily basis and, depending on the severity of the critique, this can sometimes lead to the termination of contracts, job losses, removal of funding or major

compromises being made. It is a risky business if it is taken seriously; it requires the ‘radical’ to change themselves rather than impose change on other people.

In the ‘Source of Art is in the Life of a People’, Williams symbolically wears her ‘work hat’ confidently emblazoned with the words of artist Walter Crane (1845-1915), emphasising the position from which she is speaking. In her retelling of a recent tragic episode her professional work and emotional life collided and she found herself in a state of enforced ‘non-action’, in the sense that it forced her into a state of critical reflection. She was now convinced that the children she was working with on more artist-led participatory projects had to come first and that the artists she works with should share this approach. Williams’ approach could be interpreted as one of discriminating tolerance that Marcuse referred to which he saw as the only way out of a situation of repressive tolerance. In such an emergency situation, one has to overtly take the side of the oppressed (in this case, the children of the estate where she has been working) and drop the tolerances of artists’ freedoms to express themselves and develop their own work.

In ‘Interlude’ the prescribed, homogenising effects of public art commissions and notions of empowerment through participation are challenged as the different forms of watching, facilitating, volunteering and mentoring are recognised as equally valid and emancipated forms of participation. ‘Banging on Doors’ illustrates collaboration between an artist and community development officer and the (productive) blurring of boundaries in such a partnership. While the methods the artist and civil servant use are often overlapping, the responsibilities dictated by their different contractual positions, however, remain distinct. There is a shared sense of frustration and potentiality in working towards change suggesting that it is the local power brokers that need challenging in this respect.

### **7.5 Revealing the cracks in the commissioning process**

In both parts 1 and 2, the films act as stand alone statements on the conditions of cultural production. Together, they offer insights concerning decision-making processes on all levels, in which people are finding ways of justifying their participation in different forms of cultural production. As testimonials they speak of micro interactions that have led to ruptures in the flows of the industry they serve which in turn reveals the cracks in the commissioning process. These disruptions allow the interviews and viewers of the films to reconsider the value and validity of this industry and the expectations placed on it. While they attempt to move beyond what Minh-ha has described as a ‘mere stir within the frame’, they are also a method for further engaging those involved in the commissioning process as an invitation to rethink the way the industry operates.

Together, they contest claims of criticality and social engagement that frame this industry in a way that works towards redistributing the right and practice of critical self-reflection as a form of cultural democracy.

The ‘ruptures’ described through the interviews are not contrived but emerged through negotiable and contested experiences of the commissioning process. The ‘Performative Interview’ was a site for people to reconfigure and express these critical dilemmas after the fact. The generative metaphor of the masked or re-enacted interview was used to elicit critical distance offering new perspectives that, rather than being reconciliatory, aimed to maintain the tensions inherent in the framing of commissioned culture allowing the conflictual elements to come to the fore. Rather than brush these ‘mistakes’ under the carpet or resort to suggesting a model of ‘best practice’, these re-framed ‘ruptures’ raise awareness of familiar situations. To what extent, however, did they go beyond drawing attention to these conditions and move towards intersubjective encounters or dialogical exchanges that consciously open up opportunities for self-directed, performative acts of subversion (‘la perruque’) and not close down debates on scenarios of commissioned, democratised culture as failed, unsuccessful projects? A further stage of the ‘Performative Interviews’ method could involve presenting the films to an audience to elicit further discussion and consider actions that could be taken. The final project I focus on here, ‘FUNding FACTORY’, attempts to redress this balance between a process of critical reflection that raises consciousness of the conditions of cultural production and the need to devise a site for physically enacting and responding to these issues in a way that potentially transforms one’s terms of engagement with cultural production.

*'FUNding FACTORY'*



## 8. 'FUNding FACTORY'<sup>83</sup>

### 8.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I focus on the 'FUNding FACTORY', a project in which critical reflection goes a step further than 'Het Reservaat', 'Critical Friends' and 'Performative Interviews' and uses the factory or production line as a generative metaphor for negotiating the professionalisation and **precariousness** of commissioned cultural work. I developed the 'FUNding FACTORY' following an invitation to use the gallery, Open Space Zentrum für Kunstprojekte by its curator Gülsen Bal.<sup>84</sup> The resulting project was a practical experiment in trying to turn the critique back onto the conditions of art as labour. Starting with a series of 'Performative Interviews' with six professional cultural workers in Vienna<sup>85</sup> I went on to co-create a practical workshop in which a group of five art students and I constructed an environment for collective production whilst critically reflecting on the issues this entails (it is this workshop element of the 'FUNding FACTORY' that is the focus of my analysis here).<sup>86</sup>

By co-constructing a cultural production line I wanted to see what potential there was for us to critically negotiate both the metaphor of cultural production and the invitation itself to co-create a project by treading the line between taking a position (on the production line) and critically reflecting on what this implies. Following on from 'Het Reservaat', 'Critical Friends' and previous 'Performative Interview' investigations, the 'FUNding FACTORY' was an opportunity to directly confront the inherent (albeit silent) art as labour contract and to find out how people negotiate the agendas of contracted cultural work. What convictions do practitioners have about what/who they work with and with whom (if ever) do people refuse to enter a contract?

Straddling fantasy and reality the 'Performative Interviews' I carried out in Vienna tell stories of repressive tolerance ('The Bat' and 'The Horse's Mouth'), saving critical art (in the form of 'The New Collector' and 'The Fairy Tale Princess') and the parameters of critical practice (in 'The Journalist' and 'The Office'). The artist Barbara Holub, for example, contributed by performing a

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<sup>83</sup> See Logbook #4 in Appendix A for a summary and further documentation of this project.

<sup>84</sup> The gallery is in a basement of a residential block in the 2nd district of Vienna which Bal runs effectively single-handedly and funds through project grants from a variety of sources, such as The Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture and the Erste Foundation. The programme consists of monthly group shows (curated by Bal or invited guest curators) underpinned by theoretical and political concerns, reflecting Bal's interests in investigative art as research.

<sup>85</sup> I interviewed six professional cultural producers employed by their cultural work as teachers, critics, curators or artists, recommended to me by Bal: Fahim Amir, Fatih Aydogdu, Barbara Holub, Walter Seidl as well as Bal and an anonymous cultural worker (whose written response can be read in Logbook #4). My questions focused on what they considered the limits of critical/political art practice might be. Descriptions of these filmed 'Performative Interviews' for the 'FUNding FACTORY' can be read in Appendix E.

<sup>86</sup> I put an open call out to students from the Universität für Angewandte Kunst in Vienna to participate in the 'FUNding FACTORY'. Five students decided they wanted to work on developing the 'FUNding FACTORY': Domenico Mühle, Tina Raffel, Christoph Srb, Corina Vetsch and Reinhold Zisser. We met a number of times and created an installation in the gallery that represented a 'cultural production line' in May 2009 which was then open to the public for a month.

script she wrote based on an imaginary ‘New Collector’ who would solve the problem of funding political and critical art. In two of the interviews the issue of how and if the interviewees could participate came up, for example, the theoretician and cultural producer Fahim Amir described why he did not want to participate in the project and an anonymous written contribution describes why they could not participate publicly in the process due to their conflict of interest as a journalist. These filmed interviews were then screened on monitors embedded in the production line I made with the students. They became critical positions on issues of survival, negotiation and compromise, acting as cogs, sand and lubricants to the machines of cultural production.



*Image 12.*

Following the exhibition in Vienna I organised ‘Making A Living’, a one-day public event (co-facilitated with Veronica Restrepo and the Carrot Workers Collective) on 26 September 2009 at the Austrian Cultural Forum (ACF), London to continue the conversations started through the ‘FUNding FACTORY’. Attendees were invited to confess modes of survival, declare ideals and decide collectively how to spend the £500 funding received from the ACF for the event. The students I worked with on the ‘FUNding FACTORY’ travelled to London for the event, their flights and accommodation paid for by the ACF.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Veronica Restrepo and I facilitated the event and the Carrot Workers Collective carried out a performative mapping exercise to capture “a year of your life in the cultural field”. We facilitated this event in a way that enabled the different voices in the room to be heard. During a ‘Soap Boxing’ session, for example, attendees were encouraged to share experiences of artistic survival and tell us about their fantastical and realistic proposals for making a living. A concoction of majority, spectrum and consensus voting then lead us to a decision on how to spend the £500 funding from the Austrian Cultural Forum (which we voted to give to the Carrot Workers Collective to go towards the printing of their counter-internship guide). We decided collectively to continue to meet and Making a Living (MAL) has now become an independent group of arts professionals currently active across the UK who meet regularly to research and campaign on issues of art and labour.

## **8.2 The Funding of the 'FUNding FACTORY'**

Despite Open Space's fundraising efforts, ironically, there was no funding for the 'FUNding FACTORY'. I was asked by the curator to apply to the Arts Council and/or the British Council which I explained to Bal I was unwilling to do because firstly I would be ineligible as a full time student to apply and secondly I saw a problem in asking for more UK tax-payer's money to do a project in Vienna when I was already receiving public funding for my studies through my grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). This was an ethical as well as practical dilemma and in the end I made the decision to do the project based on the fact that my AHRC grant would cover my time and the cost of two return flights to Vienna and on the basis that there would be little or no production costs. The lack of funds also extended to the participants of the project who had to make a decision about the amount of time and energy they wanted to put into the project based on the fact that there were no fees or production budget.

This experiment in exploring the hierarchies of art work and processes of negotiation artists go through was based on the self-exploitation of my own labour and of those who took part. My suggestion to make transparent in the exhibition this fact by making visible as part of the installation the budget and funding for the 'FUNding FACTORY' was not encouraged by Bal. Exposing the disparities between funding for the different monthly exhibitions (who gets paid for what) was not something the gallery wanted to draw attention to; if it appeared they are able to do so much with so little then their funders may be reluctant to give the gallery funding for the programme in the future.

While the budgets were not exposed, the 'FUNding FACTORY' aimed to draw attention to the mechanisms of producing critical practice and the dilemmas this causes in practice. In contemporary, commissioned practices characteristics such as collective production and critical reflection have become the apparatus of an artists' toolbox, which they can charge for implementing. It could be argued, however, that the system of arts funding and commissioning increases the power of a minority of professionals. When those professionals start to draw attention to the inequity of the situation, however, they can be asked to leave. There appears to be plenty of people waiting in the queue to do the work instead. The 'FUNding FACTORY' aimed to draw attention to these conditions of art labour that rely on the professionalisation of its workforce. While the artist is considered a 'free agent', I wanted to draw attention to the conditions that retain this illusion and critically engage with our complicity in the creative industries as another form of alienated, socialised labour. Rather than mourn the lost autonomy of artists as free agents, I wanted to consider the implications of the professionalisation of an industry that on the one hand creates a

more exclusive caucus of professional cultural producers whilst at the same time has made some progress (since the days of FACOP for example) to promote fair pay of artists as a recognised form of labour. Iles and Berry (2009), for example, suggest that cultural/regeneration management agencies are now doing the work of artists: “the era of public art may indeed cede to that of the creative manager” (ibid.). They differentiate between ‘actual artists’ and ‘creatives’ implying that ‘creatives’ are more ‘efficient, specialised and professionalised’ (ibid., p.11) and able to “privilege deliverability and consultation over other concerns” (Vasseur quoted by Berry and Iles, ibid., p.20).<sup>88</sup> Does this then imply that ‘actual artists’ are the obverse of this, unable or unwilling to organise and it is this very dis- or self-organised status that distinguishes them as artists? I would argue that the problem with professionalism is not an ‘administrative turn’ (as many critical practices have this ‘organising principle’ at their heart), rather it is the capacity to claim a critical position from which to speak, perform or collaborate that is at stake, whether you consider yourself an artist, ‘creative worker’, administrator or participant.

### **8.3 Testing the parameters of critical practice**

In two of the interviews I carried out for the ‘FUNding FACTORY’ the protagonists tell us why they chose not to take part (echoing a ‘Critical Friend’s’ proposal to interview non-participants of Stream projects). In the anonymous written contribution (see Logbook #4) a journalist writes how some of his writing work is paid and some is not, but that for him, “even if the working process and the workflow are identical between those two activities, there is one fundamental difference, which - for me personally - is the key issue about professionalism: money”. For the journalist, “the only criterion for classifying something as professional or not, is the salary someone gets”. When one is paid (i.e. considered ‘professional’), however, this commitment (or contract) then “turns into something like bondage and obligation”. So while payment affords him professional status, it also ties him into a responsibility “which manifests itself in the form of capital”. His non-professional, unpaid work, on the other hand, which he keeps separate from his paid work, is motivated by his desire to “learn and canalise knowledge without being under the pressure of commercial issues, which means: money”. It is for this reason that he cannot reveal his identity, as his inclusion in the ‘FUNding FACTORY’ would jeopardize his professionalism and the worlds he usually keeps separate would intermingle. Not only will it look like the anonymous journalist has a biased interest in the space, it may also jeopardize his ability to be critical of it. This perhaps represents a specific case of a journalist’s integrity and need for critical distance but how does this translate in

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<sup>88</sup> Reinhold Zisser, one of the students I worked with on the ‘FUNding FACTORY’ also made this distinction between artist and creative worker, suggesting that some of the other students were responding to my invitation as (uncritical) creative workers (following my instructions) rather than as artists: “after my first anger was released, I came up to following thought: I think you created this subject, that you never talked about directly. The concept that you have to gain consciousness about the subject you’re in. If you don’t you’re a creative worker” (Zisser 2009).

commissioned art? The roles here are often blurred where a professional, paid artist on a contract (implying ‘bondage and obligation’ to fulfill that contract) may work unpaid (overtime) taking on different roles outside the context of the commission (for example the ‘Critical Friends’ were unpaid – did this therefore offer them more scope to be critical?). An allegiance with the person who is paying you is expected, however, and it is not appreciated if you turn the critique back onto them.<sup>89</sup> To what extent are there demands for increasingly professional, paid roles (which afford a critical distance from a distant target whilst being tied to one’s employee) and to what extent are artists willing to collapse those boundaries?

In the ‘Performative Interview’, ‘The Office’, cultural theorist and activist Fahim Amir refers to the limits of critical or political practice in that these kinds of debates are usually permitted as long as they do not question directly the situation in which they are taking place (“you can always do it as long as it, preferably, has little relation to the concrete situation”). This is a key issue in terms of the commissions examined in the previous chapter and issues of repressive tolerance outlined earlier. A critique of issues beyond one’s control seems more permissible than a critique that refocuses back on the context in which the commission/contract is taking place.<sup>90</sup> Turning such a critique back onto the industry of commissioning itself would damage its image of supporting artists to develop critical, meaningful work.

Amir states how he only gets involved in a project if he is paid, if it is non-commercial or if it is political. None of these, he thought, applied to ‘FUNding FACTORY’ – neither was he getting paid and “nor is it very political – except for what is defined as political in the artistic field namely to argue about political issues”. Neither is it non-commercial in that he defines Open Space as “an established variable in a conventional art concept” that expects people to work voluntarily and “this often informal negotiation of voluntary work is something I only do under certain circumstances”.

Amir refers to the need for transparency of budgets as a crucial first step in developing a political art process where the different actors can start conversing on equal terms and create solidarity among artists: “In this respect, the disclosure of financial statements within a capitalistic relationship would actually be a precondition for further activities in order to take the whole issue seriously at all.” It is the informal conditions of work, such as that proffered by Open Space, for

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<sup>89</sup> In a recent article artist/activist John Jordan, for example, reflected on his experience of being censored by Tate Modern when, during a workshop he had been invited to do, the participants turned their critique towards the gallery’s oil sponsorship (Jordan 2010).

<sup>90</sup> For example; not being encouraged to display the budget of the ‘FUNding FACTORY’ publicly as part of the installation, my staged protest at the entrance of ‘Het Reservaat’ being ignored and being discouraged to show the ‘Critical Friends’ magazine to Stream’s funders.

example, where, he says, hierarchies of labour become blurred and it becomes harder to talk about money, when “everyone’s friends with each other, coffee is free and overtime is not paid”. How does one value one’s labour, maintain critical integrity and make a living (and not be self-exploited or exploit others) when the borders between work and leisure are disintegrating? Amir refers to how he turned his hobby into his profession and what some of the issues of this have been. He refers to how once work is,

...alienated or you cannot relate to it at all– then it is pretty clear that once work has finished, you are looking forward to spending some leisure time – which then somehow has become the kingdom of happiness and freedom. However, if work itself fulfils such possibilities, then a civic middle-class work routine, a typical separation between work and leisure, is no longer possible.

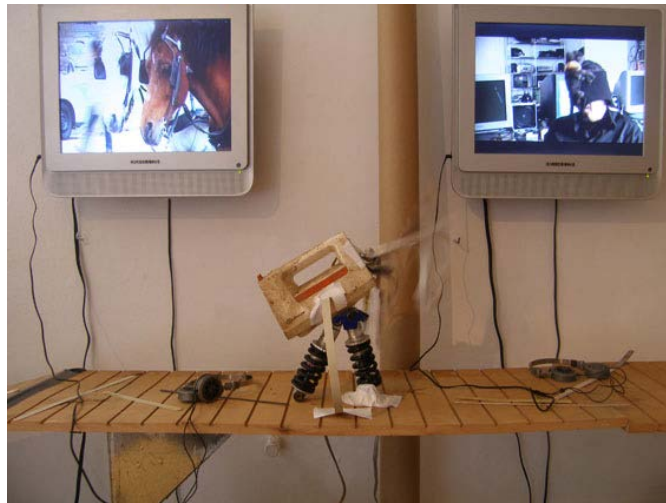
If you survive by doing the ‘job’ of art (which itself supposedly represents happiness and freedom), there is a danger that you never stop working unless you find a way of turning art into a job which in turn might make it more alienated, which is what the artist might have been trying to avoid in the first place. The contract as a symbol of alienated art work presents a conflict for artists who try and squeeze their art-life into a 6 month contract. Amir has “a different set of standards” to manage this, “for instance, if there is a certain project as well as certain amount of money – then I estimate how many hours it would take me and orientate myself, I try to stick to these working hours.” If you try to do too much, he warns, “you only exist as a ghost somehow. Speaking of this, such a ghost is something I don’t want to become”. It is these issues that Amir and the anonymous journalist through their acts of non-participation and reflections on the dilemmas of participation in relation to art labour which influenced the practical work I went on to do with the students in the making of the ‘FUNding FACTORY’.

#### **8.4 Collectively constructing the cultural production line**

Whereas the interviews with professional cultural workers in Vienna resulted in declarations or affirmations of positions, the ‘FUNding FACTORY’ workshop was a process of questioning the security of those positions and a chance to rethink them with a group of people at the beginnings of their professional art careers. It became a performative social experiment in participation in which the group acted as both the guinea pigs and scientists. The artist Thomas Hirschhorn wrote a short text ‘Towards ‘Precarious Theatre’ (2009) about his project ‘Spinoza Theatre’ in the Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival, Amsterdam, in which he declared the work a disaster but that never the less it ‘made him happy’ on lots of counts, for example, in that he maintained the “equalitarian (everyone

in the play is of same importance) and totalitarian direction (no discussion) which I imposed on my actors” and “to have stood up to the actresses and actors of the neighbourhood, who resisted with force and made me pay a high price for my lack of preparation and savoir faire with ‘people’”. Unlike Hirschhorn’s ‘Precarious Theatre’, my approach to the ‘FUNding FACTORY’ was not as a theatre workshop as such, but the process did to some extent become an improvised drama in which the set we were co-producing became the focus of the ‘play’ as we inadvertently performed different roles in this scenario. This follows through in the prescribed framework of the factory installation I introduced (considered a constraint by some of those involved) and the ‘equalitarian’ freedom of the participants to interact, challenge and disrupt that framework. The artist Artur Zmijewski in his films ‘Two Monuments’ (2009) and ‘Them’ (2007), constructs scenarios of participation and interaction between groups of people and then takes a step back, behind the camera and watches the uncomfortable, antagonistic scenes unfold. With the ‘FUNding FACTORY’ I included myself in a ‘theatre of participation’ rather than being a silent observer behind a camera. I was implicated in the negotiations and power plays the framework I set up went on to produce.

The students developed collective and individual ways of working that weaved in and out of that framework, such as filming the making of the factory, setting up a CCTV control room to monitor the workers and visitors, cutting hair at the launch, installing wheels, chains and cogs and laying tracks of old railway line through the space. I also invited my sister, Fran Hope to respond to the concept remotely with an illustration. As a graphic designer she has recently returned to college to rethink the design-as-job process and where her passion lies in the act of production. Her drawings acted as inspirations rather than instructions on which to build our factory. Without being prescriptive about what the factory produced, we continued the factory metaphor to consider the mixing, squeezing, filing, filtering, testing, rejecting, slicing, wrapping, packaging and distributing that goes on in all different kinds of cultural production. In the end, it looked the way it did because of the materials and people involved, the need to intervene and make our mark, erase our marks, record our marks and the decision to be part of a process. It draws on methods of Participatory Action Research and Ethnodrama in the way that participation was directed by the participants themselves rather than me as the a director or curator, although it was the tensions between me initiating and orchestrating a scenario of collective production and the intersubjective, dialogical exchanges that occurred within that scenario that became the focus of the ‘FUNding FACTORY’.



*Image 13.*

The questions I posed and my proposition of making a ‘cultural production line’ provided the starting points for my conversations with the students. This caused confusion at the beginning, however, as the students assumed a group show would materialise from my invitation (a misunderstanding perhaps influenced by the fact that I was introduced to the students as a curator). I was interested in finding out if we could break down the hierarchies between practitioners and acknowledge that we are all on this production line together, with different ways of approaching and negotiating it. Rather than curate a group show of the students’ work, I was more interested in setting something up to see how they reflected on their positions and conditions of art and not in the content of the artwork that they were currently making. While I was intending to collaborate with the students on developing the installation it initially came across to them that I had already made up my mind and that all I needed were some lackeys to help me build it. Reinhold Zisser wrote in an email to me after the installation of the ‘FUNDing FACTORY’:

At our first meeting when you introduced your concept I felt like, ‘oh, she just needs people to build up her concept’. After the second meeting... I felt good with the concept because you talked a lot about how everyone can involve his [sic] own ideas and statements into the whole thing. After receiving the mail with the plans for the factory [made by Fran Hope] I began to doubt that and began to feel that my first suspicions were kind of entitled. (Zisser 2009)

The contract I was interested in entering into with the students, however, was more open ended than that. I wanted to see what happened when they had the opportunity to work together to design, intervene and build the factory as a way of reconsidering their relationship to their own positions as



‘creative industry-workers’. The drawing by Fran Hope was an interpretation of this invitation rather than a set of blueprints. The ‘FUNding FACTORY’ proved to be a conflictive process where moments of solidarity, collectivity and ‘intersubjective communication’ and all the contentions that come with this approach manifested themselves. Zisser described how he started to develop an idea for the ‘FUNding FACTORY’ but that through the discussions and installation,

...a new dynamic developed itself for me. The project the ‘FUNding FACTORY’ was no longer a theoretical approach, but a structure developed in which so many questions were raised about the original theme that a work about it could no longer have a closed reflection. Through this inclusion of the problem in the solution it was difficult for me to find a beginning or end point. Therefore I decided to lay rails through the exhibition room. The rails were my statement on the theme in the end. The rails ran from the right to the left wall, beginning and end were the boundaries of the room, not the beginning or end of the rails – the track. In order to move through the exhibition it was necessary to cross over the rails. (in Bal 2010)

By offering such an open invitation I perhaps inscribed my presence even more so than if I had been more prescriptive and ‘dictatorial’. This relates to Rancière’s re-reading of the ‘Ignorant Schoolmaster’ as the distinction between roles opens up more of a possibility for others to find their own relationship to the work rather than assuming or attempting equal status. By avoiding taking a leading role and attempting to share the curatorial and artistic responsibility such openness could be interpreted as oppressive.<sup>91</sup> Zisser’s response relates to the role of ‘recruitment’ in commissioned projects and the resistance to be empowered (controlled) by the artist. In the case of the ‘FUNding FACTORY’, the participants are artists, self-prescribed authors and agents of creativity. Any attempt to question that position and suggest collective, co-production that implies losing some individual authorship is understandably met with some confusion and hostility. To shed individual authorship seemed to be an insult in that it reduces one’s position to a non-artist relegated to the perceived position of disempowered participant.

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<sup>91</sup> This refers back to the analysis of Jayne Murray’s difficulty in wanting to keep the project open enough for people to define their own participation and become co-authors of the process and yet this very openness can put some people off and be more constricting than perhaps a clear, straightforward instruction might be.



*Image 14.*

The factory necessarily evolved using found materials, mainly thanks to one of the students, Domenico Muehle who worked in a large theatre set design and constructing company, which he arranged for us to visit and collect material from. The use of discarded remnants of old theatre sets and the detritus of building replica environments for the stage seemed entirely fitting to the re-created fantasy environment of symbolic production: a cultural production line precariously stuck together with Gaffa tape. Some of the interpretations of the production line metaphor from the students included:

Some nebulous creature representing the ‘real art world’ opposed to the life around the university. The cultural production line seems like an overbearing, unpredictable beast, standing between me and my fortune. (Raffel in Bal 2010)

A metaphor for production under precarious circumstances. (Srb in Hope et al 2009)

I see it as a type of art assembly line within which I am familiar with some situations from my own experience, but the rest not. I don’t like being part of a cultural product - production line – however, I don’t see any viable alternative yet. (Vetsch in Hope et al 2009)

Through the main questions posed during the discussions we had about the ‘FUNding FACTORY’, I recognised the opportunity of developing a ‘symbolic internship’. I saw the interactions between the individual participants and the group work during our participation as a metaphor of social behaviour in the cultural production line. (Muehle in

Bal 2010)

In a similar way that the 'Performative Interviews' invited people to critically reflect on the hypothetical and real positions they take in relation to their professional practices, the making of the factory reflected the processes involved in making, surviving and collaborating in daily life. Muehle, for example, made an installation of three bicycle wheels mounted on a wall, connected by chains accompanied by a video of him, his partner and their baby going on the giant Ferris wheel in Vienna with a souvenir photo pinned on the wall of their trip. Vetsch and Raffel reflected on their ambitions and questions they have of their practice within the framework of the factory:

Within the next 5 years, I should like to have found a way to incorporate myself as well as my studies in society and to be compensated appropriately. I am aware that this goal isn't easy to achieve nowadays. 'FUNding FACTORY' reminded me of the fact that I don't like to think about this question and that I tend to lie to myself about it... To me, 'FUNding FACTORY' demonstrated many opportunities, difficulties and viewpoints of my presence as a contemporary artist in a critical cultural organization and has made me more critical/discriminating. I clearly recognized that teamwork is for me the most productive and felt supported in my views by Sophie's approach to the project. (Vetsch in Hope et al 2009)

I wanted a clean break from what I normally do, how I usually approach themes. I suddenly realised that I was sick of staying in my studio alone, rethinking me, myself and my world and what I believe art is, every day alone. Furthermore it was of course interesting to see the others adjusting to the group situation... Giving me clues to where I stand and opening up a lot of questions. (Raffel in Bal 2010)

Participation in a social encounter can invoke a questioning of the meaning of that encounter and invite critical reflection. This could be the moment that the protagonist realises the story they are in, identifies the role they play in that story and investigate it further. The different approaches to group work and defining one's own voice in the process became a significant issue to the participants and perhaps reflects the contradictory notion of developing individual authorship (becoming an artist at art school) and the possibility of working collectively on establishing a common goal. Muehle, for example, describes how there are two kinds of group work:

That of different people who put everyone's work together and the other is a group that

works together on one thing. The idea is to strike a balance between individual work in the group and the group working as an individual...Up until the opening of the 'FUNDing FACTORY', we were clear that every one of us had different understandings about group work and participated with their own skills. Everything just grew from the circumstance of open individuality serving the one production of the 'FUNDing FACTORY'. (Muehle in Bal 2010)

For some, the challenge was about negotiating a collective process of production and for others it was about carving out an individual presence from that collective appearance. Zisser raises this when he refers to how while the process was open to co-production; it was also 'authored' by the five students when "there were many other people we talked to". He notes how it was those five students who were then invited to travel to London to take part in 'Making a Living', so there was already a hierarchy of authorship (Hope et al 2009). Zisser took this to be a game:

So this whole thing showed me a right way how to work on art, creating a game. It's not about having the same way; it's about the same goal, and creating a scene where everyone can take part. I think the quality of this exhibition only shows if we put the progress in right words. I really want to know how much of that was intended by you, how much it was your concept, and how much of it just evolved during the progress. (Zisser 2009)

For Srb, while he could see the benefits to working as a group, when working on your own, "both the production and the authorship are in your hands...Basically, to sustain one's position in the world alone is the challenge" (Hope et al 2009). Vetsch and Raffel, by contrast stated:

[I find it] easier and more satisfying to work in groups with different people, ideas and suggestions. Needless to say, difficult situations, conflicts, power struggles, etc, etc. influence the working process and can trigger anger or fear. In the final analysis, group processes are more satisfying and more often better developed and stronger than the work of the individual...For me the most exciting thing was how we worked together and how the collaboration worked – who got involved and how and there were small disappointing things but at the end there was a stopping point and somehow everyone could agree and be happy with that stopping point ... Not only thinking about art industries but about this collective work and the social processes that went on was to me the most important thing... (Vetsch in Hope et al 2009)

A group like us, it's hard to get fast targets, fast results...you don't know where it's taking us yet... like you do know when you work alone... What interested me was there was more of an element of chance in this group way of working...although I never think you ever really work alone... (Raffel in Hope et al 2009)

The group temporarily become a collective with all the tensions this embodied. Some people in the group (Raffel, Vetsch, Muehle and I) worked together on the making of the whole production line and were perhaps more willing or able to risk opening ourselves up to this process and sacrifice individual authorship. Others in the group focused on their individual work, with Srb working on the technology to rig up CCTV, Zisser with his colleagues bringing a heavy section of steel track and wooden sleepers from a disused railway into the gallery and Muehle building his bicycle wheel wall installation.

These different approaches to participation created parallel experiences, frustrations and awakenings in the group. The participants did not know where the parameters of the project lay and kept trying to find out by testing each other's reactions. The group working on the production line tried to resist presenting themselves or products of themselves, but rather something produced collectively. Despite this, there was still the urge to discretely tell others 'I did that bit'. Tina Raffel:

Many people at the opening asked me, 'Tina, what's your part?'...

Corina Vetsch: When we started the production line, I knew this question would be coming, if I invite people, people will ask, what did you do, what is your special part? I did not want to have a special part but when the point of the opening came nearer I thought I have to do something of which I can say, I did it! Because I knew the question of the people and I could not get through it with not having something special there and so I did some drawings – but in the beginning I did not want to have a special object ... (Hope et al 2009)

The 'author' returns as the individuals in the group reclaim their authorship and abandon collective ownership before performing the expected role of artist by evidencing individual, authored expression. When asked if they considered themselves to be authors of the project, some of the students replied:

I see my involvement as a protagonist in the factory similar to an actor in a movie. So in

this case I am not an author because I just reacted to the pre-formulated theme of the 'FUNding FACTORY', although the role of an artist's work in the cultural production line is that of an author. (Muehle in Bal 2010)

Definitely yes! Because I shaped/thought about things and/or talked about them with my co-workers. Moreover I think that there were more authors than just the people whose names were on the flyer. (Raffel in Bal 2010)

Somehow, yes. I consider 'FUNding FACTORY' as a whole, a part that are Sophie's and our contributions in Open Space. Even though it is a small part, our work will go down in the history of the 'FUNding FACTORY'. (Srb in Hope et al 2009)

I would consider myself as a part of it, perhaps something like a co-author. (Vetsch in Hope et al 2009)

The process allowed us to question the socially constructed scenarios of both 'collectivity' and also of the learnt construct of artist as individual author. In a way, we all performed our roles in the factory installation according to how we think we should be acting in the environment of a contemporary art gallery. The realisation that this was what we were doing as it happened opened up further insights into our practices and what we expect of ourselves and the other characters in the scenario around us. Acting together towards a common goal whilst recognising and allowing for the diverse positions, skills, opinions and approaches individuals may take towards that common goal is a contrast to hosting an open platform for individuals to separately promote their own voices, skills, opinions etc. This cacophony (dissensus) can be heard in an attempt to sing as a chorus rather than the collective acting as backing vocals to support one person singing solo. While the democratisation of culture implies the latter approach, the 'FUNding FACTORY' was an attempt to create a scenario for cultural democracy to emerge as a cacophonous chorus of individuals singing different words to the same tune.

### **8.5 'An ideological shot in the knee'?**

While the 'FUNding FACTORY' held significance with the artists and collaborators in the experiment, the group was left asking, what relevance does it have to audiences beyond those who took part? Just as a team building exercise benefits those in the team to perform better at work, the 'FUNding FACTORY' could be seen as an exercise in improving the self-critical capabilities of the staff of the cultural industries. This could mean an increased capacity to critically reflect on one's roles and responsibilities in the career one has chosen. To this end, however, one might talk oneself

out of a job or find ways of halting or refusing production rather than finding ways of perpetually surviving it and ensuring its continuation. This method could also be accused of being a navel gazing exercise, a therapeutic, escapist self-help technique that offers a safe haven for people disenfranchised with their workloads, colleagues and modes of production, but which does little to move beyond wallowing in self-pity. Whilst there is a danger of this, this collective act of self-reflection can also act as a trigger or reminder to take action, collectively and/or individually.



*Image 15.*

The ‘FUNding FACTORY’ incorporated a series of mini-protests by those who took part. It is difficult, however, to gauge the extent to which people beyond those who directly took part entered into the spirit of the factory in order to identify their own realities. A comment from a fellow student remarked to Zisser, for example, on receiving my initial invitation how he thought it was “an ideological shot into the knee”, which Zisser interpreted as meaning “how much can you reflect on a system you’re so much in”. Sophie Hope:

Well, that was the point of the whole thing...that was one of the starting points, maybe that is naïve... how do we negotiate the systems we are in?

Tina Raffel: I think it can’t be naïve. If you’re part of a system and you don’t question your relationship to the system that is even more naïve... (Hope et al 2009)

Srb also mentioned a piece of feedback he received from the final installation – that it was not developed enough and should have taken more time to develop such a huge project which led to following dialogue. Tina Raffel:

Was it really meant to be such a finished piece?

Domenico Muehle: No, no, no. I see it more as a beginning point that gives stuff for rethinking and questioning...

Sophie Hope: The problem is, with making an exhibition it looks like a full stop...

Corina Vetsch: I think it was like a playground, not taken too seriously. It was to play with.

Eve Kuppelwieser: It was an experiment.

(Hope et al 2009)

Muehle asked, "Is it possible to have the correct opinion about what the 'FUNding FACTORY' is?" The final exhibition of the cultural production line might come across like a conversation only the group involved have been party to. The workshop was an excuse to have a conversation with a group of practitioners, a temporary intervention into a given structure. It was not so important what the final installation looked like; rather it documented a process (of team building for artists) during which the participants worked towards a common goal whilst questioning their individual and collective relationships to the task in hand as it progressed.

The 'FUNding FACTORY' was a practical experiment that created a space for the production of critical reflection and action on the issues of labour and power from "inside the social relations of art" (Roberts 2004, p.559). The fact that the framework of the project was contested and negotiated by its participants; that my own expectations and parameters that I brought to the project were challenged and thrown into question through the actions of those I invited into the project is perhaps testament to the fact that acts of cultural democracy can occur in ways that test or subvert the limits of prescribed attempts at democratising culture. By setting a framework, however, I was able to open up a process for participation in the 'wrong' way that contested the value and limits of that framework. The metaphor allowed us a version of critical distance with which to play with, creating a dialectic relationship to the job in hand by both participating and not participating in the process. As participants we had to constantly renegotiate and articulate our own terms of engagement in the process in ways that at times contradict each other, perhaps learning something about how we might each approach art as labour in the future.



*Conclusions*

## **9. Conclusions**

I have argued through this practice based research, the importance of recognising the ethical, political and philosophical differences between cultural democracy and the democratisation of culture and developed an analysis that unearths these tensions. Significantly, the practice has allowed me to rethink ‘participation’ as a more nuanced constellation of related experiences that contests top-down attempts at empowerment. I have developed a methodology that recognises moments of critical reflection and action from different perspectives. The research overall has allowed me to reconsider the impact that a cultural democracy way of thinking has on the development of a commissioning process predominantly based on the democratisation of culture – a model of funding that promotes culture as being accessible to consumers, whilst assuming that the means of production remain in the hands of the few.

The focus of my doctoral research was on the relationship between New Labour policies on the commissioning of art to effect social change and historical and theoretical notions of cultural democracy. Over the four years of my research, spanning the final term of the New Labour government, I developed an evaluative critique of how and where the possibilities of cultural democracy might exist within the context of publicly funded participatory, socially engaged art commissions. Encountering the different agendas of a socially engaged art process, and paying attention to these relationships as they play out in practice, has led me to reconsider cultural democracy more as an approach or way of thinking than a specific policy or doctrine. The research has captured multiple attempts to carve out intersubjective experiences from otherwise crafted packages of culture so participants at all levels of the supply chain are defining their own sense of agency and co-dependency. This approach contradicts and confuses the model-makers of so called ‘good practice’, and instead allows for participants to refocus their critique back onto the systems of oppression, inequality and exploitation that they find themselves working in/for. The contract becomes a site for subversion as participants occupy the gaps to organise and celebrate covert operations of ‘la perruque’, exposing the workings of the contract in the process.

The contribution of new knowledge that this research has made to the study of commissioning art in relation to cultural democracy can be found in the development of a new practice based approach to evaluating the extent to which projects address cultural democracy as a critical practice. A method of generative metaphor of critical distance has emerged through four projects by using time travel, critical friends, performative interviewing and the cultural production line to elicit collective critical reflection as a form of cultural democracy. These experiments with a method have increasingly brought out the inherent and necessary contradictions in frameworks for participation

constructed by artists, curators, commissioners and/or funders, which are open to others to participate in the 'wrong' way so as to change, contest and critique the direction, parameters and ideologies of that framework. During the period of my research from 2006-2010, I carried out four projects involving different contexts, frameworks and ambitions. Beginning with an art commission where I tried out a participatory process in collective time travel in the context of a new town to find a new perspective to look at neoliberal living conditions; I went on to reconsider the commissioning process from the perspective of participants of artist-led projects by facilitating 'Critical Friends'. The 'Performative Interviews' provided a new avenue for articulating critical evaluations of otherwise dismissed experiences of failure and compromise. The practical workshop to make the 'FUNding FACTORY' was an extension of this into a physical space where we had to perform collectively and reflect critically on the conditions of our labour. Time travelling, being a critical friend, mask-wearing, re-performing transcripts and enacting a cultural production line offered lenses through which to investigate current conditions of art in wider political and economic contexts. The exploration of this method also provided humorous and empathetic means to develop intersubjective encounters that maintain tensions between the absurdly uncanny and political readability of a critical practice. The projects increasingly moved towards focusing on a pro-active critique of the conditions of art as labour and our own complicity in perpetuating the circumstances we attempt to change and critique.

The boundaries of a socially engaged art project have been identified as the budget, timeframes, expectations placed on artists, commissioners and participants and the extent to which those key players are able to take risks and/or support a critical practice. I found that these projects involved a developmental process through which people learnt, adapted and interacted with the frameworks of these staged encounters, through, for example, acts of non- or wrong- participation. The projects revealed that it is often when these limits are sensed that a critical awareness of these conditions come into focus and one is able to reconsider one's relationship to it. Often, one only discovers these limits when they pose a barrier or obstacle to the progression of the project. This thesis points these out by developing mechanisms for embracing and encouraging these encounters within the frameworks of the commissioning process.

The research draws out a paradox at the heart of cultural democracy: developing tactics of critical knowledge of the conditions one is in could result in a radical rupture from those conditions, and/or the re-enforcing of those conditions through a parasitical, productive critique of them. What does the dissolution of the distinct categories art / artist, and the industries on which these depend, imply in terms of employment rights, for example? To what extent are we able to risk a critique that may

inevitably do ourselves out of a job? And what does this entail when, just as institutional critique has become a form of commissioned consultancy, modern management requires an element of self-reflexivity in order to survive? In order to avoid replicating these systems I argue that a radical rupture from within these conditions is required. This would mean finding ways of developing critical interventions rather than delivering advocacy and marketing services in the guise of evaluation.

Increasing opportunities for socially engaged art commissions over the last ten years have led to a professionalisation of the field and with it a focus on the artist as entrepreneur who can charge for their empowering services. Paradoxically, this has hindered the power that participants can have in terms of deciding their own modes of practice, despite the premise of the projects being based on participation and social engagement. Through these practical experiments, I demonstrated that despite ambitions of empowerment and effecting change, such art commissions are often experienced as performances of empowerment and participatory democracy and therefore limited in their scope to 'effect change', at least on any systemic level. Rather, I found that it was the more intimate, small-scale intersubjective encounters as the conditions of that participation come into focus that critical knowledge and agency occurred. Given this context, there needs to be further examination of the economic conditions required for cultural democracy to be realised.

Since completing the main body of my practice based research in 2010, the political and economic landscape in the UK has changed dramatically. With funding cuts to the public sector following the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010, and changes in public policy under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, the funding of socially engaged art and the organisations that have been commissioning it, are now in jeopardy. I have found cultural democracy and the general positioning of my own practice to be one that exploits the gaps of 'official' culture, mis-uses the toolkits and subverts the models of 'best practice'. With less publicly funded 'official' commissions, however, and with increasing competition for dwindling resources, socially engaged art and acts of cultural democracy are again pushed to the margins and working in the 'gaps' may remain the only option. This thesis has laid the foundations for carrying out further research into the possibilities of cultural democracy in this shifting economic and political landscape. While my practice based research highlighted the possibilities and implications of establishing a critical distance from within the framework of the project, the publicly funded commissioning model which formed the basis of my critique is in decline and there are other conceptual, policy and funding frameworks that now need negotiating, such as volunteerism promoted as the Big Society by the current Prime Minister, David Cameron. I will continue to

adopt Eleonora Belfiore's suggestion of having 'a built-in, shockproof crap detector' (Belfiore 2008, p.24), as I further my practice based research into these new policy frameworks.

Because of the dominant positivist epistemological approach to research, it is often thought that quantitative, objective, evidence-based research is required not only to make the case for arts funding but also because statistical evidence is the only language policy-maker's understand. As my research undermines this assumption, I am intrigued to learn how policy-makers and other researchers will understand the research and what they will take from it. The material will inevitably be interpreted in different ways among social scientists, artists and others, with different interpretations of the formal mechanisms of the practice (e.g. the fantasy of time travel in 'Het Reservaat'; the research methods of 'Critical Friends'; the absurdity of the 'Performative Interviews' and the form of the installation in the 'FUNding FACTORY') and various readings of the content of the critique (e.g. the privatisation of public life; the commissioning processes and the neoliberal creative industries). The relationship between the subject of the research and the form that research has taken has resulted in compositions of metaphors, masks and machinery that illustrate a series of complex intersubjective situations that are ripe for further critique and development.

I would like in the next stages of my research, to study the current context of deregulation and privatisation, and the assumption that we are now all expected to be socially-engaged, for free. Drawing on the critiques of social inclusion policies and the will to empower that I have explored throughout my PhD, for example, an active citizenship that relies on the philanthropic 'generosity' and volunteerism of individuals on which Cameron's Big Society model is based, evades the core societal problems of poverty, inequality and injustice. How can cultural democracy based on collective critical reflection, find ways of enacting political re-awakening and emancipation in ways that draw attention to the rising inequalities that the Big Society as a concept, does little to address? As I explored in my theoretical framework for cultural democracy and through the practical work, there is a need to question and explore the potential for acts of cultural democracy to expose, disrupt and play with top-down agendas of empowerment.

In future applications of the 'FUNding FACTORY', for example, one could take a step back, away from the action as a facilitator, allowing the participants to build, intervene and interpret the process on their own (more in the style of Zmijewski for example), or one could try out a more authoritative, directorial role (as in the case of Hirschhorn). There is also scope to develop the 'Performative Interviews' with more participants, perhaps developing a website that acts as a portal

for more confessional portraits that could be used as anecdotal evidence for future campaigns. The material from these projects could be used to develop specific campaigns or it could take on a more general process of disseminating possibilities of combining practical and poetic, pragmatic and aesthetic aspects of art practice as research.

It has been important to take specific, personal experiences and critiques and turn these into a body of work that speaks volumes about the wider, systemic conditions of regulated cultural production. The research could be re-presented as a call to arms; an alternative training manual or a handbook for taking art into everyday or a subversive complement to the creative industry job market that practitioners can learn from. Using the language, aesthetics and expectations of the toolkits and best practice models that have been introduced to the arts over the last ten years, a 'spoof' version could be created that amplifies the expectations and conflation of art into the everyday and misunderstandings of cultural democracy. Whichever the case, the outcomes of the research I hope will be effective in passing on the baton of cultural democracy for others to research and perform.

**APPENDIX A: Logbooks #1-4**











## **Appendix B: 'Critical Friends' Magazines**

1. 'Cauliflowers and Computers' June 2009.
2. 'Now Do This' December 2009

*Critical Friends Magazine 1: 'Cauliflowers and Computers' June 2009.*

*Critical Friends Magazine 2: 'Now Do This' December 2009.*

## **APPENDIX C: ‘Performative Interview’ question and information sheet**

### **Information sheet for interviewees**

I would like to invite you to take part in my research into the relationship between cultural democracy and the commissioning of art to effect social change.

I am currently working on a practice based PhD at Birkbeck College investigating the effect funding has had on the political and critical aspects of cultural democracy. As part of this research I am writing a ‘contextual analysis’ to map the policies and practices in the UK over the last forty years, specifically with relation to the development of political, radical, community, participatory and socially engaged art.

I am trying to use the ethos of cultural democracy as a way of working as well as the subject of my study by carrying out a series of filmed performative interviews with commissioned artists, funders and curators and a number of workshops with a group of ‘critical friends’ who are past and/or current participants of commissioned art projects. The purpose of these interviews and workshops is to invite people to reflect on the questions that arise through commissioned cultural democracy and how these issues are negotiated.

I would like to meet you to discuss your work in relation to my research and carry out a performative interview with you. Our meeting would last approximately two-three hours. I propose two steps to our meeting. You have the option of remaining anonymous in both or either of the steps.

**Step one:** I have prepared a number of questions (see attached), which I would like to ask you. Have a look at these questions in advance. Please do feel free to add questions. If there are any questions you do not want to answer that is also fine, just let me know. This part will be recorded and later transcribed for the purpose of my research. You have the option of remaining anonymous or having your name attached to your comments.

**Step two:** This is a chance for you to tell a story of a problematic experience of an art commission to camera, using disguise to protect your identity. Think in advance of a project or experience you may want to share and why – it could be an experience of compromise, cancellation, censorship, difficulty or interruption which made you think differently about the commission but is a story you have not been able to express publicly or professionally. We can discuss how you may want to approach this retelling – for example, I will bring some disguises (such as masks and wigs); you may want to tell the story in the third person, use different camera angles or ask me to tell the story for you. This section will be filmed, edited and presented publicly so it is also important we discuss why you want to go public with this particular story. Any edits will be shown to you before going public and we will discuss how you would like to be credited.

I hope my work will be of interest and use to you. I will be happy to share with you any parts of my research and welcome any feedback and suggestions.

With kind regards

Sophie Hope

### **Step One: Key questions:**

#### *General questions:*

- How would you describe your work?
- What do you understand to be 'cultural democracy'?
- Who are you influenced by (e.g. writers, theorists, artists) (three examples)?
- Who do you perceive to be your allies at the moment (three examples)?
- Who would you not align yourself with at the moment (three examples)?
- How do you think cultural democracy relates to being critical and/or political?
- Do you consider yourself to be a professional – if so, what makes you professional?
- What do you think cultural democracy looked like 50 years ago?
- What do you think it looks like now?
- What do you think 'cultural democracy will look like in 50 years time?

#### *Further questions for commissioned artists and curators:*

- Have you received funding for your practice? Can you give me examples of where from? Do you see a difference between these funders?
- How do you receive your money, e.g. do you mainly apply for funds directly, apply for commissions or through residencies?
- How do your funded projects compare to self-initiated ones?
- Do you consider the issue of where the money is from to be significant?
- What are the main issues for you in relation to the public and / or private funding for art?
- How does funding offer you opportunities and/or compromises?
- Have you ever rejected funding or a commission offered to you?
- Can you briefly describe how the funding system changed during the years you have been practising?

#### *Further questions for funders:*

- How would you describe the work that you fund?
- Why are you supportive of that particular way of working?
- Have you ever recalled funding and why?
- How has the funding system changed during the years you have been working here?
- What are the challenges of funding / commissioning art? How do you deal with these challenges?
- How would you define a successful commission?
- How would you define a failed commission?

### **Step Two (optional): performative interviews to camera**

- Can you begin by telling me about this project you tried to do? What were you aiming to do?
- What went wrong?
- How did you feel at the time?
- How did you manage things at the time?
- How did you leave it?
- What would you have done differently?
- Looking back, what was positive about the experience?



## APPENDIX D: Summaries of ‘Performative Interviews’

### Part 1: Negotiating rejection and failure

#### *Self-interview: Very Disappointing*

In ‘Self-interview: Very Disappointing’ a woman is sat in front of a log fire talking to the camera about an experience of a project that did not materialise. The filming begins and we witness the woman talking to the interviewee trying to establish the shot and where she should be looking, into the camera or at the interviewee? She tells us about the project she tried to do to engage front line staff of museums to think about getting people across the museum or gallery steps, as the building is sometimes an obstacle for people. By talking to the front line staff, she says, she wanted to get their ideas about what they thought was important. The project seemed to be going well and the front of house staff were really engaged, they had developed a good relationship with them and they thought they were getting somewhere. However, things started to go wrong, we are told, because the top management of the museums were not as involved as the front of house staff. In hindsight, she reflects, it would perhaps have been a good idea to involve them earlier and that perhaps this was her fault. The management’s disengagement meant they did not want to be party to this work with the front of house staff and stopped the project from continuing. There was a hierarchical management system and because they had focused on working with the front of house staff and not top management, the whole project ‘foundered and fell’. This led to disappointment all round and she tells us how she felt that she had let people down. Despite its failure, she felt it was a good project to get those people who work on the front line of the organisations to get involved in a two-way dialogue rather than just being the receivers. If she were to do it again she says she would have to work on a specific project, making sure everyone from the top to the bottom was engaged, use it as a pilot and see how it develops after that.

#### *It’s not all flipping roses!*

In an extract of a re-performed transcript to camera, a conversation takes place between two people about an experience of compromise. We are told that an artwork had to be moved because they did not have the permission of the people living there. Moving the artwork meant some money from the budget was left over and so the artist could make a book about the project. One of the texts however had to be edited out of the book as it told the story of the controversy this artwork had caused. The reason it was taken out, we are told, was because the book was a gift to the community and so the commissioner felt they could not include a text that was critical of that community. While the interviewee’s words reflect on the relevance of discussing how the project ‘wasn’t all flipping roses’, she felt the book was a gift to the community and it was important to her that they could be proud of it and feel they could show it to other people.

#### *Cornflake: Shooting in the dark*

In this interview, two artists, dressed in their own hand made masks talk about an experience they had of a project that never materialised. They stress how the lack of structure, parameters and opportunities to discuss ideas with the commissioner (Code Name: ‘Cornflake’), made the project impossible. Despite Cornflake being renowned for the way they work with artists in ‘awkward’ or unknown situations to produce work that is antagonistic, the interviewee’s proposal to perform as ‘Mr Woppit Amateur Security Guards’ during a festival Cornflake were putting on was rejected, apparently on the grounds that it might be offensive to the supporters of the festival. The proposed performance, we are told, was supposed to be a caricature and parody of how Cornflake work – a form of antagonism that the artists thought the commissioning organisation would relish and support: “for an organisation that prides itself on being antagonistic that should have been an interesting discussion”. The lack of communication the artists had with the organisation in the run up to the festival however, was far from satisfactory as we are told that there were no opportunities

to have a conversation, no clear parameters, “everything was a complete mystery”. They felt as if they were ‘shooting in the dark’. They had a 5-minute phone call with Cornflake and a simple, ‘no thanks’. When asked by the interviewer if they would you have gone to the festival anyway and done the performance without the official permission of Cornflake, one of the interviewees responds saying they had thought about it but asked themselves, ‘who would benefit from this and did Cornflake deserve their attention?’ He uses the analogies of their relationship with Cornflake as feeling like the ‘square peg in the hole’, ‘the kids not invited into the gang’ and ‘the new kids in school’ and that they did not relish being in that role again.

#### *Duck, Frog and Horse on Crater 5*

In this short film the same person wearing different masks plays two artists (Duck and Frog) and an arts officer (Horse). The story unfolds of a proposal that was rejected by its commissioner. Horse commissioned Frog and Duck to write a public art strategy for Crater 5 on the moon which was being redeveloped and needed some gateway features to create an identity for the place. Horse had worked hard to ensure art was embedded into this development and outsourced the strategy for this next series of commissions to Duck and Frog. Having explored the area and spoken to people living and working there, Duck and Frog proposed more subtle interventions than a public art gateway feature. The narrative we are presented with describes these three points of view highlighting the different agendas of the artists and commissioner.

The timescale for developing the strategy was too short, we are told, and despite the artists feeling that they had suggested a strong concept, it was met with disdain and rejected on the grounds that the work they were proposing was too complex and conceptual. Frog explains how she had put a lot of work into the proposal, spending more time on it than she was paid for. She suggests the reasons it got so far without being addressed, was perhaps that Horse did not brief them properly and that she maybe ignored the warning signs. Frog had worked with Horse before and was determined this time not to compromise her practice. Miscommunication on both sides (commissioner and artists) seems to have played a part in the downfall of the project and its ultimate rejection, although this is also met with a desire on the part of the artists to not compromise their practices and develop a series of proposals in response to their research. In retrospect, we are told the artists feel they should have worked more closely with the planners of Crater 5 (the herd of cattle) as they could perhaps have formed strong allies with them.

Horse was very disappointed with the artists’ proposals which she thought were “too arty and ephemeral”. While she admits she was interested in getting the community involved, ultimately she asked them to “come up with a shopping list and instead they came up with some very, very difficult art pieces that frankly, Crater 5 just aren’t ready for” and that she was not prepared to stand up and fight for something that ‘no one understands what it means’ as she has a ‘reputation to uphold’. She tells us she had wanted something similar to what she had done before, in Crater 4 that was a success, she felt “some overly conceptual piece is just going to alienate people from this environment rather than encourage them to identify more strongly with it”. She also refers to how the artists embarrassed her in a meeting with other people involved in the development because they had not taken on board the suggestions she had made (“I told them it wasn’t good enough”).

Following their presentation of the proposal by the artists, Horse rewrote the plan to suit her needs. Frog walked away from the project which she found quite traumatic and frustrating (‘I invested a lot of time and it was thrown back in my face’). Duck continued to work on a section of the project that she had developed and that while she was ‘continuing with trepidation’, the only way she could continue to work with Horse was to not directly address the situation and just move on from it. Duck remarks how she learnt a lot from Frog who had more experience, and that it gave her more confidence to ‘stick to my guns and to know what it is I want to get out of something’. It was felt

that the commissioner had a strong idea of what she wanted and that the outcomes had been pre-decided but not communicated: “our part in it was like a fly in the ointment that was then brushed under the carpet,” comments Frog.

### *Learning to say ‘no’*

In the final extract of this part, we hear how someone has found the strength and foresight to say ‘no’ to working with organisations that do not reflect their ethos and way of working. She has learnt to refuse to work with those organisations or groups that come to her with predefined outcomes and just want to outsource their creative work to her and her organisation, which works more on a grass roots level with young people. An accompanying extract reports how on the other hand, the more work they deliver, the more is expected and so she has to be aware of what she can and cannot deliver in order to meet those expectations. Sometimes, we are told, an organisation will come along with a “a fantastic idea and you think right, we really morally we have to do this, it’s just too good not to do, it’s going to provide too many benefits to the young people that we work with, but you’re already working a 40 hour week or 45 hour week or 50 hour week in some cases, so when do you deliver it? So, those are challenges.”

## **Part 2: Taking a Stand**

### *Serious Research*

In *Serious Research*, two women are sat at a table, one wearing a white facemask and scarf that covers the mask, but keeps slipping down (“my disguise keep falling off my disguise”) and the other wears a small yellow duck nose. They try to have a discussion but keep bursting into hysterical laughter. One asks the other, “are you objecting to science objectifying the natural process?” “I question that, yes”, the other replies, before bursting into a fit of giggles. While the short film comes across like a slapstick comedy sketch, it transpires that the women are considering a serious dilemma they have of justifying their roles as mothers who have gone back to college to study art. Whilst acknowledging through the outbreaks of laughter that they are “making light of such a serious subject”, the woman in the white face mask remarks how “we said that feminism does our head in” but that “women just don’t think about it – we’re disguising the fact that we could rule the world” at which point her scarf slips and she declares, “I’m exposed – you can see my identity”. Then, through the laughter, she says, “I worry about spending too much time away from my daughter to do serious things. People question me why I’m not at home with my daughter. I say, because I’m doing *serious* research”. She asks her colleague, “do you have that problem? I’ve certainly got a problem”.

### *The Egg Liberation Front*

In this film we are confronted with a wolf describing a tale of woe. The story disguises two curators, wolf (the protagonist) and fox and the artists they are working with as chickens and their ideas or work as eggs. The wolf was invited to be involved in a project by fox, who was from another country. The fox wanted to start a battery farm of chickens consisting of chickens collected by the wolf and fox in their respective countries. The ‘contract’ was such that fox would maintain ownership of the farm and that wolf would be working for them but would be recognised as a collector of chickens and eggs.

When the wolf started collecting chickens from his country, however, people started to get suspicious because a fox owned the farm from somewhere else. These chickens, we are told, were worried about the politics of how their chickens were going to fare next to the other chickens – they laid different coloured eggs and did not want them getting confused. It was at this point, the wolf reports that things started to go wrong.

Following the successful launch of the chicken farm in the wolf's country, the wolf sensed that the fox was getting worried that people were recognising his contribution to the chicken farm more than hers. The fox also started expressing concern that certain chickens were not taking part in the battery farm. Rather than getting to grips with the political context, which the wolf tells us was an important aspect of why certain chickens were not willing to be in the farm, the fox apparently decided it was because the wolf was not working hard enough to gather the chickens. Rather than recognise the cultural differences between the chickens it was easier for the fox to ignore the contribution made by the wolf to the farm.

The wolf tells us how he was interested in those chickens that would not lay the eggs and why they would not. He suggested putting some empty egg boxes outside to see what people would lay, but he came up against opposition from the fox who did not understand why he wanted to do this ("where's the money in empty boxes?"). The relationship between the fox and wolf crumbled even more as the fox took the wolf's attempts at rationality as a personal attack. We are told how the wolf was trying to explain the political situation to the fox but that this lack of engagement in the context made him realise their cultural differences were such that it was difficult to collaborate. In the end the Fox just wanted the whole chicken farm to themselves.

Towards the end, the wolf reflects on how he is 'very interested in chickens looking after their own eggs' and calls for an 'egg liberation front', but one that is chicken-led: "it couldn't be fox or wolf led, that would send out the wrong message that chickens cannot look after or think for themselves and that they need people leading them and looking after them". He ponders how he would "like to inspire a few chickens, that would be good".

#### *The Source of Art...*

In the Source of Art, Frances Williams gives an account of a tragedy that has changed the way she approaches working with artists and people. She begins by explaining the yellow hard hat she is wearing – an artwork by Ayse Erkmen which has the quote 'the source of art is in the life of a people' written on the front in black pen. The quote is taken from a section of the original (now hidden) inlaid wooden floor of the South London Gallery (SLG) where Williams is the education co-ordinator, designed by Walter Crane in the late 19th century. The builders of the new SLG extension wore the hard hat. Williams borrowed the hat for the interview and says it is 'a misuse of the hat' but acts in the context of this interview as her 'work hat' and her social contract with me.

Williams describes the recent disaster that took place on the Sceaux Garden Estate which the SLG backs onto. In July 2009 six people died, including a three-week old baby and two children in a large fire that consumed one of the blocks of flats on this estate. She talks about how her witnessing of the fire and involvement in the aftermath has had repercussions on her and the gallery in terms of how they think about what they do, specifically, the impact it has had on the Saturday Club, a project the SLG have been running on the estate in one of the shops where artists have been developing projects with the young people living there. Two of the children that that attended this Saturday club died in the fire.

Williams remarks on how strange it is to talk about the fire publicly as it was so traumatic. As the trauma spread throughout the estate, she tells us how the SLG and some of the artists she had been working with on the Saturday Club were involved in helping to normalise life on the estate after the fire and how they got the Saturday Club back up and running as soon as possible.

She has now changed the goal posts in terms of how she commissioned artists. Whereas before, she saw her role as striking a balance "between the art and the people" without "coming down on either side", this traumatic incident has meant she now prioritises the people: "it had to be all about the

people, I had to completely forget about art for a while". It made her question the role of art in such a situation ("was it a luxury, an essential"). The children now direct the Saturday Club (even "if that means [us] learning a number of 'West Side Story' that you don't want to do") and, Williams remarks how this was a significant step for them at SLG. For her, the fire deepened the gallery's relationship with people on the estate and that through that bonding it underlined how human relationships are the 'bedrock' of engagement without which you can't pursue any other work. She no longer uses the term 'us and them' (to refer to the gallery and estate), and that now, "it's just 'we', and I don't really distinguish".

Williams reflects on how this experience perhaps "wasn't very good for the art, but that doesn't really matter". While the Saturday Club projects had been more artist-led and she was more open to artists following their own ideas, she was now in a situation where she wanted to put the children first. She tells us how 'the balance tipped', that she had not gone that far before in terms of 'thinking the artists concerns aren't that important'; she had to tell them they are not free to do an artist-led project, which is not usually how she would work with artists. She realises that in extreme situations you can be pushed to extreme positions.

The Big Lottery funds the Saturday Club for three years (so the outcomes are social benefits such as increased community cohesion and improved environment). Williams tells us how it has been interesting to explore how these agendas relate to the artists' agendas. She sees her role as a broker – introducing a set of relationships to artists to work with. She has also been rethinking the framework of the Saturday Club programme which was based on six month residencies back to back, but has found this lack of continuity difficult: "the children have had to adapt. It's like a ball of Plasticine all rolled up – one minute you're talking about carrots and the next about rollerskates and you're thinking – what project was that?"<sup>92</sup> She is now adapting the programme by 'thinking across residencies' and getting the commissioned artists to talk to each other about their plans so that there are periods of overlap between the residencies: "The children will be there a lot longer than the artists so that changes the power balance... you can't afford not to listen".

### *Interlude*

In these short extracts, one of the actors recites a concern about the prevalence of public art used to mark the entrances of housing estates and that this has the danger of making places look the same. Instead, the role of art in regeneration we are told, should be "about making a difference to the people *within* the estates and be about the people *in* the estates". Another explains the process participants go through in the work and how they start off by dropping in to sessions, that they then become more regular participants, then volunteers or peer mentors and then may end up being facilitators of sessions themselves. The narrative emphasises that one form of participation is no better than another; that dropping in is as relevant as facilitating but that the main consideration is for the programme to be young-person led.

### *Banging on Doors*

In this short film two actors re-read extracts of a conversation between an artist (W) and a local authority community development officer (L) who often work together. We hear how the two protagonists weigh up their different roles and reasons for working together. L, for example, finds that W brings a new creative perspective, but that the main difference is that the artist encourages people to have their say, while it is the commissioner's role to then act on these voices and take things forward. L suggests that maybe artists should have their own contracts for the commissioning bodies rather than the contracts always being written by the commissioners and that these contracts

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<sup>92</sup> This relates to the blotting paper analogy that Critical Friend Ann Webb referred to.

could maybe ask the commissioners how they are going to deal with the issues the art project will raise, “because actually, the artist is not there to help solve them”.

W acknowledges the different roles artists often slip into or appropriate (as youth workers, teachers, for example) and that these different disciplines are often very closely linked, for example, W mentions an English Heritage oral histories project which an historian described in a very similar way to W’s project. W suggests it is the contexts of art and history which distinguish these projects, not the content as such. W tells us how he considers all aspects of the process as part of the art (“I consider going for a cup of tea as a piece of the art”), for example in a residency he has at a school, he ‘performs’ the artist role, putting on a flat cap and pretending he is a character that lives in the attic.

L reflects on how she has learnt from W how art can mean much more than a visual object and remarks that “anything anyone does is a form of art, whether it’s getting through just one day of your life, being quite creative about how you move yourself through the day”. W refers to “putting people into groups empowers them, just giving them a group identity empowers them”. W also remarks on how, “everyone who uses creativity is an artist. In which case, every single person in this room is an artist because everyone’s been creative at some point in their life, whether it’s doing your hair, putting make-up on, what clothes to wear, gardening...I think all humans are creative”. L tells us how,

“doing the job I do that makes me feel very creative, and I’ve never felt creative before... I feel creative in helping people to change their perceptions, gain skills, gain more confidence, get more involved...But that’s something I’ve felt for a long while doing this job, the more I can get people to join in and contribute, the more creative I feel and I’m not actually doing anything.”

W responds with, “you are, you’re pulling it all together aren’t you” and goes on to reflect on what might distinguish artists from non-artists could be “the fact that I’ll have an idea and I’ll make it rather than just have an idea”. L suggests it is maybe the case that W has given himself permission to act on what he thinks creatively and asks “is it because you’ve been told you’re an artist, is it because you’ve had recognition?” They reflect on the expectation or license given to an artist to do ‘something completely different’ and yet, L jokes that the commissioners don’t really want artists to do something completely different and in fact the artist can often be used more as a scapegoat (‘we can blame him when he’s gone’).

They express concern over some artists who lead projects with their egos and who manage to raise expectations but then move on (“I felt like her butler, like her slave!” and “she’s not familiar with working with people, she’s more art-landscaping and the big public art things” and “even artists who work with people, it’s usually because they want to use people in their art”). W expresses a common misconception of lumping all artists who work with people together, remarking how, “Jeremy Deller used to get recommended to me quite a lot you know, ‘you must look at his stuff’, and I just thought, why? It’s got nothing to do with what I do at all”.

They talk about how a process-based, discursive way of working often slows processes down through this form of engagement and this puts local authorities off as they have to spend budgets by a certain deadline. Timescales, they say are a real problem as often the time it takes to reach agreement on whether a project should happen or not means there is not much time left to actually do it. This results in compromised projects which have no depth,

“We’ll be back to skimming the surface because together we can’t commit the time that that project needs to dig beneath the thing because they’ll still want the 20 days worth of whatever activities so we won’t be able to root out or spend time rooting it out because it’ll be compacted”.

They go on to discuss the issue of a reluctance to change the culture in the local authority itself, which often has the attitude towards these projects as just being about ‘bums on seats’ (“They’re expecting the community to change but they’re not willing to change”). Projects that involve people in developing ownership over ideas takes time and is not something that can happen in two weeks.<sup>93</sup> She comments on how she uses art and creativity to get people engaged and increase their confidence as many people just do not feel they have anything to contribute. She works to try and get people to understand the decision making processes so people know how to contribute and then it is a process of ‘banging on doors’ to make sure decision-makers are actually listening. Her work has involved opening doors to the right people and getting access for members of the community to sit on committees to “question people who sit in their ivory towers and are guarded by other people”. For L, this process of change is not just focused on the community but changing how the process works in the Council too, “otherwise it’ll just continue to be like this and we’ll be wasting our time” but that usually it is “one or two people refusing to change”. “You do have to wonder” she says, “about people’s commitments to change in this community and what they really want from it personally, they’re own personal agenda”.

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<sup>93</sup> L gives an example of a project she worked on with three young women who took the project from ideas stage to developing and submitting a tender for the realisation for the redevelopment of a park.

## **APPENDIX E: ‘Performative Interviews’ for the FUNding FACTORY**

### **Repressive tolerance: the case of ‘The Horse’s Mouth’ and ‘The Bat’**

‘The Horse’s Mouth’ tells the story of censorship as sensationalism. An anonymous voice acts like a tour guide and storyteller of a case of sensationalism which led to the censorship of two public artworks during Austria’s presidency of the European Union in 2006. The initial shot is the scene Heldenplatz (Heroes Square) in Vienna where Hitler declared the Anschluss between Austria and Hitler’s Germany in 1938. In 1955 Austria became an independent state and fifty years later in 2005, the square was used for a series of events to commemorate the signing of the State treaty and celebrate Austria’s presidency of the EU the following year. The exhibition of billboards called ‘euroPART’ that took place around the city of Vienna in 2006 was funded by the Austrian government as part of these celebrations and was curated by Walter Seidl and Ursula Maria Probst.

The film focuses on two horses wearing blinkers while the narrator talks over the sounds of the square. Every so often there are interruptions of footage of armies of working ants. The storyteller informs his listeners of the removal of two art works which were part of the festival because a national tabloid newspaper accused them of being pornographic. The narrator reflects on how this ‘scandal’ was generated by the media and meant the project (specifically these two pieces) received much more publicity than was ever considered possible at the outset. The focus of the media, however, was almost entirely on the supposedly pornographic nature of these images, rather than the issues the works attempted to deal with: immigration, xenophobia and the building of fortress Europe. A public debate was denied with the media-driven frenzy sidestepping these issues and preferring to campaign for the removal of the work on the grounds of it being indecent imagery. With the Austrian government being the funders of the work, the curators obliged by removing the work.

The curators, the narrator says, were hoping these works would add to debates on the meaning and significance of the EU during Austria’s presidency, not just act as adverts for it. The issues the works were trying to raise were deemed too controversial for the media to report on and so pornographic imagery became an easier reason to have the works banned. We are told that “the idea of the curators was to do something that could be shocking and subversive at the same time” and that their hope was for art to “play with the given media or structures at hand and at the same time subversively interfere into what is actually happening”. While it was hoped that these billboards “might at least make you laugh for a second”, they were not expecting that “a whole catholic, conservative driven country” would get to see the images and actually ‘interfere’ with them. Maybe the images had had their desired effect and interfered with the public via the media to the extent that the media (public, and government) felt they had to retaliate. The interviewee states how he thinks art “should have some reaction on the public, on politics, on whatever and in this case there was more reaction than we ever thought there would be so in a sense the whole project worked better than it could have done”.

The political questions of the artwork were subverted by the media and reinterpreted as pornographic, however, so while the work was seen and caused controversy it did not necessarily add to the debates on xenophobia and fortress Europe. The blinkered horses and intermittent shots of armies of obedient working ants are references to the narrow-mindedness of these debates in the media and the implicit role the curators played in supporting the presidency through the exhibition whilst trying to add a touch of subversion that backfired before retreating to toe the party line. The critique the artists wanted the work and those seeing it to engage in did not materialise as the pornographic imagery took over the debates. The position of the curators funded by and working for the government were having to act as advocates of the EU presidency despite their contestations



that their roles as curators was to bring critical art practices to the public to raise questions about the EU presidency. While a polite questioning of the EU was permissible, two of these artworks apparently stepped over the line of decency rather than provoking political and ethical debates.

In the second film, 'The Bat' tells us about his arrival in Vienna 27 years ago and the political events that have influenced his way of working. His face is obscured by a bat toy, its wings wrapped around his head and he sits in front of three large computer monitors looking as though he is in a control tower. Intermittently we see shots of public spaces in Vienna. He gives a brief history of Austrian politics and the demise of public space as a valid context in which to develop a political voice. He begins with a critical reflection on his experience of going on political demonstrations in Vienna compared to Turkey:

“In my mother country, where I come from, demonstrations were structured in a different way. Literally, it was a permanent battle against the police or against other political groups – whatever. I arrived at this demonstration [in Vienna] and actually realised that the police cleared the way for the protesters and I was speechless and thought ‘Aha that seems to be western democracy!’”

As an example of Marcuse's repressive tolerance, the Bat came to realise these demonstrations were “a valve to let off steam in that system, where you go and protest against something convinced you performed your duty and then you left and went home again.” He pinpoints specific moments in Austrian recent history that influenced the political scene, such as the referendum in the 1990s against economic migrants entering Austria, which the bat says, “activated something in Austrian society which had been hidden so far, a certain form of hatred against being strange”.

During this time, in the 1990s, he sensed that artists were not interested in producing political art; that while artists may have defined their work politically, their work was not really related to politics. It was more that the medium (e.g. new media) was considered political without actually being related to the politics of that time.

In 2000 Austria elected an extreme right wing party to power. Up until this point, since the fall of the wall, we are told by the Bat that there had not really been an opposition; rather all parties were working towards the development of the economy. However, the bat remarks that this,

“so-called open public space suddenly disappeared in terms of where one could more or less settle social conflicts, argue or seek to reach a consensus in the past. That was totally eliminated... And exactly that gap that we accepted as ‘public space’ was filled by the opinion generated by the media.”

He tells us how “certain fringe groups or particular groups of people simply aren't heard anymore or rather don't find the medium where they can express themselves and because of the strict migration politics in different European countries, migration developed in a totally different direction”. It is these issues, we are told, which he tries to address in his own art work.

It could be argued (as referenced in 'The Bat' Performative Interview'), that permitted protests and critical demonstrations are framed and controlled by the State apparatus, just as critical art is commissioned and neutralised in the process. Art becomes an alternative communication tool in a xenophobic media saturated society. To what extent are artists happy to talk about politics through their work and at what point does it become political? As with the critique of the 'Het Reservaat' and 'Critical Friends', commissions could be understood as safe performances of participatory democracy rather than being politically useful in the sense of becoming part of a decision-making

process. The work can either raise expectations and consider this as a possibility or be seen as ironic gestures that highlights the dysfunctional and absurdist system of 'having a say' by reconfirming the fact that you are not being listened to. 'The Bat' and 'The Horse's Mouth' are occupying territories of repressive tolerance and having to act accordingly to circumstances that skew the desire for open, uncensored public debate.

### **Saving Critical Art: The Case of 'The New Collector' and 'The Fairytale Princess'**

In 'The New Collector', conceived and written by Barbara Holub, the artist devises a fictionalised entrepreneurial character to fill the gap where no existing funding body yet exists, challenging the notion that by suffering the artist improves their art. This new collector we are told is female, witty, self-critical, modest, generous and open-minded and is someone who "likes to get involved where risks are taken". We are told that process-orientated critical art is thought not to have an aesthetic element beyond the so called invisible aesthetic and the role of this new collector is to introduce this socio-critical art into the art market as products, and thereby lift this complex, multilayered practice out of its marginal and precarious existence.

This model of creating an alternative mode of survival (beyond the commissioning model) is based on a market that exploits risk and values socio-critical art. Is that a viable alternative or does it replicate the existing art market model and apply it to work that traditionally cannot find a commercial role (although, one could argue that art that looks anti-capitalist usually eventually finds a role in the market)? The political and ethical positions of practitioners often contests the notion of singular authorship and it would perhaps be hypocritical to then revert to singular ownership in order to sell the by-products of a collective practice. Maybe this would be more honest as the ownership of the documentation and resulting 'art' of a process-based practice is often (contractually) the property of the commissioned artist. Could this 'New Collector' model be pushed further and be explored as a collective model or community bank type system where the funds created by the sales of art ephemera go into a pot that is shared by the people involved in the process or goes towards future ventures. This still begs the question, who would support this market, who are the buyers and how would such a 'pot' be constituted?

In 'The Fairy Tale Princess' the curator of Open Space, Gulsen Bal, wears a mask and majestic hat and talks about the success of her project space in Vienna which opened in 2008. As with the 'New Collector', we are presented with another 'saviour' this time offering a refuge for political and critical art practices. Bal is Turkish and lived in London for over ten years before moving to Vienna to open her project space. Despite the language barrier, Bal has managed to secure funding for the running of the space and gained support from artists and curators based in Vienna. This film highlights aspects of her interview including the way Bal refers to how Open Space goes beyond being a white cube whilst at the same time keeps 'very institutional parameters' and how she herself has played at being the insider and outsider for more than ten years. This in between position Bal identifies and the content of the work that she presents has, we are told, contributed to the success of Open Space. The issues she brings together have struck a chord with audiences in Austria, which the protagonist remarks are issues the Austrian public need to discuss as they have been swept under the carpet for too long.

Bal presents Open Space as a success story but one born of out of a fight to succeed ("If you are expecting me to have a magic wand in the hand, you will be mistaken"). She refers to how "to survive you have to hide your warrior instincts" and really negotiate with the cultural sphere you are working in whilst not losing sight of your goals (as if coming across as too confrontational or combatant would lose her support). She also refers to the relative ease with which she managed to gain financial support: "The people who give the money, who don't usually give the money so easily, came along with a cheque in their pockets..."

We get the impression Bal's critical art space has survived despite all the odds and that this is because she has played the funding game. She is committed and sincere about her work and we get the impression this is down to her conviction, determination and belief in what she is doing. This story, like the 'New Collector', seems too good to be true, however. It seems we are being sold another fantastical fairy tale about funding and support for critical practice and how the will and energy to develop a critical debate is shared by the curators and artists she invites to use her 'refuge'.

### **Testing the parameters of critical practice: The Case of 'The Journalist' and 'The Office'**

In two of the 'Performative Interviews' the protagonists tell us why they chose not to take part in the 'FUNding FACTORY' (echoing a Critical Friend's proposal to interview non-participants of Stream projects). In an anonymous written contribution (see Log book #4) a journalist writes how some of his writing work is paid and some is not, but that for him, "even if the working process and the workflow are identical between those two activities, there is one fundamental difference, which - for me personally - is the key issue about professionalism: money". For the journalist, "the only criterion for classifying something as professional or not, is the salary someone gets". When one is paid (i.e. considered 'professional'), however, this commitment (or contract) then "turns into something like bondage and obligation". So while payment affords him professional status, it also ties him into a responsibility "which manifests itself in the form of capital". His non-professional, unpaid work, on the other hand, which he keeps separate from his paid work, is motivated by his desire to "learn and canalise knowledge without being under the pressure of commercial issues, which means: money". It is for this reason that he cannot reveal his identity, as his inclusion in the 'FUNding FACTORY' would jeopardize his professionalism and the worlds he usually keeps separate would intermingle:

"My main issue for getting involved in this project is not to get involved. I do not see myself as part of Open Space, nor do I see myself as a part of the 'FUNding FACTORY'. As a person who earns money with writing texts about art, I think it is necessary to keep - at least - some professional distance. As I already did a lot of professional writing for the art space, I think, this distance has to be kept."

The author can only take part in an unprofessional (unpaid) capacity but because of the professional role he has in writing about Open Space as a journalist, he cannot be seen publicly to be taking part in the 'FUNding FACTORY', as this would present a conflict of interest. Not only will it look like the anonymous journalist has a biased interest in the space, it may also jeopardize his ability to be critical of it. This perhaps represents a specific case of a journalist's integrity and need for critical distance but how does this translate in commissioned art? The roles here are often blurred where a professional, paid artist on a contract (implying 'bondage and obligation' to fulfill that contract) may work unpaid (overtime) taking on different roles outside the context of the commission (for example the 'Critical Friends' acted at times as participants *and* critics). Being paid in the journalist's case (acting in a professional contractual arrangement) offers a critical distance from which to address certain issues. An allegiance with the person who is paying or inviting you is expected, however, and it is not appreciated if you turn the critique back onto them.<sup>94</sup> To what extent are there demands for increasingly professional, paid roles (which afford a critical distance from a distant target whilst being tied to one's employee) and to what extent are artists willing to collapse those boundaries?

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<sup>94</sup> In a recent article artist/activist John Jordan, for example reflected on his experience of being clamped down on by Tate Modern when during the workshop he had been invited to do the participants turned their critique towards the gallery's oil sponsorship (Jordan 2010).

In ‘The Office’ cultural theorist and activist Fahim Amir is seated in a smart office showroom looking up into the camera. The interviewer begins by asking Amir why he does not want to invest much time in the ‘FUNding FACTORY’ project. Amir responds by stating how he only gets involved in a project if he is paid, if it is non-commercial or if it is political. None of these, he thought, applied to ‘FUNding FACTORY’ – neither was he getting paid and “nor is it very political – except for what is defined as political in the artistic field namely to argue about political issues”. Neither is it non-commercial in that he defines Open Space as “an established variable in a conventional art concept” that expects people to work voluntarily and “this often informal negotiation of voluntary work is something I only do under certain circumstances”.

Amir refers to the need for transparency of budgets as a crucial first step in developing a political art process where the different actors can start conversing on equal terms and create solidarity among artists: “In this respect, the disclosure of financial statements within a capitalistic relationship would actually be a precondition for further activities in order to take the whole issue seriously at all.” It is the informal conditions of work, such as that proffered by Open Space, for example, where, he says, hierarchies of labour become blurred and it becomes harder to talk about money:

“And that is something we all know: Addressing your boss informally; everyone’s friends with each other, coffee is free and overtime is not paid. Simply said, if everybody is always in such informal, amicable relationships, it is more difficult to talk about money – such as ‘How much do I actually get for this job’?”

How does one value one’s labour, maintain critical integrity and make a living (and not be self-exploited or exploit others) when the borders between work and leisure are disintegrating? Amir refers to how asking how much money is available is “almost asked bashfully, something that is seen as inappropriate to ask.” However, Fahim declares that “I am not like this: Normally I ask about the salary right away: How much do I get?” He acknowledges that this is not the norm, that “as long as there are young artists and cultural producers who are willing to do certain things for peanuts, it will continue like this”. He suggests that it would be “totally illusory to expect that people who have money would give it away by choice” and that you have to make demands and “collectively force such people to hand over money”. This is easier, he says, when you are aware of the hierarchies of information and get to know how much budget there is.

He also refers to the limits of critical or political practice in that these kinds of debates are usually permitted as long as they do not question directly the situation in which they are taking place (“you can always do it as long as it, preferably, has little relation to the concrete situation”). This is a key issue in terms of the commissions examined in the previous chapter and issues of repressive tolerance outlined earlier. A critique of issues beyond one’s control seems more permissible than a critique that refocuses back on the context in which the commission/contract is taking place (for example, not being encouraged to display the budget of the ‘FUNding FACTORY’ publicly as part of the installation; my staged protest at the entrance of ‘Het Reservaat’ being ignored or being discouraged to show the ‘Critical Friends’ magazine to Stream’s funders). Turning such a critique back onto the industry of commissioning itself would damage its image of supporting artists to develop critical, meaningful work.

For Amir, a successful piece of work would be to have good feedback from “people who are interested in politics, dedicated and interesting people; people I’d like to meet and would like to get to know anyway. And if these people give me a good feedback – namely that they have got something out of it, then that makes me feel good.” The interviewer asks Fahim how he turned his

hobby into his profession and what some of the issues of this have been. He refers to how once work is,

“alienated or you cannot relate to it at all– then it is pretty clear that once work has finished, you are looking forward to spending some leisure time – which then somehow has become the kingdom of happiness and freedom. However, if work itself fulfils such possibilities, then a civic middle-class work routine, a typical separation between work and leisure, is no longer possible.”

If you survive by doing the ‘job’ of art (which itself supposedly represents happiness and freedom), there is a danger that you never stop working unless you find a way of turning art into a job which in turn might make it more alienated, which is what the artist might have been trying to avoid in the first place. The contract as a symbol of alienated art work presents a conflict for artists who try and squeeze their art-life into a 6 month contract. Fahim has “a different set of standards” to manage this, “for instance, if there is a certain project as well as certain amount of money – then I estimate how many hours it would take me and orientation myself, I try to stick to these working hours.” If you try to do too much, he warns, “you only exist as a ghost somehow. Speaking of this, such a ghost is something I don’t want to become”. He warns young artists not to assume they will continue to support their practice with a permanent job, as this is not sustainable in the long run:

“I mean, to have such an instrumental relationship to an essential part of life and through this enabling for yourself other things that you actually wanted to do is a very respectable move and brings independence. Artistically, in a narrower sense, it won’t work out for very long. You get tired, you also become embittered, and you become burnt-out.”

He offers what he says is some ‘banal advice’: to “not fool oneself and test out things...don’t let yourself get instrumentalised, show solidarity”. It is these issues that Amir and the anonymous journalist through their acts of non-participation and reflections on the dilemmas of participation in relation to art labour which influenced the practical work I went on to do with the students.

## **Glossary of key terms**

This glossary is a partial guide to some of the key terms I am employing in the body of my thesis. I have approached the explanations of these terms through the lens of my practice based research and therefore, while I hope this glossary goes some way towards clarifying the background and context of the language I am using, it is not a fully comprehensive survey of each phrase and concept used. Indeed, each expression deserves an essay in its own right. Rather, I hope this glossary can work towards and further problematise a lexicon of cultural democracy that is open for others to revise and revise.

**Agonistic struggle:** Political theorist Chantal Mouffe has described this as a “struggle between different interpretations of shared principles, a conflictual consensus: consensus on the principles, disagreement about their interpretation” (Miessen 2007). Agonism takes a positive approach to political conflict, addressing the need to realistically deal with irreducible differences between political opinion, highlighting and allowing for the pluralistic co-existence of these differences. As a political theory, it rejects the idea that there can and should be one, ideal, consensual, harmonious society and instead, *radical democracy* should supply the space for confrontation and conflict. I relate the practice of agonism to *intersubjectivity* as it involves empathy towards and respect of the other (recognising different subjectivities) as well as acknowledging that it is these differences rather than the need to overcome them, that constitutes democratic society. (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

**Artists’ commissions:** A written or verbal contract between an artist and organisation based on a proposal made in response to a brief written by that organisation. The usual model for commissioning *socially engaged art* is for the organisation, acting as the commissioner, to allocate funds to a particular project they want to do (for artistic, curatorial, financial and/or other reasons). The commissioner writes a brief outlining the aims and objectives of the project, the context, timescale, and budget and how they are inviting artists to respond (some briefs are more open than others). Depending on the curatorial approach of the commissioners, an artist might be invited directly to make a proposal in response to that brief, others may put out an open call. There are different approaches taken as to the selection of artists – this will sometimes be a curator’s decision, other commissioning models may have a steering group made up of stakeholders who interview short-listed artists and decide collectively based on a shared set of criteria. (Cartiere & Hope 2007 and Cartiere & Willis 2008)

**Citizenship:** The roles and responsibilities of a citizen in a particular community or society, such as political participation (voting), economic participation (paying taxes) and social and legal obligations (such as jury service and obeying the law). Active citizenship implies citizens should take an active role in improving their society. Cruikshank (1999) refers to how technologies of citizenship (such as projects that aim to ‘help people help themselves’ by ‘giving voice’ and *empowering* people, an example of which could be the *socially engaged art* commission), are systems for turning individual subjects into (self) governable citizens. Rather than being a solution to poverty, political apathy, crime etc., Cruikshank argues, such democratic citizenship is a strategy of control and regulation. Citizens are not born, she states, they are made through modes of governmentality, it is therefore crucial we understand how citizens are constituted through politics and power. (Cruikshank 1999).

**Collective critical reflection:** I have combined ‘collective’ with ‘critical reflection’ to imply *intersubjective, dialogic encounters* which trigger critical reflections on the meanings, values and conditions of those encounters. These reflections are communicated between people and may result in people changing their minds, direction, or reaffirm their behaviours. As a practice, it acknowledges the different, subjective reflections on an experience, event or issue and allows space

for them to be discussed, presented or acted upon (such as in ‘Critical Friends’ and the ‘FUNding FACTORY’). As a form of ongoing evaluation of the situation you are in, expressed through the workings of a group of people, it draws on Marxist notions of *critical knowledge* and de-alienation, Freire’s idea of conscientization (where people develop a form of critical thinking about the situation they are in) and Kester’s *dialogical aesthetics*.

**Community arts:** Community arts is the term applied to an area of art practice that emerged in the 1960s in the UK that is often used interchangeably to describe:

a) Community-led art projects where a number of people not usually identifying themselves as artists, work on the co-creation of an artwork, perhaps facilitated by an artist, or ‘animateur’. A collectively produced artwork or event that celebrates the community is often the end result, such as a mural or carnival.

b) The practices of artists facilitating community action connected to campaigns for social justice and human rights where art and creative practices are used as a means to an end (for example, Art for Change’s Docklands Community Poster Project from 1981-91).

Some of the earliest examples of community arts activity include the Great Georges Community Arts Project (established in 1967), Craigmiller Festival Society (1967), Welfare State International (1968), David Harding working as ‘town artist’ in Glenrothes (1968-78), Telford Community Arts (1974), Jubilee Arts (1974), Inter Action (1975) and the Islington Schools Environmental Project (1975). Cultural democracy as a movement in the early 1980s came out of the more politicised (*socialist*) arm of community arts practices (Kelly 1984). The development of *socially engaged art* practices from the mid 1990s has, I believe, theoretical and practical roots in both uses of the term community arts, above, but has evolved, to some extent, as a more artist-led practice than the artist as facilitator methods of community arts. (Braden 1978, Kelly 1984, Crummy 1992, Dickson 1995 and Harding 1997).

**Creative industries:** According to the DCMS, these industries are advertising, architecture, the art and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software and computer services, television and radio. They define the creative industries 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). The creative industries describe an area of practice that is framed in terms of the profit-making potential of an individual’s creative output and that is led and determined by the market. This begs the important question, what is the role or relevance of the creative industries to practices of publicly subsidised, participatory, *socially engaged art* that do not tend to follow a model of exploiting intellectual property? Using the creative industries as a blanket term ignores the non-profit, process-based collectively produced ‘experiences’ of many practices which stem from a history of critiquing and undermining the commodification of art (Adorno & Horkheimer 1944, Bürger 1981, Hartly 2005, Hesmondhalgh 2007, Lippard 1973, McRobbie 2003)

**Critical knowledge:** A Marxist notion, which relates to developing critical faculties that enable one to ‘wake up’ from the alienating effects of capitalism. Henri Lefebvre refers to critical knowledge in his ‘Critique of Everyday Life’ (1947): “There can be no knowledge of the everyday without critical knowledge of society (as a whole). Inseparable from practice or praxis, knowledge encompasses an agenda for transformation” (Lefebvre 1991, p.98). He stresses the significance of critiquing society in order to understand the alienation brought about by capitalism. Its roots lie in critical theory developed by the Frankfurt School in the 1930s and the writings of Max Horkheimer on the role of social theory to both critique and change society, which was developed by Jürgen Habermas in the 1960s and many other critical theorists such as Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin and Guy Debord. *Collective critical reflection, critical pedagogy* and *cultural democracy* are

concepts that have been influenced by these writings on critical knowledge as self-reflection, criticality and emancipation. (Benjamin 1934, Adorno & Horkheimer 1944, Habermas 1980, Debord 1967, Lefebvre 1947),

**Critical pedagogy:** A philosophy of education that involves the connection of learning to social justice and the politicisation of students and teachers by learning about and understanding the conditions in which one is learning in. Paulo Freire (1972) wrote about and practiced critical pedagogy as an approach to teaching that questions dominance and oppression in society. Freire argued that the oppressed must ‘reflectively participate’ in their own liberation: “The presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation but committed involvement” (ibid., p.44). Freire argues that the oppressors cannot defend or implement a ‘liberating education’, only the oppressed can carry out their own liberation. Other theorists and educationalists such as bell hooks (in *Teaching to Transgress* 1994), Ivan Illich (in *Deschooling Society* 1971) and Henry Giroux (in *Border Crossings* 1992), have explored practices of radical education and critical pedagogy. Subsequent critiques have also called for a deeper analysis of the ideological frameworks that underpin critical pedagogy, such as the politics of criticality, *democracy* and liberation. From which position are these terms being applied and how? There have also been concerns that such liberating pedagogy could, as with the will to *empower*, strengthen the power structures they seek to redress. (Ellsworth 1989, Flores 2004, Freire 1972, Giroux 1992, hooks 1994, Illich 1971).

**Cultural democracy:** Rooted in notions of *critical knowledge* and practices of *community arts*, I understand cultural democracy to be a way of thinking and doing that reflects on one’s rights and responsibilities to produce and communicate one’s own critical culture through the production and communication of cultural acts. It reflects on and throws into question the cultural conditions of democracy through these cultural acts, by, for example, participating in the ‘wrong’ way. I position it in relation to but not in opposition to the *democratisation of culture* which is the promotion of free, accessible, professional culture for all; an approach that leaves the pillars of art (values, ownership etc.) intact and where acts of ‘wrong’ participation are usually not tolerated. These are not mutually exclusive terms rather, they co-exist as different understandings and applications of culture in a democratic society. One of the earliest definitions of cultural democracy I can find is by Jean Battersby (1981): “The cultural democrats aim is to undermine what they see as insidious attempts by the instrument of a state establishment (the arts council) to impose an alien culture on the working class, thereby indulging in cultural colonialism or cultural imperialism.” (Battersby 1981). The Shelton Trust developed a campaign and manifesto for cultural democracy in 1985 (Kelly 1984). This campaign for *cultural democracy* in the 1980s was explicitly connected to socialist politics in that it called for a ‘society of equals’ and that culture is an ‘essential proposition for socialists to act on’: “Socialism must be about making cultures which are democratic and responsible, about breaking up oppression by opposing its structures and images. It has to be made by people in action, and not handed down by centralising ‘authorities’” (Kelly, Lock & Merkel 1986). The campaign was picked up again by Sally Morgan in 1995 (Dickson 1995) and revived again another nine years later by the Cultural Policy Collective (2004) and Rosie Meade and Mae Shaw in 2007.

**Cultural production:** A broad understanding of cultural practices in relation to the conditions in which it is manifested and values ascribed to it. Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of cultural production involved analysis of the autonomous ‘field’ of the arts (its objective, economic and social power relations) and the social agents inhabiting that field (their habitus). (Bourdieu 1993).

**Democratisation of culture:** The provision of free, accessible professional culture to all (for example, free access to museums). As an ideology it has its roots in 1930s Britain with the Pilgrim



Trust and Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) and in Victorian morality of 'civilising' the working classes through educational and cultural reform. It has been the dominant model of cultural policy and funding in the UK ever since. By democratising culture, more people have access to different artforms (for example, the Arts Council's 'Glory of the Garden' report in 1984 recommended a ten year strategy to redress the inequitable funding between London and the regions), and yet this approach has been accused of maintaining centralised notions of excellence and ensuring the pillars of *cultural production* remain in the hands of the few (Owen 1984, Dickson 1995).

**Dialectic:** Dialectics was an area of study for Hegel as a philosophy of history being made up of interwoven, complex searches for truth. Marx went on to re-work Hegelian dialectics as dialectic materialism in order to recognise the role social conditions and class struggle had on the movement of history over time. There are inherent contradictions, twists and turns that move forward and undo elements of history. Marx and subsequent Marxist theorists placed these dialectics in their materialist (economic, social, political) context. Social scientists Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) explain the shift from thinking in terms of dichotomies (either, or) to thinking in dialectic terms (never either, always both, p.575). Adorno describes such a dialectic critique (participating and not participating in culture) as a potential way to increase "cultural criticism until the notion of culture itself is negated, fulfilled and surmounted in one" (quoted by Bernstein in Adorno 2007, p.17).

**Dialogical encounter / Dialogical aesthetics:** The self-critical participation in a conversation or practical event that opens up the possibility to empathise with others in a way that may shift one's own perspective and experience. This reciprocal *intersubjectivity* relates to Grant Kester's theory of a dialogical aesthetics that "requires that we strive to acknowledge the specific identity of our interlocutors and conceive of them not simply as subjects on whose behalf we might act but as co-participants in the transformation of both self and society" (Kester 2004, p.79). The space of art, he states, is where certain questions and critical analyses can take place that would not be tolerated elsewhere (ibid., p.68). Taking Bakhtin's notion of the work of art as a conversation, Kester develops a case for dialogic art that goes beyond avant-garde aesthetic criteria based on criticality, disruption and rupture and instead looks at the transformative potential of an aesthetics based on reciprocity and collaborative encounters. His theory is useful in understanding and framing *socially engaged art* (which he gives examples of in his book, *Conversation Pieces*, 2004), notions of *cultural democracy* and *collective critical reflection* in terms of the production of *critical knowledge* through dialogical, *intersubjective* encounters.

**Distribution of the sensible:** Philosopher Jacques Rancière refers to the distribution of the sensible as the allocation of sensory experiences that frame participation in a given community (Rancière 2006, p.43). These sensory experiences, he argues, put people in their place as 'embodied allegories of inequality', revealing, "who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed" (ibid., p.12). Rancière breaks down the distribution of the sensible in terms of aesthetics into three areas: 1) the ethical regime of images (the origin and purpose of images and how this effects the 'mode of being' of individuals and communities); 2) the poetic, or representative regime (which acts as a "fold in the distribution of ways of doing and making as well as social occupations, a fold that renders arts visible") and 3) the aesthetic regime based on 'sensible modes of being specific to artist products' (ibid., p.22). He argues that there is an aesthetics (for example in these three forms) at the heart of politics because, "politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time" (ibid., p.12)

**Embezzlement:** In the context of qualitative research, Pierre Bourdieu called an act of ‘embezzlement’ that where “the delegate claims the authority to speak for the community in order to empower him- or herself politically, professionally and morally” (Bourdieu 1986 and Kester 2004, p.148). It also relates to Freire’s notion of ‘*false generosity*’. It can refer to aspects of *socially engaged art* where an artist has been commissioned to collaborate with non-professionals to ‘empower’ and ‘give voice’ to them, and yet it often remains the role and responsibility of the artist in a professional capacity to represent and distribute ‘their’ work to other networks of artists, academics and commissioners which privilege the authorial artists’ voice over others.

**Empowerment:** Paulo Freire in the ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ wrote about the liberating pedagogy of the oppressed once they have recognised themselves as hosts of their oppressors (Freire 1972, p.25-6). Freire’s liberating pedagogy is one of self-empowerment and yet New Labour policies of social inclusion have tended to focus on notions of empowerment as giving voice to ‘socially excluded’ or deprived communities so they can have more of a say in the changes in their communities. Such top-down delivery of empowerment has been criticised as being patronising and in fact disempowering when it is delivered by those who consider themselves already empowered resulting in acts of *false generosity* and *embezzlement*. Indeed, Freire stated that “it would be a contradiction in terms if the oppressors not only defended but actually implemented a liberating education” (ibid., p.30). Becky Flores has described empowerment as “end[ing] a hidden curriculum that reinforces the status quo it seeks to interrogate” (Bourdieu 1986, Ellsworth 1989, Cruikshank 1999, Flores 2004, Levitas 2005).

**False generosity:** Paulo Freire referred to false generosity as what happens when a teacher (or artist), for example, is thinking they are gifting education/art to their ignorant students/participants. An act of false generosity, in effect controls the behaviour of the students/participants in a way that strengthens the teacher/artist’s own position. Similarly to Bourdieu’s application of *embezzlement*, if a researcher or artist claims their work to be collaboratively or collectively produced and yet that individual presents it as their own, this is an act of ‘false generosity’ where the researcher/artist/teacher’s professional or economic situation is improved while the status of the others involved remains unchanged (Freire 1972, p.21).

**Generative metaphor:** Donald Schön has written on generative metaphors and the way they shape and frame certain understandings and approaches to problems (such as urban ‘blight’ and tackling the problem of poverty as a ‘disease’). He asks, ‘what is the anatomy of the making of the generative metaphor?’ (Schön 1978, p.138). These generative metaphors can, Schön suggests, become tools for critical reflection on the construction of certain issues as they open up an awareness of familiar situations through new, different analogies and a re-framing that maintains these dilemmas rather than overcoming them (ibid., p.15).

**Intersubjectivity:** An ontology that links personal and shared subjectivities that informs, for example, Kester’s theory of *dialogical aesthetics* (Kester 2004). It implies an empathetic sharing of divergent, contradictory and perhaps antagonistic meanings of the same experience. While it refers to the emotional linking of individuals, it can also be understood in the broader, objective, socio-economic field of production (Bourdieu 1993). In phenomenological terms it involves experiencing ones own self as seen by the Other, bridging the relationship between personal and shared experiences of the world.

**La perruque:** Michel de Certeau (1984) uses the term ‘la perruque’ (translation: wig) to describe the ways in which people appropriate aspects of everyday life as a practice of ‘tactics’ (as opposed to ‘strategies’ which are imposed by authority and institutions). A ‘tactic’ is temporal rather than spatial because it does not have a place in society. It must be ‘seized on the wing’ and “constantly

manipulate events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities’” (ibid., p.xix). They are, according to de Certeau, decisions and ‘clever tricks’, which allow the ‘weak to make use of strong’. The consumer subverts their consumption and becomes the producer in that moment, without taking control of it or capitalising from it; it becomes a different kind of free exchange. De Certeau describes acts of ‘la perruque’ “may be as simple a matter as a secretary's writing a love letter on ‘company time’ or as complex as a cabinetmaker's ‘borrowing’ a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room” (de Certeau 1984, p.25). I apply it here as an example of *cultural democracy* in that it offers an opportunity to participate in the ‘wrong’ way in a given scenario, reclaiming time and space to do something other than what is expected of you. This is particularly pertinent to understanding *cultural democracy* in the context of paid, contracted *wage labour*, such as the *artists’ commission*.

**Neoliberalism:** The market-driven approach to economic and social policy. David Harvey describes neo-liberalism as a theory of political economic practices that “proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework and characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade” which the state creates the institutional framework for (Harvey 2005). The language and ideas of neoliberalism have informed public policy and promotion of the *creative industries*, which apply individualism, consumerism, efficiency and profit-based arguments to justify and promote cultural work.

**New Genre Public Art:** American artist Suzanne Lacy has described new genre public art as “visual art that uses both traditional and non-traditional media to communicate and interact with a broad diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives” (Lacy 1995, p.19). Kwon has described the practice as one that engages marginalised groups “as active participants in the conceptualisation and production of process-orientated, politically conscious community events or programs” (Kwon 2002, p.6) As a term it emerged in the US in the early 1990s following the project, ‘Culture in Action: New Public Art in Chicago’. It was ‘new genre’ because the practice departed from sculptural installations in public space and focused on the temporary, often performative interaction between an artist and other members of the public. It has informed Kester’s exploration of *dialogical aesthetics* (2004) and is also related to what in the UK is labelled *socially engaged art* in that the practices share what Kester has called transformative art produced through ‘performative interactions’.

**Participation:** In the context of this research, I apply participation to the *socially engaged art* commission that distinguishes between paid artists, commissioners, funders and the voluntary participation of others in the creation of the work. The experience of participation is framed by the social, emotional, economic and political contexts in which it take place. *Socially engaged art* projects rely on voluntary participation as a form of active *citizenship*, sometimes offering an alternative format to the usual forms of participation in local *democracy*, such as attending town hall meetings or being involved in public consultations. Participation in itself does not necessarily lead to empowerment and emancipation, and many funding-led projects that expect participation from local residents, for example, have been accused of being tokenistic box ticking exercises. Bertolt Brecht’s ‘alienation technique’ in theatre, involved the ‘productive participation’ of otherwise ‘passive’ spectators who through their emotional distance created by reminders of the play’s artificiality, the audience then takes what they have learnt and applies it in their real life (Kershaw 1992). Rancière, rather than following this line of assuming audiences are passive spectators that need alienating in order to encourage them into active participants, suggests we should not equate listening as passive. An active participant is assumed to be a better state than a passive consumer. Being a spectator is our normal state, rather than a passive state that needs activating. Participation is another embodiment of the *distribution of the sensible*. He argues that in order to disrupt that distribution, “emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between

viewing and acting”. In its emancipated form, the boundaries between acting and looking, self and Other are blurred. His notion of the distribution and disruption of the sensible provide a useful background to rethinking the meanings of participation (Rancière 2006 and 2009).

**Participatory democracy:** While representative *democracy* tends to limit a citizen’s participation in democracy to voting, participatory democracy implies a more involved form of participation in decision-making. This could mean *participation* in existing forms of governance through channels such as public consultations, town hall meetings or writing letters to MPs, or through non-governmental means, such as ‘grass-roots’ *participation* in ‘civil society’.

**Performativity:** I use this term broadly to refer to the way subjectivities are formed (created or rehearsed) through doing and speaking. This requires an act of expression but also an awareness of the construction and conditions of that act and how its frame affects what is being done/said (Butler 1997).

**Practice based research:** I understand practice based research to be the coming together of practice and theory so that each informs the other to further develop knowledge. New knowledge is formed through the outcomes of that practice. In art and design doctorates, practice based research usually involves the production of an artwork alongside written work which might contextualise the practice. According to the University of London regulations, for example, “the written and practice based components shall together present an integrated argument” (2009). Practice led research, on the other hand, focuses on practice as the subject of research with the aim of developing new knowledge of/within that practice (Creativity and Cognition Studios, 2011).

**Practitioner:** I use the term practitioner here to denote someone who practically applies his or her creative ideas. It implies a broader definition than the labels artist or curator, for example, in that it might involve a combination of the skills or techniques associated with these practices. For a practitioner, the label (art or curating, for example), associated with the practice is perhaps not as significant as the nature and outcomes of the process itself. Appropriating skills and approaches from a variety of disciplines, the ‘bricoleur’ practitioner may also develop their work through theoretical frameworks that justify, contest and inform their practice. A practitioner may or may not sell their labour. Some may consider their practice their profession, sometimes it may be a considered a hobby.

**Precarious (precarity/precarious labour):** Theorist and activist Franco “Bifo” Berardi has written on immaterial labour conditions which involve a new form of alienation where people willingly work overtime, endure poor working conditions and suffer increasing stress, as work and life become inseparable (Berardi 2009). As employee rights are eroded to safeguard employer’s profits, workers are forced into increasingly precarious situations with less job security (such as short term contracts and no pensions or benefits) and demands flexibility that benefits employers over employees (for example in the form of unpaid overtime). Because of the temporary, part-time, self-employed nature of the work, precarious workers are often not protected by trade union representation. Artists to some extent have sought out and romanticised a precarious existence, perhaps relying on short term, poorly-paid contracts to support their practices. Yet as artists sell their practice as *wage labour*, how long is it before the art work itself becomes alienating? Employers harness a willingness to work for free which also leads to increasingly precarious conditions which only those able to financially subsidise their free labour are able to take advantage of. These precarious conditions which some artists choose to perpetuate (carrying out numerous unpaid internships, for example, have been accepted as the only way into the industry), and which marginalised, undocumented and low paid workers are forced to endure, are being rolled out in

many sectors as more labour is outsourced to save money, eroding employee rights in the process. (Beradi 2009, Denning 2010, Lorey 2006, McRobbie 2001, Mute 2005, Temporary Services 2009).

**Radical democracy:** A concept developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), which challenges neoliberal concepts of *democracy* by stressing the need to acknowledge the dependence *democracy* has on difference and dissensus. It rejects the notion that *democracy* should strive for consensus, which can only oppress difference. Although she does not reference it directly, Audre Lorde in her essay ‘The Master’s Tools will Never Dismantle the Master’s House’ (1979) gives an example of what a radical democracy would look like. She called for the necessity of the interdependency of difference within the theory and practice of the feminist movement, in terms of class, politics and ethnicity for example. Only by recognising differences, refusing to ignore them and working with other excluded people, women would be able to gain strength and effect change.

**Repressive tolerance:** Herbert Marcuse in his essay, ‘Repressive Tolerance’ (1965) outlined how tolerance had become a form of oppression and suppression of alternative opinions, attitudes and peoples and that voting, protesting and freedom of speech were merely accepted as a “trade-off for a life of servitude” (Marcuse 1965, p.2). In a ‘civil’, ‘liberal’, ‘free’, ‘democratic’ system opposition, dissent and creative forms of critique are tolerated, he suggests, unless they incite or practice violence against that society. But, Marcuse, asked, could this tolerance be repressive and work against social change? (ibid., p.5).

**Social exclusion:** This term is used to describe the multiple causes of deprivation that prevent people from participating in a given society. In 1998 in the UK, the Social Exclusion Unit, established by the then Labour government, published the report ‘Bringing Britain Together: a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal’ (Cabinet Office 1998). As a result of this report 17 Policy Action Teams were established to investigate the problems of poor, socially excluded neighbourhoods. Subsequent social inclusion policies were used to frame funding opportunities and commissions for socially engaged art projects that were expected to tackle social exclusion. Ruth Levitas has written a thorough history and critique of social exclusion/inclusion, pointing out that tackling poverty and inequality was being replaced by addressing ‘poverty of aspiration’ and ‘equality of opportunity’ (Levitas 2005). The Cultural Policy Collective in their pamphlet ‘Beyond Social Inclusion. Towards Cultural Democracy’ also criticised these policies as promoting inclusion into a certain kind of citizenship dominated by an exploitative capitalised economy that ‘disguised unequal power relations’ (Cultural Policy Collective 2004, p.11).

**Socially engaged art:** The earliest published mention I can find of this term is from 1995 by Malcolm Dickson: “Far from being unimportant in arts work with people, quality and excellence are central to it. Certain fine art practices and high arts are protected from the yardstick which is used to measure more socially engaged arts” (Dickson 1995, p11). It has become a common term in the UK since the 1990s that has been used to describe art that is commissioned to effect social change (Matarasso 1997, Royal College of Art 2000, Albert 2003, Doherty 2004, Bishop 2006a&b, Butler & Reiss 2007, Suchin 2007). The practice, often characterised by artist-led, non-object-based encounters, performances and collaborations with others outside the gallery, has its roots in conceptual, performance and *community arts*, radical theatre, *critical pedagogy* and community activism. It is also linked to definitions used in the US such as, *New Genre Public Art* (Lacy 1994 and Kwon 2002) and *Dialogical Aesthetics* (Kester 2004).

**Wage labour:** The socio-economic relations between a worker and their employer in a capitalist society where the majority are forced to sell their labour (for example, when self-subsistence is not viable or sustainable due to the control or rising price of land). In a wage labour society, a worker sells their labour to an employer as a commodity who then makes a profit from its surplus value.

The productivity of the labour must improve in order for the employer to increase their profits. This does not necessarily translate into better working terms and conditions, the costs of which must remain low if the employer is to make a profit, for example, by using temporary, outsourced, agency workers, organisations can save on employee costs such as pensions, maternity cover, insurance etc., resulting in an increasingly *precarious* workforce. Marxist critiques acknowledge the alienation induced in the worker who feels a lack of ownership and control over their own work when it is exploited by their employer as an instrument in the capitalist means of production.

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