

# **Imagination, Autonomy and Transgression within Contemporary Fine Art Practice**

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**Sally Ann Labern**

UEL 1137616

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## Abstract

This practice-led research project, held by a materiality of 'thinking through making' on a deeply personal level, is concerned with how the autonomous imagination manifests in collaborative artistic practice, and translates into co-authored work, and the transgressions therein. The central question this research project seeks to answer is: What happens in the collaborative act of aesthetic exchange of social practice art in the context of social and political crises, and how can such acts both inform the artform, the artist and the participants? It responds to these questions through an interweaving of critical engagement with theorists and a body of work created through the research project. Its findings form a critical and reflexive expansion of my individual art practice and benefit the social practice arts sector understanding of practice through prisms of 'surrender and running to', 'beholding', 'imminence' and 'the radical imagination'. The thesis explores how the imagination ruptures normative political thinking and impacts the individual and the communal through a socially engaged art practice of solo, collaborative and group performativity, framed herein as the 'post-autonomous.'

This thesis has an alternative title of 'Beholding the Radical Imagination: a new lens on social practice art through practice-led research.'

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## List of Abbreviations

AHWEW	At Home with Essential Workers
BPS	Battersea Power Station
DDD	Day Dream Dictionary
I/Vf	In/visible Fields
IBPoC	Indigenous Black and People of Colour
RNM	Republic of North Macedonia
TPTP	The Public Typing Pool©

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## Authors Declaration

I declare that this thesis presented for University of East London ADI Professional Doctorate Programme has been composed entirely by myself, been solely the result of my own work (except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text) and not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Sally Labern

28 April 2021

## Chapter 1: Introduction

This practice-led research project is concerned with how the autonomous imagination manifests in collaborative artistic practice, and translates into co-authored work, and the transgressions therein. It should be noted here, that ‘transgression’ in the context of this research project relates solely to the breaching of the boundaries between imaginations and the use of public spaces without permissions, presented in context through the art works included in this thesis. The central question this research project seeks to answer is:

*What happens in the collaborative act of aesthetic exchange of social practice art in the context of social and political crises, and how can such acts both inform the artform, the artist and the participants?*

supported by three further (sub) questions:

- 1. What is the place that my practice holds when I am making from an affective and preconscious place of not-knowing?*
- 2. What happens when the artist and non-artist come together in the practice?*
- 3. What place does the making of objects have in this practice?*

This research project emanated from my position as an established visual artist engaged in an intentional practice that sits at the *loci* of autonomous, collaborative and social imaginations. In process, this practice moves between these engagements, both the form and the materiality contingent on communicative need. The theoretical entry point for the



research project was from my intersectional political art practice, and the project set out to expand both my theoretical praxis and my artistic practice through the interrogation of the interrelations and entanglements between the perceived sites of imaginations, as above, seeking critical positionings for the convocation of a 'radical imagination' (Chapter 6).

Khasnabish and Haiven (2014) view the 'radical imagination' as not so much an attempt to bring definition to the radical imagination, but rather as a site of practice, more to evoke it as both an aspirational and real space; it is this positioning on the radical imagination that I refer to throughout this thesis report across my practice led research.

The research project, as practice-led, was both generative and iterative, necessarily non-linear and requiring an 'un-learning', and took me into parallel critical and academic arenas, and these often encountered through a collaborative enquiry. Throughout the research project, I continued to work as a professional artist, and as director of the drawing shed [sic], an artist-led social practice arts organisation, based in east London, UK, with an international reach. This professional practice has purposefully intersected my research and led me into working with others across arts and science, to 'trouble' the ways I work with communities (artists and 'non-artists') across an interdisciplinary social practice that adds to a collective body of work bridging into the commons.

Violence as framed by capitalist realism, with its neoliberal agenda, the interpellation between these (Fisher, 2009) has been a central tenet of this research project and has led me to make work engaging in a 'critical optimism' held by a materiality of 'thinking through making' both on a deeply personal level, and also exploring how this work of the imagination ruptures normative political thinking and impacts the communities I work with.

I have looked deeply at the consistent place in my practice that the making of seductive objects occupies within solo, collaborative and group performativity, and in particular, how this works in relation to my artist films: even when made autonomously in a parallel space, that these works are set with the intentionality of a social practice and I later frame this as 'post-autonomous' (see Chapter 7). The research project progressed a culture of collective 'assembly' and co-authored, and human-centred processes. What emerged as research findings were iterations of 'autonomous' performative practices within the context of socially engaged work and/or site-contextual works. I found that video for example moved from a previously secondary form to a primary one, further exhibited as 'film as object' juxtaposed in relation to the transformation of existing objects, and in the intentional methodologies of entering into a commitment with a new materialism held within this work (Chapter 5). I came to understand my affective process as one of surrender (Chapter 5), which I now know to be vital for my progression as an artist in this time of climate and political emergency. As a consequence, this research project has led me to recognise a necessary new materialism in relation to my making art in the 'Chthulucene', our current epoch of the interweaving of the human and non-human (Haraway, 2016). Furthermore, this research project has led me to investigate the place of 'imminence' as a growing theoretical, political and aesthetic concern emergent within a post autonomous practice and the process of 'making with' (sym-poiesis) rather than a 'self-making' (auto-poiesis) of the imagination.

Thus, as will be expanded on in this report and through the thesis as a whole, this research project has resulted in a radical shift in my understanding of my own practice. The following

reflexive triptych of forming, situating and being of practice is presented as the personal and professional trajectory that brought me to the inquiry of this research project.

### 1.1: Forming Practice

My childhood years were formative in shaping my adult preoccupations as a visual artist. I grew up moving between the south to the north of England and the Isle of Man, eleven new places, 'homes' and schools, by the age of 17 when I left home. The trajectory of my family life was representative of working-class families in post-World War Two Britain: both parents left school at 14 with no formal qualifications; my father 'encouraged' by his employer, British Telecom, to have elocution lessons to be able to 'get on'; my mother an auxiliary nurse, much later training as a professional nurse and psychotherapist; my siblings the first generation in the family to attend higher education. As a child I experienced ongoing poverty and I had a heightened sense of the value of imagining other realities: aged five, I would often lie on the ground knowing that if I stared long enough the sky would turn into water, beholding a split second of transportation. Life in my family was emotionally unpredictable and, in particular for me, violent and 'insufficient', creating in me a desire for a transformation through art, and my own imagination. From an early age I used drawing as a way of protecting myself, creating a distance from the world around me that by the time I was in my mid-late teens literally became a shield, whereby I would not be without paper and drawing materials. These early experiences created in me a strong sense of connection to the social, and social justice, with a hyper-awareness I developed as a mode of survivability.

My time at De Montfort University Leicester studying sculpture attracted me to artists such as Eva Hesse (Tate, n.d.) and ingrained in me a rigorous approach to art practice. I became interested in exploring the location of materiality and the subjective gendered narratives attributed to women artists such as Hesse, Shirazeh Houshiary ([shirazehhoushiary.com](http://shirazehhoushiary.com)) and Laura Ford ([lauraford.net](http://lauraford.net)) for example, and I began to explore the contextual place and subjectivity of my body and objects as a part of the work I made.

During my BA I spent eight months and four months in Rome and France respectively as part of an exchange: in Rome, I found my way towards an underground community of political activism, at a time of the maturation of *Arte Povera* (Celant, 1967); as a 'non-movement' privileging process over form, artists had worked on the street rather than in the gallery, using 'poor' and unorthodox materials. At the time (1980-1), this work flooded every private gallery as the art market capitalised on the benefits of its seduction, and I started to see the world and in new ways. In 1983, Leicester curator Bobby Ayers

([askyfilledwithshootingstars.com](http://askyfilledwithshootingstars.com)) remade artist Allan Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959) (MOMA, n.d.). This was the first time in my life I was exposed to a performative and relational practice. In an essay in 1966 Kaprow wrote '...the line between the Happening and daily life should be kept as fluid and indistinct as possible' (Kaprow, 1966). I didn't know what that meant, as art and life appeared to me to be so separate and the majority of people around me reinforced that this was so. My BA Hons thesis was on the powerful sense of place I experienced around Isle of Man ancient burial sites; later I would understand that I was exploring affect theory.

From 1983 onwards, influenced by the seminal *The Sculpture Show*, at Hayward and Serpentine galleries ([serpentinegalleries.org](http://serpentinegalleries.org)), I joined an artist's community in Sheffield, and

worked briefly catalysed by artist David Mach ([davidmach.com](http://davidmach.com)) at Yorkshire Sculpture Park. A year supporting the Miner's Strike (1984-5) and Women Against Pit Closures, led to my joining artists Eddie Chambers (The Black Artist's Group), Roland Miller ([abandonedinplace.com](http://abandonedinplace.com)) and Monica Ross on the management committee of The National Artists Association as I gravitated towards live art, throwing myself as a young woman artist into making things happen. I founded a studio and live art space, Pitt St Studios, in a small empty factory in central Sheffield. Pitt St Studios became known internationally for its monthly live art platform and festivals, with artists including Anne Seagrave ([imma.ie](http://imma.ie), n.d.), Mona Hatoum (Tate, n.d.), Nigel Rolfe ([imma.ie](http://imma.ie), n.d.), Monica Ross, Andre Stitt ([andrestitt.com](http://andrestitt.com)) and Forced Entertainment ([forcedentertainment.com](http://forcedentertainment.com)). I tested my limits of what was possible, exploring literal and figurative territories and boundaries, found materials, and art and political activism. At this time, the writing of Griselda Pollock ([ahc.leeds.ac.uk](http://ahc.leeds.ac.uk)) was a critical influence. Pollock created a disruption for me in the historical narrative that art and culture took particular forms, and that these were shaped by the powerful place men materially and subjectively hold in defining the world:

*Art is not a mirror. It mediates and re-presents social relations...*

*Women's practice in art has never been absolutely forbidden, discouraged or refused, but rather contained and limited to its function as the means by which masculinity gains and sustains its supremacy in the important sphere of cultural production (Parker, Rozsika & Pollock, 1981, pp. 119, 170).*

Using a medium format camera, I developed a methodology of creating secondary spaces through which work was to be experienced as the primary mode of 'beholding' for the

audience, creating collaborative performance works that critiqued the subjugated role of women under the male gaze (the inherent explanation of one to other in the 'gaze' is expanded upon intersectionally below). Alongside this I made ambitious sculpture/installations, for example, a huge plaster floor based grid cast from hand cut glass moulds, that restrained body-scaled figurative and antagonist 'cutlery' forms made in yellow pulped *papier maché*. This notion of 'beholding' I have revisited in this research project (Chapter 4).

My practice further developed by being part of Women's Art Change, a UK dialogical space for women artists. Artist Helen Chadwick (Tate, n.d.) had a profound influence on my emerging practice, her 'female body as performance' practice, driven as it was by an enquiry that shape-shifted the materiality used by an artist with work that played with gender, desire, humour, transgression, and power. Later I saw Chadwick's *Piss Flowers* (1991-92), inverse plaster cast sculpture of each of her and her male partner's urine streams.

Chadwick's stream was the more powerful, appearing as a female phallus at the centre of the works (or now, as we know more about the physiology of the clitoris, as exactly this), with the male stream creating the forms around these 'flowers' as a trace installation of performative actions. This gender role inversion and humour as well as desire is also present in Chadwick's *Cacao* (1994), a chocolate fountain that has a pump like a phallus constantly spewing out molten chocolate. I experienced Chadwick's work as hugely seductive, created from human debris (hair, dust...) as the audience gathered around, its smell, though still drawing you in, was also repulsive, the male phallus becoming rejected, but still the allure. This 'contamination' and the high quality of 'exhibition' has continued to be important to me. Both these works to me were so simple and so powerful, and to me they were like 'actions.' As with artist Rebecca Horn's (Tate, n.d.) *Finger Gloves* (1972) you could feel an

investigation coming from lived experience was at the heart of the work: for Horn, this was the recovery from an illness that literally led to her developing extensions to her body as a way of interacting with the world. Feminists such as Rosalind Coward (1984) and theory on female desire, took my practice to the street, often using my body performatively, using marking to leave the visibility of a woman's body on the streets, as well critiquing the role of women and the family. This idea of making highly politicised work on the streets that disrupted everyday life, but did not seek permission for use of the site versus the form of the work, or the duration, was to be significant for the development of my practice and took me close to the Situationist movement in understanding the importance for me in the radical imagination.

## 1.2: Situating Practice

The years following led me to an Arts Council England bursary at City University London, working at commissioning agency, Public Arts, and a three-year Gulbenkian public art research grant. Through this, my practice became situated in the quality of participation in the then growing field of public art, commissioning and supporting, and writing about artists in the context of collaborative making of site-specific community-located work. I found public art lacking criticality, dominated by white, middle class male artists and agencies concerned only with the permanency of public art, and social engagement in the 'stuff' of art seriously wanting. The rigorous dialogical and socially engaged works I was involved with as an artist was hidden and undervalued as contextual practice (ideological, political, gendered body, site), localised and mainly undocumented and not only considered worthless to the market as it was, but as such, essential to exclude from the narrative. I was now situating my practice concerns and the work itself explicitly outside of the hegemonic

voice and structures of art institutions and market, and concerning itself with the liminal 'site' between the social, individual and radical imagination.

A foundational example of this was *[dis]locate* (1998-2000)<sup>1</sup> in collaboration with artist Tahera Aziz (lsbu.ac.uk) initiated in parallel to my part-time role as an officer at Arts Council England. *[dis]locate* was a body of work co-produced with Yemeni women in Sheffield exploring the fluidity of identity and its unfixed-ness in relation to the diasporic condition, through supporting the voices of the women we set out on a journey to co-author this work together. Sheffield's Yemeni community developed as a direct result of UK pulling out of Yemen as an administrative colonial power and the demand for steel workers in the late 1950's. Yemeni women had remained invisible through this diaspora. Aziz and I gathered together with a group of six women with diverse lived experience and social circumstances: what was shared between them was the desire 'to stay' and a potentiality to 'keep moving'. As artists we chose to work with a challenging new text to accompany our 'thinking through making' by theorist Irit Rogoff, *Terra Firma, Geography's Visual Culture* (2000). We created a permeable participatory structure embracing identity as a fluid concept constantly in formation, with an extended project timeframe to reflect this intention. The practice was reflective and reflexive, and work that emerged created by each woman with peer and artist support; specific elements were co-authored, with others created by Aziz and myself individually in response to this enquiry. In parallel we sent the women a series of 'triggers' through the post, resources in the form of short of texts, materials and requests, to create space to explore, think and respond to issues of identity: how our relationship with who we

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<sup>1</sup> *[dis]locate* was funded by Arts Council England and Yorkshire Arts with Site Gallery, Yemenia Airlines, Rapiscan, Maiden, Lovebytes and Sheffield City Art Galleries as partners, and shown at Site Gallery in 2000.



are changes as we experience new things, and how mutable identities are shaped by multiple worlds. Aziz and I developed a sensibility of collaborative working with the women; at the time it felt like a very new way of working, crossing into new digital territories required new skills to be learned for individual and shared image and sound works. None of this was comfortable, but it was exciting. In workshops we explored how some things, the lived experience of trauma and violence, appeared more fixed. We learnt together that diasporic time is enfolding and cyclical; that art could bring some respite as well as challenge who holds public space; and that agency isn't about abstract possibilities but about the making of real potentialities, thus ultimately, about claiming subjective agency. As artists we were concerned with deflecting the orientalist, gender and class gaze and to hold a collective position against voyeurism, with the right *not* to reveal but rather to hold subjective agency over forms, how, and what we say. One woman shared the story of her journey from Yemen to seek refuge in Sheffield; painfully hard for her to tell, she stuttered and stopped many times. I realised that this series of stutters and stops was a sonic work in itself - it is these remnants of such a trauma, I mused, that create a work of inversion, an 'in becoming' of affect. Aziz and I also created heterotopian spaces on the streets for these professionally produced works, created with 'non-artists', to be seen by a new audience.

Alongside these works (2000-8), I was involved in many anti-capitalist street protests across Europe as a part of Globalize Resistance, and engaged in many artists' collectively organised interventions on the streets of Genoa, Prague, Florence and London, where I made a cover work, with artist John Jordan and Isabelle Frémeaux for *Reclaim the Streets, The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination*, a handbook for safe non-violent collective actions. It was around this time that I began both directing artists' large-scale public works and

investigating a forfeit of authorship to be led into others' practices. This was highly formative of my current practice, inviting a process of 'surrendering' that through the process of this research project I have come to understand more deeply (Chapter 5).

### 1.3: Being Practice

The years 2008-10 saw me receive a drawing mentorship with Ann Christopher RA (royalacademy.org.uk, n.d.) and a residency with International Workshop at Siobhan Davies Studios, London; I made performative drawings narrating with an audience the complex relationship with my mother, drawing around my vagina whilst dragging my body led by my vagina across thresholds. The recurring influence of the Cuban-American artist, Ana Mendieta (Tate, n.d.) as a potent parallel to this sense of disconnection to self, holding an 'absence' of place, body and land in performing a non-essentialist gender identity. What Butler & Athanasiou (2013, p. 519) named 'performing rhetorical acts', meaning the works are constantly 'in formation' and in this 'body' of work I responded viscerally to my life impacted by coercively controlled relationships and the complicity within them. In performing these works I believe I was transgressing the normal boundaries relative to how the beholder experiences those things which we do not feel comfortable to explore.

This period culminated in my forming social practice arts organisation, the drawing shed in 2009 with artist Sally Barker and the making of *Till Island No 1* (2010), as part of *Pick N Mix*, at a now closed Woolworths in East London, curated by Mark Hampson (royalacademy.org.uk, n.d.). *Till Island No 1* Fig1 was significant in that I brought together the drawing into the transformation of an object with digital technologies. I spent long days meticulously 'papering out' the Woolworths till island No 1 by pattern cutting 200gsm

cartridge with a scalpel to give it a 'second skin'; I then 'drew it out' using intense black pigment sticks to create an unstable black powder-velvet surface. This task of drawing to produce the depth of surface I intended was endurance beyond, and impossible for me to complete alone in the timeframe, so I invited other artists to help me, including Sally Barker. I re-coded the till's two automated 'till readers', with the assistance of a hacker, so that one carried voices of redundant women Woolworths workers, the other, voices of Somalian pirates. At the time there was controversy in the press around racism and women's job losses: I responded to this with an idea to connect the experiences and consequences for ordinary peoples' lives from very different worlds. This took its conceptual cue from Foucault's lecture *Of Other Spaces* (1967) to explore *Till Island No1* as a heterotopian space; Foucault's proposal that we need 'pirates' in the world to maintain it as a place with a resistant and hopeful imagination resonated deeply with me, with the closure of Woolworths as symptomatic of an economic crash and the gendered impact on job losses, coupled with the complexity of capitalism's racist gaze.

During this show, Geoff Brunell, the then lead of the University of East London Fine Art Professional Doctorate, entered into a spontaneous crit with me: I had 'over-cleaned up' the inside of the till island that had become a dumping ground by everyone for anything left on the shop floor and, thus, it no longer held its original abandoned identity; by doing this I had removed an element of chaos the work needed to really hold its power. Re-curating the chaos inside the island completed the work. The blackness of the now-art-object seemed to float above the floor synonymous with an abandoned funerary ship. The instability of the unique surface was untouchable as the pure pigment stick, now powder, was deeply invasive to the human skin, but people could not help but touch it, it was highly seductive.

There was a complexity in reading the work that brought the voices of pirates, women workers and the 'presence in absence' of the mourning Woolworths going public together in an un-repairable relational aesthetic social object. The relationship the public had to *Till Island No1* was complex, no longer capable of its previous 'exchange', its transformation recognised its deep cultural significance and this profound loss to its public community. In addition to before, during and after recognising this Till now as art, in its new form / content (and all that is held sociologically, politically), there was something else going on in the dark instability of its seductive discomfort. An affect was created in the 'beholder as community' as well as the now art object holding this affect as an immanent sense. The audience communicated that they had strong feelings about Till Island No1, and I think these were not emotions but belonged to the body, an encounter in affect. I think on reflection that I had opened up a space for a 'third imaginary' - that place of the imagination whereby the audience in their networked rhizomic becoming with the object. This affect was produced collectively within their subjective decoding of Till Island No1 that came from their individual tacit and social/lived experiences of Woolworths. There is a violence, inferred by affect within this work; it holds a formality understood within modernist art theory, and alongside the fact that it could not be made by one person (in practice and in intentionality), it also enters the contemporary experience of the idea of the collective beholder. It is I think a work that holds a critique of participatory art and as such is problematised by its produced affect. Jacques Ranciere argues in 'The uses of Democracy' (1992) that genuine participation positions itself differently to democracy in that the imagination creates an 'unpredictable subject', occupying unfixed spaces, rather than those which are fixed, of participation framed by or dependant on the dominant order. It is a space I would suggest that is most powerful in stimulating affect if it is 'uncomfortable'.

This work was an important game changer for me during a time when I was developing a socially engaged arts organisation and questioning the relationship between that of my 'own' imagination, and how this manifested in a collaborative practice that I had engaged in for many years, and the 'other place' located 'differently' in co-authored works often with so called 'non artists.' The research through the practice-led doctorate felt the right mechanism, for me to look more closely at what was going on through the lens of my work. This report now goes on to present the practice-led methodology of the research project and following that, through Chapters 4 to 6, presents the theoretical enquiry of this research project pertaining to surviving and resisting, boundaries and connections, spectacle, time and duration, the object, and aesthetics and imagination.

#### 1.4: Introducing Terms

This thesis throughout will use the terms of affect, imagination, and social practice (art); thus, this section now offers the reader an introduction to those terms, which are expanded upon in later sections.

##### 1.4.1: Affect

Put simply by Deleuze (1978), affect 'is a mixture of two bodies, one body which is said to act on another, and the other receives traces of the first' (p. 59). Reading to this, affect thus determines the subjective body-other-environment relation that we call 'experience.'

Gregory, Seigworth and Gregg (2010) focus on the 'in-between-ness' of affect: here, affect manifests in the in-between-ness of the thinking mind and the acting body (and acting

bodies and the larger world) and in the synthesis of the two to simultaneously act, and be acted upon). It is this acting *upon* each *other* – both as subject and as object – that creates a mutable stage, allowing each body to move with porosity between both being acted upon and also acting upon. This is a movement between affect and agency, and this is where imagination and affect interplay by creating multiple imaginative spaces wherein a community of imagination can both seek desire, mitigate trauma and allow joint action. This creation does not relinquish either agency or the pre-felt affective state essential within the creative process. These feelings belong to the body and are distinct from emotion; they also belong to the object itself in an immanent sense. In the affect of art there is a coupling, joining, rhizomatic ‘becoming’ between the object (art) and the subject (beholder.)

Extrapolating from Bishop’s (2010) social and participatory turn in the arts, and more precisely, affect in the contemporary context of the socialisation of the process of artists making work with others, the collaborative and co-authored artistic practice presented in this thesis identifies and performs the link between affect and the autonomous imagination. This then leads to a consideration of the imagination and the radical imagination.

#### 1.4.2: The (Radical) Imagination

This thesis uses both the terms of ‘imagination’ and ‘radical imagination’. Firstly, then, imagination. Descartes (1973) explored the notion that reality was beholden to and shaped by the imagination; that imagination was required to bring an order to the perceived beholden world reality. Kant’s (2007) proposition was that imagination was the basis of all reality and gave form to all aspects of human mental and therefore social life encompassing

reason, aesthetics and ethics, with the mind of the individual at the centre of the universe, a 'divine spark' representing 'being' and setting us apart from animals. Kant's aesthetic legacy acknowledges that something unique happens in the intellect, emotions and imagination in the presence of the sublime, that the experience of art is beyond its usefulness; He understood affect. Kant, however, was part of a group of white men with institutional and personal wealth and power activated from a life of the enormous exploitation of others. Artists have long created works in resistance to dominant normative forces, activating a quest for the imagining of a new world and a resistance, musing on dismantling capitalism in its development, as if the imaginary could counter this hold over the huge populace demanding equity. This is countered by a Marxist position that challenges the idea that one could simply imagine one's way out of societal and institutional structuring that is founded on the exploitation of the many.

Thus, imagination is shaped by our embodied experience, which is necessarily intersectional (dependent on race class, gender sexuality, ethnicity and other differences); the imagination is also social, and this is where the radical imagination itself intersects with this thinking. 'Radical' comes from the Latin *radix* meaning 'root', those things underneath that take us to understandings of the social, political, and forms of oppression, and in this we understand the structural power relations built into the systems we live by (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2014). The radical imagination is ignited by encounters located within the differences between us. It is of shared experiences and understandings – imaginaries - that make living side by side possible: the radical imagination demands of the imagination that one visits another imaginary landscape. For example, social movements, as a coming together in a

change-driven new space, are convocations of the radical imagination. In that space of the radical imagination, change is cultivated both intentionally and incidentally through and by common (radical) imaginary landscapes.

It is from the Twentieth Century and onwards that the interdisciplinary, and dissenting, thinking of critical theorists such as Chomsky (2012), Kearney (2002, Routledge UK), Kristeva (1980), Said (2000), Butler (2008) and Haraway (2016) that we are able to engage in an intersectional entanglement of affect, the imaginary, oppression, psychoanalysis, science and politics necessary to attend to art in the time of critical and climate emergency:

*‘The root of the prevailing lack of imagination cannot be grasped unless one is able to imagine what is lacking, that is, what is missing, hidden, forbidden, & yet possible, in modern life’* Situationist International (1967).

This thesis investigates the ways that social practice artists - me included, as the subject of this investigation - engage in the plurality of radical imagination manifestation. Thus, the thesis now turns to a consideration of this term, from the purview of the research project.

#### 1.4.3: Social Practice (Art)

Theories of social practice art are well-trodden academic ground and this thesis does not function to present this as an historical study; rather, in this Introduction, it will offer the key influential theorists strictly relevant to the research project.



The point of departure is Bourriard's (1998) relational aesthetics. This places an emphasis on art practice as a social exchange, a political, cultural, socialised act. This act is understood as the form and content of the art work, and is accepted as foundational to social practice art. Kester (2011) positions the social practice artist as 'freed' from working outside of normative art definitions, the artist working with 'co-participants' as an intention to change self and society. This is critiqued by Bishop (2012), who suggests Kester places the intention and the exchange above the aesthetic. In practice, this is subjective; in practice however, one of Kester's most useful contributions is a refusal to continue locating the discourse around social art practices through a colonial northern hemispheric lens, and this I continue to consider using the thinking of Glissant (2010).

## 1.5: Images



*Figure 1: Till Island No 1 (2010), as part of Pick N Mix. Sheffield, 2010.*

## Chapter 2: Practice-based research methodology

Practice-related researchers push an examination of the process and product of art through practice-led and practice-based methods. This research project is the former, practice-led; it is a project that is concerned with the nature of artistic practice, in this case, a socially engaged art practice that dovetails with autonomously authored works that flow back into social practice, and results in new knowledge that can generatively inform operational and aesthetic development for the practice (Candy, 2006; Smith & Dean, 2009). The focus of this research project is to firstly advance understanding of my own arts practice, and secondly, though no less importantly, advance understanding of practice within the social arts field.

As a methodological framework, this research project has incorporated my own creative practice, methods and outputs and folded these into the research design and its outputs and outcomes, i.e., the creative work is a form of research and generates findings in response to research questions, and the specialist knowledge and training of the practitioner-researcher can lead to specialist research outcomes. This research project is comprised of art works made as a part of my art practice across a number of years as its method, a selection of this which are documented here that have allowed me to explore the manifestations of the imagination across autonomous collaborative and co-authored practices and a critical engagement with theory and artists' works as its methodology and in this written report as a part of the thesis. The two are inter-active in addressing the research questions above.

This research project is not 'pure practice' (Candy, 2006), though research is part of my 'pure practice' to meet the aims of the project at hand: as practice-led, this research aims to generate culturally novel knowledge not just relevant to my own art practice (Scrivener, 2002) and as such will be shared through exhibition and this report as a part of that thesis.

In the course of the research project, as practice-led, I have engaged in: reflexive comprehension supervision, in studio and on campus; Work in Progress seminars; the artworks, practices and critical thinking of other artists, many of which done so in the first person; attended and spoken at conferences; and, as referenced in Chapter 1, read to the side of normative social practice art theory in order to widen my own, and in the dissemination of this thesis, other social practice artists theoretical field. In supervision and Work in Progress seminars across the second and third years of this University of East London ADI Professional Doctorate Programme research, I realised the need to explore theory related to my practice by revisiting ideas of subjectivity held within my work, looking at areas of theory that I felt would support the ongoing preoccupations around the socialisation of imagination and the structural obstacles in the way of this holding both form and value as a result of the processes of encounter (participation) and context that both 'perform' the work, lead to shapeshifting the materiality and therefore the aesthetic of the works made. I presented on this research project at the 'Arts, Heritage, Performativity, Care' international conference March 2021 (with Rebecca Gordon, and at University College London). I was mindful that in the unpicking of this work, I had begun to consider a methodology of loose working practices and ethics to un-colonise my response as an artist

to the complexity of this place, which began with *Diminishing Returns* (2017) and the dialogues I held daily whilst in Psarades with a cohort of residency artists.

I have developed interventions and projects made through an autonomous practice, and created in collaboration within a social practice, often though not exclusively, in my role as director and lead artist of the drawing shed. Herein, there is an implicit challenge to the idea that there can be an autonomous imagination (Chapter 4). At times I have allowed other artists to lead me in their social practices (for example, John Wild ([codedgeometry.net](http://codedgeometry.net)), Monica Ross, ([monicaross.org](http://monicaross.org)) and The Portland Inn Project ([theportlandinnproject.tumblr](http://theportlandinnproject.tumblr)), willingly forfeiting authorship for this experience. Residencies across my doctorate, away from the studio, the housing estates, and real life took me to Artoll in northern Germany twice, with others in the Republic of Northern Macedonia, Bury, Manchester, Istanbul, and Charlottesville, USA, and allowed me to make work on sites of trauma or to process this as an inquiry connected to place and across time, gendered and other lived experiences (only a minority of which have been able to be included in this report.) I have developed co-authored works with culturally diverse communities using multidisciplinary media on the east London housing estates where I have held a durational residency for ten years with the drawing shed, and in other national/international locations; I have been commissioned to create works within institutions, have exhibited in galleries, curated other artists' works, and worked across arts and science. Within all this work I have engaged with a rigorous enquiry around the form, practice and theory woven through the manifestations of these works across imaginations.

## Chapter 3: Contextual Review

This Contextual Review will present this part of the research, and it will be synthesized with practice in Chapters 4 to 6.

### 3.1: Surviving and resisting

Bourdieu (in Appaduri, 1986, p. 49) saw the value of culture *vis a vis* 'the market' (read, neoliberal capitalism) as experiential, contingent, social and significantly political:

*Cultural capital only exists and subsists in and through the struggles of which the fields of cultural production (the artistic field, the scientific field, etc.) and, beyond them, the field of the social classes, are the site, struggles in which the agents wield strengths and obtain profits proportionate to their mastery of this objectified capital, in other words, their internalized capital.*

Extending the marketised manipulation of lived experience, art is devalued through the 'spectacular narrative' of its financial value, whereby this is masked by the very different value of its 'conceptual pricelessness' as unique luxury (Philips, 2015). Phillips looks to Butler and Athanasiou's (2013) understanding of the relation of the have's/have nots as the dialectic that fuels such marketisation, to position the market as pervading the lived experience at a structural level, including art and social imagination. There is a violence in this however, that can be countered:

[Butler]: *The experience itself is not simply episodic, but can and does reveal one basis of relationality - we do not simply move ourselves, but*

*are ourselves moved by what is outside us, by others, but also by whatever outside 'resides' in us.*

[Athanasίου]: *To ask and answer the question of how we might still articulate normative aspirations to political self-determination - taking into account the relational, ec-static, and even property-less character of human subjectivity but also the foreclosures through which this is distributed and delimited - is to engage with a politics of performativity.*

(Butler and Athanasίου, 2013, p. 59).

Butler and Athanasίου posit that acts of performative resistance do not equate to an acting in unison or that the subject is subjugated to the collective, but that resistance is an 'interweaving' of both that results in a collective effect, the individual act of demonstration linked to a patterned social condition (ibid.). As Brown (2015, p. 36) states, 'within neoliberal rationality, human capital is both our "is" and our "ought" – what we are said to be, what we should be, and what the rationality makes us into through its norms and construction of environment.'

Butler's (2008) notion of individual self-survival and its intrinsic, though antagonistic, relationship to 'our' survival, of self to 'Other', to think about violence, nation states, and communities of resistance. To expand: 'The pocket in question is a small pocket of resistance. A pocket is formed when two or more people come together in agreement. The resistance is against the inhumanity of the New World Economic Order' (p. 87). Berger (2015) explored the depth of an insistence of humility performed through the imagination in

Morandi's transformation of objects revisited again and again with great attention. For Foucault (1967), these forms of performative protests, represent 'a challenge to biopolitical processes of governmentality that attempt to generate normalising behaviours and regulated conduct amongst people.' Observing behaviours using what Foucault called the 'unequal gaze' we become cognisant of the socially learnt compliance of the body populace of 'docile bodies'; Foucault builds upon this throughout his critical thinking as a necessary basis for capitalism to freely advance. He also engages with various forms of the structural divisions necessary to procure the internalisation of the sense that we are all being watched by each other on behalf of the state, so that eventually we feel collectively as a society, that this is normal. It is therefore as 'normal' for human beings to engage in the alienation of mindless work (thinking here too, of the potency of the co-authored work of artist Aaron Williamson and SAG ([aaronwilliamson.org](http://aaronwilliamson.org)), as it was here that homeless people, as this 'othered' body, are ejected from our parks, or that refugees sink in dinghies, there being no public / civil trauma experienced or perceived here (Klein, 2016). The historical and contemporary re-taking of public parks and squares then, during protest and revolution as the usual site of this 'docile body', is significant beyond these 'public' sites affording us enough space to gather in large numbers, whereby we can act collectively to resist but also to 'reimagine', together, a new world. With globalisation of UK cities, dynamic policy making has changed the way public spaces are used during protests, countered by the mass selloff of public spaces to remove responsibility from the public purse (Minton, 2012, p. 20).

I met artist Alicia Grullòn ([aliciagrullon.com](http://aliciagrullon.com)), (born and living in New York), self-identifying as an Afro-Taino Carribean descendant living on Lemme Lenape land, in Charlottesville Virginia, USA, in 2018. We were artists in residence for Art in Odd Places' (with University of



Virginia) *Matter* (2018), where I made *Dirt and Desire* (2018), a performative work in three parts, marking the anniversary of the resistances to alt-right attacks that maimed and murdered anti-racist activists in 2017 (The Guardian, 2019). We met again on her residency in New York's Center for Book Arts to discuss our practices. Grullòn's work is synergistic with her community and cultural activism; the political positioning of the multiple resistances of her art and life for working class Indigenous Black and People of Colour (IBPoC), is an ongoing articulated committed practice. An overarching articulation of Grullòn's practice being the exposé of the arrogation of power, her work acting as a kind of 'archaeology of insistence' against the forms and impacts of injustices born on the intersectionality of class, race and gender. Her situational practices are autonomous, collaborative and co-authored and work to unravel the multiple hidden bellies of the beast in the local, connected to the global.

*At Home with Essential Workers* (2020) (AHWEW), at Brooklyn Museum, finds Grullòn constructing and 'performing the identities' of essential workers across the city, for each of these images she is posed in her family home in the Bronx, photographed as full body self-portraits as Grullòn sends her gaze out - in fact subjecting her audience to the gaze of each worker identified by and through the artist, including one taken on the day of the Free Them All ([ftpfund.org](http://ftpfund.org)) protest in one of the poorest areas of the Bronx, following the murder of George Floyd. Filmed on mobile phones, the brutal beating by police during the orchestrated kettling of peaceful protesters led to 700 injured people, and Grullòn poses 'as herself' as a part of the protest she attended, defiantly holding the placard 'All Power to the People.' Grullòn gathers together both personal props and 'essential worker's' uniforms observed from within her own community, that unsettle us as we are taken inside the

domestic environment that becomes hyper real in its construct. I read this as both as staged and unintentional, this being important somehow in troubling the domestic home with the 'essential worker' identity usually left at the front door, that speak of a working-class woman: as nurse, Ups courier, delivery worker on bicycle, boiler-suited civil maintenance, grocery store worker. Grullòn brings the subtleties of those local workers known to her in the imaginary of this new portraiture 'series', where she both refuses and highlights the dissociation of the essential workers' given place. There is both a sense of the uncanny in the accumulation of these images and of the absurd (leaf blower, smiling Ups delivery worker, bicycle mounted in the kitchen) as we all know are 'social witness' to what is going on outside the front door. Grullòn speaks of her work as 'the undoing of colonial history, through my body and actions' (2020, n.p.) and that she wishes to expose the signification of (the value) of her body dependant on which room or space she walks into under the gaze of 'who is doing the looking', under which gaze her place as a woman of colour, of a particular class, is determined by those outside of herself, but as an artist she asserts agency in both where her identity sits, what activisms she aligns herself with, and importantly over the positionality of this imagination. She considers this as storytelling, putting her body in situations that are not historically meant for her - between the constructed and the documented. She critiques the politics of presence arguing for the inclusion of divested communities in social and political arenas. She speaks of photography as the colonial tool it was, setting out to undo this visual othering of communities. Grullòn says she tried to work in real time on AHWEW, but it began to slip, the works becoming a merging of research and almost a kind of personal diary of herself as a human being sharing a combination of collective (civil) experiences; each image is dated and holds a hyperlink to an article about the situation of those particular workers.

Grullòn's work performs a very different aesthetic in response to the urgency represented by the crisis of the future survival of the planet through the lens of Black Lives Matter, and the nuanced absolutes of migration, work and climate crisis. The rituals of engaging with work, of safety and home and the boundaries we understand as more 'normal' are broken down, but importantly they are performed 'in between' the outside world and the domestic home and form a body of practice that signals to us that the supposed 'sanctity' of this space of comfort away from the world, has been disrupted and forever. In thinking about this work, I reflected upon my work in Charlottesville where I first met Grullòn; performing three times my semaphoric participatory work *Dirt&Desire* (2018) on the university campus built on slavery at the heart of US academic thought and research, on the Mall as a site of ethnic cleansing, and on a social housing estate with community organisers and other artists. Like Grullòn my work often holds most of its form in photography and for the beholder the images (stills or video) 'the secondary becomes primary' as stand-alone works.

Grullòn has also made simple call and response works with other artists in the Bronx during the pandemic. Using simple objects (a ball of wool to draw a red line for home to park) that are a part of everyday life (and indeed the stuff of children's play) across a number of her works, echoed in the use of these 'ordinary' objects within my own performative response practices: the 'misuse' of the flocked dustpan and brush in Istanbul and Charlottesville, the gold-plated wire cutters, the children's blow-up boxing gloves, the bed, the red ribbon). She references activist and writer bell hooks: 'the perspective from which we approach art is over determined by location' (2020, n.p.), and through many situated works within her local community, Grullòn creates social interactions as disruptions of coded rage, sorrow, deep mourning, grief and trauma creating gendered perspectives on environmental activism from

climate change to the pandemic in the Bronx; the conversation with Grullòn will continue to connect with the plurality of my practice.

Freud's (1901/2014) quest for investigating the unconscious began as a project to rupture the ruling class hold over rational explanations of why we do what we do, that the state can better control the behaviours of its subjects, but it became for the most part appropriated by those who could afford its benefits whilst the state propagated ideas of dissent as an illness, the imaginations of those critical of the notion of state borders, of capitalism's inclusion and exclusion zones. Artists such as Kader Attia ([kaderattia.de](http://kaderattia.de)) explore ideas that we are living with immaterial injuries, those psychic harms that people take forwards through and across generations, that through diaspora leaves gaps in the witnessing process and this in turn leaves this trauma 'always in transit.' Attia's preoccupation with the Lacanian exploration of desire for the object you can't have (2021), for the right of return, for processes of reparation and repair within art, hold spaces of local 'assembly' (Paris) and cultural practices of the day to day within the local and the global; his use of materials and the place of cultural equity within his art practice hold parity with my own.

### 3.2: Boundaries and connectivity

In the act of both othering and of protest, there are inherent boundaries and connections.

Butler explores the schism that 'structures and de-structures the national subject' (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 59) by bringing the psychological categories of defence and displacement that lead us to square a circle in the name of sovereignty in defending a border in one instance, and to violate in another. Going on to explore the split psyche of US nationalism to hold the right to destroy lives in the sovereign name of the national interest,

as somehow preserving the right to one of peace within its own boundaries, Butler & Athanasiou (2013, p. 59) leads us into looking at the forms this aggression can take, particularly at violence as one of its forms, outlining other forms of aggression that can work 'to underpin a democratic society: including 'antagonism' and discursive conflict, strikes, civil disobedience, and even revolution'. Butler & Athanasiou do not argue here to overcome schism, in order to justify it, but rather questions why we suspend horror in state led wars, interpreting violence as somehow acceptable as done to 'the Other' that lies outside our 'urgent and unreasoned concern' (ibid.). Butler & Athanasiou explore the human body as a site and experience of the injury of vulnerability; she seeks not to be reductionist, but takes us into thinking about gender identity, and capitalism's need to construct everything to be fed back to us. Leaving us here with questions of torture (and what constitutes that is as deep as it is wide) and how an imagination and communication of affect can be shared (for example, poetry on polystyrene cups in Guantanamo) as a form of resistance, to somehow create 'community' as a counter balance to the total destruction of what it is to be human, regarding torture, state violence and/or random terrorist acts.

Arendt (1968), in looking, at the ways that governmental nation states operate in attempts to uphold legitimacy where they have little in reality, turning to use the 'artificial' means of power where none exists, states that it is only in the absence - not the presence - of power that governmental bureaucracies make manifest the conditions for violence, whereas in the collective will of people acting together in human interests, power is superseded by a voluntary compliance and there is no need for endemic violence as cooperation takes its place.

Anthropologist, geographer and social theorist, Nicolas De Genova (2016, p. 46) posits 'border spectacle.' This refers to the inbuilt porosity of the border, and the obscenity of exclusion versus inclusion, and the spectacle of the policing of the border becoming ever more extravagant: 'Now I would like to approach our subject anew through a series of more directly, explicitly and emphatically theoretical gestures.' De Genova interrogates the idea that the agonistic coherence and fixity of the border - the human work of 'bordering', the paid work we humans do to assert an imaginary border on behalf of the State, to appear like the 'thing' that they are not - only emerges as the effect of the active processes by which these borders are performatively made solid. Because the border is in reality not an object, the social relations around the making of this contradictory non-place a place, lends the border a fetishised quality, making the (non) object of it, and so it appears to hold a power unto itself.

The social construction of border necessarily means that they can be challenged, brokered or dissolved through human connection. Human mobility has impacted the ways in which we perceive community (Nestor, 2010, pp. 167-73) and in the recognition of a 'foreign tongue' as human, it is inferred that there is always the possibility that a stranger can be a friend, despite the divisive political framing that sets up the opposite intention (Derrida, 1993). Distinct individuals can be united to form a (political) community, individuals holding very different (religious or ethnic) affinities where there is no common value system (Arendt, 1968), and just as borders are artificially created, so too are the actively constructed spaces of political and social participation, an act of cultural equity in effect, where individuals can disclose their individual identities and establish relations of reciprocity

and solidarity. Thus, and with Derrida parallels, there is an inter-relation across boundaries and in acts of resistance therein, and to turn again to Butler & Athanasiou:

*So the boundary is a function of the relation, a brokering of difference, a negotiation in which I am bound to you in my separateness. If I seek to preserve my own, but because who 'I' am is nothing without your life, and life itself has to be rethought as this complex, passionate, antagonistic, and necessary set of relations to others. I may lose this 'you' and any number of particular others, and I may well survive those losses. But this can happen only if I do not lose the possibility of any 'you' at all. If I survive, it is only because my life is nothing without the life that exceeds me, that refers to some indexical you, without whom I cannot be' (2013, p. 43).*

In *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999), artist Mark Leckey explores closeness, distance and community through the northern soul ecstatic dance experience: 'you watching an experience – but you are thrown out - thrown back on yourself - it's never pure' (Tate, n.d.). For Leckey, the dancers' body is the location of the artwork, ergo, the power of the private place of the body has been collectively activated. It is a form of intraception, a processing of the world through feelings and/or emotions where internal changes located in the brain trigger neural consequences. This holds historical cultural legacies of communal responses to violence - in a rising up, a joining up of rap, music, religion for example, as a shared celebration of an ecstatic experience, that is highly attuned to social justice and a resistance held in the body. What is so interesting for me about this particular work is that Leckey still

attends to a durational community conversation in the YouTube chat room where this collective, social and cultural moment is still being reflected upon all these years later.

Chicano artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña ([guillermogomezpena.com](http://guillermogomezpena.com)) gave the opening address as an arresting performance at the In between Time live art festival, in Bristol, 2015 ([inbetweentime.co.uk](http://inbetweentime.co.uk)). It was the first time I had experienced his work in an audience of artists; Gómez-Peña is activist and educator (known as one of the world's 'grandparents' of live art) and he chooses to live his life often connected to 'community' where for him being an 'artist and citizen' culturally connected to others with a diverse and plural lived experience and this vitally underpins his practice. Gómez-Peña's performances and writings have been inspirational for me, and his work on border crossings and the body as a site of identity, has preoccupied him and his work for many years. Gómez-Peña's work of the body as the site of the border has been provocative and explored many issues of borders, including those of the binary in gender identity. It is in his idea of the 'portable border' where he challenges the political border of economic expediency; Gómez-Peña's work has become increasingly important in my ongoing engagement and the necessity of the collective in un-colonising practices, his ideas informing the making of my work 'Diminishing Returns' in Republic of North Macedonia 2017.

Emily Jacir's work was not well known to me until I saw a body of her work in 2016 at Whitechapel Gallery ([whitechapelgallery.org](http://whitechapelgallery.org)). A Palestinian artist, her work holds a great sense of 'doing for people that which they cannot do for themselves' and of inserting social justice into spaces and situations where it has been denied. She does this through the lens of the one-to-one personal encounter at a social distance; Jacir embraces a variety of



methodologies in exploring dispossession and the political consequences of (not) belonging. *From Paris to Riyadh* (1998 -2001) (ibid.) was inspired by her mother who would on her return flight to Riyadh use a black marker pen in her magazines to ritually redact, obliterate, any trace of a woman's body as an act of necessary compliance with the rules of the state. Jacir exposes this seeming complicity as an act of defiance by enlarging the image and creating space for the viewer to behold this performative action as an object. Her work *if I could do anything for you in Palestine what would it be* (2003) (ibid.) is a photo stills work so poignant and simple work but so powerful, the participants whose requests are so human and so denied; the work is an 'acting upon', a performative act in the political, as explored by Butler and Athanasiou (2013). The artist accepts 'wishes' from Palestinians in exile, and realises them on their behalf in their country of origin; it is poetic in its enactment, though unmistakable in its intention for justice, and brings the radical imagination to what is politically impossible in the world of restricted borders for some and not others. Jacir's compositions slip through the nets of bureaucracies and non-negotiable borders, time and space, in search not of grandiose dreams or clotted fantasies but rather of humdrum objects and simple gestures like visits, hugs, watering a tree, eating a meal - the kinds of things that maybe all Palestinians will be able to do someday, when they can trace their way home, peacefully and without restriction (Said, 2000). This interspace of the radical imagination here acts upon both notions of, and real borders created, in brutal abstract on our behalf by 'the state' for very particular political gain; often what unites the artists that I am interested in, whose acts of resistance are very different / located differently in practice, but are always about re-imagining with a criticality that brings us to attend to the Heterotopian spaces that Foucault (1967) identified. The transgressive nature of these works hold a

particular and, I think, powerful positioning because they set out to performatively breach the boundaries across imaginations.

### 3.3: Spectacle

As participative spectacle, there is a position of viewer and viewed. This is a position of situated knowledge at the community, not individual level, 'the joining of partial view and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living within limits and contradictions - of views from somewhere' (Haraway, 1998, p. 590). Furthermore, in relation to the power of authorship and post autonomous practices, Haraway suggests the following questions:

*Vision is always a question of the power to see – and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualising practices. With whose blood were my eyes crafted?... How to see? Where to see from? What limits to vision? What to see for? Whom to see with? Who gets to have more than one point of view? Who gets blinded? Who wears blinders? Who interprets the visual field? What other sensory powers do we wish to cultivate besides vision?*  
(ibid., pp. 585-7).

To introduce here two notions of art practice in conversation with the topics covered thus far – surviving and resisting, boundaries and connectivity, and spectacle - to act as a theoretical bridge between the above and the following consideration of two aspects of social practice art that are considered essential to its processes, integrity and intent: time and duration, and objects. Firstly, artist and Marxist, Dave Beech's (2011) interpellation:

how ‘an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices’, and this then sets the analysis of ‘interpellation, the process by which individuals are subjectively formed within specific social institutions’, in that we are formed by the rituals and practices that draw us in. Groys (2010), talking of the work of artist Francis Alÿs, states that ‘experiments’ in social art practice, are immune to attempts to pronounce a fixed meaning or ‘social comment’, affirming ambiguity which was an intentional desire within the co-authored work *In/Visible Fields* (2018/19 ).

Marina Abramović (mai.art) talks of performance as ‘being in the present’ and that this is the materiality for her, where fear, the staging of fear, and fear of failure is something she believes is always present subjectively for her. She said of one of *The Artist is Present* performances, that ‘the hardest thing is to do is the thing that is closest to nothing’ (MOMA, 2014). By this I think she is speaking about how being in the present with an audience is an essential ingredient for trust between strangers so that the work can hold its place and connect with people. In processing my work ‘ever diminishing returns’, I reflected upon this; the deep listening I had been open to experience the affect held within the intersection of the encounter (the social, evolutionary biological, the political) allowed an ambiguity to hold form in the work that existed as an object in the world intentionally for the slightest amount of time

Juxtaposing two works, one by Douglas Gordon (Tate, n.d.) of his highly staged film *A Divided Self 1* and *A Divided Self II* (1996) (Tate, n.d.), Gordon, it transpires through the viewing is actually wrestling himself, the simple curved ball of one arm shaved the other hairy, is used to confuse us and infer a split in the self but without telling us what the split is

or why it has happened; and the other by live artist Roland Miller ([abandonedinplace.com](http://abandonedinplace.com)) *Left Hand Right Hand* (1989), (during wave of revolutions in the Eastern bloc of Europe) where Miller literally fights in real space, the damage being done to the left and right hands cause blood to be shed and it is both visceral and wildly absurd, but not funny. Although it didn't enter the space of self-abuse, it was 'sensitising' to me that an artist could make work where he alone could actively, albeit with affective intention, hurt his own body in a frenzied performance. This moment with Miller we experience as audience beholding this work, the line between performance and risk to bodily safety of the artist came so close. It is in this space, (not achieved by Gordon but leaching out of Miller's work) that the work is received in affect - a prefelt space of damage held in a collective body. With Abramović, the risk is one of testing out the boundaries and the agency handed over in an orchestration, to someone(s) you have to trust will not harm you beyond having been given the tools and the opportunity to do so or not, but there was/is huge invigilation of all her performances where the 'acting upon' is transferred to the audience. Whereas Miller held complete autonomy in his act of transgression, the integrity of his imagination could be said to be held intact, though the beholder has to manage anxieties and feelings brought up in the present with the work and its inference of things 'out of control' in the real world (rather than world of art: Gordon) However, without the beholder the work is not completed, so the notion of the autonomous imagination is potentially always flawed. Within my work 'Boxing and Burning' made during this research and explored later, the affect created by inferred violence is transferred by a deliberate positioning of the beholder into the interspace between two back projected videos on human sized sheets of suspended Perspex; Splitting the performance as film as its secondary, now primary form, the beholder has to engage in that uncomfortable split as a I, a woman beat myself repeatedly around my head to the

point where the absurd becomes untenable. Manipulating the positioning of the gaze engages the beholder as both subject and object in a work so obviously made in a public space that transgresses notions of what is acceptable pulled into the imaginary of art .

### 3.4: Time and duration

For Beech, duration in social practice art is itself ideological, 'because it is isolated and abstracted as something valuable in itself' (2011). Beech's enquiry of the merit of the durational in art is useful in understanding non-binary positions and the importance of problematising time for art:

*Duration is problematic because it is presented as a solution for art's social contradictions, whereas the only viable political solution must be to problematise time for art. If we are going to think politically about art, site, publics and time, we need to put the ideology of duration behind us. We have to stop keeping tabs on our own use of time. Let's think instead about delay, interruption, stages, flows of instantaneous performances of lingering documents, of temporary objects and permanent mementos, of repetition, echo and seriality and break with this binary opposition altogether.*

Groys talks of a contemporary obsession with jumping over time, whereby the present is simply a moment we use to pass through to the future. He suggests that the work is not time-based but rather that it is 'art-based time' whereby the process of the time used, this suspended time of the present, is being recorded (2010). Groys also, referencing Deleuze

and Guattari (1987, pp. 342-86), sees a repetition of the artist's action on a loop going beyond and being in conflict with 'the natural.' Deleuze talks here of the 'radically artificial', and thus creating a rupture from a continuity of historical life, and so creates a non-historical excess of time by means of art. Groys refers to this as the point where art becomes historically contemporary and also brings into a consideration of time and duration in social art practice, the notion of the object in this practice, the focus of the following section: on Alÿs's works, 'they exemplify excessive time that is not completely absorbed by the historical process' (2010, pp.190-1), in that there may well be no object at the end of it produced as a result (though they may be incidental of that process.)

### 3.5: The Object

As a process-led artform, social practice art can struggle with the idea of 'the (art) object' in its practice, (art) objects being associated with artworks in the gravitational pull of the art market, ergo, in the commonplace, its antithesis. However, this can be easily problematised. Said, in exploring the playful use of the everyday domestic object and artist Mona Hatoum's repositioning of the use value, sees the object as thus of a distorted identity: the object is dislocated, rather than reconciled in the practice (2016). Socially engaged American artist Suzanne Lacy speaks of what left behind in her projects are not a closed set of objects but an open field of evidence, '...are materials assembled no more than traces of the 'work proper'? Are we showing the work or just evidence of the work?' ([suzannelacy.com](http://suzannelacy.com)). Artists such as Jeremy Deller ([jeremydeller.org](http://jeremydeller.org)), Emily Jacir, Marcus Coates ([marcuscoates.co.uk](http://marcuscoates.co.uk)), Ignacio Acosta ([ignacioacosta.com](http://ignacioacosta.com)) and Alicia Grullòn share the traces of the works they make, often showing the works in film and/or photography with the objects alongside that are used in the performative works/actions, or indeed where the objects become works in

themselves. Arendt (1968) proposes that the objects we make as just as damaged as we are, so objects are a manifestation of what Hito Steyerl calls a 'condensation of social forces' (2014), everything that this stuff passes through and is passed through, coagulates in the making.

Mark Sealy, Director of Autograph, proposes in discussions with artist Ingrid Pollard, 2020 (autograph.org.uk), that in new processes of looking we 'unlearn' the ways that we present objects, that perhaps in the removal of the wider environment, that as artists we, in actively deciding to not present the full picture, could think more carefully about the positionality of the audience (in relation to the room or in the making of 'the scene'), in how we construct stories rather than deconstruct what is going on for the audience, thus building a mosaic, rather than a full picture. Here this plays with the ideas of the colonised gaze, intentionally making it harder to read, by creating ambiguity for the beholder in navigating meaning with a kind of refusal to deconstruct. Later (page 78) I look at this in relation to my work Nobody

Consideration of the object returns us to ideas of subject position and sovereignty (above). Steyerl (2014) follows a train of thought of subjectivity as the holding of agency, sovereignty and autonomy, and explores this tricky position by suggesting that taking a non-binary position on identifying as object or subject, seeing a desire 'to become a thing that feels' is perhaps a healthier contemporary position on the holding of subjective agency when the subject is already subjected. Steyerl suggests that truth may lie both in the represented (object) and the representation (subject), musing on the power of actually participating in the 'image' rather than merely identifying with it, and that images and objects are steeped in affect and availability. If then, Steyerl says, subjectivity may not be a privileged site for

emancipation any longer, and if we also recognise that internal and inaccessible trauma - the private property of the 'other' which floods our media, both beckoning and disallowing foreclosure - and if this residue is the 'left-overs' of the independent subject, then how do we participate socially on the making of the image? (the object.t)

I want to reference here Phyllida Barlow's ([royalacademy.org.uk](http://royalacademy.org.uk)) work that I have followed for years, reconciling the importance of making sculpture, the use of the transformed object to me as an essential and necessary part of the plurality of my practice. Barlow's work uses play and intuition alongside acute intelligences, that it feels to me can only come to the fore through making. In the Tate Britain work, *Dock* (2014), Barlow talks about how distressing it is to have to actually 'plan the making', which usually happens for her during the installation of her work. I admire this discomfort as the making is not preconceived, it is fluid, fragile and organic. The work holds out a banner of hope for me, making some sort of absurd order out of the obvious overwhelming chaos of this world in these works that intervene as much in the fabric of architecture (here, Tate Britain in the most ambitiously public of its unticketed exhibition spaces), exposing this unwieldy lack of balance, and the sculptures are so ambitious and 'in the world' (ibid.). For me the necessity of making objects, sculpture, holds a position in the relational, and forms an integral part of my social practice. In my works 'Boxing and Burning' and for 'Nobody' the repositioning of objects used within performance (that comes out of, made in parallel to durational social practice works with the drawing shed), can only enter into this 'third imaginary' space because it is ambiguously mapped by the rhizomic framing of encounters made in this social arts practice. There is a lack of didactic explanation or a threading backwards to this imaginary



It is helpful for me to return here to Francis Alÿs in the ‘scoring’ of his filmic action: *Gringo* (2003) ([francisalys.com/el-gringo](http://francisalys.com/el-gringo)) titling the work with the derogatory term used by some Mexicans for North American citizens. Alÿs creates the camera as protagonist, a narrow site at the entrance to a village as Object of conflict (site); the dogs as Agents of the conflict are aggravated deliberately, with Alÿs a ‘dog among dogs.’ The performance holds a simple plot all set against an open field of possibilities which he suggests (in *A Story of Deception* (2010)) despite being wide open, will only change the action, unfolding differently than his intuition, if the scenario is ‘not clear and strong enough’; here maybe he means testing out his imagination? Alÿs’ work *The Green Line* (2004) ([francisalys.com/the-green-line](http://francisalys.com/the-green-line)) embodies his practice of ‘Sometimes doing something poetic can become political’ and ‘Sometimes doing something political can become poetic.’ Alÿs walks, dripping green paint in Jerusalem on the borderline pencilled on the map by Moshe Dayan, dividing Jordan and Israel in 1948 at the end of the war, until the Six Day War of 1967 when after that Israel occupied the Palestinian inhabited territories on the east of the line. Alÿs plays precariously with the poetic and the political, though he would not have had an active primary audience, the work holding its secondary form of exhibition, in publication and film, collaborating with Philippe Bellaïche ([imdb.com](http://imdb.com)), Rachel Leah Jones ([imdb.com](http://imdb.com)), and Julien Devaux ([julien-devaux.com](http://julien-devaux.com)) in the making of this work, though this is seldom talked about in the art world. Collaboration rarely appears to be recognised as co-authoring in this context, a deference to the autonomous imagination enacted by all around ‘the artist’ and framed by neoliberalism.

Holding ideas of the object in social practice art to one side for the moment, to be revisited in Chapters 4 to 6, this contextual review now turns to what must be considered foundational to any art practice, the imagination, and as I position it here, the aesthetic of

the imagination. In a social art practice, this will be 'engaged in through the encounter (Pontbriand, 2013).

### 3.6: Aesthetics and imagination

One can see a clear necessity for and use of the imagination in the surviving and resistance to the capitalist lived experience (above) in acts of micro resistances of the imagination, Deleuze and Guattari's 'lines of flight', lines of escape from ways of thinking and being that might connect with other lines and form exciting new assemblages, that might 'bring something incomprehensible into the world' (1987, p. 349).

Khasnabish and Haiven (2014) view 'the radical imagination' as not so much an attempt to bring definition to the radical imagination, but rather as a site of practice, more to evoke it as both an aspirational and real space, one that is vital in an age of the constant zombie culture of austerity (Fisher, 2009). If, as we are, immersed in the 'perpetual news' that a fundamentally different world is not possible, Khasnabish and Haiven propose that the radical imagination is essential to bring to the present as well as the future, that without it we are unable to make common cause with the experience of others. Khasnabish and Haiven set out three 'tenses' of the imagination: firstly, the one we are accustomed to, of the conscious force of the individual mind, accepting that the edges of this are never clean-cut, and that we are always influenced by others; secondly, the place of 'shared imaginaries', the broad narrative space of understanding that makes living together possible, and where concepts such as nation states can sit, or institutional alliances; and thirdly, the affective space of 'the imaginary', the deep force identifying us as human subjects and driven by the drives, fixations, ideas, meanings, and internalised traumas of

preconscious thought. These ideas of the imagination are intertwined and inter-reliant. Khasnabish and Haiven create another space for an examination of the term 'the radical imagination', not as a judgement of value but rather as one of process and their text takes us through the challenges of this within practice. This contribution allows the radical imagination to be a space that comes out of a 'convocation' with others, that allows us to perform the radical imagination in its highly reflexive and responsible ways that do not mean embracing the consensual but by critically engaging with imagining and acting upon the crises produced within the neoliberal system - and not by shying away from what they call the 'double crisis' (a term borrowed from Edu-Factory Collective (2009)) toward a global autonomous university that manifests between us as created by the divisions we experience and the struggles to work across intersectionality. Khasnabish and Haiven suggest that if we do not forfeit this space of the radical imaginary as an island refuge, then we can work in this uncomfortable space of the 'double crisis' as the space for social and aesthetic exchange.

In her essay 'Desire in language', Kristeva (1980, p. 305) argues that the psyche of the individual (artist) is like language: interwoven with the cultural meaning it pertains as much to political and social construction as it does to the psychological and the so called 'biological' forces (that one might rename/reframe as the local, the situated) in art. With this in mind, there is an inherent challenge of the languages of the radical imagination and how such work of artists is purposeful in its desire (though not always consciously) to trigger what I think are a series of counterpoints to the dominant cultural politic. Such works are not necessarily, by this turn, reductive or easily read but multi layered and setting out to engage with unsettling the dominant hegemony of ideas, to create gaps in the cultural fabric

whereby questions and differently articulated imaginations can be explored. Actively engaging in co-production with others - co-authoring - in places where, as an artist, one encounters communities who, like East London, UK, are both embedded in the local as well as culturally divergent and increasingly transitory, holds these processes of 'a becoming imaginary.'

Theorist Edouard Glissant (2010) explored how in an imaginary it might be possible to create a space of unrooted-ness and unfixed-ness. For Glissant, 'the Imaginary is all the ways a culture has of perceiving and conceiving of the world' (p. xxii) and in this positioning of the imagination, asserts that every culture will have its own Imaginary. Glissant's deep understanding is that there is necessity to counter violence with the development of new (imaginary) forms, and that this cannot happen with a (re) appropriation of forms that were forcibly taken away, or by a 're-start' of an imaginary 'stalled' by colonialism. In this Glissant's ideas are mirrored by the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement in the way that this movement is rearticulating an activated proposal for an 'un-learning' of existing cultural framing, a relinquishing of systemic abuse, and an assertion of a new intersectionality of plural imaginaries.

On considering the spectacle (above) and the imaginary, Rancière (2010) states that where a political aesthetic defines itself through the reconfiguration of perceptual forms, the 'dream' of political art is the disruption of and causing a rupture in this:

*As a matter of fact, political art cannot work in the simple form of a meaningful spectacle that would lead to an 'awareness' of the state of the*

*world. Suitable political art would ensure, at one and the same time, the production of the double effect: the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification (p. 63).*

Zabala (2017) explores what Heidegger began thinking about in the 1940's concerning the posturing of the highly functioning society as *'the only emergency is the absence of emergency'*, whereby the role of art is *'not to rescue us from emergencies'* but rather to *'rescue us into emergencies'*, in other words art as intentionally thrusting us into these real emergencies, 'revealing what has been hidden into plain sight' those urgent issues of 21st Century advanced capitalism, that are concealed in the white noise of so much 'news', anaesthetised by neoliberalism. Further, there ought to be 'demands of art' as those who are 'thinking differently', including the cultural impositions that create the frame of our lives under late capitalism. Both Heidegger and Zabala eschew that idea that it is only academics and critical theorists that we should look to as a way of 'thinking us out' of the crisis we are in, and for Zabala, it is to artists we can look to push us into the uncomfortable spaces. For Zabala the idea that the work would extend its reach, its effect over time, more than slightly acts as a regression back into the modernist plot for art's timelessness as a measure of its quality. It does not accommodate the transitory nature of performance other than to insist, with this projection, that secondary processes / form of an ongoing public sharing works (via film, objects used, remaking of the act as relocated by an insistent framing), get taken up by the market, the museum of art and its second cousin, the art gallery, as otherwise who will decide if its 'lasting impact' makes it good and powerful art?

Jannis Kounellis (Tate, n.d.) said that everything he created as an artist referenced the specific size of the double bed 1800mm x 2000mm; this lifetime intention for his work was to reflect the parity of importance between human and a connectedness to the earth and a responsibility for it. He understood the importance of the localised relationship to place from his position politically as an internationalist. Kounellis spoke of an 'existential freedom' and (*arté povera*), artists having 'a life of silent reasoning' (very much present in *In/Visible Fields* (Chapter 4), whereby his work is actively located outside of the frame of politics and in his own words 'a little bit pagan', his work to me feels that it makes its way towards an articulated refusal of the idea that art is about an individual imagination available for absorption into a marketised system (linked to the state via capitalism). Rather it is one of a 'felt' critical social positioning, an international humanism that Kounellis states he held as an authentic relationship between the autonomous and the social act throughout his life. This existential freedom, that requires of us 'acts of responsibility' as proposed by Sartre, is not the same as a political freedom relational to state organisation, but lying rather lower beneath us, as what Mouffe (2013) refers to an ontological level of the social organisation of society, and one of phenomenological 'being', as did Heidegger, and much has been explored about this space of affect.

Artist Marcus Coates ([marcuscoates.co.uk](http://marcuscoates.co.uk)) talks about his work as 'acting politically' through both 'unconscious reasoning and his visions'; in all his works using costume-object, he speaks about how he becomes the animal. Coates considers his performances not an embodiment, but his actual 'becoming' of the animal whatever it is, and often asking his participants (invited or random strangers) what he can do for them, if there is a question they don't know the answer to, that he can help them with. There is a split though, and it is

felt in watching his work because he in essence ‘leaves’ his participatory audience and goes off into his autonomous imagination with their concerns to be ‘felt out’ alone, before returning to them often with little to offer up other than a mirror to themselves; people who have taken their time to attend to his attentions upon their concerns and questions, bear witness to this imaginary process, and then he suggests ‘we live through our imagination only when we are forced to.’ In taking away the necessity to be rational, this is really what Coates leaves both participants and the beholding audience with alike. He displays objects used to aid his experiencing of ‘being animal’ alongside films of the performances which builds up this visceral ‘becoming.’ In *Dawn Chorus* (2017), Coates worked with 14 human participants selected by Coates intuitively to match their voices to particular birds, each ‘re-sings’ the sounds of slowed-down wild birdsong, filmed in quiet spaces that the participants felt most comfortable in. The sound editing takes the speed of sound up again, and is shown on fourteen screens that dissect to represent each ‘person-bird.’ in full bird song voice. The audience navigate a trajectory through the chorus sung out from human mouths as a ‘cooperative’ project, rather than the actual competitive territory marking activity of both dawn and dusk choruses. Coates talks about this work as the closest he has come to ‘actually becoming animal’ and we experience the final work in this secondary form of film and sound. Coates made an online film of the process of making of this work where we see participants, but none are credited alongside artist, film maker and sound recordist, perhaps as confidentiality and ‘loss’ of individual authorship is what allows this work to be human, a collective interspecies sensitivity, and so personal to us all. It is this absence of named author that for me brings a presence of human ‘weight’ to the work – it is the kind of suturing to the earth that Kounellis presents as threaded throughout his life’s work.

This thesis will now thus turn to the presentation and reflections on my artist practice that formed through this research project, to respond to theory and critical thinking, firstly by introducing some key projects (for a list of all works created during this time, see Appendix 2), and drawing theory and critical thinking and my practice together in reflective sections.



## Chapter 4: Theory into Practice – Artwork 1: *In/visible Fields I & II* (2018-9)

### A1.1: Premise

*In/visible Fields I & II* [I/Vf] (2018-9) was a site-specific work, consisting of five projected artists' films, a co-authored sound work and a 'community assembly' of 150 people. It involved the participation of 18 people in its making, across three sites in London, E17, the Attlee Terrace social housing estate and St Mary's Church (I/Vf I, 2018), and at Vestry House Museum (I/Vf II, at Art Night London, 2019). It was funded by Arts Council England and Trust for London, and led by myself and artist Bobby Lloyd (and was the final collaborative practice for myself and Lloyd after eight years co-leading the drawing shed.) *In/visible Fields I & II* came after my residency in Istanbul in 2016 and before my commission in Charlottesville, USA in 2018 (not explored here in this thesis). It reflected Kester's (2011) 'aesthetic of engagement' as generative, complex, un-mapped and iterative. Daydreaming has been both a survival mechanism and a conscientization of self that led me to articulate 'I am an artist': by this, I mean my discovery that I had an imaginative life that allowed me to have autonomous transformative experiences, linked to an inner world that 'no one else could enter' (Chapter 1). The proposal for I/Vf came from my historical desire to investigate daydreaming as a space of exchange and to explore whether or not this imaginary, created almost by the 'presence of an absence' had been impacted by the ravages of capitalism. The ideas then developed as an intense dialogue between myself and Lloyd and we set out to create site-specific films stimulated by this aesthetic of exchange as it progressed, to be projected within the drawing shed's host housing estates and an adjacent threshold site that juxtaposed the surrounding gentrified Walthamstow village. It set out to further trouble the idea, established by myself and Lloyd in our projects *Ideas from Else[w]Here*

(2014) and *Some[w]Here* (2015) of how social art practice locates itself within communities that are 'othered' by class and 'disadvantage', countered in structure and art created within these durational works as a counterpoint to this premise. We also wanted to look at the value of the partially formed idea, things that are hard to hold onto (as impacted by trauma) and how we could foster this shared interspace, between self and other that holds nothing firmly in place, where time loosens.

### A1.2: Process

We invited the estates' intergenerational gardening group aged seven to 75 years to become co-researchers in an interdisciplinary arts-science investigation, with ecologist Ben Mackinnon, from E5 Bakehouse, London, neuroscientist, Micah Allen at Wellcome Trust and University College London and based in Copenhagen, and with film and sound editors Sebastian Sharples and John Ellis. The Walking Women symposium at Somerset House in 2016 ([walkingwomensnetwork.org](http://walkingwomensnetwork.org)) had focused my mind on how walking enables the human brain to process differently. I/Vf participants joined us on walks around the two housing estates, conversations with participants about their personal relationships with daydreaming were recorded, becoming the basis for the I/Vf projection and sound works. Video footage and photographic images from the estates, Cornwall, Epping Forest and Walthamstow Marshes, and city journeys filmed from the top deck of a bus traversing London from east to west, and of political marches and demonstrations, formed a living project archive. It was extremely cold (c. -10 degrees) and somehow despite this weather, 150 people came. We gathered, both residents and 'the public', and walked together from the church after the intimate experience of the blue toothed sound work on headphones, and the 'toys' video projection onto the side of church, we then moved collectively onto the

estates down a side road and into the former pram shed area, and from here through into the community garden. The projection in the pram sheds was of epic 'natural' landscapes, long video shots that one might imagine in a day dreaming state, then punctured with rapid shuttered stills of creative actions as a part of urban political protests; these included the mutual aid community events around Grenfell Tower. Art writer Paterson created an online Day Dream Dictionary (DDD) of poetic automatic writing responding to the photographic images we sent daily as a part of this generative work. For I/Vf II, Paterson and I created three risograph zines using the community resource of Rabbits Road Press ([rabbitsroadpress.com/](http://rabbitsroadpress.com/)), OOMK ([oomk.net/](http://oomk.net/)), London E12. On a day trip to the Suffolk field, I/VF participants worked with an ecologist exploring the science and metaphor of underground mycorrhizal networks, and collectively we dug and integrated two huge heaps of compost as Lloyd and I created video works of this performative action. Here we discussed individual and collective relationships to daydreaming, shared narratives and food and walked the stubble of the field until sunset. Alongside these artist-led walking practices, we held interviews in pairs, inside participant's homes.

### A1.3: Participants

As artists we became private witness to the trauma of the lived experiences of war, of political childhood persecutions, of the consequences and ongoing impact of class, economic poverty, gender and migration, and other critical musings relative to and across the imaginative space of daydreaming. For some of IV/f's women participants we learnt that the cartography of their time to daydream was gendered. Sharing the temporality of navigating complexities of working-class women's lives, intersected by race, and impacted continually by juggling several jobs with children, relationship, family and caring

responsibilities, IV/f opened up a space to explore a gendered imaginary fractured by violence of one kind or another. Datta (2011) explores the idea of gendered time in the context of the globalising city and safety, having found that the references for navigating life both outside and inside the home were very different for working class women, with every part of their lives shaped by a gendered experience as part of the mosaic of structural misogyny, racism and poverty. One of the women talked spontaneously about the deep social grieving for the 72 lives lost in the Grenfell Tower fire ([theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com)). She said, 'It's not only those who have lost their lives but those who are still a part of that community, they too will probably never daydream again.' A very powerful marker of a political imaginary in itself, this statement entered the co-researcher space opened up between 'non-artists' and artists, influencing the way that we made the sound work and the films over a two month period that led us to find a way to include images of Grenfell without bringing the community under an exploitative gaze.

#### A1.4: Reflection

Turning to Beech (2011), together we explored the antagonisms and a critical rethinking of social practice, enabling us to reflect upon the making processes of IV/f as 'Breaks, Flows and Interruptions.' The sociability of the project (Bishop, 2006, pp. 178-9) created the intersubjectivity (a conscious sharing of experiences) that was purposefully complicated by the experience of 'the beholder' as co-producer and as audience, comprised of insiders (residents) and outsiders (those from both the local and from outside of the area.) Beech's interpellation here for participants, was set up in the 'social' trust we shared as a group, generated outside of I/Vf in regular sessions in the ungated estate community garden: it allowed diverse lived experiences, including the traumatic, to flow and stumble into this

aesthetic exchange with myself and Lloyd, and further, it required us to return to a space of deep listening a number of times, particularly with the women. Witnessing both historical and present distresses felt by individuals, explored either as a blocking – ‘an interruption’ - disrupted their ability to enter this now-desired daydreaming state and experience, also as an opportunity (for a refugee coordinator from Calais) to deconstruct the unsettled and poetic incompleteness of what Beech described as a new language forming and reforming experienced whilst daydreaming. These partially formed ideas are where ‘time loosens’, as constituting - ‘a break’ - a hiatus. For Lloyd and I as artists impacted by the women’s responses, we took the slippage - ‘the flow’ - into these discussions directly into the sound and the film works. Across the exchanges, a body of social practice work emerged exploring the location of liminal space held by the daydreaming imaginary, and as we did so within these porous structures of working together, we embraced a cultural equity in the realisations that for some of us, this space is compromised. I/Vf embraced affect and the investigation of the value of the imagination as ‘absence and presence’, an interstitial and liminal space within the space of daydreaming under capitalism.

‘Assembly’ events have been a part the drawing shed’s work for some years: *Some[w]Here* (2015) (in *The Day of Small Conversations*, Pump House Gallery, London); *#civil\_uncivil* (2016), Bury Sculpture Centre; and *Black Light*, (2016), Tate Modern. For I/Vf, the ‘to-ing and fro-ing’ across the small team of artists and participants became a shared imaginary. This included how the cultural positioning of the neuro scientist, Allen, was developed in dialogue with me, so that on the night the ‘assembly’ of 150 people in St Marys Church (where we had collectively explored the sound work on this threshold, with the situated films on church, estates’ pram shed and community garden), we held a community

conversation around daydreaming and the complexities that had already been experienced by participants, as well as free flowing contributions by the beholding audience. Allen and I had agreed to frame the conversation without leading it one way or another; I passed the microphone around the circular space we had created with permissions to move much religious paraphernalia out of the way. The job of our agreed imposed resistance to give direction to this shapeshifting conversation would have been harder for myself and Allen if it weren't for the fact that the core estate' participant group sat themselves willingly within the inner circle of the assembly, and all of them took the microphone and shared their experiences and ideas. For the participants sharing a moment of reflection with Allen at a community dinner in 2019, we agreed that the shared ownership of this work coming into being had been affecting and transformative for all of us, with the combination of the sound, process of walking to see the films en masse, and the final assembly curated as a space of cultural equity. For Lloyd and I as artists making the parallel video works for I/Vf, we mirrored the 'set aside' thrown up in our exchanges and deep listening with participant group. We had set out to trouble the now 'brownfield' and former gendered pram shed/washing line areas of Attlee Terrace estate, left to re-wild themselves over the past ten years, as a video location using only our mobile phone cameras. Importantly, two of the participants were aware of the contested planning status of this land due to the social housing sell off, with some ex-pram sheds now in owner occupation; the controversy of the rights of ownership over this property and land had kept development at bay and we wanted to work with this 'invisible knowledge.'

This projected film was created for the threshold site of St Marys Church (and later, with I/Vf II at Vestry House Museum, at Art Night London 2019), as a liminal site between the

estates and Walthamstow village. This siting added to the emotional heavy lifting of this work. Lloyd and I chose a sunny winter afternoon and curated die cast toy vehicles (once made in a factory in E17 by women workers) that had been discarded on the estate. We worked in silent synchronicity in the pram-shed space creating the videos; the colour of the toys and the wild plants gave a stark 'clean light' aesthetic to video intentionally reminiscent of AI on old film footage. Soundless, it was edited with Sebastian Sharples as a continuous loop. In the making we entered easily into play as we sat on the ground and grouped the toys amongst the weeds. Lloyd hung toys swinging on the washing lines, using a piece of discarded gutter as a slide, I filmed them as they shot down; I placed a bulldozer with its little driver, to sit inside the threshold doorway of one of the derelict pram sheds deep in weeds, my camera swept up to the sky via the flats overhead and back down again leaving no horizon.

*In/visible Fields I & II* was multi-layered and the linkage between films, sites and ideas purposefully ambiguous. In its re-witnessing of a child's (lost) life, IV/f created a sense of the specificity of this culture (of play) as belonging almost but not quite to a specific moment - the audience were not afforded the information (actively denied) unless individuals asked. On reflection, this echoed my making of *Silenced* (2012), a drawing work I had made on the same site to mark the loss of life . It was part of this refusal-resistance of both the gaze and idea that art must, if it is to be culturally resistant, 'explain something.' It is the refusal to do this that is repeated again and again across the works made during the research project. Of course, some of the residents as co-creators of parts of I/Vf have lived experiences linked to the estates as a situated place of historical traumas that have migrated with them in diaspora. The absence of the child within this play intentionally drew attention to the

presence of childhood as an absence, something that I had felt keenly as a child myself (Chapter 1), as an anxiety of exclusion across my continual relocation in early years; making this video work with Lloyd re-mapped that sense of loss, and always being 'outside' as 'a place' I always felt but never understood. The boy who died did not live on the estate and he will never play again. The chosen lorries and diggers diecast toys and the site for the projection of this film *mise en scène* transposed onto a liminal threshold juxtaposed to a gentrified area, created a deliberate sense of a non-place (Augé, 1995) and experienced as a felt non-space across the eight years of our collaborative practice by Lloyd and myself, using that estate location for performance from time to time as an interregnum, with, for instance, teen girls to explore in/visibility of identity on the estates using mobile phones.

For the I/Vf participants living on the estates, most had never been into St Marys Church to attend either religious services or any cultural Music Hall events. An intention for I/Vf was to use the church as a new cultural space, eroding this threshold (also, as a 'place of worship') whilst engaging in a critical community conversation marking the complexities of the day dreaming space with the shared voices of participants of this durational work. The audience were invited to 'behold' this work as an event of 'assembly.' The demographically diverse audience was held inside these mesmeric landscapes and pushed through into urban spaces of collective creativity that spoke of reimagining from places of multiple dissent, despite the desire imbued by the tranquillity and horizons of huge spaces, thrust into a critical space of hopeful actions for a different future. By showing these films on the estates with local residents as participants within the work, we were also together re-imagining the context of the estates - particularly as on the circular route back to the church and the 'assembly' discussion about day dreaming, we went through from the internal to external spaces of



estates into the ungated community garden where films of making the garden, digging the compost mountain in the field in Suffolk, and of journeying from the outside world to inside one of the estates, replicating the daily life of residents and the audience joining us in beholding the work. This created a real sense of 'hosting' amongst the co-authors of the work, as well as the felt complexity of how the audience produced the experience of this work between themselves as beholders, and the context of the social housing estate as the site of both making and showing the works with artists.

The juxtaposition of the sites created what artist Ken Wilder (*Beholding*, 2020) proposes as very specific spaces of reception. 'We', as the co-authors, 'invited', if not demanded (through an intentional construction for this aesthetic journey) from the audience, that a sequential itinerant series of experiences be encountered. This sequence partly mirrored the making process, and actively took the beholder into and through spaces of reception that for the most part, regardless of whether we live on an estate or not, are not the usual spaces where we engage with an encounter with art, with the imaginary: certainly not in this contextual configuration, and definitely not with work that refused to be met as works in the Greenbergian notion of autonomy, of a self-sufficiency. With some of the audience 'knowing the site' and more of the political specificity of that site's precarity of the split in pram shed ownership between private and Council, and its compromised brownfield planning status now pertaining to all UK social housing sites, and others 'not knowing' created an enfolding of differences into the work that came from the composition of the beholders' experiences and knowledges. What is interesting about this, is also the different spaces of equity that were threaded through I/Vf so many ways. The intentional and affective juxtaposition of projection sites on housing estate and church on the threshold of

the gentrified village was stark; a chaperoned route along the unlit side road into the back of the estate created an affect of dis-ease and a desire for the audience to stay together, move together in groups as one body.

One of the obvious axes of dissensus within the work would have been the church as an assumed affective space of spirituality and with a kind of status that certainly one would not perceive could be rivalled in the receiving of this work connected to the space 'of church.' Yet, something unexpected happened in the setting up of the space which was important. We were given permission to reorganise the layout of the church, to break its usual rigid physical logic. This, along with an accumulation of 150 people who gathered together in the form of welcoming host and curious visitor - 'stranger-neighbour' - led to the church forgoing its usual aura, passing this onto the 'assembly' who made each other mugs of tea and shared thoughts together on the sound work/projections. In a way, the 'sanctity' of this imaginative pre-felt space of daydreaming around which the video projections and sound work coalesced, took over this space normatively taken up by a church as an authoritative spiritual architectural space. Instead, we had initiated together a liminal threshold space as essential for this assembly to take form. The impact of this on the experience of beholding, and our passionate and mysterious relationship with daydreaming, was unsettled by the disconnect experienced by some because of their trauma, class, racial identity and gender. This sense of an unfixed experience held within the process of beholding the work grew in the purposeful curation of an undirected community conversation with Allen, so as never to close down any tangent of discussion, with no attempt to calm anxieties around the question of unequal access to daydreaming as a result of class, gender, poverty or trauma,

as well as a transposition of social media that people felt had taken up this space of the imaginary.

After the event we received several communications from those who had come to IV/f about how the work had affected them - some stating that they were actively seeking to create the conditions conducive for their own daydreaming. Others felt the sites chosen for the films, both in the making and the showing, were affecting and provocative of deep reflection. Residents as co-authors of the work recognised that the discussion with Allen increased the sense for them that IV/f hadn't required them to have to 'read' the work from one perspective, keeping the work for them still 'live' with a desire and a request to be involved in making other works together.

The absorption and 'refusal for absorption' (my term), through this 'acting upon' is a resistance too, to ideas and actions in which we are immersed by acts of stealth, without being quite able to put our fingers on it - and so, how to resist it? My desire has been to create this artist's 'actioning' across my works as a frame for a 'post-autonomy' as a response to capitalist realism and 'excess' (the results of the 'crisis') and has been underpinned by the idea of 'crisis' as sold to us as something as if its outside of the normative, except that it isn't, it is in fact the normative, ongoing as we experience it every day. Butler and Athanasiou (2013) discuss that survival equals the collective contingencies of exercising freedom from dispossession through performing transformation. In thinking about issues of the body and agency, even when the dispossession is 'not our own'. They connect this to the performative in art and the processes of 'acting upon and being acted upon' by the imagination as a collective experience. I have located this within my research

practice in that when we bring this idea into both the making and into the collective processes of beholding, we start to create possibilities for a radical imaginary to open up.

#### A1.5: Images



*Figure 2: In/visible Fields I & II (2018-9). London, 2018-9.*



*Figure 3: In/visible Fields I & II (2018-9). London, 2018-9.*



*Figure 4: In/visible Fields I & II (2018-9). London, 2018-9.*



*Figure 5: In/visible Fields I & II (2018-9). London, 2018-9.*



*Figure 6: In/visible Fields I & II (2018-9). London, 2018-9.*



*Figure 7: In/visible Fields I & II (2018-9). London, 2018-9.*



## Chapter 5: Theory into Practice – Artwork 2: *Bed, Nobody, No Body, nobody* (2017)

### A2.1: Premise

*Bed, Nobody, No Body, nobody* (2017) emerged as a work in three interrelating parts; it came out of intense engagements with other artists and allies around a resistance to the othering of refugees, including, Performing Borders at University Winchester 2016, with Counterpoints Arts, London, June 2016, at Fire Station, Dublin, September 2016, and at UAL St Martins, London 2017 and the ICA, London, 2017. Issues of home, migration and borders, questioning responsibilities of artists as citizens regarding the ideological political objectification of the border and of the self. I wondered how I could perform solidarity through the positioning of my practices. I visited Calais Jungle three times with Bobby Lloyd and after its part bulldozing by the French state, I was disturbed by the literal scouring of the site for 'remains' by artists including Ai Wei Wei's 'team' ([aiweiwei.com](http://aiweiwei.com)) and Gideon Mendel ([gideonmendel.com](http://gideonmendel.com)) and I wanted to make a work as a refusal of appropriation and as a deflection of the gaze upon the suffering of 'others'. Work was also made in studio, and presented at UEL, Docklands, June 2017

### A2.2: Process

I made videos on my mobile phone in the Calais Jungle and the border channel tunnel crossing: intentionally I took long shots so that the viewers' eye could not rove around. Purposefully the images are like animated stills of the border 'on repeat' with people actively excluded, the fencing as a constant reinforcement of the camp, held the presence of security cameras. Alongside these filmic images were others of the breached fence inside



the camp, the close up of a dead rat with flies circling, draped over the internal fencing, debris in a dirty pool of water beneath a mound of earth with tents above, all as 'objects' of the camp. It then switched to the UK tunnel approach. It was not until the showing of this in exhibition, that I realised that the image of debris in the water was shaped like the UK. It seemed to have slipped past my conscious processing whilst my focus was on the aesthetic of the slow-moving floating debris. The film on the border fencing *moiréd* serendipitously, as the camera struggled to find focus on layers of the fencing that had been repaired over and over again; this continual breach of the border by refugees patched and sutured together presumably by the British state as Calais has 'hosted' the British Border on French territory since 2003. This impossibility of the camera settling on the border emphasises the abstraction and performativity of this border. The affect experienced by the beholder as they too are located in this inability to settle, adds to the intentionality to both attract and deflect the gaze. The lack of movement of the camera creates the dis-ease we experience in security cameras on a daily basis, but here its further underpinned by our knowledge that this is a border continuously breached by those who are not given the rights to cross it.

Calais Jungle refugees sold wire cutters to each other, bought from supermarket Lidl for a couple of Euro each and available in the camp for €5. It reflects the speed at which an internal economy begins to take hold within refugee camps despite and because of extreme poverty, this economy itself a leap of imagination. I had the cutters gold plated - costing £100 - and exhibited them 'open', mounted on 10mm acrylic pins to give a shadow gap. The cutters sat inside an acrylic box mounted on a grey plinth, to the side of the film projections and no longer available for cutting border fences. It felt perhaps that a series of these

cutters were waiting to be made, imminent for active use. As with artist Joshua Sofaer's *'Precious Object' 2016* ([joshuasofaer.com](http://joshuasofaer.com)), referencing his own 'nose mask' cast and gold plated, the wire cutters lost original value, and as art and so (questionably) unfit for original purpose, their provenance doubly subverted; now 24 carat gold, shifted from an 'illegal' act of performing the active, multiple, desperate and collective and radical breaching of a national border, they have now accrued the value of the precarious art object as 'a stand in' for the border as a 'real' object, representing the act of 'bordering' (De Genova, 2016).

The gold wire cutters constructed to be shown in the DFA Viva as a set of 5 in a continuous row, seductively lit and held in an open position in juxtaposition to the back projections of films. On two suspended hand-frosted acrylic screens they become objects themselves. Both films and wire cutters held a relationship with a large sculpture using a found mattress, yet also dislocated from each other, intentionally pushing the beholder to work on making a connection. During a Work in Progress (Chapter 2) with peers, artist and curator Mark Hampson discussed in support of this work holding its power through ambiguity. This ambiguity is essential in the reading of the work once one looks more closely at the 'bed.' Kounellis, as already referenced, scales all his works to double mattress, pieces often fragmented and ambiguous, but in affect 'whole', stating this as being the 'social' in its smallest sense of the collective and our existential freedom (responsibility) for the earth.

The double mattress was found abandoned on the streets, and I worked 'upon it' continuously for some weeks in the studio. It was stripped back to the springs and left only

with 'scuzzy' rolls of foam in each corner and it felt necessary to leave this in place. I worked with silver emergency blankets, used for keeping both people, and in parity, animals, warm in crisis, to transform the mattress into a sculptural object, one that holds obvious human form already, referencing the body. I had used these blankets in various works, and in the large gold SPIT drawing, and I knew I could connect to the films; I liked the fragile materiality of it and the transformation into an object of complexity far away from the thin light-permeable 'almost not there' quality so synonymous with its use in trauma. Over weeks of making, I experienced many 'dead ends' of how to work with its problematic unstable materiality; I then found a wooden ring-former, used as the metaphor for the hand, perfect for pushing the blanket into the gaps within the springs and it finally held strong aesthetic form, still hugely fragile and if disturbed the form would drop out, lose its integrity. I didn't want to permanently fix it to the mattress, knowing it needed to present and hold this dichotomy of huge fragility, and intentionality, so frustratingly it meant working with a great deal of care.

Every evening and weekend studio work resumed and I often felt in some despair about this work, full of great doubt. I invited a peer artist into the studio to sit with me, with it, and it was suggested that the discomfort felt was part of the process, this feeling of being so utterly lost. I had almost given up on it, but working late into that night, I realised that a 'skirt' had appeared at the front and what I call now, a 'shirt tail' at the back, which had come out of the play and the pain of the unconscious making process. I had no hanging points available to me in the studio, so whilst making the work I stood the mattress upright against the wall; it was not able to be freestanding unless sutured to the ground with an

integrated internal structure, and I knew intuitively that this could not work for it, so until I exhibited it, I had no option. The 'shirt tail' hung back against the wall and I wasn't sure if this was useful for the object's integrity or not, but I liked that the object had begun to reference a gender fluidity, held an enquiry about gender identity, which for me and the sculpture was a moment of revelation. I had consciously resisted working with my own experiences of gender identity, but when it found its way unconsciously into the work I realised why the making of this bed work, had been so problematic, that I had been grappling with something within the work at a very deep level. Regarding my own life, my biological daughter, now trans, had changed names; this preoccupied an emotional space for me beyond how I ever engage with the rights of anyone else to choose to re-identity themselves. In terms of a radical imagination this remains at my core. This was the first time that this issue very personal to my life had emerged in my work, and it made sense in relation to the ideas about violence, society and art that I hold a deep immersion in. I hung the work in the show intentionally using an old nylon dull orange rope on one side, and a large loop metal security chain bought for the purpose on the other; when I looked at it hanging there, I could not decide whether it manifested now like a kind of lynching of this 'other' body or indeed that despite 'no self-help' - no internal structural integrity to insist the sculpture stand up alone - the work appeared to hold its own space. The dirty foam corners only just touched the ground and physically, it was highly seductive, and indeed, it held the feeling that it could almost swing, dragging its 'just touching points' - its 'feet' along the ground. It felt heavy, the hanging gave it the weight it required, and this added to its imminence.

### A2.3: Reflections

In trusting in the making process, the relationship of the theories to the manifestation of violence to refugees and 'others' (including those othered through gender identity) emerged in what was an intense experience. I wanted this part of my very personal relationship with my own subconscious imagination, and trauma experienced by myself and others around processes and resistances to questions of gender identity, to be allowed to connect to the more conscious work I was making in troubling the positionality of the gaze upon trauma, identified with the growing discomfort regarding refugee camps like Calais Jungle, and the given ideological constructs around societies and the 'other' in various contexts. The challenge for me was in critically referencing the political travesty of human (and species) migration, as the on-going crisis of 'our' climate emergency, whilst avoiding the gaze upon 'the other.' By locating the films, wire cutters and mattress together, the human centred reference of the bed with its emergency blanket, means perhaps you have no choice but to make the connection, but the affect induced held within the bed sculpture is one of ambiguity, of an un-fixedness, unfinished.

For the DFA show the intention of locating the film of the inside of the camp on the floor, back projected on a more intimate sized screen pulls the viewer down to the ground; this manipulation of the gaze plays with the ambiguity of both inviting and deflecting gaze (see discussion re Mark Sealy and Ingrid p. 58) making it uncomfortable for the beholder to navigate in its affect.

To understand the body of work I was making around borders and gender identity '*Bed, Nobody, No Body, nobody*' (2017) I found Judith Butler (2008) very useful. Her published lecture 'Vulnerability, Survivability' helped me to think about these complicated questions that seem to underpin much of the work I have been making across the research of my doctorate. Butler's text is of course more complex and I summarize here crudely, but it feels very much pertinent to my practice led research - sitting on the edges of the defence of humanity in the face of this seemingly predetermined violence, trying to locate a creativity – a radical imagination - into the future to disrupt this damage, and take something forwards, an articulation of 'survivability and vulnerability' that is not a pastiche of being on the receiving end of this world view. Butler talks of our 'affect' as being always communicated and shaped from elsewhere, leading us to see the world in a certain way, and so we are led to allow particular values in, and to resist others. The 'why of what' we let in is indeed mixed up with boundaries and the way these are policed, and this is connected as much to definitions of the personal (body) as much as the precarious nature of what is 'public'.

## A2.4: Images



*Figure 8: Bed, Nobody, No Body, nobody (2017). London, 2017.*



*Figure 9: Bed, Nobody, No Body, nobody (2017). London, 2017.*



*Figure 10: Bed, Nobody, No Body, nobody (2017). London, 2017.*





*Figure 11: Bed, Nobody, No Body, nobody (2017). London, 2017.*

## Chapter 6: Theory into Practice – Artworks 3-6 (2012-18)

### Artwork 3: *Birdtable* (2013)

#### A3.1: Premise

Artoll's economy constitutes a series of mental health/high security institutions, one of its buildings now an artist-led residency space in a vast building that had originally been a women's asylum. I was struck at the politics of a town built up on the back of principles of incarceration and located in its history was the Nazi's gas van extermination of patients of mental institutions, tested out in preparation for the holocaust's ethnic cleansing in World War II. The infrastructure of this place sat in vast part-dismantled mansion buildings, surrounded by forest. During the first Artoll residency I created an intensive body of work. Here I want to talk about just one of those works and how it connects through to others and forwards to my most present work.

#### A3.2: Process

In the high security women's prison that I could see from my studio window, was a bird table in pantone yellow and blue colours commonly used in Germany. It sat in the interspace between two sets of high fencing topped with razor wire. Over the course of a week no one placed food on this bird table, striking me as an unnecessary violation and parallel that could be felt by the prisoners; the sadness of the potential that visiting birds who could fly in and out somehow signifying a potentiality of the end of incarceration, but it would never hold this metaphor as without food to attract them, birds would not come.

*Birdtable* was made as a very large drawing inspired by a film *The Lives of Others* (2006). In the film, the Stasi break in to and then bug a writer's flat by sliding the thinnest of wires up within the wallpaper of the room. I projected and drew out the bird table on paper 5m x 1.5m using the same pantone colours as the bird table, placing a line of hand woven Indian fishing line along the line of the drawing and sandwiching an identical top sheet of paper glued in place. I had made a number of sketches and try-outs for this new drawing method so I was hopeful that on an excessively larger scale it would work. I pulled the fishing line through from bottom to top, which ruptured the top layer of the drawing, leaving the bottom layer intact, the long lengths of the fishing lines hanging down. Carefully, I peeled back the ripped top layer to reveal more of the drawing below. I hung this work on the wall of my studio opposite the windows facing the original bird table; it was doubtful that prisoners could see the drawing, but for me it was important to site it there, its 'affectual' positioning was a part of the work.

### A3.3: Reflections

Feedback from other artists (internal and external to the university) was very positive about the form that the drawing took; it sat within the larger body of practice I made and showed there (using film, drawing, sculpture, performance) and I also knew I could develop it, now within a post-COVID-19 sound work commission. Referencing this metaphorical taking of the line – '*a line of flight*' as Deleuze & Guattari (1987, p. 349) referred that speaks of this linkage between one place, one moment, the temporality of the liminal - strikes me as one of critical hope. To make a work like this in such a context probably not one of 'repair' but certainly one of rupture, of uncovering a continuity of 'that which is done to us' and an insistence of coming to it from another place, an imminence, referencing Deleuze and

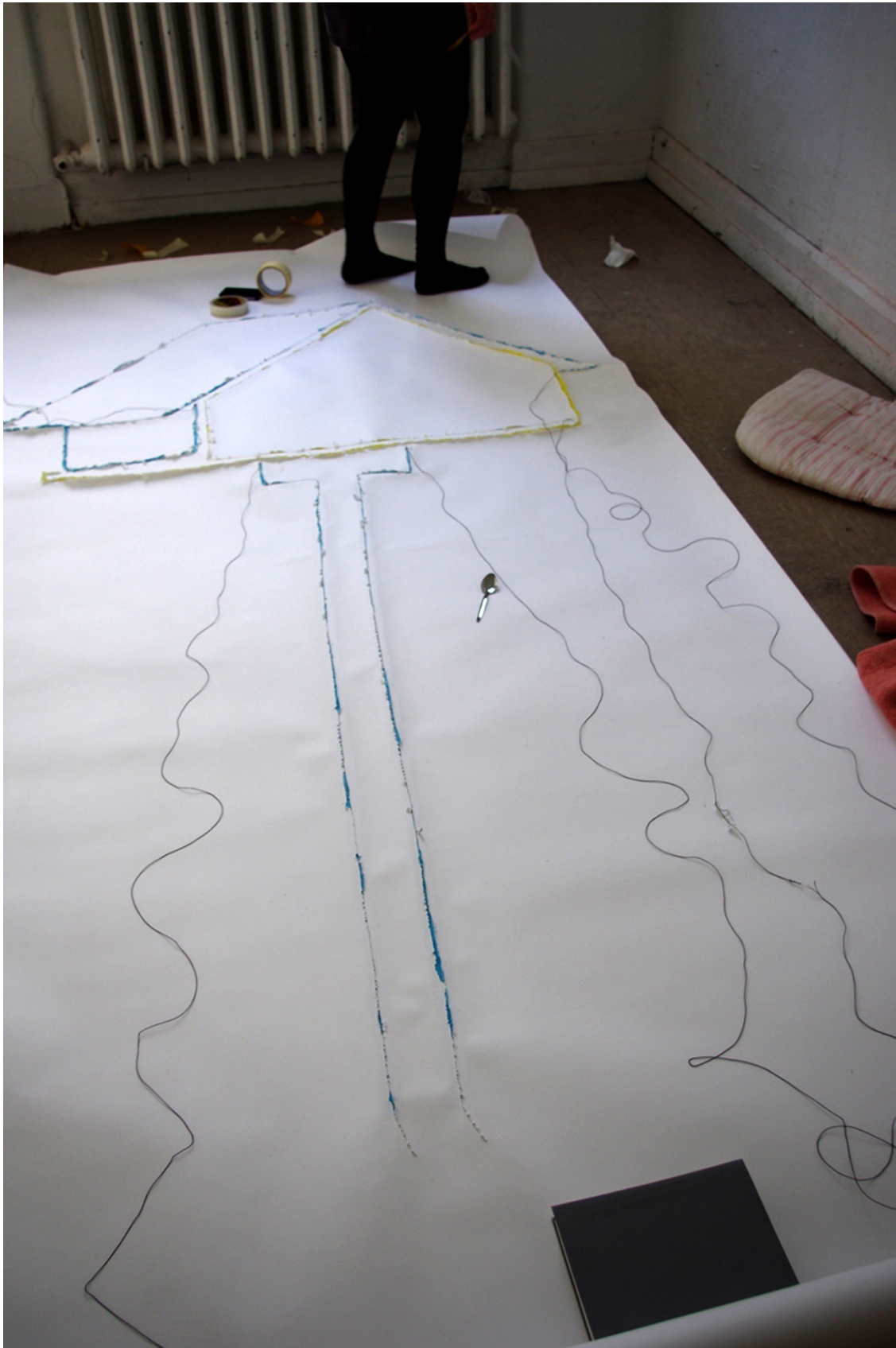
Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, 'a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle.'

#### A3.4: Images

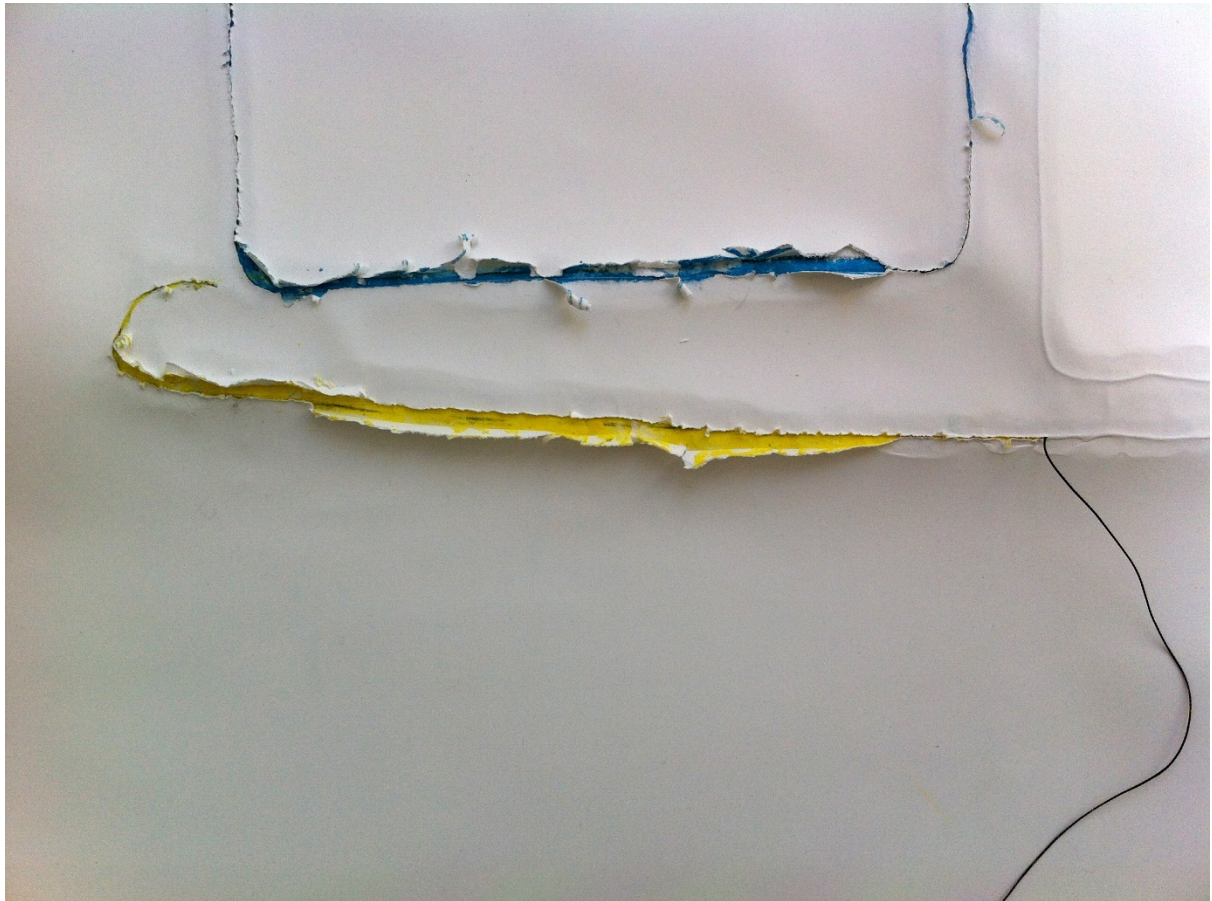


Figure 12: *Birdtable* (2013). Artoll, Germany, 2013.





*Figure13: Birdtable (2013). Artoll, Germany, 2013.*



*Figure 14: Birdtable (2013). Artoll, Germany, 2013.*





*Figure 15: Birdtable (2013). Artoll, Germany, 2013.*

## Artwork 4: *Friends oh There are No Friends!* (2015)

### A4.1 Premise

In Bury, Manchester, in 2015, during a four-month residency with the drawing shed's *The Public Typing Pool*© (TPTP) we shared the opening of the new Sculpture Centre with Lawrence Weiner (Tate, n.d.); Lloyd and I created a Twitter based performative work, *#Civil\_Uncivil*, devising a co-authored score with participants using the manual typewriters of TPTP. Inspired by shared readings of Richard Sennett's (2012) *Together*, we asked what constituted society to be (re)considered 'civil.' Alongside a core group of participants, we led a public performance on Twitter, during which Google images triggered by the content of the performance were projected into the gallery space in real time. The performance was open to the public, led by this group as the only ones working to this score that mirrored a Fluxus (Tate, n.d.) score used as a digital experiment; we found out here that the 'acts of civil disobedience' vital to democracy, required a spontaneity that couldn't be recreated without the energy of an affective emotional build-up brought about by collective 'authentic' actions of resistance 'outside of art.' It showed both the power and necessity of civil disobedience in the limiting and realignment of the reach of state violence, and so the performance interestingly was 'flawed.' As such it became an essential success of the work as an enquiry, as an act of collective imagination, finding that it required a real-life situation to bring about the 'affect' necessary for it to an organic act of radical imagination (Khasnabish & Haiven (2014)). Participants fed back to us that there was a cultural equity experienced in processes we had set in motion.

In this context I created the second autonomous drawing work referencing 'the line of refrain' to make *Oh my friends, there are no friends*, made across a week in the art museum.



I asked myself how the co-authored Twitter performance could re-enter an autonomous imaginative space and in context of the new Sculpture Centre and the existing art gallery; the space had previously been a part of the downsized public library and left empty; as a contested space from the start, this was what I wanted to work with by connecting to Bury Art Museum's permanent collection. On wandering the galleries, I noticed the attention regular visitors paid to a particular painting by Edwin Landseer (1802-1873), *The Random Shot*. Commissioned in 1847 by Prince Albert husband of Queen Victoria and reportedly the painting was too upsetting to ever hang on the royal walls, it references Sir Walter Scotts Poem, *The Lord of the Isles*. Landseer interpreted the words literally: the hind, shot falls in the snow, the fawn still feeding from the dying mother, knowing that it too will die. The painting is most affecting and it's the most visited painting in Bury Art Museum, grandparents often bringing small children to see it.

Shortly after reading Butler and Athanasiou (2013) on violence, terror and state violence I attended a meeting on the critical human situation in Palestine and I wanted to respond in a way that was both poetic and *political* – as a resistance to all that underpins the construction, cultural and historical rhetoric of Israel and the power of all states actually, to rewrite history (sequestering both historical and living archives), creating disconnect from events set in motion, and to visceral impacts inhumanly lived out. I had been thinking about 'things on the horizon', wanting to do something that explored hope, a work that connected the un-witnessed act of violence in *The Random Shot* painting, to a text typed in TPTP.

Already this supposedly autonomous work was connected to the social positioning of Landseer's painting to the beholder, as well as a series of multiple contexts. I used a text by Derrida (1993) which analyses Aristotle's statement 'O my friends, there are no friends.' This

text is deeply hopeful, unpicking the idea that even though we may hear a foreign tongue, we do recognise that it is intelligible, and so, it is human, and therefore it infers that there is *a/ways* the possibility that a stranger can be a friend, despite the divisive political framing that sets up the opposite intention.

#### A4.2: Process

I ran 'a red line', in response to Landseer's 'literal' (mis)reading of the poem, and the fact that I had been researching the impact of war upon the working class people of Bury in the Fusiliers' Army Museum that sits across from Bury Art Museum: 'The Red Line' was used by the British in early empire warfare, lining up thousands of dispensable (working class) foot soldiers in full vision upon the brow of a hill as a sign of power and a willingness, and ability ('more where that came from') to sacrifice all to the needs of sustaining Empire. I took 100 metres of 20mm red satin ribbon from the top gallery where Landseer's painting hung, running it through the next and down the stairs, across the entrance hall and into the Sculpture Centre in as straight a line as possible to reflect the thin red line of men I held in my mind's eye. I had growing in my mind as I laid the ribbon, the exact same colour as the hind deer's blood, that I would 'smother' the whole typing pool in red ribbon, a kind of 'massacre', a pool of blood in the typing pool but when I finally got there with what was an exhausting process of intense labour with eight hours of continuous laying for each of the eight days of low tack masking tape, double sided tape and then the ribbon itself, my guts told me otherwise, less is more, and I still wanted the work to read as a drawing, the drawing as an object of an idea coming into being, 'in imminence' just as *The Random Shot* appears to do for its audiences. I had written out the Aristotle text on one of the typewriters and wrapped this one machine alone randomly with ribbon, which held a text of one line 'I

am Borderless' with Derrida's analysis of Aristotle's text typed out next to it on the table.

Local people visited daily to see the line progress; I learned of the long history that local people had with this painting, returning again and again as a community of beholders, one telling me that, *'there is no white in that painting you know, even though it's of snow.'*

The exhaustion I experienced in the making of this work, which stayed on show for a month, felt as if I had made a work that recognised the position of this deeply affecting painting within the emotional and cultural life of an art museum's local community. I tested out connecting the autonomous imagination to the social imagination of the local audience. Alongside the collaborative practice, with TPTP made up of machines that had passed into 'ex-minence' that sat in a public 'place of open use' in the commons, we investigated making sense of this as holding the potential of a radical imaginary. To end the residency Lloyd and I took elements of 420mm text block that created a social sculpture in TPTP and typed 'the thin red line' continually cutting through them, creating a long text work to accompany Weiner's. By reappropriating typewriters (through a regional callout) as objects of ex-minicence into art history's common parlance of 'social sculpture', the typewriter of the now deceased chief editor of the Manchester Guardian re-signified in the context of this work. the drawing shed went on to work with Bury on other commissions.

#### A4.3: Reflections

Across my research I have examined that there is a violence that is done to people who are denied their imagination. Hannah Arendt's essay *On Violence* (1968) has been very helpful in understanding the distinguishing relationship between violence and power throughout my practices where I engage with this complexity (in Istanbul, in Wandsworth). Arendt, in

tandem with Butler and Athanasiou (2013), enabled me to think about the value of self-possession, holding agency and intentionality in the making of art works which are counterpoints, (adding to a collective) of cultural resistance in a world where the use of state violence is now endemic in every new manifestation of austerity across the world; again, for the semaphoric performance, *Dirt&Desire* (2017) in Istanbul this was revisited. When I considered the qualitative differences flowing between the autonomous, the social (collaborative) and the possibilities for radical imaginaries within my practice, I engaged in actively creating shared spaces, whereby the artist(s) and those who co-author work together - to encounter making art - or indeed, complete the art work through processes of social 'beholding', allowed me to reflect that this was about the creation of dynamic constructed spaces, within which we can 'act' together - and that this has established a being 'in common'. Pontbriand (2013 p226):

*It is daring to develop innovative thought that explores, discovers and gives birth to what is necessary for being-there-conscious and awake in the world [...] this is the judgement that the artwork allows us to make: it puts thought, and that of the other to work. It results in being-in-common because it is inscribed in the contract between one and the other. This contract is made when art allows the world of signs to show its ease and ability to move the work reveals a quality and a potential to being, a liberty. This is how art is political: it confronts us with the world as it is and above all, it provokes.*

Within my research I have engaged with the ideas that radical imaginaries for me are aligned with Arendt in her thinking about what happens when we create a work to 'take action', not in a didactic way, rather this I have thought about as an affective space where my imagination is either freed up to be rhizomic - in other words not by conscious decisions to create to a project 'brief' but to be allowed to throw lines out in many directions; this has created multi layered and complex works within social art practices (see, *In/Visible Fields* (2018-19)).

Haraway (2016) challenges us to cultivate interspecies 'response-abilities' in working, playing and thinking in multispecies cosmopolitics in the face of the killing of entire ways of being on earth that characterise the age cunningly called 'now' and the place called 'here.' In this we are drawn into what I consider to be a challenge to the ways that we consider and engage with the imaginary both in terms of a situated context and in relationship to what and who we consider to be self, other and community; In calling into question the hierarchy of species, objects (stuff) and time, it brings artists too into a place of thinking about how this 'becoming into the future' can actually take place; we are also brought rather neatly to the table of materiality which in the digital age of now and the future becomes troubled by an aesthetic of both *surrender*, in that we can no longer work in the ways that we did, if we are to sustain and repair the planet and each other, and we are also brought into a space of *imminence*, whereby there is more imperative to work along the edges of ideas and an emergence of methodologies that we can only move towards together in a state of ambiguity.

In relation to this challenge for a new materiality I have engaged with thinking differently about the ways that we see materiality as object (Bennet, 2010, p. 20; Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 27) rethinking how we think about our use of objective and corporeal materiality within art, science and anthropology. Artist Joan Jonas (Tate, n.d.) talks of making performance as 'torture' in the contemporary world, in that it requires a huge physical and emotional energy to hold an audience throughout rituals of her making drawings within performance inspired by natural history studies of fish, have to fit in with the timing of the performance video and sound. Jonas says it takes her a month to 'rethink' each time she performs. The making of these drawings as an act of transformation under the scrutiny of audience I see as feeding into a radical imaginary, not simply because it is positioned upon climate emergency, but more so that through her performativity, she brings the beholder into the troubling of a frame drawn from the exacting natural history observations and into her secondary transmission, using processes that are constructed to hold us, through our own imaginations, 'to account.' In this the 'beholding' of the challenged audience as I have examined, that 'completes the work.' As Jonas says the making of this work is exhausting, and this fits somewhere close to my discomfort about performing as an act of radical imagination that is also about the assumed responsibility by the artist to absorb, process and project forwards the beholder, invited into space whereby they may experience some kind of transformation. I discussed this at length with artist Jordan Mackenzie ([jordanmckenzie.co.uk](http://jordanmckenzie.co.uk)) who withdrew from making performance on residencies, as the one artist expected to produce a cathartic experience through which the other artists and the public (as the collective beholder) were able to 'come into the present.'

I am inspired by Grullòn's practice which moves through performance with or without voice, as 'an activism as process' and changes form dependant on need, from zines around deportations, housing and climate crisis struggles, to the making and use of objects, and durational performance; all act as mechanisms to both publicly process and ward off political injustice by bringing things into the light of civil space framed by the visual and performative language of a radical imaginary. Grullòn's work has strong parallels to my own, triggered by the influence of my reading Glissant (*Poetics of Relation* 2010), and dovetailing with my thinking about the radical imagination specifically in relation to the development of new cultural / art languages of practice that are importantly 'of this time'. Both Grullòn and I work as much in the gallery as on the street, within community social justice / political campaigns, or in the community garden and the art school, with photography as the 'secondary becoming primary' form of her many performative actions. Her body of work *At Home with Essential Workers* (2020) throws me into two places, firstly in recognition of the humanity of each worker, an identification with the important 'ordinariness' of each person living out a life in such an intimate space as 'home', ought to require no explanation, give no surprise. Except that it does. Secondly, it is the directness of the artist's gaze that thrusts me into an 'enforced visitation', into a complex place as beholder from where I cannot escape, and the dislocation that Grullòn intentionally creates by the way she moves furniture around, introduces 'back drops' and moves us around her home. In the uncomfortableness that comes with the 'assumed situatedness' of the essential worker in our lives, I am struck by the inference of intersectionality underpinning Grullòn's work. It is no longer possible to escape the central position of race, gender and fundamentally class, orchestrated in the violence, carried literally by the metaphor of the actuality of kettling, acts of beating, on the FTP4 protest, and exposed by the performativity of each image, underpinning and fusing an

imaginative transformation with the pandemic-fallout, of what now is exposed of the pre and post structural societal inequities. This is the thing for me in relation to my own practice in that by her performativity of both role (subject) and object, does not assist us in this journey - she is not willing to do the work for us as beholder. During COVID-19 the essential worker is there as dispensable, their bodies and literally their lives as 'other', and the necessary casualties in the servicing of those who hold entitlement to safety, in every part of life regardless of the post-pandemic era.

I want to feel that I have grounded myself within the location – but working with/ have been invited to / or have chosen, to talk back at how these places are framed, the physical location and its positionality is one where, in terms of life experience and the register of the social and political situation - of living in community - recognising that we operate from and towards what or where exactly? It is 'the relations location,' the combination of art and activism as they are fused, across the lived experience of being all that we are, being a parent of a young trans person say, and this is a part of my reach as an artist. The question is how do we become 'more human' human beings? We are doing this in the public realm as artists, and there as a need to communicate, to engage with, make sense of the crisis - to reflect where we have been, and how can we can work with this now, so that we know how to move albeit with ambiguity in the art making - they augment each other - it's a processing and a transformation through the making of the work. A performing of the real? Its authentic, this intentional reveal from real person as activist, and into the work as an artist - it's a supplementation this use of the body to transform this experience, also with the secondary transformation of film, the image, for both myself and Grullòn. Originally the



photographic image was a sign of power – of who had/has the power to hold this gaze upon. For Grullòn and I, the gaze is upon us as the artist, holding the agency - subject and object at the same time. Not a mimicking but a transformation - the wanting to un-do, to deconstruct, to communicate a human experience in taking a moment for it - re-constructing time (outside of life) and now climate crisis is of course shifting us on this axis as an avalanche of time. Just as I explored in my work *Friends, I have no friends* there is an insistence on a refusal to collude with the inhumanity of acts of othering tethered to the consequences of COVID-19 for working class communities of colour.

#### A4.4: Images



*Figure 16: Friends oh There are No Friends! (2015). Bury, 2015.*



*Figure 17: Friends oh There are No Friends! (2015). Bury, 2015.*



*Figure 18: Friends oh There are No Friends! (2015). Bury, 2015.*





*Figure 19: Friends oh There are No Friends! (2015). Bury, 2015.*



*Figure 20: Dirt and Desire (2018). Istanbul, 2018.*



Figure 21: *Dirt and Desire* (2018). Istanbul, 2018.



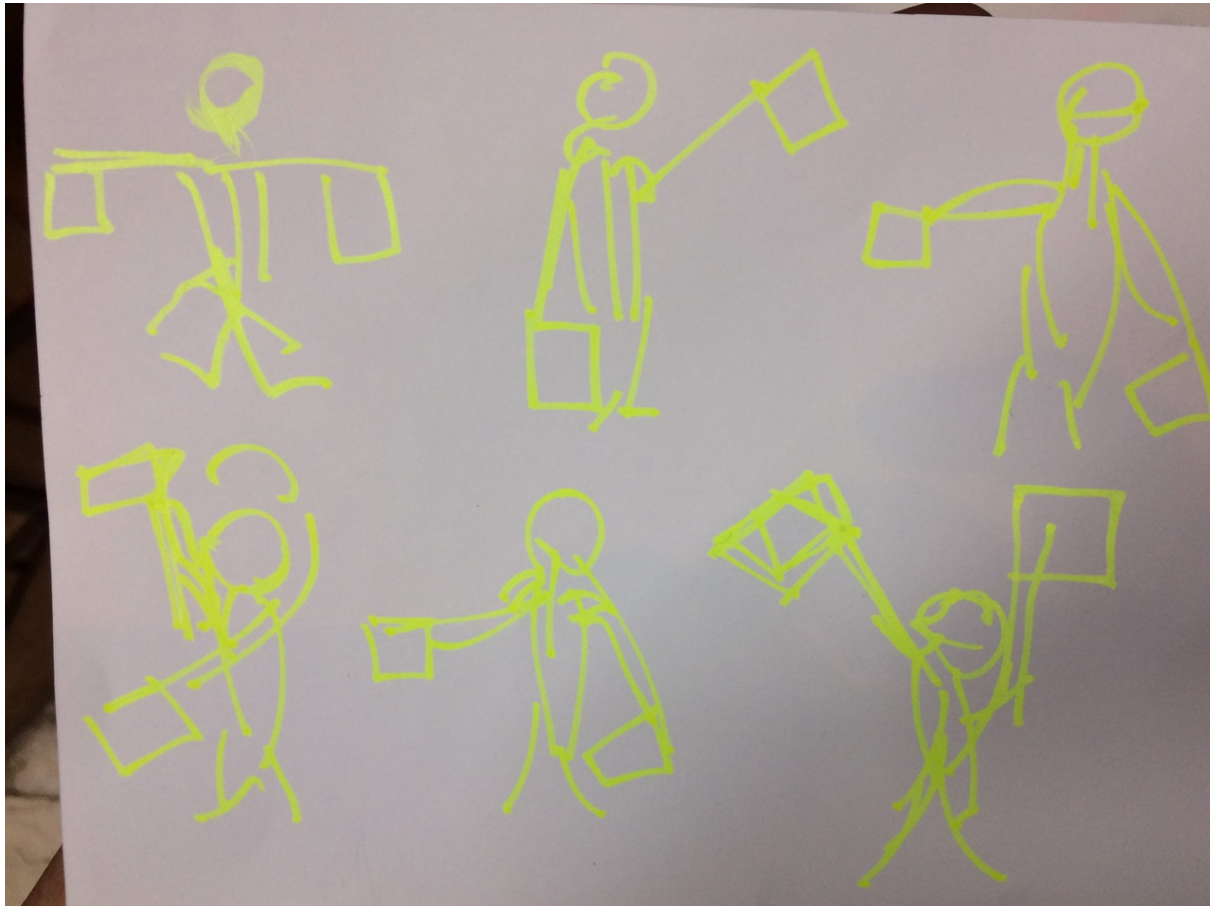


Figure 22: *Dirt and Desire* (2018). Istanbul, 2018.

### Artwork 5: *Boxing and Burning* (2016)

#### A5.1: Premise

In this film, made as an autonomous work made during a nine-month residency in Nine Elms on three housing estates opposite Battersea Power Station (BPS) in one of London's most gentrified areas, I am for the most part up a ladder and 'beating myself up' wearing clear red and blue vinyl boxing gloves, or positioned underneath the ladder with its hanging disco ball, where I paint a block of wooden Jenga bricks gold, build a mini BPS under the ladders and set fire to it. The site for these performances, Carey Garden's sheltered social housing estate is built in the round, made up of two-story flats, and is on the top of the potent site



of an old Second World War munitions' factory in Nine Elms. It forms a perfect echo chamber and is of course panoptical. It is relatively small, inferring also a kind of 'public intimacy' as you can keep sight of the whole space from one side to the other, which means actually that you can be seen and see everyone, at all times.

#### A5.2: Process

I started with a ritual of blowing up a child's clear blue vinyl boxing glove by mouth, pulled on my right hand and a matching red one on my left and I climbed the solid A-ladder. In the performance, I was the artist acting upon myself, not as a person but the object, both subject and object in fact. What followed was the exhaustive and 'violent' assault on parts of the body but mainly the face and head, which became both absurd and then, as it went on, not so funny. The use of this block game Jenga (also referencing the currency of blockchain) requires at least two players, whereby each removes a brick in turn from the stack aiming to leave it intact. Mirroring the physical removal of each stack on BPS, with some anxiety provoked in the public realm as to whether all four would be rebuilt as promised within the building's appropriation, I wondered if this could be in the mind of the social housing community? In exhibition, the final looped films literally 'take up a space' as they are back projected onto a 'floating' translucent acrylic screen 700mm x 500mm that cantilevers out from the wall with the intention that this enables the performative acts to metaphorically 'hold a space', transferring the experience of my performance into the gallery, a very different space to where they were made, and so allowing the work to 'act upon' the secondary space.

The two linked films were condensed through editing, immersing the viewer into seeing Becket-style repetitive, interruptive absurdism, that in *Boxing...* has me as the artist acting upon myself not only as a person but the object, both subject and object in an exhaustive and 'violent' assault on parts of the body but mainly the face and head, which become both absurd as a kind of 'unnecessary' process that by its longevity holds no reasoned meaning and then, as it goes on and on, it becomes uncomfortable for the viewer. None of this 'self-beating' actually hurts, it is not an act of tolerating pain but is more an 'acting upon' the world and the world acting upon us through me in these times of political stealth, and a generalised 'lack of care.' In exhibiting back projection on hanging acrylic screens increases this identification with an object, rather than subject. Other artists (such as Bill Viola ([billviola.com](http://billviola.com))) have consistently used frosted acrylic screens upon which to back project their films to create a sense of the floating film to infer I think, both the sublime and to be able in theory to see them from both sides of the screen. Here for me though this is not what I set out to do, I more saw this floating film as an object taking up the 'secondary' gallery space. In supervision, we explored how these films now work in their own right, but also as an aesthetic form integrated and part of the performative works themselves. As 'floating film' they became the vehicle through which the performative works could be experienced by a public audience; The works used objects and materials as an integral part of the performances: a glitter ball, two pairs of boxing gloves, a garden gnome, the wooden tower building game Jenga, gold paint, and there was no intention or effort on my part to attract a public audience despite it being made in a publicly accessible place. Other artists make work in this way: Alyš, Coates, Sofaer and Grullòn (see Chapter 3), where the aesthetic exchange with the beholder also takes place in the secondary space.

### A5.3: Reflections

It wasn't actually odd that no one walking past did more than glance cursorily during the performance; many people on the social housing estates where I have worked for years have turned a blind eye, ignored strange behaviours; it's not that people are more used to oddness with the close proximity of flat living, but that they do not want to get involved, life is for us after all, complicated enough. Perhaps it adds to the fact that if we charge ourselves with a responsibility, we ought to act upon it, and we do not act partly because we do not know what to do, because the things that occur now in the public realm, often occur by stealth as boundaries of the civil break down.

Making the *that things fall apart* (2015) sculpture in the third year of my research in a public workshop, allowed me to play just as I had been encouraging others to do so; a man who had spent hours in a *Some[W]here* workshop with myself, Lloyd and Mackenzie (in preparation for the *that things that fall apart* procession on the Wansdworth housing estates), turned to me and said:

*I thought this would just be some fun but as the day has gone on, working alongside you artists, I can see that there's a serious side to making this stuff, whilst Battersea Power Station literally behind us is being turned into flats for the rich!*

On the surface it could appear that it was the hours of workshop time alone - *duration* - that catalysed this understanding, but critically this misses something else intentionally brought in by the artists, to explore and register political differences through the making process. Beech (2011) again: talks of the importance of rituals in relation to duration in suggesting that creating 'counterpoints for time' is unproductive for artists involved in a practice that

intersects with the social; this discourse shared in Battersea, looked at the role of imagination in street play in childhood with octogenarians through dialogue and the making of go-carts using reclamation and maker-space collaboration. In making mobile sculptures, we explored within the ensembles of *Some[W]here*, how the imaginary can position us in a resistance to the juggernaut of gentrification, rather than offering this up *duration* as an ideology, whereby it would be separated from the social. We had overlapping encounters with different formations of both 'site' and 'community', with some of these transitory, others *durational*, and other works seeking no permissions at all – those seeking no permissions – through the spontaneous live art actions of 'guest' and also in my works *Boxing and Burning, Its Hear, it's not Here* (2015) and *Give me a good kicking* (2015), the video work I made with the appropriated cog from engineers laying superfast broadband cable, running through, but not for the social housing communities. These works problematised the question of time, site and community and are of most interest to me because it neither manifested a fetishisation with duration, nor with the short term as the works were set in a continuum of a shared practice enquiry. It is this dissensus, in that this work doesn't set out to eradicate the contradictions, that places the body of work in the interstices of the non-binary. Duration is ideological Beech proposes (above) - what was happening in this work was experienced through the conjunctural of actively practicing counterpoints alongside the durational and for *In/Visible Fields*.

There is another thing about 'time' that comes into its own in a different way when making co-authored work that I explored, as it relates to this body of practice connecting as it does, flowing in and out of collaboration and co-authored works in relation to the porosity of the

imagination that we glimpse in the work *In/Visible Fields*. These Situationist inspired actions, conflating the everyday with art have shaped much of Alÿs's work, some more obviously political, some are autonomous (other than the necessary witness of the photographer/ film maker) but together they set out to hold the collective imaginary of that moment, creating strong parallels with the conceptual and intentional engagement with sites of encounter and juxtaposition, spaces of alternation if you like, within my own practices. Groys in writing about Alÿs's performative actions that require the use of time as a media to make the work, suggests, and I think this true for my own practice, that the work is not time-based but rather that it is 'art based time' whereby the process of the time used, suspending 'time of the present', is being recorded in the ways that I have created performative works (autonomous and co-authored) across my research within the wider contextual (political and social) frameworks this held parity in relation to acts of repetition in my work.

## A5.4: Images

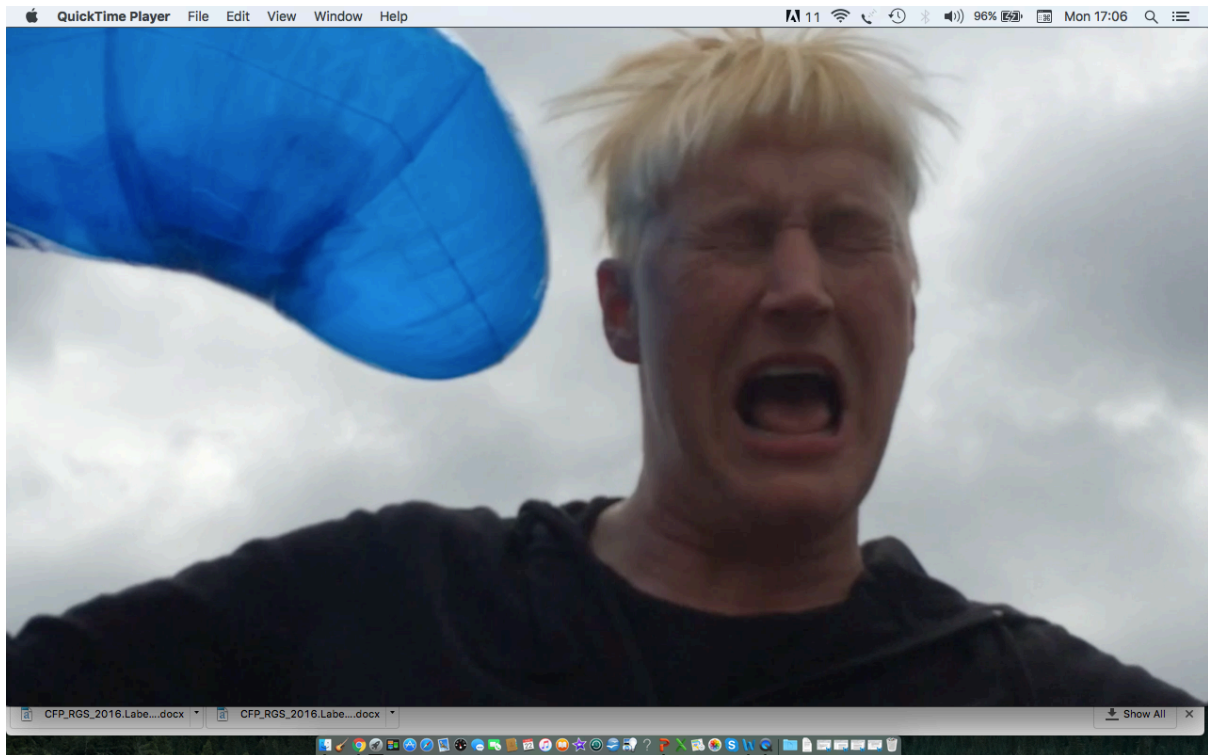


Figure 23: *Boxing and Burning* (2016). London, 2016.



Figure 24: *Boxing and Burning* (2016). London, 2016.





*Figure 25: Boxing and Burning (2016). London, 2016.*

## Artwork 6: *Ever Diminishing Returns* (2017)

### A6.1: Premise

The third connected drawing work using this 'line of refrain' was made in Psarades in the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM) during a residency led by the University of North Macedonia in 2017. It is an 18-hour journey from London into the contested area of Prespës that sits on the intersection with RNM, Greece and Albania and in researching the region I discovered that the border between them sat in fact in the middle of the Prespës lake with active refugee crossing points up on the mountains.

### A6.2: Process

I took a boat into the lake to video at the very point of this international boundary under the water. The new camera was faulty and acted as a catalyst to slow me down, it allowed the affective sensibility of this place to take over, so rather than jumping to make work, I accepted that I may not actually do anything. The residency context appeared to trigger artists' appropriation/absorption of the potency of seductive dystopian abandoned spaces including a cave protected as a heritage site in surrounding Psarades. Myself and another artist found this disturbing, and stepped back from the hostilities experienced between artists across nationalities about resources. This released the two of us to work a light touch way, in such a 'loaded' place - not just historically but in the here and now - it was only in 2019 that the signed Prespës Agreement, the political regulation vital to the European parliament's underpinning of the important trade gateway across these borders. The complexity of this place with poverty experienced by its tiny community was palpable. Houses dotted the hillside left just as they had been abandoned during the civil war following the Second World War. As a result of war diasporas, new languages developed in



the region out of necessity by people who found themselves living together and needing to communicate; this signified an understanding that the culture of everyday necessities, over time, is a part of a repair - not the notion of the 'making of things better', but the lessening of both divided and collective lived experience of pain, and re-emergence of the recognition that the power of ecology. What emerged for myself and this other artist, was that if we listened deeply, we could un-learn together, and this could take us forwards. I began attending to the extraordinariness of the ecology of this area as one of the oldest places on earth, as Lake Prespa contains eight species of fish found nowhere else in the world, and the amazing number of lichen species can grow only in the cleanest of air. International universities, as well as an 'artists walking' festival have worked in partnership with local ecologists and the fishing, wild life and bean farming communities; despite the huge poverty and a sense of stuck-ness created by being on the cusp of this tri-border, things were changing.

I observed that cows stayed on the commons of the threshold wetlands of the lake during the day, but in the deep of night they roamed freely through the village, disturbingly bold in how they climbed steps and into the abandoned footprint of houses, little front gardens, without any sense of boundaries and perhaps simply part their of their nocturnal ritual. I had brought with me very few materials: the underwater camera, some plaster for casting, notebook and an emergency blanket. One very hot sunny day I set about cutting up the blanket to create a long-drawn line running it across 'the cows' common, It started at about 300mm wide, the size of a large footprint and ran in an ever-decreasing line until it petered out, its perspective accentuated by the fact that the line itself diminished and I named the work *Ever Diminishing Returns*. This line flashed in the hot sun and I filmed it in slow motion

to focus on this 'affect', as I walked the length. Its reflection was powerful in assuming the weight of an intervention which in reality was fragile and slight. Then I waited for the cows; they were curious and disturbed. What was this border-line? They pushed and cajoled each other to go across first, some refusing to do so, and they travelled along the line until it either ended or they could jump the thinner end. Once the work had been encountered the line was removed, as if it had never been there. This was important and reflected the difficulties on this invisible tri-border and its political and cultural 'weight' that had been ongoing for so long. The animals of course have no sense of the border; they live their lives in the commons as a collective species herding as they do.

I projected the film *ever diminishing returns* on the outside of the 'town hall', which felt right. It received a positive response from the villagers, the local councillors and the artist-professor at University of Macedonia (our host.) Although the work appeared to be 'light touch', it seemed to reflect the deeper concerns and significance of this very specific geopolitical region. Haraway (2016) challenges us to cultivate interspecies response-abilities: "Staying with the Trouble" insists on working, playing and thinking in multispecies cosmopolitics in the face of the killing of entire ways of being on earth that characterise the age cunningly called 'now' and the place called 'here.'

### A6.3: Reflections

On March 2021 I presented *ever diminishing returns* at Arts, Heritage, Performativity, Care international conference (UCL, 2021), with Rebecca Gordan, UCL History of Art researcher. I was mindful that in the unpicking of this work, I had begun to consider a methodology of loose working practices and ethics to un-colonise my response as an artist in relation to the

making of work in the complexity of context, coming into a place of ‘surrender’ which had begun with ‘*ever diminishing returns*’ and through the dialogues we held daily whilst in Psarades between myself, Harris Kondosphyris and Anna Fairchild.

#### A6.4: Images



*Figure 26: Ever Diminishing Returns (2017). Psarades, RNM, 2017.*

## Chapter 7: Conclusion - drawing together, running towards

Throughout this research project, and to pose and respond to the research questions 'in the round' of my artistic practice, I have pulled apart my practice, processed, explored and interrogated it through its making and the contextualisation of theoretical frameworks written by artists and theorists occupied with the social politic and the imagination. The project set out to engage with the positionality and manifestation of the imaginary as both a place of transgression, resistance, and, at times, of repair, in response to a violence that is done to all beings and the planet under capitalism: this may sound grandiose, but it is the premise of my work as a political activist who is also an artist. Informed by extant theoretical underpinnings, this research project sought to draw from those not often referenced in social practice art theory, including artists positionality, to deepen and broaden my understanding of my practice and to respond to the research questions.

I began my research with a focus on the relationship of the multiple sites of my practice, to uncovering concealed violence done to the imagination and 'the body'. I moved through practice whilst attending to both the work of other artists and lens of critical theorists, towards the place I am now, as one of engagement through my art practice, with critical ideas of imminence and surrender that engage with deep listening and dissensus as a potent space for the post autonomous imagination. I did this first of all by engaging with contemporary understandings of the ideological and political system that we live by of capitalism and the domination of its neoliberalism in relation to art. I looked to cultural theorist Fisher (2009); turned to Khasnabish and Haiven (2014) to explore capitalist realism

as sutured to neoliberalism which in turn gives us the narrative within my art practice that I challenge, that the chaos of an unregulated market, is the only option open to us as a planet; I have returned often to Deleuze and Guattari's 'refrain' in relation to an emergence of connection between my drawing works made at the beginning, middle and end of this research project. Bourriard's (1998) placing of the social exchange, the political, cultural, socialised act as the form and content of the work, does not sit as my practices' touchstone; or perhaps it would be more exact to say, not the only preoccupation, as there are other intentional outcomes at work in parallel within my practice. This is often relating to the production and use of objects within my works that, rather than 'hold onto' a modernist positioning of the autonomous imagination, are about transgression, the radical imagination and dissensus, the objects in a continuing process of 'becoming.' This 'acting upon' as affect is what is interesting for me as an artist as a space to engage the 'other' in the participation of forming, dismantling and reforming ideas – the radical imagination - that allow us to collectively but also 'individually' and publicly engage in rhizomic multi-threaded discourse that finds its random connections.

I held an intentional engagement with critical theory, normatively outside of social practice art, to engage in recurring concerns held within my practice brokered through the desire for a sensibility of responsibility through a responsive disposition in art. For me, that art work as 'process', is not the only outcome, and not the only outcome I desire as the artist. The post-autonomous works that I make are often interventions or provocations that take place in (transgressive) locations of potential social exchange, or places where I may bring that possible site of exchange into view. However, I do not see that work solely as holding its

(use) value as the process or the dialogue that is set in motion by these works; Though this may indeed be a part of it, it is not the intended form that the work takes.

Because of the unfixed forms of my practice, I have always looked to other artists practices who are also in part investigating how we move forwards by 'running towards the emergency' to open up dialogues, often through acts of imagined or material transgressions that can create space for the kinds of support structures that we need, not just to survive but to flourish. I now understand the methodology of my practice as being non-linear and more often than not beginning with 'a feeling' about which I feel passionate, or in response to the political, social and literal sites I find myself in with others. My work, as contextually driven, requires a deep listening in the moment, sometimes with others, but also on my own. Within my social arts practice I position 'big ideas' as a space of cultural equity to be built with others in the space of the radical imagination; through the research project I have tested ways that this aesthetic exchange process can be developed whilst also creating works that hold their own aesthetic. This has enabled me to grapple with the complexity of how authorship comes into being within an enquiry around a movement towards what I now understand as that radical imagination. It has also created for me the awareness that central to my practice is the creating of spaces for 'beholding' (that position of course central to the act of imagining) art, particularly as I often work in spaces that are contested (read, transgressive) and also require the beholder to 'give themselves up' to this work as a collective audience but also as individuals where the work is completed by the beholder entering these spaces (in the synthesis of the two to simultaneously act, and be acted upon). As I do not ask of audiences that they do something that I myself would not do, I too

have entered a new space through the practice of this research project, to consider new processes, and therefore new aesthetic forms to come out of this practice, as one of 'surrender.' Surrender is something that I have practiced for years in relation to other artists practices but did not articulate it clearly - now I realise that this process of surrendering is also about, and manifests as, 'deep listening' and along with 'beholding' this brings the process of imminence into my work. Forwards from this research project, centred on this understanding of surrender in my practice, I am already in a process of working differently with other artists and I think this is part of a new collective sensibility with many of my artist peers, and now of course, post-COVID-19.

What I have become aware of during this research, as explored through my works which hold multiple layers of this resistance of 'acting upon', is that it is that these are acts of aesthetic exchange that engage in a plurality of resistances of the imaginaries. By doing this in relation to preoccupations with the dominant hidden structures that frame us culturally, socially and politically, my practice-led research has tested out what happens across these imaginations through the use of objects transformed and performances upon my own body (that are translated into the primary of film) as a stand in for the social body, as well as objects used with collaborators activated during and by co-authored performative works. Within the frame of taking response-abilities, I am now deeply committed to my self-development as a woman artist, and have located to support my forward practice, women artists to mentor my skill set that has historically relied upon men's knowledge. I am doing this differently as a result of this research project and what I have learnt about myself and my needs as an artist to develop, not in isolation but within the social. I have explored this

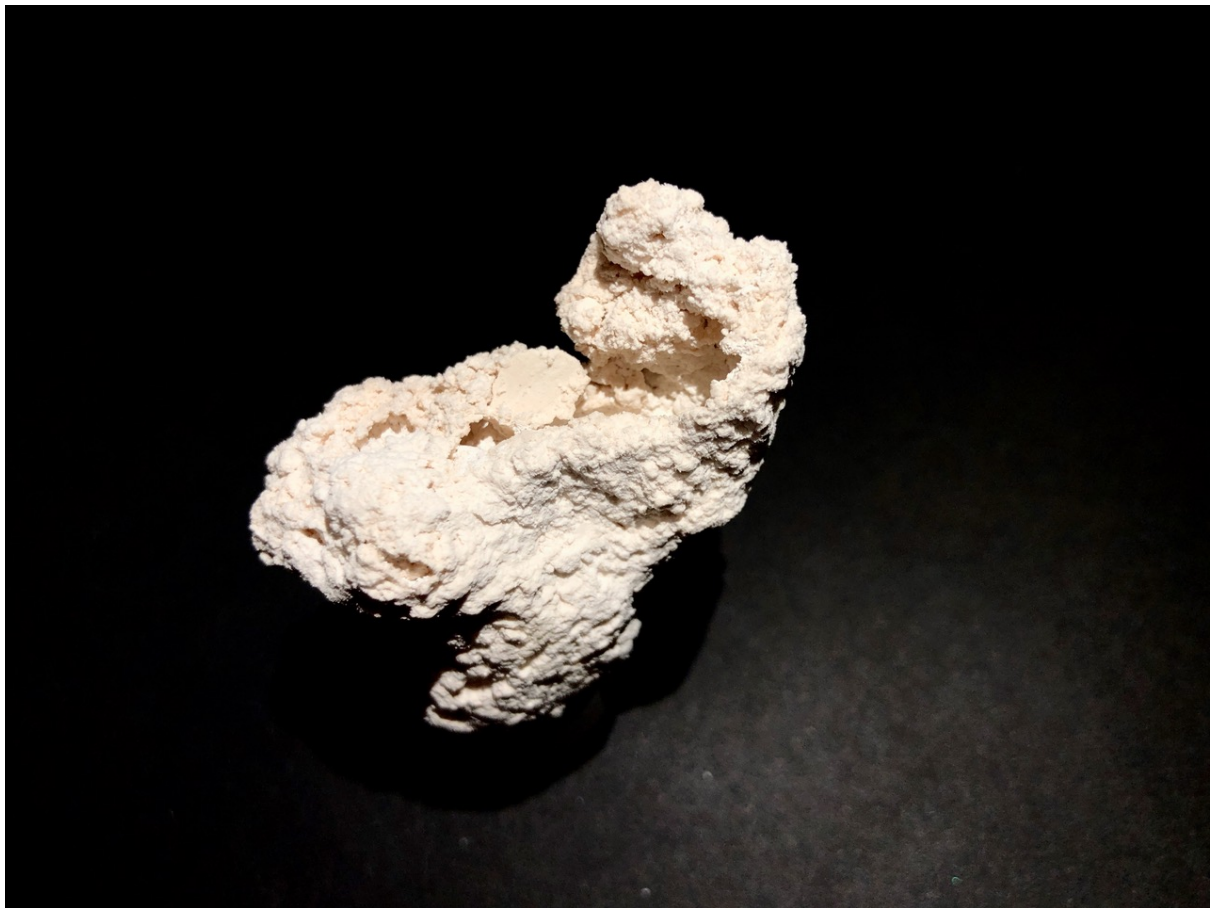
with an almost relentlessness and often affectual practice through what I now see as a cohesion of post-autonomous practices that explore the potential of the radical imagination and that intentionally, as a practice, sets out not to be enfolded into the neoliberal agenda.

## 7.1: Images



*Figure 27: spt't;t (in development).*





*Figure 28: spt't;t (in development).*

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Author's cited works URLs (where available)

*#civil\_uncivil* (2016) <http://www.thedrawingshed.org/black-light-critical-shelter/>

Artoll <https://directionalforces2012.tumblr.com/about>

*Bury Sculpture Centre and Black Light* (2016)

<http://www.thedrawingshed.org/artificial-sunshine/Tate>

Modern black-light-at-tate-modern

*Ideas from Else[w]Here* (2014)

<http://www.thedrawingshed.org/ideasfromelsewhere/>

*In/visible Fields I & II* <http://www.thedrawingshed.org/invisible-fields-2/>

*Silenced* (2012) <http://www.thedrawingshed.org/silence-attlee-terrace-2012/>

*Some[w]Here* (2015) <http://www.somewhere-now-day-small-conversations-pump-house-gallery-june-9th-2015>

*that things fall apart* <https://somewhereresearch.wordpress.com>

the drawing shed <http://www.thedrawingshed.org>

*The Public Typing Pool*© <http://www.thedrawingshed.org/the-public-typing-pool/>

## Appendix 2 – Abridged list of authors works

Sally Labern leads the drawing shed, an artist led organisation hosted on 2 housing estates in East London (co-founded with Sally Barker in 2009, co-led with Bobby Lloyd 2010-2018; 2018 - 21) There have been many works created and conferences presented at across the period of the P-Doc research and only some of these will be annotated below. Across 20/21 I have attended many on line conferences and events. I am a Fellow of Royal Society of Arts.

### **Exhibitions / Shows / Public Works / conferences**

2012 Print Bike - created a mobile print studio as sister to the drawing shed mobile drawing and performance lab - live events with the Big Draw 2012-2014 Arts Council England

2013 /14 William Morris Gallery / Exhibition Winns Gallery Stranger Neighbour funded by Arts Council England and Arvon literature agency, creating scored performance and exhibiting drawing works created using the launch space for The Public Typing Pool.

2014 IdeasFromElse[Where] : artist and curator; month long arts laboratory project by the drawing shed & artist Jordan McKenzie, Winns Gallery, London funded by Arts Council England

2012-14 Twitter based 'scored' performances led by the drawing shed (a form developed by Labern&Lloyd in E17, and for the Text Festival Bury, 2014), embracing dislocation across the ether. Stranger : Neighbour and Civil\_Un-Civil

June 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017 Doctorate showcases, UEL. Exhibited video installation, sculpture, and drawing.

E17 Art Trail – 2012-2018 various public events and festivals have been both curated and as an artist I have made site specific works/ performances relative to this annual programme.

2012 and 2014 Directional Forces, Artoll, Germany. Exhibited a number of mixed media works: film, drawing, performance and sculpture.

2013 - 2017 co-curated a series of art writing workshops with the drawing shed and writer Simon Pommery, funded and produced by Parasol Unit, London

2014 March, Chelsea UAL, London: a day symposium on Projection and Propulsion of within artists' film led by artist Ken Wilder

2014 Aug, The Public Typing Pool Sculpture Centre with Laurence Weiner, Commission and Residency

2014 Argentina, 2 month research and artists development residency.

2015, Jan, Mapping the City, symposium on state mapping of population to control class resistance and mapping tools in 'the commons', London

2015 Feb, In-Between-Time Festival, Bristol: Live Art Development Agency Partners Conference

2015 Mar, Left Coast, presented at Arts within Housing Conf and artist's contexts & network with the drawing shed, Blackpool

2015 Tate Modern 6 week course, by artist Dr Eli Carpenter: 'Art and Slow Violence' Conflict Time, Photography

2017 Affect Conference, UEL, Presented with Bobby Lloyd on Twitter / Social Media as an affective space.

2017 Norwich Text Exhibition with TPTP© curated by L Anderson.

2017-2018 4 Conferences referenced in Pdoc report re: refugee crisis; 2 with Counterpoints Arts where I chaired (London) and acted as conference raconteur (Dublin)

2018/ 2019 In/Visible Fields, created and showed film projections, sound and 'Assembly' events on London E17 housing estates co-authored with estate residents and others.

Sebastian Sharples, John Ellis, Bobby Lloyd

2019 Art Night London, funders : & collaboration with Mary Paterson, created 3 riso zineworks for In/Visible Fields. Curated Moxie Brawls 3Janes in TriO / The Sunken Garden, London E17- for London Borough of Culture.

2019 Tate Exchange Conferences : SAN, Social Practice support and Portsmouth University as mentor for students.

2019 Soup Water Bread, curator with the drawing shed - year long artists' monthly network space to develop critical practice funded by London Borough of Waltham Forest, programme for 1st London Borough of Culture.

Feb 2019 curated "How are you Feeling?" and supported artist Rebecca Thomson with installation and light-based performance and embedded zine for exhibition in new TriO space.

Nov 2019 presented at Conf for LBWF BoCulture on 'The future role of the artist?'

Sept 2020 Presented on the Radical Imagination for SAN online conference. 2021

Conference on 'Heritage, Participation, Performativity, Care' presented on my work 'ever diminishing returns' and un-colonising generative social art practices; with Rebecca Gordon, Art History UCL.

## **Residencies**

March 2012 + 2014 Directional Forces, Artoll, Germany

August 2012-2015 Live Art Development Agency D.I.Y, #DawnChorus -Twitter development - residency and performances London and Bury, Mancs.

February 2012 - Attlee Terrace Estate, 'Silenced' - month long residency to create drawing installation work; exhibited for peer review March 2012 Gallery, ADI, UEL2014-2015

2014 IdeasFromElseWhere Live Art Residencies on the Drive and Attlee Terrace estates, curator with the drawing shed of 3 live artists with community events on the housing estates in east London. Funded by Arts Council England.

2014 LiveElse[w]Here month long durational Arts Lab Winns Gallery, created and performed' 'On the Rack' ; curated with the drawing shed 51 live artists' work.

2015 Some[w]Here 9 month residency / commission with the drawing shed based on 3 housing estates in Wandsworth opposite Battersea Power Station. Made a number of performative works, films and sculptures, alongside the social practice of 5 other artists. Included an artist led conference : 'The Day of Small Conversations'

2015 Bury Art Museum and Sculpture Centre “Friends, I have no friends...” inspired by The Random Shot painting by E. Landseer shown. I made this work during a 4month residency as part of Text Festival Bury, Manchester

2016 William Morris Studio Red House - 24 hr artist overnight artists’ residency in WM Studio and Twitter based #dawnchorus performance with National Trust.

2017 [dis]tinct – a year long artist led residency with commissions; funded by Arts Council England. Created a living sculpture with women scientists’ grafted apple trees; Bronze mile-wide trail with public bronze pour/ curated 6 weeks of public events, inc Food Bank, Bakers, London Zoo Eel Scientist; and social media App

2017 Istanbul Design Biennial, Residency, inside:inside curated by Anna Fairchild and Lucy Renton

2018 Charlottesville US / NYC residency : commission by AiOP / UVA for Matter (see below)

### **Commissions**

2015 Bury Art Museum and Sculpture Centre opening show with Lawrence Weiner with the drawing shed’s The Public Typing Pool (inc 3 Twitter Performances as part of collective SevenArtWriters)

Nov 2016 Tate Modern Light and Dark Matters with Large Scale Installation Black Light Screen Prints (printed at UEL using security industry UV Ink), ‘Assembly’ event with St Andrews University and Manchester Physicists and UV inked public installation on The Public Typing Pool.

Nov 2016 and 2017 Bury Light Festival Commission with Partner Blackpool Illuminations: Black Light with new poetic texts on black UV printed wristbands (followed by exhibition in

London) flooding Black Light from Army Museum to Art Museum. And papered out inside of yellow van and created work about trafficking of migrant communities into UK using UV as drawing material and black light installation.

Sept 2018 Social Art Network commission, for the National SAN Summit, Sheffield; led day long walking workshop, Tinsley with new dS2 team Barker and Parsons, Hetherington, Studio Polpo ACE funded.

2018-2019 TriO, the drawing shed commission to build architect co-designed cultural space in The Sunken Garden; funded by LBWF with Matthew Lloyd Architects and Risner Design. Community consultation: artist Sarah Hersi.

2018 Charlottesville UVA and AiOP for Matter: created 3 semaphoric performances with and across 3 communities.

Aug 2019 Portland Inn Project, artists summer retreat conf. Stoke UK

2019 dS2, a new mobile project developed with original team for the drawing shed, Studio Polpo and Sally Barker. Funded by Arts Council England, In residence across year, community workshops and AirWalk event with zine making, across Sheffield as performative work to measure air pollution in an arc crossing the city.

2018/19 In/Visible Fields, funded: Arts Council England/Trust for London/Art Night London

2020 spt;t't project development with Marianne Rizkallah Johnson, Arts Catalyst, ASCUS in Edinburgh, RB&hArts, Imperial College London

2021 Split|Forest in development

2021 The Public Wash Station© in development / A Community Rewilds in development



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